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ENLIGHTENING STRATEGIES FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN A GLOBAL METROPOLIS: THE SEOUL EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT

Tourism has been a key driver of economic development globally, with Seoul standing out as a successful example of a popular tourist destination, particularly in the Southeast Asian region. The study explores how tourism contributes to Korea's national economy and consequently, promotes sustainable tourism development in the nation. This study relies on secondary data, primarily official documents, for data collection. It employed a qualitative research method to collect data on selected towns in Seoul, using a descriptive explanatory approach. Seoul has effectively utilised tourism to boost its global reputation and economic growth, with strategic urban planning efforts such as city branding, cultural tourism, and innovative design playing a significant role in enhancing its international tourism competitiveness. By integrating cultural tourism with urban design strategies, Seoul showcases its rich history and culture to attract visitors worldwide and foster sustainable economic development. The city's blend of modernity and tradition serves as a blueprint for other urban areas looking to enhance their global standing through tourism-focused urban development. Seoul's comprehensive approach to tourism and urban planning is instrumental in driving its economic success and international standing.

Keywords: Tourism, Economic Development, Cultural Heritage, Urban Planning, Sustainable Growth
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INTRODUCTION

Seoul has steadily become a model for cities aiming to boost their global status and economic prosperity. The city's tourism growth has played a crucial role in driving economic development, generating foreign exchange earnings, creating jobs, and investing in infrastructure since the 1960s. These benefits are important for developing regions, fostering sustainable growth and balanced development. Seoul, South Korea, exemplifies this trend through its comprehensive approach to tourism, integrating advanced technologies, cultural heritage, and strategic urban planning.

Seoul's evolution into a major tourist destination reflects a global trend where cities use their unique cultural and historical assets to attract international visitors and promote sustainable urban development. This process enhances the city's global reputation and economic competitiveness. Seoul employs strategic initiatives like city branding, cultural tourism, and innovative urban design to strengthen its global image. City branding involves creating a distinct urban identity through public design and cultural events, enhancing the city's appeal. By combining cultural tourism with urban design policies, Seoul highlights tourism's role in economic development and international competitiveness. Leveraging its rich historical and cultural resources, Seoul attracts international visitors, driving urban renewal and international recognition to support sustainable growth and economic development goals. Seoul sets a standard for other cities looking to enhance their global position and economic prospects through tourism-driven development by blending modernity and tradition. In this context, thus, the study explores how tourism contributes to Korea's national economy and consequently, promotes sustainable tourism development in the nation.
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LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism is described by the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) as the activities of individuals traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for up to one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes (UNWTO, 2019). Tourism development strategies, as outlined by Dwyer and Forsyth (2020), involve intentional and systematic efforts aimed at improving and expanding the tourism industry of a specific area. These strategies involve a combination of marketing, infrastructure development, policy creation, and community involvement intended to attract and retain tourists. According to Hall (2017), a global city is a large, economically important city that functions as a major center for international business, culture, and tourism, known for its diverse population and extensive infrastructure. These cities typically demonstrate significant economic impact, advanced transportation systems, and a high level of cultural exchange and innovation.

Sustainability, technology, and cultural authenticity have emerged as crucial components of global tourism strategies in recent years. Effective tourism strategies necessitate thorough planning that encompasses environmental factors, community involvement, and technological advancements, as noted by Dwyer et al. (2019). Mobile applications and augmented reality have enhanced visitor interaction and contentment (Gretzel et al., 2015). Edgell and Swanson (2018) further emphasised the significance of policy structures that promote sustainable tourism growth, asserting that cooperation between the public and private sectors is vital for creating infrastructure and services that enhance the experiences of tourists and local communities.

Community Engagement

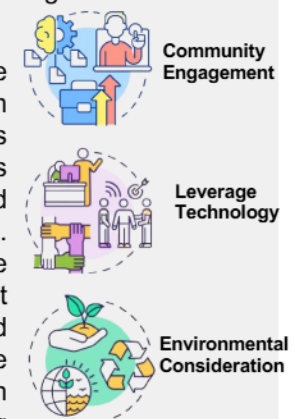Leverage Technology

Environmental Consideration

Figure 1: Important aspects of Tourism Strategies

Figure 2: Myeongdong Street is one of Seoul's main shopping and tourism districts.
(Source: Traveloka.com)

The tourism industry in Seoul has undergone significant evolution in recent decades. Initially driven by the Korean Wave (Hallyu), which attracted international visitors interested in Korean pop culture like K-pop, dramas, and fashion (Kim, Agrusa, Chon, & Cho, 2014), the establishment of key cultural landmarks and shopping areas like Myeongdong and Gangnam further enhanced Seoul's appeal. In a more recent development, Seo and Kim (2020) noted that Seoul has shifted its focus towards creating a sustainable and inclusive tourism environment. The city's policies now prioritise the preservation of cultural heritage, the development of eco-friendly tourism facilities, and the promotion of lesser-known local attractions to spread tourist traffic more evenly throughout the city.

Figure 3: River of Life is one of rejuvenation of historical area project in Kuala Lumpur
(Source: Thesun.My)

A content analysis of Seoul tourism development reveals distinct strategies employed by that city to enhance its tourism sectors. Seoul has effectively capitalised on its technological advancements and cultural exports. Choi, Lee, and Jamal (2017) addressed that Seoul's integration of smart tourism initiatives, such as free city-wide Wi-Fi, interactive digital kiosks, and mobile applications, has positioned it as a leader in blending technology with tourism. These technological innovations not only enhance the visitor experience but also provide valuable data for managing tourist flows and preferences. Moreover, Seoul's global cultural influence through Hallyu (Korean Wave) has been a significant driver in attracting international tourists eager to experience the pop culture, fashion, and cuisine that they admire from Korean media (Kim et al., 2014).

