

## Sustainable tourism as a solution to mitigate the negative impacts of tourism: A case study of Dubai

السياحة المستدامة لمواجهة الآثار السلبية للسياحة -إمارة دبي نموذجاً-

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### Abstract:

*This research paper aims to highlight the role of sustainable tourism in avoiding and mitigating the negative impacts of tourism. This sector, which is growing faster than all other economic sectors, has established significant importance for most countries around the world due to its positive effects, including improving the balance of payments, alleviating poverty, and reducing unemployment rates, especially in economies focusing on development.*

*However, on the other hand, many negative aspects have emerged that negatively affect the economies of tourist countries. This paper sheds light on the case of Dubai, where tourism is a major economic resource but has suffered from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the country's lockdown. Sustainable tourism, with its elements, is considered one of the most important solutions to alleviate these effects.*

**Key words:** *Tourism , Sustainable Tourism , Dubai.*

### الملخص:

تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية الى ابراز دور السياحة المستدامة في تفادي وتجنب الآثار السلبية للسياحة، فهذا القطاع الذي ينمو بشكل أسرع مقارنة بجميع القطاعات الاقتصادية الأخرى كون لنفسه أهمية كبيرة لدى أغلب بلدان العالم نتيجة للآثار الإيجابية التي يحققها أهمها تحسين وضعية موازين المدفوعات والتخفيف من حدة الفقر والتقليل من معدلات البطالة، التي تهتم بتنمية اقتصادياتها، لكن ومن جهة أخرى ظهرت العديد من الجوانب السلبية التي تعود بالسلب على اقتصاديات الدول السياحية، وتم تسليط الضوء على حالة إمارة دبي، التي تعتبر السياحة فيها أهم موارد الاقتصاد، لكنها عانت وتأثرت من تداعيات جائحة كورونا والاعلاق العام للبلاد، والتي تعتبر السياحة المستدامة بمقوماتها احدي أهم الحلول الممكن اتباعها للتخفيف من آثار هذه الأخيرة.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** السياحة، السياحة المستدامة، إمارة دبي.

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Tourism is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors globally and a significant player in international trade. This sector contributes substantially to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs a considerable number of people, both directly and indirectly. Inbound tourism plays a significant role in energizing the balance of payments, being one of the primary sources of foreign exchange. These multiple benefits have prompted most countries worldwide to focus attention on this sector to attract as many tourists as possible.

However, these positives mask several negatives, including child labor, crimes committed by tourists, such as artifact smuggling, and unintentional or intentional destruction of archaeological sites. These negative aspects have led to the emergence of the concept of sustainable tourism, which aims to highlight areas where tourism can contribute to sustainable development and strengthen and activate these areas.

The concept gained global traction after the United Nations declared 2017 the International Year of Sustainable Tourism for Development. Considering Dubai as one of the world's most important tourist destinations, this study attempts to examine its case and the extent of tourism's contribution to the overall economy, in addition to the impact sustainable tourism can have on the state.

Therefore, based on the foregoing, we pose the following main question:

- How can sustainable tourism contribute to mitigating the negative impacts of various types of tourism? And what is the reality of this in Dubai?"

To answer this question, we pose the following sub-questions:

- What are the positives and negatives of tourism?
- How can sustainable tourism mitigate the negative impacts of tourism?
- What is the reality of tourism in Dubai, and what are its most important initiatives to mitigate the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic?

### **1.1 Study Hypothesis:**

The problem of this study is based on the following hypothesis:

- Sustainable tourism, through environmental tourism, contributes to reducing the negative impacts of tourism.

### **1.2 Importance of the Study:**

The significance of this study lies in addressing a vital topic - sustainable tourism, which is considered one of the key mechanisms for enjoying natural resources through rational exploitation both now and in the future. The study attempts to analyze the relationship between sustainable tourism and tourism in reducing negative impacts, adopting the concept of sustainable development and working to ensure the ecological environment, biodiversity, and environmental health.

### **1.3 Objectives of the Study:**

This study aims to achieve a series of goals, most importantly:

- Understanding the importance of tourism and its global reality;
- Analyzing the relationship between tourism and sustainable tourism;
- Diagnosing the situation in Dubai and its significant achievements in the field of tourism;
- Presenting Dubai's initiative within the framework of sustainable tourism and the United Nations' objectives.

## **1.4 Study Boundaries:**

### **1.4.1 Temporal Boundaries:**

The temporal scope for addressing this issue is the period from 2018 to 2022. This involves presenting the reality of tourism in Dubai during this period and analyzing the competitive indicators of tourism.

### **1.4.2 Spatial Boundaries:**

The study focuses on sustainable tourism to counteract the negative impacts of tourism, after presenting its reality on a global level, specifically on Dubai, which has become a leader at the Arab and regional levels according to international tourism reports.

## **1.5 Study Methodology:**

In our study of the subject, we relied on the deductive method with its descriptive and analytical tools. The purpose is to clarify the importance of tourism and sustainable tourism in meeting the growing needs of individuals and enhancing and activating them. Also, to analyze the key indicators of tourism competitiveness in Dubai and to examine the significant measures Dubai has taken to revive its activity in this vital sector.

## **2. Literature Review:**

Numerous studies have addressed the topic of sustainable tourism and its importance. A review of some of these studies includes:

The study by Saed Hemash and others (2016), titled "*Sustainable Tourism as a Strategy for Developing Desert Tourism in Algeria.*" This study aimed to connect sustainable developmental thought with various developmental projects, including tourism development. It sought to implement strategies aligned with the concept of sustainability, which has become increasingly prominent globally and locally. The study adopted a descriptive approach to detail the subject matter and analyze its elements. It concluded that adopting a tourism development strategy that achieves socio-economic development of the region without harming the ecological, social, and cultural environment, and maintaining the integrity of biodiversity and the environment, is crucial.

The study by Zerkin Aboud and El Ayeb Ahsen (2014), titled "*Prospects for Developing Environmental Tourism in Algeria.*" This study aimed to introduce the tourism industry's global shift towards alternative tourism, which pays greater attention to environmental aspects. It focused on preserving natural resources and protecting them from pollution and degradation. Environmental tourism has become especially important in most countries' tourism development programs. The study highlighted the necessity for Algeria's tourism stakeholders to adapt to this shift, given the

country's natural, beach, desert, and mineral assets. It also reviewed the key projects in environmental tourism as outlined in the tourism development plan until 2025. The study found that despite Algeria's efforts in this field, the environmental dimension within the tourism development strategy remains limited.

