

# Tourism in the Major Destinations of North Shewa Zone: Challenges, Stakeholders, and Collaborations

Lammi Dinsa Kumsa (Corresponding author)

Department of Tourism and Hotel Management

Salale University, Ethiopia

Sewunet Tesfaye Lema (Ass Prof)

Department of Tourism and Hotel Management

Salale University, Ethiopia

## **Abstract**

*The availability of tourism resources and stakeholder collaboration forms the foundational basis for the existence and development of the tourism industry. The North Shewa Zone boasts an array of remarkable tourism resources, which can be categorized as religious, natural, historical, or a combination thereof. Due to the scarcity of tourism studies conducted in the zone, there is a lack of comprehensive knowledge to identify the factors impeding the industry's development. This paper aims to investigate the challenges facing tourism development in the North Shewa Zone and to examine the roles and collaborations of various tourism sector stakeholders. Employing a case study qualitative research approach, the study utilized a purposive sampling technique to select respondents. Data was collected through key informant interviews, observation, and focus group discussions. Participants included employees from zonal and district culture and tourism offices, tour guide associations, tourist destination administrations, and other relevant stakeholders, totaling 88 individuals selected based on their experience, profession, and relevance to the study's topic. Thematic analysis was used to interpret the data. The findings indicate that although the North Shewa Zone is rich in tourism resources, its tourism development remains largely untapped, with only a few active tourist sites. The study identified several factors hindering tourism development in the zone: insufficient government attention at the district and zonal levels, budget constraints, a shortage of tourism professionals, inadequate marketing and promotional efforts, safety and security issues, lack of a formal data registration system, low stakeholder involvement, absence of relevant studies and reports, and a shortage of tourism suppliers. Moreover, the study revealed the presence of multiple potential stakeholders in the region and highlighted the weak collaboration among them in fostering tourism development. Based on these findings, the researchers propose sustainable tools and strategies, providing recommendations aimed at accelerating the development of sustainable tourism in the Northern Shewa Zone of Oromia Regional State.*

**Keywords:** *tourism, challenges, stakeholders, collaboration, tourist destinations*

**DOI:** 10.7176/JTHS/68-03

**Publication date:** January 30<sup>th</sup> 2025

## **1. Introduction**

The tourism industry has become one of the largest and most influential global industries, experiencing significant growth and contributing notably to the global economy. In 2019, the tourism sector saw a 3.5% growth, outpacing the global economic growth of 2.5%, contributing 10.3% to the global GDP, and creating around 330 million jobs (WTTC, 2019; Sanjeev and Birdie, 2019). However, despite its potential, Africa's tourism remains underexploited, with only 5% of global tourist arrivals and 3% of receipts in 2013 (UNWTO, 2014). Ethiopia, with its diverse attractions and 15 UNESCO World Heritage sites, faces similar challenges,

performing poorly in tourist arrivals and receipts compared to neighboring countries like Kenya (MoCT, 2010; World Bank, 2020). The recent northern Ethiopian war and the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these issues.

The Ethiopian tourism industry faces multiple challenges, including underdeveloped infrastructure, poor maintenance of tourist products, expensive access to tourist sites, inadequate marketing, and a lack of signage and promotional materials (Robinson & Jonker, 2016; WB, 2006). Additionally, there are issues with road infrastructure, network facilities, hotel accommodations, trained personnel, and negative international perceptions (Sintayehu, 2017; Andargie, 2014). The North Shewa Zone, despite its significant tourism resources such as the Monastery of Debrelibanos, Bole Cave, and the Sululta Plain, has seen minimal economic impact from tourism compared to other regions (Genet Abera, 2018; North Shewa Zone Culture and Tourism Office, 2022). Effective collaboration among stakeholders is necessary for sustainable tourism development (Johnson, Scholes & Whittington, 2006; Jamal and Getz, 1995; Graci, 2013).

