

AN EXPLORING STUDY OF THE SCOPE FOR SPECIAL INTEREST TOURISM BASED SERVICES IN ETHIOPIA WITH REFERENCE TO KONSA VILLEGE IN ARBAMINCH

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Abstract: Tourism in Ethiopia accounted for 5.5% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) in 2006, having barely increased 2% over the previous year. The government is proving its commitment and willingness to develop tourism through a number of initiatives. Tourism is a featured component of Ethiopia's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), which aims to combat poverty and encourage economic development.

The Ethiopian Ministry of Culture and Tourism is the ministry of the Government of Ethiopia responsible for researching, preserving, developing, and promoting the culture and tourist attractions of Ethiopia and its peoples, both inside the country and internationally. In doing so the Ministry closely works together with different national and international stakeholders.

Subordinate bodies include the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA), National Archives and Library Agency, and Ethiopian National Theatre.

The Ministry publicizes the country's resources of tourist attractions and encourages the development of tourist facilities. It also licenses and supervises establishments of tourist facilities such as hotels and tour operators, and sets the standards for them. Ethiopia is blessed with abundant natural tourist attractions, including nine World Heritage Sites, but the Ministry of Culture and Tourism still struggles to attract tourists in decent numbers owing to poor investment, security, and does not have any cohesive tourism development or promotion strategy. The aim of 'ARCCH' Tourism Services is to enable tourists to find spots that only the locals know, giving the tourists opportunity to the tourists to explore new areas of the place like never before. This paper proposes find the scope for a personalized service for tourist "Special Interest Tourism" recommendation for tourists who travel within arbaminch & for the benefit of Foreign Nationals who visit the city. The major focus of the study is to understand the demand for such a service being integrated into the conventional tour package. The major findings made during the course of the show that the market for "Special Interest Tourism" based services stands at approximately 62.8%.

1. INTRODUCTION

In spite of a long history of promotion and development, Ethiopia's tourism industry is in its initial stages of development. Changes in governance systems have resulted in different social constructions of the role of tourism in national development. Since 1990s, the partial opening up of the economy to private investment, the liberalization of national economic management and a modicum of political decentralization of administration and decision-making have contributed to significant growth in both the number of inbound tourists and the generation of foreign exchange. This

research examines the opportunities and challenges of tourism development in the arbaminch surrounding areas with reference to 'konsa' village. Based on field visits and semi-structured interviews of key private-public stakeholders and archival research, the study argues that the corridor has tremendous opportunities for developing a spatial/geographical pattern of tourist destinations ranging from single destinations, to en-route, base camp, regional tour and trip chasing ones. Ethiopia's tourism has been more focused on the socio-cultural and historical aspects of the country's development. The nature-focused tourism of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda has attracted more foreign tourists though Ethiopia's outstanding biodiversity and agro-ecological zones could match and even surpass the East African nature tourism potential. Unfortunately, the low level of development, marketing and promotion of nature tourism has resulted in many foreigners going to East Africa side-stepping Ethiopia.

2. NEED FOR STUDY

Successive Ethiopian governments have promoted tourism during their tenures. The monarchy that mediated politics, economics, culture, environment and technology for most of the 20th century initiated the promotion, marketing and development of tourism as an integral part of the overall dynamics of national development. Ethiopia's existence as an independent country for thousands of years and the diversity of its ecology and culture were images that captivated foreigners for a long time. The promotional logo of 'Thirteen months of Sunshine' was interjected by an imaginary of a proud and cultured people professing the two major universal religions of the world—Christianity and Islam and an ethnic religion of Felasha Jewry. The magnificent material iconographies of Ethiopian culture were relayed to the visitor through the timeless architectural wonders of Axum's stele, Lalibela's rockhewn churches, Gondar's Castles, Harar's medieval walled city and archeological sites that traced the origin of homo-sapiens to the Rift valley where the skeletal remains of Dinkinesh (Lucy) and Selam were discovered.

Above all A UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2011, the Konso Cultural Landscape is named after its agriculturist inhabitants, who have moulded their 230km² homeland of semi-arid hills into productive agricultural land. A striking feature of Konso is the ancient hilltop paleta (terrace and walled villages) - strange hobbit-warrens towered over by generation poles felled from a sacred forest, and studded with curvaceous thatched community houses. The Konso are also renowned for their waka grave-markers, anthropomorphic hardwood statues carved to mimic the deceased, and for their communally constructed reservoirs.

