



كلية محمد بن راشد
للإدارة الحكومية
MOHAMMED BIN RASHID
SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT

MPA 901 Dissertation

2024

Boosting Domestic Tourism: Unveiling the Hidden Gems of the UAE

by

Amira Abdulrahman Al Hammadi

This dissertation report is submitted in partial fulfillment of the award of Master of Public Administration



Declaration

I, the undersigned, **Amira Abdulrahman Al Hammadi**, declare that this Dissertation is my original work, that all material presented to Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government is my own, and has not been previously submitted to any other university for a higher degree. I also declare that the publications cited in this work have been personally consulted. I understand that if at any time it is shown that I have significantly misrepresented material presented to Mohammed Bin Rashid School of Government, any degree or credits awarded to me on the basis of that material may be revoked.

Signed: Amira Al Hammadi

Date: 09/06/2024

Student ID: 00264938

Supervisor: Dr. Scott Fargher

Word Count: 16,979 words

Abstract

Tourism is a critical economic driver for the United Arab Emirates (UAE), significantly contributing to economic growth, cultural exchange, and sustainable development. This dissertation investigates the enhancement of domestic tourism within UAE, particularly in the less-visited emirates, by evaluating current tourism policies and benchmarking best practices from Zambia, Fiji, and Canada. The research employs a qualitative methodology, utilizing benchmarking and SWOT analyses to assess UAE's practices against international standards. The study is guided by two sub-questions: (1) What specific policy measures can the UAE implement to effectively promote domestic tourism in its less-visited emirates? (2) How does the UAE's current domestic tourism policy framework align with sustainable tourism practices advocated by international bodies such as the UNWTO?

Key findings indicate that while the UAE has made significant progress in international tourism, there is substantial potential for domestic tourism development. The study identifies critical factors for enhancing domestic tourism, including infrastructure development, destination enhancement, targeted marketing campaigns, and capacity-building initiatives. Additionally, the UAE's efforts in preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainable tourism align with international best practices, but further improvements are needed to optimize domestic tourism. The research concludes with several policy recommendations for the UAE. These include investing in transportation and digital infrastructure, promoting cultural and heritage tourism, launching targeted marketing campaigns, and enhancing workforce training. Emphasizing sustainability, these strategies aim to preserve cultural heritage and natural resources while fostering economic growth and social cohesion. This dissertation provides a comprehensive framework for policymakers to enhance domestic tourism in the UAE sustainably. By balancing international and domestic tourism efforts, the UAE can ensure a resilient and diversified tourism sector, contributing to its broader strategic goals of economic diversification and sustainable development.

Keywords: Domestic Tourism; *UAE*; *international tourism*; *less-visited emirates*

ملخص البحث

السياحة هي محرك اقتصادي حيوي لدولة الإمارات العربية المتحدة، حيث تساهم بشكل كبير في النمو الاقتصادي، وتبادل الثقافات، والتنمية المستدامة. تحقق هذه الأطروحة في تعزيز السياحة الداخلية في الإمارات، خصوصاً في الإمارات الأقل زيارة، من خلال تقييم السياسات السياحية الحالية ومقارنة أفضل الممارسات من زامبيا، فيجي، وكندا. تتبع الدراسة منهجية نوعية، باستخدام التحليل المرجعي وتحليل نقاط القوة والضعف والفرص والتهديدات (SWOT) لتقييم ممارسات الإمارات مقابل المعايير الدولية. تسترشد الدراسة بسؤالين فرعيين: (1) ما هي التدابير السياسية المحددة التي يمكن للإمارات تنفيذها لتعزيز السياحة الداخلية في الإمارات الأقل زيارة؟ (2) كيف يتماشى إطار سياسة السياحة الداخلية الحالي للإمارات مع ممارسات السياحة المستدامة التي تدعو إليها الهيئات الدولية مثل منظمة السياحة العالمية؟

تشير النتائج الرئيسية إلى أنه بينما أحرزت الإمارات تقدماً كبيراً في السياحة الدولية، هناك إمكانيات كبيرة لتطوير السياحة الداخلية. تحدد الدراسة العوامل الحاسمة لتعزيز السياحة الداخلية، بما في ذلك تطوير البنية التحتية، وتحسين الوجهات، وحملات التسويق المستهدفة، والمبادرات لبناء القدرات. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تتماشى جهود الإمارات في الحفاظ على التراث الثقافي وتعزيز السياحة المستدامة مع أفضل الممارسات الدولية، ولكن هناك حاجة إلى مزيد من التحسينات لتحقيق الأمثلية في السياحة الداخلية. تنتهي الدراسة بعدة توصيات سياسية للإمارات. تتضمن هذه التوصيات الاستثمار في البنية التحتية للنقل والتكنولوجيا الرقمية، وتعزيز السياحة الثقافية والتراثية، وإطلاق حملات تسويق مستهدفة، وتعزيز تدريب القوى العاملة. من خلال التأكيد على الاستدامة، تهدف هذه الاستراتيجيات إلى الحفاظ على التراث الثقافي والموارد الطبيعية مع تعزيز النمو الاقتصادي والتماسك الاجتماعي. توفر هذه الأطروحة إطاراً شاملاً لصانعي السياسات لتعزيز السياحة الداخلية في الإمارات بشكل مستدام. من خلال موازنة جهود السياحة الدولية والمحلية، يمكن للإمارات ضمان قطاع سياحي متنوع ومرن، مما يساهم في أهدافها الاستراتيجية الأوسع للتنوع الاقتصادي والتنمية المستدامة.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to my professor, Dr. Scott Fargher, for his invaluable guidance and support throughout this dissertation.

A heartfelt thanks to my sister, Aisha Alhammadi, for her constant encouragement and supporting.

Lastly, I am profoundly grateful to my family for their unwavering love, patience, and support. Thank you for always being there for me.

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Abbreviations

GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
COP28	committee of partners 2028'
DSC.....	Dubai Statistics Centre
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
UAE.....	United Arab Emirates
UNWT	United Nations World Tourism Organization

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Importance of Tourism in the Global Economy

Tourism stands as a vital component of any country's economy, driving economic growth, fostering cultural exchange, and promoting sustainable development. The annual research of the World Travel & Tourism Council reveals that in 2023, the Travel and Tourism sector contributes a significant 9.1% to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (WTTC, 2023), underscoring its substantial impact on worldwide economic growth. Moreover, the latest World Economic Outlook (WEO) Report by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) emphasizes the pivotal role of tourism in driving economic recovery and expansion on a global scale (UN Tourism, 2023). These findings highlight the essential nature of tourism in shaping the economic landscape of nations across the globe.

1.2 Significance of Tourism for the UAE

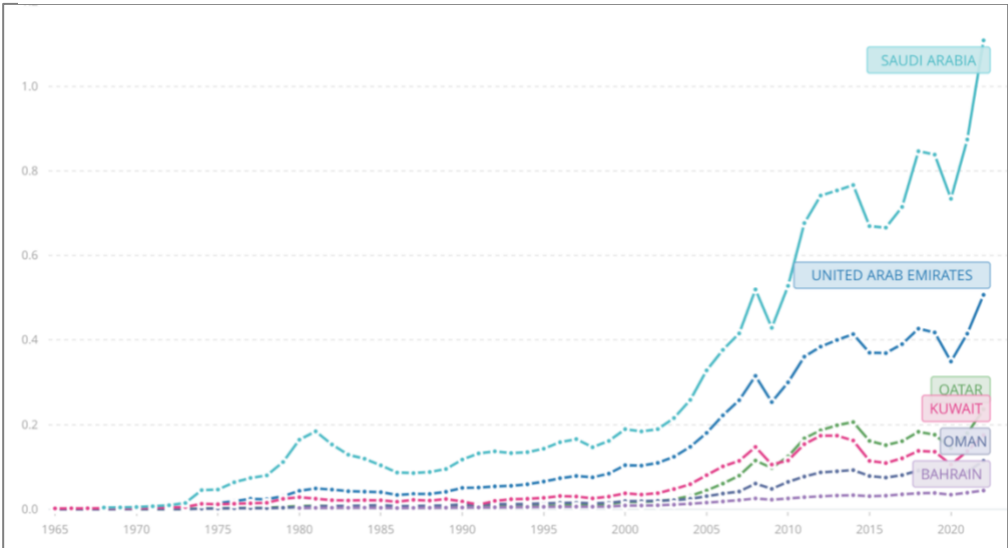
The significance of tourism extends beyond global economic indicators; it holds particular importance for the United Arab Emirates (UAE), a nation renowned for its ambition, innovation, and rich cultural heritage. As one of the world's premier tourist destinations, the UAE is committed to attracting visitors from both domestic and international markets. In the vibrant city of Dubai, often synonymous with luxury and modernity, tourism serves as a cornerstone of economic growth, driving job creation, stimulating investment, and bolstering various sectors such as hospitality, retail, and entertainment.

1.3 Economic Growth and Tourism's Contribution in the UAE

As illustrated in Figure 1.1, the GDP trends of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries reveal significant economic growth across the region from 1965 to 2020. Among these countries, Saudi Arabia and the UAE stand out with the most pronounced increases

in GDP. The UAE's economic growth underscores its commitment to leveraging various sectors, including tourism, as drivers of economic diversification. In 2016, tourism contributed 12.1% to the UAE's GDP, amounting to AED 159.1 billion (MOF, 2024). Projections indicate a continued upward trend, with tourism's contribution expected to reach AED 264.5 billion, constituting 12.4% of the GDP by 2027 (ibid). This steady growth trajectory highlights the crucial role of tourism in the UAE's economic landscape and its ongoing efforts to diversify and strengthen its economy.

Figure.3.1: The GDP Trends of GCC Countries from 1965 to 2022



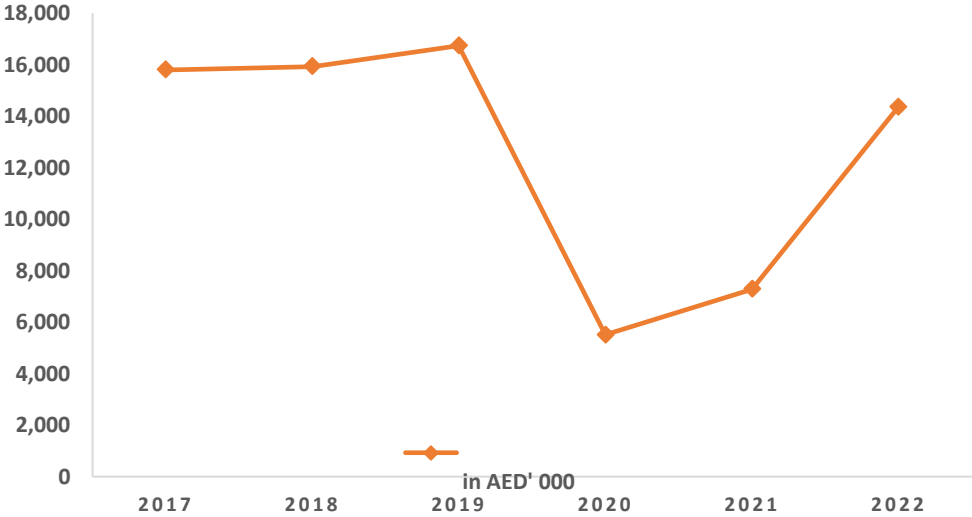
Source: World Bank (2024)

In comparison, Saudi Arabia leads the region in GDP growth, with a significant rise particularly noticeable in recent years. This growth can be attributed to various economic policies and strategies aimed at diversifying its economy beyond oil. Other GCC countries like Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain also show growth but at a more moderate pace. This regional comparison indicates that while the UAE has been successful in its economic diversification efforts, it still faces competitive pressure from neighboring countries. Saudi Arabia's economic policies and growth strategies have resulted in a more pronounced increase in GDP, suggesting that the UAE must continue to innovate and invest in various sectors to maintain and improve its economic standing within the region.

1.4 Resilience of Dubai's Tourism Sector

Dubai emerged as the most visited city in the UAE and the fourth most visited city in the world (GMI, 2024), with tourism playing a pivotal role in its resilience and recovery from the pandemic's challenges. This prominence underscores Dubai's critical role in the UAE's tourism sector, as it serves as the primary entry point for the bulk of visitors entering or passing through the country. Figure 1.2 demonstrates this resilience, depicting the trends in Dubai's international arrivals from 2017 to 2022 as reported by the Dubai Statistic Center (2023). Although the data focuses on Dubai International, it is significant because this airport sees the majority of visitors, reinforcing Dubai's status as a global tourism hub.

Figure 1.4 Dubai international arrivals from 2017 to 2022



Source: DSC (2023)

The chart highlights a clear downturn in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, this downturn was relatively short-lived, with a noticeable recovery beginning in 2021. The positive economic impact of Expo 2020 Dubai was significant, as evidenced by increases in international airport arrivals and non-oil foreign trade in 2021 compared to the previous year (Dubai Chamber of Commerce, 2022). The Dubai Hospitality Report 2022 further underscored the city's tourism success, with hotel capacities nearing full

occupancy in 2021, largely due to the Expo 2020. Following the event, Dubai welcomed a substantial influx of international football fans for the Qatar World Cup 2022, many of whom visited the UAE after the tournament. This influx contributed to the continued recovery and growth in international arrivals. Additionally, the UAE's commitment to positioning itself as a global hub for tourism and sustainable development was solidified with its role as the host of COP28 (KPMG, 2022).

As we look forward to 2024, Dubai is strategically positioning itself to continue its upward economic and tourism trajectory. The city is focusing on new initiatives and events anticipated to stimulate further growth. These events include INDEX Dubai, the region's premier interior design trade show; Crypto Expo Dubai 2024, one of the city's most significant financial technology gatherings; and 'Machines Can See', a leading AI event showcasing the latest trends in artificial intelligence (Economy Middle East, 2024). Additionally, Dubai will continue hosting other significant events that will collectively contribute to its status as a dynamic hub in the Middle East. Overall, the combined data from these figures underscore the UAE's economic resilience and its continued focus on diversification and innovation, ensuring a strong rebound to pre-COVID-19 levels and beyond.

