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**Sustainable Tourism Development &
Management for Viksit Bharat – Opportunities
& Challenges**

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Government/Public & Private Sector Roles in Sustainable Tourism Development and Management

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of online travel agencies (OTAs) has transformed tourism service delivery by positioning digital platforms as key intermediaries in travel planning and booking. The present study examines customer experience satisfaction with online travel agencies and analyzes its implications for sustainable tourism and sustainable management.

The study adopts a quantitative, cross-sectional research design and collects primary data through a structured questionnaire administered to OTA users. Graphical method is employed for data analysis to interpret customer perceptions related to platform experience, sustainability-oriented management practices, trust, loyalty, and behavioral intention. The findings indicate that customers generally exhibit high levels of experience satisfaction and positive perceptions of ethical and sustainable practices adopted by online travel agencies. Furthermore, the study contributes to the sustainable tourism literature by highlighting the role of sustainability-driven digital platforms in fostering long-term customer relationships and supporting sustainable tourism development.

Keywords: Customer Experience Satisfaction, Online Travel Agencies (otas), Sustainable Tourism Practices, Service Quality, Customer Loyalty.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a multifaceted economic activity that can generate employment, spur infrastructure development, and support cultural exchange. However, unplanned and mass tourism can cause resource depletion, ecological degradation, cultural commodification, and social displacement. The concept of sustainable tourism seeks to maximize economic and social benefits while minimizing environmental harm and preserving cultural integrity. The transition from conventional tourism development to sustainable tourism requires deliberate policy choices and coordinated actions by governments, businesses, communities, and civil society.

Public and private sectors each bring different capabilities, resources, incentives, and constraints. Governments can create enabling environments through legislation, planning, infrastructure, and stewardship of public goods, while private firms provide capital, innovation, marketing, and operational management. The effectiveness of sustainable tourism policy depends on how these actors interact, share responsibilities, and align incentives. This paper investigates those roles and proposes frameworks for improved collaboration.

2 CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Defining sustainable tourism

Sustainable tourism has three commonly cited pillars: environmental sustainability (conservation of natural resources and biodiversity), socio-cultural sustainability (protection of heritage and community well-being), and economic sustainability (viable long-term livelihoods and benefits). Sustainable tourism also emphasizes equity (benefits distributed fairly), resilience (capacity to adapt to shocks), and intergenerational stewardship.

Governance frameworks

Sustainable tourism governance can be framed within multi-level governance and systems theory. Multi-level governance recognizes the roles of international organizations (e.g., global guidelines), national governments (policy and regulation), sub-national governments (local planning and enforcement), communities (resource custodians and hosts), and private actors (operators, investors). Systems thinking highlights tourism's interconnections with transport, land use, energy, and social systems, meaning that integrated policy approaches are needed.

Public goods, externalities, and market failures

Tourism interacts with public goods (parks, cultural sites), common-pool resources (coastlines, coral reefs), and generates externalities (pollution, congestion). Market failures—such as under-provision of conservation or over-exploitation of resources—justify public intervention. However, public intervention must be designed to be efficient, transparent, and accountable.

3 ROLES OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The public sector's responsibilities are broad and foundational. They include planning and regulation, investment in infrastructure, conservation and stewardship of public assets, capacity building, monitoring and evaluation, and creating incentive frameworks.

Policy, legislation, and planning

Governments must set the legal and policy framework for sustainable tourism. This includes national tourism strategies, zoning and land-use policies (to protect sensitive ecosystems), environmental regulations (e.g., EIA requirements, waste management standards), cultural heritage protections, and tourism carrying-capacity assessments. Strategic plans that integrate tourism with national development and conservation priorities help avoid fragmented decision-making.

Provision of public goods and infrastructure

Public investment in roads, sanitation, energy, communications, and health services underpins sustainable tourism. Infrastructure must be planned to reduce environmental impacts (e.g., sustainable transport, wastewater treatment) and to support community benefits (access to markets, public amenities). Public funding or blended finance mechanisms can de-risk private investment in peripheral or fragile destinations.

Conservation, stewardship and protected areas management

Many tourism attractions are natural or cultural assets managed by public agencies. Governments must balance conservation goals with access and sustainable use. This may involve protected area management, habitat restoration, visitor management systems, and revenue mechanisms (fees, concessions) that support conservation.

