

CHALLENGES OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN AND AROUND YIRGALEM TOWN, SIDAMA NATIONAL REGIONAL STATE, ETHIOPIA

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Abstract

This study aimed to assess the challenges of tourism development in and around Yirgalem Town of Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia. Qualitative and quantitative research approaches with descriptive research design were employed to address the research objectives. Surveys, key informants, focus group discussions, field observation, and secondary data were the data collection instruments for primary data sources. On the other hand, the data type that was used for this study is both qualitative and quantitative data. To select survey respondents and tourist sites, stratified random sampling and purposive sampling techniques were employed. In order to triangulate and authenticate the study, qualitative data was employed, and frequency and percentage were utilized to assess the quantitative data when applicable. Development of the tourist business can be facilitated by the research area's potential for tourism. The findings also identified several factors and challenges that slowed down tourism development in and around Yirgalem Town. These include insufficient community awareness toward tourism, inadequate promotion and marketing, insufficient cooperation and participation among stakeholders, administration-related problems, and inadequate basic tourism infrastructure such as accommodation. The study's findings and suggestions also look at how to strengthen the ability of the local government and other interested parties to grow the tourism sector in the research area.

Keywords: Tourism Development, Tourism Resources, Challenges, Yirgalem

Introduction

Tourism industry plays a very vital role in job creation, and generation of foreign exchange revenue (UNDP, 2011). Tourism now accounts for 10.2% of the global domestic product (GDP) and 10% of all jobs (Scowsill, 2017). Sub-Saharan with only 14.7 million foreign visitors in 1990, 26 million in 2000, and 63 million in 2017, Africa is one of the tourist regions with the greatest growth rates in the world. Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, is gifted with ancient historical and cultural heritages, resources, attractive geographical sites, and many others. Due to the presence of tourism resources, the arrival of tourists from every corner of the world to Ethiopia increases the growth and development of the tourism industry (Tesfaye, 2016).

According to Kidane-Mariam (2015), the

challenges of the tourism industry development in Ethiopia are legitimately described as one that is still undeveloped. Its current low level of development is frequently attributed to changes in development policies and governance systems, ineffective marketing and promotion, a lack of skilled labor, unstable finances, a lack of government attention and understanding, and inadequate management capabilities.

Development of tourism strengthens the local economy when tourists visit an attraction, generates local employment when tourism activities stimulate the local economy, and also leads to the upgrading of the infrastructural development activities such as hospitality, roads, telecommunication, and accommodation (Nothando, 2017).

Statement of the Problem

According to Tekabe (2016), the tourism industry in Ethiopia has factors that hinder

tourism development. He distinguished that lack of tourism promotion, lack of basic infrastructure, the bad image of the destination, and poorly trained manpower are major factors in the tourism industry development in Ethiopia. Strong tourism potential exists in and around Yirgalem Town, which might greatly aid in the growth of the industry both nationally and in the surrounding area.

Researchers conducted so far in and around Yirgalem Town related to tourism development are very few. The towns' tourism challenges, as well as resources, have not so far attracted researchers and investigators in filling the knowledge gap, and there is a weakness in identifying, examining and assessing the towns' tourism challenges and tourism activities as well as tourism potentials. Due to this, the towns' tourism challenges and resources are not supported by written documents. Tourism development in Sidama and its surroundings is insignificant. The local community and government bodies do not recognize it as a means of enhancing the economic benefit of the tourism industry (Fasika T, 2017).

In line with the problems mentioned above, challenges of tourism development are not identified; there is also a gap in conducting research in the study area. Some researchers studied urban potentials and ecotourism. For instance, Ermias Kifle studied the potential of urban tourism in Hawassa in 2015. He found out the tourism potentials of Hawassa city such as Lake Hawassa, Gudumale recreational place (Amora-Gedel), Woldeamanuel Dubale Monument, Loke Palace of Emperor Haile Selassie, Saint Gabriel church,

Burkito hot spring, etc. Likewise, Fasika Temesgen studied the development of community-based ecotourism in Loka Abaya National Park in 2017; she tried to find out the abundant natural resources such as scenic features, flora and fauna, mountains, water bodies, as well as the presence of cultural features. However, all the studies failed to address the challenges of tourism development, such as tourism infrastructure, tourism promotion and marketing, community awareness, cooperation among stakeholders, financial capability, and rate of tourist flow, as well as potential tourism resources in and around Yirgalem Town. The study aims to identify the existing tourism resources in and around Yirgalem Town for tourism development and to examine the challenges of tourism development activities in the study area.

