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TOURIST SATISFACTION WITH HERITAGE SITE ATTRIBUTES IN THE SULTANATE OF OMAN

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ABSTRACT

Tourist satisfaction, as one of the important measures of destination performance, has been widely used by destination managers to improve their service offerings and hence attract more visitors. The present study analyses the level of satisfaction the tourists have with two heritage sites namely Nizwa Fort and Bahla Fort in the Aldhkhiliyah region of the Sultanate of Oman. 162 tourists were surveyed on-site through a bilingual (English and Arabic) questionnaire composed of 27 statements, 25 of which were categorized in four major variables as Facilities (9 statements), Appearance and Maintenance (4 statements), Accessibility (8 statements) and Quality of Services (4 items); and 2 statements were used to check overall satisfaction of the tourists.

While the respondents were overall satisfied with the two sites, they rated certain dimensions of the two heritage sites higher than the others. It is hoped that the findings will help the site managers and policy makers at the two heritage sites to focus on the visitors concerns and improve on those components to increase visitor satisfaction.

KEY WORDS

Tourism, Heritage, Satisfaction, Culture, Oman

ECONLIT KEYS

L83; Z320, Z380

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism, whichever form, is 'a temporary movement of people' (Mathieson & Wall, 1982) and leads to 'relationships that arise from the interactions of tourists with the destination (components)' (McIntosh & Geoldner, 1986). The tourism activities require consumers of the tourist products (the tourists) to visit the places where the consumption of the tourism product/service take place (Kastenholz, 2012; Almeida, 2015), thus making a destination an intrinsic component of the total tourist experience. Furthermore the very nature of tourism always requires consumption of a set of different services at the destination such as transport, accommodation, meals, leisure, entertainment etc., which may either make the tourist experience memorable or not enjoyable at all (Vanhove, 2004; Almeida, 2015).

One of the major concerns of the contemporary tourism is to develop and promote sustainable tourism ideas, strategies and practices; those are economically beneficial and do not compromise or conflict with a destination's social, cultural, environmental and future generations' needs. Promoting heritage tourism (a sub-sector of cultural tourism), though not new, is among the best options that support and promote

sustainable tourism agenda. With thousands of years of history, the cultural and heritage destinations around the world are much sought after destinations even in the modern times. This is more so because of the inclination of modern tourists towards seeking novelty at the destinations those are away from the mass-tourist behavior of the yesteryears. Richards (1994) opined that culture and heritage tourism are promoted as major growth areas in many countries (in Europe) as it boosts the local culture and promotes the seasonal and geographical spread of tourism.

The sultanate of Oman has been promoting itself as one of the prominent tourist destinations within Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. The Ministry of Tourism (the official body responsible for overseeing development and promotion of tourism in the Country) has laid, among others, the following objectives, a) bring sustainable economic benefits to local communities and residents; b) conserve and protect the natural environment as well as assure respect of customs, traditions and heritage (www.omantourism.gov.om). This emphasis can be witnessed by the fact that Oman hosted the recently concluded *Second UNWTO/UNESCO World Conference of Tourism and Culture: Fostering Sustainable Development in December 2017* at Muscat (UNWTO, 2017).

While a heritage tourism destination orients itself towards cultural heritage, showcasing places of historical and cultural interest, its long-term survival and sustainability will depend on the way it manages its resources, product and environment. Much of the planning will depend on the satisfaction of its visitors (the tourists). Therefore, understanding tourist satisfaction is a key factor to destination planning and management. Although the tourists' basic motive behind visiting a heritage destination is to experience culture and heritage firsthand, nevertheless their satisfaction will depend on various other destination attributes such as attraction, accessibility, facilities and amenities, convenience and comforts, people etc. (Meng et al., 2008; Sukiman et al., 2013; Wang, 2016).

This study, therefore, is aimed to investigate the tourist satisfaction with a heritage/cultural destination and its relationship with destination attributes/characteristics at two prominent cultural/heritage sites, namely Nizwa Fort and Bahla Fort within Aldakhilyah region of Sultanate of Oman. The Nizwa Fort symbolizes Nizwa as the ancient capital of Oman, which was declared as *Capital of Islamic Culture*

within Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for the year 2015; the Bahla Fort is one of the four UNESCO-World Heritage Sites in Oman.

The findings of this study will help the site managers and the policy makers of the two heritage sites to focus on the visitors concerns and improve on those components to increase visitor satisfaction.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1) HERITAGE TOURISM

Heritage tourism is a branch of tourism, oriented towards the cultural heritage of a location where tourism is occurring (www.culturalheritagetourism.org). It relates to the travelling of people to places of historical or cultural interest. Fyall & Garrod (1998) defined heritage tourism as an economic activity that makes use of socio-cultural assets to attract visitors. While Zeppal & Hall (1991) view heritage tourism as based on nostalgia for the past and the desire to experience diverse cultural landscapes and forms (the destination attributes); Poria et al. (2001, p.1047) viewed heritage tourism more narrowly as 'a phenomenon based on visitors' motivations and perceptions rather than on specific site attributes'. Poria's observation finds support in a study by Light & Prentice (1994, p. 112) who found that on average 'heritage consumers tend to be from middle classes, well educated, middle aged, and with a prior interest in history'.