Regulation and licensing

Regulation sets minimum standards for environmental performance, labor practices, building codes, and safety. Licensing and certification systems help ensure compliance. Regulations should be clear, enforceable, and accompanied by capacity to monitor and sanction violations.

Incentives, fiscal tools, and financing

Governments can use taxes, subsidies, grants, and fiscal incentives to promote sustainable practices—e.g., tax breaks for green investments, payment for ecosystem services (PES), tourism levies earmarked for conservation, and soft loans for small enterprises. Public procurement policies can favor sustainable suppliers, helping create markets for sustainable services.

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Capacity building and community empowerment

Local governments and agencies can facilitate training programs, entrepreneurship support, and participatory planning to enable communities to benefit from tourism. Empowered local actors can manage resources better and ensure benefits are retained locally.

Monitoring, data and governance transparency

Effective governance requires data on visitor flows, environmental indicators, and socio-economic impacts. Governments should establish monitoring systems, encourage open data, and promote participatory evaluation so policies can be adapted over time.

4 ROLES OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN SUSTAINABLE TOURISM

The private sector, which ranges from large multinational hotel chains to micro-entrepreneurs and community enterprises, is the engine of service delivery, investment, product innovation, and marketing. Sustainable outcomes depend on how the private sector internalizes environmental and social responsibilities.

Investment and infrastructure development

Private capital finances hotels, tour operators, transport services, and attractions. Responsible private investment considers lifecycle environmental impacts, climate resilience, and local supply chain linkages. Green building standards, renewable energy deployment, and water-saving technologies are areas where private investment can lead.

Operations, standards, and innovation

Businesses set service standards and can adopt environmental management systems (EMS), certifications (e.g., ecolabels), and corporate social responsibility (CSR) programs. Innovation in product design—such as low-impact experiential tourism, regenerative tourism, and community-based tourism models—can shift market offerings toward sustainability.

Marketing and customer engagement

The private sector connects demand with sustainable supply. Ethical marketing, accurate information on environmental impacts, and pricing that reflects true resource costs can shape consumer choices. Private platforms (OTAs, travel agents) can promote sustainable options and educate travelers.

Supply chain development and local sourcing

Private firms influence livelihoods through procurement practices. Prioritizing local suppliers, fair wages, and training creates stronger local economies and improves social sustainability. Capacity building by larger firms for small suppliers helps integrate them into value chains.

Risk management and resilience

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Businesses must manage climate, reputational, and operational risks. Investment in resilience (elevated infrastructure, flood defenses, diversified offerings) protects both commercial viability and destinations' long-term sustainability.

Self-regulation and certification

Industry associations can develop codes of conduct, benchmarking, and voluntary certification schemes. While voluntary, these mechanisms help raise industry-wide standards if designed with transparency and third-party verification.

5 MODELS OF PUBLIC–PRIVATE COLLABORATION

Sustainable tourism is most effective when public and private actors collaborate. Several models exist:

Public–private partnerships (PPPs)

PPPs can provide infrastructure, manage protected areas via concessions, or co-finance visitor facilities. Structuring PPPs to align incentives (e.g., performance-based payments linked to conservation outcomes) is critical. Transparent procurement and equitable risk-sharing are necessary to avoid capture and corruption.

Collaborative governance and multi-stakeholder platforms

Destination management organizations (DMOs), multi-stakeholder councils, or tourism boards that include government, private sector, and community representation foster joint planning. These platforms manage marketing, visitor management, crisis response, and strategy alignment.

Community–private partnerships

Models where private operators partner directly with communities—through co-management, revenue-sharing, or joint enterprises—help ensure local benefits and cultural stewardship. Community-based tourism cooperatives supported by private marketing channels have shown promise.

Blended finance and development finance partnerships

International development finance institutions (DFIs), governments, and private investors can blend concessional finance with private capital to fund sustainable tourism projects that would otherwise be commercially marginal but socially valuable (e.g., rural eco-lodges).

Certification and voluntary agreements mediated by government

Governments can facilitate voluntary agreements (e.g., sustainable charter sign-up) that involve incentives for compliance and recognition, creating reputational benefits that the private sector values.