1.5 What is Domestic Tourism

Domestic tourism, also identified by different terms, such as staycations, domestic tourism and local tourism, refers to travel within the borders of one's country involving visits to tourist attractions, cultural events, and recreational or leisure purposes (Kvítková et al., 2021). Domestic tourists can be classified into backyard, micro, and macro domestic tourists. Backyard domestic tourists leave their homes for leisure moments to forget their daily challenges or to recollect themselves and strategize on the way forward, but their activities remain within their neighborhoods (Kabote, 2021). For instance, residents of Dubai spending a weekend visiting the Dubai Mall or enjoying the Dubai Fountain show would be considered backyard tourists. They are exploring attractions close to home without overnight stays. Micro-domestic involves a bit more travel, often within the same emirate or to neighboring ones, and may include overnight stays (Kabote,

2021), an example could be residents of Abu Dhabi taking a short trip to Al Ain to visit the Al Ain Zoo or Jebel Hafeet for a weekend getaway, staying at local accommodations. Macro domestic tourists are people who travel across several emirates, and their trips can be considered as mini-vacations (Kabote, 2021). For example, residents from Sharjah might travel across the country to Ras Al Khaimah for a beach holiday, stay in a hotel, and participate in activities such as visiting the National Museum of Ras Al Khaimah.

1.6 Significance of Domestic Tourism in the UAE

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai, has highlighted the significance of domestic tourism in fostering national identity and supporting local communities. As His Highness articulated, "Tourism within the country supports its people, and exploring the homeland is an exploration of identity and roots." He emphasized this sentiment in a heartfelt message, stating, "My tourism is in my homeland... My homeland is the most beautiful... My homeland is the kindest... My homeland is the warmest in feelings and emotions... May God protect my country, the UAE." (EmaratAlyoum, 2020).

The motive for my focus on domestic tourism within the UAE comes from its comparative underrepresentation in existing scholarly literature and public discourse, which traditionally prioritizes international tourism. This oversight occurs despite domestic tourism's significant role in supporting economic flexibility, fostering cultural enrichment, and reinforcing national identity. Evidence from recent studies suggests that while international tourism garners more attention due to its immediate impact on foreign exchange earnings, domestic tourism offers sustainable benefits by distributing economic gains more evenly across different regions within a country and reducing reliance on international visitors (Radwan & Saeed, 2023).

His Highness's words underscore the profound connection between domestic tourism and national identity. By promoting tourism within the UAE, we not only support

the local economy but also strengthen the bonds that tie citizens to their heritage, culture, and land. Exploring the diverse landscapes and rich history of the UAE allows residents to develop a deeper understanding and appreciation of their nation's identity, roots, and boundaries.

1.7 Research Objectives and Questions

This research will delve into how domestic tourism supports sustainable economic growth by reducing the seasonal fluctuations associated with international tourism markets. Additionally, it will explore how strengthening domestic tourism can play a critical role in the conservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of environmental sustainability, aligning with the UAE's broader strategic goals of diversification and sustainable development (U.AE, 2024d). By providing a comprehensive analysis of domestic tourism's contributions to the UAE's societal, economic, and environmental landscapes, this dissertation aims to contribute valuable insights to the academic field, offering in-depth understanding that could inform future policy and strategic initiatives aimed at developing a strong domestic tourism sector. The primary research question guiding this study is: "Should the UAE prioritize the development of its domestic tourism sector, and what are the potential benefits and costs of such prioritization?" To answer this question, the research is structured around key sub-questions:

1. What specific policy measures can the UAE implement to effectively promote domestic tourism in less-visited emirates, diversifying the tourism sector?
2. How does the UAE's current domestic tourism policy framework align with sustainable tourism practices advocated by international bodies such as the UNWT?

1.8 Alignment with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and UAE Strategies

This research aligns with several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). By promoting

domestic tourism, this study supports economic growth, job creation, and the development of sustainable communities within the UAE.

Additionally, this research is closely aligned with key UAE strategies such as UAE Vision 2021, which emphasizes a competitive knowledge economy and the preservation of national identity. It also supports the UAE Centennial 2071's vision of ensuring a high quality of life and sustainable economic growth. The UAE Green Growth Strategy's focus on sustainable environment and infrastructure, the UAE Tourism Strategy 2031's goal of increasing tourism's GDP contribution and diversifying tourism offerings, and the UAE National Innovation Strategy's emphasis on fostering innovation within the tourism sector are all integral to this study.

1.9 Structure of the paper

- The second chapter will include the "Literature Review" which outlines the evolution of the UAE's tourism policies focusing on both domestic and international markets. This section will discuss the challenges, the factors and the benefits of promoting domestic tourism, and the future of tourism in the UAE, including sustainable practices. Finally, it will summarize the key findings, challenges, and opportunities in the UAE's ongoing tourism development journey.
- The third chapter will detail the "Methodology." The methodology employed in this research includes a combination of benchmarking analysis and SWOT analysis. Benchmarking analysis involves comparing the UAE's tourism practices with those of countries that have successfully implemented domestic tourism strategies. SWOT analysis evaluates the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the current domestic tourism policy framework in the UAE. Data collection is conducted using various sources, including government reports, peer-reviewed journal articles, reputable news outlets, and expert opinion documents, ensuring comprehensive and credible information.
- The fourth chapter, "Data Analysis and Findings," will present robust data from reviewed papers and journals related to the topic. This section will answer sub-research questions by providing a document analysis of the UAE's tourism

transformations, focusing on domestic tourism's role. It will analyze policies, studies, and reports to understand the impact and efficiency of tourism strategies. This method will ensure the credibility and validity of the results through comparative analysis.

- Lastly, the fifth chapter will include the conclusion, a summary of key findings, and a framework for recommendations and future work. It will highlight the importance of sustainable tourism practices, the need for comprehensive policies, and the benefits of promoting domestic tourism for economic growth and cultural preservation. Recommendations will focus on improving infrastructure, enhancing marketing strategies, and fostering community engagement to boost domestic tourism in the UAE.

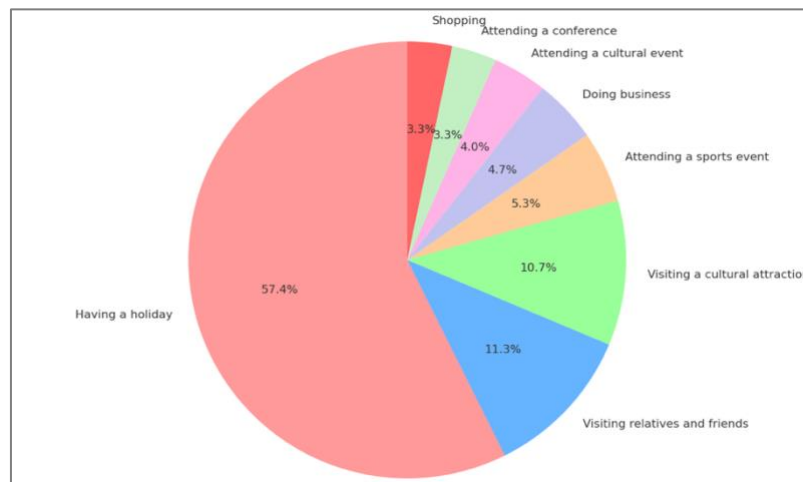
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Tourism is a critical economic driver in the modern economy, considering its role in generating revenue, creating employment opportunities and stimulating local businesses. The UAE relies on tourism to promote the growth of various sectors such as hospitality, entertainment, and retail, drive job creation, and stimulate investment. International tourism refers to travel for leisure, visits to tourist attraction sites, business meetings or conferences, cultural events, and medical purposes in other countries. In this case, although the UAE tourism policy structure seeks to encourage domestic and international visitors, its primary focus has been attracting international tourists.

Existing literature shows that although international tourism is vital in fueling economic development; however, researchers have often overlooked on these policies can establish balance between domestic and international tourism, especially during the off-peak season when international visitors flow has dipped. While domestic tourism can promote job creation, cultural exchange, economic growth, and revenue generation for sectors like transport, hospitality, and entertainment, scholars' and policymakers' failure to focus on its capability and benefits. After all, domestic tourists engage in activities similar to those of international tourists, as per Radwan and Saeed (2023), shown in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1: Reasons for Domestic Travel



Source: Radwan & Saeed (2023)

UAE tourism growth patterns have been influenced by diverse global events and trends shaping the nation's policy frameworks. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic had severely impacted the sector through implementation of movement restrictions, such as lockdowns. According to the study by Saini, Bhalla, Qazi, and Iftikhar (2021), the tourism industry has experienced an international decline of 20% because of the lockdown. Additionally, international organizations, such as UN Tourism, are encouraging nations globally, including the UAE, to align and integrate sustainability measures in their tourism policies (UN Tourism, 2024). These institutions advocate for states to adopt multiple measures, such as environmental conservation, wise resource management, and cultural conservation. Transitioning to these changes requires the UAE to adapt its tourism policy initiatives around these proposals, affecting the nation's ability to achieve desired goals. Furthermore, domestic tourism has a unique feature, which is its ability to succeed during crises when international tourism is impossible.

This literature review analyzes the current status of UAE's domestic tourism. It identifies potential policy framework changes that can improve it, its role in economic growth, promoting economic recovery following crises, and fostering a sustainable tourism industry, which external pressures from foreign tourists on local systems. This literature review also examines the significance of reforming domestic tourism policies through incentives targeting industry players and consumers to improve the sector's resilience and contributions towards the UAE's economic growth. This literature review undertakes a multidimensional and comprehensive analysis of the costs, such as environmental pollution, congestion and resource wastage, and benefits, including income generation and economy diversification, associated with domestic tourism.

Moreover, the search strategy for articles to complete the literature review on UAE domestic tourism involved the exploration of diverse databases using different keywords and terms, as outlined in Table 2.1. The sources used also had to meet the search and evaluation criteria discussed below.

Table 2.2: Literature Review Search Strategy

DATABASES SEARCHED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Google Scholar • Scopus • ScienceDirect • These searches also included direct inquiries from the UAE government websites.
KEYWORDS AND SEARCH TERMS	<p>The keywords and search terms used are listed below.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Tourism in UAE 2. Domestic Tourism in UAE 3. Classification of Domestic Tourism 4. UAE Domestic Tourism Laws 5. Domestic vs. International Tourism 6. Domestic Tourism and Economic Growth 7. Constraints of International Tourism 8. Prospects of UAE Domestic Tourism 9. Economic Diversification through Domestic Tourism in UAE 10. Connection between Domestic Tourism and Environmental Protection 11. COVID-19 Implications for Domestic Tourism 12. Domestic Tourism and Economic Sustainability 13. Drivers of Domestic Tourism 14. Role of Media in Boosting Domestic Tourism 15. The Substitution of Domestic and International Tourism 16. UAE Domestic Tourism Data/Statistics 17. UAE Domestic Tourism Strategy 18. Destinations for UAE Domestic Tourists 19. Attitudes toward Domestic Tourism 20. Domestic Travel Intentions 21. International Tourism Overreliance
CRITERIA APPLIED FOR SELECTING AND EVALUATING SOURCES	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authority and Credibility—To be selected, an article had to be published in a peer-reviewed journal. Non-peer-reviewed articles were not included. 2. Accuracy or Reliability- the articles had to be supported by evidence and proper citations for them to be selected and. This approach ensured that non-academic articles were excluded. 3. Currency—The issue of UAE domestic tourism is changing dynamically. The papers selected had to have been published within the last ten years, with the majority being published after 2019. 4. Relevance- the selection and evaluation process also considered the articles' relevance. The papers had to cover search terms or keywords used. Papers that did not mention concepts implied by the keywords or search terms were omitted. 5. The websites used were government-managed to ensure they were reliable and credible. Specifically, the UAE government websites provided existing statistical data and strategies on domestic tourism.

2.2 Tourism

Tourism is a modern, socially constructed concept relating to spending time away from home by visiting areas and destinations with recreational enjoyments that allow individuals to relax and learn about diverse cultures. Tourism is a multidimensional term

that refers to individuals' movement to diverse destinations to engage in socialization and pleasure. Vázquez et al. (2021) assert that the tourism sector is a structured and organized industry involving private and public players, such as hotel owners, travel companies, employees working in these organizations and government institutions regulating diverse sections of touristic activities. Tourism exists in multiple forms, such as adventure, ecotourism which is nature-based tourism, and cultural and food tourism, each offering unique experiences to the visitors. Nations structure their tourism policies based on the availability of natural or artificial resources, such as parks, shopping malls and others (Vázquez et al., 2021). In this case, the diversification of the tourism products increases visitors' expenditure in acquiring these services, enhancing the nation's economy through employment creation and revenue collection through taxation, licensing and park entry fees. As a result, tourism includes diverse sociocultural activities, such as accommodation, visiting parks, entertainment and shopping establishments, which contribute to a nation's gross domestic product through job creation and revenue generation.

2.3 Domestic Tourism

2.3.1 Definitions

Domestic tourism is a multidimensional term for individuals travelling to sociocultural pleasure and infrastructures within their country for leisure, relaxation or business (Canh & Thanh, 2020). Domestic tourists visit recreation facilities, such as hotels and attraction centers, within their nation's geographical boundary. In particular, domestic tourism exists in diverse forms, such as holiday tourism, where individuals travel to beaches and other leisure destinations for relaxation, and business tourism, characterized by travel for conferences, meetings, and other professional purposes within the country. Therefore, domestic tourism is based on activities and travel experiences within the borders of one's own country, catering to diverse needs from leisure and recreation to business and cultural exploration.

2.3.2 Trends

Domestic tourism is experiencing multiple trends centered on unique consumer needs and a shift towards sustainability. Even though changes in domestic tourism are subjective, and changes from one nation to another depend on social, economic and political elements, there are common trends observed globally. Knežević Cvelbar and Ogorevc (2020) state that in 2020, European nations offered their citizens staycation vouchers to use in short-term getaways to save the tourism sector from collapsing due to international COVID-19 restrictions. Although the health risks of the pandemic have been reduced through mass vaccination drives, the staycation culture has become common in modern society (Knežević Cvelbar & Ogorevc, 2023). Furthermore, an increase in environmentalism and health well-being consciousness has led to a demand for ecotourism and adventure, creating a demand for outdoor activities and experiences that enable individuals to connect with nature. Additionally, prioritizing family unity and connection is forcing tourism players to develop family-friendly travel packages, including visits to reserves and theme parks (Knežević Cvelbar & Ogorevc, 2023). As a result, domestic tourism has witnessed changes in travel services, characterized by a preference for short getaways, adventure and ecotourism.

