

During the last decades in Jordan, many traditional villages have been abandoned, with rural populations increasingly moving to urban areas and abandoning farms that are suffering from desertification and lack of water. However, due to the development of tourism and the increasing awareness of local communities regarding the importance of cultural heritage in creating economic opportunities, today the protection of these abandoned villages is becoming an integral need.

Located in Tafila, southern Jordan, Matan Heritage Village is a very interesting example of a rural village that was abandoned in the 1980s as villagers moved away to nearby towns that offered more services and space for growth. Despite having since suffered from a number of deterioration factors, the village is well known for its breathtaking natural landscape and very rich history, having first been inhabited by the Edomites and then later by the Nabataeans. This article presents a case study of an applied cultural resource management project that seeks to restore and rehabilitate the Matan Heritage Village through a tourism development model that directly engages the local community in the preservation of the site's cultural and natural landscape (Fig. 1).

Implemented by the Tarmeem Center for the Preservation of Heritage during November 2017 to June 2020, the project is funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Jordan. The project highlights the role of heritage as a driver of sustainable economic growth by understanding its high contemporary value through community engagement in restoring and developing the local community's own heritage. Thus, the project conducted an intensive awareness program for the community before and during the field interventions to enhance their engagement with and valuing of heritage. This was achieved through workshops held for women, children, youths, and even the elderly who had a role in transferring intangible heritage for future generations through videos, joining field visits, and participation in the workshops.

The project's main components include restoration and rehabilitation of the Matan Heritage Village and developing experiential tourism programs. A comprehensive methodology for cultural heritage preservation was implemented based on incorporating all aspects of documentation, management, capacity building, conservation, rehabilitation, presentation, and site usage. So far, the project has involved more than 50 members of the local community and university students in different components through a hands-on training program (Fig. 2). The project team members conducted analysis and documentation of the old building techniques and material used in the village,

## Tafila: Matan Heritage Village

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Fig. 1. A general view of the Matan Heritage village with the cluster under development and showing in the background the mount of Busayra Archaeological site, 2020. (Photo by Toqa Al Oran.)

cleaned the main path, which leads to the project cluster houses, cleaned and organized all the debris of the houses, numbered all the main features inside the houses, and fully restored the project five houses cluster.

As part of the Tarmeem process for studying the village and the potential houses for restoration and rehabilitation, it was agreed with the local partner, Al Baqee Tourism Cooperative, to focus this project on a model cluster of around five houses. The Tarmeem Center worked with the cooperative through a local lawyer to formulate and sign an agreement between the house owners and the cooperative. This agreement allowed the cooperative to have a 25-year lease for the restored properties in order to ensure the sustainability and long-term economic impact of the project on the community, which is based on a collective economic return and financial benefit to the owners and cooperative members. This model will be based on the living museum concept, which will introduce new adapted functions of the rural houses and will include a historical and heritage museum represented in the accommodation spaces, a natural museum and local traditional food represented in the kitchen, and a library and research area.





Figure 2. The project during the restoration of the houses, 2019. (Photo by Ibrahim Albarghouthi.)

## References

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