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Strategic Planning for the Development of Sports Tourism in the Sultanate of Oman

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to provide a strategic planning framework for developing sports tourism in the Sultanate of Oman. A SWOT analysis was employed to identify optimal strategies aligned with the country's sport-tourism context. Quantitative data were collected from 109 experts via a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics. The SWOT results indicated that Oman's sports tourism sector falls into the "WO" (Weakness–Opportunity) quadrant—internal weaknesses outweigh strengths while external opportunities outweigh threats. Accordingly, conservative strategies that leverage opportunities to overcome internal weaknesses are recommended as the most appropriate course of action. These findings provide an evidence-based foundation for policymakers, highlighting critical areas to address in order to enhance Oman's sports tourism development.

Introduction

Tourism is a global, multi-faceted industry whose effects ripple across destinations. When all stakeholders engage responsibly, it can drive substantial local development (Alamineh, Hussein, Endaweke, & Taddesse, 2023). In 2018, the sector contributed about USD 8.8 trillion to the world economy -10.4% of global GDP- and grew 3.9%, outpacing overall global economic growth (World & Tourism, 2020). Tourism supported roughly 10% of all jobs worldwide that year, creating one in every five new jobs over the preceding five years, with forecasts of 100 million additional jobs in the coming decade (Cristian, 2020). Rising living standards continue to fuel travel demand (Shen, Sun, & Luo, 2018); (Khanna & Sharma, 2023). In 2019, tourism generated USD 9.6 trillion and 333 million jobs globally (10.3% of GDP and total employment) (World & Tourism, 2022). However, the COVID-19 pandemic precipitated a 72% collapse in international arrivals from 2019 to 2020—nearly 900 million fewer travelers and a loss of USD 1.1 trillion in receipts (Clark, Nyaupane,

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Timothy, & Buzinde, 2022). Global tourism's contribution to GDP fell to 5.3% in 2020 but rebounded to 6.1% in 2021 as the industry began to recover (World & Tourism, 2022). This turbulence highlighted the sector's vulnerabilities and the importance of strategic, diversified approaches to sustain tourism through crises.

One avenue for diversification and resilience is event tourism. Because their benefits are tangible and measurable, local stakeholders often view hosting events as highly advantageous. Event tourism channels investment into venues and transportation, extends visitor seasons, creates jobs, and generates new tax revenues (Grix, 2014); (Schnitzer, Schlemmer, & Kristiansen, 2017). Over recent decades, cultural, sporting, and business events have become one of the fastest-growing segments of the leisure travel market (Alexandris & Kaplanidou, 2014; Getz & Page, 2016). Within this niche, sports tourism—at the intersection of sport and travel—has expanded so rapidly that virtually every destination now seeks to tap into it (Taleghani & Ghafary, 2014). Major sports events are considered a cornerstone of event tourism and among its most dynamic components (Chersulich, Perić, & Wise, 2020).

Sport-related travel is not only growing in volume but also increasingly recognized for its strategic value. The United Nations World Tourism Organization reports that sports tourism is among the industry's fastest-growing segments, as more travelers incorporate athletic activities into their trips (World Tourism). Sports events of all kinds and scales attract tourists as participants or spectators, and destinations infuse these events with local flavor to provide authentic experiences. Mega-events such as the Olympic Games and FIFA World Cup can catalyze broader tourism development if successfully leveraged in terms of destination branding, infrastructure development, and other socio-economic benefits (World Tourism). Even more modest sports events draw diverse national and international attendees (Kim & Walker, 2012; Ritchie, Shipway, & Cleeve, 2009). Many destinations, therefore, deploy sporting events as a strategy to spur economic development and tourism growth (Zhang & Park, 2015). In developing countries, sports tourism has emerged as a catalyst for the economic and social revitalization of communities, and it has recently gained attention as a vibrant domestic market segment (Honari, Goudarzi, Heidari, & Emami, 2010). When strategically leveraged, sport-event hosting can also enhance residents' quality of life by increasing incomes and job opportunities and even moderating inflation (Homafar, Honari, Heidary, Heidary, & Emami, 2011), while elevating the status of under-represented cities and regions (Bull & Lovell, 2007). Accordingly, sport and tourism have become core components of economic development strategies in nations at every stage of development (Swart & Bob, 2007).

Realizing the full benefits of sports tourism requires deliberate strategic planning. Local governments increasingly use strategic planning to anticipate and address complex challenges. Strategic planning entails setting long-term goals, prioritizing actions to achieve those goals, and mobilizing resources to execute the plan (Guyadeen, Henstra, Kaup, & Wright, 2023). Historically, tourism planning has often been short-term and has lacked community involvement, which weakens territorial identity and limits the use of tourism as a development tool. Integrating strategic planning with community-based tourism, by contrast, produces more durable outcomes for local communities and destinations (Zárate-Altamirano, Rebolledo-López, & Parra-López, 2022). Effective leverage of sports events likewise hinges on foresight. Previous studies on sport-event strategy underscore the importance of evaluating initiatives in both pre- and post-event stages (Hemmonsbeey & Tichaawa, 2019). Sport-tourism events create a broad spectrum of economic, social, and environmental impacts on host communities (Chersulich et al., 2020). However, sustainable positive outcomes do not occur by chance—they require meticulous planning and execution. Past experience provides cautionary lessons: for example, despite the operational success of the 2004 Athens Olympic

Games, weak coordination between commercial providers and public authorities meant that plans to harness post-Olympic facilities went largely unrealized (Ziakas & Boukas, 2013). This illustrates that simply hosting a mega-event is not enough; a joint strategic approach is imperative to fully leverage such events.

To ensure lasting benefits, planners must incorporate sustainability and stakeholder engagement into event strategies from the outset. Key success factors include enhancing decision-making processes, building participant and spectator loyalty, and integrating events with complementary local attractions to enrich visitor experiences (Buning & Gibson, 2016; Getz & Page, 2016; Hallmann, Feiler, Müller, & Breuer, 2012). It is also crucial to understand residents' perceptions of both the positive and negative impacts of events in order to secure broad community support (Kim, Jun, Walker, & Drane, 2015). Without proper regulation and careful planning, new sport-tourism infrastructure and the influx of visitors can harm the environment—mass gatherings tend to generate excess waste, pollution, and noise (Abdel Azim Ahmed, 2017; Lesjak, Axelsson, & Uran, 2014). Long-range planning allows host destinations to anticipate such issues and implement measures to mitigate them (Tichaawa & Bob, 2018). In line with global best practices, contemporary event organizers strive for sustainability, aiming for each dimension of an event to deliver more benefit than cost. Achieving this outcome requires collaboration with stakeholders to ensure financial viability, maximize positive socio-economic impacts, and minimize harms (Hemmonsbey & Tichaawa, 2019). These outcomes depend on defining key strategic elements at the planning stage—such as eco-friendly transportation, recycling programs, local product sourcing, cultural programming, local hiring, and legacy projects—so that benefits endure well beyond the event itself (Perić, Durkin, & Wise, 2016; Zhang & Park, 2015).

is especially pertinent to Oman, a nation at the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula with exceptional ecological and cultural assets. Oman boasts diverse landscapes and rich heritage, including UNESCO World Heritage Sites such as the ancient frankincense port of Al-Baleed, the 3,000-year-old beehive tombs of Bat, and the historic Bahla Fort, as well as unique natural attractions like the turtle nesting beaches of Ras al-Hadd (Alsawafi, 2016; World Tourism & Women, 2011). Recognizing the potential of these assets, Oman's Ministry of Heritage and Tourism formulated a National Tourism Strategy (2016–2024) aimed at boosting economic prosperity, engaging local communities, and protecting natural and cultural resources (Al-Sayyari, Tabishat, Foda, & Mukhtar, 2021). Vision 2040, the country's overarching development blueprint, likewise emphasizes tourism as a key sector for diversification, with the industry's contribution targeted to reach 6% of GDP by 2040. According to the National Centre for Statistics and Information, tourism accounted for 2.2% of Oman's GDP in 2015 and grew to 2.9% by 2019 (National Centre for & Information, 2023).