2.3.3 Benefits

Strengthening domestic tourism promotes economic and social development through job creation, revenue collection, and cultural preservation. Encouraging citizens to travel to local destinations increases demand for diverse services, such as accommodation and transportation, enabling job creation. When more people get jobs, they spend more money, enhancing the nation's gross domestic product. Canh and Thanh (2020) state that domestic tourism's reliance on local citizens reduces a country's economic vulnerability to international factors, such as a decline in foreign visitors. Therefore, domestic tourism is advantageous because it fuels regional development through the equitable distribution of economic activities and enriches cultural identity.

2.3.4 Spill-overs

Domestic tourism has far-reaching effects that extend to infrastructure development, economic diversification, and heritage conservation. Tourism is a multifaceted industry comprising diverse sectors, including transportation, hospitality, accommodation, entertainment, and travel services. As a result, the labor demand for providing relevant services enables job creation, which, in turn, improves the country's GDP. Additionally, governments must develop and enhance various enabling infrastructures, such as roads, airports, public transportation systems, and healthcare facilities, to support the tourism industry. Therefore, optimizing domestic tourism enhances environmental sustainability, and community development within destinations.

2.3.5 Costs

Domestic tourism is beneficial in fueling development, but there are also associated costs, such as harming the environment and putting pressure on public facilities and services. The operations of tourism in the hospitality and travel sectors contribute to water, air, and land pollution. Additionally, increasing local travelling can cause overcrowding and overload infrastructural systems, like roads and road networks. Consequently, the overdevelopment of tourist sites and uncoordinated domestic tourism policy frameworks can lead to negative consequences such as pollution and loss of cultural heritage.

2.4 Domestic Tourism Policies

2.4.1 Policies to Promote Domestic Tourism

The UAE must formulate policies based on these issues to boost domestic tourism. Stolz et al. (2023) propose that the UAE government adopt policies to strengthen the unified national tourism identity, develop and diversify specialized tourism products, and increase investment in all tourism sectors. Stolz et al. (2023) add that the UAE government should also build tourism capabilities and encourage the contribution of national cadres (Stolz et al., 2023). These policies are relevant to the domestic tourism

determinants discussed. For example, strengthening the unified national tourism identity would promote domestic tourism by promoting nationwide tourism while maintaining the uniqueness of each Emirate. Similarly, developing and diversifying specialized tourism products would broaden consumer choice and ensure there is a tourism product or service that suits all people regardless of their demographic characteristics and preferences.

The UAE also needs policies that will see each Emirate increase its tourist attractions consistently to make them more available to citizens and cut the need to travel far to get their desired experiences. Further, the government should respond to the issue of citizens' income as an obstacle to domestic tourism by providing differentiated costs. For example, domestic tourists should pay lower fees than international tourists when accessing tourist attraction sites. Therefore, while the UAE has policies supporting domestic tourism, existing literature proves they are inadequate.

2.4.2 Best Practices from Other Countries

Domestic tourism policies of various countries offer valuable insights to enhance its domestic tourism sector. Table 2.2 below summarizes these best practices from different countries, highlighting specific strategies and examples that have proven effective in promoting domestic tourism.

Table 2.2 Best Practices from Other Countries to Enhance Domestic Tourism

POLICY CATEGORY	COUNTRY EXAMPLES	DETAILS	SOURCE
MARKETING CAMPAIGNS	New Zealand, Argentina, Morocco, Mexico, Malaysia, Jordan, Georgia, Fiji, Uruguay, Costa Rica	Examples: Fiji: 'Love Our Locals' New Zealand: 'Do Something New'	McDougall (2023)
FINANCIAL INCENTIVES	Malaysia, Thailand, Serbia	Example: Thailand: Subsidized hotel accommodations for locals, offering a 40% discount off the regular price.	McDougall (2023)
PARTNERSHIPS AMD	Peru, Canada	Examples: Peru: Free access to numerous renowned sites for domestic tourists. Canada: A private association invested \$2 million in collaboration with the government.	McDougall (2023)

MARKET INTELLIGENCE, INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT AND SUSTAINABILITY	Malaysia, Philippines, Argentina, Zambia	Initiatives to better understand their tourism markets through market surveys Infrastructure development Sustainability programs	McDougall (2023) Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023)
REDUCING OVER-TOURISM	Amsterdam, Venice	Examples: Amsterdam: Stopped the development of new hotels to prevent further overcrowding. Venice: Banned large cruise ships, controlled access to congested areas, and imposed fines for disruptive behaviors.	Simmons (2021)
DOMESTIC TOURISM DURING PANDEMIC	Singapore	Examples: Increased local tour bookings due to innovative products and SRV scheme. Specific examples include Big Bus and Ducktours, Singapore Sidecars, and Travcoach.	Tan (2021)

By adopting similar practices, the UAE can enhance its domestic tourism sector, making it more attractive and accessible to its residents while ensuring sustainable and balanced growth across all Emirates.

2.4.3 UAE Tourism Policies

While the UAE has made significant progress in promoting domestic tourism, its efforts are inadequate, and more measures are necessary to benefit from it fully. Late in 2020, His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid approved the UAE's new Strategy for Domestic Tourism. This strategy is designed to regulate the national tourism industry through effective collaboration between the appropriate local and federal authorities. In addition, His Highness has introduced a unified tourism identity as part of the UAE Nation Brand initiative, with the goal of solidifying the country's position as a leading travel destination on both a national and international level (U.AE, 2023). Additionally, he initiated the "World's Coolest Winter" campaign, a 45-day promotion of the emirates' distinct sites. Coordinated by the Ministry of Economy, alongside local tourism partners and the UAE Government Media Office, it sought to underscore the unique features of each emirate and market the UAE as an integrated destination (H. H. Sheikh Mohammed News, 2020). This marketing policy has led to significant improvements in domestic

tourism. Other notable policies include laws on public transport that make mobility easy, dress codes that promote peaceful coexistence and adherence to local cultures, and public morals on alcohol consumption, smoking, antisocial behavior, and sexual orientation. These policies have made healthy interactions among tourists smooth.

Moreover, The UAE aligns its tourism industry with the SDGs through various initiatives and strategies focusing on social, economic, and environmental sustainability. According to El-Aidie et al. (2021), the UAE utilizes relevant tourism agencies for implementing sustainability practices as outlined in the SDGs (El-Aidie et al., 2021). For instance, the government emphasizes adopting measures to band negative impacts on the environment, culture, and local communities while maximizing the benefits. Furthermore, the UAE invests in infrastructure development that supports sustainable tourism, such as eco-friendly hotels and resorts, renewable energy projects, and efficient transportation systems. Such commitment enables the country to meet the SDGs related to sustainable cities and communities (SDG 11) and affordable and clean energy (SDG 7). Additionally, Aldhanhani & Zainudin (2022) argue that the UAE prioritizes the preservation of critical historical and cultural heritage centers to maximize the tourism benefits realized from these locations (Aldhanhani & Zainudin, 2022). These efforts to safeguard museums, traditional arts, and cultural events contribute to SDGs related to cultural preservation (SDG 11.4). Consequently, the UAE's awareness of sustainable development goals has facilitated the implementation of a strong framework that integrates economic growth and environmental supervision.

2.5 Domestic Tourism and Economic Growth

Domestic tourism has a greater potential to achieve economic growth than international tourism. According to Seyfi, Hall, and Saarinen (2023), developing domestic tourism gives the country better growth opportunities since this sector would not be subject to external interference. The government would be better positioned to control various variables to increase tourism volumes instead of depending on international

tourists over whom it lacks control (Seyfi et al., 2023). Arbulú, Razumova, Rey-Maqueira and Sastre (2023) argue that domestic tourism is more spread out within a country since tourists are citizens scattered all over. Tourism expenditures are also spread throughout the country, implying that all parts of the nation experience job creation and get their daily income due to income distribution. This scenario differs from international tourists, who only target major cities and urban areas, benefiting only a few people. In contrast, domestic tourism involves people spending money in all areas, including the remote ones, creating an income redistribution effect. The authors also state that governments and destination managers often prefer international visitors since they are associated with higher spending capacities and foreign exchange. However, the authors retaliate that the same governments and destination managers often appreciate domestic tourism during economic crises.

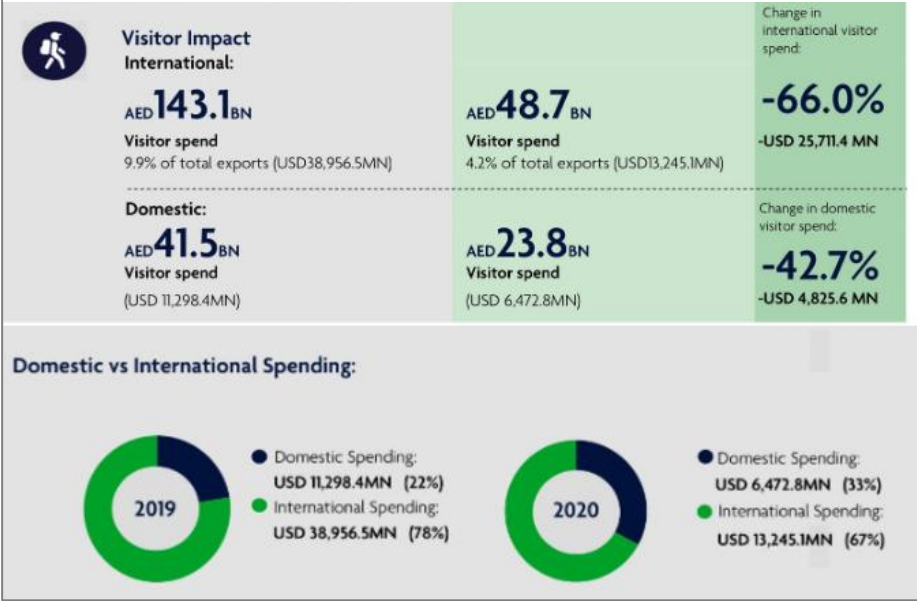
Besides, domestic tourism decreases external leakages, and domestic tourists are more likely to consume locally produced goods and are more willing to participate in development initiatives. Even though domestic tourists have lower spending capacities than international tourists, their expenditure is consistent and frequent because they are more likely to go for holidays, visit friends or cultural attractions, and attend conferences in the country than foreign tourists (Arbulú et al., 2021). Moreover, many tourist firms offer products and services consumed in foreign tourists' home countries and focus less on local dynamics. Promoting domestic tourism supports the local economy by continually ensuring businesses utilize local materials and support businesses by local citizens (Agyeiwaah, 2023). Thus, existing literature presents domestic tourism as critical for economic growth.

2.6 Domestic Tourism during Crises in UAE

Domestic tourism's role in driving economic activity, fostering cultural exchange, and promoting national pride that positively impacts society, the economy, and the environment is evident in crises that reduce international tourism. According to Aburumman (2023), domestic tourism is critical for a country during crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic that reduce international travel. UAE citizens contributed to the

economy through domestic tourism, an aspect that international tourism could not achieve during that period (Aburumman et al., 2023). For example, international visitors spent AED 48.7 billion in 2020, down from AED 143.1 billion in 2019, representing a -66% decline against domestic tourists, who spent AED 23.8 billion in 2020, down from AED 41.5 billion in 2019, representing a -42.7% drop (U.AE, 2023a). This data is summarized in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Domestic vs International Tourism Data



Source :U.AE (2023a).

This data indicates that international tourism may be more volatile and susceptible to crises than domestic tourism. In 2020, domestic spending accounted for 33% of the total tourism income, up from 22% in 2019, while the share of international spending decreased to 67% from 78%. According to the World Travel & Tourism Council (2018), domestic tourism typically accounted for at least 50% of total Travel & Tourism spending in major economies (WTTC, 2018). Therefore, while the increase from 22% to 33% suggests a move towards a greater balance, further growth in domestic tourism spending may be desirable to align with broader economic benchmarks and strengthen the resilience of the tourism sector.

Allan, Cobbolly, Figus and Maurya (2022) state that countries always have more control over internal factors than external ones, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, local mobility was less restricted than international mobility, which led to a faster recovery in domestic tourism than international tourism. The faster recovery saved the economy from the worse impacts of reduced international tourism. Further, the UAE economy is subject to unfavorable factors such as the hard climatic conditions, which reduce inbound tourism (Allan et al., 2022). This instance is usually beyond the control of the government. At the same time, dependency on international tourists presents notable risks, especially when their countries experience economic uncertainty due to war or conflict, such as the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This is because their spending power is significantly reduced when people lose hope for future income and begin to minimize expenditures to ensure that their resources last as long as possible (Arbulú et al., 2021).

2.7 Unsustainability and Intolerance of International Tourism

The long-term sustainability of international tourism is uncertain due to the UAE's social carrying capacity. Zaidan and Kovacs (2017) argue that a country's citizens tolerate tourists as long as their economic impacts remain positive and become dissatisfied if tourists no longer contribute to improving their lives. Host populations often show symptoms of dissatisfaction through slight apathy or extreme xenophobia when they no longer benefit from international tourists and start viewing them as a burden to their country (Kılıç & Seçilmiş, 2022). This reading implies that the UAE might have problems in the future when international tourists exhaust its social carrying capacity. This scenario describes domestic tourism as critical in avoiding such issues in the future because the country will not need international tourists to obtain the benefits attached to them. Even if citizens do not become aggressive to foreigners living in their country, other factors might make international tourism impossible due to an unsupportive environment.

According to Joshi and Dahal (2019), tourism carrying capacity is the optimal number of people that can visit a tourist destination at the same time without causing harm to the physical, economic, and socio-cultural environment or leading to a decrease

in the services provided to visitors. This definition introduces a critical concept besides the harm to the physical, economic, and socio-cultural environment. The satisfaction of international visitors must be maintained high in addition to protecting locals and the environment from any harm. Otherwise, the country might experience negative publicity for not treating international tourists as required (Joshi & Dahal, 2019). This issue might also force the country to cut on international tourists, leading to economic disruptions. The option left is domestic tourists whom the country can easily accommodate, meaning it is more sustainable in the long run and unlikely to create locals' intolerance of foreigners.