These observations suggest that heritage destinations are principally different from those oriented towards leisure or mass tourism where tourists are much oriented towards leisure and enjoyment with not much concern and care for the destinations and their surroundings. Since heritage destinations are primarily characterized by history and culture, tourists who visit cultural/heritage sites seek authentic experiences as compared to those who visit traditional tourist products or mass destinations. More recently heritage tourism has attracted the attention of economists (Laplante et al., 2005) as a source of income and a means to diversify and strengthen economic base of several developing economies due to its strong linkages with several industries (Mazimhaka, 2007; Lee & Han, 2002; Maskey et al., 2007). Mershen (2007), in his study on community based tourism in Oman, argues that while cultural and heritage

sites form one of the major reasons for tourist visitation to a destination, yet these sites (cultural and archeological) are not sufficiently managed and interpreted. This necessitates heritage site managers to see these sites through the eyes of the visitors to manage these sites sustainably.

2.2) TOURIST SATISFACTION

Kozak & Rimmington (2000), through a demand side perspective, argue that tourist satisfaction is important to successful destination marketing as it influence the (tourists') choice of a destination, the consumption of goods and services, and the decision to return. Poria et al. (2001, p.1048), through the supply side perspective, conclude that understanding motivations and perceptions "is helpful for the management of [heritage] sites with respect to such factors as pricing policy, the mission of heritage attractions, and understanding visitor profiles, as well as public funding and sustainable management..." . Therefore, studying tourists' satisfaction with tourist destinations is the key to tourist destination planning and survival (Sukiman et al., 2013).

Various studies such as San Martín et al. (2019), Pandza Bajcs (2015), Alananzeh (2018), Chami (2018), Vinh & Long (2013), Huh, Usyal & McCleary (2006) studied tourist satisfaction, and their studies were primarily based on a consumer behavior model. According to Clemons & Woodruff (1992), consumer behavior model postulates consumer satisfaction as a function of both expectations related to certain attributes, and the judgment of the performance regarding those attributes. While tourists' basic motive behind visiting a heritage destination is to experience culture and heritage firsthand, their satisfaction will depend on their perception of a destination's various attributes. Nevertheless, tourists' satisfaction with a heritage destination will depend on how heritage destinations offer themselves, and their satisfaction will consequently influence the heritage site's future attractiveness, repeat visitations, word of mouth referrals etc.

Therefore, for any tourism destination to plan and manage itself well there is always a strong need to understand the level of satisfaction the tourists have with the destinations core offerings, as well as with other destination attributes. This will provide destination managers valuable input towards enhancing and improving the destination

attributes as many studies such as Baker & Crompton (2000), Smith (2001) McAlexander et al. (2003), Truong & Foster (2006), Uysal & Noe (2003) have highlighted that the past experience of tourists with a destination will influence not only their future revisit intentions, but also their expectations of the future visits.

2.3) RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TOURIST SATISFACTION AND HERITAGE DESTINATION ATTRIBUTES

Destination attributes performance as critical to determining the tourist satisfaction has been emphasized by various studies. One of the early studies that measured tourist satisfaction based on different dimensions of destination performance was carried by Pizam et al. (1978). Pizam's model was later supported by Churchill & Surprenant (1982) who stated that the quality of destination can be measured in terms of its attributes performance. Later and more recent studies such as Chi & Qu (2008), Meng et al. (2008), Kozak & Rimmington (2000), Poria et al. (2003), Ramires et al. (2018) have also emphasized the role of destination attributes performance in measuring tourist satisfaction. For example, while Meng et al. (2008) opined that evaluation of attribute performance is the most important indicator for satisfaction, Ramires et al. (2018) supports this view by stating that satisfaction with specific attributes is highly influential for the overall satisfaction.

Based on the literature it can be concluded that tourist satisfaction at a heritage destination can be assessed by evaluating the tourist experience based on several destination attributes. While no conclusive list of heritage destination attributes has been established by the literature, Ramires et al. (2018) argue that tourist destination in general can be evaluated on specific supply side elements such as gastronomy, accommodation, entertainment, hospitality and culture. However, Ramires et al. (2018) and also Pavesi et al. (2016) opine that other attributes such as mobility, accessibility, cleanliness and safety are other attributes worth highlighting. Based on the literature review this study has used four attributes as *Facilities*, *Appearance and Maintenance*, *Accessibility* and *Quality of services* since these have been frequently used to evaluate the tourist experience and satisfaction with heritage sites. While studies of Huh, Uysal & McCleary (2006) and Chen & Chen (2010) highlight that, *facilities* such as toilets, visitor

center and special provisions for children and aged etc. play a major role in the satisfaction of tourists, Ramires et al. (2018) and Jusoh et al (2013) emphasized, among others, on *appearance* and *maintenance* as well as *accessibility* as critical to tourist satisfaction with a tourist attraction. The *quality of available services* have been identified as important attributes of heritage sites that determine tourist satisfaction by various authors such as De Rojas (2008) and Lee et al. (2007).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1) SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

The study used convenience sampling method, and the sample was comprised of tourists who visited the two heritage sites (Nizwa Fort and Bahla Fort) between January and April of 2019. Although convenience sampling is statistically not considered as a much reliable data collection method, we used it due to limitation of time and resources available to us. Also, since we were not able to find any data available regarding average number of visitors to the two sites, it was not possible to estimate the total population and pre-determine the sample size; hence, it was necessary to use convenience sampling. Nevertheless, this method allowed us to survey the visitors immediately after their visit of the site, when the visitors were more likely to well-remember their experience and, thus, their responses can be considered more authentic.