Oman's tourism industry has shown resilience and strong growth in recent years, reinforcing the call for strategic planning to sustain this trajectory. Fitch projects accelerated expansion of Omani tourism through 2026, driven by Vision 2040 initiatives and post-pandemic recovery programs. Official statistics reflect this upswing: tourism revenues climbed from OMR 1.23 billion in 2018 to OMR 1.41 billion in 2019, dipped in 2020 during the peak of the COVID-19 impact, and then rebounded to OMR 1.3 billion in 2021. International visitor arrivals surged from about 652,000 in 2021 to 2.9 million in 2022—a 348% increase—while total tourism output jumped 47%, reaching OMR 1.9 billion in 2022 (National Centre for & Information, 2023). Working in tandem to capitalize on these trends, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and the Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN) have mapped out investment priorities to boost the sector's capacity, with opportunities projected at roughly OMR 15 billion over the next 20 years. These developments underscore both the

opportunities and the imperative for rigorous, sustainability-oriented planning in Oman's tourism sector—particularly in high-potential niches like sports tourism.

Within Oman's diversification strategy, sports tourism stands out as a promising niche. The Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, in coordination with the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, has actively bid for and hosted numerous regional and international sports events, reflecting a commitment to leverage sports for tourism growth. Over the past 15 years, Oman has staged a variety of high-profile competitions—for example, the 2009 Gulf Cup of Nations (football); the 2010 Asian Beach Games; the 2012 World Beach Handball Championships; the annual Tour of Oman road cycling race; the 2022 ICC Men's T20 Cricket World Cup Qualifiers; the 2022 Youth Sailing World Championships; the 2023 World Veteran Table Tennis Championships; and the 2023 World Athletics Race Walking Team Championships. Hosting these events has upgraded sports facilities and broader infrastructure, created jobs for Omani youth, and bolstered local expertise in event organization, venue management, and coaching. Exposure to visiting international teams has also elevated the performance of Omani athletes on the global stage (Al-Rahbi, 2019). Moreover, the economic benefits are evident: for instance, a series of international sailing regattas in 2021 generated over OMR 2.2 million in direct economic impact and a return on investment of about OMR 4.8 million, according to Oman Sail officials (Al-Ghassani, personal communication, 14 September 2023).

Despite such successes, the tourism sector still contributes only around 2.9% of Oman's GDP (as of 2019), a modest share that highlights considerable room for growth (Al-Sayyari et al., 2021). Oman possesses abundant sport-tourism assets—ranging from eleven prime dive sites and extensive coastlines and beaches to rugged mountains suited for climbing, hiking, and other adventure sports—but many of these assets remain under-developed or under-promoted (Alroya, 2020). A report in *Alroya* (2020) identified five key challenges hampering the growth of sports tourism in the country: (1) under-investment in Oman's natural advantages (terrain and strategic location) for sports activities; (2) weak inter-agency collaboration among stakeholders; (3) absence of a clear, long-term plan for sports tourism and international sporting events; (4) ineffective marketing, including limited advertising, media coverage, and event promotion; and (5) insufficient development of specialized human capital in sports-tourism management. Addressing these gaps through coordinated planning, targeted investments, and capacity-building will be essential for Oman to unlock the full economic potential of its sports tourism sector. Encouragingly, Omani authorities have begun taking steps toward a more strategic approach. Guided by high-level directives under Vision 2040, an Oman Investment Laboratory for Sport was convened in November 2022, bringing together representatives from government, business, and civil society to chart the future of the sports sector. Participants examined the sector's challenges and opportunities and issued several key recommendations, including the establishment of a national Sports Events Center and the adoption of a long-range strategic plan to sustain sport-tourism growth (Oman Vision 2040, n.d.). These developments signal that robust strategic planning is now recognized as vital for boosting visitor numbers, enhancing service quality, and positioning sports tourism as a pillar of Oman's economic and cultural development.

Oman's strategic location and rich natural and cultural assets give it strong potential for sports tourism development. The country boasts diverse ecosystems and heritage sites – from mountain ranges and deserts to beaches and UNESCO World Heritage Sites – that can support a wide range of sport-tourism activities (Alsawafi, 2016; Gani & Al Mawali, 2013). The government has explicitly prioritized tourism in national policy: according to Oman's Tourism Strategy 2016–2024 and the Vision 2040 economic plan, tourism's contribution to GDP is targeted to increase from about 2.2% in 2015 to 6% by 2040 (Al-Sayyari et al., 2021;

National Centre for & Information, 2023). This emphasis is reflected in recent performance indicators. In 2019, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, tourism's direct value added reached 2.9% of GDP (National Centre for & Information, 2023). After a sharp pandemic-induced downturn in 2020, the sector is rebounding: international arrivals climbed from 0.65 million in 2021 to 2.9 million in 2022, and annual tourism revenues recovered to nearly OMR 1.9 billion in 2022 (National Centre for & Information, 2023). Oman News Agency (2022) reported that Fitch Solutions upgraded its outlook for Omani tourism, expecting robust growth through 2026 as post-pandemic recovery initiatives and Vision 2040 investments (projected at OMR 15 billion over 20 years) take effect. These trends underscore both the opportunities before Oman and the need for rigorous, sustainability-oriented planning to capitalize on them.

Sports tourism – the travel linked to sport events and activities – is increasingly seen as a niche that Oman can leverage within its broader tourism strategy. Over the past 15 years, the Sultanate has hosted numerous regional and international sporting events as a catalyst for tourism and development. **Figure 1** illustrates Oman's experience in staging major competitions, which has led to upgraded facilities, job creation for local youth, and enhanced national expertise in event management and coaching. Notable events include the 2009 Gulf Cup of Nations, the 2010 Asian Beach Games, the 2012 Beach Handball World Championship, the annual Tour of Oman road-cycling race, and several world championships held in 2022–2023 (in cricket, sailing, table tennis, and race walking) (Ministry of Culture). These efforts have begun to raise Oman's profile on the global sport-tourism map. For example, hosting a series of international sailing regattas in 2021 generated over OMR 2.2 million in direct economic impact (Al-Ghassani, 2023, personal communication).

