

Caravanserai as a Tourism Destination: Case Study in Iran and Türkiye

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Abstract

Caravanserais were constructed as rest stops and shelters, developed by the government free of charge for merchants, travellers, and pilgrims to rest before continuing their journeys. In addition to serving as stopovers, caravanserais were seen as potential tourism destinations that provided opportunities to explore their history and culture more closely. This study was conducted to examine caravanserais that became tourism destinations in Türkiye and Iran, and to identify the factors that formed significant links between caravanserais and tourism. The study adopted a qualitative research design using descriptive methods. Research topics and aspects were identified through literature review, research objectives, findings, and scope of discussion. Article sampling was carried out in two stages: first, by searching for articles using keywords such as “caravanserai,” “caravanserai and tourism,” and “UNESCO recognition”; second, by reviewing the reference lists at the end of the initially selected articles. Data analysis was conducted in stages, beginning with explicit content analysis followed by implicit content analysis. The findings showed that caravanserais gradually evolved into tourism destinations, linked to two main factors: the facilities provided, which attracted tourists, and UNESCO World Heritage recognition.

Keywords: Caravanserai, tourism, Islamic tourism, Islamic civilisation

Introduction

Caravanserais served as rest stops for sailors, merchants, travellers, and pilgrims to recuperate and store their goods.¹ Before the 19th century, they emerged as the primary rest areas. *National Geographic*² defined a caravanserai as a roadside inn along major trade routes such as the Silk Road, functioning as a centre for the exchange of goods, ideas, and cultures. According to the UNESCO Silk Road Programme, a caravanserai was defined as “large guest houses or hostels designed to welcome travelling merchants and their caravans”.³

Other terms for caravanserai included *funduq*, *khān*, *han*, *ribāṭ*, and *wakāla*.⁴ The term ‘caravanserai’ itself combined ‘caravan’ (a group of travellers) and ‘serai’ (palace),⁵ thus likening it to a palace for travelling groups, especially those involved in trade expeditions, to rest and enjoy the available services and facilities. Essentially, caravanserais were developed with two main functions: to provide a safe place for travellers to rest and to house markets where merchants could sell and trade their goods.⁶

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¹ Kevin D. O’Gorman and Richard C. Prentice, “Iranian Hospitality: From Caravanserai to Bazaar to Reporting Symbolic Experience,” *Paper presented at EuroCHRIE 2008 Congress*, (Dubai, University of Strathclyde, October 11-14, 2008); Jagjeet Lally, “The Pattern of Trade in Seventeenth-Century Mughal India: Towards an Economic Explanation,” *Economic History Working Paper No.120/09*, (Department of Economic History, London School of Economics, May 2009); Sadik Ridvan Karluk and Suleyman Cem Karaman, “Bridging Civilizations from Asia to Europe: The silk road,” *Chinese Business Review* 13, no. 12 (2014): 730-739; Willem Floor, “Hotels in Iran, 1870-1940,” *Studia Iranica* 44, no. 2 (2015): 277-314; John Swarbrooke, *The Meaning of Luxury in Tourism, Hospitality and Events* (Goodfellow Publishers Ltd, 2018).

² National Geographic, “Caravanserai,” *National Geographic Encyclopedia Entry*, last modified May 19, 2022, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/caravanserai/>.

³ UNESCO, “Caravanserais: Cross-roads of Commerce and Culture Along the Silk Roads,” accessed Mac 30, 2022, <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/content/caravanserais-cross-roads-commerce-and-culture-along-silk-roads>.

⁴ Jonathan M. Bloom and Sheila S. Blair, eds. *The Grove Encyclopedia of Islamic Art & Architecture* (Oxford University Press on Demand, 2009), 353.

⁵ Andrew Petersen, *Dictionary of Islamic Architecture* (Routledge, 1996), 51; H. M. Yilmaz, M. Yakar, and F. Yildiz. “Documentation of Historical Caravansaries by Digital Close-Range Photogrammetry,” *Automation in Construction* 17, no. 4 (2008): 489-498; Birgit Krawietz and Florian Riedler, eds. *The Heritage of Edirne in Ottoman and Turkish Times: Continuities, Disruptions and Reconnections*. (Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2019).

⁶ National Geographic, “Where Worlds and Ideas Connect: The Caravanserai,” last modified May 19, 2022, <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/where-worlds-and-ideas-connect-caravanserai/>.

These facilities were provided free of charge by the government, allowing merchants, travellers, and pilgrims to benefit from them. According to O'Gorman,⁷ caravanserais were offered free for three days, whereas Della⁸ stated that various parties could use caravanserai facilities free for up to a year. Typically, the architecture of caravanserais was rectangular, with a spacious courtyard and various amenities such as bedrooms, stables, mosques, shops, warehouses, and storage rooms.

Some modern caravanserais also included pharmacies and repair shops for trading vehicles, ensuring that travellers had all necessary facilities at hand.⁹ Caravanserais in Iran were built centuries ago for the comfort and convenience of merchants and travellers. Historians considered Iran as the birthplace of caravanserai construction, with origins tracing back to the Achaemenid era (559 BC–331 BC).¹⁰

During the Safavid era, Shah Abbas I (1571–1629) ordered the construction of a network of caravanserais across the country.¹¹ Besides Iran, Türkiye also boasted a significant number of caravanserais, many of which had been designated UNESCO World Heritage Sites. According to Saoud,¹² leaders who encouraged caravanserai construction greatly increased their numbers in Türkiye, with Sultan Han, for instance, being among the most impressive examples.

Today, many caravanserais in Iran and Türkiye remained in use as a result of various efforts and initiatives undertaken by the government to upgrade and preserve them, with the aim of attracting tourists while simultaneously maintaining their historical value.

