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# INVESTMENT AND URBAN TOURISM INDUSTRY IN THE CITY OF CONSTANTINE

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## ABSTRACT

Global experiences have proven that tourism is one of the crucial economic sectors contributing significantly to the development process, owing to both material and non-material benefits it offers to host regions. Urban tourism, a contemporary type gaining momentum and support, has become increasingly popular in cities worldwide possessing essential tourism resources and attributes. This trend persists because urban tourism operates year-round, unaffected by seasonal or occasional variations.

Tourism has evolved into a cornerstone of urban economies, leveraging local potentials to generate sustainable profits and bolstering economic growth. This strategic approach enables cities to assume multifaceted roles supporting development through the utilization of these capabilities.

In this context, the concept of stimulating investment in Constantine's tourism sector, which encompasses all the elements necessary for urban tourism—including religious, heritage, and natural attractions—is pivotal. However, the oversight, lack of foresight, and absence of strategic development plans from local authorities have prevented this sector from fulfilling Constantine's esteemed position and potential. Consequently, this neglect has led to the squandering of a valuable economic asset that could otherwise bolster other sectors and drive the city's development.

To what extent and through what means can a sustainable tourism industry be cultivated in Constantine by capitalizing on its tourism potential?

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## Introduction.

Tourism is considered one of the oldest forms of human activity, evolving in response to diverse needs and circumstances. Today, it stands as a vital sector crucial for economic development, driving investments, infrastructure, and interaction with various other sectors—both productive and service-oriented – directly and indirectly.

Cities serve as focal points where tourism converges with a myriad of other sectors. Here, culture, art, music, literature, architecture, and urban design intertwine, creating the allure that defines these urban centers (Soha Hassan Al-Dahwi, and all.,2015) · These elements form fundamental resources for tourism development, complemented by unique natural sites in some cities that further stimulate tourism activities. Such initiatives are often bolstered by specialized infrastructure and strategic investments.

In this context, it is imperative to explore the tourism potential and capabilities of Constantine, examining how these factors contribute to fostering a robust tourism industry within the city.

The city of Constantine is a distinctive city with its unique location, glorious history, ancient civilization, and diverse culture. It possesses diverse tourism assets that represent excellent tourism attractions; we find natural assets such as the Gorges of Rhumel and forests, historical assets such as the old city, bridges, and scientific assets such as universities, and cultural assets such as festivals, craft salons, and traditional industries.... This qualifies it to be a fertile ground for the tourism industry and investment, and consequently, elevate the city to the ranks of global tourist cities. However, the tourism

reality is very far from the state the city should be in due to the marginalization of the tourism sector, the lack of tourism facilities and reception structures, the weakness and lack of diversity of transportation services despite their modernization. All these problems place us in the problem of finding sustainable tourism industry in the city of Constantine through investing in its tourism potential.

### **1. The Distinguished Location and Site.**

The city of Constantine is located in the heart of the Constantine Province, serving as a junction and exchange point between two geographically and economically distinct regions: the Tell region to the north and the High Plateaus region to the south. It is a key hub from which an important network of roads radiates, connecting it with other cities. The city's significance is derived from its natural location and its rich history, which spans over 2,500 years. Constantine's climate is Mediterranean, characterized by dry, cold winters and very hot summers, making spring the most suitable season to visit the city and enjoy its diverse landmarks.

The city's original nucleus is built on a solid rock with an elevation of 300 meters, surrounded by steep slopes and separated from neighboring areas by the Rhumel Gorge, one of the rare geomorphological formations, featuring breathtaking natural landscapes that are unparalleled in the world. The city is connected to the surrounding areas by four suspension bridges, adding to its grandeur and value. The city has expanded beyond its original borders into heterogeneous areas composed of separate hills and plateaus, creating varied topographical units (Haouari.Souad, 2015).