2.8 Domestic Tourism Initiatives in the UAE: Outbound Tourism

The growing outbound travel by UAE citizens to European countries presents critical opportunities for UAE's domestic tourism growth. According to Prayag and Hosany (2014), the number of tourists from the UAE heading to Europe and other parts of the world has more than quadrupled in the last three decades. UAE outbound tourism has increased, and the purpose of visits includes holidays, business, medical treatment, education, and the need to visit friends or family (Prayag & Hosany, 2014). According to UAE (2023a), Saudi Arabia tops the international market for outbound departures from UAE with a share of 30%, the UK 17%, Oman 14%, Azerbaijan 6%, France 5%, and the rest of the World 28%. Prayag and Hosany (2014) note that UAE citizens are also interested in visiting Germany and Italy due to their scenic beauty, cool weather, history, culture, and infrastructure. UAE can boost its domestic tourism by identifying its citizens' interests that force them to go to other countries. Prayag and Hosany (2014) suggest that the UAE can provide similar experiences based on these aspects. For example, the UAE has an advanced infrastructure, hosts many cultural events and festivals, is involved in business tourism through major cities like Abu Dhabi and Dubai, and has staycations characterized by luxury hotels and resorts. These experiences are similar to those sought abroad by its citizens. Convincing consumers to consume local resources and hosting foreign content, especially European cultures, has the potential to grow domestic tourism. The media stands out as an enabling factor for converting outbound tourism to domestic tourism. Radwan & Saeed (2023) state that the press plays a critical role in enlightening

the masses about UAE's tourist destinations, including its nature reserves, beaches and islands, desert tourism, and mountains for rock climbing and canyoning. Therefore, the UAE tourism sector can benefit significantly by cutting into UAE outbound travel.

2.9 Economic Diversification

UAE considers tourism to be a diversification strategy for its economy. According to Siddiqui and Afzal (2022), the UAE anticipates that its economic growth might slow down as more countries globally are shifting to renewable energy, oil reserves are minimized, and oil prices are highly jumpy. This scenario has pushed the UAE to invest in economic, technology, financial services, education, infrastructure projects, and tourism (Siddiqui & Afzal, 2022). In 2021, tourism accounted for 12% (AED 43.3 billion) of the total GDP, which it seeks to increase and reduce dependency on oil (Siddiqui & Afzal, 2022). While tourism as a whole is a diversification component, the UAE can diversify the economy further by focusing on domestic tourism. Overreliance on international tourism presents similar challenges to those necessitating a shift from oil dependency. Specifically, domestic tourism reduces exposure to global crises and currency risk, and fosters a stronger sense of belonging (Agyeiwaah, 2023). In other words, while tourism is a potential source of revenue and a shift from oil, relying on international tourism exposes the country to the same issues it avoids. Thus, the UAE should take its economic diversification policy further by focusing more on domestic tourism.

2.10 Environmental Protection

Domestic tourism is more supportive of environmental protection than international tourism. Domestic tourism involves traveling for shorter distances, meaning lower carbon emissions from transportation. According to Barakazı (2023), global tourism contributes to about 5% of the global greenhouse gases, likely increasing to 5.3% in 2023. International tourism is associated with unplanned urbanization since tourist volume often exceeds destination capacity because they need transportation, accommodation, and entertainments, leading to unplanned urbanization. Unplanned urbanization includes the

construction of resort hotels on beaches, increased air pollution because roads carry beyond their capacity, and authentic regions that reveal the traditional lifestyle of an area are damaged due to the rush to construct modern buildings (Barakazi, 2023). Due to irregular activities, international tourism is associated with loud music, construction work, and noise pollution. Further, international tourism contributes to increased non-recyclable waste as hosts rush to please their guests, who are less willing to align with current prosocial behaviors. Agyeiwaah (2023) states that positive behaviors include group photo-taking, sharing photos on social media, group dining, and buying from local pastries to support the local economy. International tourists might not promote these positive behaviors since most do not travel in groups, implying minimal resource co-sharing, such as using common transport means, leading to more pollution. Local people are always concerned about conserving their environment to ensure that it satisfies the intergeneration sustainability of the tourism industry (U.AE, 2023b). This concern makes them utilize their tourism resources responsibly, unlike international tourists, who might be less concerned. The implication is that domestic tourism is more associated with environmental conservation than international tourism.

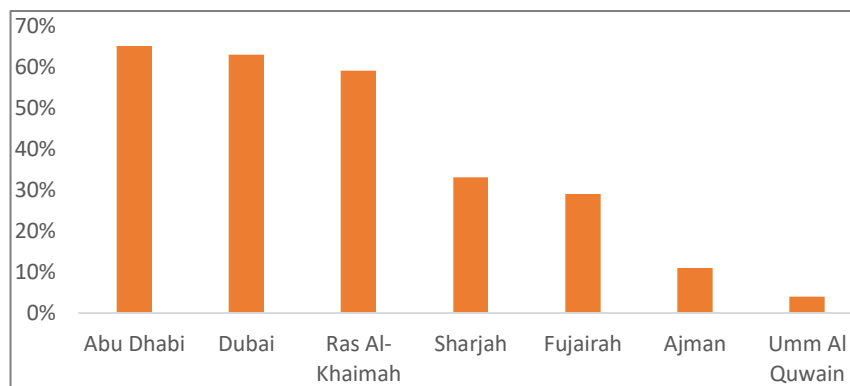
Many countries, including the UAE, usually prefer international tourists because they have higher spending capacities and contribute to foreign exchange. This mentality has undermined domestic tourism despite its unique capabilities, creating more benefits to the economy, society, and environment than international tourism. This literature review identifies such unique capabilities such as domestic tourism's ability to keep the economy going amid crises crippling international tourism like COVID-19. This literature review also establishes that domestic tourism is associated with better economic growth due to its ability to redistribute income and foster a sustainable tourism sector independent of international tourists. Additionally, domestic tourism presents the UAE with a greater potential for further economic diversification and environmental conservation in addition to retaining most of its citizens who travel abroad to consume local tourism products and services. However, policy limitations have significant implications for domestic tourism in the UAE. Better policies that reflect the UAE's current tourism status are needed to benefit fully from domestic tourism. This literature review is

critical since it provides insights into overlooked aspects of domestic tourism that might be optimized to improve the UAE economy, environment, and society.

2.11 Research Gaps in UAE Domestic Tourism Policies

However, UAE policies on domestic tourism are significantly limited and not thorough like strategies on international tourism. According to the proposition for improving tourism provided by the UAE official portal (2023a), it is evident that domestic tourism initiatives lack support, most government investment projects focus on international tourism, and local tourism legislation is not unified. Domestic tourism initiatives find these issues challenging and unfavorable to their trade. Some emirates lack the resources and capability for diversification to enhance local tourism. Additionally, due to the absence of media coverage and marketing campaigns in these areas, Dubai and Abu Dhabi remain the most frequented by both foreign and domestic tourist (U.AE, 2023a). Figure 2.3 below illustrates the domestic tourists' most preferred destinations.

Figure 2.3: Emirates by Visitors Preference



Source: Radwan and Saeed (2023)

Training and academic programs in domestic tourism and public-private partnerships are lacking in this sector, supporting the view that policies on domestic tourism are not detailed like those on international tourism (U.AE, 2023b). For instance, government involvement of private entities in developing tourism policy frameworks is relatively low compared to other nations. Roxas et al. (2020) state that achieving sustainable tourism depends on including diverse, relevant stakeholders, ranging from business owners to local communities (Roxas et al., 2020). According to Kvítková,

Petrů, and Zíková (2021), determinants of domestic tourism include the income of citizens, desire to learn or experience new cultures and nature, awareness of existing tourist attractions sites, comprehension of the need to participate in domestic tourism, and their travel habits. Policies are needed to address these gaps (Kvitkova et al., 2021).

2.12 A Proposed Theoretical Model Drawn from Best Practices

This literature review establishes that domestic tourism, defined as travel within the borders of one's own country for leisure, relaxation, or business, offers significant advantages for economic growth, diversification, and sustainability. The key points derived from the literature are:

1. Economic Growth:

- **Income Redistribution:** Domestic tourism can redistribute income more evenly across different regions of the country. Unlike international tourists who typically visit major cities, domestic tourists often travel to various local destinations, spreading their expenditure widely (Seyfi et al., 2023).
- **Consistent Expenditure:** Domestic tourists, due to their proximity and familiarity, tend to travel more frequently and consistently than international tourists, ensuring a steady stream of revenue (Arbulú et al., 2021a).
- **Job Creation:** The increase in domestic tourism activities stimulates local businesses, such as hospitality, transportation, and entertainment sectors, leading to job creation and economic development (Canh & Thanh, 2020).

2. Economic Diversification:

- **Reduced Dependence on International Factors:** By focusing on domestic tourism, the UAE can mitigate risks associated with international tourism fluctuations, such as global economic crises or geopolitical issues. This focus allows the UAE to have greater control over its tourism sector and economic stability (Aburumman et al., 2023; Agyeiwaah, 2023).

3. Sustainability:

- **Environmental Conservation:** Domestic tourism often involves shorter travel distances, leading to lower carbon emissions compared to international tourism. Additionally, local tourists are more likely to engage in sustainable practices to preserve their own environment (Barakazi, 2023).
- **Cultural Preservation:** Domestic tourists are more interested in their cultural heritage, which promotes the preservation of local traditions, arts, and historical sites (Aldhanhani & Zainudin, 2022).

4. Policy Implications:

- **Need for Comprehensive Policies:** The literature highlights the need for more robust and comprehensive domestic tourism policies. Current policies are often insufficient compared to those promoting international tourism. Effective policies should include destination enhancement and partnerships, marketing campaigns, training and infrastructure development to support domestic tourism (Stolz et al., 2023).
- **Best Practices from Other Countries:** Adopting best practices from countries with successful domestic tourism strategies, such as financial incentives, partnerships, and targeted marketing campaigns, can enhance the UAE's domestic tourism sector (McDougall, 2023).

In conclusion, the literature demonstrates that investing in domestic tourism can yield substantial benefits for the UAE's economic growth, diversification, and sustainability. However, realizing these benefits fully requires addressing policy limitations and implementing strategic initiatives tailored to domestic tourism's unique characteristics and potential.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

As noted by George and McCombes (2023), a well-defined methodology enhances the credibility of the findings by allowing readers to evaluate the validity of the research process. In the context of this study, the methodology outlines the strategies and methods used to evaluate domestic tourism enhancement in the UAE, focusing on sustainability, cultural preservation, and economic impact. This chapter details the qualitative research design chosen for its ability to provide in-depth insights into the current domestic tourism policies and potential improvements. A comprehensive benchmarking analysis will be employed, comparing UAE's practices with successful international examples to identify best practices suitable for the UAE context. The methodology ensures the study's rigor and legitimacy, providing a solid foundation for the analysis and findings presented in subsequent chapters.

3.2 Research Questions and Objectives

As detailed in chapter 1, the primary research question guiding this study is: “Should the UAE prioritize the development of its domestic tourism sector, and what are the potential benefits and costs of such prioritization?” To answer this question, the research is structured around key sub-questions that delve into specific policy measures and their alignment with sustainable tourism practices. The examined literature answered the research question, indicating that it strengthens domestic tourism by creating more jobs and revenue collection sources and preserving the country’s culture by reducing interference from external forces (Canh & Thanh, 2020; Seyfi et al., 2023). The focus then shifts to determining what the UAE government can do to optimize domestic tourism. These concerns are addressed through two sub-questions:

- (1) What specific policy measures can the UAE implement to effectively promote domestic tourism in less-visited emirates, diversifying the tourism sector?
- (2) How does the UAE's current domestic tourism policy framework align with sustainable tourism practices advocated by international bodies such as the UNWTO?

These questions establish the notion that relevant policy changes accompany the socio-economic benefits of improving domestic tourism.

3.3 Research Approach

In answering these questions, this study will employ benchmarking analysis. From the literature review, none of the currently available studies utilize a standardized benchmarking model. Consequently, this study constructs a theoretical model based on the best practices identified from a survey involving different countries. These exemplary practices were highlighted in the literature review (Chapter 2, Section 2.12). For example, Fiji and New Zealand have exploited the 'Love Our Locals' and 'Do Something New' market campaigns to encourage local tourism. Financial incentives, as indicated in the case of Thailand, that subsidies hotel accommodations for locals and offer a 40% discount on the regular price have been found effective in incentivizing local tourism. Market intelligence, as showcased in the Zambian and Canadian cases, where a private association has invested \$2 million in collaboration with the government to develop domestic tourism, provides scenarios where local tourism has been boosted.

Before delving into the benchmarking analysis, it is crucial to highlight the key factors identified in (Section 2.12) of the literature review that structure this study and its reporting of the results. These factors include Infrastructure Development, Destination Enhancement and Partnerships, Marketing and Promotion, and Capacity and Training. Each of these factors plays a significant role in driving domestic tourism, and they have been contextualized within the UAE framework to tailor the recommendations and strategies to the specific needs and conditions of the UAE's less-visited emirates.