The questionnaire was administered by a group of trained undergraduate students (comprised of two female and one male student) during the day time between 9:00 am and 4:00 pm on the days they had no classes to attend. The respondents were approached near the exit gates of the two heritage sites, ensuring that they had already completed their visit of the site. Respondents were explained the purpose of the study and asked if they would participate in the survey before handing over the questionnaire.. Questionnaires were handed over to only those who said that they are aged above 18 years. A total of 220 questionnaires (135 at Nizwa Fort and 85 at Bahla Fort) were handed out to the respondents. After a thorough scrutiny of the received questionnaires, only 162 (73.6%) were found complete and usable for analysis [106 out of 135 (78.51%)

at Nizwa Fort and 56 out of 95 (65.88%) at Bahla Fort]. The sample size of just 162 could be a limitation of this research. Nevertheless, Hair et al. (2010) suggest that a minimum sample size of 100 is acceptable when considering five or fewer constructs. Also, Cliff (1987) recommends a sample size of 150 for 40 item statements on a scale. Consequently, over 160 responses have allowed us to enhance our understanding and reach meaningful findings as well as draw significant conclusions.

3.2) MEASURES AND ANALYSIS

Visitor satisfaction surveys have been used as one of the common methods to understand the visitors' perception of provided services at the visiting site. For the present study an exploratory visitor survey was conducted to explore the visitor's level of satisfaction at two heritage sites namely Nizwa Fort and Bahla Fort. The study used a structured questionnaire implemented face to face at the two study sites while the visitors were exiting from the site. This ensured that the visitors' memories were fresh and captured whole of their experience with the study site. The questionnaire used was bi-lingual (English and Arabic) divided into three parts. The questionnaire was initially prepared in English by the authors and was later translated into Arabic by a professional academic translator working at the authors' University. In the first part respondents were asked to answer questions related to their demographic profile such as age, gender, nationality, occupation, income etc. Second part of the questionnaire consisted of 25 items 25 categorized in four major variables as *Facilities* (9 statements), *Appearance and Maintenance* (4 statements), *Accessibility* (8 statements) and *Quality of Services* (4 items). Attributes related to facilities were adapted from Huh, Usyal & McCleary (2006), Chen & Chen (2010) who opined that facilities such as toilets, visitor center and special provisions for children and aged etc. play a major role in the satisfaction of tourists. Tourist attraction attributes relating appearance and maintenance of a tourist attraction have been considered important by several authors such as Ramires et al. (2018) and Jusoh et al (2013) and therefore were added to the survey. While studies such as De Rojas (2008), Lee et al. (2007) in their studies highlighted that the perceptions of visitors regarding quality of available services at a tourist attraction influence their level of satisfaction with the visited site; Ramires et al. (2018) and Jusoh et al. (2013)

emphasized, among others, on accessibility attributes as critical to tourist satisfaction with a tourist attraction.

The third part of the questionnaire consisted of 2 statements which were used to check overall satisfaction level of the tourists with the visited heritage sites. A five-point Likert scale, ranging from 5=Strongly Agree to 1=Strongly Disagree, was used to measure responses. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to explore the data. As for statistical techniques, firstly, reliability (Cronbach alpha) and validity tests were conducted. Next, mean score was employed to observe average responses. The data were analyzed using SPSS (version 20). Apart from reliability and validity testing, mean scores were used to observe the average responses.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

4.1) DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

The whole sample comprised of 162 respondents. Of this 65.4% (comprising of 45.3% males and 54.7% females) were received from Nizwa Fort and 34.6% (comprising 60.7% males and 39.3% females) from the Bahla Fort. While the number of female respondents at Nizwa Fort was on higher side (54.7%) as compared to males (45.3%), the number of male respondents was higher at Bahla Fort (60.7%) as compared to females (39.3%); the overall aggregated gender ratio seems balanced at 50.6% males and 49.4% females (see table 1).

Tourist Site	Male	%	Female	%	Total	%
Nizwa Fort	48	45.3	58	54.7	106	65.4
Bahla Fort	34	60.7	22	39.3	56	34.6
Total	82	50.6	80	49.4	162	100.0

Table 1: Site distribution of respondents by gender
Source: survey data

To know the origin of the visitors, the visitors were asked to identify themselves as either Omani or non-Omani (foreigners and resident non-Omanis). While 71% of the total respondents were non-Omani, only 29% comprised of Omanis. The unequal ratio of Omani to non-Omani could be due the conduct of this survey during the day time

(between 9 am to 4 pm). Although the surveys were conducted on weekends, the local people usually visit these in the evenings, and most of the visitors to these sites during the day time are foreigners as they are normally on a travel itinerary.