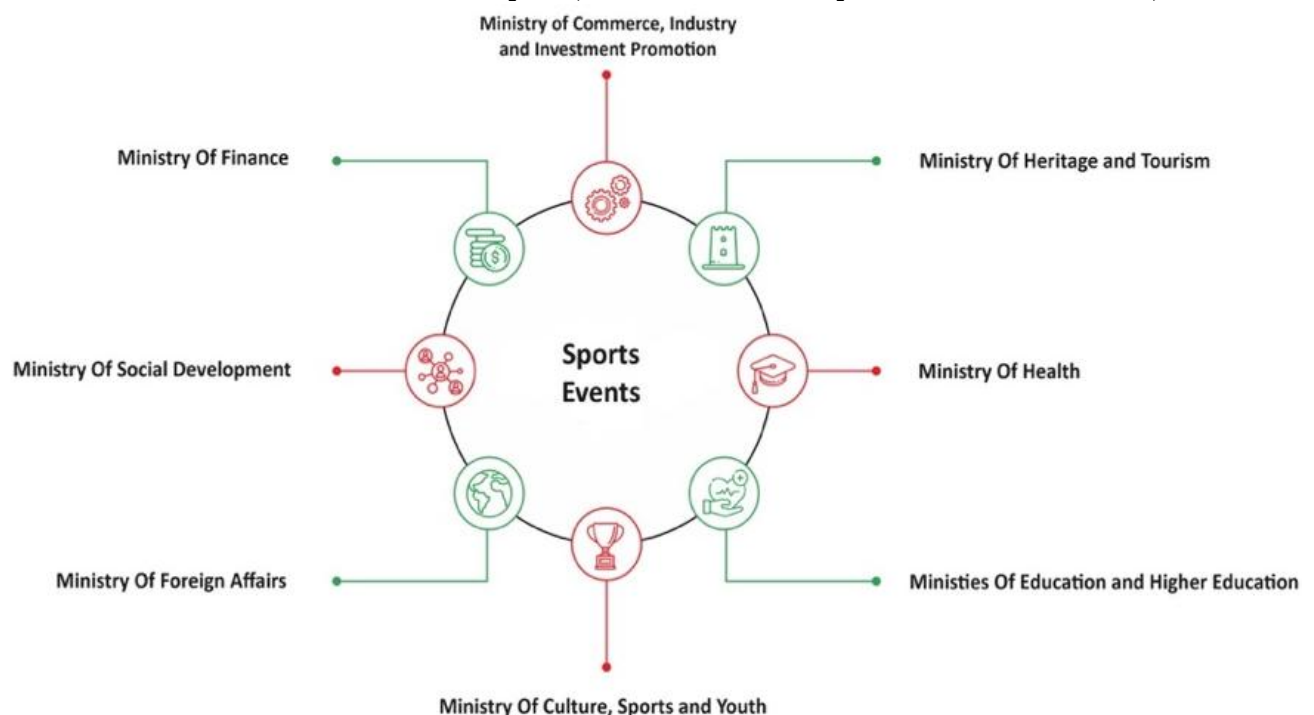


Figure 1. Hosting of Sports Events in the Sultanate of Oman.

Despite such successes, tourism remains a relatively small pillar of the economy (contributing under 3% of GDP as of 2019), highlighting considerable room for growth (Al-Sayyari et al., 2021). Local analysts have pointed out several challenges that continue to hinder the development of sport tourism. According to an Omani media report (Alroya, 2020), five key shortfalls must be addressed: (1) under-investment in Oman's natural advantages (terrain and climate) for sports activities, (2) weak coordination between tourism and sports authorities,

(3) the absence of a clear long-term plan for sports events and tourism, (4) ineffective marketing and promotion of events internationally, and (5) a shortage of specialized human resources in sport-tourism management. In line with these observations, Al-Sayyari et al. (2021) note persistent gaps in public-private partnership, investment-friendly policies, and marketing capacity, which together explain the slow pace of sport-tourism growth in Oman. To overcome these challenges, recent initiatives have stressed the importance of comprehensive strategic planning. In November 2022, a national Sports Investment Laboratory – convened under the Vision 2040 program with representatives from government, business, and civil society – examined the sport-tourism sector's prospects and issued several recommendations. Chief among these was the creation of an Oman Sports Events Center and the adoption of a long-range, integrated strategic plan to guide sport-tourism development. Such calls align with global best practices: sustainable sport-tourism growth requires deliberate, long-term planning to maximize positive impacts (economic gains, community benefits, destination branding) while mitigating negatives (environmental pressures, social disruptions) (Hemmonsby & Tichaawa, 2019; Tichaawa & Bob, 2018). In other emerging destinations, researchers have likewise emphasized strategic approaches. For instance, Boroujerdi, Mansouri, and Asadi (2023) outline a development model for a sports-tourism destination in Iran, and Nazari (2021) reports that growing public enthusiasm for sport tourism in Isfahan has boosted local participation in sport-related travel. Farag et al. (2018) even proposed a joint marketing plan linking sports events with tourist attractions in Egypt and Oman, underlining regional interest in leveraging sport tourism for economic diversification.

Against this backdrop, the present study sets out to lay the groundwork for a comprehensive sport-tourism development plan for Oman. It asks: **Which strategies are most appropriate for developing sports tourism in the Sultanate of Oman?** Using a SWOT framework, this research identifies and ranks the sector's internal strengths and weaknesses alongside external opportunities and threats, thereby providing an evidence-based roadmap for future growth.

Methodology

This study employed an analytical-descriptive research design. We began by reviewing available information on sports tourism in Oman (e.g. policy documents, industry reports, and prior studies) and consulting with experts to pinpoint relevant internal and external factors. Using this groundwork, we carried out a SWOT analysis to systematically identify the sector's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Our goal was to evaluate Oman's sport-tourism environment and formulate suitable development strategies based on the SWOT framework.

The study population comprised all employees in key organizations involved in sport tourism in Oman, including the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and private companies specializing in sports tourism or event management. In total, this population consisted of $N = 109$ individuals. Given the manageable size, we adopted a total population sampling approach, inviting all 109 identified stakeholders to participate in the survey. Ultimately, we obtained 109 completed responses (a 100% response rate), achieving a census of the target population.

Data were collected in 2023 using a researcher-designed questionnaire administered to the above stakeholders. The questionnaire was divided into four sections corresponding to the SWOT dimensions (internal strengths and weaknesses, external opportunities and threats). In each section, respondents were presented with a list of potential factors and asked to evaluate them. In total, the instrument contained 33 items reflecting candidate SWOT factors –

specifically, 9 strengths, 8 weaknesses, 9 opportunities, and 7 threats identified from the initial expert review and literature search. Respondents rated each item on a Likert-type scale indicating its significance or degree of presence in Oman's sport-tourism context. The survey also collected basic demographic information (e.g. participants' age, education level, sector, and region) to characterize the sample.

Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire's content validity was established by expert judgment. Several sport management and tourism experts reviewed the draft instrument to ensure the clarity and relevance of each item. We then pilot-tested the questionnaire on a small subset of participants (not included in the main sample) to assess its reliability. The pilot responses were analyzed to compute Cronbach's alpha, resulting in a reliability coefficient of $\alpha = 0.83$, which indicates satisfactory internal consistency for the questionnaire items.

We used both descriptive and inferential statistics to analyze the data. First, we applied descriptive statistics to summarize the respondents' demographic characteristics and to provide an overview of their responses on each SWOT item (e.g. mean ratings and frequencies). Next, we performed a Friedman test, a non-parametric test for related samples, to rank the internal and external factors by their mean importance ratings. This test determined the ordering of strengths (S1–S9), weaknesses (W1–W8), opportunities (O1–O9), and threats (T1–T7) as perceived by the stakeholders.