The doctoral thesis by Abdullah Ayashi (2015-2016) in Economic Sciences, titled "***Strategies for Developing Environmental Tourism in Algeria from a Sustainability Perspective - The Case of Tassili National Park in El Oued Province.***" This thesis aimed to define the theoretical framework of environmental tourism and sustainable tourism development, clarifying the tourism sector's image in Algeria by highlighting its tourism assets. It focused on the environmental tourism model in Tassili National Park in Southern Algeria and analyzed the content of Algeria's tourism strategy as represented in the tourism development plan. The thesis concluded that environmental tourism represents a modern model of global tourism and an alternative to traditional tourism that contributes to sustainable development. It also emphasized that environmental tourism planning is a crucial step towards achieving sustainable development and pointed out the fragility of the tourism system in Algeria and its failure to reach the desired level.

Based on the studies presented, our study distinguishes itself by addressing sustainable tourism as a mechanism to counteract the negative effects of tourism. This is done by presenting Dubai's experience and its significant achievements in the tourism industry, as well as examining the measures it has implemented to address the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic and revitalize the sector. This includes presenting Dubai's initiative for sustainable tourism in line with the United Nations' goals.

### **3. Study Sections:**

To cover various aspects of the topic, this study is divided into the following sections:

**Section One:** The global reality of tourism - positives and negatives;

**Section Two:** The development of tourism in Dubai;

**Section Three:** The reality and prospects of sustainable tourism in Dubai.

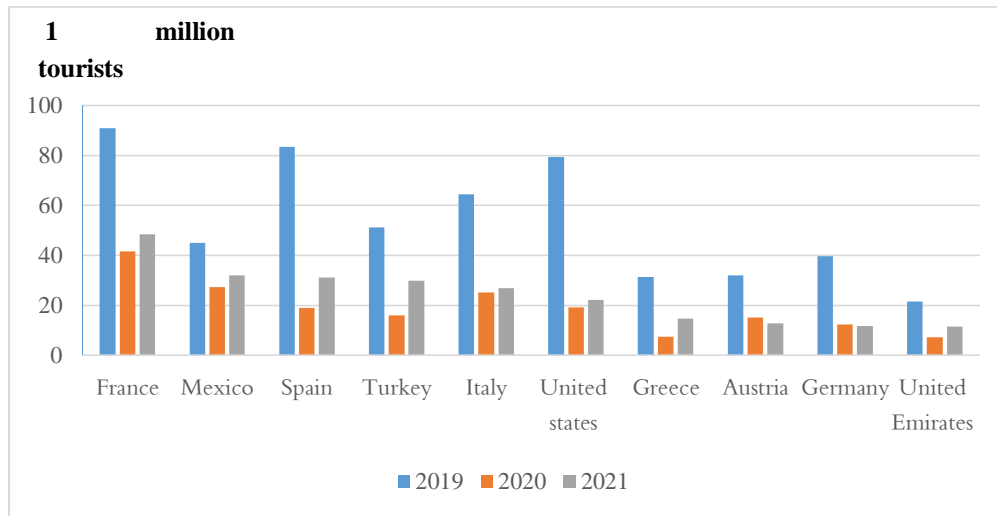
#### **Section One: The Global Reality of Tourism - Positives and Negatives:**

Tourism is one of the significant sectors across the world, providing opportunities and revenues for countries. On this basis, we present the following:

#### **Firstly, An Introduction to Tourism and Its Global Reality:**

Tourism can be defined as the movement of people between different places and is also considered an economic sector. It represents an interactive system involving people, places, and mechanisms, emphasizing that it is a comprehensive entity, not just a single part (**Suleiman & Amer, 2012, p. 277**). Tourism is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors. The number of incoming tourists can be illustrated as follows:

**Figure 01: Number of Tourists Arriving at the Top Ten Tourist Destinations in the World**

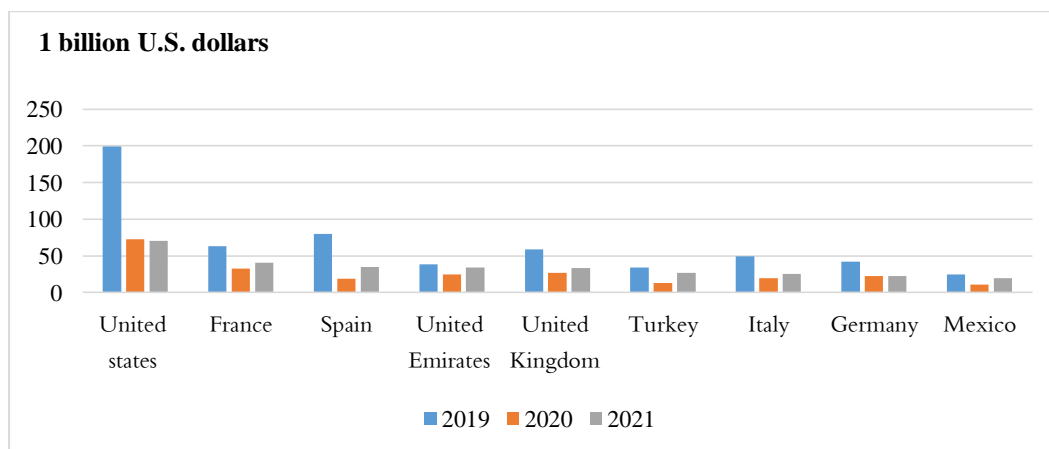


*Source: Prepared by researchers based on UNWTO, Tourism Highlights, 2022 Edition, p7.*

The World Tourism Organization, in its latest report, revealed that tourism saw a 4% recovery in 2021 compared to 2020, with the number of tourists worldwide reaching 415 million, up from 400 million the previous year. Despite the decrease in tourist numbers between 2020 and 2021, France remains the world's top tourist destination. However, the number of international tourists in 2021 was still 72% lower than in 2019, the pre-pandemic year, with 2020 being the worst year ever for tourism, witnessing a 73% decline in international tourist numbers. Notably, as shown in the figure, the United Arab Emirates is the only Arab country that has established itself among the top ten tourist destinations globally, highlighting the significant efforts of the UAE government in promoting and encouraging this vital sector, which have led to these positive and leading results at the Arab and regional levels.

Regarding the revenues generated from the tourism sector, the top destinations in terms of earnings are illustrated in the following figure:

**Figure 02: Top Ten Tourism Revenue Earnings in the World**



*Source: Prepared by researchers based on UNWTO, Tourism Highlights, 2022 Edition, p8.*

The United States is the country with the highest income from tourism, with a difference of more than \$140 billion compared to Spain, which is second in global tourism revenue rankings. This indicates that the U.S. has tourism infrastructures that encourage tourist spending. Despite being sixth in terms of the number of incoming tourists, the size of the sector's revenues is extremely large compared to other countries. On the other hand, although Australia and Mexico are among the most attractive countries for tourists, they do not appear among the countries with the highest tourism revenue. In contrast, France and the United Arab Emirates occupy advanced positions, as shown in the figure.