The non-Omani respondents were from diverse background representing 31 different countries. Among the countries with the highest representation were Germany (13.6%), France (9.9%), Italy (8.6%), American and British (3.7% each), Holland (3.1%), India (2.5%), and Belgium, Kuwait, New Zealand, Saudi Arabia, and UAE (1.9% each).

Most of the respondents were comparatively younger (58% aged 18 - 34 years), well-educated (72.8% with bachelor's degree and above). Most of the respondents were employed (65.2%).

(N=162)		Frequency	%
Gender	Male	82	50.6
	Female	80	49.4
Origin	Omani	47	29
	Non-Omani	115	71
Age	18-24 Year	47	29.0
	25-34 Years	47	29.0
	35-44 Years	26	16.0
	45-54 Years	19	11.7
	55 Years and above	23	14.2
Educational Qualification	School	14	8.6
	Undergraduate	41	25.3
	Graduate	77	47.5
	Others	30	18.5
Major Occupations	Farming	1	0.9
	Business	5	4.3
	Government Employment	75	65.2
	Private Sector Employment	9	7.8
	Self Employed	12	10.4
	Others	13	11.3

Table 2: Demographic profile of respondents
Source: survey data

4.2) RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Reliability is a measure of internal consistency that shows how closely related are a set of items in a group and the extent to which a measure will produce consistent results (Malik et al., 2017). While the Chronbach alpha for a test measures between 0 and 1, the closer the value to 1 the higher the internal consistency between the tested items (Tavakol & Dennic, 2011) and commonly a Cronbach alpha of 0.70 or higher indicates that the measurement scale that is used to measure a construct is reliable (Nunnally, 1978). As can be observed from the table 3 below, the Cronbach alpha for all the constructs is more than 0.70, and as such, the instrument may be considered as reliable.

Variables	Cronbach Alpha	Cronbach Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
Facilities	.871	.872	9
Appearance and maintenance	.805	.816	4
Accessibility	.835	.835	8
Quality	.856	.862	4

Table 3: Reliability Statistics
Source: survey data

4.3) FINDINGS

The respondent were asked to rate their satisfaction of the visited site (the Nizwa Fort and the Bahla Fort) on a Likert Scale of five (5=Strongly agreement and 1=Strong disagreement) based on four major variables – a) satisfaction with available facilities in and around the site; b) appearance and maintenance of the site; c) accessibility to and around the site; d) quality of services in and around the site.

4.3.1) FACILITIES

When asked to report about their satisfaction with the available facilities in and around the site (see table 3), the respondents rated the *availability of facilities* just above average *availability of visitor information center* (Mean=3.57, SD=1.205), *availability of tourist guides* (Mean=3.56 and SD=1.120), *availability of resting areas* (Mean=3.64 and SD=1.107), *availability of good quality eating outs* (Mean=3.18 and

SD=1.152), *availability of good hotels* (Mean=3.51 and SD=1.076), *safety measures are in place* (Mean=3.74 and SD=1.043), and *availability of toilets* (Mean=3.64 and SD=1.156). While most of the *facility* aspects at the heritage sites under study were rated at just above average, certain aspects such as *provisions for physically challenged people* (Mean=3.19 and SD=1.106) and *provisions for children and old age people* (Mean=3.19 and SD=1.134) were rated relatively low.

One of the surprising facts about the responses in almost all aspects was that a considerable proportion of respondents remained undecided (see table 4). One of the possible reasons for this could be because such visitors may not have felt the need of using these facilities and therefore did not remember whether they witnessed such facilities or not.

	Frequency	Percent (%)	Mean	SD
Visitor information center is available (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	15	9.3	3.57	1.205
Disagree	13	8.0		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	38	23.5		
Agree	57	35.2		
Strongly Agree	39	24.1		
Tourist guides were available at the site (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	11	6.8	3.56	1.120
Disagree	13	8.0		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	47	29.0		
Agree	56	34.6		
Strongly Agree	35	21.6		
Sufficient sitting and resting areas are available at the site (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	9	5.6	3.64	1.107
Disagree	18	11.1		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	30	18.5		
Agree	70	43.2		
Strongly Agree	35	21.6		
Good quality eating-outs and restaurants are available (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	15	9.3	3.18	1.152
Disagree	26	16.0		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	60	37.0		
Agree	37	22.8		
Strongly Agree	24	14.8		
Good hotels around the site are available for overnight stay (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	10	6.2	3.51	1.076
Disagree	15	9.3		

