

Review on the Opportunity and the Challenges of Eco Tourism Development in Ethiopia

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Abstract

Ecotourism is defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improves the well-being of local community. The country of Ethiopia is home to a variety of bird species, mammals, plants, amphibians, reptiles, lakes, rivers, jungle forests, and savannahs, making it a haven for various unknown living organisms. Additionally, Ethiopia offers a wealth of unexplored cultural tourism features that draw in a lot of tourists. Although having an abundance of natural, cultural, and historical resources, Ethiopia eco tourism development is suffering from poor promotion. Compared to other African countries, the resource is still undiscovered, due to inadequate marketing and a lack of educated and qualified manpower, the majority of foreign tourists also had the impression that Ethiopia was a country with signs of conflict, drought, and starvation and did not have many tourist attractions. Poor ecotourism infrastructure and facilities (trekking passes, parking spaces, all-weather roads, camping areas, clean water, electricity, health and other facilities), conflicts over resource usage, a lack of coordination between sectors, and a critical shortage of trained manpower are the main obstacles to the growth of ecotourism in Ethiopia. This indicates Ethiopia has a lot of resources, but not all of them have been used to the country's advantage, and not all of its attractions are well-known. The inability of diverse stakeholders to fulfill their tasks is one of the main causes of poor implementation, which is the outcome of institutions' insufficient coordination.

Keyword: Eco -tourism , Infrastructure ,conservation ,Ethiopia

DOI: 10.7176/JTHS/65-02

Publication date: August 31st 2023

1. Introduction

The tourism industry is one of the largest and fastest-growing industries, both in developed and developing nations, and is a significant source of employment and economic activity (Teshome *et al.*, 2022). According to recent estimates from the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), 2021 and the International Labor Organization (ILO), 2022, tourism currently accounts for about 10% of the global gross domestic product (GDP), is the largest source of employment globally, and is responsible for 1 in 4 of all new jobs created worldwide. There were also an estimated 57.1 million tourists from Asia and the Pacific, who spent 132.6 billion dollars, and 69.7 million tourists from the United States, spent 127.1 billion dollars. Meanwhile, 18.2 tourists traveled to Africa and the Middle East, spending 14 and 28.7 billion dollars, respectively. In 2020, tourism contributed to 3.9% of Ethiopia GDP total economy, which came to ETB 139.7BN (USD 3,186.9MN), and in 2021, it contributed to 5.0% of the GDP total economy, coming to ETB 185.4BN (USD 4,229.7MN)(WTTC,2022). Ecotourism, or travel rooted in nature, is one of the tourism industry's fastest-growing subsectors of tourism (Honey, 2008; Lad, 2021). Ecotourism is also credited with fostering the preservation of natural resources and the diversification of livelihoods; it also provides locals with employment opportunities and fosters a sense of ownership over resources. Ecotourism also contributes to economic development and resource management by generating revenues (Asfaw, 2014; Mnini, and Ramoroka, 2020). According to International Ecotourism Society (TIES), (2018), ecotourism defined as "responsible travel that maintains the environment and sustains the well-being of local people." Furthermore , ecotourism is crucial for sustainable development since it focuses on protecting the environment, educating travelers, and helping the local community (United Nation Environmental programme, (UNEP), 2020, Stronza *et al.* 2019 ; Ogato , 2014 ,).

The nation of Ethiopia is richly endowed with ecotourism opportunities. This qualifies it as a country where community-based ecotourism projects can be developed, helping to promote conservation efforts and native peoples' standard of living (Teshome *et al.* 2020). With more than 20 national parks, four wildlife sanctuaries, more than 18 controlled hunting areas , two pilot projects, and community conservation areas, Ethiopia has a strong potential for ecotourism development (Young, 2012; Tessema.,2019). Also Ethiopia has 314 mammal species, including 57 (18.5% of the total mammal endemic species. Out of the 314 mammal species, populations of 74 (23.5%) species are experiencing declining trend and 39 (12.4%) are currently globally threatened, including 16 threatened and 4 near threatened endemic species. Similarly, about a quarter (214 species) of the total bird species occurring in Ethiopia are experiencing decreasing population trend and 36 species are globally threatened. Of the 253 reptile species known from Ethiopia, 26 (10%) are endemic to the country. Additionally