Travelers to Ethiopia are looking for the real local experience. This cannot be achieved with pre-packaged tours. There is immense potential in a customized tour planning service that makes tailor made tour plans for the customers. Having a clear understanding about what are the needs and wants of the traveler would help travel agencies to develop better tour plans for the travelers that suit their means and demands. It comes without saying that such a service would also increase job opportunities in arbaminch, especially at Konso village.

Highlights of konsa village

Karat-Konso lies about 540km south of Addis Ababa along a good road through Butajira and Arba Minch. Most visitors to Konso drive there as part of an organised tour, also taking in South Omo zone to the west. The closest airport is at Arba Minch, 85km to the north of Konso. Ethiopian Airlines (www.ethiopianairlines.com) operates daily flights to Arba Minch from Addis Ababa. Hotels in Arba Minch can arrange transfers or tours to Karat Konso.

The area is most often explored on an organised 4x4 tour out of Addis Ababa or Arba Minch. All visitors must report to the Konso Tourist Information Centre in Karat-Konso to pay entrance fees and arrange a mandatory guide before visiting any of the traditional villages.

The Konso Tourist Information Centre can also arrange multi-day overnight hikes taking in several villages as well as the Doha hot springs and rock formations at Gesergiyu.

A few stalls in Karat-Konso sell traditional Konso fabrics and other local handicrafts. There are also craft sellers operating in most of the more popular traditional Konso villages

- Konso's hilltop paleta villages emphasise defensive structures. Each village is encircled by up to six concentric dry-stone basalt walls that stand around 4 metres high and are entered only through two or more ceremonial gates. About two dozen traditional villages are scattered around the World Heritage Site, the most frequently visited being Mecheke, Dokatu, Gamole and Buso.

- A village is divided into several subcommittees, each with its own mora, a striking open-sided and thatch-roofed community house.
- The oldest mora in a village stands alongside a small common where an olahita (generation pole) is erected every 18 years to mark the initiation of a new generation-set. The age of any given paleta can be determined by counting its generation poles: Dokatu with 43 olahita indicating an age of more than 750 years, is claimed to be the oldest village in Konso,
- In some villages, the exploits of a celebrated age-set is commemorated by the erection of a stone obelisk called a daga-hela, a custom that makes Konso one of the world's last existing megalithic cultures.
- The Konso erect impressionistic wooden waka grave-markers at the burial place of an important man or particularly brave warrior. Although many waka can still be seen in situ, the Konso Museum displays around 200 examples that were confiscated by the local authorities after being looted by foreign collectors.
- The Konso countryside typically comprises hard, dry, rocky slopes, so the people have developed an extensive system of dry-stone terracing to prevent erosion and create saddles for agriculture.
- Gesergiyo is a Konso village best known for a nearby gorge filled with skyscraper-like water-sculpted sand pinnacles nicknamed 'New York'.
- The sacred Kalla Forest is the site of an important chief's compound and the new Konso Coffee Cooperative, which uses a traditional dry method to process the coffee beans.

Objectives of the Study:

- To have a basic understanding about the changing demands of domestic and international travelers in konso
- To analyze the scope for Special Interest Tourism Services in konso
- To measure the demand for customized tourism services in konso

3. LITERATURE

Wium, (2010) in his research clearly indicated that the Mobile tourist service system has high potential and is encouraged enormously by the positive feedback from many users. Users especially found the system to be more beneficial to them as tourists, and that they could use the system during vacations. Unfortunately, the achieved responses were not completely satisfactory to our goals, but further iterations with the suggested improvements. M.P.Saji, Senior Research Fellow at Gandhigram Rural Institute in his research paper "Tourism Product Development In Ecologically And Culturally Fragile Areas – Observations From Kerala In India" states that countries that are economically backward but rich in terms of resources, tourism has become a vital sector to be considered for regional development.