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES

Sustainability continues to be a key focus of modern tourism strategies, with cities around the world working to strike a balance between tourism growth, environmental conservation, and community well-being. Gössling et al. (2019) stated that the importance of sustainable tourism practices in addressing the environmental impacts of rising tourist numbers in major global cities. Cities like Seoul are urged to implement green policies, promote eco-friendly transportation, and ensure the sustainable management of tourist sites to ensure long-term sustainability (Gössling et al., 2019).

In 2019, Lee discussed sustainable tourism initiatives in Seoul, which focus on creating green spaces, implementing sustainable urban planning, and offering eco-friendly accommodations. The city has developed urban parks like Han River Park and green belts to provide recreational areas for residents and visitors, promoting ecological health. Seoul also promotes public transportation and cycling to reduce the environmental impact of tourism.

Figure 4: Recreational Spaces along the Han River
(Source: visitkorea.or.kr)

Additionally, Seoul has taken steps to protect its cultural heritage sites, ensuring that tourism growth does not harm its historical and cultural treasures. Initiatives promoting local crafts and traditional markets support the cultural economy and offer genuine experiences for tourists. According to Lee (2019), these initiatives significantly improve residents' quality of life and appeal to environmentally conscious travelers who appreciate sustainability and authenticity.

Figure 5: Gyeongbokgung Palace
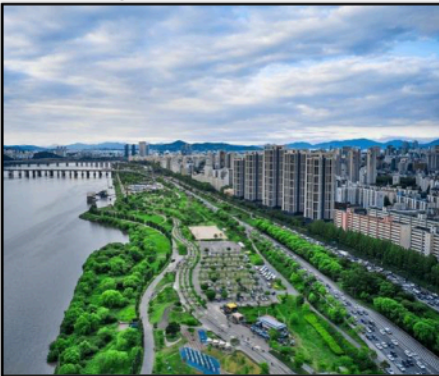(Source: visitkorea.or.kr)

Figure 6: Hangang Park
(Source: visitkorea.or.kr)

Figure 7: Bukchon Hanok Village
(Source: visitkorea.or.kr)

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METHODOLOGY

This study utilised a qualitative research method in specific towns in Seoul, employing a descriptive explanatory approach. The case study method was adopted to collect information from academic journals, industry documents, and government publications to analyse tourist strategies in Seoul and other major cities globally. Key government documents were obtained from the Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO) and Seoul Tourism Organisation (STO), providing reliable data on tourism development in Seoul, Korea. Data was gathered from primary and secondary sources, with a particular focus on Seoul as a global popular tourist destination.

The selection criteria for the study areas in Seoul included factors such as:
i.   attractiveness;
ii.   reliable accessibility;
iii. good infrastructure; and
iv.   sufficient tourist services.

The study areas chosen for analysis included Myeong-dong, Dongdaemun, Seoul 7017, and Yeouido Hangang Park due to their suitability. Observations were conducted on these areas to document the key features that have effectively influenced tourism policies and strategies, leading to an increase in tourists from various countries visiting Seoul. Site analysis was carried out on-site, and photographs were taken.
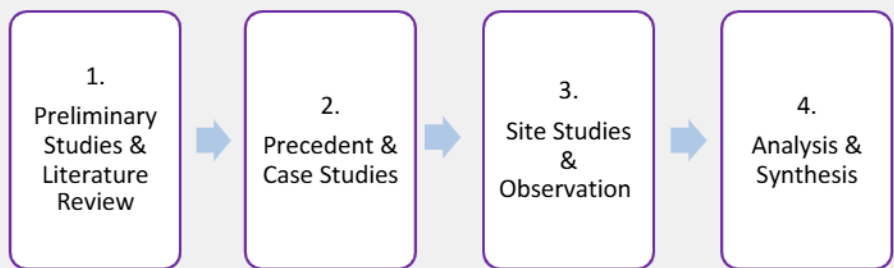

Figure 8: Data Collection Methodology

By consolidating the research findings, a range of practical steps will be proposed to boost tourism in Seoul. These strategies will tackle existing challenges and leverage Seoul's distinctive assets by integrating key elements such as cultural identity, visitor experiences, accessibility, partnerships, and customisation. This comprehensive approach will enable a thorough grasp of Seoul's tourism landscape, facilitating the development of effective strategies for sustained growth and prosperity. Nonetheless, the study is constrained by data limitations that hinder access to the most up-to-date information on tourism trends in Seoul.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

SEOUL TOURISM COLLABORATIVE STRATEGY

Seoul, a vibrant city with a mix of historical and modern attractions, aims to maintain its position as a top destination (MasterCard, 2023). This approach focuses on leveraging Seoul's unique combination of tradition and innovation, fostering strong partnerships, creating engaging content for a worldwide audience, embracing technology-driven advancements, and promoting sustainable tourism practices. Through these initiatives, Seoul can enhance its global tourism competitiveness, attracting a diverse range of visitors and offering an exceptional experience for all. The Seoul Metropolitan Government is currently actively working to attract more international tourists by collaborating with foreign travel agencies to develop customised tourism offerings tailored to younger travelers.

