



## HEALTH TOURISM MARKET IN SHIRAZ SWOT ANALYSIS

Seyyed Javad MOHAMMADI\*, Neda MAHMOUDABADI

Ph.D. student in Management, Islamic Azad University, South Tehran Branch. Tehran, Iran.

**\*Corresponding Author:**

**Email:** mohamadi5580@gmail.com

### ABSTRACT

*The global popularity of Shiraz due to its prominent literary, cultural, scientific and religious figures, unique natural and ecological perspectives and surroundings (dense gardens, mountains, lakes, rivers, and etc.), as well as the special role of the metropolis Shiraz as the largest population, service, tourism and cultural center in the south of the country is considered by anyone. In addition, the city is considered as one of the medical centers of the country, which with specialized medical centers and skilled physicians can be a host of health tourists every year from different areas of the country and abroad. Consistent with this type of tourism capacity in Shiraz, this paper seeks to study the health tourism market in Shiraz using SWOT analysis method.*

**Keywords:** Health Tourism Market, Shiraz, SWOT

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism and tourism economics are now becoming one of the main elements of the world's commercial economy. In addition, many development planners and policy makers also refer to tourism industry as a center of sustainable development (Eftekhari and Mahdavi, 2006). Today, tourism industry can be considered as one of the most important economic sectors of a country, as it directly plays a role in the production of services, products, foreign currency collection, employment and investment (Soh Ms, 2008). Health tourism is not a new phenomenon in Iran. In the past, residents of neighboring countries, especially the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf, traveled to Iran and especially to Fars Province to receive health care services (Turani et al., 2010). Currently, the main causes of travel of patients to Iran are related to the quality of health services, low costs of medication and treatment in comparison with other countries of the region, access to health services and advanced equipment, the presence of specialists and skilled medical personnel in the field of health in Iran, similar culture and language, and the shortage or lack of equipment and specialist force in most of the origin countries (Jabari, 2009). Travel and tourism industry is considered as the largest and most diverse industry in the world. Many countries view this dynamic industry as the main source of income, job creation, private sector growth and infrastructure development. Tourism industry is very much appreciated around the world, especially in developing countries, given that other economic forms, such as the production or extraction of natural resources, are not very cost-effective (Ch G., 2008). Tourism and health tourism have been considered for many years and its potential for sustainable development has been introduced in the country. Various

studies have been conducted on various fields of tourism, all of which have sought to develop this phenomenon.

### ***Problem statement***

Creating a comprehensive and sustainable development, as well as replacing new sources of income, requires the use of all facilities and capabilities, rather than oil resources. In this regard, the development of tourism industry, which economists consider it as the third most dynamic and growing economic phenomenon after oil and automobile industry, has emerged as a fundamental requirement of the country (Madhoushi, 2003). Tourism industry is also an effective factor on the interaction of cultures, dialogue between civilizations, and establishment and consolidation of empathy between nations (Ch G., 2003). Tourism is one of the most important activities of the contemporary world. According to the report of World Trade Organization (WTO), the number of tourists in the world grows 4.3 percent annually, reaching 1.6 billion by 2020. At the same time, the cost of tourists around the world grows by 6% every year to \$ 2 trillion (Moharamzadeh, 2008).

Today, tourism in many regions has become an important economic activity in the service sector (Shonk, 2007). Considering the necessity of strengthening and developing tourism industry to achieve its credit and status internationally, different sectors of the industry should be identified and we should pay particular attention to the most important sectors (Moharamzadeh, 2008). A tourist is someone who travels for a period of at least one night, not more than one year, to a country other than his own country or his usual place of residence, and his purpose is not to work and earn money in that country (Ch G., 2003). In recent years, tourism has become a competitive industry, and countries are more inclined towards new ways of making money and innovating in this industry. Holding different festivities in countries, conferences and even using experienced physicians to bring patients to the country are new ways to attract tourists and recognize the culture of a country to the world.

