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Research article

Revisiting sustainable tourism practices in coastal tourism with particular focus on the South Beach in Durban, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perception and implementation of sustainable tourism principles by tourism businesses around South Beach, Durban. As a growing and prominent tourism destination, pursuing a more sustainable tourism remains important. Realising sustainable tourism fully remains a great challenge among tourism destinations, and South Beach, Durban, is no exception. Therefore, the study's objective was to understand how sustainable tourism is perceived and practised by tourism corporations around South Beach. By doing so, it reveals the stakeholder's capacity to enhance the livelihoods of local communities through tourism and environmental preservation. The study used a qualitative research method to try to explore understandings and recognition of sustainable tourism. A total of fourteen (14) participants were interviewed in the study. According to the findings, sustainable tourism is seen as an environmentally sound policy that promotes sustainable consumption and production of goods and services. Nonetheless, poor municipal resource management prevents tourism suppliers from fully engaging in sustainability, thereby hindering the supply of high-quality products. The paper concludes that tourism is more than just a profit-driven or externally imposed activity. It can promote communal well-being and ecological stewardship. The study recommends collaboration between local tourism authorities and tourism enterprises.

KEYWORDS

Sustainable tourism; local economic development; community well-being; corporate social responsibility; stakeholders.

Introduction

Coastal tourism has received global attention and become increasingly competitive as everyone strives to increase profits from beach tourism, both local and international (Senthilkumar, 2022). It is unsurprising, then, that tourism development remains a priority, particularly for developing countries seeking to expand revenue streams and boost local economic growth. Tourism, while significantly contributing to economic development, cultural exchange, and employment, also leads to environmental degradation, social inequalities, and economic disparities (Aransyah et al, 2025). Consequently, tourism should contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals through sustainable tourism development. However, some tourism destinations have yet to fully practise it. A dilemma persists in maximising earnings while ensuring more environmentally friendly tourism (Chetty & Ndlovu, 2018; Karsokiene et al., 2025). This can be attributable to tourism managers' inability to commit resources to sustainable tourism and the perceived high costs of transitioning (Frey & George, 2010:6). Sustainable tourism management must prioritise ecological protection in destinations and address the needs of both local communities and visitors (Chetty & Ndlovu, 2022). Local communities have become a central part of sustainable tourism. After all, development is meant to improve the standards of their lives (Senthilkumar, 2022). Sustainability aims to prevent harm by assuring

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responsible resource use, reducing negative environmental impacts, and preserving socioeconomic equilibrium and harmony (Artal-Tur & Badillo-Amador, 2024; Karsokiene et al., 2025). Thus, creating a harmonious environment between local communities, the private sector and local governments, ensuring the sustainability of the tourism sector in that destination.

Tourism businesses play a crucial role in implementing sustainable tourism practices as providers of goods and services (Gkoumas, 2019). They influence the types of products available in the market, how visitors are educated about proper conduct during their visits, and the adoption of environmentally friendly infrastructure (Chetty & Ndlovu, 2018; Senthilkumar, 2022). This responsible tourism, as an individualistic approach, implies that the private sector, as a stakeholder, shares equal responsibility with the public sector to ensure the sustainability of the tourism destination (Chiawo et al., 2023). Therefore, this has led to an examination of how sustainable is perceived, practised, and incorporated into the management policies of tourism suppliers (Aransyah et al., 2025). The apotome representation of the tourism industry is in the private sector, which includes accommodation, transportation, and service industries (Karsokiene et al., 2025). Therefore, their perspective and drive toward sustainable development are critical, as they directly influence the sector's transformation toward more sustainable tourism. South Beach in Durban is a lively coastal locale renowned for its stunning beaches, multiculturalism, and thriving tourism sector (Gkoumas, 2019). It is imperative to implement sustainable tourism measures to protect the natural environment, support local communities, and ensure long-term economic sustainability (Hoarau-Heemstra et al., 2025; Senthilkumar, 2022). The critical components of sustainability, including social, economic, and environmental responsibility, must be carefully harmonised to effectively integrate sustainability into a destination (Aransyah et al., 2025). Prior studies have predominantly focused on analysing tourists' behaviour in coastal destinations such as Durban, assessing their attitudes and behaviours during tourism activities (Bob, 2016). This research, however, shifts its focus to evaluating perceptions and the implementation of sustainable tourism policies in the same area. The objective is to understand business representatives' perspectives on current sustainability practices, identify obstacles, and explore potential opportunities. The paper contributes to the tourism discourse on coastal tourism and provides insights into the changing dynamics of tourism, community agency, and socio-ecological adaptation.

