

# The Role of Hot Spring for Domestic Tourism Development: The Case of Wondogenet Hot Spring, Sidama Regional State, Ethiopia

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## Abstract

*Nowadays, the use of natural hot spring is one of the fastest growing sectors of world tourism. Tourism to hot springs led to economic development in many countries, the industry was affected by the emergence of other tourism destinations. Hence, this study aimed to fill this gap by to investigate the role of hot springs for domestic tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring, Sidama Regional State, Ethiopia as study context. The study employed exploratory research design and qualitative research approach. Both secondary and primary data were obtained through field observation, semi-structured in-depth interview, and focus group discussions. Key informants were selected purposively from government experts, local community representatives and Wondo Genet Local Ecotourism Tour Guide Association. Semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20key informants and 2 FGDs were held with local communities and experts. Qualitative data gathered through semi structured interview and FGD were analyzed thematically. The results of the study demonstrate that, the current state of the hot spring tourism practice is very low. Moreover, the study revealed that hot spring tourism has economic, socio-cultural, environmental, tourism and health contributions. Similarly, the results of the study identified the drivers of hot spring tourism such as; natural resources, cultural resources, health, safety and security and special attractions. Hence, there is a need to develop the required infrastructure, improve service delivery systems, strength stakeholder integration, undertaking promotional and awareness creation activities. These findings assured that the responsible bodies should be integrated to use the contributions of the hot spring for domestic tourism development by enhancing the management and conservation issues.*

**Key words:** Domestic Tourism, drivers, barriers, Hot spring, Wondo Genet

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## Background of the Study

Tourism is a global industry, forecast to exceed 1.8 billion arrivals by 2030 (Holloway, 2022). As a worldwide export category, tourism ranks third after fuels and chemicals, and is the top export sector in many developing countries (Shavkatovich, 2018). Tourism also plays an increasingly important role in the economic expansion because it is one of the main sources of foreign exchange and an essential component of export diversification (Goffi et al., 2019). In 2019, the tourism sector experienced 3.5% growth outpacing the global economic growth of 2.5% for the 9th consecutive year that contributes 10.3% to the global GDP (USD 8.9 trillion) and creating around 330 million jobs, 1 in every 10 jobs all over the globe (WTTC, 2019).

Tourism in Ethiopia is growing in the fastest rate with a growing contribution to the GDP in which total contribution of travel and tourism to GDP was ETB58, 581.7million (10.8% of GDP) in 2011, and is forecast to rise by 3.0% in 2012, and to rise by 4.6% to ETB 94,181.8mn in 2022 (by constant price and exchange rate of 2011). In 2011, the total contribution of travel and tourism to employment, including jobs indirectly supported by the industry, was 9.3% of total employment (2,271,500 jobs). This is expected to rise by 1.7% in 2012 to 2,310,500 jobs and rise by 0.7% to 2,481,000 jobs in 2022 (7.5% of total) (WTTC, 2012).

Hot springs tourism is a popular and important segment of the global tourism market. In fact, the market scale of wellness tourism was estimated to be \$4.2 trillion in 2017, with thermal/mineral springs being one of the major sectors in related markets (Medai et al., 2022). Specifically, hot springs have been used for medicinal purposes for centuries due to their unique healing and rejuvenating properties, which include reducing stress, improving blood circulation, and relieving pain (Damer & Deamer, 2020; Fikri-Benbrahim et al., 2021; Yamasaki et al., 2023). The popularity of hot springs in tourism has made it a significant contributor to the industry, attracting visitors seeking relaxation, recreation, and adventure (Ranjit, 2022a). The sector holds great potential for sustainable tourism practices and the development of domestic tourism (Bogar, 2023). The increasing recognition

of hot springs' health benefits is expected to drive further growth in the industry, making it a vital component of the tourism market.