Benchmarking analysis is used to apply these concepts within the context of UAE local tourism. In this case, the strategic benchmarking analysis will encompass assessing UAE's tourism practices, policies, and outcomes against the best practices from other countries known to offer advanced sustainable tourism initiatives. Notably, the benchmarking analysis will be aligned with the research questions as they seek to guide

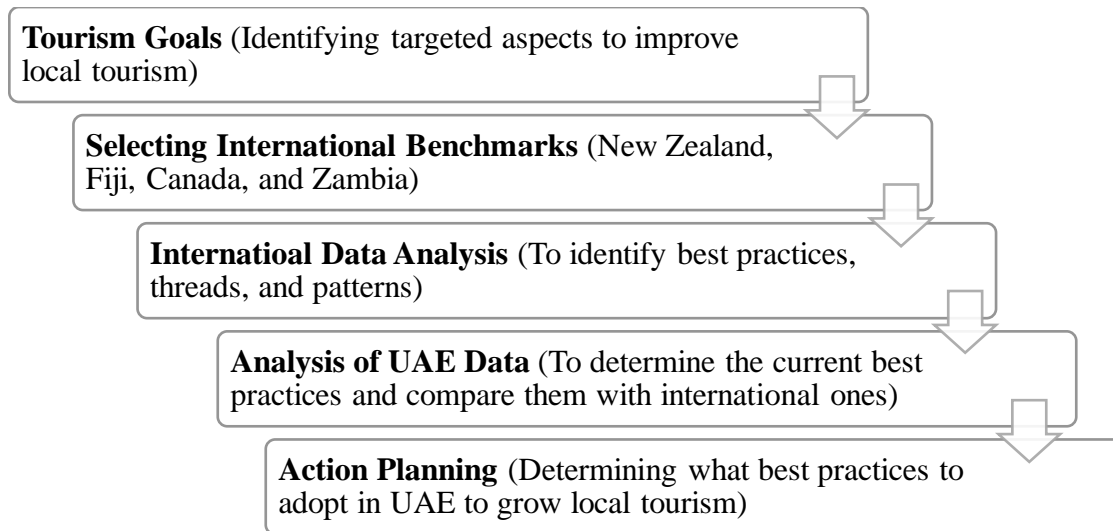
an exploration of what the UAE is doing in line with local tourism, identify the gaps, and assess the suitability of the best practices in other countries to its case.

Benchmarking is the most appropriate technique for the intervention because it will identify the best practices in the tourism industry and identify potential application of the same in the UAE. Second, it will assist in establishing realistic goals based on the current industry standards. Comparability forms the impetus for constant and realistic improvement, which will form a significant part of local tourism.

In parallel, this study also employs SWOT analysis as a means of validating the benchmarking analysis. SWOT analysis, which stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, provides a comprehensive framework for identifying both internal and external factors that could impact the success of local tourism initiatives. By leveraging SWOT analysis, we can complement the benchmarking approach by ensuring that the identified best practices are not only applicable but also strategically aligned with the UAE's unique context. This dual approach ensures a robust evaluation by combining external best practices with an internal assessment of the UAE's capabilities and challenges.

The specific features for the benchmark analysis as captured in Figure 3.1 are defining the research goals, identifying the benchmarks, collecting the information, and analyzing the results

Figure 3.1: Benchmarking Analysis



The highlighted methodology captures the stepwise approach that the design will leverage to analyze information. The first step will be determining the specific local tourism goals. The second is using the countries identified in the literature review as the international benchmarks. As captured in the literature review, these countries experience success in local tourism. Following the identification of the countries, data analysis will be conducted to identify best practices. Correspondingly, the local best practices will be assessed and compared with international ones. The final stage will include an action plan detailing how the identified best practices will be integrated. Simultaneously, the SWOT analysis will be conducted to validate the applicability of these best practices within the UAE context, ensuring a holistic approach to enhancing local tourism.

3.4 Research Design

A qualitative research design is employed to address the research questions. The qualitative research design was selected due to its ability to help develop a contextual depth of the existing domestic tourism policies, identifying areas that must be addressed to improve activities in the less-visited emirates. Interpretivism focuses on developing the contextual depth of a research area (Bell et al., 2022), making qualitative research design

applicable to this scenario. Besides, the information collected is critical in developing a theoretical understanding of the topic (Saunders & Bristow, 2023). A qualitative research design provides a seamless consistency with the research philosophy and approach.

One of the primary reasons for employing a qualitative approach is the nature of UAE tourism data. Typically, UAE tourism data is presented in aggregate form, combining both international and domestic tourism statistics. This aggregation precludes the application of a quantitative approach, as it does not allow for a distinct analysis of domestic tourism trends and patterns. The lack of disaggregated data makes it challenging to apply quantitative methods effectively, hence the choice of a qualitative design to explore the nuances and specificities of domestic tourism in the UAE.

Moreover, there is currently a shortage of quantitative data that specifically relates to domestic tourism, further preventing the employment of quantitative methods. The qualitative approach will thus allow for a more in-depth exploration of the existing policies and practices, providing valuable insights into areas that require improvement to enhance local tourism activities in the less-visited emirates.

3.5 Data Collection and Instrument

The data collection process for this study is designed to build upon and complement the insights gathered in the Literature Review (LR). While the LR primarily relied on secondary sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, government reports, and reputable news outlets, the data collection for this methodology involves a more targeted approach aimed at obtaining specific information related to the current tourism policies and best practices in domestic tourism.

3.5.1 How the Data is Sourced:

1. Government Publications and Reports:

- We will gather detailed policy documents, strategic plans, and tourism development reports published by the UAE government and relevant

authorities. These documents will provide up-to-date information on the current state of domestic tourism policies and initiatives.

- Sources include official websites of the UAE Ministry of Tourism, Department of Economy and Tourism in Dubai, and the Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi.

2. Publishd Surveys and Statistical Data:

- Analyze existing surveys and statistical data published by reputable sources such as the World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC), International Monetary Fund (IMF), and local tourism boards. This data will help identify trends, gaps, and opportunities in the current tourism offerings.
- Data from the Dubai Statistics Center and similar organizations will be used to understand the quantitative aspects of domestic tourism.

3. Case Studies and Benchmarking:

- Review case studies and benchmarking reports from other countries that have successfully implemented domestic tourism strategies. This comparative analysis will help identify best practices that can be adapted to the UAE context.
- Sources will include international tourism reports, academic journals, and industry publications.

3.5.2 Difference from Literature Review Data:

- **Depth and Specificity:** While the LR provided a broad overview of existing research and general insights into domestic tourism, the data collected in this methodology will be more specific to the UAE context. It will focus on detailed

policy analysis, real-time data, and comprehensive reviews of government and expert reports.

- **Targeted Secondary Data Collection:** Unlike the LR, which provided a general synthesis of available literature, this phase involves a more targeted collection of secondary data focused specifically on the UAE's domestic tourism policies and their effectiveness.
- **Current and Real-Time Information:** The data collection process will ensure that the information is current and reflects the latest developments in the UAE's tourism policies and practices. This real-time data will be crucial for making informed recommendations.
- **Comparative and Benchmarking Analysis:** The use of case studies and benchmarking reports will provide comparative insights that go beyond the general literature review. This analysis will help understand how other countries' successful practices can be adapted to the UAE's unique context.

3.6 Data Analysis

Data collected will be analyzed using benchmarking analysis. The anticipated data will identify the current tourism policies adopted in the UAE and best practices from other countries. Benchmarking analysis will allow a comparison of domestic tourism practices based on other countries' policies. However, benchmarking might result in considerations of policy aspects that cannot work in the country of interest. Nevertheless, there is an opportunity to develop a wider scope of applying lessons learned to specific cases through benchmarking analysis. Benchmarking analysis can be replaced by content or thematic analysis, which can offer similar findings, and pose a significant threat to this tool. Moreover, SWOT analysis is a credible tool for analyzing a strategy, which explains its inclusion to complement the benchmarking approach (Benzaghta et al., 2021). Considering these SWOT results for benchmarking analysis, it is more critical to consider the cultural fit of the best practices in the case of the UAE to ensure the policy change recommendations are consistent to its context. The UAE has a unique perspectives,

attitudes, and motivations for domestic tourism. Considering these aspects will render benchmarking analysis more effective.

3.6.1 Benchmarking Analysis

The benchmark analysis will begin with identifying the goal of the intervention, which will be derived from the research questions. Some of the specific goals include to determine costs and benefits associated with local tourism, identify the best practices across the world, and establish the approach's sustainability. The second step is identifying the benchmarks, which are the countries whose best practices will be investigated. Examples of the countries that the study will consider are New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, and Zambia. Thirdly, a data collection process will ensue, and this will detail collecting information from the highlighted sources to aid the investigation. The fourth step is analyzing the data to identify the best practices and themes.

Having completed all the steps of the benchmark analysis, the results will be interpreted in the context of the UAE. For example, the identified best practices will be compared with the local tourism market in the UAE to determine their feasibility. This will detail analyzing the flow of local tourists, the number of tourism destinations, and cultural constructs that dictate conduct. The trends of local tourism in the UAE will be compared to those in the benchmarked countries to determine the variations in performance. Only those practices from more successful countries than the UAE will be considered. Lastly, each best practice will be evaluated to establish the success level before adoption in the UAE. The benchmark analysis allows an appraisal of strategies that have succeeded in other regions before adopting them to the UAE tourism industry.

However, benchmarking might have several limitations that must be considered. First, the best practices identified in countries such as the Netherlands, Fiji, and Zambia are effective in these countries, and they might offer discrepancies when applied in the case of UAE. The limitation will be addressed by ensuring that the best practices selected are attuned to the UAE context while transferring key principles and concepts. Second, each country has unique practices, raising a concern about reliability and validity.

Capturing several case studies in a single construct will help mitigate the problem (Subedi, 2023). Finally, cultural differences also a critical issue when using benchmarking analysis (Gierczak-Korzeniowska, 2020a). An in-depth contextual analysis shall be performed to determine the feasibility of the identified best practices.

3.6.2 SWOT Analysis

Following the benchmarking analysis, a SWOT analysis will be conducted to complement and validate the findings. SWOT analysis, which stands for Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats, provides a comprehensive framework for identifying both internal and external factors that could impact the success of local tourism initiatives.

The strengths will focus on the existing advantages and successful elements of the UAE's current tourism practices. Weaknesses will identify the gaps and areas where the UAE's local tourism could improve. Opportunities will highlight potential areas for growth and development, particularly those identified through the benchmarking process. Threats will examine external challenges that could hinder the implementation of the best practices identified.

The SWOT analysis will serve to underscore the themes and best practices from the benchmarking analysis, ensuring they are strategically aligned with the UAE's unique context. This dual approach ensures a robust evaluation by combining external best practices with an internal assessment of the UAE's capabilities and challenges, providing a holistic approach to enhancing local tourism.

3.7 Practical and Technical Aspects of the Research

While using a qualitative research design, the absence of validity and reliability tests typically performed in quantitative research does not reduce the necessity for accuracy and trustworthiness in the findings. Credibility will be maintained through careful review and interpretation of the published data. Systematic methods will be employed to

analyze this data, ensuring an objective approach that minimizes researcher bias. Sticking to evidence-based and scientific methods, such as the benchmark and SWOT analysis will achieve a high credibility. Moreover, using of a diverse range of sources will enhance the transferability and applicability of the findings. These measures are critical in maintaining the validity of the study. Additionally, consistency in data interpretation will be sought through the adoption of standardized analytical procedures. Combining the different methods will reduce the probability of bias, hence creating an objective project.

3.8 Research Ethics

The key ethical considerations faced by this type of study, primarily concern the potential for researcher bias and the methodological approach to data collection. Given that this research relies on published data, it is crucial to apply a methodical and objective approach to data analysis. This will create a standardized and verifiable approach to gauge the credibility and reliability of findings. The findings from the examined literature could lead to a skewed interpretation if not handled carefully. Ethical guidelines will be followed to ensure that data is used responsibly and acknowledges original sources accurately. Some of the guidelines include maintaining accuracy, keeping information confidential, and adhering to the standard methodologies. Furthermore, the study will strictly use peer-reviewed journal articles and quality sources that match the inclusion criterion.

In summary, the study will leverage high-quality sources to inform a quality result. Accordingly, it will combine peer-reviewed sources, government publications, news articles, and expert opinions to answer the research question. The analytical methods, the benchmark and SWOT analyses, will be leveraged to further exploit information. Lastly, adhering to the standard methodologies will form the principal ethical consideration to achieve a credible study.

3.9 Summary

This methodology effectively addresses the primary research question on prioritizing UAE's domestic tourism. The qualitative research design, chosen due to the lack of quantitative data, allows for a deep understanding of current policies and practices. Benchmarking analysis will compare the UAE's practices with successful international examples from countries like New Zealand, Fiji, Canada, and Zambia, identifying best practices and suggesting feasible improvements. Complementary SWOT analysis will evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of these practices. High-quality data sources and adherence to ethical guidelines ensure credible findings. This methodology will yield actionable insights and practical recommendations to optimize the UAE's domestic tourism sector and contribute to sustainable tourism development.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter reports on the results of a comprehensive analysis of strategies to enhance tourism within the UAE's less-visited emirates, following the methodology outlined in Chapter 3, guided by the primary research question—"Should the UAE prioritize the development of its domestic tourism sector, and what are the potential benefits and costs of such prioritization?", which has been answered by the Literature Review in chapter 2. The chapter explores key factors spurring tourism and assesses policy measures to promote it. Section 4.1 addresses sub-question 1, "What specific policy measures can the UAE implement to effectively promote domestic tourism in less-visited emirates?" by examining infrastructure development, partnerships and destination enhancement, marketing and promotion, capacity building, and challenges. Section 4.5 addresses sub-question 2, "How does the UAE's current domestic tourism policy framework align with sustainable tourism practices advocated by international bodies such as the UNWTO?" through a comparative analysis with successful initiatives in Canada, Fiji, and Zambia.

The chapter concludes with a SWOT analysis of the UAE's domestic tourism policy framework. The motivation for including the SWOT analysis is to complement the benchmarking. This analysis not only provides additional validity to our findings but also offers a different perspective to see if any other insights can be extracted from the data by looking at it through a different lens. Finally, it provides recommendations for optimizing domestic tourism, ultimately unlocking the full potential of its less-visited emirates.

4.1 Factor Spurring Tourism in UAE

4.1.1 Infrastructure development

Infrastructure development is critical for boosting domestic tourism in each emirate of the UAE, especially the less visited ones. Investment in transportation infrastructure,

including roads and public transportation systems, is significant in widening the accessibility of distant destinations (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2008). Furthermore, regional airports and the expansion of air connectivity can also enhance mobility to areas that are underserved by other means of traveling, thus making them more accessible to domestic tourists (Saleh et al., 2015). Moreover, making accommodation options available, like grand hotels and eco-friendly that meet the needs of different types of travelers, is necessary (Reisinger et al., 2019). Therefore, by diversifying the UAE's accommodation range, we can attract more domestic tourists with longer-term stays in less popular emirates. Moreover, the ease of movement between Oman and Saudi Arabia makes it possible for residents to travel within their respective territories in search of the country's cultural and natural wonders (Busaidi et al., 2019). It is relatively easy to travel across borders due to better road and air connections and shared borders, encouraging citizens to experience the diverse heritage and lands of both nations. Collaborative tourism ventures can use this connectivity to foster cultural exchanges and to develop the Gulf region

In addition, digital connectivity plays an active role in improving travelers' experience and in destination marketing efforts (Sharpley, 2002). Telecommunication infrastructure development and digital technology investment are vital for better internet connectivity and access to online booking platforms, in which simple travel plans and information delivery are ensured (Busaidi et al., 2019). Digital technologies and platforms effectively engage travelers during their travel time by offering personalized experiences and promoting hidden spots (Henderson, 2006). Improving roads and hotels in less-known places in the UAE makes it easier and more enjoyable for local people to explore their own country, boosting tourism among residents.

