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Potentials of Historical Houses in Arid Areas for Tourism Development Case Study: Kashan City

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Received: 2025-03-05</p> <p>Accepted: 2025-05-31</p> <p>Keywords: Historical Houses Tourism development Pralong Method Kashan</p>	<p>Historic houses are among the key tourist attractions in arid regions. Kashan, a city located in the arid zones of Iran, is home to numerous historic houses. This study aims to assess the potential of Kashan's historic houses to attract tourists using the Pralong model. The tourism grade for each house was determined based on several indicators, including physical beauty, scientific value, historical-cultural significance, and socio-economic impact. Data collection involved library research, documentary analysis, and surveys. The results indicate that, in terms of tourism standards, Borujerdi House ranks first. According to statistics from the Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism, as well as the Pralong model, Borujerdi House holds the top position in attracting tourists, followed by Sharifian House, Ameri House, Tabatabaei House, and Abbasian House. Borujerdi House received the highest score in aesthetic value, while Ameri House ranked first in scientific value.</p>
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Introduction

Tourism plays a crucial role in sustainable development across economic, social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. In recent years, it has increasingly emphasized nature tourism as a key approach (Papoli Yazdi & Saqai, 2014). The development of sustainable tourism not only enhances the tourism industry but also boosts both domestic and international tourist arrivals. To be truly effective, tourism must address present-day demands while fulfilling economic requirements, fostering cultural cohesion, and reinforcing national identity. Broadly, tourism can be categorized into three main types: natural tourism, historical tourism, and human-origin tourism (Pereira et al., 2007).

Tourism development relies heavily on historical tourism, which plays a significant role in national progress due to its historical, cultural, and environmental potential. Historic houses exemplify this form of tourism and can be classified within all three major tourism categories. The success of tourist attractions depends largely on their quantity and diversity in drawing visitors. The structure of a tourist attraction consists of key factors that enhance its appeal and encourage tourism demand. Among these attractions, historic houses stand out for their ability to provide cultural and historical value to visitors.

The historic houses of Iran represent a deep interaction between human craftsmanship and the physical and natural environment, where the country's social and cultural dimensions are distinctly reflected. The tradition of housing artistry in Iran, with its long-established heritage, is recognized as one of the major architectural schools worldwide (Khayat Moghadam et al., 2018). Persian housing has an extensive historical lineage. The Persian House, often referred to as an earthly paradise, integrates urban design with natural elements, creating a space that harmonizes with environmental features. By maximizing the beneficial aspects of the natural surroundings, these houses provide an environment well-suited to social and cultural needs, ensuring comfortable conditions for both leisure activities and temporary or permanent residence (Khaksari & Dehghan, 2014). A defining characteristic of the Persian House is its enclosing wall, which serves security purposes and reflects the religious beliefs of those living on the Persian plateau. Key indicators of the authenticity of historic houses in this region include the presence of water, lush greenery, carefully planned landscapes, a central axis, shaded spaces, and the main mansion. Many of the old historic houses that exhibit traditional Persian architectural patterns share similarities in tree planting, aesthetic enhancement, waterfront integration, and mansion design. While previous research has primarily focused on architectural design, this study shifts the perspective toward the role of historic houses in tourism using the Pralong model.

Iran's cultural diversity rivals that of the European continent, making it a valuable asset when ethnic and cultural groups recognize and understand one another, fostering national harmony. Strengthening and expanding domestic tourism is one of the most effective ways to achieve this cohesion. Historical

areas are subject to rapid transformation in terms of scientific, aesthetic, and architectural values. Tourism planning, whether for small towns or larger cities, not only generates economic benefits but also enhances public income, employment opportunities, and urban infrastructure. Effective planning supports facilities and services while aiding the preservation and restoration of historic and touristic sites (Saarinen, 2019).