Review of Literature

Since the term "tourism" is still contested, there are no agreed-upon definitions, and different academics have varying interpretations of what it entails.

Tourism is defined by Nabil (2003: 11) as the actions of people visiting and remaining in locations other than their regular permanent places of residence for up to a year in a row for business, pleasure, or other reasons. According to this wide definition, all socioeconomic activities that directly or indirectly assist travelers or tourists who visit certain locations are included in the tourism business. Or, to put it another way, the tourist sector is very important for the socioeconomic development of the host nation, region, and community.

The economic and alternative development methods are two opposing ideas that have emerged throughout the history of development studies. A macroeconomic, capitalistic, neo-liberal paradigm is represented by the economic model. According to Potter (1999:45–69), the alternative development strategy stands for bottom-up development, self-reliance, sustainable development, and meeting basic requirements. The two development thinking models are the culmination of all the concepts (such as theories, ideologies, and methods) found in each model. Modernization theories, neo-liberal practices, and a top-down methodology are all involved in economic progress. A desire to transition from a traditional to a modern society founded on Western positivism frequently leads to this model.

Research Methodology

A descriptive research design was employed for this study. According to Kothari (2004), a descriptive research design is concerned with a narration of facts and characteristics relating to individuals, groups, or situations. It is most often employed in social science research. Related to the research approach, this study used both quantitative and qualitative (mixed) methods to investigate the challenges of tourism development in and around Yirgalem Town of Sidama National Regional State of Ethiopia. According to Singh (2004), using a mixed research method gives the research sounder and better quality, especially for tourism research.

The key participants of this study were hotel owners and managers; tour guides, culture, tourism and sports officers; religious leaders and elders; local communities who live around tourist sites and

domestic tourists; hotel employees; and environment protection and forest development office experts as well as sports persons and church leaders. As a sampling technique, the study used purposive sampling from a non-probability sampling technique and a proportionate stratified random sampling technique from probability sampling. The total sample size is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Sample Size of the Respondents

No	Survey Respondents	Population	Sample Size	Sampling Technique
1	Culture and Tourism Office	15	10	Stratified Random Sampling
2	Tour Guides	12	8	Stratified Random Sampling
3	Hotel owners and managers	98	65	Stratified Random Sampling
4	Religious leaders and Elders	78	52	Purposive Sampling
Total		203	135	

Source: Computed the Records of Yirgalem Town Culture, Tourism & Sport office, 2021

For this study, qualitative and quantitative data were used for this study. Both primary and secondary sources of data are employed for this study. The primary data were collected from surveys, interviews, FGDs, and observations, and non-participant observation was particularly used. The Secondary data are related to the sector policies, tourism development plans, institution reports, documents and publications, and planning frameworks and principles. Furthermore, annual reports, books, journals, websites, have been used for this study.

The data collection method involves the tool utilized for data generation (Sarankatos, 1996). The methods of data collection for this study were survey, focus group discussion, key informants'

interview, non-participant observation, and document review. For this study, the researcher analyzed and presented the results using descriptive statistics techniques. Quantitative data obtained using the questionnaires were analyzed using SPSS software version 20, and it could also assist the study in working with descriptive statistics like frequency and percentage. Qualitative data gathered from key informants' interviews, direct observation, focus group discussions, and document review were first organized and categorized thematically and written up into narratives.

Results and Discussion

Potentials of Tourism Resources

To declare a tourism destination in a certain area, the area must be enriched with unique tourist attractions that can capture the attention of tourists. According to UNWTO, attractions frequently command visitors' attention and can serve as their primary source of inspiration when planning a trip (UNWTO, 2015).

As depicted in Table 2 below, all of the respondents (100%) claimed that there was an availability of tourism resources in the study area.

Table 2: Potential of Tourism Resources in the Study Area

Variables	Alternatives	No of Respondents(n=130)	
		Frequency	Percent
Availability of Tourism Resources	Yes	130	100.0
	Total	130	100.0
Types of Tourism Resources	Natural	15	11.5
	Cultural	10	7.7
	Historical	9	6.9
	Religious	24	18.5
	All	72	55.4
	Total	130	100.0

Source: Field Survey

According to the data gathered from household surveys, key informant interviews, and the researcher's observations, the study area has rich potential for different tourism resources. The finding reveals that the study area is endowed with natural, cultural, historical, and religious tourism resources.