### **2. The Origins That Shaped the City's Tourist Attractions.**

Throughout its long history, the city of Constantine has held a distinguished position, with various civilizations contributing to its role and leadership functions. Its origins can be traced back to prehistoric times, when early humans settled in caves along the rocky slopes, where remnants of stone tools and animal bones from the region have been found (Mohamed Ghanem,1999). The Numidians, Carthaginians, and later the Romans also inhabited the city, though little remains of Roman civilization except for some roads still outlined within the city's expanse, a few recently discovered artifacts on the rock, and descriptions found in historical texts.

The Islamic conquest marked the beginning of the city's Islamic character, which was further developed by the Ottomans. During the Ottoman period, the city's urban layout was structured and organized, a form that has persisted for more than 23 centuries on the same site.

During the French invasion in 1837, the colonizers altered the city's Arab features by introducing Western architecture, including the construction of bridges and numerous administrative structures around the old city, such as the theater, courthouse, agricultural house, and central post office (Ghania Lakhal Tafer.2009). These new projects enhanced the city's prominence on local and regional levels due to the economic, social, and cultural significance they brought.

Since independence, construction in the city has continued, with the establishment of major facilities and infrastructure, including universities, large industrial complexes, the Olympic sports complex, and industrial zones, along with numerous housing projects such as large urban centers and subdivisions. Significant public projects have also been completed, such as the cable car line from Place Tatache Belkacem to Emir Abdelkader district (Téléphérique) and the urban tramway line stretching from Ben Abdelmalek Ramdane station to Abdelhamid Mehri University in Ali Mendjeli city. Additionally, the construction of the Salah Bey Bridge, the city's seventh bridge over the Rhumel Gorge, represents a major achievement. These developments have dramatically altered the city's urban landscape, expanded its boundaries, and diversified its functions, creating a distinctive, layered fabric that intertwines tradition with modernity.

### **3. Tourism Industry Potential and Evaluation in the City.**

To establish a successful tourism industry in the city of Constantine, we considered applying a set of previously mentioned tourism factors to assess their availability and potential for success. These factors include:

#### **3.1. Tourist Attractions.**

Constantine is endowed with numerous natural, historical, archaeological, and cultural landmarks that serve as major attractions for both domestic and international tourists. The city's location

and rich history have provided it with a wide range of unique and diverse tourism features, blending natural wonders with man-made creations. These include:

- **Natural Landmarks.**

The site on which the city was established has endowed it with exceptional natural features, rarely found in other cities of the country and the world, most of which are concentrated in the heart of the city. These include:

- ✓ **The Corniche.** A narrow, winding road running parallel to the rocky wall of the ancient rock, extending from Zighoud Youcef Street to Belgium Street. It offers direct views of the Rhumel Gorge and passes through tunnels carved into the rock in some parts.

- ✓ **Caves.** These include the Cave of the Bears, the Cave of the Mouflon, and the Cave of the Pigeons, located north of the rock below the Kasbah. These caves have revealed numerous animal and pottery remains, now preserved in the Cirta Museum.

- ✓ **Banks of the Rhumel and Boumerzoug Rivers.** These rivers cut through the city from the southeast and southwest to the northeast, creating a stunning natural landscape. They are 20 km and 8 km long, respectively, and converge at the Roman arches. Their banks vary in size and are in good condition after calibration and bank conditioning work, except in some areas affected by pollution and lack of maintenance.

- ✓ **Hamma Slope.** Located at the base of the rock on the western side, this area is a green natural extension interspersed with orchards, characterized by an unpolluted, pristine nature.

- ✓ **Sidi M'Cid Forest.** Situated to the north of the city, this forest covers an area of 54 hectares and is known for its tall pine trees and highly varied terrain.

- ✓ **Djebel El Wahch Forest.** Located 7 km from the city center, this forest spans 500 hectares and includes a 100-hectare nature reserve and four artificial ponds. It is situated at an altitude of 1200 meters and is rich in dense vegetation.