Kashan, with its rich historical, cultural, geographical, and social potential, possesses remarkable yet underappreciated tourism assets. Its historic houses—including Borujerdi House, Sharifian House, Ameri House, Tabatabaei House, and Abbasian House—represent invaluable heritage that, if properly highlighted, can drive tourism growth, job creation, and economic development in the city. Given the fundamental role of tourism in regional progress, recognizing and leveraging these assets becomes increasingly important.

In this context, two key questions emerge:

- What is the priority ranking of Kashan's historic houses based on aesthetic value, scientific significance, historical-cultural importance, and socio-economic impact?
- What is their priority ranking in terms of utilization value?

Research Background

The theoretical framework of this research adopts a combined approach, recognizing that contemporary problems cannot be fully explained by a single theory. It integrates perspectives from Maslow, Homans, and Merton, particularly their views on facility and purpose. Maslow's theory suggests that human behavior is driven by the need to satisfy fundamental requirements, where an individual's level of modesty corresponds to the fulfillment of these needs. Consequently, tourist satisfaction depends on the ability to meet their essential needs. Homans' theory frames exchange as a calculated behavior in which participants aim to maximize their benefits. In a tourism context, travelers seek to optimize rewards through their experiences.

House construction has a deep-rooted history in our country, spanning various eras, with particular emphasis on the Islamic period. Historically, houses have served diverse functions, and at times, public historic houses were built to provide spaces for recreation and social gatherings. During the Islamic period, the development of historic houses and gardens remained a favored practice, reflecting the cultural preferences of the region's inhabitants. While large historic houses were established outside urban centers, the tradition of urban housing has remained a defining feature of the built environment for centuries. The historic houses of Kashan, like other regional architectural styles, possess unique characteristics. Their design differs from other areas in terms of mass-to-space proportions, site placement and orientation, spatial organization, and the integration of open, semi-open, and closed areas.

Additionally, these houses exhibit a distinctive relationship between the structure and its surrounding landscape. The architectural approach in Kashan's historic homes harmonizes with the natural setting, while also catering to the cultural, social, and economic needs of its inhabitants.

Examples of research conducted on modern Iranian historical houses are listed in Table 1.

Area of Study

Kashan, a city with a population of approximately 400,000 and an area of about 2,100 hectares, is situated at 51°27' east longitude and 33°59' north latitude. While its northern and eastern regions are bordered by desert plains, the presence of settlements such as Ghamsar, Qahrud, Joshqan, Niasar, and numerous other temperate locations along the slopes of Mount Karkas, with their stunning natural landscapes and mountainous climate, contributes significantly to the city's tourism prosperity.

Materials and Methods

This study was conducted to develop applications based on field evaluations and the analysis of historical documents, utilizing one of the widely used models for assessing tourism potential—the Pralong method. The selection of the Pralong model in this research, among other similar approaches, is due to its exceptional effectiveness in attracting tourists by considering various aspects and capabilities of tourism sites.

To achieve this, the necessary information and data were first gathered through library research, reviewing sources and documents related to the study area. Subsequently, topographic maps and field visits were examined to identify historic houses and the locations of the studied geocomposites. It is important to note that the tourism grade of each house was determined by averaging four key indicators: physical beauty, scientific significance, historical-cultural value, and socio-economic impact, each assessed across five levels.

During the research process, tourism experts reviewed and scored the model. Borujerdi House, Sharifian House, Ameri House, Tabatabaei House, and Abbasian House in Kashan were identified as the most significant historic houses for this study. Research data were collected through targeted semi-structured interviews with 20 participants, with their information presented in Table 2.

Pralong Model

The Pralong model was first introduced by researchers of the same name in 2005 to evaluate the tourism potential and capabilities of different regions (Pralong, 2005). In this method, the tourism value of each site is determined by the average score of four indicators: A: Beauty of appearance (physical beauty) B: Scientific significance C: Historical-cultural value D: Socio-economic impact. Each of these indicators is assessed across five levels (Ehsani, 2015, p. 234).

