

Agritourism Potentials in Oman: An Overview with Visionary for Adoption

A. Al Hinai, H. Jayasuriya, H. Kotagama

Abstract—Most Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries with oil-based economy like Oman are looking for other potential revenue generation options as the crude oil price is regularly fluctuating due to changing geopolitical environment. Oman has advantage of possessing world-heritage nature tourism hotspots around the country and the government is making investments and strategies to uplift the tourism industry following Oman Vision 2040 strategies. Oman's agriculture is not significantly contributing to the economy, but possesses specific and diversified arid cropping systems. Oman has modern farms; nevertheless some of the agricultural production activities are done with cultural practices and styles that would be attractive to tourists. The aim of this paper is to investigate the potentials for promoting agritourism industry in Oman; recognize potential sites, commodities and activities, and predict potential revenue generation as a projection from that of the tourism sector. Moreover, the study enables to foresee possible auxiliary advantages of agritourism such as, empowerment of women and youth, enhancement in the value-addition industry for agricultural produce through technology transfer and capacity building, and producing export quality products. Agritourism could increase employability, empowerment of women and youth, improve value-addition industry and export-oriented agribusiness. These efforts including provision of necessary technology-transfer and capacity-building should be rendered by the collaboration of academic institutions, relevant ministries and other public and private sector stakeholders.

Keywords—Agritourism, nature-based tourism, potentials, revenue generation, value addition.

I. INTRODUCTION

AGRITOURISM means the integration of agriculture and tourism and enhancing mutual benefits for both sectors. It has been very popular since the past decades and shows potential to continue to grow in the future as well [1], [2]. Agritourism can help to improve various operations and activities of different agricultural sectors in order to attract and obtain additional income from tourists visiting the farms.

Oman's economy depends substantially (50% of government revenue in 2020) on revenue from crude oil, thus under current context of price reductions and fluctuations, reduction in oil production the country's economy has been

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affected [3]. Therefore, the state is considering moving to improve other potential sectors such as industrial, commercial, tourism, and agricultural to contribute to raising the state economy. In Oman, Agritourism is in a primitive and weak state. Sznajder [4] stated that Agritourism is one of the sectors that could significantly add to the economy of a country.

II. TOURISM IN OMAN

Abdul-Ghani [5] fourteen years ago predicted that Omani tourism is expected to contribute to GDP by about 3% by the end of 2020, which in turn will contribute to the increase in tourism revenues by ten times, about OMR 130 million (US\$338 million). One of the main goals of the National Strategic Plan up to 2040 [6], and under the national priorities on "economic diversification and fiscal sustainability", the strategy projected is to increase domestic and international tourists arrivals to 11 million per year. Tables I and II indicate that the early projected tourism goals by 2020 and changes in statistical indicators from 2011-2017 showing steady growth [5], [7].

TABLE I
 THE OBJECTIVES AND VISION OF THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR 2040 [5]-[8]

Objective	Vision
Increase the employability related to the sector	More than half a million jobs
Increase in the volume of investments 2016-2040	19 billion OMR (1 OMR = 2.58 USD)
Increase the contribution of tourism to GDP	From 6 to 9%
Develop the local economy small and medium tourism institutions	1100 small and medium enterprises
Improving quality of life and confidence in the future	Pride in local identity

TABLE II
 THE STATISTICAL INDICATORS OF THE TOURISM SECTOR DURING 2011-2017 [5]-[8]

Indicator	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	Growth rate (%)
Direct added value of the sector (million OMR) #	520.8	613.0	653.1	689.5	732.2	714.9	728.3	5.7
GDP Contribution (%)	1.9	2.0	2.1	2.1	2.7	2.8	2.6	5.4
Number of incoming tourists (million)	1.4	1.7	1.9	2.2	2.6	3.2	3.3	15.2

#1 OMR = 2.58 USD

A. Nature Tourism Destinations in Oman

Oman is very rich with many natural, cultural and heritage sites when compared with other neighboring GCC countries. It is rich with natural beauty and diversity of terrains from northern Strait of Hormuz in Musandam region which is

known as the Arabian Gulf Gate, to the Dhofar region in south where the autumn monsoon season “Kharif” in Dhofar is famous for green hills, oaks and valleys. Table III shows list of some of the selected nature tourism destinations in Oman. As a positive note, the most nature tourism destinations are located in areas where rural agricultural activities are being taken place and have the best opportunity for linking with agritourism activities.