### 1. Positive Impacts of Tourism:

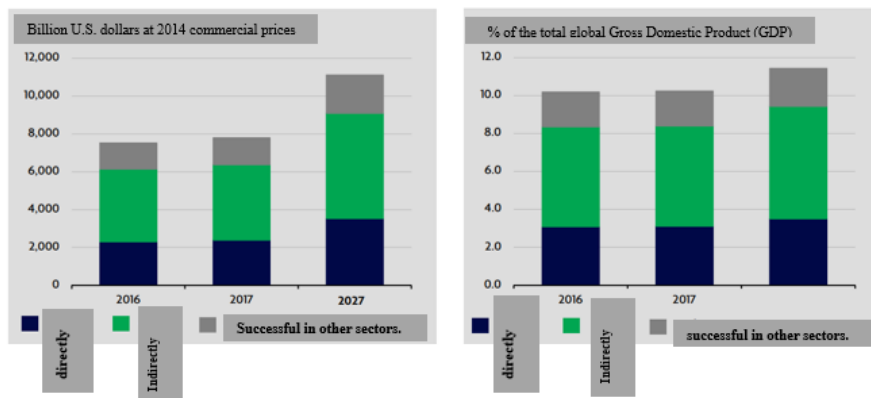
The benefits of tourism are diverse and can be highlighted through various aspects, the most important of which are: (Ayashi, 2016, p. 72)

#### 1.1. Economic Aspects:

The economic contributions of tourism are among the sector's most significant positives, and they can be illustrated through several points:

- **Improvement of Balance of Payments:** The influx of tourists into a country results in an influx of foreign currency, thereby improving the balance of payments, which is a summary indicator of a country's international economic position.
- **Achieving Regional Development:** Tourism, especially in rural areas, creates new job opportunities. It also helps preserve traditional activities in tourist regions and provides real opportunities for marketing local products, particularly in rural areas that often maintain traditional customs.
- **Provision of Infrastructure Services:** The development of the tourism sector necessitates the creation of sector-specific infrastructure like hotels. Indirectly, it also contributes to the construction of roads and other types of necessary infrastructure to attract tourists.
- **Increase in Income Levels:** Tourism contributes approximately 10.2% to the global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as of 2016. The contribution of tourism to the global GDP is illustrated in the following figure:

**Figure 03: Contribution of Tourism to the Global Gross Domestic Product**



*Source: World Travel & Tourism Council, The Economic Impact Of Travel & Tourism, March 2017, United Kingdom, p7.*

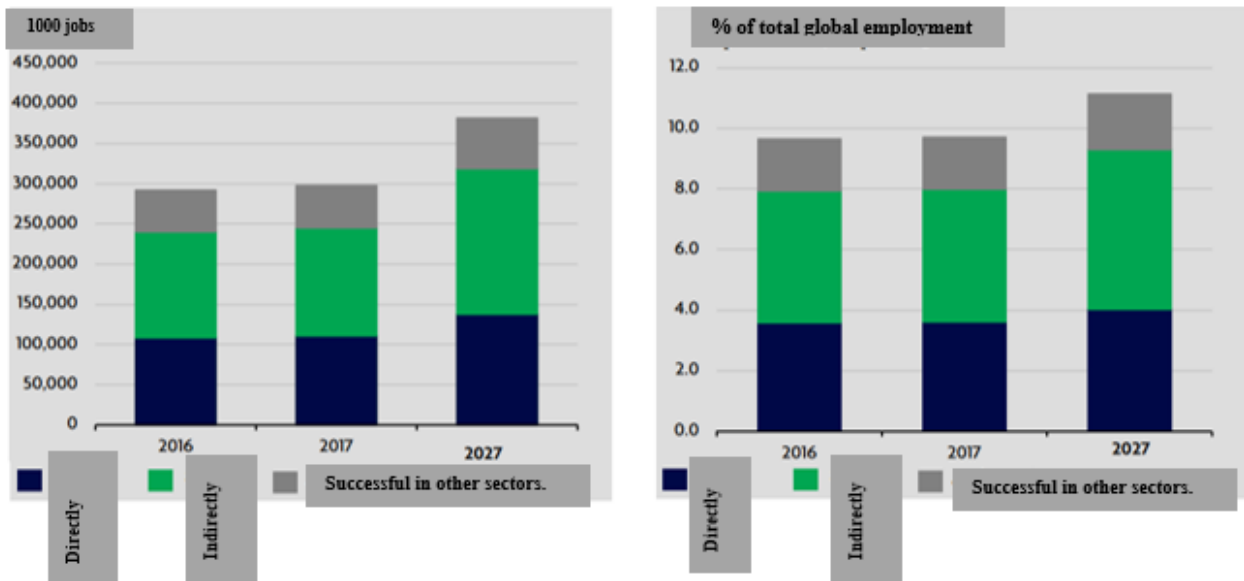
From the figure, it is evident that tourism significantly contributes to the global GDP, with expectations for these numbers to rise in the future. The revenue approaches \$8 trillion and is expected to exceed \$11 trillion by 2027. A closer look at the contribution of tourism to this output in previous years shows a decrease in the direct contribution of the tourism sector to the global GDP between 2013 and 2014, attributed to a higher increase in global income compared to the rise in tourism revenue. A steady increase in contribution is observed between 2014 and 2017, expected to continue rising by 2027.

These figures represent significant revenue for countries that are tourist destinations, thus highlighting the importance of tourism investment as a primary source of foreign currency and direct improvement of balance of payments.

**Increase in State Revenue from Taxes:** Tourism structures are among the most profitable activities in areas with high tourist traffic. These revenues form an excellent source of income for the state through taxes imposed specifically on these structures.

**Creation of New Job Opportunities:** Tourism contributes to reducing unemployment rates and absorbing labor. The contribution of tourism to employment at the global level is illustrated in the following figure:

**Figure 04: Total Contribution of Tourism to Global Employment**



*Source: World Travel & Tourism Council, The Economic Impact Of Travel & Tourism, March 2017, United Kingdom, p7.*

Tourism contributes directly to employment in tourism structures like hotels, restaurants, etc., and indirectly in sectors such as transportation. It also stimulates other sectors like public works for infrastructure provision, local producers, farmers, and others. Tourism helps in attracting marketing opportunities for their products through incoming tourists. The figure shows that tourism

globally provides approximately 300 million jobs and is expected to rise to more than 375 million jobs by 2027, representing about 11% of total global employment.

### **1.2 On the Social Level:**

Tourism contributes to strengthening the local social aspect by providing recreational and relaxation facilities for the local population, who often benefit the most from the established tourism infrastructures. Additionally, the sector plays a role in protecting and satisfying the social desires of individuals and groups, particularly those in local communities.