For strategic analysis, we employed the standard Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) and External Factor Evaluation (EFE) matrix techniques (Capps Iii & Glissmeyer, 2012). In the IFE matrix, each strength and weakness was assigned a weight (reflecting its relative importance out of 1.0) and a rating on a 1–4 scale (where a higher rating indicates that the factor is being managed well or is a strong point, and a lower rating indicates a weak point or poor management). Similarly, in the EFE matrix, each opportunity and threat was weighted and rated (with higher ratings signifying a better response to opportunities or a lesser vulnerability to threats). From these matrices, we calculated total weighted scores for the internal factors and external factors. Finally, we plotted the IFE and EFE totals on the Internal–External (IE) matrix, a strategic positioning tool. The IE matrix – divided into nine cells – indicates whether the system's overall condition calls for aggressive growth, focused maintenance, or defensive strategies (Capps Iii & Glissmeyer, 2012). In our case, the plotted point revealed which SWOT quadrant best characterizes Omani sports tourism. Based on that quadrant, we formulated appropriate high-level strategies. In addition, we generated specific TOWS strategies (SO, WO, ST, WT) to provide concrete strategic options, matching the identified factors in a way that leverages strengths and opportunities while addressing weaknesses and threats.

Results

Descriptive results show that 66.4% of the 109 survey respondents are affiliated with the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Youth, reflecting that ministry's central role in sport-tourism initiatives. Another 21.8% work under the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism, and the remaining 11.8% are employed in private-sector companies related to sports tourism or event organization. The sample was fairly experienced in terms of age: the largest age group was 30–39 years old (47.9%), followed by 40–49 years old (35.3%), with smaller proportions in their 20s or 50s. A majority of participants (~58%) held at least a bachelor's degree, and about 16% were female. Notably, the respondents represented all governorates of Oman, with the capital region of Muscat contributing the highest share (43% of respondents). This broad coverage suggests that the data capture perspectives from across the country's geographic and administrative spectrum.

Using the procedure described in the methodology, we identified a robust set of internal strengths and weaknesses and external opportunities and threats for sports tourism in Oman. After expert review and the Friedman ranking analysis, a total of 33 key factors were confirmed: 9 strengths, 8 weaknesses, 9 opportunities, and 7 threats. These factors are listed below.

Table 1. General indicators of tourism statistics in the Sultanate of Oman (NCSI).

Indicator	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Contribution to GDP (%)	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.9	2.6	2.4
Direct Added Value (million OMR)	683	825	936	980	732	805
Number of Tourists	3,044,623	3,332,714	3,243,649	3,506,442	868,571	651,633
Hotel Establishments	337	367	412	492	547	612

These figures confirm the tourism sector's strong rebound in Oman. The industry now contributes more to GDP and is supplying a growing number of local jobs through "Omanisation." Steady growth reflects the coordinated efforts of the Ministry of Heritage and Tourism and Oman Tourism Development Company (OMRAN) to advance Vision 2040. Working in tandem, they have mapped out priorities and projects that will boost sector capacity; investment opportunities are projected to reach OMR 15 billion over the next 20 years (Oman, 2022).

Table 2. SWOT Matrix of Oman's sports tourism sector

Code	Strengths of Oman's sports tourism sector (S1–S9)
S1	Strong support and positive orientation from ministry officials toward developing sports tourism.
S2	Inclusion of sports tourism as a critical pillar of Oman's national sports strategy.
S3	Qualified and experienced human cadres capable of organizing international sports events.
S4	Proven success in hosting international sporting events over the past decades.
S5	Utilization of Oman's diverse geography (mountains, deserts, beaches) to host adventure sports and tournaments.
S6	Widespread sports infrastructure across all provinces of Oman (facilities are not limited to the capital).
S7	Presence of foreign professional players in Omani domestic leagues (enhancing the profile of local sports).
S8	Regular organization of international sports seminars and conferences in Oman.
S9	Enthusiastic athletes and youth with a passion for tourism-themed sports and adventure activities.
Code	Weaknesses in Oman's sports tourism sector (W1–W8)
W1	Few tour companies and tourism offices specialize in sports tourism.
W2	Insufficient sports facilities to host major international sporting events (capacity constraints).
W3	Inadequate financial resources allocated to sport-tourism initiatives.
W4	Shortage of qualified and trained personnel in sports tourism management.
W5	Poor promotion and limited international marketing of Omani sporting events (low global visibility).
W6	Limited number of sport-tourism events hosted in Oman (few recurring or marquee events).
W7	Absence of a clear, long-term strategic plan for sports tourism and international sporting events.
W8	Lack of programs and training courses to instill a sports-tourism culture among staff in the sports sector.
Code	Opportunities for developing sports tourism in Oman (O1–O9)
O1	Unique natural and cultural attractions that can be integrated with sports (e.g. scenic landscapes for adventure sports).
O2	Growing global and regional interest in sports tourism and adventure travel experiences.
O3	Government commitment to investing in the sports sector and positioning sports as an industry (aligned with Vision 2040 objectives).
O4	High demand among different segments of Omani society for sports-tourism activities (rising domestic

Code	Strengths of Oman's sports tourism sector (S1–S9)
	interest).
O5	Oman's successful track record in hosting cultural and tourism festivals (Muscat Festival, Salalah Festival) that could be expanded to include sports events.
O6	Potential to host and organize new international sports events and competitions, given Oman's political stability and renowned hospitality.
O7	Strategic partnerships with international sports federations and organizations seeking Middle Eastern venues.
O8	Ongoing infrastructure developments (airports, roads, hotels) that improve accessibility for tourists and event participants.
O9	Government initiatives to turn sports into an economic driver (e.g. professionalizing sports leagues and attracting foreign talent).
Code	Threats facing sports tourism development in Oman (T1–T7)
T1	Economic volatility and global disruptions (e.g. oil price swings, pandemics) that may limit funding for tourism and sports.
T2	Natural disasters and extreme weather (such as tropical cyclones or regional epidemics) that can disrupt events and travel plans.
T3	Intensifying competition from neighboring countries that are also investing heavily in sports tourism (regional rivalry for events and tourists).
T4	Bureaucratic or slow government procedures for approving and hosting international events (potentially discouraging organizers).
T5	Insufficient hotel capacity and specialized accommodations for large sports events in certain locations.
T6	Gaps in public transport infrastructure (e.g. no metro system and limited mass transit options), affecting event logistics and tourist mobility.
T7	Weak private-sector involvement and sponsorship for sporting events, limiting resources and innovation.

These factors provided a comprehensive picture of the current state of sports tourism in Oman. After obtaining and ranking the above items, we constructed the IFE and EFE matrices to calculate overall internal and external scores.

