

**THESIS/
DIPLOMA THESIS SUMMARY**

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Challenges and Opportunities in Tourism
Development in Isfahan, Iran.

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Isfahan is a city in central Iran that is known for its historical and cultural heritage. It was once the capital of the Persian Empire and is home to many historical landmarks such as the Naghsh-e Jahan Square, the Imam Mosque, and the Chehel Sotoun Palace (Besalatpour et al, 2020). The city is also known for its traditional Persian architecture and its intricate tile work. As a result, tourism in Isfahan is a significant industry and a major source of revenue for the city. Visitors from around the world come to Isfahan to experience its rich history and culture, as well as to see its beautiful monuments and buildings. In recent years, the tourism industry in Isfahan has been growing, with an increasing number of tourists visiting the city each year.

- In 2016, the number of tourists increased to around 3.6 million.
- In 2017, it was approximately 4.3 million.
- In 2018, the number of tourists visiting Isfahan was around 5 million.
- In 2019, the city welcomed approximately 5.5 million tourists.

Hateftabar & Chapuis, (2020) state that tourism development in Isfahan has been a priority in recent years, as the city has a rich cultural and historical heritage that can attract a large number of tourists. The government and local authorities have been working to improve the infrastructure and services to support the growing tourism industry. One of the key areas of focus has been the development of accommodations, such as hotels and guesthouses, to meet the needs of tourists. Additionally, transportation infrastructure, such as airports and public transport, has been improved to make it easier for visitors to reach Isfahan and move around the city. Efforts have also been made to promote Isfahan as a tourist destination, through marketing and advertising campaigns, as well as by participating in international tourism fairs.

This research problem explores the effects of political sanctions on the tourism industry in Isfahan, which is a popular tourist destination in Iran. The study also examines how the sanctions affect the number of tourists visiting Isfahan, the types of tourists who are more likely to be deterred by the sanctions, and the economic implications of reduced tourism revenue for the local economy. Some of the implications that will be substantiated in the context of tourism in Isfahan include: Understanding the current level of tourism in Isfahan, Assessing the impact of tourism on the local economy, evaluating the quality of tourism infrastructure and services, examining the impact of tourism on the city's cultural heritage, examining the effectiveness of tourism marketing and promotion strategies.

The following were the specific research questions for the thesis:

Q1: To what extent do potential opportunities exist to aid tourism development in the city of Isfahan?

Q2: What challenges exist in Isfahan with regard to tourism development and what are the opportunities this area may benefit from within the said industry?

Q3: Is there evidence of necessary improvements to be made in the tourism sector in Isfahan?

The literature derived from international journal articles, books, reports and other relevant materials gives the author the conclusion that tourism development can have both positive and negative impacts on a destination, and careful planning and management is necessary to maximize the benefits and minimize the negative effects.

Isfahan is a city in Iran with a rich cultural heritage and many historical and architectural sites, making it a popular tourist destination. The city has been undergoing a process of tourism development in recent years, with the construction of new hotels, restaurants, and other tourism infrastructure. This can bring economic benefits to the city and its residents, such as increased job opportunities and income. However, it can also lead to overcrowding, strain on local resources, and damage to the city's cultural heritage the literature was reviewed through the use of SWOT and PESTEL analyses of the city's tourism sector.

Finally, Both SWOT and PESTLE analyses are useful tools for identifying the internal and external factors that may impact the success of tourism development in Isfahan, and help to inform decision-making and planning for sustainable and responsible tourism in the city. Overall, Isfahan as a tourist destination has many positive aspects to offer, but it is also important to consider how to balance the benefits and drawbacks of tourism development in order to ensure sustainable and responsible tourism in the city.

This study followed an inductive research approach. Inductive research is a method of inquiry that begins with specific observations and uses these observations to formulate a general theory or recommendations. This study adopted a qualitative research choice in the form of interviews that was conducted through the guidance of an inclusion criteria. This criteria is 8 professionals across the spectrum of the tourism sector in Esfahan. Different educational backgrounds of these professionals is also part of the inclusion criteria in such that not only the highly educated people are interviewed. It will comprise of people who possess primary, secondary school as well as tertiary qualifications. The respondents comprise of a restaurant supervisor, chef, food and beverage director tour leader, tour guide event manager and a marketing manager.

The data was collected in the form of words, through the semi structure interview questions that were sent via mail to the respondents by way of Google form. Once data was collected, it was analyzed using content analysis and discourse analysis.

In conclusion, the data gathered from the eight respondents provided a comprehensive view of the opportunities and challenges in tourism development in Isfahan, Iran. Despite the rich history and cultural heritage of Isfahan, the tourism sector is facing a number of challenges that need to be addressed to unlock its full potential. The key challenges identified in the study include mandatory hijab, prohibition of alcohol, lack of clubs and discos, limited internet, safety concerns, and the absence of effective management. These issues have been found to be significant barriers to attracting more tourists to the city, as they limit the freedom and enjoyment of tourists.

One of the major opportunities for tourism development in Isfahan identified in the study is the potential for generating significant income for the local economy. If the challenges facing the tourism industry in Isfahan are addressed, the city could attract more tourists, which would create job opportunities, increase revenue, and promote economic growth. Additionally, Isfahan could benefit from an increase in the number of hotels and restaurants, which would provide more job opportunities for the local population.

Another opportunity for tourism development in Isfahan is the city's rich cultural heritage, including historical buildings and monuments such as Naqsh-e Jahan Square and Imam Mosque. Tourists can also visit traditional bazaars and sample local delicacies. The respondents highlighted the need for guided tours and packages to be available for tourists to explore the city's attractions, and the availability of high-quality tourism information.

The study also identified some cultural and religious customs that tourists should be aware of when visiting Isfahan, including the necessity of modest dress, Islamic laws, and the call to prayer, known as azan. Therefore, it is essential to educate tourists about these customs to ensure they have an enjoyable and respectful experience.

This dissertation ultimately makes the following recommendations:

1. Address the challenges: The challenges identified in the chats such as mandatory hijab, prohibition of alcohol, lack of clubs and discos, and limited internet access should be addressed to make Isfahan more appealing to tourists.

2. Promote safety and freedom: Tourists need to feel safe and have the freedom to explore the city. Measures should be taken to ensure their safety and promote freedom of movement.
3. Develop infrastructure: Isfahan needs to develop its infrastructure to accommodate more tourists. This includes more hotels and restaurants to provide jobs for locals and increase the city's capacity to host tourists.
4. Create guided tours and packages: Tourists need more information about Isfahan and what it has to offer. Tour packages and guided tours should be created to provide visitors with a more organized and informative experience.
5. Improve accessibility: Improving accessibility to Isfahan would make it more attractive to tourists. This includes better transportation options such as more flights and improved road networks.
6. Promote cultural and religious customs: Tourists should be informed about the cultural and religious customs of Isfahan to ensure they are respectful and do not offend the locals.
7. Provide quality tourism information: The availability of quality tourism information is essential to attract more tourists. Efforts should be made to improve the quality and accessibility of tourism information.
8. Encourage investment: The government should encourage investment in Isfahan's tourism sector to improve its infrastructure and promote its attractions. This would help to create jobs and boost the economy.
9. Increase marketing efforts: Isfahan needs to be marketed more effectively to attract tourists. This includes online marketing, social media campaigns, and traditional marketing efforts.
10. Collaborate with other stakeholders: The government, private sector, and other stakeholders need to collaborate to promote tourism in Isfahan. This would help to create a more cohesive strategy for the development of tourism in the city.