Tourism Value= Appearance beauty index + Scientific + Historical-cultural + Socio-economic / 4

Table 1. Research Background

Research results	Research title	Year	Researcher
Objects of historical and cultural heritage, as valuable assets of cities, generate revenue and play a significant role in economic development. By stabilizing seasonal fluctuations and creating additional job opportunities, they contribute to the social sector in meaningful ways. Furthermore, by revitalizing local cultural values, fostering national creativity, and preserving traditions, historical and cultural heritage enhances the cultural enrichment of the local population.	Using Historical Heritage as a Factor in Tourism Development	2015	Ismagilova et al.
The results indicate that the challenges surrounding the heritage of historic villages extend beyond the contemporary issues of deterioration and structural changes in traditional buildings. Instead, they represent a more intricate problem that demands thoughtful, comprehensive, and fundamental solutions.	The heritage of historic villages: an asset for the development of cultural tourism (case of the Oued Labiod valley in the Aures, Algeria)	2023	Mechiat and Dekoumi
The historic houses built by the Isfahan school stand in contrast to the palaces constructed in earlier periods of Persian history.	The Persian House is an allegory of paradise with an emphasis on the values of the Persian House of the Safavid dynasty	2007	Ansari and Mahmoudinejad
Although the existential reasons for building a house vary in significance, its construction holds particular importance in relation to its location and the historical period in which it was built. The primary motivation behind house construction has traditionally been rooted in hedonism and the pursuit of pleasure.	Analysis of the existential reasons for building an Persian House	2011	Pourmand and Keshtkar Ghalati
Based on the questionnaire results, most responses suggest that motor components, both physical and semantic, play a significant role in shaping a coherent and shared mental image among the audience.	Spatial quality analysis of Borujerdi house based on motion theory and evaluation of the audience's mental image	2018	Azmoon and Moeini
The emergence of certain variations within the Persian House pattern, while preserving its core characteristics and evoking a sense of presence for the observer, highlights the richness of the design and its capacity to adapt to environmental factors. Persian architects have skillfully aligned these adaptations with users' needs, as exemplified in the Tabatabaei and Sharifian historic houses, where these principles have been materialized in an objective form.	Differences and similarities of Tabatabaei and Sharifian historic houses of Kashan with each other and Persian House	2013	Soltanzadeh and Ashraf Ganjooe

Table 2. Interviewees' Profile

Areas of expertise	Education	Female	Male
Tourism Management, Tourism, Geography and Rural Planning, Tourism Planning	PhD.	7	13

A. Beauty of Appearance Value

The beauty of appearance value of a place is determined by calculating the average score of its intrinsic spectacular attractions. This value is obtained based on the average of the items listed in Table 3.

Table 3. Criteria and Scoring in Physical Beauty (Beauty of Appearance) Value

Score Criterion	0	0/25	0/5	0/75	1
(1) Number of sights	-	1	2 or 3	4, 5 or 6	More than 6
(2) Gravity durability	-	Less than a month	Between one and three months	Between three and five months	More than 5 months
(3) The extent of human impact	-	Low	Medium	High (Much)	Very much
(4) Invigorating	-	Low	Medium	High (Much)	Very much
(5) Contrast colors with the environment	Similar colors	-	Various colors	-	Contrasting colors
(6) The extent of communities' awareness of the beauty of the place	-	Local	Regional	National	International

B. Scientific Value

This includes criteria such as long-standing geographical value and ecological significance, which are determined by calculating the average scores of the items listed in Table 4.