Figure 9: Seoul's Tourism Website in a Global Stage
(Source: https://www.visitseoul.net/index)

SEOUL TOURISM COLLABORATIVE ACTIONS

Building a Network of Collaboration in a Global Stage
The official Seoul tourism website outlines their mission is to make Seoul a world-class tourist destination by providing excellent service and information to visitors from all over the world.

Content Marketing for Seoul Global Image Appeal
UNWTO publishes reports on tourism trends and best practices. Their reports often highlight the importance of digital marketing strategies for destinations.

Harnessing Technology for Smart Promotion
"Ahn et al. (2022) examine the impact of mobile apps on tourist experiences in Seoul, highlighting the potential for technology to enhance visitor engagement."

Building a Network of Collaboration in Global Stage

Partnering with international tourism agencies expands Seoul's reach, promoting the city as a top destination in their marketing efforts. This collaboration enhances Seoul's visibility and attracts a diverse tourist base. By sharing knowledge with global tourism organisations, Seoul gains insights into successful strategies, fostering innovation in its tourism policies.

A key element of this strategy is to establish strong partnerships. By collaborating with local businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and cultural institutions, attractive tourist packages and discount programmes are created. These initiatives aim to encourage travel to Seoul and enhance the overall visitor experience. Additionally, it is important to empower residents to act as 'cultural ambassadors.' For instance, in 2023, the 11-member K-pop group THE BOYZ represented Korean culture internationally as the promotional ambassador for the Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS).

KOCIS, a branch of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism, officially appointed THE BOYZ to this role at the KOCIS Center in Seoul's Jung-Gu District. Following in the footsteps of CRAVITY, THE BOYZ kicked off their activities by promoting Talk Talk Korea, a global competition focused on Korea-related content. They also engaged in initiatives that promote Korean culture and Hallyu content worldwide.

Figure 10: The Boyz K-Pop Group as a Cultural Ambassador of Korean Culture and Information Service (KOCIS).
(Source: korea.net)

Content Marketing for Seoul Global Image Appeal

In today's digital era, content marketing is essential for attracting tourists, as emphasised by Skift (2023) in their article "Content Marketing for Travel & Tourism: Strategies for Success". Creating a comprehensive global marketing campaign tailored to various tourist interests is crucial (UNWTO, 2023). This campaign can be shared through social media platforms (Skift, 2023), travel websites (UNWTO, 2023), and international publications (Skift, 2023). The official Seoul tourism website ("Visit Seoul") and YouTube channel ("Visit Seoul TV") act as central hubs for showcasing Seoul's offerings (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2024). These platforms can highlight Seoul's unique strengths through various content formats such as travel videos (Skift, 2023), cultural guides (UNWTO, 2023), blog posts (Skift, 2023), and virtual tours (UNWTO, 2023).

Moreover, capitalising on the global popularity of the Korean Wave ("Hallyu") through K-pop, K-dramas, and Korean food culture presents a distinct opportunity (Forbes, 2024). Promoting filming locations, celebrity-frequented restaurants, and K-pop dance classes taps into this trend, attracting fans and establishing a youthful, trendy image for Seoul (Forbes, 2024). Therefore, it is evident that enhancing Seoul Tourism on a global scale is crucial. Korean content has gained significant value and importance as Korean pop culture has become a worldwide phenomenon.

In 2018, the K-pop group BTS made history by becoming the first Korean act to reach the top of the Billboard 200 chart. In the years that followed, BTS continued to set records in various music and social media platforms such as Spotify, YouTube, Twitter, TikTok, and Instagram. In 2020, the Korean film "Parasite," produced and distributed by CJ ENM, made history by winning the prestigious Best Picture award at the Academy Awards, marking the first time a foreign language film achieved this honor. The following year, the Korean original series "Squid Game" became a global phenomenon as the most-watched series on Netflix, making it the first non-English series to dominate the global charts. A 2023 report by Skift, a travel industry research firm, emphasised the significant impact of social media marketing in reaching a worldwide audience and influencing travel choices. As a result, Seoul has been recognised as one of the top 5 cities in the Asia-Pacific region for tourism competitiveness.

Figure 11: Expat social media influencers to promote domestic tourism appeal

Table 1: Seoul ranked fifth in tourism competitiveness among Asia-Pacific cities
(Source: korea.net // gowithguide.com)

Ranking	1	2	3	4	5
City	Tokyo	Sydney	Singapore	Beijing	Seoul
Score	4.67	4.51	4.47	4.01	3.98

Harnessing Technology for Smart Promotion

The Seoul Metropolitan Government and private companies are working together to create mobile apps that are easy for users to navigate. These apps include interactive maps, multilingual audio guides, personalised itinerary suggestions, and real-time updates on public transportation. A study conducted by Kim and Wang in 2023 explored the impact of these mobile apps on tourists in Seoul. The study revealed that the apps significantly improve visitor engagement and navigation. Additionally, augmented reality (AR) technology allows tourists to see digital information overlaid on the real world, such as historical landmarks or hidden gems. For example, a tourist could point their phone at Gyeongbokgung Palace and see a 3D recreation of its past glory, creating a stronger connection to Seoul's history.
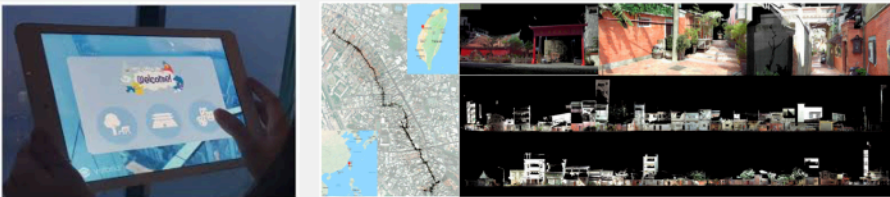

Figure 12: Technology used of Seoul for Global Tourism Strategy
Source: https://www.mdpi.com/

CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PRESERVATION STRATEGY

Seoul's tourism strategy is centred on preserving and promoting its cultural heritage. The city has implemented various initiatives to ensure that historical and cultural assets are maintained and integrated into the urban tourism experience. Traditional practices such as wearing Hanbok in heritage locations like Gyeongbokgung Palace, Bukchon Hanok Village, and other historical sites are part of these preservation efforts. This not only attracts tourists but also fosters a deeper appreciation of Korean culture (Peck & Kwak, 2020).

The Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea has introduced a new conservation system that focuses on a "list-caution" policy, which records and manages cultural assets through comprehensive surveys rather than just protecting designated cultural assets. This shift aims to involve local communities and the private sector in the preservation process, promoting value preservation and creation (Peck & Kwak, 2020). This approach underscores the importance of community participation in heritage conservation and the promotion of cultural tourism.

Figure 13: Gyeongbokgung Palace
(Source: korea.net)

CULTURAL AND HERITAGE PRESERVATION ACTION

Cultural Heritage Care Project:
Initiated in 2010, this project involves periodic monitoring and minor repairs to minimise damage and reduce maintenance costs (Peck & Kwak, 2020).

Comprehensive Maintenance Plans:
These plans ensure efficient preservation, management, and utilisation of cultural assets through thorough research and analysis (Peck & Kwak, 2020).

Museum and Exhibition Establishments:
Historical sites are transformed into museums and exhibition spaces, such as the National Palace Museum, to educate the public and promote cultural heritage (Peck & Kwak, 2020).

Cultural Heritage Education Programs:
These programmes provide systematic and professional experiences through on-site visits and experiential learning, operated by local governments and cultural commentators (Peck & Kwak, 2020).

Utilisation as Public Parks:
Some historical sites serve as public parks, providing natural resting places while preserving the cultural environment (Peck & Kwak, 2020).

CULTURAL AND HERITAGE IMPACT OF TOURISM

Seoul's tourism strategy has had a significant impact on its cultural landscape, focusing on heritage preservation, promoting traditional arts and crafts, and influencing local lifestyles and customs. These efforts have not only increased the city's attractiveness as a tourist destination but also cultivated a greater understanding and appreciation of Korean culture among both residents and tourists. Here are some of the main initiatives and their effects:

Promotion of Traditional Arts and Crafts
Cultural Events and Exhibitions: Seoul promotes traditional arts and crafts through high-profile cultural events like the Seoul Design Olympiad and the World Design Capital designation in 2010. These events showcase the city's rich artistic traditions by blending traditional Korean crafts with contemporary design innovations. This approach attracts a global audience and fosters international cultural exchange (Yu, 2012).

Educational Programs
Cultural heritage education programmes provide hands-on activities and workshops that allow participants to learn and experience traditional arts and crafts up close. These programmes are designed to preserve traditional skills and knowledge, promoting a greater understanding and appreciation of Korean culture among both locals and tourists (Peck & Kwak, 2020).

Influence on Local Lifestyle and Customs
Cultural Heritage Protection Programs: Programs such as the "Protector of Cultural Heritage" engage citizens in the protection and maintenance of cultural sites. This community involvement fosters a sense of ownership and pride in cultural preservation, positively influencing local lifestyles and customs (Peck & Kwak, 2020).

Promotion of Cultural Experiences
The city provides cultural experiences like traditional tea ceremonies, calligraphy classes, and Hanbok-wearing at historical sites such as Gyeongbokgung Palace and Bukchon Hanok Village. These activities facilitate people immerse themselves in Korean culture, fostering cultural understanding and appreciation (Yu, 2012).

Development of Media Content
Seoul has developed comprehensive digital archives of its cultural heritage, providing online access to historical documents, photographs, and artifacts. These archives are valuable resources for researchers, educators, and the public, promoting wider access to cultural information and facilitating academic and cultural exchanges (Peck & Kwak, 2020).

Technological Integration in Cultural Heritage Sites
Seoul has created smart tourism apps with virtual tours, interactive maps, and cultural site details to enhance the visitor experience. These apps provide convenient information for exploring the city and its heritage (Peck & Kwak, 2020).

SMART TOURISM STRATEGY

Seoul's tourism strategy focuses on using smart tourism technologies to improve its destination image. Hwang, Park, and Hunter (2015) used constructivist methodologies to study how residents view Seoul's image. They used the Q method to categorise residents' subjective views based on common tourism promotional photographs. The study identified three clusters of subjectivities, showing that symbolic monuments like Seoul Tower and Namdaemun are crucial representations of Seoul. This approach emphasises the need to align marketing strategies with residents' perceptions to create a compelling destination image (Hwang et al., 2015).