TABLE III

LIST OF SELECTED NATURE-TOURISM DESTINATIONS IN OMAN [9]-[12]

Castles and forts in Oman	Description
Bahla Castle	An important archaeological site in the UNESCO World Heritage List, located in agricultural farming area
Nizwa Castle	Built in 1668 AD; large circular building built with Omani stones and plaster
Nakhal Castle	The largest castles in Oman; surrounded by hot springs, high mountains and agricultural farming area
Al-Kasfah Hot Spring	Spring of natural water with temperature up to 45 ° C with "sulfuric" nature; used for natural treatment of rheumatism and skin diseases
Al-Thowarah Hot Spring	Hot water spring; contains beneficial minerals (treating some diseases)
Mount Grand Canyon	The highest mountains in the Sultanate; height of 3005 m, passes farming areas
Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar	Steep valleys and winding roads; villages and farms on the edge of the slopes
Beaches in Oman	
The Beach of Musandam Peninsula	Proximity the Strait of Hormuz, the abundance of diving and swimming sites, and the small fish village
The Gulf Coast of Oman	Overlooking the Arabian Sea waters, opposite the Sailboat Park (a major shipbuilding center)
The Coast of Dhofar	A long sandy beaches; the abundance of coconut trees, and the gathering of many rare birds
Other Attractions	
Historic City of Muscat	The city of the Arab culture in 2012
Ain Arzat	A water spring, surrounded by agricultural area
Sand of Wahiba	An extended sand dunes for about 10,000 km ²
The Hutah Cave	Natural wonders, located in the state of Hamra
The Musandam Strait	Rugged mountains and scenic views
Ras Al-Ganz	Turtle beach; living green turtles
Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque	The largest mosques in Oman; beautiful Islamic inscriptions

III. AGRICULTURE IN OMAN

Agriculture is one of the important sectors for Oman in achieving food security. The annual contribution from the agriculture to the national income is around 600 million OMR. The cultivated area is around 72,600 ha. Table IV shows the cultivated areas of Oman in hectare and percentage of different cultivated crops [13]-[15].

TABLE IV

CULTIVATED AREA IN HECTARES AND PERCENTAGE OF DIFFERENT CULTIVATED CROPS [13]-[15]

Crop	Area (ha)	% of Total area
Fruit crops including dates	39926	58.03
Perennial forages	15956	25.08
Field crops	5596	8.79
Vegetable crops	5154	8.10
Total	63632	100

More than 50% of agricultural activities take place in Al-Batinah costal belt in the north-eastern region of Oman [16], [17]. Many of the agricultural sites in Oman can be promoted to agritourism industry with adoption of appropriate value addition, technology transfer and capacity building etc., in order to enhance farm income and sustainably in agriculture in Oman. Table V shows the potential sites and agricultural products that can be considered for developing the agritourism industry.

TABLE V

POTENTIAL SITES FOR AGRITOURISM IN DIFFERENT REGIONS IN OMAN

Region	Potential commodities
Salalah	Fruits: coconut and banana, Cow and camel milk and meat, Frankincense (Luban) [18]
Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar Muscat	Fruits: pomegranate, peach, apple, walnut, Floriculture: roses, orchids [19]
Al-Batinah	Fruits and vegetables Omani sweet (Halwa) [20]
Bahla	Fruits; dates, mango, lemon, Vegetables; cucumber, tomatoes, leaf vegetables, Wheat fields, Bee's honey [21]
Nizwa	Date palm handicrafts Fruits and vegetables, Sugar cane Pottery [20]
Al-Sharkhiya	Gold and silver industry: swords and daggers, ornaments and decorations Cooper industry: cooking utensils Sugarcane industry: Omani red sugar Omani Halwa industry [22]
	Fruits and vegetables Traditional crafts: textiles, gold and silver jewellery, leather tanning, shoe making, date and lemon drying [23]

A. Agritourism Potentials in Oman and Benefits

Table VI provides some selected examples for potential agritourism sites in different regions of Oman and possible agricultural products and corresponding agritourism farm activities to attract agritourists.

Table VII provides the potential added financial benefits to farms and economy of Oman through agritourism activities. Zekri [24] reported that 6 to 21% increase in farmer profit and 10% of additional cost spent for the trip when tourist visits farms. Table VII is organized to simulate how the selected commodities with agritourism could contribute to farm economy and sustainability. It has provided the facilities and promotional activities that should be made available at the Agritourism destinations.