Table 4. Criteria and Scoring for Scientific Value

Score Criterion	0	0/25	0/5	0/75	1
Attractiveness in terms of ancient geography	-	Low	Medium	High (Much)	Very much
Visual features	0	Low	Medium	High (Much)	Very much
Area as a percentage	-	Less than 25	Between 25 and 50	Between 50 and 90	More than 90
Rarity	More than 7	Between 5 and 7	Between 3 and 4	Between 1 and 2	Unique
quality of building	Severely damaged	Damaged (Demolished)	Moderate destruction	Slightly damaged	Without any manipulation
Ecological attractiveness	0	Low	Medium	High (Much)	Very much

C. Historical-cultural Value

Historical-cultural value considers the artistic elements and shared cultural traditions of the region. This value is determined by calculating the average score of the items listed in Table 5.

Table 5. Criteria and Scoring for Historical-Cultural Value

Score Criterion	0	0/25	0/5	0/75	1
Cultural-historical aspects	Without belonging	Weak	Medium	Intense	Very intense
Historical and archaeological aspects	Without any effect or building	Weak	Medium	High (Much)	Very much
Religious and spiritual aspects	0	Weak	Medium	High (Much)	Very much
Artistic and cultural events	Never	-	Occasionally	-	At least once a year
The positive effects of tourism on indigenous culture	Ineffective	Low impact	Medium impact	High impact	Extreme impact
Negative effects of tourism on indigenous culture	Ineffective	Low impact	Medium impact	High impact	Extreme impact

D. Socio-economic Value

The socio-economic value of each location is determined by its potential for tourism and recreational development, including its exploitable and entrepreneurial features. This value is assessed based on the average scores of the items listed in Table 6.

Table 6. Criteria and Scoring for Socio-economic Value

Score Criterion	0	0/25	0/5	0/75	1
Accessibility	More than one kilometer from the accessible route	Less than one kilometer from the available route	Accessible via local road	Accessible by road of regional importance	Accessible by road of national importance
Natural hazards	Uncontrollable	Not controlled	Somewhat controlled	Optional controls	No danger
Number of visitors per year	Less than 10 thousand people	Between 10 and 100 thousand people	Between 100 and 500 thousand people	Between 500,000 and 1 million people	More than 1 million people
Level of protection measures	No protection	Low protection	Medium protection	High protection	Extreme protection
Attractiveness	-	Low	Medium	High (Much)	Very much
Impact on the economy of the indigenous community	0	Low	Medium	High (Much)	Very much

After calculating landform scores based on field visits and the Pralong method, the utilization potential of the studied landforms was assessed. This evaluation consists of two parts and, similar to the assessment of tourism capability, specific criteria and scoring scales have been established for each component (Shayan et al., 2011).

In this approach, the analysis goes beyond tourism quality to include an evaluation of the current value of the sites. The exploitation value is determined based on two criteria: utilization rate and utilization quality of the region, which together help identify both the potential and actual capabilities of these sites (Pralong, 2005).

Evaluation of Tourism Utilization Value

This value is determined based on two parameters: utilization rate and utilization quality.

$$\text{Utilization Value} = \text{Utilization rate index} + \text{Utilization quality} / 2$$

The amount of utilization reflects the spatial and temporal usage of a tourist site, while the quality of utilization is determined based on the application of four tourism criteria. In this context, various indicators with distinct scoring scales are employed to assess these two primary components of utilization value.

Table 7. Criteria and Scoring for Utilization Value

Score Criterion	0	0/25	0/5	0/75	1
Area used (hectares)	0	Less than 1	Between 1 and 5	Between 5 and 10	More than 10
Number of infrastructures	0	1	Between 2 and 5	Between 6 and 10	More than 10
Seasonal accommodation (days)	-	From one to 90 days	From 91 to 180 days	From 181 to 270 days	From 271 to 360 days
Daily accommodation (hours)	0	Less than 3 hours	Between 3 and 6 hours	Between 6 and 9 hours	More than 9 hours
Investment motivation	0	Low	Medium	High (Much)	Very much

Utilization quality is determined by averaging four key tourism criteria: physical beauty, scientific significance, cultural value, and economic impact.

Each component of this equation has its own criteria, evaluated across five levels, with the average of its clauses determining the final score. In this formula, all aspects of tourism carry equal weight, as there is no specific reason to prioritize one over another in assessing the theoretical tourism capability of ecotourism.