Table 3: Natural Tourism Resources

Variables	Alternatives	No of Respondents(n=130)	
		Frequency	Percent
Availability of Natural Tourism Resources	Hot spring	70	53.8
	Bird watching	3	2.3
	Forests	4	3.1
	Rivers	5	3.8
	Wild animals	6	4.6
		42	32.3
	All Total	130	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

As shown in the above Table 3, the majority, 53.8% of the respondents, revealed that hot springs were the dominant natural tourism potential in the study area. The findings also indicate that the study area is gifted with enormous natural tourism potential, which is a great opportunity for developing the tourism industry. Yirgalem hot spring (Filwuha), Gidabo River, Forest, bird-watching sites, wild animals, and landscape and scenery were identified as the availability of the natural tourism potentials of the study area, and they had a good advantage in developing the tourism industry in the study area.

Cultural tourism has a long history in the Sidama Region, with its roots in the Grand Tour, which is arguably the original form of tourism in the region. The existence of cultural tourism potential can play an important role as the major attractions themselves at tourist sites. It includes traditions, way of life, ceremonies and rituals, traditional

dances, food, traditional houses, and cultural medication.

Table 4: Historical Tourism Resources

Variables	Alternatives	No of Respondents(n=130)	
		Frequen cy	Percentage
Availability of Historical Tourism Resources	Monuments	5	3.8
	Palace	9	6.9
	Buildings	17	13.1
	Caves	10	7.7
	All	89	68.5
	Total	130	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

As depicted in Table 4 above, the respondents were asked about the availability of historical tourism resources based on their opinions indicate that the majority (68.5%) of the respondents confirmed that there were different historical tourism resources such as monuments, palaces, ancient buildings and caves in the study area. The finding reveals that the study area has tremendous historical tourism resources such as ancient buildings, historical palaces, caves, and ancient stele sites. Accordingly, from those historical tourism resources, the Dingama Koya Stele site, Ras Desta Damtew Palace, Princess Tenagnework cave, and Yirgalem Public Library building were mostly available in the study area.

The religious tourism potentials of the study area, such as churches, mosques, holy water, religious caves, and monasteries, were analyzed. Yirgalem is the home of holy water and different spiritual buildings such as churches, mosques, and caves. Some examples of moveable church heritage that are important for tourism development are the art of music and the various instruments used in churches, the art of building churches, holly crosses, a replica

of the Ark of the Covenant, materials used for the dance ceremony like a drum, and the holy book (Ayalew, 2009).

Table 5: Religious Tourism Resources

Variables	Alternatives	No of Respondents (n=130)	
		Frequency	Percent
Availability of Religious Tourism Resources	Churches	12	9.2
	Mosques	6	4.6
	Holy water	9	6.9
	Monasteries	6	4.6
	Caves	5	3.8
	All	92	70.8
	Total	130	100.0%

Source: Field Survey

Based on Table 5 above, the respondents were asked about the availability of historical tourism resources found in the study area; their opinions reveal that the majority (70.8%) of the respondents stated that the study area has the potential of religious tourism resources such as churches, mosques, monasteries and religious caves in the study area. The finding reveals that there were a lot of places of worship in the town, such as Saint Emmanuel church, Saint Arsema church, Saint Mary church and holy water, as well as Washa Maryam (Cave Mary), and Estinfase Kirsitos Monastery and holly water. However, the study selected the places of worship based on the priority of tourist values.

The study area has also been gifted with various handicrafts. According to the information obtained from key informants, the researchers' observation, and FGD, there were different types of handicrafts in the study area that attract tourists, and Local communities have the opportunity to generate revenue by selling objects that are manufactured locally to tourists. Accordingly, the hand products can be made mostly from wood, metal, bamboo,

and palm trees. Bamboo work skill is acquired through observation and practice. Mostly, both men and women (in some, only men) make products such as baskets, chicken pens, floor covers, seats, food containers, jewellery, etc. Basketry was made from palm trees and grass, which are part of women's occupation in the study area. The information obtained from the researchers' observation confirms that the other handicrafts of tourist products were cultural clothes, cultural hats, holy crosses, and other spiritual books that were also available around churches in the study area.

Challenges of Tourism Development

Poor quality of lodging and services, a poor reputation as a travel destination abroad, a lack of demand from international tour operators and travel agencies, the inability of major Ethiopian tour operators, weak supply chains supporting the tourism industry, a lackluster management and coordination structure, subpar products, an institutional structure lacking in focus that makes it difficult to create policies, regulate the industry, and establish strategies, and a disregard for domestic tourism are just a few of the problems mentioned (Kidane-Mariam, 2015).