Health tourism is an organized travel from the environment of one's life to another in order to maintain improvement and re-access to physical and mental health of the person (Carrera, 2008). Health tourism includes "medical tourism", "health tourism" and "preventive tourism" (Tourism and Marketing Research, 2006). Health tourism development can be considered as a national strategy, in addition to optimum use of domestic capital to increase the country's income as a national security arm (Janson, 2011). Today, national security of countries is divided into two parts: "soft security" and "hard security". The medical relationship and affiliation of personalities and nations in terms of receiving reliable and guaranteed services in the second country is one of the factors that contribute to the sustainability and security of the country. Health tourism market is considered as one of the most motivated and competitive industries in the world and one of the new areas of advanced tourism. At a macro level, governments are interested in benefiting from the economic advantages of this industry. An increasing competition has started between different countries, especially developing countries in Asia, to attract health tourists (Herrick MD, 2007). On the other hand, health tourism has also grown in developing countries; globalization and trade liberalization in the field of health service have been the basis for the rapid growth of this type of tourism (Garcia Altes, 2005). If health tourism is also considered as a priority, Iran could potentially prevent foreign currency and human resources from being exported to other countries. Over the past few years, the number of those who have left their countries for the purpose of using health services has been



added (Nagarajan, 2004). This increase in the number of medical tourists is related to the factors such as high costs of health services in industrialized countries, increased ease of travel internationally, desired rate of currency conversion in the global economy, rapid advancements in medical technology, improved standards of care in most countries, and availability of tourists to the Internet, as well as the establishment of new companies that do not have medical expertise, but mediate between patients worldwide and the hospital network (Connell, 2006). Nowadays, with the advent of world standards and laws that are being implemented in different parts of the world, people are seeking the best quality treatments at low and competitive prices (Lagiewsky, 2008, Moody, 2007).

Considering the subject significance and because Iran and Shiraz are one of the active centers of health tourism in the Middle East, and annually receive a large number of patients from different countries in the region to receive medical services, in this paper we attempt to analyze health tourism market in Shiraz.

### *Significance of the research*

Today, tourism is referred to as the main element of sustainable development. The importance of this industry and its role in economic, social and cultural development has led many local and regional managers and planners to plan and expand it. Iran's economy is also heavily dependent on oil export earnings, and its macroeconomic variables are subject to extreme fluctuations over time, following the global oil price. The main process of variables such as gross national product, gross investment, per capita income, and etc. in the last three decades of the Iranian economy clearly illustrated this. Therefore, in order to diversify the sources of economic growth and foreign exchange earnings as well as create new job opportunities in the country, the development of tourism industry is very important, because Iran is one of the top 10 countries in terms of tourism attraction and has a great potential for international tourism (Tabibi, Babaki and Jabari, 2007).

Due to its advantages in health tourism, including low cost, high quality of health services, competent physicians and many natural attractions, Iran has decided to benefit from this advantage (Shalbfavian, 2006). The Ministry of Health and Medical Education has also approved legislation in the field of health tourism as "medical conditions and requirements" which specifies the conditions in six clauses. The 6 clauses are: general conditions, human resources, medical equipment, geographical conditions, conditions and regulations for the websites of the medical centers of the Ministry of Health, Medical Education<sup>1</sup> required to provide a basis for effective presence in world markets and conversion of the Islamic Republic of Iran to meet the health and medical needs of the region in the framework of strategic and commercial policies, and necessary facilities for introducing the capabilities, supply and marketing of health services and medical education, and products, equipment and medical products, and pharmaceuticals. The value of the export of services and products is 30% of exchange of health care sector, at the end of the Fourth Development Plan<sup>2</sup>. Due to the important position of the medical tourism industry in the world economy and Iran's capabilities in attracting health tourists, this study was conducted to examine the status of health tourism in Shiraz.

### Literature review

<sup>1</sup> Lawoffice.mohme.gov.ir

<sup>2</sup> Parliran.ir



Weisi and Mehmandoust (2015) explored obstacles to the development of the international tourism industry in Iran with an emphasis on entry tourism. The research method was quantitative descriptive, data collection tool was a questionnaire, and statistical population composed of 75 experts, specialists and some government executives. Data analysis was done by software SPSS. One-way ANOVA and single-sample T tests were used to measure the significance of factors on tourism industry in Iran and Friedman test was used for factor ranking. The study results showed that internal and external political, institutional and organizational and economic factors have a significant effect on the development of tourism in Iran. Cultural and religious factors, security and tourism attractions have no significant effect as barriers to development of tourism industry in Iran.