Therefore, this study was conducted to achieve two objectives: the first was to examine caravanserais that became tourism destinations in Türkiye and Iran, and the second was to analyse the factors that formed significant links between caravanserais and tourism, namely the facilities provided which served as attractions for tourists, and UNESCO recognition as World Heritage Sites.

Caravanserais as Tourism Destinations in Türkiye and Iran

The findings of this study indicated that caravanserais in Türkiye and Iran did not merely serve as stopovers for merchants and travellers. On the contrary, they also underwent conservation processes and subsequently developed into tourism destinations.

Among the caravanserais that had been conserved and turned into tourist attractions were Mahperi Hatun Caravanserai, Orkney Caravanserai, Sultan Han Caravanserai, Saruhan Caravanserai, Alay Han Caravanserai, Ağzikara Han Caravanserai, Zazadin Han Caravanserai, Akhan Caravanserai, Sa'd al-Saltaneh Caravanserai, Madar Shah Caravanserai, Maranjab Caravanserai, and Zeinodin Caravanserai. These findings were supported by numerous previous studies such as those by Hashemi et al.,¹³ the Islamic Republic of Iran's Presentation on "Tourism Product Development",¹⁴ Erdem,¹⁵ Ghasemi and

⁷ Kevin D. O'Gorman, "Origins of the Commercial Hospitality Industry: From the Fanciful to Factual," *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management* 21, no. 7 (2009): 777-790.

⁸ Pietro Della Valle, *Della Valle's Travelogue*, trans. Shoauddin Shafa. Vol. 1 (Ghatre, 2005), 107-108.

⁹ Eleanor Sims, "Trade and Travel: Markets and Caravanserais," In *Architecture of the Islamic world: Its History and Social Meaning: with a Complete Survey of Key Monuments and 758 Illustrations, 112 in Colour*, ed. George Michell and Ernst J. Grube (Thames and Hudson, 1996), 102.

¹⁰ Mehdi Basouli and Saeedeh Derakhsh, "An Investigating of the Functions of Iranian Caravanserais with a Landscape Approach," *MANZAR, The Scientific Journal of landscape* 13, no. 54 (2021): 28-37.

¹¹ Anon., "Maranjab Caravanserai One Step Closer to UNESCO Status," *Tehran Times*, January 2, 2021, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/456480/Maranjab-caravanserai-one-step-closer-to-UNESCO-status>.

¹² Rabah Saoud, "Muslim Architecture under Ottoman Patronage (1326-1924)," *FSTC Limited, Manchester* (July 2004): 1-26.

¹³ Soroush Hashemi, Mohammad Hassan Talebian and Eskandar Mokhtari Taleqni, "Determining the Position of Ahovan Caravansary in Silk Road Route," *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research* 2, no. 2 (2012): 1479-1489.

¹⁴ *Islamic Republic of Iran's Presentation on "Tourism Product Development"*, Slaid, (Iranian Cultural Heritage, Handicraft and Tourism Organization, 2013).

¹⁵ Büşra Erdem, "Contribution of the Tourism on Economy: Tokat Sample," *Journal of International Management Educational and Economics Perspectives* 3, no. 1 (2015): 29-38

Gholamalizadeh,¹⁶ Yazarlou,¹⁷ Khaleh et al.,¹⁸ Zeinizadeh,¹⁹ Bakhtiari and Allahyari,²⁰ Medina,²¹ Ahunbay,²² and Dabanlı and Şimşek.²³ Bakhtiari and Allahyari's²⁴ study also emphasised that the uniqueness of caravanserais architecture was a main factor in attracting tourists.

Several examples of caravanserais renowned for their architectural beauty included Madar Shah Caravanserais, Maranjab Caravanserais, Abbasi Caravanserais, Koozpa Caravanserais, and Aminabad Caravanserais. In addition, Siti Nurain et al.²⁵ observed that the uniqueness of the architecture of historic buildings and their remarkable historical backgrounds made a location attractive to tourists. The study by Roziah Sidik et al.²⁶ also supported this argument by stating that the caravanserais concept could be used to promote art, cultural, and national heritage tourism in Malaysia. This concept was also suitable for enhancing tourist experience and satisfaction, in line with the National Tourism Policy 2020–2030. Therefore, caravanserais could be utilised as tourist attractions that enrich the visitor experience and contribute to the development of the national tourism sector.

In addition, the conservation of caravanserais was closely linked to the concept of sustainable tourism development in ensuring the continuity of the historical, architectural, and cultural values present in their original structures so that they could benefit future generations. According to Abdul Ghani and Aziah,²⁷ the concept of sustainable tourism development had been adopted in all types of economic activities, including the tourism sector. This concept began to be highlighted since the Brundtland Commission, also known as the “World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)” in 1983. The Brundtland Report, entitled “Our Common Future” and published in 1987, became the main reference in discussions on sustainable development.

In general, sustainable tourism refers to the conservation of natural, cultural, and other tourism resources to ensure that tourism destinations remain viable in the future and provide benefits to present-day communities. This aligns with the main purpose of caravanserais conservation, which is not only to protect historical heritage but also to revive its function in the modern context as a tourism attraction that generates economic returns for the country. As stated by Murphy,²⁸ sustainable tourism is a form of tourism activity that continuously conserves, provides various facilities at tourist sites, and modernises the social structure of those areas. Such efforts can, in turn, contribute to national income and improve the standard of living for local communities.

Therefore, the conservation of caravanserais carried out in Türkiye and Iran could serve as a reference in formulating sustainable tourism development strategies in other countries with similar historical heritage. As part of sustainable tourism development initiatives, caravanserais that underwent conservation processes have now been upgraded into hotels, museums, art galleries, arcades,

¹⁶ Farid Ghasemi and Hamzeh Gholamalizadeh, “The Principles of Designing the “Silk Road Hotel-Faculty” Inspired by the Usage of Caravanserais in this International Road,” *European Online Journal of Natural and Social Sciences: Proceedings* 4, no. 3 (s) (2015): 969-987

¹⁷ Mohaddese Yazarlou, “Thinking Relatively on Nature Concept with Creating” Modern Tourism Space” At Mazandaran through Tourism Approach,” *Current World Environment* 10, no. 1 (2015): 967-978.