Given these challenges, identifying the factors behind the stagnant tourism development in North Shewa Zone is crucial for future planning. However, there is a notable gap in research concerning tourism development challenges, stakeholder analysis, and collaboration in the North Shewa Zone, Oromia. This research aims to fill this gap by addressing these issues, thereby contributing to a comprehensive and inclusive tools and strategies for sustainable development.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Definitions, Concepts, and Components of Tourism**

Tourism is defined variably by different authors and organizations based on their interests and perspectives. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines tourism as activities of persons traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited. According to Suryawanshi (2014), tourism involves three major elements: tourists, service providers, and places of interest. Service providers must meet the needs and desires of tourists, who are the main players in the tourism system (Slehat, 2018). The success of tourism varies depending on the region and the appeal of tourism activities and resources (Formica and Uysal, 2006).

### **2.2. Ethiopian Tourism and Challenges**

Ethiopia is rich in natural and cultural resources, including some of the highest and lowest points in Africa, diverse wildlife, and a rich historical tradition. UNESCO has recognized fifteen world heritage sites in Ethiopia, such as Axum's obelisks, the monolithic churches of Lalibela, and the walled city of Harar. Despite this wealth, Ethiopia has not fully harnessed its tourism potential. The direct contribution of travel and tourism to Ethiopia's GDP was 2.7% in 2017, with forecasts for growth in subsequent years (WTTC, 2018). However, the overall growth has been slow, and the country has struggled to effectively capitalize on its tourism resources (World Bank, 2006).

Tourism development faces numerous challenges globally, including lack of infrastructure, health and safety concerns, and a shortage of skilled workforce (Pathmananda, 2018). Specific issues such as financial crises, economic downturns, and immigration regulations have impacted tourism in various regions (Fonseca, 2012). For example, in Egypt, challenges include lack of modern planning, private sector awareness, and local participation (Gouda, 2012). Similar challenges are noted in Oman, where tourism development suffers from lack of cooperation between private and government sectors, language barriers, and infrastructure issues (Syed, 2016). In Nigeria, tourism faces problems such as poor accommodation, transportation, and security (Ndanusa, Harada, & Islam, 2014). Tourism also faces sustainability challenges related to energy consumption, waste disposal, and cultural heritage management (UNWTO & UNEP, 2012).

Ethiopian tourism is hindered by a range of issues, including lack of infrastructure, insufficient information, and standard tourist services (Ajala, 2008). The industry faces problems such as poorly maintained tourist products, expensive access, and lack of marketing (Robinson & Jonker, 2016). Ethiopia's tourism promotion is also hampered by negative images associated with drought, famine, and war (World Bank, 2006). Recently, political instability and COVID-19 have further exacerbated these challenges, leading to significant declines in tourism earnings and employment (Worku, 2023).

### **2.3. Tourism Stakeholders and Collaborations**

Stakeholders in tourism include any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives (Freeman, 1984). This includes national and local governments, tourism enterprises, financial institutions, employees, consultants, and local communities (UNWTO, 2005). Effective tourism development requires the identification and participation of all potential stakeholders to ensure a holistic approach (Bryson, 1995). The involvement of a wide range of stakeholders is critical for sustainable tourism, as it helps in addressing various issues and ensures that different perspectives are considered in the planning and implementation stages.

Collaboration in tourism involves various bodies working together to achieve common goals. It is defined as "working with partners to leverage existing resources to provide maximum strategic benefit" (Hardy, Phillips, & Lawrence, 2003). Successful tourism development requires collaboration between public and private sector stakeholders in planning, decision-making, and management (Bornhorst, Brent, & Sheehan, 2010). Stakeholder collaboration embraces participative processes recognized as a core principle of sustainable development. When a wide and representative range of stakeholders from the destination community are able to play an active role and strive together to meet common objectives, it enhances the overall effectiveness of tourism strategies (Beritelli, 2010; Dredge, 2006). Achieving a reasonable degree of consensus on desired directions for tourism development is considered an important ingredient for the long-term success of a destination (McComb et al., 2016). Effective collaboration helps build strong networks among various stakeholders, enabling them to access necessary resources and share best practices. It fosters mutual understanding and cooperation, which are crucial for addressing complex tourism-related challenges and leveraging collective strengths (Saito and Ruhanen, 2017).