Literature review

Sustainable tourism: A conceptual framework

Sustainable tourism is conceptualised as encompassing practices that aim to minimise negative environmental, social, and cultural impacts while maximising economic benefits for local communities and preserving natural resources for future generations (UNWTO, 2015). Sustainable tourism has emerged as a key topic in global conversations (Berbeka et al., 2024), particularly as destinations strive to balance economic growth, environmental preservation, and social equality (Gkoumas, 2019; Karsokiene et al., 2025). As tourism grows, it is critical to adopt strategies that promote long-term sustainability while increasing resilience (Butler, 2024). The concept of sustainable tourism is rooted in the principles of sustainable development, which include economic viability, environmental protection, and social justice (Aransyah et al., 2025). The active engagement of local communities in decision-making processes and the development of tourism initiatives is crucial to sustainable tourism, underscoring the importance of community participation (Dangi & Jamal, 2016; Makoni et al., 2023). The primary objective of sustainable development is to safeguard current resources from depletion and prevent future generations from being deprived of their use. Scholars have formulated various concepts, particularly in specialised fields such as environmental science, energy science, and political science (Aransyah et al., 2025), to identify and address many viewpoints that influence sustainability practices at a chosen location (Ekonomou & Halkos, 2023; Karsokiene et al., 2025). Visitors are essential to the tourism supply chain because their demand drives the entire system (Atasoy & Eren, 2023; Chetty & Ndlovu, 2018). The Magic Pentagon presents a theoretical structure for examining the sustainability of tourism. It is a fundamental concept in tourism planning and development, encompassing the five essential components for effective tourism management and sustainable

promotion (Gkoumas, 2019). E. Namely, guest satisfaction, economic health, community well-being, resource preservation, and a healthy culture. Achieving equilibrium and harmony among these essential principles within a destination involves prioritising sustainability and responsible resource management in tourism development and practices, while also addressing the needs of both tourists and local communities (Donyadide, 2010:427).

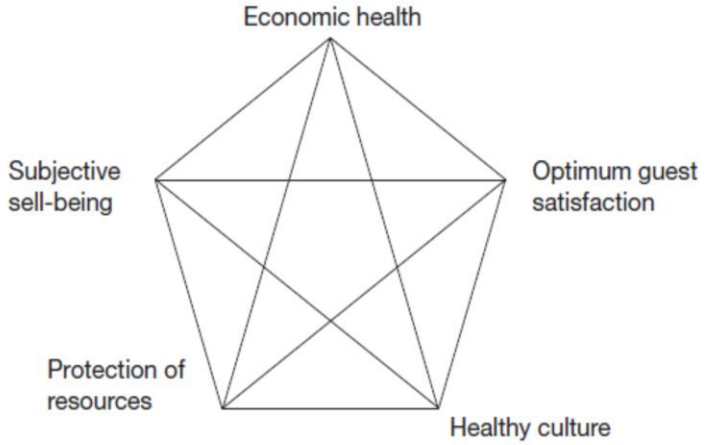

Figure 1: The magic pentagon
Source: Donyadide (2010:427)

Sustainable tourism in coastal destinations

Much of the literature underscores the importance of environmental preservation for the development of coastal tourism. Research by Jones et al. (2018) and Smith et al. (2020) highlights the negative impacts of extensive tourism on coastal environments, including habitat degradation, contamination, and reduced biodiversity. A study by Khalid et al. (2019) examines the swift expansion of tourist amenities, which has led to detrimental environmental transformations that have impacted local fishing communities dependent on healthy ecosystems for their sustenance. Similarly, adverse consequences on local ecosystems and communities have been witnessed along the Kenyan coast, where the displacement of indigenous populations to accommodate tourism development has been documented (Gola et al., 2018). Sustainable strategies such as establishing marine protected areas, implementing responsible waste management systems, and promoting eco-friendly transportation methods have been suggested as viable approaches to address these challenges (Bramwell & Lane, 201; Brett, 2019). A vital component in steering sustainable tourism in coastal areas is effective governance and policy frameworks. These policies encompass Integrated Coastal Management strategies that strive to harmonise conservation aims with socio-economic development objectives (Charuka et al., 2023). Nevertheless, the execution of these policies often encounters hindrances stemming from regulatory disunity, absence of interagency coordination, and limited financial resources (Ikhwani et al., 2023).