The study reveals that, in and around Yirgalem Town, they possess a multitude of tourist assets, although they are unable to fully exploit them due to several limitations.

. Additionally, the destination service delivered was not enough for a visitor's good experience. As shown in Table 6 below, the majority (42.3%) of the respondents confirmed that there were different kinds of tourism infrastructural problems, such as

lack of accommodation, lack of road access, poor telecommunication, and shortages of power and water in the study area.

Table 6: Lack of Tourism Infrastructural Development

Variables	Alternatives	No of Respondents (n=130)	
		No.	%
Satisfied With Tourism Infrastructural Development	Yes	10	7.7
	No	120	92.3
	Total	130	100
Tourism Infrastructural Problems	Lack of accommodation	12	9.2
	Lack of road access	20	15.4
	Poor telecommunication	15	11.5
	Shortage of power	18	13.8
	Shortage of poor water	10	7.7
	All	55	42.3
	Total	130	100.0

Source: Own Survey, 2021

The finding reveals that the lack of communication centers in the town was the major safety and security of tourism industry development in the study area. From this, it could be realized that the factors related to the shortage of accommodation, network communication, and lack of quality services in most hotels, pensions, restaurants, sewage, and sanitation problems were identified as the major challenging factors for tourism development in the study area.

The findings also reveal that there were different kinds of tourism infrastructural problems such as lack of accommodation (hotels, guest houses, entertainment), lack of road access, shortage of power infrastructure (electric power), poor

telecommunication (internet, telephone, etc.), and shortage of pure water supply in the study area. Information obtained from interviews with key informants also reveals that a great shortage of hotels, restaurants, pensions, etc. were the main challenges of tourism development in the study area.

The findings also confirm that there was a great problem of road access in the study area. In addition, the main road was also covered by unmaintained old asphalt, which connected Yirgalem town to Aposito Junction or, 3 km away from Yirgalem, to the main road, Hawassa-Moyale road. Almost all of the streets were very low standardized roads, including cobblestones and stony, grounded roads that connected the town with the major tourist sites. In addition, the FGD with the local community also underlined that the summer season was one of the difficult periods to travel from one site to another site because most of the stony grounded roads are eroded and filled with mud.

Table 7: Awareness of Tourism Development

Variables	Alternatives	No. of Respondents(n=130)	
		No.	%
The Local Community is Aware of the Tourism Industry	Yes	34	26.2
	No	96	73.8
	Total	130	100.0%
The main determinant factors	Limited gov't role	26	20.0
	Lack of interest	13	10.0
	Institutional	31	23.8
	arrangement	60	46.2
	All Total	130	100.0

Source: Own Survey, 2021

As shown in Table 7 on the community awareness toward tourism development in the study area, the

majority (73.8%) of the respondents reveal that the local community was not aware of the tourism industry in the study area due to different factors such as giving low levels of attention to tourism, local government-related problems including low budget allocation for tourism development and lack of promotion and marketing of tourist sites. As a result, lack of community awareness of tourism development was the major determinant factor for the tourism industry in the study area.

Mulugeta (2012) asserts that in order to promote tourism in Ethiopia, the government is involved at the federal, regional, woreda, and local levels. At the federal level, the government works with the regions to create implementation plans and develop policies and strategies for the growth of tourism. The mapping and inventory of the nation's current and future tourist destinations are also linked by it. Regional tourist resources are mapped, research is evaluated and conducted, and service-providing organizations' standards are upheld by the government. In addition, it offers community awareness, business and entrepreneurial training, customer management skills, high-quality service, and tour guiding.

According to the survey result the limited government's role in community awareness was the determinant factor for tourism industry development in the study area. Interviews with key informants and FGD state that they were not satisfied with the local government's role in creating awareness for the local community. They also pointed out that the local government was weak in creating awareness for the local community, and they underlined that the local

government didn't pay more attention to the economic, social, and environmental significance of tourism in the study area.