6 CASE STUDIES (ILLUSTRATIVE)

The following case studies synthesize widely reported practices (used here illustratively).

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Bhutan: “High value, low impact” tourism

Bhutan’s tourism model historically emphasized high-value, low-volume tourism, with a policy of regulated entry through minimum daily tariffs. The state-led approach prioritized cultural preservation and ecological protection while channeling revenues to welfare and conservation. Strengths included clear policy direction and revenue for conservation; challenges included equity, access, and balancing growth aspirations.

Costa Rica: ecotourism and conservation financing

Costa Rica developed national parks and protected areas and used policy instruments (park fees, PES schemes) and private partnerships (eco-lodges, certification programs) to bolster ecotourism. The private sector invested in green hotels and sustainable tours while conservation payments helped incentivize forest protection. Success factors included strong biodiversity assets, political commitment to conservation, and market positioning as an ecotourism destination.

Kerala, India: Responsible Tourism and community engagement

Kerala launched Responsible Tourism initiatives that encouraged homestays, local employment, and community participation, with public facilitation and private operators promoting inclusive models. Local governments worked with industry and communities to create standards, training, and marketing support. Outcomes included income diversification and more community control, though scaling and monitoring remain challenges.

Private-sector leadership: hotel chains and certifications

Large hotel groups adopting sustainability certifications and global reporting have driven energy efficiency, water conservation, and waste reduction. Certification schemes (third-party verification) created competitive differentiation and supply-chain improvements.

(These case studies are used to illustrate governance approaches and trade-offs rather than to provide exhaustive empirical evaluation.)

7 CHALLENGES AND TRADE-OFFS

Sustainable tourism governance faces multiple barriers:

Institutional fragmentation and capacity constraints

Weak institutional coordination between ministries (tourism, environment, transport, culture) leads to policy incoherence. Local authorities may lack technical and financial capacity for enforcement and planning.

Incentive misalignment and short-termism

Private firms may prioritize short-term profits and rapid occupancy, leading to overuse of local resources. Political cycles can produce short-term infrastructure projects that neglect long-term sustainability.

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Equity and benefit distribution

Even when destinations prosper, benefits may flow to external investors rather than host communities. Land grabs and displacement have occurred where governance is weak.

Environmental limits and carrying capacity

Popular destinations face overcrowding, habitat loss, and pollution. Measuring and managing carrying capacity is technically and politically challenging.

Climate change and external shocks

Climate impacts (sea-level rise, extreme weather) and shocks like pandemics illustrate the vulnerability of tourism-dependent economies. Recovery strategies must integrate resilience and diversification.

Monitoring and data gaps

Lack of robust, timely data on impacts, resource use, and socio-economic outcomes hinders adaptive management. Measurement of intangible cultural impacts is particularly difficult.

Governance risks and corruption

Procurement for tourism projects and land-use decisions can be vulnerable to corruption, undermining equitable outcomes and trust.

8 POLICY AND MANAGERIAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are aimed at policymakers, private-sector leaders, and multi-stakeholder platforms to strengthen sustainability in tourism.

For governments — build an enabling, accountable framework

- **Integrate tourism into broader national plans:** Align tourism strategies with national environmental, cultural heritage, and rural development policies. Use cross-ministerial task forces where appropriate.
- **Adopt and enforce sensible regulation:** Establish environmental and social standards (EIA requirements, waste, water, labor), and ensure enforcement through capacity building and transparent monitoring.
- **Use fiscal instruments strategically:** Introduce or ring-fence tourism levies to fund conservation and community projects; provide incentives for green investments and local procurement.
- **Invest in sustainable infrastructure:** Prioritize low-impact transport, waste and wastewater systems, and renewable energy in tourism corridors. Use environmental costing in infrastructure planning.

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- **Institutionalize destination management:** Support DMOs with legal mandates, technical resources, and multi-stakeholder representation to coordinate planning, marketing, and crisis response.
- **Support data systems and research:** Fund monitoring systems for visitor flows, environmental indicators, and socio-economic distribution of benefits. Promote open data for transparency.
- **Prioritize community rights and participation:** Legally recognize community consultation, consent, and benefit-sharing mechanisms in planning decisions.