The significance of collaborative partnerships among various stakeholders and the adoption of adaptive management tactics is highlighted as essential tools for addressing these governance hurdles and fostering more comprehensive and participatory decision-making processes (Makoni et al., 2023). The South African government, through the Coastal Public-Private Partnership (CPPP), promotes joint management of coastal areas involving public and private sector stakeholders. This approach aims to help the public sector fulfil its constitutional duties, take the lead in conserving and sustainably developing the coastline, and promote economic efficiency principles (Aransyah et al., 2025). This method prioritises cooperative leadership that incorporates input from both the public and private realms. By examining these perspectives, policymakers and stakeholders can ensure that the strategies and initiatives developed for South Beach Durban incorporate a diverse array of considerations from both sectors.

Private sector engagement in sustainable tourism

The private sector, as a significant actor in the international tourism industry, can influence or facilitate transformation within the broader tourism framework to promote greater sustainability (Bramwell & Lane, 2011). In the tourist industry, hotels, airlines, tour operators, and transportation providers are vital players. Their involvement is crucial to advancing sustainable practices, as they have significant influence on resource use, waste generation, and community relations (Charuka et al., 2023; Goliath et al., 2018). However, ongoing difficulties such as financial constraints, limited knowledge, and conflicting business objectives frequently impede the implementation of sustainable practices (Frey & George, 2010). Furthermore, the decentralised structure of the tourism sector and the lack of standardised sustainability criteria complicate endeavours to effectively evaluate and oversee progress (Buckley, 2018). The World Business Council for Sustainable Development highlights that, in the absence of supportive policies and regulatory frameworks that encourage and guide private-sector actions towards sustainability, companies may default to conventional business strategies. These strategies are likely to prioritise profit generation and market expansion, potentially contradicting the overarching goals of sustainable tourism as a means of responsible resource management and mitigation of negative social and environmental impacts (Frey & George, 2010; Senthilkumar, 2022). Dangi & Jamal (2016) note the challenges faced by private-sector entities in adhering to intricate, ever-changing sustainability regulations. This compliance issue could deter participation or prompt the adoption of greenwashing tactics (Ekonomou & Halkos, 2023; Karsokiene et al., 2025). Moreover, without stringent regulations in place, certain enterprises may resort to greenwashing, a deceptive practice in which they inaccurately portray their operations as environmentally beneficial to appeal to environmentally conscious customers (Font, 2017). From an optimistic perspective, tourism establishments can benefit from integrating sustainable practices. For example, reducing costs by decreasing energy consumption and waste production (Senthilkumar, 2022). In addition, this commitment can elevate the overall travel experience (Aransyah et al, 2025). Prioritising quality allows tourism companies to forge stronger connections with local communities, businesses, and the environment, enhancing tourists' travel experiences. Consequently, these businesses can gain a stronger reputation and competitive advantage.

Methods

The study adopted a qualitative research method. Qualitative research primarily centres on the interpretation of human experiences through a humanistic, interpretive lens. It was chosen because the study seeks a deeper comprehension of a specific subject or aims to recognise and define important issues (Bickman et al, 2009). The research utilised purposive sampling; specifically, the researcher selected managers and representatives from various sectors of the tourism industry due to their expertise in the operations and policy frameworks related to sustainable tourism development in the South Beach Durban region. Consequently, the primary participants in the study included managers of tourism businesses, government officials from Tourism KwaZulu-Natal and Durban Tourism, and representatives from non-governmental organisations. The researcher utilised in-depth interviews to collect pertinent data from the study participants. In-depth interviews are characterised by their exploratory nature and were selected for this study for their emphasis on addressing the research questions while also giving participants the opportunity to express their viewpoints and offer insights they consider relevant to the inquiries being posed (Busetto et al., 2020). This decision was particularly crucial in this study as the researcher aimed to gain insights into the interpretations of sustainable tourism principles and their strategic implementation by tourism industry proprietors. Before commencing the interview process, the researcher obtained ethical approval from the University of KwaZulu-Natal. Subsequently, the interviews were initiated. Although all interviews were conducted in English, a few responses were given in IsiZulu and subsequently transcribed and translated accurately. To establish the research's credibility, a pilot study was conducted to assess the reliability and validity of the study questions. This process enhanced the robustness of the study. Following data collection, the data were analysed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is significant across a wide range of disciplines, such as tourism research, owing to its experiential nature, which involves identifying themes and sub-themes from