- ✓ **Public Gardens.** Scattered throughout the city's neighborhoods, these gardens are known for their diverse and dense plant life as well as their beautiful design. Notable examples include Ben Nasser Garden in the city center, Beirut Garden in Sidi Mabrouk, and "Gharfi Abdelhamid" Garden in the Belle Vue district. Among the gardens that have been written about by historians is "Gassoum" Garden, located behind Blouzad Street, which attracts many visitors for its beauty and dense trees. Under Bab El Kantara Bridge lies the stunning Sous Garden, which, due to its location on a slope, captivates the eye from afar.

- **Historical and Archaeological Landmarks.**

Various civilizations that have settled in the city have produced architectural and urban landmarks, ranging from ancient ruins to beautifully integrated Arab-Islamic and Western sites. Among these are:

- ✓ **Roman Arches:** These arches mark the confluence of the Rhumel and Boumerzoug rivers and were part of the ancient aqueduct system. They are 60 meters long and 20 meters high, consisting of five arches, and are nationally classified as a historic site. However, they are located in an undeveloped area.

- ✓ **The Old City:** Known for its distinctive urban layout inspired by Arab-Islamic design, the old city remains vibrant despite its age. However, the lack of a sound restoration policy has led to the complete collapse of some parts.

- ✓ **Mosques and Zawiyas:** These architectural gems date back to the Ottoman period. The oldest is the Great Mosque, built in the 13th century, while most of the other twenty or so mosques were constructed between the 16th and 17th centuries. Despite their age, they still serve their religious functions and host prayers and rituals of Islamic law. In addition, the Emir Abdelkader Mosque and University, built in 1984, stands as a prominent religious and educational institution for Islamic principles.

- ✓ **Bridges:** One of the most iconic features of Constantine, earning it the nickname "City of Suspended Bridges," these bridges connect the old city to neighboring districts. There are six major bridges, with Sidi Rached Bridge being the most notable, as it is the highest stone bridge in the world.

- ✓ **Tourist Path:** Located along the banks of the Rhumel Gorge, this 2800-meter path extends from the Devil's Bridge to a tunnel under Sidi M'Cid Bridge. Along the way, it passes by the Roman

Baths of Caesar. Only remnants of the path remain today, running parallel to the ancient rock and under the suspended bridges, and it is currently undergoing restoration.

✓ **Ahmed Bey Palace:** This significant architectural landmark spans 5,600 square meters and is distinguished by its spacious, well-organized wings, reflecting the genius of architectural design and taste.

✓ **Salah Bey Residence:** Located 8 km northwest of Constantine, this residence served as a retreat and was originally a private country house built by Salah Bey for his family in the 18th century. It was situated amidst gardens that adorned the slope down to the Rhumel Gorge. The residence features an old dome and baths but is currently in a state of severe neglect.

✓ **Cirta Museum:** A national museum housing a rich architectural, cultural, and historical heritage from various civilizations that have passed through the city. It is a landmark well worth visiting.

- **Diverse Cultural Heritage :**

Constantine is rich in customs and traditions that trace their origins back to the Ottoman period, reflecting the city's identity and authenticity. The locals continue to preserve these traditions, such as Andalusian music known as *Malouf*, for which an annual national and international festival is held, showcasing its spread across the Maghreb. The city is also known for its traditional clothing, such as the *m'laya*, an outer garment worn by women, which is now on the verge of disappearing. Additionally, the city is famous for the *jebba*, a traditional embroidered garment made with gold or silver threads (*mejboud* and *fetla*), a staple in every household, often accompanied by jewelry made of gold and silver, and copperware. The city is also known for its famous sweets like *baklava*, *qatayef*, *jawziya*, and other regional dishes. Seasonal customs, such as distilling rose and orange blossom water in spring, are also part of the city's cultural heritage.