### **1.3 On the Environmental Level:**

Although this point is the basis of controversy regarding the long-term viability of tourism, the sector can contribute to environmental preservation, prevent its degradation, and implement strict protection measures. Tourists' perceptions and feedback about the condition of their destination country are among the most influential factors in decisions aimed at preserving the environment in general, and tourist areas in particular.

### **1.4 On the Political and Cultural Level:**

The importance of tourism here lies in its contribution to spreading cultures and enhancing communication between peoples. Tourists often seek to interact with local populations, learn their language, and understand their customs and traditions, fostering familiarity and acquaintance between peoples worldwide. The sector can also contribute to developing political relationships between governments in tourist countries.

## **2. Negative Impacts of Tourism:**

These impacts can be concentrated in three main points: (Kafi, 2009, pp. 242-245)

### **2.1 Tourism-Related Crimes:**

This refers to crimes committed by tourists in the destination country, which include:

- **Smuggling Crimes:** Including drug smuggling, which encompasses cultivation, production, possession, import, export, or dealing in drugs, as well as currency smuggling. Many tourists engage in black market currency exchanges, violating local laws.
- **Currency Counterfeiting and Forgery:** The promotion, disposal, possession for circulation of counterfeit currencies, and their import or export is a punishable offense, whether the currency is local or foreign.
- **Forgery and Use of Forged Documents:** This includes the use of fake passports or other counterfeit documents.
- **Espionage and Intelligence Gathering:** Many intelligence agents enter countries as tourists to blend in and facilitate movement, then communicate with foreign states or persons working for them.
- **Frauds and Scams:** Tourists obtaining others' money through deception and misleading practices.



- **Immoral Crimes:** Actions by tourists that are indecent or not in line with the public order and sentiments of the local society, potentially impacting local customs and traditions.
- **Theft Crimes:** Tourists engaging in theft, including stealing artifacts, often small ones that are easy to hide, for financial gain without considering their historical and archaeological significance.

**2.2 Over-reliance on Tourism in the Economy:**

Despite the advantages and positives of tourism, complete reliance on this sector makes the economy vulnerable to fluctuations in tourist demand due to various factors like price changes, currency fluctuations, energy prices, shifts in tourist preferences, global political events, international economic changes, etc. (Al-Houri & Al-Dabbagh, 2012, p. 214)

**2.3 Destruction of Tourist Sites:**

Whether they are archaeological landmarks or natural sites, the increasing visitation of tourists without considering their carrying capacity and without adhering to preservation standards (e.g., continuous photography, which some museums restrict by banning flash photography to protect their exhibits) can lead to degradation. Overcrowding in diving areas, for example, can diminish their uniqueness.

A summary table of the above-mentioned positives and negatives of tourism is provided in the following:

**Table 01: Key Positives and Negatives of Tourism**

<b>Criterion</b>	<b>Positive Effects of Tourism</b>	<b>Negative Effects of Tourism</b>
<b>Tourist Arrivals and Departures</b>	Foreign inbound tourism brings in foreign currency.	International outbound tourism leads to the outflow of foreign currency, reducing available resources in the economy.
<b>Tourist Spending</b>	Tourist expenditure locally through the purchase of goods and services increases income for companies, thereby raising tax revenues.	Increased crime rates associated with tourism lead to higher security costs.
<b>Tourism Investment</b>	Tourism income can be used to improve the host country's infrastructure and services, like roads, airports, and other facilities like parks, benefiting local residents.	Focusing investment in the tourism sector can weaken financial capabilities that could be directed to other sectors.

<b>Long-term Effects</b>	Improves the investment image of the community and the host country, attracting investments and human talents seeking a better quality of life.	Promises of income and job opportunities are always countered by the possibilities of losses and low-wage jobs.
<b>Tourism Revenue</b>	Tourism serves as a means to diversify the economic base of the community, especially when reliance is on a few activities and services.	Dependence on tourism revenue as a primary resource makes the entire economy vulnerable to changes in this sector.
<b>Jobs in Tourism</b>	Tourism can create direct or indirect job opportunities.	Jobs provided by the tourism sector can be seasonal, leading to a form of disguised unemployment.

*Source: Prepared by researchers based on the above.*

## **Section Two: The Evolution of Tourism in Dubai**

Dubai's advanced approach in offering tourist services and attractions has directly reflected on the tremendous achievements of the sector in recent years. Along with its strong economic foundations and flexibility in dealing with challenges and new developments, the city ensures readiness for any shift in traveler behavior and expectations in the post-COVID-19 era.

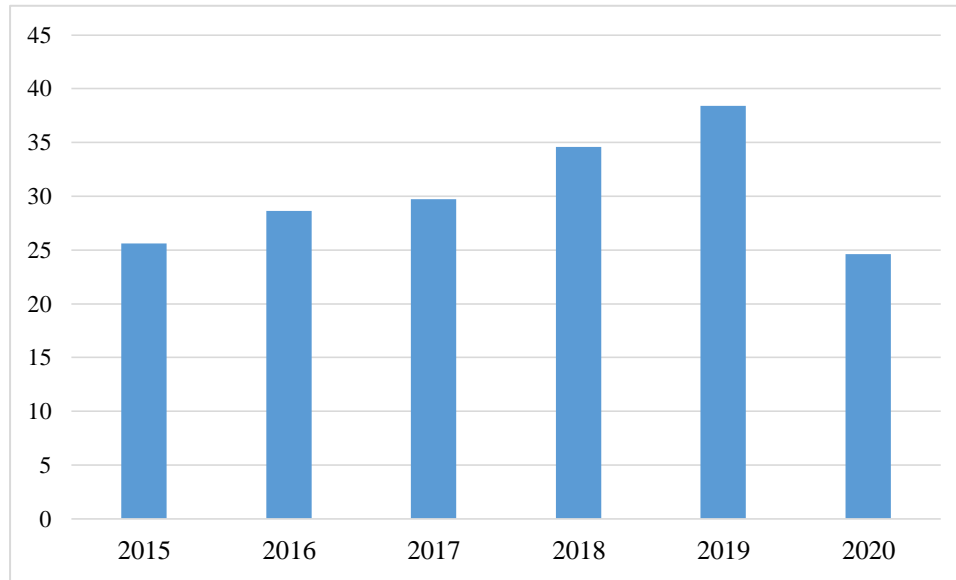
Dubai is globally recognized as a safe destination, a feature that has shaped its identity over the years. Amidst the global repercussions of COVID-19 and the gradual return to normalcy, this attribute undoubtedly enhances trust and reassures those yearning to travel again, especially families.