Dr. Seyed Ali Badri (2009) in a study entitled "Economic Effect of Tourism on Rural Areas" stated that the uncontrolled and spontaneous growth of tourism has had various economic effects on the foundations of rural economies. The present paper seeks to identify and analyze the effects of tourism on the rural areas of the central part of Nowshahr based on the principles of sustainable tourism and related theoretical principles. Accordingly, this research method is applied descriptive-analytical using objective and subjective data derived from a completed questionnaire by households' heads and village councils. The research variables have a quantitative and qualitative nature. In addition, in order to collect subjective data Likert scale was used, and for analyzing the data, the statistical tests of parametric correlation and non-parametric sampling have been used. The study results show that tourism has resulted in positive effects and positive outcomes such as job creation, especially job creation for young people, increasing income of residents and multiplier factor in the rural areas of the mentioned area, but followed by negative economic impacts and consequences such as increased prices of goods and services in the tourist season, and land prices, and, in general, living costs for residents and excessive dependence of rural economy on tourism.

Gholami (2007) conducted a study entitled "Factors Influencing the Growth of Tourism Industry in Iran", which proposed the following for tourism development: a comprehensive and appropriate definition of tourism industry and desired goals, increased internal border security, expansion of communication and modern transportation facilities, development of airline and airport services, improvement of health facilities and water networks, resolving the weakness of hotel and restaurant management services, holding special tourism exhibitions and conferences and identifying tourism capacity of Iran, permanent publication of books, articles, catalogs, and photographs of Iranian tourist attractions as well as Tourist maps and brochures containing the information needed by tourists, preventing the multiplicity of decision-making centers and strengthening the main organization of tourism industry of Iran more than before, as well as providing tourist maps and brochures containing information needed by tourists, preventing interference of duties of organizations and policy-making by these organizations, effective human resource training, guidance police training, residential accommodation facilities, entertainment, sports and recreation, comprehensive tourist plans for each province according to historical, natural and religious characteristics and etc.

Gripan and Yasha (2013) examined the factors affecting the development of tourism in India. The study results showed that security is one of the most important factors affecting tourism development. This effect is positive and significant due to correlation coefficient ( $r = 0.903$ ).



Other factors such as advertising, cultural, artistic and recreational attractions are the most important factors affecting the development of tourism in India.

Blanco et al. (2009) in their study suggest that government policies have developed programs for consumer use of natural attractions and implemented throughout the world. This indicates that specific factors, such as appropriate techniques (tourist tour operator initiatives for its development) or an environmental management system (ISO 14001 and EMAS) have been developed.

Kim et al. (2006) examined the causal relationship between tourism expansion and economic growth in Taiwan. A causal test has been carried out into a coherent approach to determine the causality between tourism expansion and economic growth. The results show that a long-term equilibrium relationship is found between tourism and economic growth in Taiwan as well as the relationship between these two variables is a two-way causal relationship.

Miranda and Andueza (2005) found that the factor of natural attractions with 78.3 percent is the most important factor in attracting tourists to Spain. They also found that historic sites with 36.48% and entertainment with 31.58% are more important in attracting tourists.

Yoon and Uysal (2005) performed a test of the effect of stimulation and encouragement on the real purpose and structural model. This paper suggests a method to understand stimulation and encouragement of tourists and tries to use theoretical and empirical reasons to show the causal relationships between attracting stimuli, the methods of attracting the tourist and the real purpose. In this study, an analysis of structures is carried out through structural equation modeling. As a result, in order to achieve a positive tourism method, the main goal of the managers is to attract more tourists not only to maintain their position in the competition, but also to improve it.

### ***Health tourism***

According to the definition of the World Tourism Organization, one of the goals that can stimulate the tourist to travel is to travel in the same way for health. Traveling to health villages and regions with mineral springs and hot water (spas) to escape from the stress of daily living and rehabilitation without medical intervention and surveillance, and in cases where the tourist does not have a definite disease called health tourism (Ayala, 1995). Health tourism is a kind of tourism that takes place for a period of more than 24 hours and less than one year in order to maintain, improve and regain the physical and mental health of a person (Bouchard, 1973).

Factors such as changes in consumers' values, constructional changes, older population, and health care system implications can be considered as the main drivers of the emergence of health tourism. The combination of these factors has made health tourism one of the world's most diverse types of tourism (Carter, 1999).