¹⁸ Esmael Nasiri Hende Khaleh, Faramarz Hadavi and Mahdi Zamani, “Identification of the Relationship between Tourism Industry Development and Economic Growth of Zanjan Province,” *The Scientific-Research Quarterly Journal of Urban Economics and Management* 4, no. 3 (2016): 75-93.

¹⁹ Habib Zeinizadeh, “*Urban Tourism in Tabriz, Iran: An Analysis of the Domestic Tourism Market*” (PhD diss., University of Malaya, 2017).

²⁰ Somayeh Bakhtiari and Fereydoun Allahyari, “Investigation and Analysis of the Experience of Isfahan in the Re-Functionalization of Caravanserais as Tourist Facilities,” *The Journal of Social Science Institute, (IWACT)* 18 Special Issue (2018): 23-44.

²¹ Lucia Medina, “*Orkney Caravanserais: Tourism and the Everyday*,” in *Scott Sutherland Yearbook 2018*, ed. Calcum Dalgetty, Stuart Dilley, Sophie Houston, Alexandra Leask, Fiona Logie, Neil Mair, Katie Rice, and Danny Whitelaw (The Robert Gordon University, 2018), 60-63.

²² Zeynep Ahunbay, “Giving New Life to Historic Buildings.” In *International Civil Engineering and Architecture Conference*, (Karadeniz Technology University, Trabzon, Türkiye, 17-20 July 2019): 1-11.

²³ Ömer Dabanlı and Muradiye Şimşek, “Ancient Witnesses of the Silk Road: The Cultural Tourism Potential of Historical Caravanserais in Anatolia.” *Scientific Culture* 9, no. 1 (2023): 89-106.

²⁴ Bakhtiari and Allahyari, “Investigation and Analysis of the Experience,” 27.

²⁵ Siti Nurain Marzuki, Agnes Amoi Anak Sudin, Dorathy Sebi Anak Nelson Atang, Aini Atiqah Nor Arsat, Nurul Liyana Zainal Abidin, Nurul Fadilah Mohd Nawi, and Er, A. C. “Tarikan Pelancongan Berasaskan Warisan Di Kuala Lumpur,” *e-BANGI Journal* 18, no. 2 (2021): 243-261.

²⁶ Roziah Sidik Mat Sidek, Aina Zafirah Samsudin, Ermy Azziaty Rozali, Hanif Md Lateh, Dalbir Singh Valbir Singh, and Ammalina Dalillah Mohd Isa. “Symbiosis between Caravanserais in Islamic Civilisation and Tourism in Modern Era: A Reference to Malaysia,” *Journal of Al-Tamaddun* 18, no. 2 (2023): 1-12.

²⁷ Abdul Ghani Abdullah and Aziah Ismail, “Kesediaan Memperkasa Pendidikan Pembangunan Lestari Oleh Pengurus Pendidikan Sekolah: Satu Kajian kes,” *Jurnal Pengurusan dan Kepimpinan Pendidikan* 17, no.1 (2007): 1-15.

²⁸ Peter Murphy, *Tourism: A community approach (RLE Tourism)*, (Routledge, 2013).

entertainment centres, libraries, and restaurants.²⁹ This development is in line with Kiani's³⁰ view that the conservation of caravanserais is intended for tourism and hospitality purposes. Among the caravanserais that have been upgraded into hotels are Madar Shah Caravanserai, Dehnamak Caravanserai, Maranjab Caravanserai, Moshir Caravanserai, Kuhpa Caravanserai, Zeinodin Caravanserai, and Rustem Pasha Caravanserai. Meanwhile, the caravanserai that has been upgraded into an entertainment centre is Şarapsa Han Caravanserai.

The conservation of caravanserais has received serious attention from both the government and non-governmental organisations due to their potential in the tourism sector. This measure was not only intended to protect historic monuments from destruction and decay, but also to meet the needs of local residents and tourists at these destinations. However, Sararoudi³¹ revealed that there were also caravanserais that suffered damage after conservation processes had been carried out. This was due to the age of the structures, which have existed for thousands of years and are extremely sensitive to any alterations made to them. In addition, the upgrading of caravanserais has had a positive impact on the government by minimising the costs of constructing new buildings.³² Therefore, this initiative is in line with the concept of sustainable tourism development, which emphasises ongoing conservation and the continuous use of resources for long-term benefit.

Furthermore, the transformation of the original function of caravanserais from stopover points to tourism destinations can be explained through the concepts of continuity and change. Continuity is one of the aspects that shapes the identity of a place.³³ Its existence can help to maintain, reshape, and preserve the identity of a location. For example, the presence of old buildings can evoke the history of the past.³⁴

This is consistent with the conservation processes in most caravanserais, which apply the adaptive reuse approach. This approach has been implemented in several caravanserais, including Sultan Han Caravanserai, Karatay Caravanserai, Sa'd al-Saltaneh Caravanserai, Maranjab Caravanserai, and Zeinodin Caravanserai. Abbasian³⁵ states that the adaptive reuse of these caravanserai buildings demonstrates varying levels of intervention, such as changes to the interior and exterior spaces. Nevertheless, the objective of their conservation remains the same, which is to develop the tourism sector, revitalise historic buildings, and select new functions that are appropriate to the needs of society and the future, based on the historical background and original function of the buildings.