Dubai has thus solidified its status as a vibrant, multicultural city and a globally renowned center for tourism and trade. Hosting over three million residents from more than 200 countries, Dubai exemplifies openness, social harmony, and a microcosm of the real world. The city has not faltered in its future aspirations, adopting concepts of innovation and development in all tourist offerings to meet the needs of travelers from around the world. Moreover, it has paved the way for a future acceleration in its rise and advancement, aiming to become the world's premier preferred destination.

These realities, coupled with the remarkable development and momentum witnessed in Dubai's tourism sector over the past decade, as well as its ambitious future plans which remain in place despite current challenges, will continue to bolster the city's elements of ongoing success as one of the most favored destinations worldwide.

The number of tourists generated significant revenue for the sector in Dubai and the UAE economy as a whole. This can be illustrated in the following figure, showing the development of tourism revenues as a percentage of total exports in the United Arab Emirates: **(World Bank, n.d.)**

**Figure 05: Tourism Revenues (% of Total Exports)**



*Source: Prepared by researchers based on data from the World Bank*

International tourism revenues comprise expenditures by incoming international visitors, including payments to national transport companies for international transport. Their share in exports is calculated as a percentage of exports of goods and services, which encompass all transactions between residents of a country and the rest of the world.

The figure shows that the contribution of tourism to total exports decreased in 2020, impacting the country's GDP. The contribution fell from 11.6%, amounting to 180.4 billion Dirhams in 2019, to 5.4%, totaling 71.6 billion Dirhams in 2020, a 66% decrease due to the COVID-19 pandemic affecting the global tourism sector. **(Dubai Economy and Tourism, n.d.)**

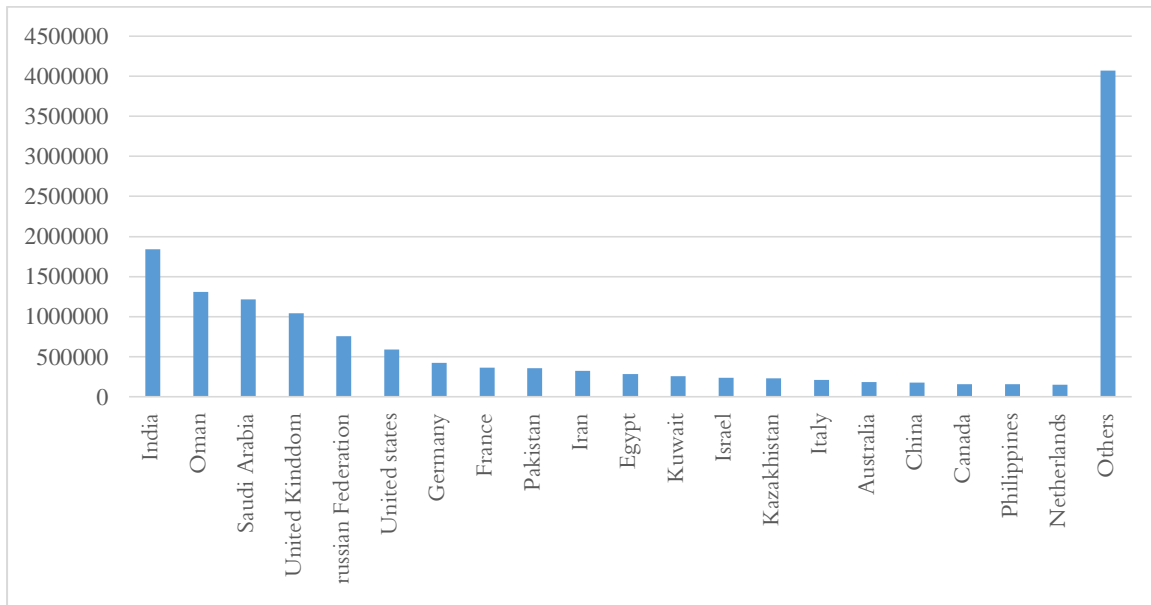
### **First: Analysis of Tourism Competitiveness Indicators for Dubai:**

Dubai's evolved approach in offering tourist services has directly impacted the sector's significant achievements in the past year. Alongside its strong economic foundations and flexibility in addressing challenges and new developments, the city ensures readiness for any shift in traveler behavior and expectations. It has adopted innovation and development concepts in all tourist offerings to meet the needs of travelers worldwide. This approach also paves the way for a rapid rise and advancement to become the world's favorite destination.

#### **1. Dubai Visitor Index by Nationality for 2022:**

The following figure illustrates the number of visitors to Dubai by nationality for the year 2022:

**Figure 06: Number of Visitors to Dubai by Nationality for 2022**



*Source: Prepared by researchers based on data from Dubai Statistics Center*

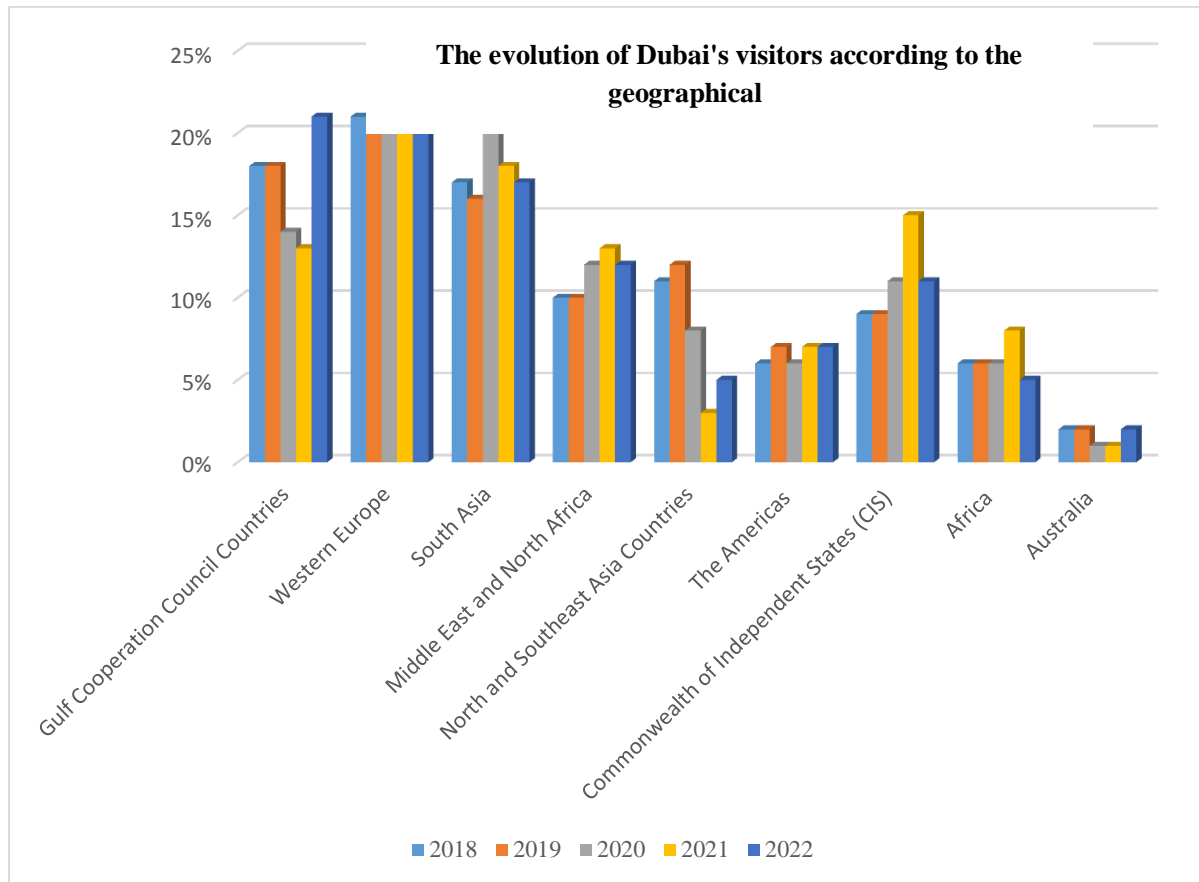
As seen from the figure above, Dubai welcomed approximately 14.36 million international visitors from January to December 2022, a 97% increase compared to the same period in 2021, which saw 7.28 million visitors, and 2020, which had 5.51 million international tourists. This surpasses the global and regional tourism sector's recovery levels, especially following the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lockdown that affected all countries. This confirms Dubai's significant role in the global tourism sector's recovery and its steady steps towards achieving sustainable growth, in line with its continuous efforts to become the world's favorite visitation destination.