In the post-modern world, there seems to be an ever increasing urge for experiencing authentic life styles and environment – a search which is obvious to end up in locations and communities that were ecologically and culturally enclosed so far, so that it had not altered yet. This taste of more diversified and specialized experience makes many of the culturally and ecologically rich regions attractive in contemporary tourism market. The new tourism styles like Eco-tourism, Cultural tourism, Rural tourism, (indeed too many) have become synonym with the growth of tourism in several countries. The paper tries to explore through various alternative tourism concepts like eco-tourism and cultural tourism and observe its actual practices in konso. Anne Bader (2010), in his research paper titled "Tourism Business Environment Analysis Conducted For Kerala/India" analyzed the tourism business environment of the Indian state Kerala. Furthermore, four scientific models are shortly explained in order to identify the most suitable ones for the business environment analysis. A case study titled "Community-Based Tourism: A Case Study From Buhoma,Uganda" describes how community-based tourism activities were developed in Buhoma, Uganda in the context of the FAO/United Nations Foundation project Community. Sudipta Kiran Sarkar and Babu P George (2010), titled "Peace Through Alternative Tourism" examines the connection among alternative forms of tourism and the establishment of long term peace. The challenge starts when you lack most of the above and what you have is only a handful of beautiful natural resources, breathtaking sceneries, goodwill and a great desire and pride to show those visitors your country. You target that group of customers whom are specifically interested in what you have, beautiful views, heartfelt welcome, home like accommodations and very warm people. These customers do not look for fancy, expensive, overcrowded hotels; they are in search of real beauty and

nature. They have special interests and would like to fulfill them toward a reasonable price. Hence starts the development of what is widely known as the special interest tourism. A Research paper was done by Wouter Sou_riau and Pieter

Vansteenwegen (2011), titled “Tourist Trip Planning Functionalities: State of the Art and Future”, the paper states that When tourists visit a city or region, they cannot visit every point of interest available, as they are constrained in time and budget. Tourist recommender applications help tourists by presenting a personal selection. Providing adequate tour scheduling support for these kinds of applications is a daunting task for the application developer. The research paper written by Weiler, B.; Hall, C. M. (1992), titled “Special interest tourism: in search of an alternative.” looks at some of the common things that can be identified customized tourism services provided to the tourists who are looking for a unique experience while travelling to a new destination. A special interest tourism experience is always motivated primarily by that particular interest. With respect to travel behaviour, the one aspect that seems to be consistent is the 'seeking' behavior. The potential of special interest holidays in providing a quality experience for host populations and in avoiding detrimental impacts on the environment are discussed. The research paper written by authors Kalinowski, K.M. & Weiler, B.; Hall, C. M.(1992), titled “Educational travel: The dawn of a new era in Travel” talks about the forms of travel which are distinctly educational with respect to their origins and reasons for development.

4. METHODOLOGY

The research design used in this study was descriptive in nature. Probabilistic sampling design has been used to conduct the research which is appropriate. Sampling unit is the basic unit containing the elements of a clear target population. The sampling unit of the study is only the focused persons who travel on holidays and business purposes at least once a year. The study contains a limited sample size of 100 respondents. The time period of the study was approximately 3 Months. Simple random sampling has been adopted as sampling technique. The data was purposefully collected from the both primary and secondary sources. In this study the primary data was obtained through the survey of the limited respondents. The questionnaire was comprehensively prepared by me with the help of similar research papers and articles.

Secondary data is the data that has been obtained through various other sources like the internet, journals, other research papers, magazine articles. A pool of secondary data sources were meticulously used for this study and the references are given towards the end of this report. Major part of the data collection work was carried over through the internet, the questionnaire is uploaded in instantly and the link was sent to the respondents as soon as they give their response it was recorded in the cloud space.

5. ANALYSIS

Table 1.1: konsa Destination of Travel

Destination of Travel	Overseas	Percentage
Within the Country	63	63
Overseas Travel	37	37
Total	100	100
Destination of Travel	Overseas Travel	Percentage

From the data received, we can assume that there is a lot of scope for personalized “Special Interest Tourism” services within the locals. Assuming that all the respondents are Ethiopians there is a 63% market for the service. This means that the opportunity is to initiate the rendering of such a service would be an additional advantage to the tour promoters.

Holiday Period	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Day wise Trip	3	3
Weekend	37	37
Lasted Over a Week	60	60
Total	100	100

The duration of the stay as per the responses wise collected; there is not much demand for day trips to tourist destinations. Maximum number of expected respondents prefer going on trips that last over a week followed by weekend getaways. Both these duration of limited stay during a holiday were preferred by 60% and 37% of the respondents respectively. These are the preferably two durations that would be optimal to initiate “Special Interest Tourism” Services.

Purpose Of Visit	Number Of Responses	Percentage
Business or commercial	16	16
Leisure or fun based	28	28
Night Life and relaxation	18	18
Shopping especially handicrafts	21	21
Cultural Heritage based	17	17
Total	100	100

The data collected shows that the main reason for travelers to go on a holiday is to have a enormous relaxing time. The other factor that plays major influence while selecting a destination is the Shopping facilities that are available. The Night Life that a place is offering and the Cultural heritage of the place are also equally important factors. This is one if the vital reason konsa is considered one of the most sought tourist destination in ethiopia by foreigners.