4.1.2 Destination Enhancement and Partnerships

Partnering with local communities and stakeholders is the key factor for the success of a tourism destination (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2008). Implementing community-run tourism programs is critical in poverty reduction and community empowerment while supporting cultural understanding and exchange (Sharpley, 2008). Furthermore, collaborating with the private sector companies, including tour operators, hospitality

service providers, and organizers of events, will lead to investment in the tourism infrastructure and the development of new and attractive tourism products (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015). By engaging the knowledge and strength of public and private partners, the UAE can attract more tourists to the underrated emirates, extend its tourism modus, and develop domestic tourism. Partnering with locals and businesses to enhance these places ensures that the experiences are tailored to the preferences and interests of domestic tourists, making them more appealing for local exploration.

In order to improve the attractiveness of a destination for tourists, it is essential to address the diversity of accommodation prices, especially those tailored to Emirati families with children who often travel in large groups. Hotels that are equipped with a wide variety of accommodation choices and priced at various levels are inclusive of all target audiences. Promoting domestic tourism is not only possible but also worthwhile by offering family packages or discounts in hotels and other attractions in less-visited emirates so that Emirati families can enjoy the attractions within the UAE with a sense of local familiarity and comfort. In addition, collaboration with travel agencies, tour operators, and other industry players can create curated travel packages and promotional offers that will attract more visitors to explore less-visited emirates (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015). Making prices fair and offering family deals specifically targets domestic tourists, encouraging them to choose these destinations for affordable and family-friendly getaways within the UAE.

4.1.3 Marketing and promotion

Marketing and promotion are crucial drivers of generating interest and increasing awareness regarding the less-visited emirates as potential tourist destinations within the UAE. Launching focused marketing campaigns that emphasize the distinctive attractions, activities, and experiences offered in the regions is essential in attracting the interest of domestic tourists (Reisinger et al., 2019). Using digital marketing channels, i.e., social media, websites, and online travel platforms, a large audience, can be effectively targeted and engaged.

Furthermore, “the world coolest winter” campaign is a key tourism initiative by the UAE, designed to boost domestic and international tourism during the winter season. Launched by His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum (The Media Office, 2024), this campaign focuses on promoting the unique attractions across the UAE, from its natural landscapes to cultural landmarks.

Moreover, Department of Economy and Tourism in Dubai has launched “Visit Dubai” Portal, which includes details on attractions, activities, events, accommodations, dining options, shopping, and practical travel tips. The "Visit Dubai" portal features sections to discover the less visited areas in Dubai, such as Hatta, Al Marmoom, and various Dubai neighborhoods, to help tourists discover and enjoy these less frequented parts of Dubai (DET, 2024). Similarly, the Department of Culture and Tourism in Abu Dhabi has developed the "Experience Abu Dhabi" portal. This comprehensive platform offers extensive information on attractions, activities, events, accommodations, dining opportunities, shopping, and essential travel tips. The "Experience Abu Dhabi" website also highlights the less explored regions of Abu Dhabi, such as Al Ain, Al Dhafra, and various coastal and desert locales, enabling tourists to discover and experience the more secluded parts of Abu Dhabi (Abu Dhabi Concierge, 2024). Additionally, 'Platinumlist.net' is an online ticketing platform for events in Dubai. It offers tickets for various events, including concerts, theater shows, sports, attractions, and other entertainment activities, providing an easy access point for tourists and locals alike to engage with the vibrant entertainment scene in Dubai.

4.1.4 Capacity and training

Capacity building and learning are the main factors that give the potential to deliver excellent tourism services and experiences in the less visited emirates of the UAE. Supporting workforce development programs, professional education and enhancing/developing skills initiatives implies that the local communities and tourism industry workers will be capable of providing superior hospitality and service delivery (Busaidi et al., 2019). By incorporating language training, culture sensitivity, and tourism management into the frontline staff's skills, they can deliver improved services to diverse

domestic tourists (Stephenson, 2014). Also, the availability of certifications and accreditations to standardize the services and the insurance of consistency in delivering tourism experiences can enormously contribute to providing tourism experiences (Busaidi et al., 2019).

Building strategic partnerships with universities, training institutes, and industrial professionals to develop specific educational courses that will aid tourism staff in acquiring the knowledge and abilities needed to accomplish their roles (Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015). Also, there are openings to form joint ventures with international organizations and tourism associations, which can be channels for information and best practice sharing so the local stakeholders can keep in touch with global developments in the field of tourism. Formalizing capacity-building programs and training initiatives as a priority measure will help bring about a highly trained and educated workforce, improving service delivery and general tourist experience and attracting tourists to the not-so-prominent emirates in the UAE. Training staff well ensures that local tourists receive warm hospitality and excellent service, creating memorable experiences that encourage them to return to these destinations for future trips.

4.2 Barrier and challenges

Overcoming the barriers and obstacles that the tourism industry experiences in the less-visited emirates of the UAE calls for a multifaceted approach that creates policy changes and promotes sustainable growth. The major challenge is the reliance on foreign labor specially in the tourism field, which limits local job opportunities and consequently reduces the development of a skilled workforce (Henderson, 2006). Adopting strategies and measures to promote Emiratization and give preference to the local labor pool through hiring and training them can overcome the challenge and provide economic opportunities for UAE nationals (Mansfeld & Winckler, 2007). To address these barriers, the UAE government started the 'Nafis' program in 2021, aiming to employ 75,000 Emiratis in the private sector within five years. Additionally, the government committed to spending up to AED 24 billion to support UAE citizens through salary support,

unemployment benefits, pensions, and child allowances (U.AE, 2024b). This initiative is designed to enhance the UAE economy by bolstering the competitiveness of Emirati human resources and eliminating barriers to local employment in various sectors, including tourism.

4.3 Environmental concerns

Significantly, environmental and social problem-solving issues are considered for sustainable tourism growth in the less-visited emirates in the UAE. Water sports and coastal and seafaring tourism, such as scuba diving and beach hotels, have a significant and negative impact on the environment, including loss of ecosystems, impoverishment of species, and resource consumption (Gladstone et al., 2013). Executing environmental laws of high order, encouraging responsible tourism, and setting aside funds where necessary go a long way in combating the risks and ensuring the coastal beauty and biodiversity are protected (Stephenson, 2014). Addressing issues like reliance on foreign workers and environmental concerns benefits domestic tourists directly by creating more job opportunities for locals and preserving natural attractions for them to enjoy within their own country.

Table 4.1 presents findings from various studies focusing on regional tourism trends and challenges. It provides insights into different aspects of tourism development, including economic diversification, environmental impacts, destination competitiveness, and cultural preservation. These findings address the overarching research question: "What are the key factors influencing tourism development and sustainability in the region?"

Table 4.1: Exploring Tourism Trends and Challenges in the Region: Findings from Other Studies

Study	Country	Major Finding
Busaidi et al. (2019)	Oman	The study provides recommendations to increase sustainable sea turtle tourism and its contribution to Oman's GDP by: (i) increasing hotel capacity, especially on ecological sites; (ii) considering the seasonal fluctuation in visitors; (iii) increasing the workforce and developing skills for tourism sectors; (iv) designing and implementing marketing plans for attracting more tourists; and (v) providing and implementing an effective sustainable development plan for the entirety of Oman and protecting its environment, including the turtles.
Giampiccoli & Mtapuri (2015)	Qatar	The study suggested that Qatar's tourism development should diversify beyond the conventional sun, sand, and sea (3 Ss) strategy, focusing on cultural, heritage, and event-based tourism to achieve sustainable growth.
Gladstone et al. (2013)	Gulf and Red Sea	The study identified significant environmental impacts of tourism in the Gulf and the Red Sea, including damage to coral reefs, pollution, and habitat disruption, calling for stricter regulations and sustainable tourism practices.
Government of Saudi Arabia (2016)	Saudi Arabia	Saudi Vision 2030 outlined plans to diversify the economy, including the development of the tourism sector, with goals such as increasing the number of visitors, enhancing tourism infrastructure, and promoting cultural heritage.
Henderson (2006)	Dubai	The study discussed the barriers to destination development in Dubai, such as limited infrastructure and socio-political challenges, and highlights strategies for overcoming these barriers to boost tourism.
Mansfeld & Winckler (2007)	GCC Countries	The study explored how the tourism industry can serve as an alternative to the oil-based rentier economies of the GCC countries, highlighting the potential for economic diversification and sustainable development through tourism.
Mansfeld & Winckler (2008)	Bahrain	The study examines the role of the tourism industry in transforming Bahrain's economy from a rentier state to a more diversified and sustainable economy, emphasizing the importance of strategic planning and investment in tourism infrastructure.
Reisinger et al. (2019)	UAE	The study assessed destination competitiveness from a tourist perspective, identifying key factors that make the UAE a competitive tourism destination, such as infrastructure quality, safety, and unique attractions.
Saleh et al. (2015)	Middle East	The study used a panel cointegration analysis to demonstrate the positive impact of tourism on economic growth in the Middle East, suggesting that tourism development can be a significant driver of economic diversification in the region.
Sharpley (2002)	Abu Dhabi	The study discusses the challenges of economic diversification through tourism in Abu Dhabi, highlighting issues such as dependency on oil

Study	Country	Major Finding
Stephenson (2014)	Dubai	revenues and the need for a coherent tourism strategy to foster sustainable growth. The study examines the cultural dilemmas and future challenges of tourism development in Dubai, discussing the balance between modernization and cultural preservation in the context of rapid urbanization.
Stephenson & Ali-Knight (2010)	Dubai	The study explores the societal impacts of Dubai's tourism industry, noting both positive and negative effects on local communities and stressing the importance of sustainable tourism practices.
UAE Ministry of Cabinet Affairs and the Future (2020)	UAE	The Future Possibilities Report 2020 outlines strategies for sustainable development and innovation in various sectors, including tourism, to enhance the UAE's global competitiveness and resilience.
Zamani-Farahani & Henderson (2010)	Iran and Saudi Arabia	The study investigates Islamic tourism and the management of tourism development in Islamic societies, focusing on the cases of Iran and Saudi Arabia, and highlights the challenges and opportunities in aligning tourism practices with Islamic cultural values.

4.4 Benchmark with UNWTO

The analysis of tourism strategies in Zambia, Fiji, and Canada addresses how various countries approach the enhancement of domestic tourism through infrastructure development, cultural promotion, marketing strategies, sustainable practices, and investment incentives. While each country's approach offers valuable insights into specific aspects of domestic tourism stimulation, it is important to note that none of these strategies comprehensively cover all critical factors driving domestic tourism. Therefore, by examining multiple examples from different countries, this study aims to identify a range of strategies that can collectively inform a more holistic approach to enhancing domestic tourism within the UAE's Emirates, particularly focusing on less-visited regions

4.4.1 Zambia

4.4.1.1 Infrastructure Development and Accessibility

Zambia's infrastructure development exerts a significant role in the stimulation of tourism. The government has allocated budgets to upgrade its transportation systems by

implementing road, airport, and telecommunications infrastructures to reach the many tourist destinations. Moreover, targeted programs aimed at improving facilities, particularly hotels, lodges, and resorts, have catered to different tourists' needs, be it luxury or budget facilities (Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). As a result, more people, whether local or international tourists, have found Zambia a fun destination, which has led to increased tourism activities across the country.

4.4.1.2 Cultural and Heritage Tourism

Zambia's cultural heritage, being diverse and remarkable, is also another factor that plays a role in the country's tourism strategies. The region is a homeland of many ethnic groups. Each group has different traditions, customs, and ways of life. Development of cultural tourism arising from cultural festivals, heritage sites, and cultural villages allows observers to deepen their understanding of Zambia's rich cultural fabric (Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). Furthermore, the conservation and protection of historical places, including traditional villages, offers an opportunity to preserve Zambia's cultural heritage and attract tourists eager to understand local customs and be part of history.

4.4.1.3 Marketing and Promotion Strategies

Creating distinct market channels and promotional techniques has been fundamental in establishing Zambia as a fascinating tourism location. Working hand in hand with travel-related entities, the government has developed focused marketing campaigns that aim to place Zambia internationally as a preferred tourism destination. Digital marketing, social media engagement, a presence in international travel fairs, and promotional events are some tools used to create awareness of what Zambia has to offer (Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). The collaboration with yoga centers and sports clubs has enhanced the engagement of target audiences for Zambia's tourism activities through

tour operators, travel agencies, and online travel platforms drawn to experience adventure, relaxation, and cultural immersion.

4.4.1.4 Sustainable Tourism Practices

Sustainability is a bedrock of tourism reforms in Zambia, centered on environmentally friendly and responsible practices promoting local communities. The country has implemented policies and regulations that aim to stop the destruction of the country's natural resources, animals, and birds, set up protected areas of the environment, and run conservation programs (Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). A few strategies, such as green accommodations, wildlife conservation, and community-based tourism initiatives, have been developed to support sustainable tourism development, which promotes the preservation of the diverse ecosystem within the country alongside strengthening local communities and heritage of the country for current and future generations of Zambia.

4.4.1.5 Investment incentives

The Zambia Tourism Investment Guide has highlighted investment incentives to draw home-based and foreign investors to the tourism sector. Such incentives include tax breaks, duty exemptions, and financial benefits to trigger investment in tourism infrastructure and services (Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). The duty exemption on imported capital items and equipment and the tax holiday for new tourism development help reduce investment costs, making Zambia an attractive destination. Additionally, the Zambia Tourism Agency assists investors by facilitating land procurement, obtaining permits, and maneuvering through challenging regulatory requirements, thus creating a conducive setting for investment. Furthermore, the Government's Tourism Development Fund provides financial support for tourism initiatives, which multiplies investment opportunities and stimulates economic growth and development in Zambia's tourism industry.