SWOT Evaluation and Strategic Position

Each identified factor was assigned a weight based on its relative importance, and combined weight-rating scores were computed for the IFE and EFE matrices. The total weighted score for internal factors (IFE) was calculated as 2.44, which is slightly below the neutral midpoint of 2.50 on the 1–4 scale. This IFE result indicates that, overall, Oman's weaknesses outweigh its strengths – in other words, the internal condition of the sport-tourism sector is somewhat weak relative to an average benchmark. In contrast, the total weighted score for external factors (EFE) was 2.74, above the 2.50 midpoint, implying that opportunities outstrip threats in the external environment. In strategic terms, this combination of scores (IFE $\approx$ 2.44, EFE $\approx$ 2.74) places Oman's sports tourism sector in the **“Weakness–Opportunity” (WO) quadrant** of the IE matrix. The WO quadrant (also known as Quadrant II) is associated with a conservative or turnaround strategy: it suggests that while the environment is favorable (many opportunities exist), the system's internal weaknesses need to be addressed so the opportunities can be fully exploited (Hadadian, Mashhadi, & Hosseini, 2013). In practice, a WO positioning calls for strategies that overcome internal deficiencies by harnessing external opportunities – for example, investing in capacity-building and planning (to fix weaknesses) while leveraging positive market trends, partnerships, and unique assets (to seize opportunities).

Table 3. Internal Factor Evaluation (IFE) matrix results for Oman's sports tourism sector.

Code	Strengths and Weaknesses	Mean (M)	Weight	Rating	W×R (Weighted Score)
S1	Strong support and positive orientation from ministry officials toward developing sports tourism.	3.24	0.050	4	0.200
S2	Inclusion of sports tourism as a critical pillar of Oman's national sports strategy.	3.71	0.058	4	0.232
S3	Qualified and experienced human cadres capable of organizing international sports events.	3.86	0.060	3	0.180
S4	Proven success in hosting international sporting events over the past decades.	3.81	0.059	4	0.236
S5	Utilization of Oman's diverse geography to host adventure sports and tournaments.	3.70	0.057	4	0.228
S6	Widespread sports infrastructure across all provinces of Oman	3.14	0.049	3	0.147
S7	Presence of foreign professional players in Omani domestic leagues	3.17	0.049	3	0.147
S8	Regular organization of international sports seminars and conferences in Oman.	3.49	0.054	3	0.162
S9	Enthusiastic athletes and youth with a passion for tourism-themed sports and adventure activities.	3.50	0.054	4	0.216
W1	Few tour companies and tourism offices specialize in sports tourism.	4.21	0.065	1	0.065
W2	Insufficient sports facilities to host major international sporting events (capacity constraints).	3.97	0.062	2	0.124
W3	Inadequate financial resources allocated to sport-tourism initiatives.	4.14	0.064	1	0.064
W4	Shortage of qualified and trained personnel in sports tourism management.	3.90	0.060	2	0.120
W5	Poor promotion and limited international marketing of Omani sporting events (low global visibility).	4.34	0.067	1	0.067
W6	Limited number of sport-tourism events hosted in Oman.	4.33	0.067	2	0.134
W7	Absence of a clear, long-term strategic plan for sports tourism and international sporting events.	3.45	0.053	1	0.053
W8	Lack of programs and training courses to instill a sports-tourism culture among staff in the sports sector.	4.43	0.069	1	0.069
Total –		3.79	Σ=1.00	–	2.44

Note: **Mean (M)** is the average importance rating (on a 5-point scale) from the survey for each factor. **Weight** is the normalized relative importance (summing to 1.0 for all factors). **Rating** is the assessment of the factor in Oman (1 = poor, 4 = excellent for strengths; 1 = very high weakness, 4 = low weakness for weaknesses). **W×R** is the weighted score. The total IFE score of 2.44 suggests that internal weaknesses slightly outweigh strengths.

Table 4. External Factor Evaluation (EFE) matrix results for Oman's sports tourism sector.

Code	Opportunities and Threats	Mean (M)	Weight	Rating	W×R (Weighted Score)
O1	Unique natural and cultural attractions that can be integrated with sports	4.65	0.075	4	0.300
O2	Growing global and regional interest in sports tourism and adventure travel experiences.	3.97	0.064	4	0.256

Code	Opportunities and Threats	Mean (M)	Weight	Rating	W×R (Weighted Score)
O3	Government commitment to investing in the sports sector and positioning sports as an industry	3.72	0.060	4	0.240
O4	High demand among different segments of Omani society for sports-tourism activities	3.71	0.060	3	0.180
O5	Oman's successful track record in hosting cultural and tourism festivals that could be expanded to include sports events.	3.77	0.061	3	0.183
O6	Potential to host and organize new international sports events and competitions, given Oman's political stability and renowned hospitality.	3.67	0.059	4	0.236
O7	Strategic partnerships with international sports federations and organizations seeking Middle Eastern venues.	3.87	0.062	4	0.248
O8	Ongoing infrastructure developments that improve accessibility for tourists and event participants.	3.92	0.063	3	0.189
O9	Government initiatives to turn sports into an economic driver	3.64	0.059	4	0.236
T1	Economic volatility and global disruptions that may limit funding for tourism and sports.	3.76	0.061	1	0.061
T2	Natural disasters and extreme weather that can disrupt events and travel plans.	3.30	0.053	1	0.053
T3	Intensifying competition from neighboring countries that are also investing heavily in sports tourism	3.73	0.060	2	0.120
T4	Bureaucratic or slow government procedures for approving and hosting international events	4.08	0.066	1	0.066
T5	Insufficient hotel capacity and specialized accommodations for large sports events in certain locations.	3.59	0.058	2	0.116
T6	Gaps in public transport infrastructure affecting event logistics and tourist mobility.	4.16	0.067	1	0.067
T7	Weak private-sector involvement and sponsorship for sporting events, limiting resources and innovation.	4.39	0.071	2	0.142
Total –		3.87	Σ=1.00	–	2.74

Note: The total EFE score of 2.74 indicates that Oman's external opportunities outweigh its threats. Combined with the IFE result, this places Oman's sport-tourism strategic position firmly in the **WO quadrant** of the IE matrix (favorable environment, but internal weaknesses to address). A conservative "turnaround" strategy is therefore warranted: shoring up internal shortcomings while actively capitalizing on external opportunities.

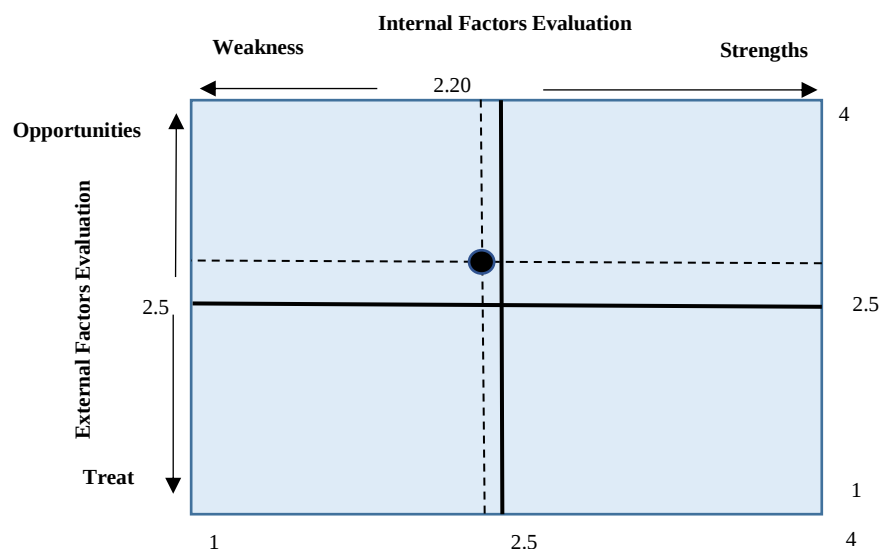


Figure 2. Strategic position based on the final score of the internal and external assessment matrix