Table 1.4 Customer Preferences towards Destination Demographics

Destination Demographics	History	Culture	Climate
Rank 1	26	32	63
Rank 2	29	47	16
Rank 3	45	21	21

From the sample collected, it is clear that the respondents have ranked clearly Climate to be the attribute of most importance while choosing a destination to spend a holiday. This means that the expected climatic conditions on a place need to be given a lot of importance while recommending a place to a tourist. The next vital variable that most respondents felt played an important role while choosing a destination is the Culture of the people of the place. The other variable that had the least influence on the Impact of choosing a holiday destination was the History of the destination.

Order	Answer	Responses	percent
1	People living styles and natural views	21	21%
2	Land Marks and cuisine	26	26%
3	Place of Worship	16	16%
4	handicrafts	31	31%
5	Others	6	6%

As per the report most of them travelling to obtain the handicrafts as the main one.following that landmarks and cuisine and other factors so on.

Konso based Tourist Request for Prior Information Regarding Preferred means of Transport while on a Holiday

	Taxi /Bus	Bike/Car Rentals	Guided tour package	Total
Business	3.1	3.3	1.2	7.1
	8%	8%	5%	7%
Leisure	12	15	9	36
	32%	41%	45%	38%
Night Life	4.1	4.1	1.2	9.1
	11%	11%	5%	9%
Shopping	9.1	8.2	4.2	21
	24%	22%	20%	22%
Cultural heritage	10	7	5	22
	26%	19%	25%	23%
Total	38	37	20	95
	100%	100%	100%	100%

While travelling to a destination, the purpose of the journey plays a very important role in determining the means of transport that the traveller would like to take. Taking the purpose of the visit the following conclusions were made:

- ❖ Of the total number of respondents who preferred to take a taxi or a bus as a means of transport while traveling within the destination,
 - 8% of the travellers were on Business activities, ○ 12% of the travellers were there on a leisure trip
 - 11% of the travellers were there to enjoy the night life ○ 24% of the travellers were on a shopping expedition
 - 26% prefer the means of transport to explore the cultural heritage of the area.
- ❖ A total of 37 respondents felt that they felt more comfort. Table 4. exploring an area by taking bikes or cars on rent. This meant that they could enjoy the place at their own convenience.
 - 3% of the respondents who preferred bike/car rentals in a destination were on business ○ 41% of the respondents were on leisure trips
 - 11% of the respondents were visiting the place to enjoy the night life ○ 22% of the respondents were there to enjoy the shopping
 - While the remaining 19% preferred to explore the cultural heritage of the area.
- ❖ A total of 20 respondents felt that the best way to go around the city would be to be part of a guided tour.
 - 5% of the respondents were on Business ○ 45% of the respondents were on Leisure
 - 5% of the respondents wanted to enjoy the night life ○ 20% of the respondents were on shopping expeditions
- ❖ 25% of the respondents felt it was the best way to enjoy the cultural heritage of the area

Order	Answer	Responses	Percent
1	Shopping Facilities	22	22%
2	Food and Cuisine	32	32%
3	Nightlife DJ parties & pubs	13	13%
4	Lodging facilities	30	30%
5	Others	3	3%
	Total	100	

	Shopping Facilities	Food and Cuisine	Nightlife DJ parties & pubs	Lodging facilities	Total
Package Tour	8	9	5	8	30
	36%	28%	15%	27%	28%
Customized Tour	14	23	11	22	70
	64%	72%	85%	73%	72%
	22	32	16	30	100
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

On the basis of the data collected, it is very clear that there is a lot of demand for customized tour packages. When asked about the kind of holiday package that they would prefer while on a holiday for the given parameters, 72% of the respondents felt that a customized tour would be the best option to take. 64% of the respondents who really wanted to explore the shopping avenues chose to take a customized tour, and so did 72% of the respondents who wanted to experiment with the various food and cuisine offerings that the destination had to offer. 85% of the people who had visited the destination for the night life experience felt that customized tours would be the best option. 73% of the respondents who felt that the best way to find the best accommodation facilities are if they took a customized tour.

- ❖ As far as the demand for a packaged tour is concerned, the following trends were discovered.
 - 36% of the respondents were in the destination for the shopping experience
 - 28% of the respondents were in the destination for the food and cuisine ○ 15% of the respondents wanted to experience the night life

- ❖ 8% of the respondents wanted proper lodging facilities.