Neither Agree nor Disagree	48	29.6		
Agree	61	37.7		
Strongly Agree	28	17.3		
Good safety measures in place (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	8	4.9	3.74	1.043
Disagree	9	5.6		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	39	24.1		
Agree	67	41.4		
Strongly Agree	39	24.1		
Toilets were available and easily accessible (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	11	6.8	3.64	1.156
Disagree	14	8.6		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	39	24.1		
Agree	56	34.6		
Strongly Agree	42	25.9		
Provision for physically challenged people were available (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	15	9.3	3.19	1.106
Disagree	19	11.7		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	70	43.2		
Agree	36	22.2		
Strongly Agree	22	13.6		
Provisions for children and old age people were available (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	16	9.9	3.19	1.134
Disagree	18	11.1		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	72	44.4		
Agree	31	19.1		
Strongly Agree	25	15.4		
'Facilities' aggregate			3.46	0.788

Table 4: Satisfaction with available facilities in and around the site
Source: survey data

4.3.2) APPEARANCE AND MAINTENANCE

While rating their level of satisfaction with the *appearance and maintenance* of the sites and their surroundings (see table 5), the respondents rated the sites good and above on most of the criteria such as *site was clean and litter free* (Mean=4.06 and SD=1.053), *site was culturally and traditionally aesthetic* (representing artistic nature of local culture and traditions) (Mean=4.32 and SD=0.846), *employees available at site were neatly dressed* (Mean=4.28 and SD=0.948). The only criterion on which the sites were rated average was *cleanliness of toilets and resting areas* (Mean=3.42 and SD=1.214)

	Frequency	Percent (%)	Mean	SD
Toilets and resting areas were clean and tidy (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	16	9.9	3.42	1.214
Disagree	17	10.5		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	46	28.4		
Agree	49	30.2		
Strongly Agree	34	21.0		
The site was clean and litter free (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	6	3.7	4.06	1.053
Disagree	10	6.2		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	19	11.7		
Agree	61	37.7		
Strongly Agree	66	40.7		
The site was culturally and traditionally aesthetic (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	2	1.2	4.32	0.846
Disagree	5	3.1		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	13	8.0		
Agree	61	37.7		
Strongly Agree	81	50.0		
The employees available at site were neatly dressed(N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	5	3.1	4.28	0.948
Disagree	2	1.2		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	21	13.0		
Agree	53	32.7		
Strongly Agree	81	50.0		
'Appearance and maintenance' aggregate			4.01	0.813

Table 5: Satisfaction with appearance and maintenance of the sites

Source: survey data

4.3.3) ACCESSIBILITY

To understand how accessible did the visitors found the two heritage sites and their surroundings, the respondents were asked to rate the sites on eight (8) different criteria (see table 6). While some of the criteria were rated good such as *roads leading to the site were in good condition* (Mean=4.14 and SD=0.932), *easy to move inside the site* (Mean=4.15 and SD=0.821), *site can be easily located on GPS or on-line maps* (Mean=4.14 and SD=0.818), and *easy to move around the site* (Mean=4.09 and SD=0.918); the sites were rated average on other criteria such as *signposts and directions are clearly marked* (Mean=3.96 and SD=1.009), *information panels were*

installed at the site (Mean=3.83 and SD=1.139), information panels provided sufficient information (Mean=3.65 and SD=1.139), and tourist guides were knowledgeable and informative (Mean=3.67 and SD=1.008).

	Frequency	Percent (%)	Mean	SD
Roads leading to the site were in good condition (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	3	1.9	4.14	0.932
Disagree	6	3.7		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	24	14.8		
Agree	61	37.7		
Strongly Agree	68	42.0		
Easy to move inside the site (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	2	1.2	4.15	0.821
Disagree	4	2.5		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	20	12.3		
Agree	78	48.1		
Strongly Agree	58	35.8		
Site can be easily located on GPS or on-line maps (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	1	.6	4.14	0.818
Disagree	3	1.9		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	29	17.9		
Agree	68	42.0		
Strongly Agree	61	37.7		
Signposts and directions are clearly marked (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	6	3.7	3.96	1.009
Disagree	7	4.3		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	28	17.3		
Agree	67	41.4		
Strongly Agree	54	33.3		
Easy to move around the site (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	5	3.1	4.09	0.918
Disagree	2	1.2		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	25	15.4		
Agree	71	43.8		
Strongly Agree	59	36.4		
Information panels were installed at the site (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	10	6.2	3.83	1.139
Disagree	7	4.3		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	34	21.0		
Agree	60	37.0		
Strongly Agree	51	31.5		
Information panels provided sufficient information (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	10	6.2	3.65	1.139
Disagree	17	10.5		

Neither Agree nor Disagree	32	19.8		
Agree	64	39.5		
Strongly Agree	39	24.1		
Tourist guides were knowledgeable and informative (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	6	3.7	3.67	1.008
Disagree	10	6.2		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	51	31.5		
Agree	59	36.4		
Strongly Agree	36	22.2		
'Accessibility' aggregate			3.95	0.665

Table 6: Satisfaction with the accessibility to and around the sites
Source: survey data

4.3.4) QUALITY OF SERVICES

As can be seen from the Table 7 below, the respondents when asked about the overall satisfaction with quality of sites, rated the *quality of access to the sites* highest (Mean=4.0 and SD=0.863) followed by *quality of available services* (Mean=3.88 and SD=0.935), *quality of available information* (Mean=3.81 and SD=0.973), and *quality of facilities in and around the site* the least at (Mean=3.74 and SD=1.072).