the number of protected areas of Ethiopia has been increasing over time, from about 6% in 1970s to 12% in 2019 and 12.14% in 2022 (MoCT, 2017. Tesema *et al.*, 2022). Furthermore The fascinating natural, cultural, historical, and archaeological sites in Ethiopia that are recognized by UNESCO as tangible world heritages include the Lower Awash, Konso Cultural Landscape, Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela, Castle of Gondar, The Stelae of Axum, The Walled City of Harrar, Tiya Stones, and Semien Mountains National Park. The Ethiopian Epiphany, the Gada System (an Oromo indigenous democratic socio-political system), Fichee- Chambalaalla (the Sidama people's New Year festival), Commemoration feast of the discovery of the True Holy Cross of Christ, and Ashenda (the Ethiopian Girls Festival), which is currently on the nomination list, are among the nation's world intangible cultural heritages (UNESCO, 2020).

The nation came in at number 37 in the world for natural heritage, and number 38 for cultural heritage (WEF, 2011). Despite being home to all these tourist destinations and resources, Ethiopia's tourism industry has not performed as well as one might anticipate compared to other Sub-Saharan African nations like Kenya, Tanzania, and South Africa (Mekonen, 2016). According to (Sheferahu, 2016), Although having an abundance of natural, cultural, and historical resources, Ethiopia eco tourism development is suffering from poor promotion, Compared to other African countries, the resource is still undiscovered, due to inadequate marketing and a lack of educated and qualified manpower, the majority of foreign tourists also had the impression that Ethiopia was a country with signs of conflict, drought, and starvation and did not have many tourist attractions (Asfaw *et al.*, 2021).

1.2. Objectives of the review

- ✚ To identify the potential resource and opportunity of Ecotourism dev't in Ethiopia.
- ✚ To determine the major challenges eco tourism development in Ethiopia.
- ✚ To show the link between ecotourism and protected area in Ethiopia.

2. Concepts and Definition of Eco Tourism

Ecotourism, which has a strong connection to sustainable development, is the most significant sector of the sustainable tourism business (Hosseinalizadeh *et al.*, 2018). While still providing advantages to the current communities, it seeks to maintain natural, cultural, and other tourism resources for ongoing usage by future generations (Dimitriou, 2017). According to the International Ecotourism Society (2015) eco tourism defined as "Responsible travel to natural regions that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people and involves interpretation and education" According to Sâmbotin *et al.* (2011), "Ecotourism is a form of tourism that has been established in natural areas with the aim of recognizing and appreciating nature and local culture, which involves conservation measures and ensures an active involvement, creating advantages for the local population.. Moreover, it promotes social advancement, economic growth, and biodiversity preservation (Anup ., 2018).

2.1. Principles of Ecotourism

Eco tourism is "Sustainable, non-invasive form of nature-based tourism that focuses primarily on learning about nature first-hand, and which is ethically managed to be low impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented. It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation of such areas (Fennel, 2015). Ecotourism, which depends not only on land sparing but just as importantly on sustaining incentives for people to conserve biodiversity, can bring a net benefit to conservation of biodiversity at landscape and regional scales, provide revenue to support habitat conservation over large areas, and influence major conservation and development policies (Buckley . 2010). Ecotourism may provide economic benefits to the people and may be less destructive as compared to conventional tourism in the long run (Khah *et al.*, 2011)

Ecotourism aims to bring together sustainable travel, communities, and environmental protection. This means that the following ecotourism principles should be followed by individuals who implement, engage in, and market ecotourism activities: Reduce the effects on people's mental, behavioral, social, and physical health. Provide enjoyable experiences for both guests and hosts. Provide direct financial benefits for conservation. Produce financial benefits for both locals and private enterprise. Build environmental and cultural knowledge and respect. Provide visitors with enduring interpretive experiences that heighten awareness of the political, environmental, and social contexts of the host countries. Recognize the rights and spiritual beliefs of the Indigenous People in your community and work in conjunction with them to develop empowerment. Design, build, and maintain low-impact facilities (TIES, , 2015).