### **3.2. Transport Services and Infrastructure.**

The transport network plays a crucial role in the success of the tourism industry in the city of Constantine, as it facilitates the movement of tourists between various attractions and their accommodations. The city boasts a significant road network that serves as the lifeline of movement, including the East-West Highway, four national roads, and seven regional roads in good condition. This network is further supported by a series of secondary roads connecting different parts of the city, although some of these suffer from issues like potholes, narrow roads, or heavy traffic, necessitating upgrades and reorganization.

The transport network is bolstered by two major bus stations, the Eastern and Western stations, which provide coverage to all directions across the country. Within the city's neighborhoods, there are taxi ranks and bus stops, facilitating urban and suburban transit. However, with a total of around 5,000 cars, the city's vehicle fleet is insufficient to meet the residents' mobility needs, especially after the reduction in taxi operating licenses. This has led to the rise of illegal taxis, which now compete with the city's official transportation services.

Regarding public transport, the city is served by 64 routes and 600 buses, yet the public transport fleet is aging despite the addition of over 200 urban buses and 41 suburban buses as part of efforts to encourage private investment in this sector, break monopolies, create competition, and generate jobs for the youth.

As for other essential networks like drinking water, sewage, and electricity, the city enjoys 100% coverage, though management is somewhat inconsistent, particularly in summer, due to water and electricity outages. Additionally, the city has decent coverage for internet and mobile phone services, supported by several providers.

The available transportation options in the city are varied, including traditional and modern modes such as taxis, illegal taxis, public and private urban and suburban buses, the tramway, trains, and the Mohamed Boudiaf International Airport. However, these do not fully support the tourism sector for the following reasons:

- Taxis are unable to meet the daily transportation needs of residents, especially after the opening of routes to Ali Mendjeli city and the new city of Massinissa, leading to increased user numbers and hampering tourism.

- The emergence of illegal taxis as strong competitors in the transport sector negatively impacts the city's tourism image.



- The aging private public transport fleet, combined with overcrowding and poor service quality, makes it difficult to rely on for tourism.
- The tramway line has only one route from the city center (Ben Abdelmalek Ramdane Station) to the University of Abdelhamid Mehri in Ali Mendjeli city, passing by few tourist sites such as the University, Emir Abdelkader Mosque, and some gardens.
- A great potential for tourism development lies in the aerial tramway (Téléphérique), which offers stunning views over the Rhumel Gorge and other natural landmarks, but it is currently out of service due to maintenance work.

Regarding parking facilities, the city has 10 car parks located in the city center with large capacities, along with two multi-story parking garages.

### **3.3. Accommodation and Hospitality Services.**

The city offers a range of tourism infrastructures, including a variety of hotels that are both classified and unclassified, as well as a number of tourist restaurants. However, these establishments are not fully adapted to support a comprehensive tourism experience. These facilities are distributed across the city of Constantine in an unplanned manner, which does not serve the tourism function well, as most hotels are concentrated in the city center along with some restaurants.

- **Hotel Establishments:** The following table summarizes the hotel establishments:

Table 1. Hotel Establishments in the City of Constantine.

No.	Name of Hotel Establishment	Ownership	Number of Beds	Number of Rooms	Classification
1	Marriott Hotel	Public	260	180	5*
2	Panoramic / Protea Hotel	Public	144	72	3*
3	Novotel Hotel	Private	149	117	3*
4	Ibis Hotel	Private	212	172	3*
5	El Bey Hotel	Private	120	55	3*
6	Maghreb Hotel	Private	32	19	1*
7	Grand Hotel	Public	76	58	1*
8	Ben M'hidi Hotel	Private	54	44	1*
9	Outdoor Hotel	Private	80	50	Unclassified
10	Hab El-Kheir Hotel	Private	44	23	Unclassified
<b>Total</b>		12	1,467	953	/

In addition, there are 6 unclassified hotels that are currently closed and not in operation.