In the context of Ethiopian tourism, stakeholder collaboration is vital for overcoming the existing challenges. The government, private sector, local communities, and international organizations must work together to improve infrastructure, enhance service quality, and effectively market Ethiopian tourist destinations. Collaborative efforts can also help in preserving cultural and natural heritage, ensuring that tourism development is sustainable and benefits all stakeholders involved. By fostering a collaborative environment, Ethiopia can harness its tourism potential and achieve significant growth in the industry.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1. Description of the Study Area**

North Shewa, a zone in Oromia Regional State, is bordered by the Amhara National Regional State to the north and east, West Shewa to the west, Oromia Special Zone to the south, and East Shewa to the southeast. Geographically, it lies between latitudes 8°55'N and 10°23'N and longitudes 3°56'E and 39°32'E (ZFED, 2014). The 2014 population was 1,523,432, with 1,466,103 living in rural areas. The study focuses on 183,624 rural farmers in Warra Jarso, Aleltu, Debre Libanos, and Wuchale districts.

### **3.2. Research Design and Approaches**

A case study design was employed to investigate challenges and stakeholder collaborations in North Shewa's tourism sector. This qualitative approach involved in-depth data collection through interviews, focus group discussions (FGDs), and observations (Creswell, 2007). Participants included tourism experts, business owners, tour guides, local managers, and government officials, selected via purposive sampling. Sixteen key informants

were interviewed until data saturation was reached (Dworkin, 2012). Eight FGDs with 72 participants were conducted across Aleltu, Debre Libanos, Wuchale, and Warra Jarso, focusing on tourism facilities and infrastructure. Data were collected using an observation checklist in areas chosen for their tourism potential and organizational presence.

Data analysis followed Creswell's (2007) thematic analysis framework, including familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and naming. Method triangulation and member checks were used for reliability.

#### **4. Data Analysis and findings**

This study presents findings organized into three main sections: challenges of tourism development, tourism stakeholders, and stakeholders' collaboration.

##### **4.1. The Challenges of Tourism Development**

The major challenges identified at destinations in the North Shewa Zone include low attention from the government, lack of budget, absence of marketing and promotion works, shortage of tourism professionals, safety and security issues, impacts of COVID-19, lack of formal data registration systems, lack of stakeholder support, absence of studies and reports, and insufficient tourism suppliers in the zone.

###### **4.1.1. Low Attention and Limited Budget to Culture and Tourism Office**

Most respondents have highlighted the low attention to tourism and culture offices at the district level. Despite increased attention at regional and federal levels, district-level offices receive minimal budget, limiting their activities and effectiveness in promoting tourism. This limited funding severely restricts their ability to conduct essential activities such as tourism resource identification and field research and hindering their ability to achieve their mission. Respondents expressed frustration that tourism is not prioritized as a poverty-reducing sector, resulting in a perception that culture and tourism offices are marginalized and assigned minimal responsibilities compared to other sectors.

###### **4.1.2. Lack of Well-Trained Tourism Professionals**

Tourism professionals are crucial for developing effective tourism initiatives and enhancing tourist satisfaction. However, the study reveals significant challenges within culture and tourism offices due to a severe shortage of qualified tourism and ecotourism professionals. According to respondents, most employees in these offices lack formal training in tourism and have limited understanding of tourism concepts. Capacity-building training is rarely provided to enhance their skills. For example, one respondent noted that the office ideally requires 22 professionals but currently has only five employees, many of whom have backgrounds unrelated to tourism, hindering office effectiveness. Another respondent highlighted that appointments to these offices often disregard educational backgrounds, leading to personnel being placed there temporarily due to misconduct or while awaiting assignment elsewhere. This lack of professional training and development opportunities further complicates the effective management and promotion of tourism in the study areas.