2.2. Ecotourism Potentials Resource of Ethiopia

Particularly for ecotourism, Ethiopia has enormous potential for growth in the tourism sector. For Ethiopia to be an ecotourism destination, the country's extensive forests, caves, waterfalls, endemic birds, mammals, and hot springs are found to be essential (Yilma *et al.*, 2016). Comparatively to the neighboring nations, ecotourism is

still in its infancy and has little social, environmental, or economic relevance in the countries (Dejene *et al.*, 2014). The nation is also blessed with abundant natural resources, including the Rift Valley, the Danakil Depression/Afar Depression (with its vibrant sulfur and salt lakes), and volcanically active regions like Ertale (Lava Lake). Wide altitudinal variation, from 4,620 meters above sea level at Mt. Ras Dashen/Ras Dejen, (the highest peak in Ethiopia and the fourth highest in Africa) to 126 meters below sea level at the Danakil Depression/Afar Depression (the lowest point in Ethiopia). Scenic areas including the Semien and Bale Mountains, the Blue Nile Falls, and the lakes in the Rift Valley. Favorable weather and climate (the climate varies from cool and temperate in the highlands to hot and arid in the lowlands). Deserts and semi-deserts, wood lands, shrub lands, grasslands, marshes, and forests (especially coffee forests in south western and southeastern Ethiopia). Afro-alpine regions like the Semien, Choke, and Bale Mountains, islands of Lakes Tana, Ziway, Langano, and Shalla Abaya, rivers and their waterfalls like the Blue Nile River and Blue Nile Falls and the Awash River and Awash Falls are also important tourist attractions in the nation (Young, 2012; Zegeye *et al.*, 2016, Mo CT, 2015, Robinson and Jonker. 2016)

2.3. The Role of Tourism in the Economy of Ethiopia and livelihood diversification

Tourism industry is now an important source of employment accounting for 3.8% of total employment in 2013 representing 985,500 jobs directly and this is forecast to grow by 0.1% in 2014 to 986,000 (3.6% of total employment) (MofCT, 2015). The travel and tourism sector in Ethiopia is growing at the fastest rate in the world, up 48.6%, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council's 2019 report. In 2018, the GDP and sector contributed \$7.4 billion to the Ethiopian economy, an increase of \$2.2 billion from the previous year. The sector contributed 9.4% of Ethiopia's overall GDP and supported 2.2 million jobs, or 8.3% of all employment. This reveals that 41.6% of Ethiopia's job growth was directly attributed to travel and tourism. In 2017, domestic travel contributed for 23% of Ethiopia's increase in travel and tourism, while international visitor spending accounted for 77%, (UNWTO, 2020). Also In 2018, there were 849,000 total foreign visitors to Ethiopia, with leisure travelers accounting for the majority of this figure. 79% of travel and tourism expenditures were for leisure travelers, while 21% were for business travelers. (WTTC, 2019). Additionally, tourism generates 1 in 12 employment (271 million) and 5.3% of Ethiopia's overall GDP (USD 4,775 billion) and 6.1% (USD 5,812 billion) (or 1 in 11 job possibilities) in 2021, respectively. (WTTC, 2022).

Tourism is also one of the largest employment generators for women, even when compared to other labor-intensive and export-oriented sub-sectors such as floriculture and leather. It contributes to 8 percent of employment as compared to 0.7 percent by the floriculture sector, and 0.4 percent by the leather sector; furthermore, 74 percent of tourism employment benefits women (CSA, 2011). Currently, it is estimated that approximately 770,000 people work directly in Ethiopia's tourism sector, which generated 430,000 visitors in 2009. Following this proportionally, the GTP target of 1 million visitors would suggest total sectoral employment of about 1.8 million people by 2015 (MoCT, 2012).