These numbers indicate that the Emirate is steadily on its way to becoming one of the top 3 economic cities globally, as per Dubai's Economic Agenda D33, launched by the Ruler of Dubai. This agenda focuses on continuing to provide added value to visitors from all over the world and enhancing the foundations that ensure the continued strong performance of the tourism sector, ensuring enjoyable experiences for visitors in Dubai, reinforcing its position as a leading global tourist destination, and achieving its ambitious goals to become the world's most attractive city for international visitors.

## **2. Number of Visitors to Dubai by Geographical Region for 2018-2022:**

The following figure presents the number of visitors to Dubai by geographical regions for the period from 2018 to 2022:

**Figure 07: Number of Visitors to Dubai by Geographical Regions for the Period (2018-2022)**



**Source:** Prepared by researchers based on data from Dubai Statistics Center

In 2022, Dubai's outstanding performance not only reinforced its position in traditional markets but also achieved robust growth in several emerging markets. Last year, Dubai maintained its leadership as a prime and safe travel destination, with a notable increase in visitors from its key markets.

Western Europe and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries accounted for 21% each of Dubai's international visitors. South Asia contributed 17% of the total visitors, while the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region made up 12%, highlighting Dubai's continued appeal to travelers from nearby markets. The Americas accounted for 7% of the total international visitor share. North and Southeast Asia, as well as Africa, each contributed 5%, and visitors from Australasia represented 2%.

### **3. Index of Hotels and Hotel Apartments in Dubai for the Period 2018-2022:**

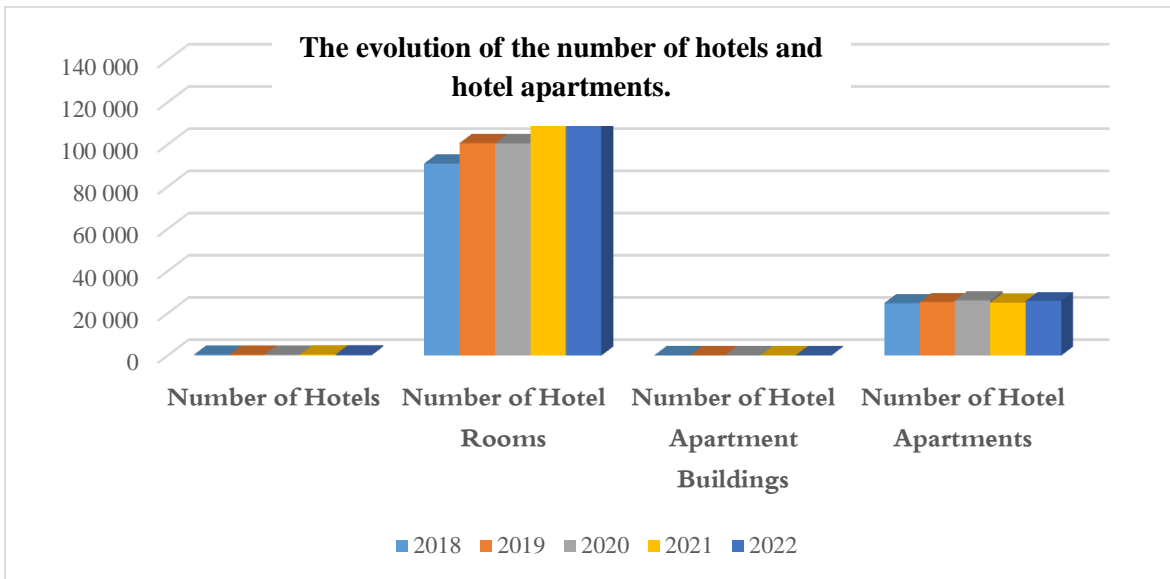
The following table and figure illustrate the development of the number of hotels and hotel apartments in Dubai from 2018 to 2022.

**Table 02: Number of Hotels and Hotel Apartments in Dubai for the Period (2018-2022)**

Description	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Number of Hotels	519	544	520	567	610
Number of Hotel Rooms	91,085	100,744	100,704	112,796	120,602
Number of Hotel Apartment Buildings	197	197	191	188	194
Number of Hotel Apartments	24,882	25,376	26,243	25,154	25,894

Source: Dubai Statistics Center

**Figure 08: Number of Hotels and Hotel Apartments in Dubai for the Period (2018-2022)**



Source: Prepared by researchers based on data from Dubai Statistics Center

As observed from the table and figure, the hotel sector in Dubai, a crucial component of the Emirate's tourism growth, continued its strong performance with high growth rates across all hospitality categories. In 2022, the average occupancy rate for hotel rooms was 73%, one of the highest globally, compared to 67% in 2021 and nearing the 75% recorded in 2019.

It's noteworthy that this increase occurred alongside a 16% expansion in Dubai's hotel capacity in 2022 compared to 2019. By the end of last year, Dubai's hotel capacity reached 146,496 rooms across 804 establishments, up from 126,120 rooms in 741 establishments at the end of December 2019. The total number of hotel establishments in 2022 grew by 6% compared to 2021, which registered 755 establishments with 137,950 rooms, reflecting strong investor confidence in Dubai's tourism sector.