	Frequency	Percent (%)	Mean	SD
Quality of facilities in and around the site was good (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	9	5.6	3.74	1.072
Disagree	11	6.8		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	32	19.8		
Agree	71	43.8		
Strongly Agree	39	24.1		
Quality of services available at the site was good (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	3	1.9	3.88	0.935
Disagree	12	7.4		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	27	16.7		
Agree	79	48.8		
Strongly Agree	41	25.3		
Quality of access to the site was very good (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	2	1.2	4.00	0.863
Disagree	7	4.3		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	27	16.7		
Agree	79	48.8		
Strongly Agree	47	29.0		
Quality of available information was very good (N=162)				
Strongly Disagree	5	3.1	3.81	0.973

Disagree	12	7.4		
Neither Agree nor Disagree	28	17.3		
Agree	80	49.4		
Strongly Agree	37	22.8		
'Quality' aggregate			3.85	0.721

Table 7: Satisfaction with the quality
Source: survey data

4.3.5) OVERALL SATISFACTION

The respondents at the two heritage sites in study were asked to rate their overall satisfaction of the sites and whether they would recommend others to visit these sites. As can be observed from the Table 8 below, when asked '*overall are you satisfied with the experience you had with the site*', 92.6% responded in affirmation. Similarly when asked whether they would recommend others to visit these heritage sites (*would you recommend others to visit this site*), the respondents were very positive with 94.4% responding in affirmation.

	Yes		No		Undecided	
	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)	Frequency	Percent (%)
Overall, are you satisfied with the experience you had with the site?	150	92.6	0	0	12	7.4
Would you recommend others to visit this site?	153	94.4	3	1.8	6	3.7

Table 8: Overall satisfaction of the tourists with the site
Source: survey data

When analyzing that whether there was any difference of perceptions among the visitors at two different sites on various variables, it can be observed (see table 9) that the respondents showed a higher overall satisfaction at both the sites Nizwa Fort (Mean=4.367, SD=0.637) and Bahla Fort (Mean=4.446, SD=0.600). At Nizwa Fort all the site components were rated average to above average with means ranging between 3.568 and 3.924. At Bahla Fort while '*facilities*' were rated average (Mean=3.281 and SD=0.741), '*quality*' (Mean=3.883 and SD=0.854) was rated above average and the other two components '*appearance*' and '*accessibility*' were rated between good and very good with means 4.218 and 4.013 respectively.

Site		Facilities	Appearance_ Maintainance	Accessibility	Quality	Overall Satisfaction
Nizwa_Fort	Mean	3.5681	3.9033	3.9245	3.8467	4.3679
	N	106	106	106	106	106
	Std. Deviation	.79775	.84203	.66518	.77810	.63734
Bahla_Fort	Mean	3.2817	4.2187	4.0134	3.8839	4.4464
	N	56	56	56	56	56
	Std. Deviation	.74127	.71995	.66686	.85409	.60059

Table 9: Satisfaction of visitors on various site components (site wise)
Source: survey data

To check whether there was any difference among the male and female respondents regarding their satisfaction with various site components, no significant difference was found in the mean values of males and females (see table 10).

Gender		Facilities	Appearance_ Maintainance	Accessibility	Quality	Overall Satisfaction
Male	Mean	3.3902	4.0213	3.9284	3.8110	4.3537
	N	82	82	82	82	82
	Std. Deviation	.81374	.78979	.67673	.84762	.61608
Female	Mean	3.5500	4.0031	3.9828	3.9094	4.4375
	N	80	80	80	80	80
	Std. Deviation	.75791	.84240	.65596	.75603	.63333

Table 10: Satisfaction of visitors on various site components (gender wise)
Source: survey data

To check whether there was any significant difference among the Omani's (citizens) and non-Omani's (foreigners) respondents regarding their satisfaction with various site components, the data produced in the Table 11 showed that while there was no significant difference between them with regard to the 'quality'; there was a significant difference on other components such as 'facilities' - Mean_Omani=2.992, Mean_non-Omani=3.663; 'appearance'- Mean_Omani=3.633, Mean_non-Omani=4.167; and 'accessibility'-Mean_Omani=3.750, Mean_non-Omani=4.039.

Omani or Non-Omani		Facilities	Appearance_ Maintenance	Accessibility	Quality	Overall Satisfaction
Omani	Mean	2.9929	3.6330	3.7500	3.6755	4.3191
	N	47	47	47	47	47
	Std. Deviation	.87685	.89814	.78756	.93674	.62923
Non-Omani	Mean	3.6638	4.1674	4.0391	3.9348	4.4261
	N	115	115	115	115	115
	Std. Deviation	.66005	.72527	.59151	.73231	.62212

Table 11: Satisfaction of visitors on various site components (nationality wise)
Source: survey data