2.4. Challenges of eco tourism development in Ethiopia

2.4.1. Low level of community involvement (lack of awareness)

Ethiopia still has relatively little community involvement in the tourism industry. Communities frequently are unaware of the tourist and ecotourism resources available to them, making it difficult for them to recognize ecotourism as a viable engine for local economic growth (Meskele *et al.*, 2016). Similar to that, the local government leadership lacks the knowledge and authority to coordinate community participation in tourism generally and ecotourism specifically (Teshome *et al.*, 2018). There is still insufficient interaction and cooperation among local, national, and umbrella organizations (Economic Commission for Africa, 2011). Lack of funding for promotion and development, lack of awareness, bad infrastructure, lack of accessibility, a lack of trained labor, and a lack of skilled human resources are the key obstacles to the development of these important tourism resources. (Teshome *et al.*, 2022).

2.4.2. Limited Financial Incentive for the Tourism Sector

Financial institutions including banks and insurance firms mostly focus on short-term urban real estate markets and mainstream tourism investments in order to reduce financial risk. This method ignores many ecotourism businesses that are thought to be "high risk" due to their frequent location in rural areas, use of local building materials (the majority of ecotourism lodges use grass, poles, and timber), and in some cases, management in conjunction with the local population that is thought to be untrained (Ogato, 2014; Berhanu., 2013; Ketema., 2015; Economic Commission for Africa, 2011). Major obstacles to Ethiopian tourism include a lack of understanding of the value of teamwork, a lack of professionalism and trust, power disparities, and inadequate supervision (leadership and governance) (Ferede, 2019). Furthermore The difficulties in the growth of ecotourism were caused by the limited budget for the tourism sector and the very low promotion (Daricha *et al.*, 2019).

2.4.3. Inadequate Research and Lack of Professional Man Power

Governments and research bodies do not prioritize funding for tourism-related research, and the majority of institutions do not give it significant priority (World Bank, 2013 Gebremariam , 2018). The lack of skilled workers at all levels in the tourist sector is mostly caused by the government's meager efforts to improve tourism education at public institutions. Due to unregulated training institutes, subpar training standards, and a lack of professionals, most human resources, even when they have been taught, are of low quality. This in turn has a detrimental impact on customer service quality and satisfaction, which may lead to less effective ecotourism development and marketing (Workie *et al .* , 2018). The accessibility of high-quality human resource is crucial for destination growth and competitiveness. In fact, the most competitive locations in the world, such as Switzerland, France, Spain, the United States, China, Italy, the United Kingdom, Malaysia, and Singapore, have human resources that are of a high caliber. For instance, Ethiopia offers a small number of institutions that provide certificate and diploma programs in tourism as well as graduate and postgraduate programs (World Bank, 2006, 2013). Uganda, Kenya, and Rwanda provide the nation important lessons. Kenya, for instance, is ranked 37th, 64th, and 69th for the quality of its educational system, the availability of specialized research and training, and the extent of staff training in tourism sectors , respectively. Kenya also has reasonably well-developed tourist training and research facilities (Economic Commission for Africa , 2011). According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), 2019 tourism and travel competitive index report, Ethiopia is ranked 123 in human resources, 125 in education and training, and 124 for availability of qualified labor, while neighboring Kenya is ranked 106, 93, and 123 in those categories out of 140 countries, respectively. This indicates that a major issue with Ethiopia's tourism sectors is a lack of professionalism(Sheferahu, 2016, Tesfaye, 2017, Gebremariam , 2018).

