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Prospects of mountain ecotourism in Oman: the example of As Sawjarah on Al Jabal al Akhdar

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Abstract

The continued existence of Oman's unique oasis settlements depends on the productivity of their lush crop fields and orchards. In the course of the country's modernisation process, the more remote of these settlements are rapidly abandoned, if poor infrastructural conditions and limited opportunities for income generation prevail. Given its potential to reconcile the cultural values and needs of oasis residents with the interests of national and international tourists, ecotourism may offer opportunities to slow down the widespread decline of Oman's traditional oasis agriculture and transform it into an asset, which offers additional income opportunities. This approach to tourism is in contrast to the mainstream of the country's current development policy, which increasingly favours beach hotels and easy access to remote areas through day trips on paved, well-illuminated roads. Using the example of a village in the northern Jabal al Akhdar range, this study discusses how ecotourism may become an avenue to preserve Omani mountain oases as culturally unique, agro-pastoral livelihood systems, which, for millennia, have effectively coped with a fragile, hyper-arid environment.

Keywords: cultural heritage; low intensity tourism; rural development

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