Therefore, caravanserais can serve as an example of this concept because the conservation carried out on their structures has preserved their historical heritage, while their functions have been altered to meet the demands of the modern tourism industry. The transformation of caravanserais from stopover points to tourism destinations demonstrates the interaction between continuity and change, where caravanserais are revitalised by maintaining their historical identity yet evolving to meet current economic and social needs. This aligns with Özerden's³⁶ view that caravanserais that have survived to the present-day act as mediums in conveying both tangible and intangible heritage of a region to tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds.

²⁹ Ghasemi and Gholamalazadeh, "The Principles of Designing the," 969; Mohammad Bagherian Sararoudi, "Built Heritage and Tourism on the Silk Road: Caravanserais in Isfahan, Iran." PhD diss., Universidade do Minho (Portugal), 2017; Bakhtiari and Allahyari, "Investigation and Analysis of the Experience," 32; Mitra Seyyedpour Esmailzadeh, Ahad Nejad Ebrahimi and Vahid Vaziri, "Prioritizing infill structure indicators in a historical context: in terms of economic sustainability-the vicinity zone of Tabriz historic bazaar," *Smart and Sustainable Built Environment* 11, no. 3 (2022): 500-515; Ali Asghar Shalbafian, Neda Zarandian and Negar Rajabi, "Thematic tourism; A new concept for developing tourism (Case study: Rural areas of Meyami county)," *Sustainable Rural Development* 4, no. 1 (2020): 89-100; Naimeh Rezaei, Zahed Ghaderi and Maryam Ghanipour, "Heritage Tourism and Place Making: Investigating the Users' Perspectives Towards Sa'd al-Saltaneh Caravanserai in Qazvin, Iran," *Journal of Heritage Tourism* 17, no. 2 (2022): 204-221; Dabanlı and Şimşek, "Ancient Witnesses of the Silk Road," 99-100.

³⁰ Mohammad Yousef Kiani, *The Iranian caravanserais during the Safavid period*. University of London, School of Oriental and African Studies (United Kingdom), 1970.

³¹ Sararoudi, "Built Heritage and Tourism on the Silk Road."

³² Shaikha Eisa al-Mannai, "Reviving the Concept of Caravanserai: A Critical Study for the Adaptive Design of an Indigenous Boutique Hotel in The North District of Qatar." PhD diss., Hamad Bin Khalifa University, Ar-Rayyan (Qatar), 2021.

³³ Clare L. Twigger-Ross and David L. Uzzell, "Place and identity processes," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 16, no. 3 (1996): 205-220.

³⁴ Marco Lalli, "Urban-related identity: Theory, measurement, and empirical findings," *Journal of Environmental Psychology* 12, no. 4 (1992): 285-303.

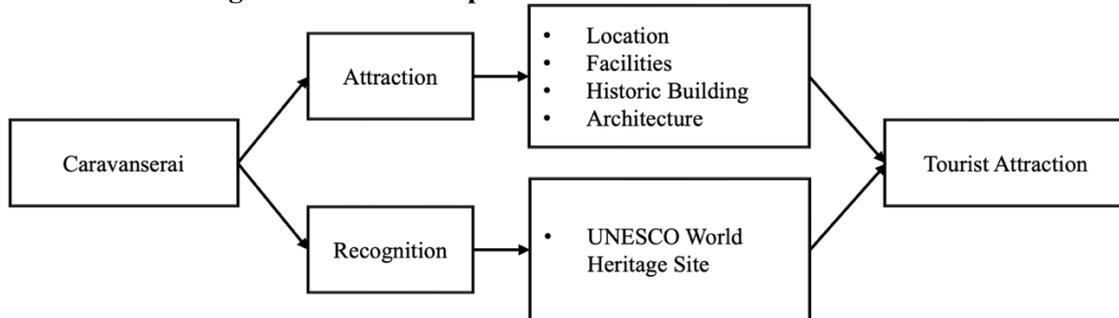
³⁵ Aryana Abbasian, "Examining Authenticity in Adaptive Reuse of Iranian Caravanserais for Tourism: Comparative Assessment of Two Cases from Safavid Era," Master's thesis, Eastern Mediterranean University (EMU)-Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi (DAÜ), 2019.

³⁶ Seden Turamberk Özerden, "Utilization of Ottoman Tangible Cultural Heritage in Northern Cyprus for Tourism Purposes." *Osmanlı Mirası Araştırmaları Dergisi* 10, no. 28 (2023): 533-552.

Factors Forming the Significant Relationship between Caravanserais and Tourism

The findings of the study indicated that there was a significant relationship between caravanserais and tourism. This relationship could be explained by two main factors. The first factor was the facilities provided, which served as attractions for tourists, and the second factor was UNESCO recognition as World Heritage Sites. In summary, the relationship between caravanserais and tourism can be illustrated as follows:

Figure 1: Relationship between caravanserais and tourism



Facilities Provided as Tourist Attractions

The findings of the study showed that there were many facilities available at caravanserais. Previous research has demonstrated the existence of various facilities in caravanserais. For example, O’Gorman³⁷ showed that among the facilities attracting tourists to caravanserais were accommodation and the provision of food and beverages. According to Thareani-Sussely,³⁸ there were specific areas within caravanserais that provided meals for travellers who were resting or passing through.

In addition, caravanserais also supplied food and water for the animals brought by travellers. Petersen³⁹ specifically noted that along the pilgrimage routes to Mecca, many caravanserais provided other facilities such as food and drink for pilgrims, in addition to accommodation. The issues of food and beverage provision were also discussed by Bakhtiari and Allahyari,⁴⁰ who stated that caravanserais located on the outskirts of towns provided drinks and food for travellers.

Furthermore, studies have also focused on the availability of clean water sources in caravanserais. Water sources were essential for travellers for drinking, bathing, and performing ablutions. According to Lee et al.,⁴¹ water sources were usually located in the centre of the courtyard or outside the caravanserai. Ghasemi and Gholamalizadeh⁴² detailed that “...cisterns were sometimes built inside caravanserais and sometimes outside; for instance, cisterns in the Persian Gulf are located outside the building, while in the central regions they are generally made inside the caravanserais.”