In fact, the role of hot springs tourism has established in the bulk of the literature. Several studies have explored the role of hot springs in tourism development worldwide. For example, a study conducted by (Mi et al., 2019) examined the impact of hot springs on the tourism industry in Taiwan. They found that hot springs tourism had a positive effect on the economy, creating employment opportunities and generating revenue for local businesses. Similarly, a study by (Kim & Jamal, 2015) explored the potential of hot springs for rural tourism development in South Korea. They concluded that hot springs could serve as a catalyst for local economic development, leading to the creation of new jobs and the revitalization of local communities. Several studies have explored the relationship between hot springs and domestic tourism development. Similarly, a study in China and Japan has traditionally been as the global Hot spring's Champions, generating more than 50% of the industry profits. China is the leader in terms of the world highest revenue generation, but Japan holds the record for the world's highest number of hot spring establishments (Medai et al., 2022; Su, 2020).

However, most of these studies are focused on developed countries, and little research has been conducted on the potential of hot springs for domestic tourism development in developing countries. However, natural hot springs tourism is one of the advantages of these countries. For example, the West Java province, Indonesia has a total of 12 natural hot springs resorts visited mostly by domestic visitors each year (Kusdibyo & Setiawati, 2021). In addition, there are many hot springs in Africa that have become a big tourist draw. For example, parts of Ethiopia and Kenya that are known as regions of intense geothermal activity, thanks to the geological turmoil beneath the Great Rift Valley is among the beauties as these two countries are dotted with numerous hot springs (Wilbanks, 2016). But their potential is yet to be explored as these resources are untapped for various reasons.

### Statement of the Problem

Hot springs in Ethiopia have become popular among locals and tourists are also being utilized by hotels to heat their swimming pools, such as Filwuha, Sodere, and Lake Shala. Despite this, there are many undeveloped hot spring pools that can be enjoyed in their natural state, such as Aweyitu hot springs, Borkana hot springs, and the Wondo Genet hot springs, leaving behind their potentials to serve as a focal point for developing a variety of tourism-related services. Besides, if properly managed hot springs could provide opportunities for alternative forms of tourism, such as eco-tourism and wellness tourism (Ranjit, 2022b). Furthermore, hot springs are a natural resource that can promote cultural exchange and environmental awareness while generating income and creating jobs for local communities (Wang & Lin, 2021). As a result the development of these hot springs tourism could have a positive impact on the local economy (Sekiguchi, 2020), particularly in areas where economic opportunities are limited, as noted by Wang & Lin (2021).

Given the potentials of hot springs in tourism and economic developments, only few studies that have examined the role of hot springs in tourism development exists. To mention few, a study conducted by (Tilahun, 2021) explored the potential of hot springs for ecotourism development in Ethiopia. The study found that hot springs could serve as an important resource for community-based tourism, contributing to poverty reduction and sustainable development. Additionally, a study by (Mariam, 2015) examined the potential of hot springs for spa and wellness tourism in Ethiopia. The study found that hot springs had the potential to attract both domestic and international tourists seeking therapeutic benefits. Moreover, it has been highlighted that tourism from any sector, in Ethiopia, in general, has been rising, but the absence of domestic tourism data at the national level weakens the generalization and was evidence to the level of attention given to the sector (Bayih & Singh, 2020). In addition, a recent literature review revealed that the cultural heritages of Ethiopia contributed to the development of sustainable cultural tourism but it did not achieve the expected results (Worku, 2023).

Studies have also shown that various factors influence the role of hot springs in domestic tourism development, including accessibility, natural features, and cultural significance. Specifically, accessibility is a key factor as hot springs that are easily accessible to visitors are more likely to attract tourists and contribute to domestic tourism development (Ranjit, 2022b). Natural features, such as mineral-rich water heated by the earth's core, provide a relaxing and therapeutic experience for visitors, while the surrounding landscape adds to their attraction (Aneseyee et al., 2022; Mequanint & Gebremedhi, 2015; Sekiguchi, 2020). Cultural significance is another factor, as hot springs have been utilized for centuries by different cultures for their healing properties (Ranjit, 2022a; Wang & Lin, 2021). Availability of amenities and services in the surrounding area also play a role in the role of hot springs in domestic tourism development (Ranjit, 2022b).

