

Bagan's Sustainable Tourism Model: Integrating Heritage Conservation and Local Development

Bagan, a UNESCO World Heritage Destination, Myanmar

Tourism planning in Bagan has been closely aligned with UNESCO World Heritage conservation requirements through the development of the Bagan Management Plan (BMP). The BMP incorporates a Strategic Plan for Sustainable Tourism that aims to manage visitor growth while protecting the site's Outstanding Universal Value. This integrated approach positions tourism not as a risk to heritage, but as a practical tool to support conservation objectives and contribute to local development when it is carefully planned and managed.

Quality destinations Employment Resilience Skills

Initiative	Myanmar's approach to sustainable tourism is exemplified by the Bagan Tourism Management Plan, which places heritage conservation and community approach at the core of tourism development.
Actors	Cross-Sector Coordination
URL	https://wonderbagan.com/en/

Governance and Cross-Sector Coordination

Strong institutional governance has been a defining feature of Bagan's approach to sustainable tourism management. The initiative has been led by the Ministry of Hotels and Tourism (MOHT), with technical cooperation from the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), ensuring that tourism development objectives have been aligned with heritage conservation requirements from the outset.

To put this coordination into practice, Joint Coordination Committees (JCCs) and thematic Working Groups were established, bringing together relevant ministries, regional and local governments, destination management organizations, and private sector associations. These platforms enabled structured dialogue, joint decision-making, and clear allocation of roles among institutions responsible for tourism, culture, infrastructure, and local administration. Recognizes that safeguarding Subak is not only an environmental obligation, but also a cultural and spiritual duty. Without this living system, the terraces would lose their meaning and their form.

Community Participation and Local Livelihood Development

Community participation has been systematically embedded in Bagan's sustainable tourism framework as a core implementation approach rather than a parallel activity.

The Bagan Tourism Management Plan places strong emphasis on community-based tourism (CBT) and capacity building to ensure direct benefits to local residents from tourism development and an active contribution to heritage conservation.

Through targeted training programmes and pilot CBT initiatives, local communities have been engaged in tourism-related activities such as handicraft production, guiding services, and small-scale hospitality. These efforts have strengthened local skills, generated employment opportunities, and deepened understanding of heritage values. While fostering a stronger sense of cultural pride among residents.

Sustainable Tourism Management and Promotion

Infrastructure development in Bagan is guided by principles of sustainability, heritage sensitivity, and long-term maintainability. Tourism-related facilities—including information centres, viewing points, visitor routes, and public signage—are designed to harmonize with the historic landscape and comply with regulations set by cultural heritage authorities.

Construction approaches prioritize the use of local materials and labour, resulting in infrastructure solutions that are durable, cost-effective, and manageable by local authorities. In addition, controls on outdoor advertising and landscape modification have helped safeguard the visual integrity of the heritage environment. Iture remains a viable and respected livelihood rather than one abandoned by younger generations.



Environmental Sustainability and Urban Services

Environmental management has been treated as an integral component of sustainable tourism development in Bagan. Investments in waste management systems, water supply and sewage infrastructure, underground power lines, and transport facilities have helped reduce the environmental pressures associated with growing tourism activity.

These improvements have contributed not only to enhanced visitor comfort and safety, but also to the long-term conservation of the cultural landscape. Focus on knowledge and skills helps young residents build sustainable careers without leaving their village.

Human Resource Development and Public Awareness

Human resource development has been recognized as a critical enabling factor for sustainable tourism management in Bagan. Training programmes for government officials, tourism professionals, and community members have been implemented to strengthen technical capacity, improve service quality, and enhance institutional coordination.

These efforts have been complemented by public awareness campaigns that promote responsible visitor behavior and reinforce understanding of heritage conservation among residents and key stakeholders.

Replicability and Policy Implications

As a pilot model for regional tourism development in Myanmar, Bagan offers transferable lessons for other heritage destinations, underscoring the value of long-term planning, strong institutional coordination, community engagement, and international cooperation. The experience demonstrates that when governance structures, technical planning, and local participation are effectively integrated, tourism can support heritage conservation while providing a replicable pathway for other UNESCO and heritage destinations.