Smart tourism technologies have transformed how destination images are perceived. User-generated content (UCC) and social media have shifted tourism marketing towards a participatory model where residents and tourists collaborate to shape the destination image. This interactive environment allows for a more authentic and diverse representation of Seoul, enhancing its appeal to a global audience (Hwang et al., 2015).
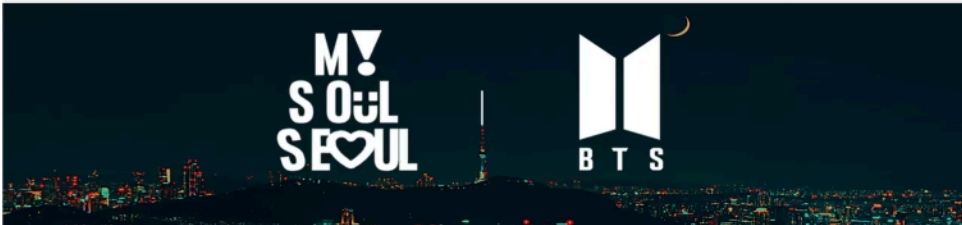

Figure 14: My Soul Seoul Digital Campaign
(Source: korea.net)

SMART TOURISM ACTIONS

Seoul's dedication to smart tourism is crucial for improving visitors' experience and encouraging sustainable urban development. The incorporation of cutting-edge technologies like mobile apps, IoT, and AR/VR has revolutionised how tourists engage with the city. The main benefits of smart tourism in Seoul include:

Enhancing Visitor Experience
Interactive Guides such as Mobile apps and digital kiosks provide real-time information, interactive maps, and virtual tours, helping visitors navigate the city more efficiently.

Efficiency and Convenience
Smart Infrastructure: Seoul utilises smart infrastructure such as free Wi-Fi zones, smart card payments for public transport, and IoT-enabled facilities to streamline the visitor experience.
Seamless Transportation: Integrated transport systems with real-time updates on buses, subways, and taxis ensure tourists can move around the city with ease.

Cultural Immersion:
Digital Storytelling: Interactive platforms and apps provide rich historical and cultural narratives, enhancing the understanding and appreciation of Seoul's traditions and heritage.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SMART CITY INITIATIVES

Seoul has adopted the smart city concept by incorporating a range of technological solutions to enhance urban living and tourism. This involves the implementation of IoT devices and sensors across the city to oversee and regulate various aspects such as traffic flow and energy usage. These efforts contribute to establishing a more effective and sustainable urban setting, which is a significant draw for tourists looking for destinations that are both technologically advanced and environmentally conscious. The smart city projects in Seoul aim to elevate the overall standard of living, making the city more appealing to both locals and tourists (Dameri, 2017).

Traffic Management:
Smart Traffic Lights: IoT sensors and AI algorithms are utilised to dynamically control traffic lights, decreasing congestion and enhancing traffic flow.
Real-Time Traffic Information: Mobile apps and digital displays offer real-time traffic updates, assisting drivers and pedestrians in navigating the city more effectively.

Integrated Transportation Systems:
T-Money Card: A convenient smart card that enables easy payment for transportation services such as buses, subways, and taxis. It streamlines travel for visitors and eliminates the necessity of carrying cash.
Real-Time Transit Information: Mobile applications and digital screens offer up-to-the-minute details on public transportation timetables, routes, and any disruptions, aiding tourists in planning their trips more efficiently.

Public Safety:
Smart Surveillance: CCTV cameras with AI technology are used to monitor public spaces for safety and security. They can identify unusual activities and notify authorities immediately.
Emergency Alerts: Tourists receive real-time alerts and emergency information through mobile apps and digital platforms to ensure their safety.

Mobile Applications:
Visit Seoul App: The authorised travel app offers comprehensive details on sights, lodging, dining, shopping, and activities. It offers personalised schedules, AR guides, and language translation tools.
Seoul Pass: A mobile pass that provides tourists with discounts and complimentary access to a variety of attractions, improving convenience and saving money.

Tourist Services:
Interactive Tourist Information: Smart kiosks and mobile apps offer tourists comprehensive information about attractions, events, and services in various languages.
Digital Guides and AR: Augmented reality (AR) applications enhance the visitor experience at cultural and historical sites by providing interactive guides and virtual tours..

Real-Time Data and Analytics:
Tourist Behavior Analysis: Seoul adopts big data analytics to gain insights into tourist behavior, preferences, and movement patterns, which in turn aids in enhancing tourism services and refining marketing strategies.

URBAN AESTHETIC ENHANCEMENT

Urban aesthetic enhancement is crucial in shaping the identity and appeal of global cities as tourist destinations. Research indicates that tourists are increasingly attracted to destinations that offer a unique aesthetic experience, with a focus on walkable areas and green spaces. In Seoul, South Korea, initiatives aimed at revitalising public spaces, integrating cultural heritage, and promoting sustainable urban design are key components of the city's tourism strategy. This introduction delves into Seoul's approach to urban aesthetic enhancement in the context of tourism development, highlighting key actions, implementation strategies, and academic viewpoints.

Seoul's urban aesthetic enhancement efforts prioritise the preservation of cultural heritage alongside modernity and sustainability principles. Kim and Lee (2018) emphasise that urban green spaces and public art installations not only enhance the city's visual appeal but also contribute to environmental sustainability and community well-being. Research by Park et al. (2022) shows that the Cheonggyecheon Stream restoration project in Seoul resulted in a significant increase in tourism foot traffic in the surrounding area. Collaborative planning involving stakeholders from the public and private sectors is crucial for fostering inclusive and culturally sensitive urban designs (Park & Kim, 2019). As Seoul continues to develop as a global city, understanding the diverse impacts of urban aesthetic enhancement on tourism, cultural identity, and urban sustainability is vital for guiding future development endeavors.