Strategy Formulation (TOWS Matrix)

Based on the above SWOT analysis, we formulated a set of strategic initiatives to guide the development of sports tourism in Oman. These strategies were developed using the TOWS matrix approach, which pairs internal factors with external factors to generate actionable recommendations in four categories: **SO strategies** (use Strengths to capitalize on Opportunities), **WO strategies** (address Weaknesses by taking advantage of Opportunities), **ST strategies** (use Strengths to mitigate Threats), and **WT strategies** (minimize Weaknesses to avoid Threats). The key strategies identified for each category are summarized below:

Table 5. TOWS Matrix of Oman's sports tourism sector

EFE	Strengths (S1-S9)	Weakness (W1-W8)
Opportunities (O1-O9)	SO Strategies Aggressively bid for and host major international sporting events. Oman's proven capability (S4) and supportive officials (S1) can be harnessed to attract high-profile competitions, taking advantage of global event opportunities and Oman's growing reputation (O2, O7, O9). Develop sport-tourism infrastructure nationwide. Using the country's diverse geography (S5, S6) and strategic prioritization of sports tourism (S2), invest in upgrading and building facilities across all governorates. This aligns with strong government investment interest (O3) and rising domestic demand for sports activities (O4, O7). Facilitate foreign and domestic investment in sport tourism. Draw on Oman's experienced event organizers and human capital (S2, S3) and supportive policies (S1) to create an attractive climate for investors. This could involve new regulations or incentives (building on O5, O9) to fund sports complexes, clubs, and event ventures, capitalizing on the government's industry focus.	WO Strategies Formulate a national sports tourism master plan. Develop a comprehensive long-term strategy (tackling W7) for sports tourism development, aligned with Vision 2040, to systematically exploit available opportunities (O3, O7, O9). This plan would set clear goals, roles, and timelines for the sector's growth. Establish a National Centre for Sports Events. Create a dedicated body or facility to coordinate and promote events (mitigating W5 and W1), which can improve marketing and unify efforts. This leverages government support (O3) and the opportunity to host more events (O6, O9) by providing centralized expertise and resources. Develop world-class "sports city" complexes. Invest in building integrated sports city hubs with international-standard venues and amenities in select locations. This directly addresses the lack of facilities (W2, W7) and limited event hosting capacity, while taking advantage of Oman's land availability and tourism appeal (O1, O8, O9). Such complexes could attract regional and global tournaments. Strengthen public-private partnerships in sport tourism. Forge closer collaboration with the Omani Investment Authority, private investors, and sponsors to support events and infrastructure (addressing W7, W3, W8). Tapping into private-sector resources will help utilize opportunities like new markets and government openness (O3, O4, O9). Implement specialized training and education programs. Launch targeted programs to build skills in event management, sports marketing, tourism services, and media promotion (addressing W4, W5, W8). By partnering with educational institutions and international experts, Oman can leverage available opportunities (O3, O9) to develop a qualified workforce that underpins sustainable sports-tourism growth.

Threats (T1-T7)	ST Strategies 1. Promote a culture of strategic planning and risk management in sports organizations. Leverage support from officials and inclusion of sports tourism in strategy (S1, S2) to institute long-term planning practices, including contingency plans for crises (addressing threats like economic or natural disruptions T1, T2). By using existing governance strengths, Oman's sports bodies can better withstand external shocks. 2. Invest in supportive tourism infrastructure for events. Build on Oman's existing tourism infrastructure spread (S6) and multi-agency backing (S1) to expand accommodation options (hotels, guesthouses) and transport services (e.g. dedicated shuttles for events). Increasing such capacity will directly counter threats such as inadequate hotels and transport (T5, T6), ensuring that hosting major events is logistically feasible and comfortable for visitors.	WT Strategies 1. Enhance emergency preparedness and risk management training. Given the potential for natural disasters or public health emergencies (T2) and weaknesses in current training (W4, W8), introduce programs to train sport-tourism stakeholders in emergency response, crowd safety, and risk mitigation. This will help venues and organizers handle threats like extreme weather or pandemics more effectively despite limited internal capacity. 2. Leverage mass media to improve public awareness and support. Collaborate with national media outlets to run campaigns on the value of sports tourism, upcoming events, and responsible fan behavior. By doing so, Oman can mitigate weak marketing and public engagement (W5, W3) and reduce the threat of low local support or negative perceptions (which could exacerbate T3 and T7). Proactive media outreach and transparency can build community backing for events, creating a positive feedback loop that diminishes both internal and external resistance to the growth of sports tourism.
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Each of these recommended strategies corresponds to the findings of the SWOT analysis, ensuring that strategic planning efforts are directly informed by the realities of Omani sports tourism. In particular, **WO strategies** – which focus on fixing internal weaknesses by seizing external opportunities – are crucial given the sector's placement in the WO quadrant. Implementing the above actions can move the sector toward its full potential, turning Oman's strengths (enthusiastic athletes, supportive policy, skilled organizers, and unique venues) into drivers of growth while systematically resolving the weaknesses that have so far limited tourism's contribution to the economy.

Discussion and Conclusion

Although tourism in Oman has been studied extensively, research on sports tourism remains scarce, and real momentum in this area has emerged only in the context of the country's recent Vision 2040 push. The present study contributes to filling this gap by identifying the most pertinent internal and external factors and crafting strategic recommendations for sport-tourism development. In doing so, our findings both reinforce and extend insights from the broader literature on sport tourism and strategic planning.

Strengths: The SWOT analysis highlighted several strengths that Oman can build upon. Four principal strengths stand out: (1) enthusiastic athletes – there is strong passion among Omani athletes and youth for sports and adventure activities, (2) strategic prioritization – sport tourism has been explicitly recognized as a pillar of Oman's national sports strategy, (3) skilled human capital – the country already has experienced professionals and officials capable of organizing large events, and (4) diverse geography – Oman's varied terrain (mountains, deserts, coastline) provides natural venues for a wide range of sports and outdoor pursuits. These strengths position Oman favorably to host and create unique sport-tourism experiences. For example, Nazari (2021) observed in neighboring Iran that rising public enthusiasm for sport tourism increased its share in leisure activities and family recreation – a trend that appears to be mirrored in Oman's case (interest among athletes and youth is high).

Furthermore, Omani authorities' commitment to sport tourism as a development tool aligns with global best practices: many countries have made sport tourism a core part of their diversification and sustainability agendas (Higham & Hinch, 2006; Swart & Bob, 2007). By making sport tourism a national priority, Oman acknowledges its potential as both an economic driver and a community enrichment mechanism. The spending associated with sporting events – by participants, teams, and spectators – can inject significant funds into local economies, a portion of which directly benefits host communities (Boroujerdi, Mansouri, & Asadi, 2023). Realizing these gains, however, requires sustained collaboration among government agencies, private investors, and civil society (Getz & Page, 2016). A long-term, inclusive strategy will be needed to ensure that Oman's strengths (e.g. its enthusiastic people and unique venues) are effectively mobilized in the service of sport-tourism growth.

