



# Coastal Tourism Sustainability in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: Environment, Protected Areas, and Culture

Harshitha Sai Viswanathan, MMA  
University of Washington, School of Marine and Environmental Affairs



The globalization of tourism has influenced human activity in coastal environments and, consequently, increased coastal tourism and tourism-associated activities everywhere, including the Emirate of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates. As tourism continues to expand at an unprecedented rate, the recognition of social and environmental tradeoffs associated with the coastal tourism sector and its unintended externalities have led to debates against ideals of sustainable development and what this looks like for coastal environments and associated societies. Sustainable development in coastal tourism comprises three key questions. The first is "what is being balanced?" regarding risks with development. The second question is, "what is meant by balancing?" or "are there alternative development methods?" The third question discusses "how can balancing be accomplished?" which aims to respond to risks responsibly across environmental, socio-cultural, political, and economic systems.

**Sustainable coastal tourism in Abu Dhabi is a dynamic interaction between components of culture, environment, society, tourism, and development that support the natural characteristics of the region. This outcome is the result of a strong relationship between regional identity and the natural environment, signifying its heritage and culture as a maritime and coastal Emirate.**

# 1.

## Methodology - Mixed Methods

**This study explores characteristics of tourism that contribute to sustainability in the coastal environment of Abu Dhabi through interviews with subject matter experts and surveys administered to the general public comprising residents and tourists.**

The questions posed generally covered topic areas of culture, natural environment, tourism management and development, sustainability, and social awareness of development.



**Sustainability on the coast recognizes socio-cultural, political, economic, and environmental factors that create 'meaningful' experiences through tourism for all stakeholders involved.**

The sustainability of culture accounts for the inclusion, adaptability, and awareness of people and their interactions with the environment by mitigating impacts and ensuring societal well-being. Political characteristics integrate sustainability through informed decision-making. Environmental sustainability on the coast broadly falls into two categories – management of ecological systems and resources, and instilling environmental values as the precursor to supporting the health and well-being of environments and entities encompassed in them for generations. Sustainability entails "stability, security, efficiency, and opportunity" through mitigation of risks and continuity within environments, culture, society, and economy.



# 2.

## What is sustainability within the context of coastal tourism in Abu Dhabi?

# 3.



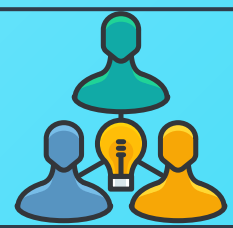
## What are some impacts of tourism development on environmental and cultural sustainability regarding coastal tourism in Abu Dhabi?

**Without accounting for all facets of sustainability, irresponsible development and management of tourism can threaten the biological viability and quality of environments leading to multidimensional impacts resulting from mass tourism.**

Although tourism development creates opportunities for new forms of employment, consequently reducing dependency on traditional gas and oil sectors, the globalization of tourism can reduce economic sustainability when profits do not support communities and the environment. This is exacerbated by the influx of tourists, demands for tourism services, and changes in values and societal structures. The uncontrolled expansion of tourism on the coast can increase the impact on local physical, biological, and cultural characteristics of sensitive areas, indicative of the complexity of interactions between coastal tourism components.

**The interactive processes between coastal components have added value to local heritage, culture, and natural resources by integrating sustainability and raising social awareness among residents and tourists through their experience.**

The emphasis on the integration of heritage within environments tied to the region of Abu Dhabi embraces natural, historic, and cultural elements shaping regional and national identity. Sustainable coastal tourism in Abu Dhabi thrives due to the space-specificity and interactions between different management brokers, and the incorporation of multiple demographics and disciplines, given the region's diversity.



# 4.

## What are some prospects of tourism development on environmental and cultural sustainability regarding coastal tourism in Abu Dhabi?

# 5.



## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR STAKEHOLDERS



**I. Integrate awareness for marine citizenship through investments in outreach programs and building relationships between community members and relevant stakeholders involved in the industry.**

**II. Integrate social, economic, political, technological, and environmental factors in a multidisciplinary model while developing sustainability models.**

**III. Think of culture as an asset and support cultural heritage by emphasizing cultural education, programs, and resources to support local ecosystems, and individuals.**

**Moving forward, it is not only helpful to plan for environmentally responsible tourism projects, but it is equally important to educate the public on these concepts and develop strategies for active and continuous participation that will further benefit tourism and other forms of sustainable development in the region.**

MMA - Masters in Marine Affairs  
Thesis Committee: Dr. Marc L. Miller (Chair), Dr. Yoshitaka Ota  
For more information on the methodology for data collection and analysis of results :

**Contact Information:**

Email: [harshi.sai.v@gmail.com](mailto:harshi.sai.v@gmail.com); [hsv2@uw.edu](mailto:hsv2@uw.edu)

US Contact: +18582429268

UAE Contact: +971551253500