Despite the potential of hot springs for domestic tourism development, there is a lack of understanding of the level of hot spring tourism practice, the major contributions of hot springs to domestic tourism development, and the factors that influence the performance of hot springs in domestic tourism development of Ethiopia, specifically in case of Wondo Genet hot springs among others. As far as knowledge of the researcher no study

had been done before on the role of hot spring for domestic tourism development in the area. More importantly, other similar studies are rare in Ethiopia and only little attempts towards uncovering this interesting area of research were made in the past. For instance, Tilahun(2019) focused on the study challenges and opportunities of Wanzaye hot spring for domestic tourism development, revealing that domestic tourism is not well developed due to massive challenges in related to tourism policy and strategy.

Wondo Genet town, located in the southern part of Ethiopia, is one of the most well-known nature based recreational sites the country has. The main attraction of the site includes the pockets of landscapes covered with jungle forests, streams and a variety of birds and wildlife as well as hot springs (Mohammed, 2007). Even though, ecotourism was suggested as complimentary form of tourism development in this area, previously by (Wondirad, 2020). Therefore, the researcher argues that studying the role of hot springs in domestic tourism development is critical for two reasons. Firstly, hot springs have the potential to create job opportunities, promote local businesses and generate income for communities living near hot springs. Secondly, hot springs are considered as eco-friendly tourism resource and can contribute to sustainable tourism development, which is critical for the preservation of the environment.

While there is considerable scientific research conducted into hot springs and their use in health and medical facilities, the role of natural hot and mineral springs in health, wellness and recreational tourism is underreported and under researched yet. This is an indication that the role of natural hot springs in health, wellness and recreational tourism is not fully recognized as a valuable tourism resource, neither is the substantial economic contribution the usage of these resources makes to the tourism industry.

Driven by reasons, the main aim of this is to explore the role of hot spring for domestic tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring and to identify the major contributions of hot springs to the local economy. In addition, the thesis aims to examine the factors that influence the performance of hot springs in domestic tourism development in this area. Thus, this study adds to the knowledge on the role of hot springs in tourism development and provides recommendations for the sustainable development of Wondo Genet hot springs and extrapolates the results to similar comparable resources in Ethiopia.

## **Research Questions**

The thesis uncovered the following research questions:

1. What is the current state of hot spring tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring?
2. What are the drivers of hot spring tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring?
3. What are the major contributions of hot spring tourism development for domestic tourism development in Wondo Genet spring?
4. What are the barriers of hot spring tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring?

## **Objective of the Study**

### **General Objective**

The general objective of this study is to investigate the role of hot springs for domestic tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring, Sidama Regional State, Ethiopia.

### **Specific Objectives**

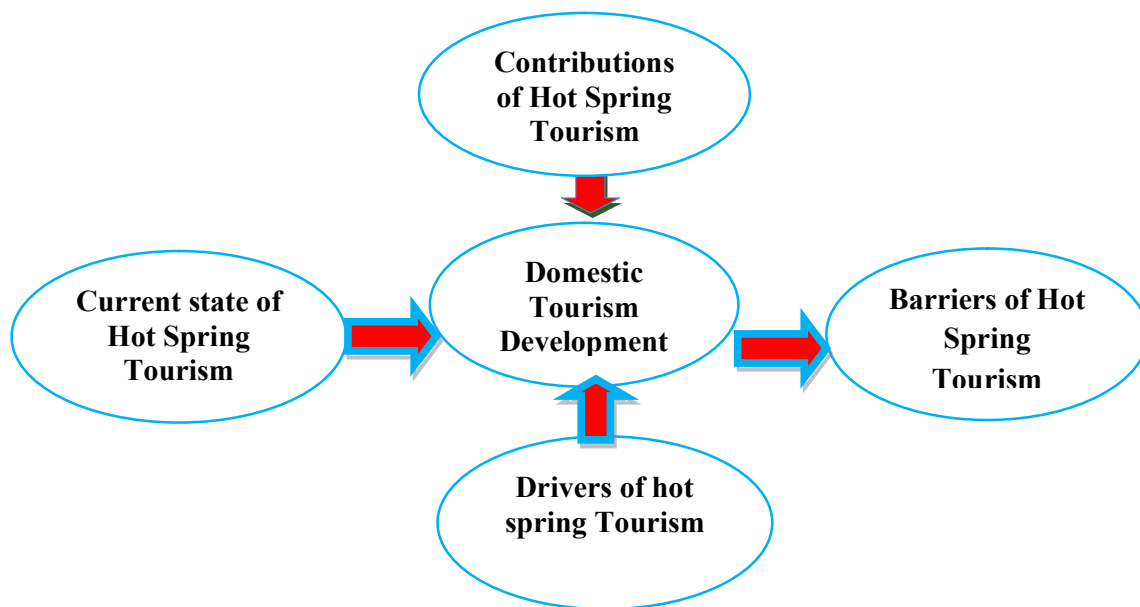
The specific objectives of this study are:

- 1) To assess the current state of hot spring tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring.
- 2) To identify the drivers of hot spring tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring.
- 3) To analyze the major contributions of hot spring tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring.
- 4) To examine the barriers of hot spring tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring.

## **Conceptual Framework of the Study**

The conceptual framework gives particular emphasis to the relationship between hot spring and domestic tourism development. To achieve the objectives of the research this conceptual framework shows current state of hot spring, drivers of hot spring tourism, contribution of hot spring and barriers that influence the performance of

hot spring for domestic tourism development in the study area. It has designed by the researcher by reviewing the existing literature to explain the conceptual relationship that exists between hot spring and domestic tourism development.



**Figure 2.3: Conceptual Framework of the Study**

**Source: Own Completion, 2023**

### **Research Design**

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of hot springs for domestic tourism development in Wondo genet hot spring, Sidama Regional State, Ethiopia. In line with the nature and objectives of the current study, exploratory research design is deemed feasible since it explores and interprets existing conditions, opinions, situations, and problems undergoing. Therefore, an explorative method was used to collect data with the intention of describing the nature of existing and current situations related with tourism in the study area.

### **Research Approach**

The major reason for doing qualitative research is to become more experienced with the phenomenon under study and to investigate complex and sensitive issues and similarly, most of the previous sustainability studies/literatures adopted qualitative approach. Qualitative approach to research is concerned with subjective assessment of attitudes, opinions and behavior. Research in such a situation is a function of researcher's insights and impressions (Saunders, et al., 2007). The main reason to conduct qualitative research in this study is to become more experienced with the phenomenon under study and to investigate complex and sensitive issues.

### **Target Population**

The term population is an entire group of individuals, events or objects that have common observable characteristics. It refers to all elements that meet certain criteria for inclusion in a given universe. The target population of this study was the local community representatives, tourists (both domestic and international tourists), Wondo Genet local ecotourism tour guide associations and Wondo Genet government tourism experts from, because they are important stakeholders who are more knowledgeable about the area.

### **Data Type and Sources**

The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources (for literature and discussion part) to effectively achieve the objectives of the study. The primary data were collected for the first time and thus happen to be original in character. On the other hand, the secondary data are those which have already been collected by someone else and which have already been passed through the statistical process (Kothari, 2004). Accordingly,

this study employed primary data sources including through interview, focus group discussion, observation and secondary data from published (books, journals, and articles, magazine) and unpublished materials (Government office tourism reports, UNWTO tourism websites, WTO Handbook).