Another important strength is Oman's physical setting and infrastructure, which can be a decisive factor in tourism appeal. Landscape and climate shape tourists' perceptions of a destination (Higham & Hinch, 2006), and many sports are inherently tied to geography – for instance, mountains enable hiking and trail-running events, deserts allow rally racing or sand sports, and coastal waters are ideal for sailing and diving events. Oman's varied geography thus gives it a comparative advantage in attracting different types of sport events. Strategic planning efforts should align event portfolios with these natural assets (Zhang & Park, 2015), ensuring, for example, that mountain sports are promoted in the Hajar range, desert endurance events in the Sharqiya Sands, and water sports along the coastline. By playing to its geographic strengths, Oman can maximize visitor appeal while also distributing tourism benefits across regions (not just concentrating them in Muscat). The existing network of hotels, resorts, roads, and airports – steadily expanded in recent years – further enhances Oman's capacity to host international visitors and events (Ahmad, Ibrahim, Ahmad, & Masri, 2019). These infrastructural strengths will be crucial to support the anticipated growth in sports tourism.

Weaknesses: The analysis also brought into focus several weaknesses that currently undermine Oman's sport-tourism progress. Three primary weaknesses were identified: (1) limited training and capacity-building – there are few specialized programs to develop sport-tourism expertise among staff in the sports or tourism sectors, (2) inadequate promotion and marketing – Oman's sporting events and sport-tourism offerings are not effectively advertised or visible in international markets, and (3) scarcity of specialist firms – only a handful of tour operators and agencies in Oman offer dedicated sport-tourism services, reflecting an immature industry ecosystem. These findings are consistent with observations from prior studies and reports. For instance, Abdul-Ghani (2006) noted weaknesses in hospitality and tourism education in Oman, which remain relevant in the context of sports tourism where specific training is lacking. Al-Rahbi (2019) similarly pointed out a shortage of investment in training programs for sports marketing and management in Oman – a gap that directly relates to our identified weakness in human capacity. Education and professional development are pivotal for both the sports and tourism sectors to thrive. Without knowledgeable event managers, marketers, coaches, and tour guides, it is difficult to stage profitable events or deliver quality experiences that attract tourists. Our results underscore that, although some training initiatives exist, their relevance, depth, and accessibility are limited. Many practitioners may not have opportunities to learn best practices in sport event planning, sustainable tourism, or international marketing. This situation calls for embedding culture-building and capacity-building measures into the sport-tourism strategy. Practical steps could include partnering with universities to introduce sport tourism modules, offering scholarships or incentives for professionals to gain certifications, and hosting workshops led by

international experts. By equipping local talent with business and marketing skills, Oman can better capitalize on the tourism opportunities that sporting events present.

Another weak point is the marketing and promotional aspect. Effective promotion is essential to draw international participants and spectators to events. Our SWOT found that promotion of Omani events abroad is currently inadequate – a view corroborated by Al-Sayyari et al. (2021), who highlighted limited tourism marketing capacity within authorities, and by Al-Rahbi (2019), who noted insufficient budgets for sport marketing. In a comparative context, Farag, Al-Hadabi, and Farouq (2018) observed that Oman (relative to Egypt) lacks explicit legislation and frameworks to support sport marketing, partly due to low public and institutional awareness of its importance. This weak marketing effort results in lower international visibility: even if Oman hosts a quality event, it may not attract large numbers of sport tourists unless it is well-publicized through channels like international sports federations, travel media, and online platforms. Improving this requires dedicated marketing campaigns and possibly engaging professional sport-tourism promoters. The identified scarcity of specialized firms (travel agencies or event companies focusing on sports) is both a cause and effect of the weak marketing environment – without a vibrant private sector offering sport-tourism packages, promotion remains ad hoc; and without strong demand spurred by marketing, few firms enter the field. To break this cycle, government support could be provided for startups or joint ventures in sport-tourism services, and public agencies might incorporate sport-tourism promotion into mainstream tourism advertising. The recommendations by Al-Sayyari et al. (2021) to integrate tourism awareness into education and to streamline the legislative framework for investment directly address these issues: educated citizens and a business-friendly environment would encourage more entrepreneurs to develop sport-tourism ventures, which in turn improves marketing reach organically.

Opportunities: Oman's external opportunities for sports tourism are abundant, and many are rooted in its rich endowments and regional context. Foremost among these opportunities is the country's diverse natural and cultural heritage, which provides a compelling backdrop for sport events. As noted in a recent doctoral study, Oman's strategic location at the crossroads of Asia and the Middle East, combined with its deep history and renowned hospitality, give it exceptional potential to leverage tourism for economic diversification (Al-Naamani, 2021). Our SWOT findings echo a broad consensus in the literature: analysts such as Alsawafi (2016), Al-Rahbi (2019), and Al-Sayyari et al. (2021) all conclude that Oman's natural landscapes and heritage assets are key advantages for tourism development. In fact, most major tourism initiatives in Oman to date have revolved around its environmental and cultural endowments (Al-Sayyari et al., 2021). This suggests that aligning sports events with these unique assets – for example, mountain biking races in the Al Hajar Mountains, desert rallies in the Empty Quarter, or open-water swimming off Musandam – could create signature experiences that few other destinations can offer. To capitalize on this opportunity, Oman must develop an integrated sport-tourism plan that not only upgrades event venues but also the supporting services at these sites (lodging, transportation, visitor facilities). As our strategic recommendations indicated, preparing key locations across the country for hosting events will allow Oman to spread the benefits of tourism while highlighting attractions that set it apart from regional competitors.

Another significant opportunity is the ongoing expansion of tourism infrastructure and general investment in the tourism sector under Vision 2040. Oman is steadily enhancing its hotel capacity, transportation networks, and visitor amenities (Oman, 2022). Research on sport destinations shows that such infrastructure is critical: in successful cases, improvements tend to concentrate on accommodations, entertainment, shopping, and F&B (food and beverage) outlets to enrich the visitor experience (Ahmad et al., 2019). Oman's growing

network of hotels and resorts (as evidenced by the rise from 337 hotel establishments in 2016 to 674 in 2022, per NCSI data) is an opportunity to host larger events and more tourists. However, the opportunity must be harnessed sustainably. It is not enough to build facilities; they must be integrated into a sustainable tourism model. Clear policies and planning should ensure that development balances economic, social, and environmental objectives (Achu, 2019). For example, new sports venues or tourist facilities should adhere to environmental standards and involve local communities, so that growth in sport tourism delivers long-lasting benefits (Malchrowicz-Moško & Chlebosz, 2019). If managed well, Oman's infrastructure investments can significantly boost the appeal and capacity of sport tourism while avoiding pitfalls such as overdevelopment or cultural commodification.

Opportunities also exist in targeted promotion and niche marketing. With the rise of social media and digital marketing, even a smaller destination like Oman can reach global sport enthusiast markets if it crafts the right message. Tourism agencies have the chance to boost visitor numbers by highlighting Oman's safety, authenticity, and variety of sport experiences (Heebkhoksung, Rattanawong, & Vongmanee, 2023). Additionally, Oman could tap into the growing segment of tourists seeking "alternative" or extreme sports training destinations. For example, Heuwinkel and Venter (2018) found that destinations like Stellenbosch (South Africa) attracted foreign athletes for training due to favorable climate and facilities. Oman similarly could market itself as a winter training base for athletes from colder climates, or as a venue for eco-conscious outdoor sports. Ferreira and Carneiro (2021) note that developing cycling and river sports in a sustainable manner can attract environmentally conscious tourists. Oman's varied terrain provides an opportunity to develop such niche offerings (e.g. winter cycling camps in a warm climate, rock climbing festivals, ultramarathon trails), which, with proper marketing, could draw visitors outside of the traditional peak season and spread tourism benefits year-round.