the data (Bickman et al., 2009). This approach is particularly crucial as it enables the exploration and appreciation of the multifaceted layers of meanings inherent in tourism experiences and practices. This aspect was deemed essential to the study's interpretation of the diverse experiences prevalent among tourism industry stakeholders. There was a total of 14 (fourteen participants in the study. Table 2 presents a breakdown of the study participants and their respective sectors.

Table 1: Participants of the study and their details

Participants	***Type of Tourism business***	***Position in the business/Organisation***
Participant 1 (P1)	Tour Operator	General manager
Participant 2 (P2)	Hotel	Manager
Participant 3 (P3)	Hotel	Manager
Participant 4 (P4)	Hotel	Supervisor
Participant 5 (P5)	Hotel	Manager
Participant 6 (P6)	Hotel	General manager
Participant 7 (P7)	Amusement Park	Manager
Participant 8 (P8)	Hotel	General manager
Participant 9 (P9)	Attraction	Owner
Second group of Participants	***Municipality Officials***	***Position in the Organisation***
Participant 10 (P10)	Tourism KwaZulu-Natal	Coordinator
Participant 11 (P11)	Durban tourism	Manager marketing
Third group of Participants	***Non-Governmental organisations (NGO's) or Community projects/initiatives***	***Position in the Organisation***
Participant 12 (P12)	Non-Governmental organisations	Director
Participant 13 (P14)	Non-Governmental organisations	Interim Member
Participant 14 (P14)	Community projects/initiatives	Community activist

Results and discussion

Understanding of sustainable tourism as a policy in South Beach

The researcher embarked on a quest to explore perspectives on sustainable tourism policy in the South Beach Area, focusing primarily on tourism businesses. Stakeholders, including consumers, investors, employees, and local communities, are placing increasing importance on companies demonstrating their commitment to environmental, economic, and social responsibility (Font, 2017). In an illustration of this perspective, P2 stated: "*Yes, we include sustainable tourism guidelines into our management approach; we have regulations in place to ensure that we as a hotel are environmentally sustainable, and we also ensure that our visitors are responsible, so it's all about respecting the environment and ensuring that it is not, our activities do not damage the environment* (P2)." Moreover, P7 indicated that: *I would say one of the park's core values is contributing to the area's sustainability. You can see that we are surrounded by a lot of greenery, which we have worked hard to maintain in accordance with the municipality's mandate that we keep our spaces green. It is important to the city, so we contribute in any way we can. We have also tried to educate our visitors through posters on appropriate behaviour and the need to avoid damaging the nearby vegetation…* (P7)."

Moreover, Buckley (2012) and Miller et al. (2015) contend that ensuring the long-term sustainability of tourism destinations requires proactive environmental stewardship and educating visitors about responsible conduct. As stated by P1, who mentioned that: *We encourage our clients to take trips in places that recognise the importance of responsible tourism* (P1). Participant 7 added that: *We have also tried to educate our visitors through posters on appropriate behaviour and on avoiding damage to nearby vegetation* (P1). Some tourism businesses adopted a responsible tourism approach by educating tourists about environmental stewardship. This was done through the implementation of policies and the use of posters to guide tourists towards responsible behaviour.

Maintaining economic viability in South Beach

The importance of competent destination management cannot be overstated in ensuring the sustainability and profitability of tourism ventures. It was found that the efforts of local authorities, notably Durban Tourism, play a pivotal role in bolstering South Beach's competitiveness as a tourist destination. As articulated by P10: "*What we do is promote say, KZN or Durban as a destination of choice in the global competitive market, we have marketing managers that are focused on promoting our destination in different parts of the world for example in Asia, Europe and even America, our work is to lure customers around the world to come see the great tourism products and services that they offer as tourism businesses* (P10)*."*