Examples of water reservoirs built within caravanserais can be seen in the courtyards of Shah Abbasi Caravanserai and Chahak Caravanserai in Yazd. In terms of construction, water tanks were built in various shapes. Some were rectangular with simple roofs, while others were cross-shaped with brick roofs. However, reservoirs built in the centre of the caravanserai courtyard were typically pool-shaped, roofed, and resembled those in defensive forts. The availability of water supplies in caravanserais indirectly facilitated the ritual and daily activities of merchants, travellers, and pilgrims.

As stopover points for merchants, caravanserais developed into trading centres. There was a space within the caravanserai designated for commerce and commercial activities. Merchants often brought goods such as jewellery, cosmetics, and amulets.⁴³ Sims⁴⁴ described that caravanserais with shops inside provided convenience for merchants, travellers, and pilgrims, allowing them to purchase what they

³⁷ O’Gorman, “Origins of the Commercial Hospitality,” 777-790.

³⁸ Yifat Thareani-Sussely, “Ancient Caravanserais: An Archaeological View from ‘Aroer,” *Levant* 39, no. 1 (2007): 123-141.

³⁹ Andrew Petersen, *The Medieval and Ottoman Hajj Route in Jordan, an Archaeological and Historical Study* (Oxbow Books, 2012).

⁴⁰ Bakhtiari and Allahyari, “Investigation and Analysis of the Experience,” 43.

⁴¹ Marjorie Lee, Claudia Raso and Robert Hillenbrand, “Mamlük Caravanserais in Galilee,” *Levant* 24, no. 1 (1992): 55-94.

⁴² Ghasemi and Gholamalizadeh, “The Principles of Designing the,” 976.

⁴³ Paulette M. Michèle Daviau, *Houses and Their Furnishings in Bronze Age Palestine: Domestic Activity Areas and Artefact Distribution in the Middle and Late Bronze Ages* (Sheffield Academic Press, 1993).

⁴⁴ Sims, “Trade and travel: Markets and caravanserais,” 101.

needed for themselves and their animals. After the 14th century, some caravanserais were equipped with additional amenities such as factories, bakeries, and tea shops. Sa'd al-Saltaneh Caravanserai is one of the few caravanserais in Iran with a tea shop inside.⁴⁵

According to Thareani-Sussely,⁴⁶ the evolution of caravanserais from accommodation to trading hubs was acceptable because some spaces within caravanserais had temporary functions. Thus, merchants could use the caravanserai for trading in the morning and as accommodation at night. This function developed further, and caravanserais emerged as commercial bases frequently used as wholesale centres and for selling various goods. For example, Ipek Hani, built by Mehmed I, served as a centre for silk wholesale, while Pirinc Hani, Fidan Hani, and Koza Hani in Bursa were main markets for wheat and rice.⁴⁷

Another facility provided at caravanserais was the courtyard. According to Abbasian,⁴⁸ the courtyard was an important element of caravanserai structures, serving various purposes. The courtyard was used for transferring goods, as a resting place for travellers during summer nights, and as a space for conversation among travellers. This indicated that the courtyard in caravanserais functioned as a centre for social activity.⁴⁹ Here, people gathered, animals rested, and small bazaars were set up where traders could sell their goods. The atmosphere in caravanserais was filled with a variety of sights, sounds, and smells.

Some modern caravanserais were also equipped with various facilities, including pharmacies and vehicle repair shops.⁵⁰ The provision of pharmacies and repair shops was explained by Karluk and Karaman,⁵¹ who highlighted the Seljuk government's initiative to provide various facilities for merchants within caravanserais. In addition to these two facilities, caravanserais also contained other amenities such as hammams, medical services, barns, and barbershops. Goodwin's⁵² study of Sultan Han Caravanserai showed that it provided facilities such as a mosque in the centre of the courtyard. Each side of the caravanserai had verandas, *hammams*, workshops, and private rooms. Kutlu's⁵³ research, which focused on Han-Abad and Akhan Caravanserais, also indicated that both provided mosque facilities, as well as baths, kitchens, and bakeries. According to Ahmadreza et al.,⁵⁴ such facilities were not only found in urban caravanserais but also in semi-urban ones.

In addition to the specific facilities provided within caravanserais, conservation efforts also did not overlook improvements to existing amenities. For example, Bakhtiari and Allahyari⁵⁵ showed that Abbasi Hotel, originally a caravanserai, was upgraded as a tourist destination in 2010. Facilities provided included a shopping centre, accommodation, playground, and recreation area. Today, classic and traditional restaurants and beautifully decorated dining areas with a pleasant atmosphere also attract both domestic and international tourists.

However, the arrival of tourists at caravanserais was not solely driven by the appeal of the facilities provided. Some tourists were also attracted by the historical background and architecture of the caravanserais. Bakhtiari and Allahyari⁵⁶ highlighted several caravanserais with remarkable architecture that could serve as tourist attractions, such as Madar Shah Caravanserai, Maranjab Caravanserai, Abbasi Caravanserai, Kooopa Caravanserai, and Aminabad Caravanserai.

⁴⁵ Rezaei, Ghaderi and Ghanipour, "Heritage Tourism and Place Making," 209.

⁴⁶ Thareani-Sussely, "Ancient Caravanserais: An Archaeological View," 127.

⁴⁷ Saoud, "Muslim Architecture under Ottoman Patronage," 20.

⁴⁸ Abbasian, "Examining Authenticity in Adaptive Reuse," 54.

⁴⁹ National Geographic. "Where Worlds and Ideas Connect: The Caravanserai."