In 2022, Dubai also launched the "Dubai Leads" initiative, a city-wide innovative sustainability drive to encourage communities to make simple changes in daily habits, like using refillable water bottles, aligning with efforts to transform Dubai into a leading sustainable destination and the best city for living, working, and visiting.

Dubai strives to achieve its strategic sustainability goals, and its efforts and initiatives over the past year have steadfastly advanced this direction. The "Dubai Sustainable Tourism" initiative, inspired by the wise vision of making Dubai a leading sustainable destination, contributed to achieving the Emirate's clean energy objectives, the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, and the UAE's Strategic Initiative for Climate Neutrality 2050.

Dubai Expo City will host COP 28, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change conference in 2023, supporting sustainability and climate security goals, in line with national efforts, especially with 2023 declared as the Year of Sustainability. (**Dubai Economy and Tourism, n.d.**)

### **Second: Dubai's Initiative in Facing the Negative Effects of Tourism - COVID-19 Fallout**

In early 2020, Dubai's tourism sector continued its robust performance, welcoming over 3.27 million international overnight visitors in January and February, a 4.2% increase compared to the same period in 2019. These results were remarkable considering the challenges and travel restrictions resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic and the rapid developments in the first quarter of that year, including the complete closure of major markets like China.

All of Dubai's key markets were impacted by the spread of the virus, with varying degrees of travel restrictions implemented to control the infection and combat the virus within those countries. The United Arab Emirates was among the first to implement a series of preventive and precautionary measures aligned with the highest health and safety standards, including enhancing hospital infrastructure and rapid testing. This placed the UAE among the top 10 countries in the world in its response to COVID-19, particularly in terms of tests conducted per million people.

Dubai adopted advanced technological solutions to limit the spread of the infection and monitor the tourism sector, alongside issuing strict guidelines at airports, public transportation, hotels, restaurants, retail stores, destinations, and entertainment facilities. Visitor satisfaction, repeatedly expressed in their evaluations of their visits to Dubai and the assurance of their safety at all times, remains a top priority for all partners in Dubai's tourism sector.

The tourism sector in Dubai relied on strong operational foundations, ensuring rapid responsiveness after reopening markets to international visitors and transitioning towards normalcy post-COVID-19. The significance of 2021 for Dubai was highlighted by hosting the global event Expo, organized for the first time in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia.

Dubai continues to offer new and unique experiences, making each visit one-of-a-kind. In 2021, the city opened more tourist attractions and entertainment destinations, contributing to its appeal to various visitor segments. Notable projects include Ain Dubai, Deep Dive Dubai, Hatta Dome Park, and "The View at The Palm" in Palm Jumeirah, adding real value to the visitor experience.

Dubai's tourism pillars include culture, cuisine, entertainment, outdoor adventures, water and beach activities, family experiences, and shopping. Festivals and events like Dubai Shopping Festival, Dubai Summer Surprises, Dubai Fitness Challenge, Gulfood, Arabian Travel Market, GITEX, and others play a role in increasing visitor numbers for both leisure and business. (**Dubai Economy and Tourism, 2019, p. 5**)

Dubai continues to reap the benefits of its successful management of the COVID-19 crisis in 2021 and 2022. The city's prompt response to the pandemic from its onset, being among the first global cities to lock down and then gradually resume activities, has restored traveler confidence and made it one of the safest destinations. Additionally, the UAE is among the most vaccinated countries globally, with over 94% of its population receiving two doses of the COVID-19 vaccine. The UAE ranked first worldwide in Bloomberg's pandemic resilience ranking in January 2022. **(Ghraibeh, 2012, pp. 111-112)**

### **Third: Reality and Prospects of Sustainable Tourism in Dubai:**

#### **1. Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism:**

Both concepts emerged in the 1980s, with ecotourism or environmental tourism being seen as a solution to some of the negative impacts of tourism in destination countries. Ecotourism is defined as a form of clean tourism based on visiting natural areas such as beaches, mountains, reserves, deserts, and valleys to observe and study living organisms (birds, plants, fish, corals, etc.) as a means to support environmental protection and conserve natural resources with minimal negative impact on the environment and maximum positive impact environmentally, socially, and economically. **(Zerqin & El-Ayeb, 2014, p. 6)**

It is an excellent field for spreading environmental awareness among locals and eco-tourists about environmental issues. Features of ecotourism include:

- Minimizing negative impacts on natural and cultural resources in tourist areas;
- Educating tourists on the importance of preserving natural areas;
- Emphasizing responsible investment focused on collaboration with local authorities to meet the needs of local populations and preserve their customs and traditions;
- Conducting social and environmental research in tourist and environmental areas to minimize negative impacts;
- Working to maximize the financial return for the destination country through the use of local natural resources and human potential;
- Ensuring that tourism development goes hand in hand with social and environmental development, meaning that developments in all areas occur simultaneously so as not to cause sudden change in society;
- Relying on infrastructure compatible with environmental conditions (e.g., eco-friendly hotels) and reducing the use of trees for heating and conserving wildlife and culture.

#### **2. Characteristics of Ecotourism:**

Ecotourism is characterized by: **(Jaafar, 2017, p. 7)**

- The destination being a natural, unpolluted environment;
- Attractions generally include plants, animals, or natural biodiversity;
- Supporting development in the eco-tourist destination and preserving its uniqueness;
- Contributing to environmental conservation and promoting activities that restore natural balance;
- Accommodations in eco-tourist destinations sometimes providing educational programs to enlighten tourists and rationalize their behavior towards natural resources.



### **3. Negatives of Ecotourism:**

Despite the positives and characteristics of ecotourism, there are several negatives, including: (Lisse, n.d., p. 1)

- Establishing development projects in fragile environments;
- Pollution of sites;
- Increasing tourist numbers beyond the carrying capacity of sites;
- Congestion of vehicle and people movement;
- Soil erosion;
- Exploiting sites under the guise of environmentalism;
- Building facilities and resorts that detract from traditional practices and lead to displacement of residents.

These negatives led to the emergence of the concept of sustainable/responsible tourism, which focuses on how tourism can contribute to the economic development of local economies without disrupting local ecological systems. Sustainable tourism aims to visit a tourist site while attempting to leave only a positive impact on the site itself, the local community, and the host country's economy. (Association Italian Tourism Responsible, 2016, p. 1)

Sustainable tourism is defined as development that meets current needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. It respects people and cultures, avoids all forms of violence (unethical tourism, cultural and biological piracy, discrimination, damage to cultural identity, etc.), and promotes positive human relations between and through tourism cultures. (Michal, 2017, p. 1)

Recently, the concept of "sustainable tourism" fully encompasses responsible tourism, considered more a behavior than a form of tourism, representing an approach to dealing with tourism elements, whether as tourists, business organizations, local residents, or any other party directly or indirectly related to tourism. It aims to improve the sector through balanced exploitation of tourism resources.