Their strategic focus on marketing South Beach and Durban globally underscores the proactive stance taken to attract visitors from diverse regions. This approach resonates with Hassan's (2000) assertion that understanding and catering to tourists' varied needs is necessary to ensure the diversification and market orientation of tourism products and services. However, despite the efforts of Durban Tourism, some stakeholders expressed concerns regarding the adequacy of promotion initiatives, particularly in tapping into the international market, as expressed by P3: "*I also believe that Durban tourism should focus on enhancing South Beach. We have a lot to offer, but as you are probably aware, many visitors are from within South Africa, so we need Durban tourism to work with us to revitalise South Beach. We also need to tap into the international travel market, so the emphasis should really be on enhancing the Durban CBD and South Beach* (P13)". This highlights the need for intensified efforts to revitalise South Beach and enhance its appeal to both domestic and international travellers. This sentiment is reinforced by the observation that South Beach primarily attracts domestic tourists, while international visitors favour other areas, such as North Beach and Point, due to prominent attractions like uShaka Marine World and world-class hotels like the Sun Coast Hotel and Casino. The study's findings illuminate economic interconnections among tourism enterprises in the South Beach area. For instance, one participant said, *I don't know if you are aware of the homeless man who used a vacant lot to grow fresh produce. Our job was to reach out to him and ask if we could purchase some of his produce* (P10). This aligns with recommendations from the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), which advocate prioritising locally sourced goods and services within tourism operations to maximise benefits for local communities (Figueroa & Rotarou, 2021). Such practices not only contribute to the uniqueness of a destination's offerings but also foster a more comprehensive visitor experience (UNWTO and UNEP, 2008). However, the predominantly urban nature of South Beach poses challenges for securing local produce for hotel operations, particularly fresh vegetables, due to limited nearby farms. Nevertheless, alternative avenues for sourcing within the broader Durban area ultimately bolster local community welfare. Analogous challenges have been observed in other settings, such as Greece, where hotels face cost and availability constraints in procuring local products but are gradually recognising the value of local sourcing (Argyropoulou et al., 2019). In line with this, fostering collaboration among local businesses is a pivotal strategy, as emphasised by one participant: *'As local businesses, we must really work together to support one another and develop the local economy together' (P6).* This echoes Vidal Rua's (2020) findings, which posit that such collaborations engender network formation and mutual support mechanisms among tourism service providers, potentially extending to other economic sectors, such as agriculture. Encouragingly, initiatives in destinations such as the UK have demonstrated the effectiveness of government interventions, including accreditation schemes and subsidies, in incentivising hotels to prioritise local procurement, thereby nurturing local economic linkages (Ashley et al., 2005).

Environmental protection and Local community participation in South Beach

Many tourism businesses in the South Beach area have implemented strategies to conserve resources, such as investing in solar energy systems and monitoring water consumption as explained by P8 *It is not just us, I think that many industries have adopted sustainable practises to save the environment, we also don't use a lot of energy, we preserve power, and we turn the lights off in, or during times where they are unoccupied, that's also important* (P8). These efforts not only contribute to environmental sustainability but also respond to global calls for addressing climate change and resource depletion. Furthermore, the adoption of the three Rs, recycle, reuse, and reduce, plays a vital role in minimising environmental impact and improving waste management in tourism establishments. While challenges exist in implementing these practices due to resource-intensive operations and the prevalence of single-use products in the tourism industry, consumer preferences for environmentally responsible businesses drive their adoption. Despite barriers such as limited understanding and resources among hotel managers, incorporating strategies focused on resource reduction, reuse, and recycling can lead to positive financial outcomes and enhance the overall sustainability of tourism businesses (Figueroa & Rotarou, 2021; Hassan, 2000; Zografakis et al., 2011). The study's findings

underscore the need for vigilant monitoring and regulation of tourist activities by local government entities to uphold stringent regulations and minimise adverse impacts on marine ecosystems in South Beach. P11 stated: "*South Beach is part of our most visited areas, especially by people coming from all over the country, there's many activities there extending to the point area, we have many attractions that put an emphasis on, on the protection and conservation of our marine life, Because it is part of the coast line, there is resources in place that you know are aimed at managing the coast through legal or whatever means, this is all to achieve, long-term conservation so that tourism continues to benefit the area, not only limited to the area but benefits are shared all over so it is important for the nature along with its associated ecosystem services and cultural values* (P11)". This highlights the significance of such oversight and emphasises the importance of protecting and conserving marine life in popular tourist destinations like South Beach. This is crucial for ensuring the long-term sustainability of tourism and the equitable distribution of benefits across the region. While some businesses prioritise direct interaction with communities, others opt for partnerships with NGOs to better understand community needs and preferences. As supported by P2*I am not going to lie, we do not personally reach out to communities, because where can we start, you see, so it is better we approach community programs through their representatives, since every organisation has representatives, even NGOs, so they know what they do and what they need from us (*P2). This aligns with the notion that collaboration between the private sector and NGOs can facilitate effective community engagement and address local concerns (Holden & Mason, 2005). Additionally, leveraging local employees' insights and connections can be a valuable strategy for identifying and engaging communities, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of tourism development initiatives (Sihombing et al., 2017).