4.4.2 Fiji

Fiji has a documented strategy, the "Fiji Tourism Development Plan (2017-2021)", popularly known as "FIJI," which contributes to the improvement of the country's tourism industry. For example, FIJI has made infrastructural development and construction of the amenities for the tour activities critical ways of progress in tourism. Amongst the upgrades and facilities for accommodation, transport, and recreation, Fiji has become more accessible and attractive to tourists due to the increased number of tourists (MDF, 2021). Moreover, FIJI has achieved remarkable achievements in protecting local culture and heritage, a unique feature that draws domestic tourism to Fiji. Via earmarking assistance to cultural events, festivals, and community-based tourism, FIJI fosters the preservation and showcasing of Fiji's diverse cultural heritage as visitors who seek authentic and cultural experiences visit. Another critical factor is adopting sustainable tourism practices to reduce the ecological impact of tourism activities and allow Fiji to maintain its natural beauty for generations to come (MDF, 2021). Environmental events and activities such as ecotourism, marine conservation, and waste management are what FIJI advocates for to ensure responsible tourism that positively impacts tourists and local communities.

4.4.3 Canada

4.4.3.1 Federal Tourism Growth Strategy

As the foundation for building up Canadian tourism, the Federal Tourism Growth Strategy, a multifaceted approach, is a crucial strategy for the industry. Through the bold ambition to achieve a 40% rise in the tourism sector's contribution to the GDP by the decade's end, this strategy becomes the guide for the way forward. The priority to sustainability within its main philosophies symbolizes the national commitment to preserving the beauty of nature and culture and strengthening its tourism products. The strategy aims to achieve this by promoting partnerships between government agencies, private sector actors, and Indigenous communities, thereby leveraging the country's

diverse landscapes and rich cultural fabric to improve the numbers of domestic and international visitors(Vancouver, 2023).

4.4.3.2 Support for Indigenous Tourism

Reflecting on the importance of native experiences to Canadian tourism, the government has pursued a path of policy interventions to empower Indigenous communities. Among the many government programs launched is the Sustainable Indigenous Tourism Employment and Skills Initiative (SITES), an innovative program to support Indigenous-led tourism management (Government of Canada, 2024). The SITES plan starts with \$10 million, which is significant financing for Indigenous heritage and culture tourism projects. Utilizing economic empowerment and skill development within Indigenous communities, SITES achieves an opportunity to participate in tourist activities with preservation and a feeling of pride in traditions (Government of Canada, 2024).

4.4.3.3 Regional Investments

The Government of Canada has invested strategically in regional tourism initiatives all around Canada to utilize the potential of tourism as a source of economic development. The provinces of Newfoundland and Labrador have received the most significant transfers, with funding exceeding \$1 billion, of which \$2 million is allocated to empower tourism development projects (Government of Canada, 2016). These investments act as catalysts that encourage local development, creating jobs and improving infrastructures in communities that depend on tourism. By investing in diversification and enhancing tourism products, the government seeks to impress visitors and position regions such as Newfoundland and Labrador on their travel destinations (Government of Canada, 2016).

Table 3 presents key findings from benchmarking studies with the UNWTO, highlighting strategies and initiatives aimed at bolstering domestic tourism and promoting sustainable tourism development in various countries, addressing aspects related to the research question on identifying effective approaches to stimulate domestic tourism growth and sustainable tourism practices.

Table 4.2: Benchmarking with UNWTO

Study	Country	Major Findings
Government of Canada (2016)	Canada	The government invested over \$1.2 million in tourism initiatives in Newfoundland and Labrador, aiming to enhance local tourism infrastructure, promote the region, and support sustainable tourism development.
MDF (2021)	Fiji	Insights from local travelers for post-COVID tourism highlight the importance of domestic tourism in Fiji, emphasizing the need to adapt to new travel behaviors and preferences to support the recovery and growth of the tourism industry.
Government of Canada (2023)	Canada	The Tourism Growth Program aims to boost the tourism sector by providing funding and support for innovative projects that enhance visitor experiences and promote sustainable tourism.
Government of Canada (2024)	Canada	The new initiative to support Indigenous tourism focuses on empowering Indigenous communities by providing resources and opportunities to develop and promote their tourism offerings, fostering economic growth and cultural preservation.
Zambia Ministry of Tourism (2022)	Zambia	The guide provides insights into investment opportunities in Zambia's tourism sector, emphasizing the potential for growth and development through strategic partnerships and sustainable practices.

4.5 Comparative Analysis

Several vital similarities and differences emerge when comparing the UAE's domestic tourism policy framework with sustainable tourism practices advocated by international bodies such as Zambia, Canada, and Fiji. While the UAE aligns with these practices in various aspects, including infrastructure development and environmental sustainability, distinct approaches and contextual factors differentiate its approach from that of other countries.

4.5.1 Alignment with Sustainable Tourism Practices

4.5.1.1 Infrastructure Development

The current sustainable tourism practices promoted by the UAE, which are in line with the framework of Zambia, Canada, and Fiji, are being applied in different sectors of the country's domestic tourism. As evident with projects in Canada and Fiji, the UAE once

more highlights the fundamental role of infrastructure in fostering sustainable tourism. The provision of better transportation networks, as well as the digital infrastructure upgrade, not only tries to enhance accessibility but also the intention of enhancing the entire tourist experience while simultaneously minimizing the damage to the environment (Government of Canada, 2023; Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023).

4.5.1.2 Destination Enhancement

The approach adopted by the UAE to make its destinations more attractive is quite similar to that followed by Fiji and Zambia. Through preserving heritage sites and adopting sustainable tourism approaches, the country hopes to impart genuine tourism experiences while ensuring the protection of natural and cultural assets. This is attractive to visitors and performs the significant function of enhancing their appreciation for the wide variety of culture and natural assets of the UAE (MDF, 2021; Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023).

4.5.1.3 Marketing and Promotion

Like Canada's Federal Tourism Growth Strategy, the UAE heavily relies on collaboration and advertising promotion. Using digital platforms and entering into strategic alliances, their marketing campaigns are intended to build recognition and hold the audience. The UAE emphasizes sustainable tourism development through this collaborative approach that includes governmental bodies, private companies, and local communities (Government of Canada, 2023).

4.5.1.4 Capacity Building and Training

Training programs and workers' development design are other main parts of the structure of sustainable tourism in the UAE. By enabling the community and workers in the tourism industry with the right skills and information, the UAE seeks to provide the best tourism experience. Still, on the counter way, it helps tackle unemployment and poverty, too. Along with this institutional strengthening, the service standards can also be

improved. Furthermore, it can also lead to the overall resilience and sustainability of the tourism sector (MDF, 2021; Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023).

4.5.1.5 Environmental and Social Concerns

The Emirates' proactive stand on solving environmental and social problems demonstrates the intention of sustainable tourism acts. What is achieved through the efforts to reduce ecological impact, maintain cultural heritage, and develop the community is that the United Arab Emirates resembles the world standards that such organizations as Fiji's Tourism Development Plan or Zambia's sustainability initiatives lead. Using its tourism policies, the UAE aims to jointly preserve the environment and society while making economic progress (MDF, 2021; Zambia MOT, 2023).

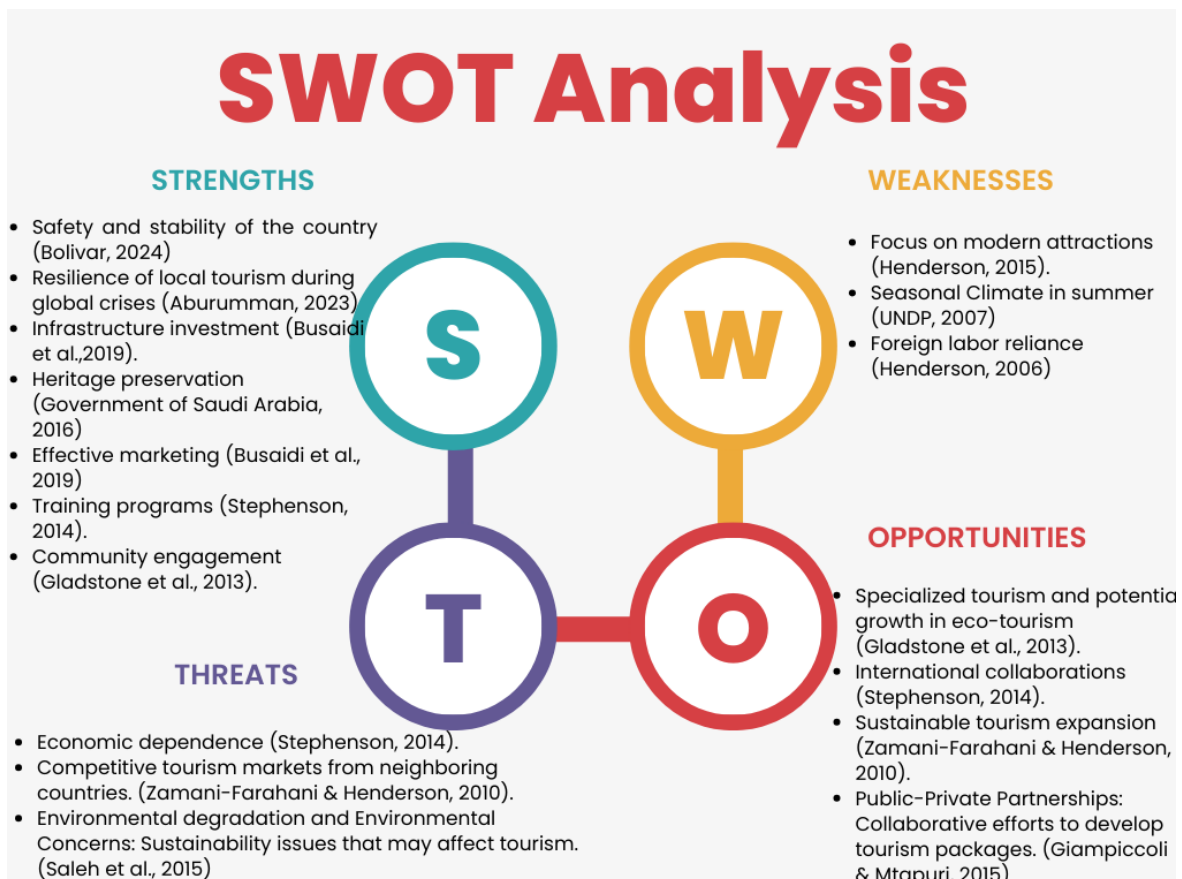
4.6 Differences in Approach and Context

Just like the UAE's domestic tourism policy framework shares more of the common characteristics of sustainable tourism approach and context advocated by international players such as Zambia, Canada, and Fiji, there are varying size differences in both the methods and contexts. The most important of them is the scale and size of infrastructure development, which is very huge. The impressive transportation modernization activities and digital connectivity fostered by the UAE are commendable but differ from the nature-based approach and culturally enriching activities prominently in Fiji's and Zambia's sustainable tourism models (MDF, 2021; Zambia MOT, 2023). In addition, the UAE invests significantly in the creation of unique attractions, which is a ploy that is different from the more traditional and culturally authentic experiences that are promoted by Fiji and Zambia, which are respective advertising strategies (MDF, 2021; Zambia MOT, 2023). Moreover, UAE's skills training and capacity building will improve the hospitality sector. The challenges related to the hiring of migrant workers and Emiratization, which are attributed to the UAE strategy, are the ones associated with its need for migrant labor (MDF, 2021; Zambia MOT, 2023).

4.7 SWOT Analysis

Exploring the internal environment of the UAE using the SWOT analysis shows that there is much to be proud of and much work to do in its domestic tourism policy. The following are among the findings of the strengths that state that the UAE has a solid infrastructure in terms of airports, highways, and hotels, among others, thus enhancing the journey and accommodation of domestic tourists (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017). Moreover, a comprehensive marketing campaign branching from the top to bottom, a massive use of digital and social media, and harvesting successful partnerships with global brands boosted the UAE's image among tourists and people in business as one of the most welcoming countries for both guests and investors within the nation's territories. Furthermore, the UAE's commitment to preserving its rich cultural heritage through initiatives like the Dubai Expo 2020 and the Abu Dhabi Cultural Foundation showcases its dedication to offering authentic and immersive experiences to domestic visitors.

Figure 4.1: SWOT Analysis



However, there are weaknesses which are revealed by the SWOT analysis that pose threats to the sustainability of domestic tourism in the UAE. This is one of the challenges, and it involves the fact that the nation heavily depends on the tourism sector, which serves as one of the key indicators for the country's economic development (Busaidi et al., 2019). Another threat that threatens the future of this supposed asset is the degradation of the environment as a result of urbanization and the growth of the tourism sector; issues to do with water resources, pollution, and loss of habitat are causes for concern, and until now seen negatively affecting the natural resources that have earned this country its reputation for tourism (Stephenson, 2014). Furthermore, in terms of competing with other complementary sectors where competition is stiff both at a domestic and regional level in the tourism sector, companies face difficulties in attracting and retaining passengers due to the many competing regional destinations.

To counter these threats, the UAE has embarked on several strategies to enhance its home-grown tourism structure, thus guaranteeing sustainable growth. One of these includes the continuous need to invest in infrastructure development, such as skyscrapers like the Burj Khalifa and tourist attractions such as the Louvre Abu Dhabi, which have been instrumental in attracting more domestic tourists (Gladstone et al., 2013). The nation has also adopted sustainable tourism as a key highlight for tourism development in carrying out sustainable tourism steps, and the Green Tourism Project helps support sustainable tourism in the UAE and protects the natural resources in the different ecosystems in the country (Saleh et al., 2015). In addition, some of the relevant community engagement programs, such as 'My Emirates Pass', provide special privileges and special offers to the residents of the UAE. This helps enhance the locals' loyalty towards the place and increases the participation of domestic tourists in the same (Aburumman et al., 2023). Based on the current analysis, the UAE has identified its resources and fulfilled its obligations to overcome essential issues that may affect domestic tourism and create competitive advantages for the country and valuable tourist experiences.