The vast potentials of our beloved country in various types of health tourism have led the Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism Organizations to consider exploiting this growing and competitive market through the establishment of the Tourism Tourism Committee and its special support on the agenda.

### ***Research objectives***

- Identifying the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats affecting health tourism in Shiraz.
- Developing a proper strategy for development of health tourism in Shiraz.





## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is of applied-development type. Because it first integrates and develops implicit and explicit knowledge about the studied subject, and second, the results can provide a suitable and applicable model for the studied population.

Scope of research (temporal, spatial and thematic scope)

**Thematic scope:** Health tourism market in Shiraz using SWOT analysis method

**Spatial scope:** The location of this research is a case study of Shiraz. The realm of time:

**Temporal scope:** The time of the research was spring and summer of 2018.

### *Sampling method and sample size*

In the field of surveying and field studies, interviews have been conducted with experts in the statistical population and continued to reach the theoretical saturation stage.

### *Tools and methods for data collection*

Each scientific research is based on theoretical principles, results and achievements of past studies and research, and the accuracy of the information guarantees the validity of the research. In this study, the data were collected in two ways: library studies (to examine the different dimensions of the subject, create the main structure and determine the variables of the study, as well as provide the content of the interview, the information required through library resources including books, national papers and research review, and foreign language translation, web search and official sites) and field studies (field study by questionnaires). In this study, in the field method, an interview was used and in the library method, we used documents' note and search with related software.

### *Methods of data analysis*

In this study, QSPM method was used for data analysis in the strategy identification section. The software used in this paper is EXCELL.

### *External Factor Evaluation Matrix (EFE)*

The external factor evaluation matrix is the result of a strategic review of external factors. This matrix develops and evaluates the opportunities and threats of the external environment. In order to prepare this matrix, the following stages should be followed:

1. After reviewing the external factors, we listed the identified factors so we write first the factors that become opportunities in the future and then those that threaten the area.
2. We assigned a weight or coefficient to the listed factors. These coefficients are from zero (insignificant) to one (very important). The coefficient indicates the relative importance of a factor in terms of the success of the region in the relevant situation. The sum of these coefficients should be equal to one.
3. When ranking the external factors i.e. opportunities and threats, the opportunities' score is 3 and threats' score is 4. The score 3 means relative opportunity and the score 4 means a basic opportunity. The score 2 means a relative threat and the score 1 means a major threat.
4. The coefficient of each factor is multiplied by the corresponding rank to obtain the final score.
5. The score of the external factors is obtained from sum of the final scores belonging to each of the factors.



Table 1: External Factor Evaluation Matrix

No.	O	Final score	Significance level	Rank
1	Weak competitors in the country	85	.034	2.5
2	The role and place of the metropolis Shiraz as the backbone of health services in the southern region of the country	159	.057	2.8
3	Closeness to the health centers of the Persian Gulf states	237	.079	3
4	Development of tourism and tourist attraction from the countries of the region with regard to health facilities of Shiraz	58	.023	2.5
5	Organizing exhibitions, festivals and international congresses in terms health capacities in Shiraz	130	.045	2.9
6	Attract the support of policy makers and planners for developing medical facilities of Shiraz and allocating funds	92	.034	2.7
7	The tendency to open up cultural and political space in order to attract the health tourist in the country	204	.068	3
8	Exploiting the inter-urban train network and facilitating traveling in the country	204	.068	3
9	High HR capacities in the country to work with health tourism departments in Shiraz	237	.074	3.2
	T			
1	Continuity of ambiguity in Iran's relations with the major political and economic centers of the world and the negative impact of these conditions on the position and role of Iran	95	.079	1.2
2	Attention of fellows of other cities to facilities and health services in other countries	96	.079	1.3
3	Negative advertisement of foreign media about Iran	179	.085	2.1
4	Reducing tourism budgets in the country relative to per capita	39	.017	2.3
5	Extraterritorial structures of power in the management of health tourism	59	.028	2.1
6	Inadequate infrastructure of transportation in relation to health tourists on interurban routes	117	.090	1.3
7	Lack of adequate funding for the preservation of health centers	117	.090	1.3
8	Weak collaboration between formal institutions, private sectors and the general public	77	.051	1.5
Total		2.18	1	



If the sum of the final score of the external factors is 1 to 2.5, it represents a threat and if it is 2.5 to 4, it means an opportunity. Therefore, the score 2.18 in Table 3 represents a relative threat at the given level.