This study explored the presence and recognition of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the South Beach area of Durban, particularly their interactions with tourism businesses. Despite the limited residential areas in South Beach, various NGOs and community projects run by individuals operate there, prompting an investigation into their recognition and support by tourism businesses. The findings revealed that these NGOs receive support from tourism enterprises, as articulated by P12, who stated that, *"we work with a few hotels in the area... Garden Court... help us... give us any clothing, food parcels, or other items they are not currently using."* (P12). Furthermore, although the support extended to these NGOs is not exclusive to tourism businesses in South Beach, these organisations receive assistance from businesses across Durban. P13 highlighted the widespread support, stating, *we are supported by many businesses in Durban generally... Our goal is to give back to communities... people need help* (P13). Additionally, collaboration between some tourism businesses and local community projects was evident, as illustrated by P 14, who noted, *we are partners with some tourism businesses in the area... we provide them with what they need... received help from restaurants... we ensure to run our project and keep them close* (P14). The analysis reveals that sustainable tourism principles emphasise the importance of tourism businesses addressing the needs of local communities to enhance their quality of life. While all tourism businesses interviewed asserted having community development policies, the study revealed variations in approaches to community engagement.

Participant 1 highlighted the implementation of projects dedicated to empowering local community members. Conversely, P5 emphasised the necessity of continuous engagement with evolving community needs to shape community engagement policies. These findings underscore the commitment of tourism businesses in the South Beach area to contribute to local community well-being. This aligns with Font's (2017) assertion that pro-social and pro-environmental policies in tourism development improve community quality of life and long-term sustainability. Moreover, the study suggests that policy coherence across branches of tourism enterprises is crucial for effective community engagement, as articulated by P9: "*Our businesses, as well as our board of directors, are involved in various community improvement projects. They oversee policy development across all aspects of the company, guide us, and have created charities in the company's name. You can even refer to our websites for more specifics about our charities* (P9)." However, dissatisfaction among local communities in some destinations with tourism development stems from

inadequate recognition of the opportunities tourism brings (Sihombing et al., 2017; Waligo et al., 2015). Reflecting the challenge of accommodating diverse community interests.

Challenges hindering the total integration of sustainable tourism in South Beach

The findings reveal that local NGOs in the South Beach area face significant financial constraints, hampering their efforts to improve the lives of local communities. Participants express frustration with inadequate funding, noting, "The problem we face is the issue of funding... we do not receive enough financial support from the government and sponsors" (P13). This finding aligns with research by Segrado & Farmer (2006), who note similar challenges faced by local NGOs in Valle de Bravo, Mexico. Insufficient funding limits NGOs' capacity to implement sustainable tourism initiatives and address community needs effectively. The study highlights the adverse impact of high crime rates and a large homeless population on the attractiveness of the South Beach area as a tourist destination. Participants acknowledge these challenges, with one stating, *we have high crime rates and a higher concentration of homeless people... causing a lot of problems over the years* (P9). Research by Dube (2015) corroborates these findings, linking homelessness to neighbourhood issues like violence and pickpocketing. Addressing crime and homelessness is crucial to enhancing tourists' perceptions of safety and security, as emphasised by Perry & Potgieter (2013). The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated existing challenges faced by the South Beach tourism industry, leading to job losses, the closure of tourist attractions, and economic downturn. Participants reflect on the impact of the pandemic, with one noting, "*You have probably seen how travel decreased... there were literally no tourism activities happening in the city"*. This includes a renewed focus on domestic tourism to mitigate reliance on foreign markets. "*So, we were forced to go back to the drawing board and see how we can partner up with organisations like Proudly South African and Shot Left to see how we can encourage domestic tourism, because we have been so heavily reliant on foreign arrivals, that is why we have put an emphasis on local travel, organisations such as shot left are some of our partners that we work with in this, people of this country really have to travel and check what's on their backyard, there's a whole lot more interesting places around that people need to see especially in the province of KwaZulu-Natal* (P10)." The study's findings align with Rogerson and Rogerson's (2020) research, highlighting the pandemic's detrimental effects on the tourism sector and the wider economy. In response, stakeholders are re-evaluating sustainable tourism strategies, focusing on promoting domestic travel and ensuring compliance with COVID-19 protocols. Stakeholders in the tourism industry have been compelled to adapt and re-strategise their approaches.