Tourism is a decentralized industry, not under the ownership or control of any one or small group; rather, it is the common sense of every stakeholder. To realize tourism, strong coordination and involvement of stakeholders are a must. The data revealed that one of the most constraining factors for slowing down tourism industry growth in the town was the lack of stakeholder coordination and participation in tourism industry development, as well as the activity done to be aware of tourism and its products. As a result, the data collected from key informants and through FGD emphasized that even individuals with a high level of education lacked a comprehensive understanding of the tourism business. Despite its longevity spanning several decades, they regarded the industry as a nascent field of study. The inadequate knowledge of the town's attraction can be attributed to the lack of stakeholder mobilization by the relevant organization.

Conclusion

This study uncovers that Yirgalem town possesses a diverse range of prospective tourism resources, including natural, cultural, historical, and religious elements, which can be harnessed and developed as the town's tourism offerings. The study tried to locate some tourist attraction sites on the map of Yirgalem Town administration, presented the number of the major attractions, and came up with the sites of the photos. Churches with unique collections were the most important pilgrimages of religious tourism potential in the study area.

Besides, the findings of the study also show that the existing tourism enterprises of the town were those involved in hotels, pensions, restaurants, and lodges. The study demonstrates that Yirgalem Town possesses distinctive and abundant tourism assets, although it is unable to fully use them due to numerous limitations.

The challenges/bottlenecks for tourism development in and around the town were numerous, including safety and security problems such as lack of service quality. The poor performance of the tourism business and the existing insufficient tourism infrastructure were challenging tourism development activities in and around Yirgalem Town. Some hotels, restaurants, cafes, and other related centers in the study area had service quality problems. The great problem related to the lack of road access to connect the town with tourist attraction sites was the major infrastructural challenge for tourism development in the study area. Most of the roads that reach the tourist sites are stony, grounded roads. Shortage of communication infrastructure, such as lack of internet access, shortage of tourist information centers, and the shortage of fax, was one of the determinant problems. Lack of community awareness toward tourism development: The Local community was not aware of the tourism industry. Lack of coordination and involvement among key stakeholders (Government, NGOs, Community, and private sectors) in and around the town was identified as the major problem. The development of tourism in and around the town was being severely hampered by a lack of funding and government attention to the industry. Both the

owners of tourism-related businesses and government offices in the industry lack qualified personnel. The town's tourism offerings were not sufficiently promoted or marketed to draw attention to the diverse resources available at the site. Regarding the limitations, the active participation, and coordination of all parties involved, as well as figuring out their place in the tourism sector as a way to resolve the issues

Recommendations

The growth of tourism has several benefits, including the creation of jobs, the improvement of communities, the preservation of historical, cultural, and religious legacies, and the advancement of infrastructure all while providing entertainment. Thus, in order to achieve the town's and its environs' tourist growth, the aforementioned obstacles should be reduced by means of the active engagement and participation of all parties involved and by identifying their respective roles in the tourism sector within the research region. Thus, based on the research findings and conclusion, the study suggests the following critical role for important stakeholders in the growth of the study area's tourism industry:

The Government

- Single stakeholders do not run the tourism industry; rather, it is a combination effort of many sectors. Governments have a key role to play in improving the environment so that tourism thrives. Therefore, the Yirgalem Town Administration culture, tourism, and sports office are expected to work on establishing conditions for tourism development through government-led

policies, plans, and laws that guide and regulate the sector for tourism development.

- The government should expand infrastructure to provide domestic and foreign tourists with access to tourist sites.

Private business entrepreneurs

The main role of these entrepreneurs should be to satisfy the demand and satisfy the needs and wants of the visitors.

- They also ought to advance or improve (bedrooms, pensions, cafes, restaurants, and bars), and they should need to provide short-term training to enhance labour force performance.
- Also, when they hire employees, they should have to hire them according to their profession.
- They should also develop existing and new tourism products, such as rural tourism, tourist shops, safari tours, eco-lodges, boutique hotels, professional event organizers, etc, in the study area.

The Local Community

- Their critical role includes participating in decision-making, understanding the value of tourist attraction sites, participating in the preservation and conservation of the attraction sites, being hospitable to visitors, and involve in new tourism entrepreneurs. For example, the landscape of Yirgalem Town could be engaged in offering to hikers.
- Further, all local communities could be involved together in cultural and religious festivals such as Fiche-Chambalala, Timket, Saint Arsema annual feast, and so on.

The Researchers

- This study is a pioneer for the study area because there is no former research conducted on the challenges of tourism development,
- The researcher recommends that the other researchers dig out further to reveal the challenges as well as potentials of tourism development in and around Yirgalem Town and utilize the potential of tourism development.
- It is therefore suggested that the study should be replicated in other service sectors.

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