###### **4.1.3. Lack of Adequate Promotion and Marketing Efforts:**

The tourism sector in the North Shewa Zone suffers from minimal marketing and promotional efforts due to budget constraints, lack of internet access, and insufficient skilled manpower in digital tourism marketing. This has prevented the zone from fully leveraging its proximity to Addis Ababa and its position on major tourist routes. Respondents emphasized the overall lack of effective promotion and marketing in the area, a sentiment echoed by service providers. Officials noted missed opportunities to capitalize on the zone's strategic location near Addis Ababa and along major tourist routes to historic sites, attributing this to inadequate promotional efforts. Additional challenges identified include the absence of an information desk, the scarcity of travel agency offices, limited initiatives for new business development, and ineffective mechanisms for interpreting tourism offerings.

#### **4.1.4. Safety and Security Problems**

Tourism in the North Shewa Zone is significantly affected by safety and security concerns. The presence of armed insurgencies linked to the Oromo struggle and the impacts of the Northern Ethiopian war have created an environment of fear, deterring both domestic and foreign visitors.

#### **4.1.5. Impacts of COVID-19**

The pandemic has severely impacted tourism worldwide, and the North Shewa Zone is no exception. The pandemic led to a drastic reduction in tourist numbers, and the recovery has been slow even after the situation improved.

#### **4.1.6. Lack of Tourism Data**

There is no systematic registration of tourism data, including visitor numbers and revenue. Instead, some sites estimate visitor counts based on receipts issued for entrance fees. This lack of coordinated data collection hinders accurate assessment of tourism income and planning for sustainable development. Many potential tourism sites also lack formal documentation, making it difficult to plan effectively.

#### **4.1.7. Lack of Research and Studies**

In the study areas, there is a lack of formal studies assessing tourism conditions and knowledge. This gap hinders tourism development by preventing informed awareness, strategic planning, and problem mitigation. Respondents emphasized the need for studies to disseminate information, recommend improvements, and facilitate sectoral growth.

#### **4.1.8. Limited Investors and Development Partner Organizations**

The availability of investors plays a crucial role in tourism development, as they invest in hotels and facilities to generate income. In the study area, there are limited investors operating hotels and restaurants, mostly offering below-standard services tailored for locals. These establishments are characterized by low quality and unprofessional service delivery. Furthermore, there is a notable absence of organizations supporting tourism and hotel service development. The presence of donors, NGOs, volunteers, or private companies could potentially fund infrastructure, capacity building, and local entrepreneurship in tourism and hospitality, catalyzing sectoral growth. The lack or scarcity of competent investors and supportive organizations significantly impedes tourism development in the region. Respondents strongly emphasized that the absence of investors has severely hindered tourism growth in the zone

#### **4.1.9. Limited Tourism Suppliers and Infrastructure**

Tourism suppliers in the North Shewa Zone are limited and poorly developed. The suppliers in the North Shewa Zone are sparse and underdeveloped, lacking essential services such as car rentals, tourist-standard restaurants, guest houses, and hotels. The absence of travel agencies and tour operators forces reliance on intermediaries from Addis Ababa and other cities. Accessibility to tourist sites is hindered by inadequate roads, limiting visitor flow. Focus group discussions highlighted frustrations over the lack of local tourism services, including accommodations and dining options, prompting tourists to bring their own supplies. Despite abundant natural and cultural attractions, the tourism sector stagnates due to these deficiencies. There is a critical need for government and private sector involvement to bolster tourism infrastructure and service providers in the region.

### **4.2. Tourism Stakeholders and Collaborations**

Tourism development relies heavily on the involvement of various stakeholders. Globally, according to UNWTO (2005), these stakeholders include national and local governments, tourism establishments, financing institutions, tourism employees and professionals, education centers, travelers, and local communities.

In North Shewa Zone, the government has prioritized tourism as a crucial sector for poverty reduction. Despite this focus, most tourism stakeholders in the zone are government bodies due to the limited presence of private tourism institutions. The study identified available stakeholders. These include governmental bodies such as the Oromia Regional State Tourism and Culture Bureau, Oromia Tourism Commission, North Shewa Zone Culture and Tourism Office, and various District level Administrative Culture and Tourism Offices. Municipalities, educational institutions like Salale University, agricultural offices, peace and security offices, communication bureaus, and trade bureaus also play roles. Additionally, service providers such as hotels, restaurants, local guides, and transport authorities are vital. Media outlets such as OBN TV and Walta TV, local communities, religious institutions managing attractions, visitors, and bodies like the Revenue Bureau, Finance Bureau, Education Bureau, and Road Authority are also stakeholders.