Discussion and implications

The integrity of physical landscapes is paramount for preserving the authenticity of natural environments and mitigating degradation caused by tourism. Resource efficiency is a critical aspect of sustainable tourism, aiming to minimise the use of scarce resources while ensuring their availability to local communities (Hoarau-Heemstra et al., 2025). This could be coupled with supportive government policy initiatives to enable the successful conservation of environmental and natural resources without jeopardising local economic viability or social well-being (Mgadle et al., 2022). It is crucial for tourism businesses to grasp the various perspectives on sustainable tourism to align their strategies, meet stakeholder demands, manage risks effectively, enhance resource utilisation, and distinguish themselves in the market (Butowski, 2021; Buckley, 2012; Sørensen & Grindsted, 2021). Although the importance of sustainability for tourism growth is clear, some researchers have raised fundamental reservations about the concept's application across all types of destinations (Gkoumas, 2019; Senthilkumar, 2022). However, the study's identification of tourism businesses as significant drivers of social sustainability is a novel contribution, underlining their previously untapped potential to lead resilience-building initiatives and stimulate socio-environmental participation (Karsokiene, 2025). Weaver (2006) and Adejumoke & Ndlovu (2025) highlight the crucial importance of sustainable tourism in mitigating environmental impacts by preserving resources and maintaining ecological harmony and equilibrium. The threat to beaches and coastal infrastructure requires innovative management

solutions to sustain coastal tourism (Mgadle et al., 2022). Durban, like other coastal towns that rely on tourism, is implementing nature-based and engineering solutions to maintain its beaches and ensure sustainable tourism development. The emphasis is on the necessity of integrated management approaches that address environmental, social, and economic objectives to reduce the negative effects of tourism (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Makhaola & Proches, 2017; Shin et al., 2026). Small-scale, localised examples present best practices that can pave the way for new ideas and innovation (UNWTO, 2020). Destination management needs to set goals and provide leadership to achieve sustainability by improving environmental and socio-cultural outcomes in collaboration with industry (Mgadle et al., 2022). Stakeholders must urgently enhance governance by ensuring effective participation, equitable benefit sharing, and dispute resolution, and by reforming transparency and accountability mechanisms to enable ecotourism to contribute to biodiversity protection and livelihood sustainability (Chetty and Ndlovu, 2022, 2018; Forje et al., 2022). By engaging residents and involving them in decision-making, tourism development initiatives can garner community support and foster a sense of ownership over local resources (Gola et al., 2018; Sihombing et al., 2017). The paper contributes to the current coastal tourism discourse on sustainability practices, ongoing transformations, and the challenges destinations face in delivering practical benefits to tourism professionals, improving the well-being of host communities, and providing excellent services to tourists.

Conclusions

Coastal tourism plays a pivotal role in driving local economic growth, but challenges such as pollution, high crime and poverty threaten its expansion and attractiveness to visitors. The paper underscores the tourism industry's commitment to corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a driving force behind the adoption of sustainable tourism practices on South Beach. Sustainable tourism seeks to provide jobs and income while minimising serious environmental and cultural impacts. Environmental, biodiversity, and socio-cultural challenges were highlighted as the most significant threats to coastal sustainability. The paper shows that the long-term sustainability of the coast can be improved by strengthening environmental education and disseminating information to enhance coordination among existing stakeholders involved in coastal management. This underscores the importance of collaboration among different stakeholders to ensure sustainable tourism development in the South Beach area. The competitiveness of the South Beach area hinges on its ability to ensure the safety and security of visitors. Prioritising visitor safety and security not only fosters trust among visitors but also enhances satisfaction, encouraging repeat visits and positive word of mouth.

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