Figure 15: Dongdaemun Design Plaza which is a major urban development landmark in Seoul
(Source: https://english.seoul.go.kr/dongdaemun-design-plaza)

URBAN AESTHETIC ENHANCEMENT ACTIONS

1. Revitalisation of Public Spaces and Landmarks
Seoul is implementing strategic revitalisation projects to improve the visual appeal and cultural significance of public spaces and landmarks. These initiatives are boosting Seoul's reputation as a tourist destination, with foreign tourist spending in the city hitting a record high of $18.2 billion in 2019 (Korea Tourism Organisation, 2020). One example is the restoration of Gyeongbokgung Palace, where historical buildings and gardens are being meticulously reconstructed to showcase traditional Korean architecture and landscaping techniques (Kim & Choi, 2019). Another notable project is the Dongdaemun Design Plaza (DDP), designed by Zaha Hadid Architects, which combines contemporary design with historical elements to attract visitors with its innovative aesthetic and cultural exhibitions (Choi & Kim, 2017).

2. Public Art Installations and Cultural Districts
Seoul incorporates public art installations into urban planning to enhance public spaces with artistic expressions and cultural narratives. The Seoul Street Art Project transforms urban walls into platforms for murals and graffiti, drawing both tourists and residents, with approximately 10 million visitors coming to see the evolving street art scene each year (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2023). A recent survey by the Korea Tourism Organisation (KTO) revealed that 78.4% of international tourists cited Seoul's unique cultural experiences, including art and traditional crafts, as a key factor in choosing Seoul as a destination (KTO, 2023).

Cultural districts like Insadong showcase galleries, street performances, and interactive installations that celebrate traditional Korean arts and crafts, offering immersive cultural experiences for visitors (Jung & Kwon, 2018). These districts are a major draw for tourists, with over 40% of respondents in the survey expressing a preference for visiting cultural districts while in Seoul (KTO, 2023). This focus on public art and cultural integration in public spaces not only caters to tourist interests but also enriches Seoul's dynamic cultural landscape, attracting a significant number of visitors to the city.

Figure 16 & 17: Insadong is known for the food stalls and variety of food and public art
(Source: https://www.koreatodo.com/insadong)

3. Landscape Architecture and Green Urbanism
Seoul prioritises green urbanism principles by integrating sustainable landscape architecture into its urban planning. The Seoullo 7017 Skygarden, previously an elevated highway, has been converted into a verdant pedestrian pathway featuring more than 24,000 plants, providing sweeping vistas of the cityscape (Kim & Lee, 2018).

This project not only improves the visual appeal but also supports biodiversity, mitigates the urban heat island effect, and offers recreational opportunities. Research indicates that cities with ample green spaces attract more tourists. According to a survey conducted by the Seoul Tourism Organisation (STO) in 2022, 85.3% of international tourists preferred visiting cities with parks and green spaces during their trips. The Seoullo 7017 Skygarden exemplifies Seoul's dedication to green urban planning, enhancing the city's appeal as a tourist destination.

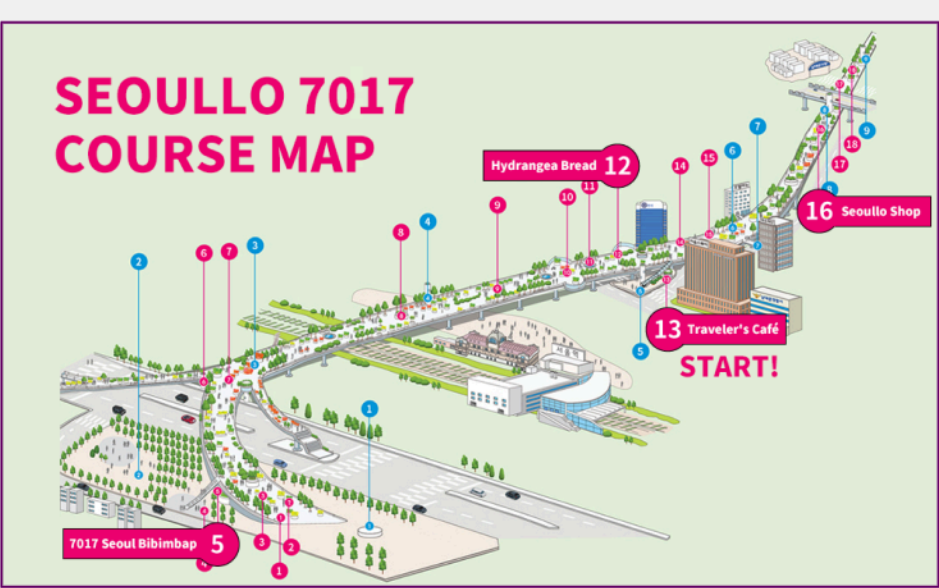Figure 18: Seoullo 7017 - The Skygarden for Seoul

(Source: https://www.mvrdv.com/seoullo-7017-skygarden)

Figure 19: Seoul 7017 Course Map
(Source: https://www.mvrdv.com/seoullo-7017-skygarden)

IMPLEMENTATION OF URBAN AESTHETIC ENHANCEMENT ACTIONS

Implementing Seoul's Urban Aesthetic Enhancement strategy involves turning visionary ideas into real urban improvements that boost the city's cultural vibrancy, visual attractiveness, and environmental sustainability. This process includes a comprehensive approach that combines collaborative design frameworks, policy support mechanisms, and acknowledgment of outstanding projects. By utilising these strategies, Seoul not only safeguards its cultural legacy but also stimulates economic development by increasing tourism attractiveness and enhancing residents' quality of life. The implementation of Urban Aesthetic Enhancement includes two approaches as follows :

1. Collaborative Design and Planning

Seoul adopts collaborative design and planning methods to ensure that urban aesthetic improvements align with community values, cultural heritage, and environmental factors. This collaborative approach involves architects, urban designers, landscape architects, and community stakeholders collaborating to plan and implement projects. An example of this is the revitalisation of Cheonggyecheon Stream, which involved extensive public consultations and interdisciplinary cooperation to turn a neglected waterway into a vibrant urban park that rejuvenates the nearby neighborhoods (Park & Kim, 2019).