The collaboration among tourism stakeholders in the North Shewa Zone is predominantly ceremonial or fragmented, rather than deeply collaborative. Some districts have established committees to support tourism development, comprising representatives from public institutions. However, these committees' contributions often extend primarily to maintaining peace, security, and rural road infrastructure. They also oversee the performance of district culture and tourism bureaus, focusing on budget management and reporting. Overall, while there is recognition of the importance of collaboration among stakeholders for tourism development, the current level of engagement remains limited in driving substantive sectoral growth and development initiatives.

## **5. Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **5.1. Conclusion**

The North Shewa Zone in the Oromia Region boasts considerable untapped tourism potential, yet its current tourism sector remains severely underdeveloped, failing to capitalize on these valuable resources. The zone faces a myriad of challenges, including inadequate funding, a shortage of trained personnel, ineffective marketing strategies, and significant safety concerns exacerbated by recent regional instability and the enduring impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite the presence of capable stakeholders within the zone, collaboration among them is currently disjointed. Public sector support for the tourism industry is notably lacking, and there is minimal involvement from the private sector. Non-governmental stakeholders are conspicuously absent from efforts to promote tourism, further complicating efforts to advance the sector.

### **5.2. Recommendations**

To develop sustainable tourism in North Shewa Zone, it is essential to implement a multifaceted approach. Capacity building and regular training programs should be conducted for tourism professionals and local communities, supported by partnerships with educational institutions. A comprehensive marketing strategy utilizing digital platforms and participation in tourism fairs is crucial for enhancing the zone's visibility. Infrastructure improvements, such as upgrading roads and developing tourist amenities, are necessary to increase accessibility and improve visitor experience. Engaging local communities in tourism planning and promoting community-based tourism initiatives will ensure that the economic benefits of tourism are shared locally.

Strengthening safety and security measures at tourist sites, in collaboration with local law enforcement, will safeguard visitors and enhance their confidence. Establishing a formal system for data registration and analysis, along with conducting regular research, will inform better planning and decision-making. Implementing eco-friendly practices and promoting the use of renewable energy in tourism operations will support environmental sustainability. Fostering partnerships between government bodies, the private sector, and NGOs, and encouraging investment from private and international investors, will drive growth and innovation in the sector.

Developing and enforcing policies that support sustainable tourism, protecting cultural and natural heritage, and providing incentives for businesses that adopt sustainable practices are essential. Diversifying tourism products to include cultural, historical, and natural attractions, and enhancing the quality of existing offerings, will attract



more visitors. Finally, governmental support through substantial budget allocations, improved staffing, and logistical support, along with strategic collaboration among stakeholders, will overcome current challenges and unlock the tourism potential of North Shewa Zone, contributing to its economic growth and sustainable development.