Nevertheless this significant difference among Omani and non-Omani respondents on such dimensions as ‘facilities’, ‘appearance and maintenance’, and ‘accessibility’ related to only certain attributes. While within the ‘facilities’ dimension, 4 out of 9 attributes were rated lower by Omani respondents compared to those of non-Omani respondents. These were - *availability of good quality restaurants* (Mean_Omani=2.51); *availability and easy accessibility of toilets* (Mean_Omani=2.94); *provision for physically challenged people* (Mean_Omani=2.55) and *provisions for children and old age people* (Mean_Omani=2.70) (see table 13 in Appendix). Similarly 1 out of 4 attributes within the ‘appearance and maintenance’ dimension that was rated lower by Omani respondents is *cleanliness and tidiness of the toilets* (Mean=2.62) (see table 14 in Appendix). The lower rating of certain attributes relating to *facilities* and *appearance & maintenance* by Omani respondents can be to a major extent attributed to the reason that the Omani visitors usually visit these sites along with their families including children and old-age people (parents and grandparents) and may have found certain facilities either non-existent or not-satisfactory.

Within the ‘accessibility’ dimension (see table 15 in Appendix), 3 out of 8 attributes were rated lower by Omani respondents when compared to the non-Omani respondents. These attributes were – *condition of roads leading to leading to the site* (Mean-Omani=3.70 & Mean non-Omani=4.32); *ease of moving inside the site* (Mean-Omani=3.96 & Mean non-Omani=4.23); and *ease of moving around the site* (Mean-Omani=3.81 & Mean non-Omani=4.21). While the condition of the main road leading to both of these sites is very good (author’s own experience), the lower rating of Omani respondents may have been influenced by their understanding of other peripheral roads

leading to these sites which they may have used to arrive to these sites. Same may not be the case with the non-Omani visitors who usually come from Muscat (Oman's capital city) and use the main highway to reach these sites. The same reason may apply when rating 'ease of moving around the site'. However there was no apparent reason to understand the difference when it comes to 'ease of moving inside the site', and may possibly be investigated through further research.

Yet three (3) attributes within the 'accessibility' dimension relating to availability of information and tourist guides were rated lower by both the Omani and non-Omani nationals (see table 15 in Appendix). These were whether *information panels were installed at the site* (Mean_Omani=3.79 and Mean non-Omani=3.85); *information panels provided sufficient information* (Mean_Omani=3.51 and Mean non-Omani=3.70); and whether the tourists guides were knowledgeable and informative (Mean_Omani=3.45 and Mean non-Omani=3.77).

5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of tourist satisfaction with the two heritage sites, namely Nizwa Fort and Bahla Fort indicate that, in general the tourists were satisfied (92.6%) with two heritage sites. Nevertheless, there were various aspects/components with which the tourists' response was not very positive. While tourists were overall happy with the *appearance & maintenance* (Mean=4.01 and SD=0.813) and *accessibility* (Mean=3.95 and SD=0.665) at the two sites, their satisfaction with available *facilities* at the two sites was relatively poor (Mean=3.46 and SD=0.788). The higher satisfaction with the *accessibility* component can be attributed to the recent construction of fully electrified four-lane road connecting these two sites with the Muscat-Nizwa highway. Also the peripheral roads and connections have been recently refurbished and maintained. Nevertheless the tourists were not happy with the available information at the sites, which was either scarce or not accessible. When asked whether the *information panels at the sites were sufficiently available*, only 67% respondents (Mean=3.83 and SD=1.139) responded in positive. The tourists were also not happy with the amount and quality of information provided by the guides, as when asked *whether they found the guides informative*, only 58.6% (Mean=3.67 and SD=1.008) responded in positive. During the survey it was

observed that the local visitors, particularly the Omani nationals do not use guide services at these sites. Guides were more frequently seen accompanying foreign visitors. On enquiring, it was found that the guides accompanying them are more often non-locals designated by the tour operators who are not always well versed with the history of these two heritage sites.

While *appearance and maintenance* attributes at both the sites were rated satisfactorily, the respondents claimed that the toilets and the resting areas were not properly maintained. Only 51% of the respondents found the toilets and resting areas maintained. The respondents' satisfaction with the *facilities* attribute at both the sites was lower with all aspects of facilities such as *availability of toilets and resting room, availability of information, availability of guides, availability of proper eating-outs, availability of hotels, availability of proper information, and availability of special provisions for old, children and the people with special needs* (see table 5).

The results of overall satisfaction at two sites did not show any significant difference, which suggested that both the sites were rated equally by the respondents. Also the results did not show any significant difference among the respondents in evaluating the attributes at the two sites based on the respondents' gender, but there was a significant observed difference among the respondents' based on their nationality. Although both the nationals (Omani's) and foreigners showed a similar overall satisfaction, the Omani's rated sites relatively lower on all the three attributes (see table 11).

While most of the 'facilities' and 'appearance and maintenance' attributes were rated higher by non-Omani visitors, the Omani visitor's rated certain attributes such as 'availability and maintenance of toilets'; facilities for children and old-aged people'; and 'facilities for physically challenged people' as below average. Similarly, the 'accessibility in and around the sites' was rated lower by Omani visitors as compared to non-Omani visitors. Both the Omani and non-Omani visitors rated 'availability of information' and 'quality of guides (knowledge and informative)' below average.