	Shopping Facilities	Food and Cuisine	Nightlife DJ Parties & pubs	Lodging Facilities	Total
Business	4	5	2	4	15
	9%	8%	8%	7%	8%
Leisure	15	24	11	21	71
	33%	36%	44%	34%	36%
Night Life	6	7	4	6	23
	13%	11%	16%	10%	12%
Shopping	11	15	4	13	43
	24%	23%	16%	21%	22%
Cultural heritage	10	15	4	17	46
	22%	23%	16%	28%	23%
Total	46	66	25	61	198
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100

The tourism industry of a destination can only survive if there are supporting industries that cater to the needs and requirements of the traveller. The purpose of the visit to the tourist destination plays a very important role in determining the demand that the traveller will have for supporting industries. On analysis of the data collected, the following were inferred.

- ❖ In regards to respondents who had travelled to a holiday destination, 9% of the respondents felt that they required proper shopping facilities. 8% of them wanted proper facility for clean and hygienic food. 8% of the respondents felt the need for proper night life, so that they could relax after a hard day of work. 7% felt that the most important factor was to have proper shelter at a reasonable price.
- ❖ In regards to the respondents who travel to holiday destinations for having a good time, 33% of the respondents felt the need for proper shopping facilities so that they may buy gifts for people back home. 36% of the respondents felt that having good places to eat was important. 44% of the respondents were of the opinion that they required to have proper facility to enjoy the night life and 34% felt the need for proper lodging facilities.
- ❖ Considering the people who had gone to the destination for shopping, only 24% of the respondents felt the need for better shopping facilities. 23% of the respondents felt the need for proper food and dining places. 16% of the respondents were of the opinion that there had to be better facilities to enjoy the nightlife better. 21% felt the need for better accommodation facilities.
- ❖ Among the tourists who travelled to a tourist destination to explore the cultural heritage the area, 22% felt the need for proper shopping facilities. 23% of the respondents felt that the food and dining experience need to be improved. 16% of the respondents wanted scope for enjoying the night life. 28% wanted proper accommodation facilities.

6. FINDINGS

The following are the major findings from this study

- ❖ The market for “Special Interest Tourism” based services stands at approximately 63%
- ❖ 53% of the respondents have a fixed budget while traveling and would like economic travel solutions that fit their budget. This accounts for a major part of the market for the service.
- ❖ Most tourist prefer to go on week end getaways or trips that last more than a week, this means that a specialized trip plan based on the travelers interests is feasible with these type of travelers.
- ❖ Maximum demand for “Special Interest Tourism” based services would be during the festive seasons.

- ❖ The travelers would be happy to pay for special services that give them additional information about the tourist destination.
 - 84% of the respondents felt that they would like to have information regarding the best place to get a meal. The respondents were of the opinion that they would like to taste the original local cuisine.
 - 79% of the respondents felt the requirement for getting proper prior information regarding the best place to stay that offered good services at reasonable prices.
- ❖ The purpose of the visit to a holiday destination plays a huge impact on the way in which the traveler chooses to go about the destination
- ❖ Majority of the respondents do a lot of research before going to a tourist destination but would like additional services that help them to visit places that best suit their needs.
- ❖ A majority of the respondents prefer to have customized tours, this means that there is a huge potential for “Special Interest Tourism” based services
- ❖ There is a huge demand and potential for industries that support travel and tourism.

From the above data it is clear that In the event that tourists visit a place or region, there are various criteria that affect the experience that they earn while on the trip. The main intention of such a service initiative should be to provide travelers complete, up-to-date, and reliable travel guide. While providing such services, it is crucial to know what the traveler aims to achieve during his/her visit to a particular destination.

This helps facilitate a better understanding about the traveler’s expectations, meeting the expectations of the traveler being the key to the success of such a venture.

7. CONCLUSION

Designing a custom travel itinerary planning is a complex task. The entire process requires to identify specific places of tourist interest, to select a few of them according to the customer’s tastes and potential constrains (e.g. time), and to manually to set them in a meaningful visiting order. Travel is no longer the hobby of the rich and famous but it is also accessible to the common middle class. Ethiopia is a county that caters to such a population of tourists, which is accessible to people from all income and cultural backgrounds. Being such a unique country of diversity, ethiopia is perfect for the implementation of Special Interest Tourism Services.

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