## References

- Ajala, O. (2008). Employment and Income Potentiality of Tourism Development in Amhara Region. *Ethiopian Journal of Environmental Studies and Management*, 1(2), 74-82.
- Andargie, M. (2014). *Challenges of Tourism Development in Ethiopia: A Case Study of Selected Tourist Sites in Addis Ababa and its Surroundings*. Addis Ababa University.
- Bandarin, F. (2007). *UNESCO-World Heritage–Challenges for the Millennium*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre.
- Beritelli, P. (2010). Cooperation among prominent actors in a tourist destination. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 38(2), 607-629.
- Bornhorst, T., Ritchie, J. R. B., & Sheehan, L. (2010). Determinants of tourism success for DMOs & destinations: An empirical examination of stakeholders' perspectives. *Tourism Management*, 31(5), 572-589.
- Bryson, J. M. (1995). *Strategic Planning for Public and Nonprofit Organizations: A Guide to Strengthening and Sustaining Organizational Achievement*. Jossey-Bass.
- di Grugliasco, G., & Meyer, D. (2009). Understanding the challenges and constraints to sustainable tourism development. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, 8(1), 44-55.
- Dredge, D. (2006). Policy networks and the local organisation of tourism. *Tourism Management*, 27(2), 269-280.
- Fonseca, J. (2012). Tourism and economic development: A comparative study of Mexico and Spain. *International Journal of Tourism Research*, 14(3), 203-218.
- Formica, S., & Uysal, M. (2006). The revitalization of Italy as a tourist destination. *Tourism Management*, 27(5), 893-904.
- Freeman, R. E. (1984). *Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gouda, S. K. (2012). Sustainable tourism development in the Red Sea of Egypt. *Tourism Management*, 33(4), 1326-1340.
- Graci, S. (2013). Collaboration and partnership development for sustainable tourism. *Tourism Geographies*, 15(1), 25-42.
- Hardy, C., Phillips, N., & Lawrence, T. B. (2003). Resources, knowledge and influence: The organizational effects of interorganizational collaboration. *Journal of Management Studies*, 40(2), 321-347.
- Jamal, T. B., & Getz, D. (1995). Collaboration theory and community tourism planning. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 22(1), 186-204.
- Johnson, G., Scholes, K., & Whittington, R. (2006). *Exploring Corporate Strategy*. Financial Times/Prentice Hall.
- Macbeth, J., Burns, G., Chandler, L., Revitt, M., & Veitch, S. (2002). Understanding the social impacts of tourism in the New Forest. *New Forest Tourism Research Partnership*.
- Mayaka, M., & Prasad, H. (2012). Tourism in Kenya: An analysis of strategic issues and challenges. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality*, 3(1), 51-66.
- McComb, E. J., Boyd, S. W., & Boluk, K. (2016). Stakeholder collaboration: A means to sustainable tourism development. *Journal of Destination Marketing & Management*, 5(3), 284-304.
- Ndanusa, S., Harada, Y., & Islam, M. (2014). Tourism development in Nigeria: Challenges and prospects for resource diversification. *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, 5(7), 28-36.
- Pathmananda, V. (2018). Challenges of tourism development in Sri Lanka. *International Journal of Social and Economic Research*, 8(1), 54-62.
- Robinson, P., & Jonker, S. (2016). *Tourism in Africa: Harnessing Tourism for Growth and Improved Livelihoods*. World Bank Group.
- Roselyne, M. (2010). Tourism development in Africa: Strategies for the future. *African Journal of Business Management*, 4(17), 4207-4217.

- Saito, H., & Ruhanen, L. (2017). Power and politics in tourism stakeholder collaboration. *Tourism Management*, 65, 191-204.
- Sanjeev, G. M., & Birdie, A. K. (2019). *India's outbound tourism: Exploring the emerging market*. Springer.
- Slehat, H. (2018). *Essentials of Tourism*. Pearson Education.
- Suryawanshi, M. (2014). *Tourism Management*. Oxford University Press.
- Syed, M. (2016). Tourism development in Oman: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Management*, 4(1), 19-29.
- UNESCO. (2007). *World Heritage: Challenges for the Millennium*. UNESCO World Heritage Centre.
- UNWTO & UNEP. (2012). *Tourism in the Green Economy – Background Report*. United Nations World Tourism Organization and United Nations Environment Programme.
- UNWTO. (2005). *Making Tourism More Sustainable: A Guide for Policy Makers*. United Nations World Tourism Organization.
- UNWTO. (2014). *International Tourism Highlights, 2014 Edition*. United Nations World Tourism Organization.
- Walle, Y. M. (2010). *Tourism in Ethiopia: Current realities and future trends*. Ethiopian Tourism Commission.
- Worku, B. (2023). The impact of COVID-19 on cultural tourism in Ethiopia. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 21(2), 174-192.
- World Bank. (2006). *Ethiopia in Makeda's Footsteps: Towards Sustainable Development of Ethiopia's Cultural Heritage*. World Bank.
- World Bank. (2020). *International Tourism, Number of Arrivals*. World Bank.
- World Travel and Tourism Council. (2018). *Economic Impact Ethiopia*.
- World Travel and Tourism Council. (2019). *Travel & Tourism Economic Impact 2019*.