4.8 Benchmark versus SWOT analysis

SWOT and benchmarking analysis are both valuable techniques for assessing tourism policies. Though their findings are different, they are complementary in some areas. These methods highlight the significance of infrastructure development, cultural and heritage tourism, marketing, and sustainability as crucial elements. For example, benchmarking shows that Zambia, Fiji, and Canada have invested heavily in infrastructure and promoted cultural tourism, as in the UAE. They are the strong points identified in the SWOT analysis. They also emphasize the significance of strategic marketing and sustainable tourism. However, they differ in specific findings: benchmarking reveals policy stability and investment attraction in Canada and Zambia. At the same time, the SWOT analysis focuses on the negative aspects of regulation inconsistency and economic dependence on the UAE.

Moreover, the benchmarking results indicate how other countries mobilize communities in tourism activities to which the UAE was recognized as potential in SWOT analysis. Furthermore, benchmarking is helpful in identifying external factors, such as investment incentives; meanwhile, SWOT analysis is helpful in detailing internal factors, such as reliance on foreign labor. These methods are useful because they offer a holistic view of how the UAE may improve its domestic tourism policy by using internal and external considerations.

4.9 Summary

The UAE Government can take several policy measures to efficiently promote domestic tourism in less-visited emirates and diversify its tourism nature. Furthermore, allocating financial resources to developing more infrastructure, for example, improving road networks and expanding air connectivity to far-flung areas, will be beneficial as it will result in better accessibility and a more extensive clientele. Then, encouraging the enrichment of a destination via the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of sustainable tourism practices would give the visitors a unique experience while safeguarding the natural and cultural assets (Busaidi et al., 2019; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri,

2015; Henderson, 2006). Also, well-thought-of strategies and promotion via tour operators, targeted campaigns, and dispersion of information can be highly useful in drawing attention and increasing demand in regions that are not so popular (Reisinger et al., 2019; Sharpley, 2002). The last point focuses on enhancing capacity building and training programs to empower local communities and tourism professionals, which are crucial for providing quality service (Busaidi et al., 2019; Giampiccoli & Mtapuri, 2015; Stephenson, 2014). It ensures the sustainability of tourism development, as well.

The UAE's current domestic tourism policy framework has shown the capabilities at the international bodies' level to lay the grounds for sustainable tourism. Initiatives dedicated to providing infrastructure expansions, destination improvement, marketing, and capacity development demonstrate that authorities aim to obtain the primary goal - tourism sustainability. Via infrastructure improvement, cultural heritage conservation, responsible marketing, and community enrichment, the UAE cultural position boards the sustainability principles discussed by UNWTO (Government of Canada, 2016; Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). Tourism strategies are designed to stop over-exploitation and over-development of the environment so that economic growth can be sustainable and resilient over time and contribute to society.

The SWOT analysis of the UAE's domestic tourism policy framework shows some strengths, including significant infrastructural development, heritage protection, robust marketing approaches, community participation such as Ferjan Dubai initiative (Ferjan Dubai, 2024), and extensive training programs. However, problems such as dependency on foreign labor, and the concentration on the facilities of the modern world continue. Potential lies in increasing segmented tourism, developing international linkages, public-Private collaboration and promoting sustainable tourism. Possible dangers are overreliance on tourism, environmental harm, competition, and clashes between society and culture. These concerns can be addressed by introducing policy instruments that promote less-visited Emirates within the UAE to boost domestic tourism, like investing in the infrastructure of these areas and endorsing specialized marketing strategies to promote local features and destinations as well as encouraging domestic participation in destination marketing (Zaidan & Kovacs, 2017). Other potential measures to consider

include aligning these with sustainable tourism practices as suggested by the principles proposed by the UNWTO, such as policy consistency, strong emphasis on environmental sustainability, and balanced attention between both modern and historical attractions (MDF, 2021; Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). This strategic alignment will enable the diversification of the tourism sector and guarantee the sustainability and economic viability of tourism's sustainability and economic viability.

Chapter 5: Recommendations and Conclusion

5.1 Summary of the Main Arguments

This dissertation examined the strategies the UAE can employ to spur the growth of domestic tourism. Mainly, the focus of the study was on identifying ways the UAE government could improve domestic tourism. The primary research question guiding this study was: “Should the UAE prioritize the development of its domestic tourism sector, and what are the potential benefits and costs of such prioritization?” The findings from the literature review (Chapter 2) highlighted the benefits of implementing a domestic tourism strategy, including economic growth, job creation, cultural preservation, and increased sustainability.

5.2 Benefits of Implementing a Domestic Tourism Strategy

1. Firstly, the literature review demonstrated that strengthening domestic tourism can significantly promote economic growth and job creation. By encouraging citizens to travel to local destinations, there is an increase in demand for diverse services such as accommodation, transportation, and entertainment, which in turn stimulates local businesses and creates employment opportunities (Section 2.3.3 Benefits).
2. Secondly, domestic tourism plays a crucial role in cultural preservation. By promoting travel within the country, citizens become more engaged with their cultural heritage, which fosters a deeper appreciation and encourages the preservation of local traditions, arts, and historical sites (Section 2.3.4 Spill-overs).
3. Thirdly, domestic tourism contributes to sustainability by reducing the carbon footprint associated with long-haul travel. Shorter travel distances mean lower carbon emissions, and local tourists are more likely to engage in sustainable practices to preserve their own environment (Section 2.3.2 Trends).

5.2 Findings' Validity and Reliability

The study undertook a process of collecting data from diverse sources. The identified specific areas of concentration, including developing appropriate marketing campaigns, integrating sustainability concepts into the domestic tourism improvement plan, investing more in infrastructure, and building human capital. These findings are in line with the findings from case studies of Zambia, Fiji, and Canada. With this, the second research question was adequately answered. According to the third research question, the study observed that the UAE is more focused on international tourism. Accordingly, results showed that the government has not instituted proper sustainable policies in domestic tourism. However, more future studies should seek to explore the area further, emphasizing the areas of achievement and improvement. The study also showed that investing in culture and heritage would spur growth in domestic tourism. The findings adequately addressed the third research question. However, the following recommendations are considered essential in further understanding the topic.

1. A quantitative study is needed to further examine the impact of domestic tourism on the UAE's economic, social, environmental, and cultural well-being. The quantitative data needed in this case would include tourism revenue, employment, cultural exchange, cultural identity, resource consumption, and sustainability initiatives. The data will comprehensively capture various dimensions of domestic tourism development from economic, social, and environmental, to cultural aspects of domestic tourism improvement. The diverse case studies for benchmarks increased the reliability and credibility of the results (Subedi, 2023), and quantitative data that integrates these components will further enhance the validity of the findings. The tourism department should capture this data to facilitate informed decision-making.
2. The findings from the quantitative study would further need to be aligned with the SWOT analysis. A SWOT analysis is crucial in placing the best practices into the context (Gierczak-Korzeniowska, 2020). The case of UAE's domestic tourism improvement plan is unique to its circumstances. Hence, while the benchmarking analysis would be critical in informing areas of policy changes, there will be needed for the UAE cultural aspects to be adopted during decision-making processes.

5.3 Discussion of the Results within the UAE Context

The study showed that the UAE has achieved impressive infrastructure development. However, there are immense opportunities for growth in the less-visited emirates with more investment in areas such as transportation networks and technology. Moreover, the Etihad Rail, which connects from the border of Saudi Arabia to the border of Oman, will ease movement between the seven emirates, offering luxury hospitality services on board (Etihad Rail, 2024). The rail is an environmentally sustainable service, expected to reduce CO2 emissions by 21% by 2050 (Time Out Editors, 2024). In addition, the rail started carrying its first passengers in February 2024 and is currently open partially, from the capital city to Al-Dannah (Salim, 2024). Also, the internal airlines play a vital role in domestic tourism in other countries like Saudi Arabia (Al-Baqmi, 2014), which will help in boosting domestic tourism in the less-visited areas. Moreover, there are several internal airlines that operate exclusively from and to Abu Dhabi (U.AE, 2024a), and there is a need to operate more of these internal airlines across the country.

Besides, this study discovered that the UAE holds a rich cultural heritage critical in boosting a sense of local pride. For the less-visited emirates, this is essential if coupled with the creation of eco-lodges and preserving heritage assets and organising cultural festivals. Local community partnerships would help support the goal. Influencers could be crucial in crafting stories narratives that capture the emirates' unique tourism aspects.

Additionally, the study found that there is a need for strategic marketing and promotional campaigns. Specifically, focusing on the less-visited emirates will create awareness about the heritage sites. The UAE Government has made efforts to preserve and protect heritage sites by establishing museums, creating heritage villages, and holding events and festivals (U.AE, 2024c), such as the Sheikh Zayed Festival, which is one of the most important cultural events in the country (SZF, 2024). Furthermore, there is a need to focus on the less-visited emirates and organize similar kinds of events there.

Furthermore, increasing regional connectivity and internet-based user-friendly booking platforms are considered the main highlights in these efforts. Partnering with the local and international businesses with specialties in digital marketing and social media engagement has been shown to increase visitor knowledge (Armutcu et al., 2023). Targeted campaigns that capture the emirates' unique cultural and natural assets can boost local tourism. The study also observed that capacity-building and training programs of communities is essential in facilitating local tourism. Despite the successes in the UAE, there is need for human capital development. Support programs for professional development will help provide superior hospitality services (Barreto & Mayya, 2023). Notably, this is the case where cultural sensitivity and language training programs are provided for frontline tourism staff (Stephenson, 2014). Since the focus is on the less-visited emirates, creating employment opportunities and sustainable tourism would boost connection to domestic tourism. Importantly, addressing environmental and social concerns will propel the efforts for policy changes aimed at enhancing domestic tourism. Preserving cultural heritage and creating community-based tourism will ensure these policies reduce damages to sites that harbour the region's unique cultural artefacts.

5.4 Conclusions and Recommendations

The UAE exhibits unique tourism resources that can elevate domestic tourism with improvements. Its excellence in international tourism demonstrates the untapped opportunities for improving domestic tourism through policy changes. The following recommendations could be considered in improving domestic tourism in UAE.

1. Policies should focus on infrastructural development. Opening the remote areas to the regional and international tourism markets is essential. For instance, in Zambia, the government allocated significant amounts for budgets to support the upgrades of transportation systems such as airports, roads, and telecommunications (Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). The development area

should consider long-term strategic plan as the infrastructure development must capture effects in the long run.

2. There is a need to improve hotels, lodges, and resorts in the UAE. These areas have proved critical in boosting domestic tourism in Zambia (Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). In UAE, this is feasible considering its resource endowments.
3. Additionally, promoting cultural and heritage tourism would be essential in creating appeal for domestic tourism. The UAE can consider this as a medium-term project for domestic tourism development since these elements require a significant understanding of cultural expectations of local tourists considering the changes in the social order due to global interactions. In the less-visited destinations, developing eco-lodges, family-orientated accommodations and cultural events will help boost domestic tourism. These facets should consider a long-term process of development since sustainability concepts must be adopted. The UAE can emulate the case of Zambia and Fiji, where the development of cultural villages, heritage sites, and cultural festivals have worked in creating the local tourist's connection with the country's rich cultural fabric (Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). These efforts would be more significant if supported with marketing campaigns. In Zambia, there have been ambitious digital marketing, social media engagement, a presence in international travel fairs, and promotional events to create domestic tourism awareness offers (ibid).
4. In the UAE, there is need for targeted digital marketing campaigns. The marketing campaigns should be envisaged on a short-term basis since the impacts and promotional initiatives to create awareness will be regularly assessed.
5. Capacity-building should be considered in the case of UAE. Hospitality services require superior experience and skills that can be earned through investment in human capital development. This should be adopted on a long-term perspective since preparing citizens through training may not have immediate impacts. In Canada, the establishment of the Sustainable Indigenous Tourism Employment and Skills Initiative (SITES) has been regarded as essential in skills development (Government of Canada, 2024). The Canadian government also invested over \$2 million to support tourism development projects, including creating jobs and local

development. Investing in capacity building in the UAE will help develop and adopt training programs needed to promote professional domestic tourism.

6. To enhance the resilience of UAE's domestic tourism during crises, we can draw insights from Singapore's COVID-19 strategies. Implementing a voucher system similar to Singapore's SingapoRediscovered Vouchers (Tan, 2021) can incentivize local travel. Diversifying tourism offerings to include cultural, heritage, eco-tourism, and adventure tours will attract a broad audience. Collaborating with local businesses to create appealing packages, coupled with strong digital marketing campaigns, can boost engagement. Additionally, adopting flexible booking policies and providing real-time updates on travel safety can reassure residents. These measures collectively ensure a robust and adaptable domestic tourism sector in the UAE.
7. Importantly, the overall domestic tourism strategic plan should have the concept of sustainability in mind. The cultural heritage should be viewed from a future standpoint. In Zambia, this has been achieved through policy changes that discourage damage to the natural resources, animals, and birds and support of conservation programs (Zambia Ministry of Tourism, 2023). In the UAE, policies that identify and protect environmentally sensitive areas should be considered. These policies should focus on improving domestic tourism but reduce environmental impacts.

5.5 Research Implications

Investing in local tourism in the UAE will have multiple implications. At its heart, these efforts will promote local tourism, which is essential for the economic growth of the country. Besides, it will offer more employment opportunities in the less-visited emirates. Enhancing domestic tourism will also be a prime source for promoting social cohesion through cultural festivals. In a broader sense, boosting domestic tourism is aligned with the UAE's economic diversification goals. Reducing overdependence on international tourism will offer opportunities for balanced and sustainable domestic tourism in the UAE.

5.6 Reflections

The completion of this dissertation entailed an extensive exploration of the topic, analysis, and synthesis of the findings. The comparative analysis involved international best practices from countries like Fiji, Zambia, Canada and Singapore needed an understanding of the UAE context to identify policy changes that could work. A SWOT analysis particularly helped strengthen an understanding of the UAE's capabilities and areas of improvement to enhance domestic tourism investment through policy changes. Throughout the process, the researcher learned the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to developing tourism policies. Local community involvement was also affirmed to offer several benefits in developing competitive domestic tourism. However, while diverse sources were used for data collection, future studies should adopt empirical surveys to validate the policy recommendations provided in this report. For instance, longitudinal studies may help deliver insights into policy impacts in the long term.

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