⁵⁰ Sims, "Trade and travel: Markets and caravanserais," 102.

⁵¹ Karluk and Karaman, "Bridging civilizations from Asia to Europe," 730-739.

⁵² Godfrey Goodwin, "Key Monuments of Islamic Architecture: Turkey," In *Architecture of the Islamic world: its History and Social Meaning; with a Complete Survey of Key Monuments and 758 illustrations, 112 in colour*, edited by George Michell and Ernst J. Grube (Thames and Hudson, 1996), 237-245.

⁵³ Mehmet Kutlu, "Seljuk Caravanserais in the Vicinity of Denizli: Han-Abad (Çardakhan) and Akhan," PhD diss., Bilkent Universitesi (Turkey), 2009.

⁵⁴ Ahmadreza Saberi, Anuar Talib, Shervin Motamedi and Shahab Kariminia, "Adaptive Reuse of Historical Safavid Caravanserais in Iran as a Sustainable Development Strategy," *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding* 3, no. 3 (2016): 15-25.

⁵⁵ Bakhtiari and Allahyari, "Investigation and Analysis of the Experience," 37.

⁵⁶ Bakhtiari and Allahyari, "Investigation and Analysis of the Experience," 27.

UNESCO Recognition as a World Heritage Site

UNESCO World Heritage Site status is an invaluable international brand for any country and is considered highly prestigious, as it symbolises the significance of a site or area in terms of its history, culture, and natural environment.⁵⁷ According to UNESCO, any area or site nominated for inclusion in the World Heritage List must possess Outstanding Universal Value and meet at least one of the ten selection criteria established by UNESCO. Selection as a UNESCO World Heritage Site is based on the criteria outlined in the Operational Guidelines for the Implementation of the World Heritage Convention. These guidelines are used collectively and serve as the main reference document for the inscription of any site or area as a World Heritage Site.

It is not an easy feat for any site, area, building, or monument to receive recognition as a World Heritage Site. UNESCO undertakes a meticulous assessment based on the universal value of a site before declaring it a World Heritage Site.⁵⁸ According to the Department of National Heritage,⁵⁹ various rather complex processes and procedures must be followed, including nomination, listing, and recognition as a World Heritage Site. For example, the *Tehran Times*⁶⁰ discussed Iran’s preparations to nominate Khan Caravanserai in Khoy for the World Heritage List. In 2019, Iran’s Ministry of Tourism announced that it was preparing a nomination dossier for this caravanserai. Accordingly, cultural heritage experts evaluated the monument for shortlisting based on its architectural, historical, and cultural significance. In 2021, the *Tehran Times* also reported that Iran ranked tenth in the world in terms of the number of monuments and historic sites registered on the UNESCO World Heritage List.

Therefore, the World Heritage Site status granted by UNESCO must maintain its Outstanding Universal Value to ensure that the recognition remains.⁶¹ As such, the conservation of heritage sites is crucial to guarantee the continuity of this status. If a heritage site is not properly maintained, there is a high likelihood that the recognition will be withdrawn.⁶² Thus, maintaining this status is not something to be taken lightly by the countries involved. Taking Iran and Türkiye as examples, UNESCO World Heritage recognition in both countries involves several caravanserais, including:

Table 1: Caravanserais Recognized by UNESCO World Heritage

Türkiye	Iran
Akhan Caravanserai	Izadkhist Caravanserai
Ertokus Han Caravanserai	Zeinodin Caravanserai
Saadettin Han Caravanserai	Sa’d al-Saltaneh Caravanserai

Numerous previous studies have demonstrated that UNESCO recognition of a building as a World Heritage Site can significantly enhance its potential as a tourism destination. For instance, the *Tehran Times*⁶³ anticipated that tourists visiting Sa’d al-Saltaneh Caravanserai would be able to enjoy and appreciate the beauty of Persian architecture. This expectation was based on conservation efforts undertaken to attract more international tourists should the caravanserai attain World Heritage Site status. Moreover, most tourist attractions consist of heritage cities declared as UNESCO World Heritage Sites. Heritage-based tourism activities are growing rapidly, especially in developing countries.

⁵⁷ Mohd Syahrin Abdullah, “Kelebihan lindungi Warisan Dunia UNESCO.” *Berita Harian*, 10 Julai, 2016, <http://ptsldigital.ukm.my:8080/vital/access/manager/Repository/ukm.vita>.

⁵⁸ UNESCO, “Historic town of Vigan,” *UNESCO World Heritage Convention*, accessed August 16, 2022, <https://whc.unesco.org/uploads/nominations/502rev.pdf>.

⁵⁹ Jabatan Warisan Negara, *Warisan Kebangsaan 2009* (Jabatan Warisan Negara, 2009).

⁶⁰ Anon., “Safavid-Era Caravanserai to Undergo Restoration for Possible UNESCO Registration,” *Tehran Times*, 18 Mei, 2021, https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/46104_8/Safavid-era-caravanserai-to-undergo-restoration-for-possible.

⁶¹ Nurfashihah Omar and Indera Syahrul Mat Radzuan, “Kesan-Kesan Pewartaan Melaka Bandaraya Bersejarah Sebagai Tapak Warisan Dunia oleh UNESCO,” *Research in Management of Technology and Business* 2, no. 1 (2021): 1443-1458.

⁶² Solihah Mustafa, Mazdi Marzuki, Ruzanna Syamimi Ramli, Jabil Mapjabil, Mohammad Kadir Zainal Abidin, and Mohamad Pirdaus Yusoh, “Pengurusan bandar warisan UNESCO dan penglibatan komuniti tempatan: Kajian kes di George Town, Pulau Pinang,” *Geografika* 11, no. 12 (2015).

⁶³ Anon., “UNESCO Inspectors to Visit Sa’d Al-Saltaneh Caravanserai,” *Tehran Times*, September 24, 2021b, <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/465398/UNESCO-inspectors-to-visit-Sa-d-al-Saltaneh-caravanserai>.