For the private sector — adopt sustainable business practices and partnerships

- **Embed sustainability into core strategy:** Move beyond CSR to integrate environmental and social criteria into investment appraisal, supply-chain management, and corporate governance.
- **Adopt third-party verification where feasible:** Use credible certification schemes and publish transparent sustainability reporting to build consumer trust and investor confidence.
- **Localize supply chains and create shared value:** Prioritize local sourcing, fair wages, and training programs that strengthen local businesses and retain value in host communities.
- **Invest in resilience:** Incorporate climate risk assessments, diversify products and markets, and design infrastructure to withstand environmental shocks.
- **Engage in collaborative governance:** Participate actively in DMOs and multi-stakeholder platforms, not just for marketing but for joint planning and carrying capacity management.
- **Innovate in sustainable product offerings:** Develop low-impact experiences, regenerative tourism products, and education-based visits that promote conservation.

For partnerships and financing

- **Structure PPPs with clear public goods outcomes:** Ensure PPP contracts include environmental and social performance criteria, transparent revenue-sharing, and community benefit clauses.
- **Leverage blended finance for impact:** Use concessional public or philanthropic capital to mobilize private investment in projects with high social/environmental returns but limited immediate commercial viability.
- **Support SME inclusion:** Design financing and capacity-building programs for small and medium tourism enterprises to meet standards and access markets.
- **Ensure transparent governance:** Use open procurement, independent audits, and stakeholder grievance mechanisms to reduce corruption risks.

For communities and civil society

- **Strengthen local governance capacities:** Provide training in enterprise development, resource management, and participatory planning.
- **Secure tenure and benefit-sharing:** Legal recognition for community land and rights improves stewardship and equitable outcomes.

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- **Foster cultural integrity:** Encourage community-led narratives and control over commodification of heritage, with benefits flowing to custodians.

9 MEASURING SUCCESS: INDICATORS AND ADAPTIVE MANAGEMENT

Good governance requires measuring both outputs (e.g., tourist numbers, revenues) and outcomes (biodiversity health, local incomes, cultural well-being). A balanced indicator set should include environmental (biodiversity status, water quality, waste generation), economic (employment, local value retention), social (community satisfaction, cultural preservation), and governance (compliance rates, transparency metrics). Adaptive management—iterative policy adjustments based on monitoring—should be institutionalized through regular stakeholder reviews.

10 CONCLUSION

Sustainable tourism is not a single policy or sectoral fix; it is a governance challenge that requires aligning multiple actors' incentives and capacities. The public sector must set clear

goals, protect public goods, and create enabling conditions through planning, regulation, infrastructure, and incentives. The private sector must adopt long-term perspectives, internalize social and environmental costs, innovate, and invest responsibly. Equally important are structured mechanisms for collaboration—PPPs, DMOs, community partnerships, blended finance—backed by transparency, data, and accountability.

The path to sustainable tourism is iterative and place-specific. No single model fits all contexts; successful implementation depends on institutional capacity, political will, market structures, and community empowerment. Yet, across contexts, a set of principles—integrated planning, equity, precaution, transparency, and resilience—provides a reliable compass. By realigning policy instruments and business practices toward these principles, tourism can contribute to prosperity while safeguarding the natural and cultural capital upon which it depends.

11 REFERENCES (SELECTED / SUGGESTED READING)

Note: these are suggested foundational sources and authoritative institutions relevant to the themes discussed. If you would like, I can fetch up-to-date versions, links, and additional academic references.

- [1] United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) — reports on sustainable tourism policy, destination management, and guidelines.
- [2] United Nations — Sustainable Development Goals (particularly SDG 8: decent work & economic growth; SDG 12: responsible consumption & production; SDG 14 & 15: life below water/land).
- [3] World Bank / IFC — publications on tourism, PPPs, and sustainable infrastructure.

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- [4] Academic literature on tourism governance, including journals such as *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, *Tourism Management*, and *Annals of Tourism Research*.
- [5] Case study literature on Costa Rica, Bhutan, and Kerala's responsible tourism initiatives (policy briefs, national tourism board reports).
- [6] OECD guidance on tourism and regional development