Table 8. Criteria and Scoring for Quality of Utilization

Score Criterion	zero	0/25	0/5	0/75	1
The use of physical beauty	No advertising costs	A supportive action and introduction of a product	A supportive action and introduction of several products	Several actions and introduction of a product	Several support actions and introduction of several products
The use of scientific value	Without any educational possibilities	A supportive action and introduction of a product	A supportive action and introduction of several products	Several actions and introduction of a product	Several support actions and introduction of several products
The use of cultural value	Without any educational possibilities	A supportive action and introduction of a product	A supportive action and introduction of several products	Several actions and introduction of a product	Several support actions and introduction of several products
Use of economic value (person)	No visitors	Less than 5000	Between 5000 and 20,000	Between 20,000 and 100,000	More than 100,000

Discussion and Results

The first step in this section involves identifying the studied areas. Following this, valuation has been conducted based on the insights of tourism activists in the province, as well as the perspectives of professors specializing in tourism planning and management, utilizing the relevant model outlined below.

Historic Houses of Kashan City

A. Borujerdi

The Boroujerdi House spans an area of 1,700 square meters, with 1,000 square meters of infrastructure. It consists of two sections—external and internal—and features two main and secondary entrances, a porch, corridor, courtyard, summer and winter residences, kitchen, covered courtyards, and a large basement. The house has two floors, along with a three-story crypt in its southern section. In 2015 and 2016, UNESCO recognized the Boroujerdi Historical House in Kashan as a top choice in terms of tourist attraction popularity.

B. Ameri House

The Ameri House spans 7,000 square meters and features extensive infrastructure, including a total of 85 rooms. It also has several courtyards, with the outer and inner courtyards being the oldest. Like many of Kashan's historic houses, it is divided into two sections—outer and inner—each containing elements such as a pool, a porch, and rooms with three-door and seven-door emperors surrounding the courtyard.

The interior architecture of the Ameri House was designed by Amir Anoushfar, an Iranian architect residing in France.



Figure 1. Borujerdi house



Figure 2. Ameri House

C. Sharifian House

The Sharifian House consists of three interconnected spatial complexes, with the two most prominent and essential sections spanning two floors, situated along the northern and southern fronts of the courtyard. This house stands out for several reasons, including the strategic division of space usage across different seasons, its architectural harmony with Kashan's climatic conditions, and its status as a flourishing private residence from the Qajar period. The intricate decorations and architectural features of this house demand careful preservation. Furthermore, the Sharifian House is located in one of Kashan's oldest neighborhoods, likely influenced by the architectural styles of surrounding historical structures.



Figure 3. Sharifian House

D. Tabatabaei House

The Tabatabaei House spans 4,730 square meters and comprises multiple sections designed for diverse purposes. Every aspect of its construction follows meticulous and intelligent architectural principles, ensuring that all residential needs are thoughtfully accommodated. Traditionally, large houses like this provided wealthy owners the opportunity to remain in the same residence after marriage, alongside their children, while also serving as venues for trade and ceremonies. The house's luxurious interior and exterior decorations, including intricate plasterwork and the use of colored glass and sash windows, preserve the authenticity of Iranian and Islamic architecture. These design elements are carefully tailored to complement the region's unique culture and climate, making the Tabatabaei House one of the most distinguished historical monuments in Iran.



Figure4. Tabatabaei House

E. Abbasian House

The Abbasian House, designed and constructed primarily following the principles and architectural style of Kashan's historic residences, was nominated for the award of the most beautiful Iranian-Islamic residential building, as recognized by architectural experts. In addition to incorporating key elements such as the garden pit method, veiled architecture, and introverted design, one of the house's most striking features is its symmetry. If an imaginary line were drawn through the center of each side, both halves would mirror each other perfectly. This fascinating and elegant characteristic enhances the aesthetic appeal of the house, further solidifying its architectural significance.