Public interest and community attitudes present another opportunity. Our findings suggest a growing appetite among Oman's populace for sports and outdoor recreation (as reflected in strong athlete passion and domestic demand). Farag et al. (2018) observed that participation in sport tourism is often driven by recreation motives like enjoying nature, seeking adventure, relaxation, and family companionship. Oman's youth and families are increasingly looking for such experiences, indicating a ready domestic market that can support sport tourism ventures. Moreover, sports events can generate significant social benefits for local communities: improved facilities, new leisure opportunities, and sources of pride and entertainment (González-García, Añó-Sanz, Parra-Camacho, & Calabuig-Moreno, 2018). If managed inclusively, sport-tourism development can thus foster goodwill and community buy-in, which in turn enhances the visitor experience (tourists tend to enjoy events more when locals are welcoming and engaged). To fully realize this opportunity, authorities must nurture positive local attitudes through awareness and consultation. They have an ethical responsibility to ensure that sport-tourism activities are sustainable and do not harm local communities or environments. Clear evidence of this commitment will maintain public support. Community support is not just a "feel-good" factor; it is critical to commercial success. As noted by Kim et al. (2015), if residents perceive that the negative impacts of tourism or events (e.g. noise, traffic, cultural disruption) outweigh the benefits, their opposition can quickly undermine the viability of those events. In Oman, proactively addressing community concerns, sharing economic benefits, and celebrating local culture within sport events can turn residents into champions of sport tourism rather than bystanders or opponents.

Threats: Finally, our analysis identified various threats in the external environment. Many of these are not unique to Oman but are nonetheless pressing. Economic volatility and global

disruptions (T1) – such as fluctuating oil revenues or the COVID-19 pandemic – pose a constant risk to funding and executing sport-tourism projects. Oman experienced this firsthand with the pandemic causing a 72% drop in international tourism in 2020 (Clark et al., 2022). While our results place Oman in an opportunity-rich scenario now, the possibility of future downturns means contingency plans are necessary. Strategies like diversifying funding sources, building reserve budgets for events, and designing flexible event plans that can scale down if needed will help cushion against economic shocks.

Environmental threats (T2) are also salient. Oman's climate includes periodic cyclones (as seen with Cyclone Gonu in 2007 and Cyclone Shaheen in 2021) and extreme heat in summers. Outdoor sporting events must be scheduled and prepared with such risks in mind (e.g. avoiding cyclone season for coastal events, having heat mitigation measures for summer competitions). Additionally, as a desert-margin country, Oman is vulnerable to climate change impacts which could increase weather unpredictability. Ensuring robust safety protocols and insurance for events is advisable. Training stakeholders in emergency management – one of our recommended WT strategies – directly tackles this threat by improving readiness and responsiveness.

Another external threat is regional competition (T3). The Gulf region is witnessing intense competition in tourism and sports. Neighboring countries like the UAE, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia are investing billions in sports events and infrastructure (from hosting World Cups and Formula 1 races to developing entire sports cities). This competitive pressure means Oman cannot be complacent; it must find a differentiated niche or complementary role. On one hand, competition can spur improvement – Oman will need to innovate and perhaps specialize in certain sports or types of events that align with its scale and strengths (for example, high-end endurance sports or eco-adventure events, rather than trying to compete for mega-events that require enormous expenditures). On the other hand, Oman should also pursue collaboration within the region, positioning itself as part of a Middle East sport-tourism circuit rather than a direct rival. By coordinating calendars or jointly promoting events (e.g. a regional sailing series or a desert rally spanning multiple countries), Oman could mitigate the zero-sum aspect of competition and benefit from the overall growth of Gulf sports tourism.

Administrative and structural threats (T4, T7), such as bureaucratic hurdles and low private-sector engagement, have been discussed as internal weaknesses and remain a threat if not resolved. If government processes for event approval remain slow or non-transparent, international organizers may simply opt for other countries. Similarly, if local businesses do not see sport tourism as a viable market, investment and sponsorship will flow elsewhere, limiting Oman's ability to host events competitively. These threats reaffirm the urgency of the reforms and partnerships outlined in our strategies (e.g. simplifying procedures, creating incentives for sponsors, and public-private partnership models).

In conclusion, this study finds that Oman's sports tourism sector is in a classic **“WO” scenario**: abundant opportunities exist, but internal weaknesses must be overcome to seize them. The strategic recommendations we propose – from developing a national sport-tourism strategy and improving training programs to investing in infrastructure and marketing – provide a roadmap to address those weaknesses. If implemented, these measures will help Oman leverage its considerable strengths and environmental opportunities to establish sports tourism as a pillar of sustainable development and economic diversification. By focusing on long-term strategic planning and inclusive stakeholder engagement, Oman can transform the challenges identified in the SWOT analysis into catalysts for progress. In doing so, it can emulate and even surpass regional benchmarks, offering unique sport-tourism experiences that draw visitors from around the world and enrich the lives of its own citizens.

Practical Implications and Limitations: The findings carry practical implications for policymakers and industry stakeholders in Oman. The government, in particular, should consider incorporating the recommended strategies into its national tourism and sports policies – for example, formally tasking a committee or “Sports Tourism Council” with drafting the sport-tourism master plan, and allocating funding for capacity-building initiatives. Enhancing inter-ministerial coordination (between the sports, tourism, finance, and education sectors) will be critical to implement changes such as curriculum updates and infrastructure investments. Private entrepreneurs and investors can also glean insight into areas of opportunity (e.g. establishing sport-tourism agencies or facilities to fill current market gaps). For the broader academic and planning community, this study provides a case example of applying SWOT and TOWS analysis in a developing-country context to bridge policy and practice in sport tourism.

It must be noted that our research has certain limitations. First, the study is context-specific – it focuses solely on the Sultanate of Oman. While this provides depth, the generalizability of results to other countries is limited. Different cultural or economic contexts might yield different SWOT factors and thus different strategies. Second, our approach was predominantly quantitative and based on stakeholder perceptions collected via a structured survey. This method offers a systematic ranking of factors, but it may not capture nuanced insights that a qualitative approach (such as interviews or focus groups with industry experts, tourists, or community members) could provide. In other words, some underlying reasons for the identified weaknesses or the feasibility of certain opportunities were beyond the scope of the survey. Future research should therefore consider a mixed-methods approach – for example, complementing SWOT survey data with qualitative case studies of specific events or benchmarking analyses with other destinations. Finally, while the study identified a wide range of factors, the prioritization of strategies was not exhaustively explored; subsequent work could use techniques like AHP (Analytic Hierarchy Process) or consultative workshops to rank the proposed strategies by impact and ease of implementation. Despite these limitations, this research offers a valuable foundational framework. It provides Omani decision-makers with an evidence-based starting point for strategic planning in sports tourism. By addressing internal gaps (training, planning, marketing) and leveraging external positives (demand, investment, unique assets), Oman can move toward its vision of becoming a vibrant sport-tourism destination in the region.

Ethical Considerations: This research was conducted in accordance with all relevant ethical guidelines for studies involving human participants. Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymous, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the corresponding institutional ethics committee prior to data collection.

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