### **Sampling Techniques**

Palys (2008) made extensive argument on purposive sampling and he stated that to say one engages in purposive sampling signifies that one sees sampling as a series of strategic choices about with whom, where and how one does his/her research. In doing so, it is vital to contact the key personnel who are experts in the area and can give concrete data on the area. Consequently, purposive sampling technique fits the requirement of this research. Therefore, local community representatives, Wondo Genet local ecotourism tour guide associations and Wondo Genet government tourism experts were selected based on purposive sampling and based on their experience, knowledge, positions and authority to administer interview. Whereas tourists were selected based on convenience/accidental sampling to administer interview

### **Sample Size**

Sample size refers to a number of items to be selected from the population. It is also a collection of some parts of the population to be a true representative of the population (Uys&Basson 1991). The sample considered in the current study consists of 20 (data saturation point) semi-structured in-depth interviews that were conducted with government tourism experts (5), local community representatives(5) and Wondo Genet local ecotourism tour guide associations (5)and tourists (both domestic and international tourists (5). In addition, two separate FGDs were held with government tourism experts, local community representatives and Wondo Genet local ecotourism tour guide associations. The total number of discussants from the selected kebele were, therefore, be 18(6 community representatives, 6 Wondo Genet resort hotel employees and 6 government tourism experts from Woreda).

### **Methods of Data Collection**

#### **Semi-structured in-depth interview**

The skill of guiding the discussion back to the topic outlined when discussions are unfruitful. Indeed, interview has the disadvantages of being very costly time consuming and can introduce bias through desires of the respondent to the interviewer (Aaker & Day, 1990: 164). In this study, semi structured interview for informants that were selected purposefully as the tool for data collection were used as provides participants with the opportunity to fully describe their experiences. Overall, 20 key informants will be interviewed: from 5 local community representatives, 5Wondo Genet local ecotourism tour guide associations, 5 from tourists and 5government tourism experts from Woreda.

#### **Focus Group Discussions**

In order to get detailed and ample information to answer the research questions, focus group discussions were also organized to help the researcher in understanding the issues under consideration from the viewpoints of different individuals at a given time period. Accordingly, three separate FGDs wereheld with 18 discussants from 6 community representatives, 6Wondo Genet local ecotourism tour guide associations and 6government tourism experts from woreda. The FGD was conducted in Amharicand later translated to English. In doing so, the researcher prepared a checklist based on the specific objectives to be discussed by FGD. In capturing the full discussion, audio recording instrument was used after seeking the respondents' consent by asking the interviewees permission and clarifying the objective of the study.

#### **Observations**

Observation is instrumental in conducting thorough inspections of the ongoing tourist community interactions in the tourist settings. Babbie (2008) acknowledged the superior merits of observation as it creates the opportunities for observing and thinking at the scene of the action, event, processes or phenomena. In this study, the researcher took the role as an observer. Observation includes observation of the tourism activities, tourist services and facilities, natural and cultural tourism resources, the conditions of community in tourist attraction area. As a result, field level observations served as a complementary method to triangulate data collected through

interviews and questionnaire. During the field observation information were acquired through note taking and photo camera to record important information and activities.

### **Methods of Data Analysis**

After collecting data necessary for this study through field observation, key informants' interview, focus group discussion, the researcher organized and arranged these data in the way which is easy and give meaning to analyze and interpret. To analyze the data collected, the current study used thematic analysis.

Thematic analysis is a process of identifying, analyzing and reporting themes with in a data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It will use in this study due to its accessibility and flexibility (Braun& Clarke (2012). The step by step process will be adopted from (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, the data collected through interview and FGDs transcribed considering the sign languages, hatred and happiness. The sign languages, likes and dislikes replaced by correct punctuations during data transcription to evidence them later on analysis (Amare, 2020). Secondly, the researcher went through the transcribed document to familiarize with the data corpus. Thirdly, having familiarized with the data corpus, the initial codes generated from the data set carefully. Next, potential themes searched and the initial codes associated with the emerging themes from the data set by moving back and forth over the data set to identify homogeneity and heterogeneity. Subsequently, the potential themes reviewed to refine confounding themes which are not themes but merely pretending and wrongly labeled as themes. Lastly, the refined themes defined and named and reports generated based on the final themes emerged from the data inductively.