2.4.4. Inadequate and lack of Infrastructure

Physical infrastructure is one of the basic development catalysts in tourism industries of destination area by determining the accessibility and quality of a site(Assefa and Meseret .2020). Poor ecotourism infrastructure and facilities (trekking pass, parking facilities, all weather roads, camping sites, clean water, electricity and health and other facilities(Lemma,2017). According to Economic Forum's 2019 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index, In terms of tourism infrastructure, ground transportation infrastructure, ICT infrastructure, and road density, Ethiopia was ranked 128, 98, 138, and 132 out of 140 countries in the World. While Kenya was ranked 111, 87 , 112, and 107 respectively(WET ,2019).

Tourism infrastructure, which is often broken down into primary, secondary, and tertiary categories, is an essential aspect of destination competitiveness. In addition to restaurants and travel/tour operator services, a few key tourist infrastructure facilities and services include hotels, resorts, motels, and lodges. Examples of secondary infrastructure include shopping malls or centers, museums, recreational and entertainment venues, and visitor information centers. On the other hand, tertiary tourism infrastructure refers to those facilities and services that are not explicitly related to or unique to tourism but are nonetheless essential to enhancing the visitor experience. These include health care, postal, financial, personal, and emergency services. The availability and quality of these facilities and services continue to be a major issue for the country in its effort to become a globally competitive destination, despite the fact that the situation on the ground is fast changing (Ayinalem, 2013,).Minister of Culture and Tourism , 2013, Tekabe, 2016, Zeleke et al., 2022).

Table 1 : Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index (TTCI) based on 14 pillars,

Indicators (pillars)	Ranking – ETHIOPIA		
	2015 (141 countries)	2017 (136 countries)	2019 (140 countries)
Natural Resources	63	69	37
Price in Travel and Tourism	69	64	23
Environmental Sustainability	76	56	87
Cultural Resources	79	70	84
Safety and Security	80	99	102
Air Transport Infrastructure	90	111	87
Affinity /International Openness	93	97	107
Health and Hygiene	104	102	139
Policy Regulations /Business Environment	116	118	93
Prioritization of Travel and Tourism	118	115	119
Ground Transport Infrastructure	123	90	98
Human Resources	126	125	123
Tourism Infrastructure	134	129	128
ICT Infrastructure	137	125	138
Overall ranking	118	116	122
Overall ranking among sub-Saharan countries	17 (out of 31)	15 (out of 30)	15(33)

Source: World Economic Forum (2015, 2017, 2019).

Quite surprisingly, Ethiopia received its best score in natural resources (Number of World Heritage natural sites, Total known species, Total protected areas, Natural tourism digital demand, Attractiveness of natural assets, and air transport infrastructure (Quality of air transport infrastructure, Available seat kilometers, domestic Available seat kilometers, international, Aircraft departures, Airport density, Number of operating airlines), ranked 63rd in 2015 compared to a 69th position in 2017 and improved to 37th in 2019 and 90th in 2015, 111th in 2017 and improved to 87th in 2019. Other areas with best score were price competitiveness (based on factors like price parity, airport charges, hotel prices) -ranked 69th in 2015 and improved to 64th in 2017 as well as more improved to 23rd in 2019. However the countries ranked as the least in terms of **Tourist Service Infrastructure**, (Hotel rooms, Quality of tourism infrastructure, Presence of major car rental companies and Automated teller machines per adult population). **Health and hygiene** (Physician density, Use of basic sanitation, Use of basic drinking water, Hospital beds HIV prevalence and Malaria incidence, as well as **ICT infrastructure** (ICT use for business-to-business transactions, Internet use for business-to-consumer transactions, Individuals using the internet, Broadband internet subscribers, Mobile telephone subscriptions, Mobile broadband subscriptions, Mobile network coverage, Quality of electricity supply). Furthermore the countries ranked as poor level indication in terms of Ground and Port Infrastructure, that include :- Quality of roads, Road density, Paved road density, Quality of railroad infrastructure, Railroad density, Quality of port infrastructure, Ground transport efficiency (Table 1). Poor infrastructural developments (roads that are incomplete and discourage tourists from visiting, poor travel transportation systems to visit tourist areas, campsites, lodges, a lack of plentiful health facilities, hotels, and electricity, and a lack of shopping and commercial facilities are the main obstacles for the development of ecotourism in any site of Ethiopia (Sintayehu, 2016, Wagnaw, 2016).