#### Internal Factors Evaluation Matrix (IFE)

The internal factors evaluation matrix is the result of the strategic evaluation of the internal factors. This matrix evaluates the main strengths and weaknesses. In order to prepare this matrix, the following stages should be followed:

1. After reviewing the internal factors, the known factors are listed, first strengths and then weaknesses are identified and written.

2. We assigned a weight or coefficient to the listed factors. These coefficients are from zero (insignificant) to one (very important). The coefficient indicates the relative importance of a factor in terms of the success of the region in the relevant situation and the sum of these coefficients should be equal to one.
3. When rating the internal factors, the strengths are rated 3 and 4, and the weaknesses are rated 1 and 2. 3 means relative strength and 4 means strong strength. 2 means relative weakness and 1 indicates the basic weakness.
4. The coefficient of each factor is multiplied by the corresponding rank to obtain the final score.
5. The score of the internal factors is obtained from sum of the final scores belonging to each of the factors.

**Table 2: Internal Factors Evaluation Matrix (IFE)**

No.	S	Final score	Significance level	Rank
1	The existence of unique natural and ecological sceneries in and around the city (massive gardens, mountains, lakes, rivers, and etc.)	230	.072	2.3
2	Temporate weather in Shiraz and four seasons	192	.062	3.1
3	High human resources capacity in health sector	153	.053	2.9
4	The hospitality spirit of the residents	246	.077	3.2
5	Proximity to academic centers in most of the health tourism centers	308	.077	4
6	Increase the facilities suitable for health tourists	125	.043	2.9
7	Increasing health centers and hospitals	308	.081	3.8
8	The existence of the international airport of Shiraz as the second airport in the country for direct foreign flights	288	.072	4
	W			
1	Inability to create attraction and organize increased demand for health tourism creating value added	74	.067	1.1
2	Non-specialist and inadequate urban and health management	66	.033	2
3	Weakness in business and income generation in health tourism	170	.081	2.1
4	Some old health facilities	74	.053	1.4
5	Lack of communication with health care providers	79	.053	1.5
6	Poor advertising and information for introducing and attracting tourists in the field of health	73	.043	1.7
7	Absence of specialized management personnel in the field of health tourism	50	.024	2.1
8	Lack of Innovation in Health Tourism Programs	59	.033	1.8
9	Lack of space for medical travelers	161	.077	2.1
Total		2.65	1	

If the final score of the internal factors is 1 to 2.5, it indicates weakness and if it's 2.5 to 4, it means strength. Therefore, the score 2.65 in Table 4 means the relative strength at the given level.

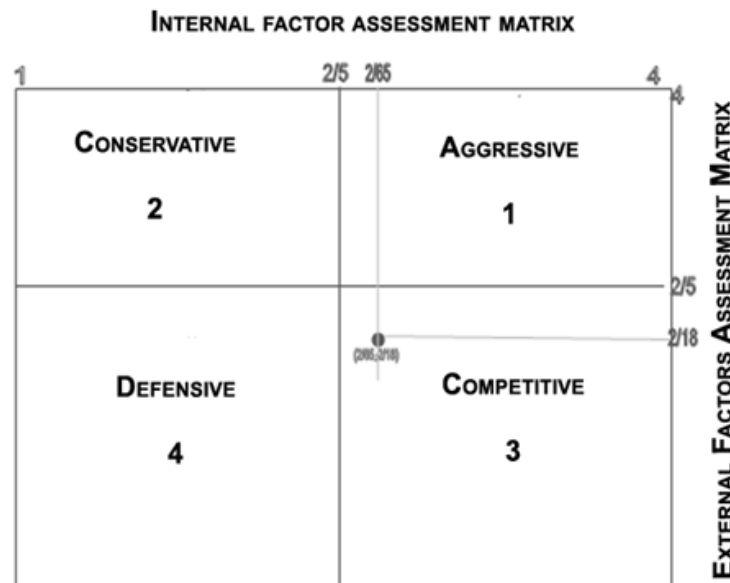


### Developed strategies

First, with numerous analytical meetings with managers, internal and external factors were identified and a questionnaire was prepared about opportunities, threats, strengths and weaknesses. Then, based on the data extracted from the questionnaires, the internal and external factors evaluation matrix was adjusted and strategies were developed using SWOT analysis matrix. Finally, using internal and external factor (IE) quadratic matrix, optimal strategies were selected and proposed among the given strategies.