Sustainable and balanced tourism development is defined as development initiated after comprehensive scientific study and planning within the framework of integrated economic, social, and environmental development, either nationwide or in any region of the country that gathers tourism development elements, whether natural or civilizational. (Hamaash et al., 2016, p. 107)

The International Year of Sustainable Tourism aims to highlight tourism's role in the following five areas: (World Tourism Organization, 2016, p. 5)

- Inclusive and sustainable economic growth;
- Social inclusiveness, employment, and poverty reduction;
- Resource efficiency, environmental protection, and climate change;
- Cultural values, diversity, and heritage;
- Mutual understanding, peace, and security.

### **4. The Role of Tourists in the Tourism Sector from a Sustainability Perspective:**

Tourists represent one of the most critical elements of the tourism sector and are the primary beneficiaries of its services. Their influence on the tourist sites they visit is significant, and their role

in achieving sustainable tourism is manifested in adhering to and respecting a set of procedures, some of which are mentioned below: (Al-Omari, 2011, pp. 263-264)

- Respecting the cultures, customs, and traditions of the peoples of the countries they visit, without infringing on their environmental beliefs, freedoms, or causing any social, ethnic, or sectarian offense;
- Adhering to the laws and legislations in force in the destination country, particularly those related to their arrival, tourist activities, stay, and departure;
- Refraining from any activities that could lead to real, apparent, or potential conflicts that contradict their status as tourists or exceed the rights granted to them by the systems and legislations of the destination country. This basis requires tourists to avoid anything that raises suspicions, doubts, or poses a threat to them.
- Consequently, it is imperative for tourists to respect the host country's laws, customs, and traditions, in addition to preserving the cleanliness of the tourist sites they visit and working to minimize the pollution they may cause.

### **5. Dubai's Emirate and Sustainable Tourism**

The "Dubai Sustainable Tourism" initiative, part of the Department of Economy and Tourism in Dubai, celebrates sustainable practices throughout the city in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of World Environment Day. This initiative aims to establish Dubai's position as a leading global destination for sustainable tourism.

The Department of Economy and Tourism in Dubai, through the "Dubai Sustainable Tourism" initiative, leads efforts to preserve the environment and enhance the natural landscape of Dubai Emirate, maintaining its biodiversity away from any risks that wildlife elements might face (Press Release, 2022).

The initiative draws inspiration from the leadership's vision to position Dubai as a globally leading sustainable destination. This aligns with the Emirate's goals for clean energy, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, and the UAE's strategic initiative for climate neutrality by 2050.

Dubai's Department of Economy and Tourism has introduced 50 pioneering initiatives in environmental conservation and sustainability within its tourism system. These include desert reserves, restaurants, hotel facilities, and tourist attractions that preserve the environment, as well as awareness-raising and cultural activities in this field.

The "Dubai Initiates" campaign aims to educate different segments of society about the importance of preserving the Emirate's natural resources. It also inspires people to change harmful practices that cause significant environmental damage, including altering their consumption behavior of plastic water bottles and effectively inspiring people to reduce the use of single-use plastic containers.

Dubai hotels continue to adopt sustainable solutions and commit to environmental conservation, in line with the guidelines of the "Dubai Sustainable Tourism" initiative and the exceptional achievements of the Dubai government in this field. Many resorts and hotels in the Emirate are

committed to sustainability and achieving positive results in the hospitality sector, as well as keeping up with the latest trends in the tourism sector.

Dubai hotels are currently implementing a series of nineteen sustainability requirements set by "Dubai Sustainable Tourism" as part of ongoing efforts to enhance Dubai's leading position as a sustainable destination.

These nineteen sustainability requirements aim to bring about positive change in the sector, covering a wide range of areas including sustainable management, performance metrics, employee sustainability training, a sustainability management committee, commitment to future government initiatives, guest awareness, green events, energy management systems, energy management plan - transportation plan, water management systems, water management plan - towels and bed linens, waste management plan, waste management (facilities), air quality management (smoking), procurement management plan, and community responsibility.

The food sector in Dubai is rapidly evolving, continually striving to embed sustainability through extensive technological updates in agriculture and food waste management. Most restaurants in Dubai are moving towards using locally sourced ingredients to fulfill their sustainability commitments and offer more authentic experiences to tourists.

Dubai also has numerous wellness and fitness centers for residents and visitors alike, encouraging activities that enhance environmental and sustainable practices. These centers offer sports equipment made from recycled materials and provide a range of spa treatments and snacks from reliable and sustainable sources.

Furthermore, Dubai is rich in cultural and recreational facilities that celebrate the Emirate's long history in sustainability and aim to establish its status as a leading destination striving for a sustainable future. The Emirate offers a variety of cultural and educational sustainable experiences, including tours in the old city, Dubai museums, and art exhibitions that inspire its guests.

The Department of Economy and Tourism in Dubai has enhanced the "Dubai Sustainable Tourism" initiative by launching a new and updated version of the "Carbon Calculation Tool" for the hospitality sector. This update ensures real-time reading of carbon emission data sources, allowing hotels to accurately determine and efficiently manage their energy consumption levels.

These improvements are designed to enhance the initiative's contribution to achieving major clean energy goals and support the UAE's Climate Neutrality Strategy 2050. This is in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 2030 and also strives to achieve the targets of the Dubai Economic Agenda D33, positioning it as one of the top 3 cities in the world and consolidating its status as a leading global destination for sustainable tourism.

## **6. CONCLUSION:**

Tourism is a fundamental sector of the economy and one of the fastest-growing economic sectors globally. To mitigate its negative impacts, the world is increasingly focusing on sustainable tourism. Based on the preceding discussion, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Tourism is one of the most important economic sectors, whether in terms of its contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), the direct and indirect employment it generates, or the new sectors it creates due to tourism activities.

- European tourists are globally significant in both numbers and spending in the sector.
- Tourism of various types generates undeniable positive effects, supporting economic development and reducing poverty rates. However, it also leads to numerous negative impacts on host or destination countries, notably pollution of tourist sites, smuggling crimes, and other irresponsible activities by tourists.
- Dubai is one of the leading global tourist destinations. The number of foreign tourists visiting Dubai is approximately three times the local population, making tourism the most important economic sector in Dubai.
- Ecotourism, the first concept linking tourism with the environment, is based on directing tourists to pristine natural areas. However, this approach has significantly impacted these sites.
- Sustainable tourism, under the umbrella of responsible environmental practices, represents the latest and perhaps the best approach to protect the environment from irrational exploitation of tourist sites, especially the environmental ones. It aims to enhance the contribution of tourism to development within the framework of sustainability.

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