3. Role of Protected Area for Sustainable Ecotourism Development in Ethiopia.

Ecotourism uses diverse nature, landscapes and biodiversity as major tourist attractions. National parks are becoming major ecotourism sites. Regardless of their emphasis on conservation efforts, at present Ethiopian national parks are recognized as important places for sustainable ecotourism development (Getahun and Yeshanew 2016). At some ecotourism destinations, residents benefit from revenue sharing programs that either provides cash payments or, more commonly, funding for community projects such as wells or schools. It also provides new markets for locally produced goods, increased government revenues through fees and taxes paid by visitors, and serves as insurance for the protected areas from being converted to other damaging industry like Agriculture and mining (Birhan and Gebreyes 2015).

Ecotourism creates enormous opportunities for conservation, protection and sustainable use of natural resources through the involvement of the local people. If ecotourism needs to be sustainable, it should make positive contribution to environmental conservation with an emphasis on economic benefit to the local community (Getahun and Yeshanew 2016), identified that Awash National Park has spectacular scenic resources suitable for sustainable ecotourism development. Among them five distinctive land and physical features used as tourist attractions are Mt. Fentalle, the LalaSala plain, Kudu Valley, the Awash fall and reverie forests, and the hot springs. Availability of cultural and archaeological resources in and around PA is also important for the

development of ecotourism in Ethiopia. For Example, Awash national park is not too far from the archaeological site Hadar where Lucy, the fossil of one of the oldest hominid species in Ethiopia was discovered, is located in the Afar Triangle of Ethiopian Rift Valley. Another Late Stone Age anthropological site (11,000-15,000 years ago) is also found around the shores of Lake Basaka in the AWP (Getahun and Yeshanew 2016).

Future work of line

- The government is needed to give infrastructure development special consideration or priority, as well as developing basic tourist facilities and amenities (transportation, accommodation), such as roads, electricity, water service, telecommunication, bank services, internet cafes, hotels, motels, and lodges, in and around ecotourism potential areas.
- Effective eco tourism marketing and promotion should be done by creating and spreading various brochures, flyers, guidebooks, and websites, leveraging the internet and social media, setting up media programs, and organizing school conservation clubs and workshops.
- In order to properly promote and sell ecotourism sites, the government, the corporate sector, and NGOs should allot enough funding.
- Government should offer financial incentives and funding for local ecotourism development and research.
- Human resources should receive particular focus with a qualified expert in the relevant fields to manage the ecotourism industry and improve visitor flows.
- Improving the knowledge and skills of all stakeholders (including the local community, government representatives, the private and public sectors, investors, experts, lodging operators, tour and travel operators, and tour guide associations) through workshops and training.
- The establishment of community-based ecotourism businesses is necessary to give the local population of the destinations employment opportunities. Since tourist businesses depend on the collaboration and integration of numerous stakeholders.

4. Summary and Conclusions

This review attempts to examine the potentials resource for ecotourism and challenges of eco tourism development in Ethiopia. The review showed that Ethiopia has huge attractive natural and cultural potential resource needed for ecotourism development. These includes historical, cultural, archaeological, anthropological, scenic, climatic, flora and fauna resources and attractive mountains for mountain trekkers are valuable opportunities that empower development of ecotourism; Regardless of their emphasis on conservation efforts, at present Ethiopian protected are recognized as important places for sustainable ecotourism development however, eco tourism development Ethiopia due to, a lack of marketing and promotion, deforestation, agricultural expansion, demarcation problems, a lack of professional expertise in the area to develop community-based ecotourism, and a lack of fundamental infrastructure, such as a lack of adequate roads, transportation, communication, healthcare, and lodging ,a lack of knowledge, poor stakeholder collaboration,

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