**Table 3: Strategies developed by the experts**

No.	Strategy	S	O
SO1	Development of health centers	2, 3, 5 and 6	2 and 3
SO2	Development of health and treatment research institutes	3 and 5	2 and 9
	Planning for health tourists benefiting from other tourism opportunities in order to strengthen their morale in addition to medical facilities	2 and 6	3, 4 and 5
	Strategy	S	T
ST1	Strengthening and improving the facilities of roads and updating communication facilities	6 and 7	6
ST2	Development of treatment centers in accordance with the latest standards	6 and 7	2 and 6
ST3	Pay attention to the hidden needs of health tourists	1, 2, 3 and 4	2 and 4
	Strategy	W	T
WT1	Development of communication with other governmental, private and research organizations to create innovative ways to strengthen the management and planning of health tourism in Shiraz	3 and 9	7 and 8
WT2	Planning to create micro policies to support health tourism in Shiraz	2	1 and 8



**Figure 1: Internal and external factor (IE) quadratic matrix**

As shown in Table 4, the focus is on cost reduction at (3) or competition. This point indicates that the focus on cost reduction in terms of internal factors is good, but in terms of external factors, the situation is not good.

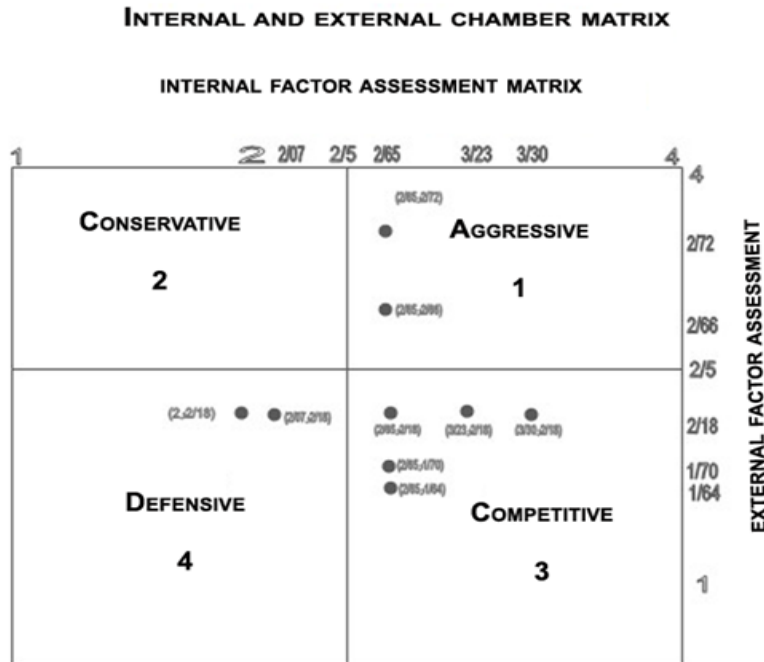


Figure 2: Internal and external factor (IE) quadratic matrix

As shown in Table 5, the points obtained from the minimum and maximum standard deviation of internal and external factors around the point (2.65 and 2.18) indicate that the concentration of points at (3) and its dispersion at (1) and (4), this suggests that, along with competitive strategies, aggressive and defensive strategies should also be developed and implemented.

### Suggestions

1. Establishing appropriate infrastructure in the country in order to implement as much as possible the plans related to health tourism
2. Using appropriate marketing programs to attract tourists in the field of health and treatment.
3. Use and planning in health tourism to increase employment in this sector.
4. Improving structures to attract foreign investment in health tourism.
5. Creation of educational programs in foreign exhibitions in order to introduce the capabilities of Health Tourism Department of Shiraz.
6. Optimal use of ecotourism in the inner regions of the city and province to attract more domestic and foreign tourists.
7. Establish coordination between different units and organizations to improve the health tourism space of Shiraz.
8. Creating complete security for foreign and domestic tourists in Shiraz.

9. Establishing and constructing various resting places such as hotels, restaurants, health centers, and etc. for the welfare of most tourists in this area.
10. Implementing the nationwide education plan among all community members and receiving feedback from the implementation of programs can be effective on improving the educational level of the people.

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