Figure 5. Abbasian House

Table 9. The Final Result of the Evaluation of Tourism and Utilization Values

Phenomenon Value	Ameri House	Borujerdi house	Tabatabaei House	Sharifian House	Abbasian House	Value Point
Physical beauty	0/61	0/93	0/64	0/79	0/65	0/72
Scientific	0/69	0/57	0/45	0/49	0/53	0/54
Historical-cultural	0/67	0/78	0/71	0/86	0/76	0/75
Socio-economic	0/49	0/53	0/47	0/59	0/59	0/53
Tourism Value	0/61	0/70	0/56	0/68	0/63	-
Utilization rate value	0/58	0/63	0/38	0/69	0/59	0/57
Utilization quality value	0/68	0/8	0/61	0/71	0/73	0/7
Utilization Value	Medium	High (Much)	Low	High (Much)	Medium	-

According to the results, Tabatabaei House received the lowest score, primarily because it is not open to the public. In contrast, Borujerdi House achieved the highest score, reflecting its beauty and significance at the international level. Its inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage list further enhances its importance. Based on expert evaluations, the ranking of historic houses in Kashan city is as follows:

- 1) Borujerdi
- 2) Sharifian House
- 3) Abbasian House
- 4) Ameri House
- 5) Tabatabaei House

Conclusion

Persian historic houses are invaluable heritage sites, and their inclusion in the UNESCO World Heritage List has underscored their significance in the tourism industry and its development. This study evaluates five prominent historic houses in Kashan—Borujerdi, Sharifian, Ameri, Abbasian, and Tabatabaei—using the Pralong model to assess their tourism potential. Given its comprehensive approach to evaluating various site characteristics, the Pralong model has proven effective in identifying key attractions for tourists.

Based on expert evaluations and the Pralong model, Borujerdi House ranks highest, followed by Sharifian House, Ameri House, and Tabatabaei House. Borujerdi House excels in aesthetic value, attributed to its historic trees, flowing water, and remarkable architecture. Regarding scientific significance, Ameri House leads with a score of 0.69, primarily due to its archaeological museum and valuable historical artifacts. Overall, Borujerdi House outperforms the others in tourism potential and utilization value, while Tabatabaei House ranks lowest due to its current inaccessibility to visitors.

As shown in Table 9, historical-cultural value (0.75) and physical beauty (0.74) rank significantly higher than socio-economic (0.52) and scientific values (0.55), reinforcing the aesthetic and historical importance of these sites. Previous studies indicate that Persian historic houses were originally designed to cultivate happiness and recreation. While existing research has explored the broader cultural role of historic houses, few studies have focused specifically on those in arid regions—particularly the five historic houses of Kashan discussed in this paper.

Recommendations

- **Enhancing Tourism Awareness:** Educating local communities about tourism and its impact on historic houses.
- **Digital Marketing & Promotion:** Utilizing websites and social networks to introduce these attractions, especially to foreign tourists.
- **Community Engagement:** Organizing conferences to familiarize locals with the socio-economic value of tourism and foster a sense of belonging to historical sites.
- **Improving Accessibility:** Opening Tabatabaei House to the public for visits.
- **Infrastructure Development:** Establishing essential facilities to support tourism growth.

- **Leveraging Location:** Capitalizing on the strategic geographical positioning of historic houses to boost tourism and create employment opportunities.
- **Curated Heritage Tours:** Conducting guided tours of Kashan's historic houses, including Shazdeh, Ameri, Sharifian, and Tabatabaei.
- **Digital Transformation:** Creating information databases for historic houses and implementing electronic credit card systems for visitor access.
- **Cultural Exhibitions:** Hosting rosewater-making exhibitions and cultural conferences within these historic houses to engage the local population.
- **Enhancing Visitor Experience:** Expanding welfare and recreational facilities to improve tourist satisfaction.

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