Heritage is the most valuable treasure for any country and is an important asset in attracting tourists.⁶⁴ In many locations worldwide, heritage is made a key element in tourism development.⁶⁵ In addition, recognition as a World Heritage Site has shown a positive impact on the increase in tourist arrivals and tourism activities.⁶⁶ Henderson⁶⁷ also stated that the existence of such historic sites influences local communities. Beyond its impact on tourism, this recognition also stimulates economic growth within communities.⁶⁸

However, economic growth can also occur as a result of increased participation in tourism activities. Mohd Syahrin⁶⁹ further explained that the rise in tourist numbers can stimulate the economy of an area and related industries when a location attains World Heritage Site status.

As a site recognised by UNESCO, such locations have the potential to become tourism products that can be promoted. This is also an effort to attract more foreign tourists to explore the cultural diversity and natural beauty of a destination.⁷⁰ According to Siti Norsakira and Rosniza Aznie,⁷¹ the aim of this recognition is to provide a special opportunity to preserve extraordinary uniqueness worldwide and to protect heritage sites so that cultural and natural diversity continues to be safeguarded. With this recognition, the history of World Heritage Sites can also become known to international tourists.⁷²

Furthermore, the study by Nurfashihah and Indera Syahrul⁷³ also examined the impact of World Heritage Site recognition, particularly the proclamation of Melaka as a Historic City by UNESCO. This recognition not only helps in compliance and enforcement of protection, preservation, and conservation of heritage sites, but also strengthens site management through the support of expertise from international bodies such as the World Heritage Centre (WHC) and the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS). Since attaining World Heritage Site status, Melaka has become a major tourism destination in Malaysia, with a dramatic increase in both domestic and international tourist arrivals. This development has directly contributed to the growth of Melaka's economic sector. With this recognition, Melaka was also automatically included on the world tourism map as one of the key destinations to visit.

Therefore, the findings of Nurfashihah and Indera Syahrul⁷⁴ clearly demonstrate that World Heritage Site recognition plays an important role in enhancing the potential of a location as a tourist attraction. In this regard, caravanserais that have attained World Heritage Site status also possess the same potential. This indirectly shows that there is a significant relationship between caravanserais and the tourism sector, whereby such recognition can strengthen the appeal of caravanserais as historical heritage destinations.

Impact of World Heritage Site Recognition on Local Communities

Recognition as a World Heritage Site not only affects the tourism sector but also has an impact on local communities. This is because local communities play a crucial role in revitalising and sustaining heritage sites. The involvement of local communities encompasses participation in decision-making processes at the highest level to economic involvement and destination promotion at the lowest level.

⁶⁴ Mohamad Zaki Ahmad, Johan Afendi Ibrahim and Hood Mohd Salleh, "Membangunkan Kuala Kedah sebagai Destinasi Pelancongan Warisan: Penerapan Konsep Pembangunan Pelancongan Lestari," (Paper presented at Persidangan Kebangsaan Ekonomi Malaysia Ke III 2008, Port Dickson, Negeri Sembilan, August 20-22, 2008), 1-25.

⁶⁵ Er Ah Choy et al., "Analisis Faktor Kepuasan Pelancong Terhadap Tarikan Pelancongan Warisan di Melaka," *Geografia-Malaysian Journal of Society and Space* 10, no. 8 (2014): 72-86.

⁶⁶ Yaniv Poria, Arie Reichel and Raviv Cohen, "World Heritage Site: Is it an Effective Brand Name? A Case Study of a Religious Heritage Site," *Journal of Travel Research* 50, no. 5 (2011): 482-495.

⁶⁷ Joan C. Henderson, *Tourism Crises: Causes, Consequences and Management* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁶⁸ Myra Shackley, "Visitor Management at World Heritage Sites," In *Managing World Heritage Sites*, ed. Anna Leask, and Alan Fyall (Routledge, 2006).

⁶⁹ Mohd Syahrin, "Kelebihan Lindungi Warisan Dunia UNESCO."

⁷⁰ Zuliskandar Ramli, Mazlin Mokhtar, Muhammad Rizal Razman and Sharifah Zarina Syed Zakaria, "Pelancongan berasaskan warisan di Malaysia: potensi dan cabaran," In *Prosiding Seminar Antarabangsa Ke8: Ekologi, Habitat Manusia dan Perubahan Persekitaran, Langkawi, Kedah*, pp. 21-22. 2015.

⁷¹ Siti Norsakira Mohamed and Rosniza Aznie Che Rose, "Potensi bandar Kuala Lipis sebagai destinasi pelancongan warisan," *Geografia-Malaysian Journal of Society and Space* 14, no. 1 (2018): 102-115.

⁷² Ng Sheue Li, Habibah Ahmad and Hamzah Jusoh, "Interaksi Tuan Rumah dan Pelancong Antarabangsa dalam Pelancongan Budaya di Kampung Morten, Melaka," *Jurnal Wacana Sarjana* 2, no. 1 (2018).

⁷³ Nurfashihah and Indera Syahrul, "Kesan-Kesan Pewartaan Melaka Bandaraya Bersejarah," 1443-1458.

⁷⁴ Nurfashihah and Indera Syahrul, "Kesan-Kesan Pewartaan Melaka Bandaraya Bersejarah," 1443-1458.

The form of this involvement depends on the location of the heritage site. For rural World Heritage Sites, community involvement is more focused on economic aspects and destination promotion rather than participation in decision-making processes.⁷⁵

In addition to enjoying the benefits resulting from economic growth, local communities also play a role in maintaining their identity, culture, and heritage, as well as safeguarding the sustainability of their heritage. Local communities are the main custodians of the heritage in their areas, acting as guardians, protectors, drivers, and developers of their cultural heritage. This heritage covers various aspects, including traditions, customs, language, arts, architecture, cuisine, and local lifestyles.