### **Current state of hot spring tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring**

Wondo Genet is a tourist destination nestled in the eastern sub-catchment of Lake Hawassa Basin frequented by conventional visitors. Hot springs in Wondo Genet has been served as an idyllic place for excursionist and tourists to escape the daily hectic and hustle life for many decades. The area is endowed with many breathtaking ecotourism potential resources like: sizzling hot springs, lush green dense forest and wildlife diversity (Ali, 2007; Italemahu, 2015; Wondirad, 2020).

Likewise, data found from literatures and information got from the interview, observation and focus group discussion confirmed that hot spring tourism in Wondo Genet is being practiced. The researcher observed that the respondent also believes the current status of the hot spring tourism practice is at infant stage, it needs strong private and public sector commitment. Furthermore, findings from the observation is also supported this fact that the hot spring tourism is being practiced in different ways. Similarly the interviewee from WWCTSO1 stated that:

*The current status of hot spring tourism is very low. The main causes for low level of hot spring practice are poor stakeholders' collaboration, lack of infrastructural development, lack of budget, poor marketing strategy, and lack of development programs, lack of training and development and poor benefit sharing mechanisms.*

### **Drivers of hot spring tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring**

#### **Natural Resources**

It is generally accepted that the surroundings of a tourism destination played a major role in attracting visitors. Tourists are attracted to a destination because of its natural environment's uniqueness. The destination may be unique in terms of climate, landscape, fauna or flora (WTO, 2014). The climate, landscape, fauna and flora species, experienced at the tourism destination is also a pull factor (Lee & King, 2006). Moreover, Wondo Genet area and its environment are identified with abundant flora and fauna species composition, richness and diversity. The high species richness and species diversity of flora and fauna in Wondo Genet is probably due to the diverse physiographic nature, with its mountain slopes, valleys and fluvial landforms, in addition to this, springs/rivers flowing from the foot of the mountains, made the area unusually diverse. As a result, Wondo Genet has a national significance regarding conservation of biodiversity and endemic species. It is vivid that the presence of species diversity is perceived as a more suitable criterion for ecotourism development. Because of flora and fauna are being the main attractions for ecotourism (Honey, 2010).

The following are identified during the field survey:

*The attraction of Wondo Genet recreation site is primarily based on its naturally endowed resources namely the hot spring water alongside the perennial stream flow that forms nature's unique beauty which visitors enjoy with. Additional glamour of the site is the attractive*

*landscape scenery created by the surrounding forest covered hilly topography containing diverse plant and animal species of tourist importance (Interviewee T3, 2023).*

Wondo Genet is a true bird paradise. The area has been identified among the 73 important bird areas (IBAs) of Ethiopia (Mengistu, 2003). A number of bird researches were made in Wondo Genet in different time interval. Earlier, Sim (1979) recorded 118 species of birds in Wondo Genet area, out of which seven are endemic to the country, three inter-African migrant and six inter-continental migrant species could be observed. Burger & Sturtevant (2014) identified more than 50 species of birds in Wondo Genet in 2013. A total of 33 migratory bird species in Wondo Genet and its surrounding were also recorded as the findings of (Girma et al., 2017). More recently, a total of 137 species of birds in to 47 families and four habitats such as: natural forest, agro forestry, grassland and wooded grassland in and around Wondo genet forest catchment (Girma et al., 2017).

### **Cultural Resources**

Like many parts of Sidama, Wondo Genet has various ethnic groups co-reside in the area, with tremendous varieties of tangible and intangible heritages across the woreda. Wondo Genet is favored with wondrous cultural amenities and historical treasures; however, the main drawing factor is still limited to the natural asset specifically water-based activities (Ali, 2007; Reba, 2011; Italemahu, 2015).

The key to success for tourist destinations is to create a product that attracts potential consumers in an emotional way (Morgan, 2004). Similarly, WWCTO5 commented that

*Wondo Genet and its surrounding areas comprise imposing attractions of both natural and cultural settings that are the foremost sources of tourism and ecotourism potentials development. The cultural and natural resource endowment of the area is suitable for eye-catching colorful birds, mammals, suitable weather condition, hot springs at the valley of the forest, abundant wildlife diversity, sharing the local culture and traditions including the hospitality of the local community (Interviewee, WWCTO5, 2023).*

Thus, the culture of the local community in and around a tourist destination area is a pull factor for a tourist destination as visitors want to learn more about the culture of the area. It gives the background to the evolution of the particular society (Mckercher, 2013; WTO, 2010). Tourism developments associated with cultural sites and events are important as they can be an uplifting experience in local people's lives.