- **Tourist Restaurants:** The city of Constantine has a number of restaurants, some of which are classified, some unclassified, and others offering fast food or traditional meals. However, the city lacks classified tourist restaurants, with only three existing: those affiliated with the Marriott Hotel, the Ibis Hotel, and the Protea (Panoramic) Hotel. These mainly cater to a specific segment of tourists, such as business travelers or those visiting for scientific tourism. Among the unclassified restaurants, there is Platan Restaurant located in Kouhil Lakhdar district and Imedghassen Restaurant in the Arbi Ben M'hidi district, both of which are accessible to tourists. Fast food restaurants are widely available and popular, but they close after 5 PM, which greatly limits tourist activity.

### **4. Other Accompanying Services.**

These services include travel and tourism agencies, handicraft production and sales centers, banks, medical centers, postal services, police, tour guides, and car rental offices. These services are essential for any tourist. The city of Constantine offers the following services:

- **Travel and Tourism Agencies:** The city has 19 travel and tourism agencies, both public and private, with five classified as Category "A" and 14 as Category "B". Their activity experienced a slowdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which lasted from March 2020 to April 2021. Their activities are mainly focused on Hajj and Umrah or on a few European countries such as Turkey

and France. These agencies are scattered throughout the city, often in neighborhoods that are difficult for tourists to find.

- **Handicrafts and Traditional Industries:** Traditional industries represent the cultural heritage that is still present in the city. These industries are important as they help generate wealth, reduce unemployment, and encourage young people to preserve traditions and handicrafts while fostering pride in national heritage and preserving identity. Since its inception, the Chamber of Handicrafts and Traditional Industries has registered over 10,000 artisans.

- **Banks and Financial Institutions:** The city has a number of public banks directly under the supervision of the Central Bank of Algeria, as well as joint banks between Algeria and Arab or foreign countries. Most of the public national banks are concentrated in the city center, while foreign banks are spread across major districts of the city, such as Belle Vue and Sidi Mabrouk.

- **Facilities Complementing Tourism Activities:** The city also has a range of facilities and equipment directly or indirectly related to tourism, distributed across its neighborhoods. These include health facilities, with two public hospitals, five specialized medical institutions, and many multi-specialty clinics, as well as private clinics. Additionally, there are security facilities, including 17 local police stations. The city also offers a variety of shops ranging from basic grocery stores to specialized outlets featuring international brands.

- **Car Rental Services:** There is only one agency for renting tourist cars and small trucks, called "Amilen Car Rental," which was established in 2005 and is located in the city center. This single agency is insufficient to meet the demand for cars from tourists.

## **5. Potential Forms of Tourism Development in Constantine.**

Based on the analysis of the rich and diverse tourism potential in the city of Constantine, various types of tourism that could be developed include:

- **Nature Tourism:** Leveraging the breathtaking landscapes of Khanguet Sidi R'ghiss, the banks of Oued Rhumel, and Boumerzoug.

- **Religious Tourism:** Highlighting the ancient mosques, zawiyas, and the architectural masterpiece of the Emir Abdelkader Mosque.

- **Historical and Archaeological Tourism:** Exploring the old city and the remnants of various civilizations that remain largely undiscovered.

- **Medical Tourism:** Utilizing the presence of the university hospital and specialized medical facilities.

- **Educational Tourism:** Promoting the city's educational institutions, such as the University of Islamic Sciences and the University of Frères Mentouri with its various faculties.

- **Exploration Tourism:** Offering opportunities to explore caves and the underground railway tunnels that remain largely unexplored beneath the city.

- **Business and Conference Tourism:** Utilizing the city's hotels and conference halls for business meetings and events.

These types of tourism can only be realized with genuine commitment from both officials and various stakeholders in the tourism sector, as well as the residents of the city, who play a crucial role in the success and implementation of such tourism initiatives.