Figure 20: Cheonggyecheon Stream before and after
(Source: https://www.thenatureofcities.com/)

2. Policy Support and Regulatory Frameworks

Policy support is essential for guiding and facilitating urban aesthetic enhancement projects in Seoul. Research indicates that more than 70% of international tourists visiting South Korea prioritise the beauty and aesthetics of a destination (KTO, 2023). Additionally, a study conducted by the Korea Development Institute (KDI) in 2022 revealed that investments in urban aesthetics, such as public art and green spaces, can result in a 15% increase in tourism revenue (KDI, 2022). The Seoul Metropolitan Government has implemented strategic policies that emphasise design excellence, cultural preservation, and sustainable development. Initiatives like the Design Seoul program offer incentives for creative urban design and cultural activities, encouraging developers and designers to incorporate aesthetic improvements into their projects (Choi & Park, 2020). Furthermore, regulatory frameworks ensure adherence to environmental standards, heritage preservation laws, and accessibility requirements, promoting inclusive and environmentally conscious urban development.

URBAN TRANQUILITY STRATEGY

Seoul's Urban Tranquility Strategy aims to transform the South Korean capital into a peaceful, pedestrian-friendly city, enhancing its appeal as a top global tourist destination. The South Korean tourism industry has seen significant growth, with a record 17.5 million visitors in 2019 (KTO, 2019). However, concerns about traffic congestion and air pollution affect tourists in Seoul (Tan, 2020). The Urban Tranquility Strategy addresses these issues by focusing on reducing traffic and improving air quality. A key aspect of the plan is the enhancement of public spaces. The strategy includes creating more green areas, pedestrian zones, and lively recreational areas for residents and tourists to relax and explore at a leisurely pace. Studies show that cities with walkable areas and green spaces are more appealing to tourists, especially those interested in cultural experiences (Jun & Shin, 2019). By promoting these peaceful environments in the city, the strategy aims to encourage deeper cultural immersion and a greater appreciation for Seoul's historical heritage.

URBAN TRANQUILITY ACTION

1. Creating Car-Free Zones

Transforming key urban areas into car-free zones to reduce congestion and enhance pedestrian safety and comfort. A 2023 survey by the Seoul Metropolitan Government revealed that 68% of tourists visiting Seoul found pedestrian-only areas like Insadong to be particularly enjoyable, highlighting the value of these zones for cultural exploration and a more relaxed sightseeing experience (Seoul Metropolitan Government, 2023). For example, Insadong has been designated as a pedestrian-friendly district, lined with traditional shops and tea houses, providing an inviting environment for cultural exploration (Jung & Kwon, 2018).
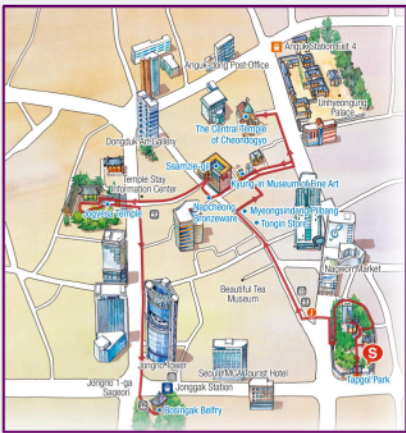

Figure 21: Insadong Street that was classifies as car-free zone
(Source: https://english.seoul.go.kr/)

2. Enhancing Public Spaces

Seoul's dedication to improving public spaces goes beyond Seoullo 7017 Skygarden and includes projects like Yeouido Hangang Park. This park, located by the Han River, offers landscaped gardens, walking paths, and recreational facilities that attract tourists and locals seeking relaxation and beautiful views (Choi and Park, 2020). A report from the STO in 2023 revealed that 82.7% of international tourists considered convenient and accessible public transportation a key factor in choosing to visit Seoul (STO, 2023). The development of well-connected public spaces like Yeouido Hangang Park, integrated with Seoul's extensive public transport system, enhances the visitor experience. These initiatives not only enhance urban landscapes but also help create a vibrant and welcoming cityscape in Seoul.

Figure 22: Yeouido Hangang Park Illustration
(Source: https://greatruns.com/seoul-yeouido-hangang-park/)

3. Preserving Historical Heritage

Preserving and incorporating historical sites into the urban landscape provides cultural and educational value for tourists. Bukchon Hanok Village, known for its well-maintained traditional Korean houses (hanoks), allows visitors to delve into Seoul's rich historical legacy (Lee and Park, 2021). According to the KTO, (2023), 87.2% of international tourists are keen on exploring historical and cultural sites during their travels. By safeguarding and blending historical sites such as Bukchon Hanok Village and Gyeongbokgung Palace, the largest of Seoul's Five Grand Palaces, Seoul caters to this significant tourist interest and enhances the city's cultural allure (Cultural Heritage Administration of Korea, 2024).

Figure 23: Gyeongbokgung Palace
(Source: Korea.Net)

IMPLEMENTATION OF URBAN TRANQUILITY STRATEGY

1. Monitoring and Evaluation

Ongoing evaluation of pedestrian-friendly initiatives is essential for maximising visitor satisfaction and minimising environmental impact. Regular assessments of projects like the Seoullo 7017 Skygarden help ensure they are in line with objectives and improve the cityscape (Kim & Lee, 2020). According to a report from the Seoul Tourism Organisation in 2023, 92% of international tourists consider pedestrian-friendly infrastructure and walkable areas to be significant factors in their enjoyment of Seoul (STO, 2023). By actively monitoring and assessing these initiatives, Seoul can guarantee they meet the preferences of tourists and enhance the overall visitor experience.