6. CONCLUSION

The analysis of tourist satisfaction has been used as an important tool to understand the tourists' perspective of visited destination. The results of the study revealed that all

the four dimensions (facilities, appearance and maintenance, accessibility, and quality) play a critical role in the overall satisfaction of the tourists visiting heritage sites. While the results showed that the respondents' overall satisfaction with the sites was very positive with 92.6% saying that they were satisfied and 94.4% saying that they would recommend others to visit these sites, yet the tourists rated certain dimensions of the two heritage sites better than the others such as *quality of access to the sites* was rated at the highest (Mean=4.0 and SD=0.863) followed by *quality of available services* (Mean=3.88 and SD=0.935), *quality of available information* (Mean=3.81 and SD=0.973), and *quality of facilities in and around the site* the least at (Mean=3.74 and SD=1.072).

The results also revealed that the domestic visitors (Omanis) visiting the two sites were not as happy as non-Omani visitors with certain aspects of the facilities and appearance and maintenance such as *availability and cleanliness of toilets and resting room; availability of special provisions for old, children and the people with special needs; availability of proper eating-outs; and quality of access in and around the sites*. The results further revealed that both the Omani and non-Omani visitors were less satisfied with the *availability and quality of information and guide services*.

Based on the results of this study various recommendations can be made to increase the satisfaction of tourists with the two heritage sites of Nizwa and Bahla. These are a) improving facilities in and around the two heritage sites; b) improving maintenance of basic amenities in and around the site; and c) enhance provisions of information and local guide services.

While the study focused on the level of satisfaction the visitors had with the two heritage sites in the study, the results and conclusions drawn were subject to numerous limitations which may affect the generalizability of this research. First, the site attributes used in this study, as independent variables, are not exhaustive and other attributes not used in this study could influence tourist satisfaction as well. Second, the survey instrument also presented some challenges such as a small sample size, a population sample with unequal representation of the domestic and foreign visitors, a limited questionnaire, and the timing of the survey. Thirdly the study did not cover the managerial perspective on managing and maintaining these two sites. Nevertheless, these limitation, are hoped to, suggest directions for future research.

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Appendix

Omani or Non Omani	Visitor information center is available	Tourist guides were available at the site	Sufficient sitting and resting areas are available at the site	Good quality eating-outs and restaurants are available	Good hotels around the site are available for overnight stay	Good safety measures in place	Toilets were available and easily accessible	Provision for physically challenged people were available	Provisions for children and old age people were available
Omani	Mean	3.40	3.38	3.13	2.51	3.09	2.94	2.55	2.70
	N	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47
	Std. Deviation	1.469	1.278	1.361	1.196	1.396	1.237	1.309	1.350
Non-Omani	Mean	3.63	3.63	3.85	3.45	3.68	3.95	3.93	3.39
	N	115	115	115	115	115	115	115	115
	Std. Deviation	1.079	1.046	.910	1.019	.864	.877	.953	.971

Table 12: Comparing means on various 'facilities' components among Omani's (citizens) and Non-Omani's (foreigners)

Source: survey data

Omani or Non Omani	Toilets were clean and tidy	The site was clean and litter free	The site was culturally and traditionally aesthetic	The employees available at site were neatly dressed
Omani	Mean	2.62	3.72	4.30
	N	47	47	47
	Std. Deviation	1.295	1.228	.954
Non-Omani	Mean	3.75	4.19	4.33
	N	115	115	115
	Std. Deviation	1.016	.945	.803

Table 13: Comparing means on various 'appearance and maintenance' components among Omani's (citizens) and Non-Omani's (foreigners)

Source: survey data

Omani or Non Omani		Roads leading to the site were in good condition	Easy to move inside the site	Site can be easily located on GPS or on-line maps	Signposts and directions are clearly marked	Easy to move around the site	Information panels installed at the site	Information panels provided sufficient information	Tourist guides were knowledgeable and informative
Omani	Mean	3.70	3.96	4.02	3.77	3.81	3.79	3.51	3.45
	N	47	47	47	47	47	47	47	47
	Std. Deviation	1.178	.977	.967	1.127	1.173	1.215	1.140	.996
Non-Omani	Mean	4.32	4.23	4.19	4.04	4.21	3.85	3.70	3.77
	N	115	115	115	115	115	115	115	115
	Std. Deviation	.744	.738	.748	.950	.767	1.070	1.139	1.003

Table 14: Comparing means on various 'accessibility' components among Omani's (citizens) and Non-Omani's (foreigners)

Source: survey data

Omani or Non Omani		Quality of facilities in and around the site was good	Quality of services available at the site was good	Quality of access to the site was very good	Quality of available information was very good
Omani	Mean	3.38	3.77	3.85	3.70
	N	47	47	47	47
	Std. Deviation	1.311	1.088	1.000	.976
Non-Omani	Mean	3.89	3.93	4.06	3.86
	N	115	115	115	115
	Std. Deviation	.925	.866	.798	.972

Table 15: Comparing means based on 'Quality' of various site aspects among Omani's (citizens) and Non-Omani's (foreigners)

Source: survey data

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