Furthermore, community involvement in heritage conservation can fulfil the concept of a bottom-up approach. This concept is very important in preserving heritage, in addition to protection and enforcement from a legal perspective. This means that local communities also assist the government in sustaining heritage by providing views and feedback on the social, economic, and environmental impacts related to heritage conservation. This enables the government to consider the interests of local communities and to plan more integrated and sustainable programmes.⁷⁶

Challenges in Maintaining World Heritage Sites

Although tourism brings various benefits, the industry also faces challenges in maintaining World Heritage Sites. Efforts to retain this recognition status can have negative effects due to the increase in tourist numbers at certain destinations. Among the main challenges are the impacts on local culture and social issues, such as the loss of identity, culture, and traditions. The presence of foreign tourists can trigger cultural clashes with local communities, which may ultimately erode local traditions and ways of life.⁷⁷

In addition, environmental pollution has also emerged as an issue resulting from tourism activities. The main factor contributing to this pollution is irresponsible human behaviour in maintaining cleanliness and environmental sustainability. A study by Nur Farahin and Nicholas Gani⁷⁸ showed that pollution in Lamin Dana, Sarawak, was caused by uncontrolled littering by tourists, despite the presence of dedicated management responsible for maintaining the area's cleanliness.

Damage to the structures of historic buildings also poses a challenge in the preservation of World Heritage Sites. Many historical sites, including caravanserais, have undergone conservation processes to attract tourists. In Iran, for example, the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts and Tourism has restored Maranjab Caravanserai to ensure that this heritage is preserved as a tourism destination. However, an excessive influx of tourists can cause damage to the structures, sculptures, and historic monuments. This is because most of these structures are thousands of years old and extremely sensitive to physical changes. Moreover, the intensity of tourist activities and issues of vandalism are also factors leading to structural damage.⁷⁹

Another challenge in the tourism industry is the spread of infectious diseases, especially those that spread rapidly, such as cholera, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), and COVID-19. In the case of the COVID-19 outbreak in Malaysia, the first case was detected in a foreign tourist visiting the country. Shahrul Nazmi and Kamaliah Siarap⁸⁰ argued that outbreaks such as SARS have a negative impact on economic growth because tourist arrivals are an important source of national income.

⁷⁵ S. Mostafa Rasoolimanesh and Mastura Jaafar, "Community participation toward tourism development and conservation program in rural world heritage sites," In *Tourism-from empirical research towards practical application* (IntechOpen, 2016).

⁷⁶ Daeng Haliza Daeng Jamal, Nordiana Ab Jabar, Suraya Sukri, Farrah Atikah Saari, Mohd Saipuddin Suliman and Norazlinda Mohamed Rosdi, "Penglibatan Komuniti dalam Pemuliharaan Warisan di Lembah Lenggong, Perak," *Jurnal Melayu* 22, no.2 (2023): 1-21.

⁷⁷ Kreg Lindberg, "Sustainable tourism and cultural heritage: A review of development assistance and its potential to promote sustainability," (1999).

⁷⁸ Nur Farahin Shudie and Nicholas Gani, "Impak Industri Pelancongan Terhadap Penduduk Kampung Tellian Tengah, Mukah, Sarawak: Satu Kajian Awal," *Trends in Undergraduate Research* 3, no. 2 (2020): 16-21.

⁷⁹ Johan Afendi Ibrahim and Mohamad Zaki Ahmad, *Perancangan dan Pembangunan Pelancongan (Edisi Kedua)* (UUM Press, 2012).

⁸⁰ Shahrul Nazmi Sannusi and Kamaliah Siarap, "Peranan Perhubungan Awam dan Komunikasi Krisis: Kajian Terhadap Kementerian Kesihatan Malaysia Dalam Penanganan Wabak SARS," *e-BANGI* 9, no. 2 (2014): 125.

The spread of SARS led to a sharp decline in tourist arrivals, which in turn affected the tourism sector. This situation demonstrates that the prolonged spread of infectious diseases not only paralyses the national economy but also causes significant losses to related sectors.⁸¹ Therefore, proactive measures must be taken to ensure that the tourism industry is more resilient in facing global health crises in the future.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that caravanserais in Iran and Türkiye are not merely historical heritage sites but also serve as significant tourism destinations. The conservation of caravanserais that has been undertaken has now seen them upgraded and commercialised as hotels, museums, art galleries, arcades, libraries, and restaurants, thereby enhancing their appeal within the tourism sector. The uniqueness of their architecture, historical background, and systematic conservation efforts make caravanserais an important element in the development of sustainable tourism. However, this study focused solely on caravanserais in Iran and Türkiye, without making comparisons to other countries that also have caravanserais, such as India, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan. From a conservation perspective, this study emphasises a sustainable conservation approach to ensure that caravanserais continue to function as tourism destinations that retain their historical and cultural value through the framework of sustainable tourism development, continuity, and change.

Tourism-based conservation not only protects historic monuments from destruction but also contributes to the economic development of local communities and the nation. Through this study, further research is suggested on the impact of caravanserai tourism on local and national economies as well as heritage sustainability. In conclusion, caravanserais are not only historical symbols reflecting the splendour of Islamic civilisation's architecture, but also tourism assets with great potential for development. Well-executed conservation can preserve the identity and authenticity of caravanserais and ensure that this historical heritage continues to benefit present and future generations.

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⁸¹ Nur Halimatul Yasmin Yaacop and Rosniza Aznie Che Rose, "Cabaran Industri Pelancongan Serta Impak Terhadap Faktor Ekonomi Di Sekitar Kuah," *Jurnal Wacana Sarjana* 5, no. 4 (2021): 1-24.

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