2. Visitor-Centric Design Philosophy

Creating urban spaces that prioritise the comfort and exploration of visitors. Places like Bukchon Hanok Village are designed to encourage the discovery of hidden cultural gems through narrow alleys, enhancing the overall visitor experience (Kim & Lee, 2020). According to a 2023 survey conducted by the KTO, 84.1% of international tourists consider walkability, clear signage, and convenient access to public transportation as crucial elements for a positive tourism experience in Seoul (KTO, 2023). This approach to design, centered around the needs of visitors, resonates with tourist preferences and promotes a spirit of adventure and exploration throughout the city.
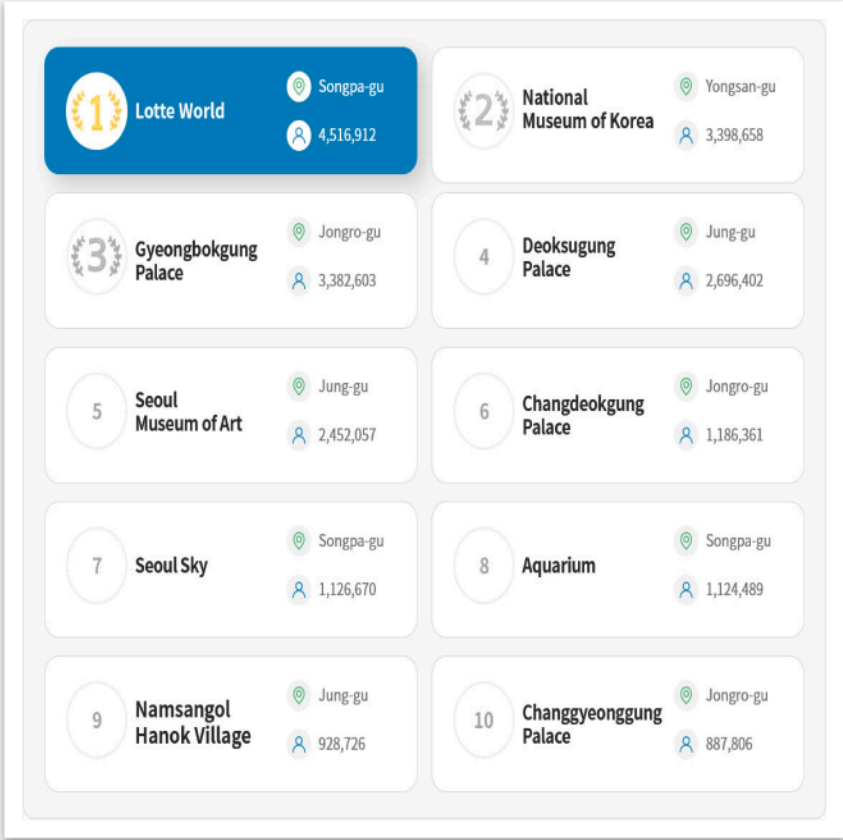

Figure 24: Top 10 ranking Korea Domestic Tourism Places
(Source: Tourism Knowledge & Information System)

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POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthening Public-Private Partnerships: To sustain and enhance its tourism initiatives, Seoul should continue to foster strong partnerships between public and private entities. This collaboration can lead to more innovative and inclusive tourism projects.

Diversifying Tourism Offerings: Expanding the range of tourism products beyond traditional cultural sites can attract a broader audience. This includes promoting niche markets such as eco-tourism and medical tourism.

Enhancing Digital Marketing: Leveraging digital platforms and social media can significantly boost Seoul's tourism marketing efforts. Engaging with potential tourists through interactive and immersive digital content can enhance the city's global reach.

Promoting Sustainable Tourism: Integrating sustainable practices into tourism development can ensure the long-term viability of Seoul's tourism sector. This includes preserving cultural heritage, promoting eco-friendly initiatives, and encouraging responsible tourism practices.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study of smart tourism initiatives in Seoul and Kuala Lumpur showcases how both cities have applied innovative technologies to improve the visitor experience, each with their own distinct approaches. Seoul's approach is deeply integrated into its smart city framework, utilsing IoT, AI, and big data to create an efficient and sustainable urban environment. Key features such as free Wi-Fi, real-time data analytics, augmented reality, and virtual reality offer personalised and immersive services, attracting tech-savvy and environmentally conscious tourists. Kuala Lumpur, while also embracing smart tourism, focuses on digital platforms to enhance accessibility and convenience. Mobile apps, digital payments, and smart transportation solutions improve tourist satisfaction through practical applications. The city's focus on cultural tourism and digital storytelling helps preserve and promote its rich heritage. Both cities showcase the potential of smart tourism to revolutionise urban tourism, striking a balance between technological innovation and cultural preservation. This analysis emphasises the importance of tailoring smart tourism strategies to fit local contexts, ensuring that technological advancements complement the unique cultural and historical aspects of each city.

In summary, Seoul demonstrates how smart tourism can enhance the tourism sector. Through ongoing adjustments to their approaches, these cities can remain competitive and offer memorable experiences for tourists. Further studies should track the impacts of these efforts to assist other cities in their quest to become smart tourist destinations.

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