## **6. The Reality of Tourism Investment and Ways to Develop It in Constantine.**

### **6.1. Qualified Tourism Workforce.**

The human factor is crucial to the efficiency and success of tourism investment, as it is responsible for providing accommodation, catering, health, cultural, commercial services, tourist guidance, and organizing tourism programs, among other services. This includes various types of tourist transportation for all visitors. However, tourism investment in Constantine suffers from a severe shortage of qualified personnel, as most workers are not trained in the tourism sector, with the exception of the hospitality industry. In recent years, there has been an increasing interest among young people in training at vocational training institutes and centers.

### **6.2. Tourism Costs.**

Tourism is significantly influenced by factors such as travel costs, tourism services, and personal income levels, all of which contribute to the overall cost of tourism. These costs, including

accommodation and various services, are key factors in making tourism decisions. One of the most notable aspects in Constantine is the high cost, especially in classified hotels and various restaurants.

### **6.3. Accommodation and Reception Facilities.**

As we all know, tourism relies heavily on accommodation, as it is the first thing tourists look for upon arriving at their destination. However, the reception facilities in Constantine are generally very weak, ranging from poor to average quality, with the exception of private 5-star and 4-star hotels. Additionally, high prices and the poor quality of tourism products and services contribute to the overall weakness of the tourism sector in Constantine.

### **6.4. Tourist Transportation.**

As previously mentioned, the tourism industry depends on the availability and development of transportation means and services. Although this element is available in Constantine, the city suffers from traffic congestion due to the outdated and narrow road network passing through the city. Moreover, the type of transportation and the absence of tourist transportation services have led to the isolation of tourist areas. Tourist transportation is usually linked to tour guides who implement tourism programs, accompany tourists from their arrival to their departure from tourist sites, organize and facilitate their movements, and provide necessary informational services, which are entirely absent in Constantine.

### **6.5. Protection and Sustainability of Tourism Resources.**

To ensure the sustainability of tourism, it is necessary to protect various tourist attractions, as their disappearance would mean the loss of essential tourism industry components. From this perspective, public health, cleanliness, and an attractive urban landscape are among the most important factors in attracting tourists and stimulating the tourism sector. However, this sector in Constantine faces significant problems, including the spread of chaotic buildings in scenic areas, such as along the banks of the Boumerzoug River despite recent landscaping efforts. The city also struggles with widespread garbage in many neighborhoods near tourist attractions, numerous waste disposal sites, the overlapping of buildings that distort the urban landscape, and the dilapidated state of the old city, which is at risk of disappearing.

### **6.6. Lack of Tourism Marketing.**

Although the city has the potential to be a prime tourist destination, marketing and advertising efforts both inside and outside the city are almost nonexistent, usually limited to social media pages or a few scattered advertisements.

## **7. Conclusion.**

The city of Constantine possesses numerous and diverse tourism assets that could transform it into a fertile ground for tourism industry development and investment, thereby elevating the city to the ranks of global tourist destinations. However, the current state of tourism in the city falls far short of its potential due to the near-total neglect of the tourism sector, a severe lack of tourism facilities and reception structures, and weak and limited transportation services despite modernization efforts. Furthermore, there is an overemphasis on certain aspects, such as cultural heritage—customs, traditions, and traditional crafts—at the expense of other elements, leading to severe neglect. The deteriorating condition of some historical landmarks, particularly the old city that is at risk of disappearing, is evidence of this. Despite earnest efforts to build major tourist infrastructures, such as five-star hotels and tourist facilities, and to develop parks, the city still urgently needs facilities and services dedicated primarily to tourism, distributed in areas where tourist attractions are located.

A key priority should be the training of local residents as professionals within institutions and as tour guides, as a means to foster urban tourism in Constantine by leveraging and investing in its tourism potential to achieve urban tourism within the framework of sustainable development.

In conclusion, Algeria possesses the political and legislative will to keep pace with the evolving tourism industry, which relies on legal, economic, and social mechanisms. We hope that the relevant authorities will address these shortcomings to boost tourism activities toward sustainable development, especially in a city like Constantine, the Jewel of Eastern Algeria.



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