IV. DISCUSSION

What distinguishes the Sultanate of Oman from other Gulf countries is that having various cultural and heritage sites and agriculture can diversify the economy not depending entirely on oil revenues. There are other sectors that are expected to be rapidly expanded such as agriculture, tourism, fishing, and light industries [26]. The tourism sector is considered a valuable contributor to economy and would provide career opportunities for young Omanis. New strategies have been planned in Oman Visions 2040 with diversification of economy to selected priority areas including to help develop

the tourism sector in order Oman to become one of the prominent tourist destinations and capture international markets [6], [26]. Oman is expecting to increase the investments for the tourism as well as agriculture sectors targeting value-addition to the precious nature tourism hotspots surrounded by farms having specific cultural practices in the country. Most of these nature tourism sites are

linked to farming areas and there is a huge potential to develop agritourism sector in the country. The expected auxiliary advantages will be improved value-addition industry for agriculture generating more employment opportunities, more export-oriented agribusiness and food security and sustainability.

TABLE VI
EXAMPLES OF ADAPTABLE STRATEGIES FOR AGRITOURISM ACTIVITIES AT DIFFERENT FARMS

The region	Farm characteristics	Possible agritourism activities in farms
Al-Sharqiah	Al-Mabsili dates farms	Participation for stripping process of Al-Mabsili dates from the bunches, gaining experience from Al-Tabseel process (specific cultural practices), selling fresh and value added products (dry dates)
Al-Batinah (Barka)	Tomato and cucumber farms	Participation for picking tomato and cucumber, selling fresh and value added products (paste, ketchup, pickles, etc.). Making entertainment activities for the tourist
Salalah	Coconuts farms	Participation for picking coconuts, tasting the coconut water and fruit, buying fresh fruit and value added products (water, oil, etc.)
Nizwa and Bahla	Luban (type of fragrances) farms in the green mountains	Gaining experience and participating in extracting of frankincense from the tree trunk, selling Luban products, incense of Luban and other handicrafts products
	Date fruits farms	Gaining experience of traditional harvesting process, making and handicrafts products from the date palms, selling fresh and value added products (date with different flavours, paste, honey, etc.)
Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar	Sugarcane farms	Manufacturing process of Omani red sugar, touching and testing the products, selling the products and souvenirs
	Pomegranate and Rose farms	Participation for picking the products, gaining experiences from the manufacturing process of pomegranate and rose, selling fresh and value added products (pomegranate jams, rose water)

TABLE VII
POTENTIAL FINANCIAL BENEFITS TO FARMS IF AGRITOURISM IS PRACTICED BY FARMS IN OMAN [14], [25]

Farms and commodities potential for agritourism		Predicted numbers of Agritourists		Expected farm income (OMR)#	Promotion strategy
Commodity	Destination	Annual Tourist visit/year	Predicted number of tourist (25% of nature tourist)	OMR 10 per tourist, visiting ticket and purchase of products	Facilities and promotional activities at the destination
Date Fruit	Nizwa/ date farms	101,000 /2015	25,250	252,500	Reception at the entrance with hospitality (Provide snacks and refreshments like products of the farm)
	Bahla/ date farms	47,000 /2015	11,750	117,500	
	Al-Sharqia Region (Badiya, Ibra)	167,000 /2015	41,750	417,500	
	Nakhla	20,662 /2017	5,166	51,655	Provide brochures about the different products for sale, and recreational activities within the farm and at other destinations nearby.
Sugarcane	Bahla	47,000 /2015	11,750	117,500	
Pomegranate and Rose	Al-Jabal Al-Akhdar	226,487 /2018	56,622	566,218	
Tomato	Barka	2,326 /2017	582	5,815	Entertainment activities such as traditional or cultural pageants, dances, exhibitions
Cucumber	Barka	2,326 /2017	582	5,815	
Banana	Barka	2,326 /2017	582	5,815	
Coconut and Luban (type of fragrances)	Salalah	752,289 /2018	188,072	1,880,723	
	Salalah	752,289 /2018	188,072	1,880,723	

V. CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Oman has been facing economic stability issues due to oil price fluctuations and looking for other feasible non-oil-based economic options such as tourism.

Oman is rich with nature tourism hot-spots around the country and there is a potential to link agritourism activities in farms on the way to nature tourism locations.

One of the benefits of agritourism is enhancement of value-addition industry with technology transfer and capacity building at harm levels and quality improvement to agricultural produce benefiting the export market potential.

The agriculture sector in Oman contributing more or less 600 million OMR (1.54 billion USD) annually to the national economy, agritourism may significantly improve the agricultural revenues and the dignity and better livelihood of farmer community.

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