### **Special Attractions**

Special attractions refer to attractive resources found in and around a destination. Destinations that offer a variety of attractions have a competitive edge over other destinations and, according to WTO (2010), encourage tourists to stay longer. Such attractions may include hiking, wild life viewing and many other indoor and outdoor activities (WTO, 2010; Lee & King, 2012). This is even more advantageous if these activities can be pursued throughout the year. Generally, Wondo Genet area has the potential to provide tourism and ecotourism activities like: rafting, mountain trekking, mountain biking, swimming, camping, photographing and video-graphing, picnicking, ballooning, bird watching, picnicking, and cultural tripping. Whereas, the lower section of Wondo Genet, can also provide the necessary platform for sports such horseback riding, boating, and motorcycling and etc. could be mentioned as some of the interesting opportunities in Wondo Genet Woreda.

### **Health and Spa Tourism**

Health is the major concerns for tourists, especially those travelling to international destinations. Health issues refer to illness as well as accidents (Crouch & Ritchie, 2009; WTO, 2010; Lee & King, 2012). The hot spring chemical properties as found at the eye of the hot spring were specified and this allowed visitors to know the mineral composition of the water in which they would probably be swimming. Other factors that pose a risk to the safety of visitors could involve the nature of the kind of activities undertaken, the standard of accommodation and food quality, the behavior of some tourists

### **Contributions of hot spring tourism development for domestic tourism development in Wondo Genet spring**

Hot spring tourism makes a significant contribution towards health, wellness and recreational tourism, it receives less attention in the academic and popular literature than the general wellness sector (Erfurt-Cooper

and Cooper, 2009). The use of natural hot springs is practiced mainly to achieve health improvements such as rehabilitation from accident, injury or surgery, to prevent illness maintaining good health, unique selling points for holiday destinations, employment for local communities, encourage new developments, many countries are developing potential hot spring areas, good prospects for future expansion (untapped markets hold further potential, sustainable development possible), value adding to all recreational facilities and substantial financial savings by using geothermal energy for tourism infrastructure.

### **Economic Contributions**

According to WTO (2010), tourism brings investment in public infrastructure and services, direct and indirect jobs are created, revenue is earned from tourists spending power, taxes are earned from tourism businesses and any increase in asset value, like land, and the cost of infrastructure provision. Employment from tourism can be measured by the number of local people employed in tourism, the average wage earned in a community and the ratio of part-time to full-time employment in tourism enterprises (WTO, 2010). Assessing employment trends in the tourism industry will assist in identifying the benefits of tourism, assist in future planning and evaluation of investment needed, and to reduce the belief among some local communities that tourism generates only low income jobs (Lee & King, 2011; Baker, 2009).

The literature review supports that tourism brings opportunities for the development of different business enterprises. Several studies have highlighted the economic benefits of tourism, including job creation and increased revenue for local businesses (Jamal & Robinson, 2009). The following text from the said participant explained as;

*Around these hot springs, there are many restaurants, hotels, lodges, recreation center built for the visitors/tourists. As a result some people are getting employment in providing the services to the visitors and tourists; selling the local agricultural products; so the economy of the local community has been going in progress and being strong day by day (Interviewee WWCTSO1, 2023)*

Moreover, the same thing has also been aired by WWCT01 as follows;

*“Hot spring tourism they can have a potential to contribute significantly to the local economy by generating employment opportunities, promoting local business and attracting investments for infrastructure development” (Interviewee WWCT01, 2023).*

### **Socio-Cultural Contributions**

Hot springs are believed to have therapeutic properties due to mineral rich waters. Local communities and visitors use these natural resources for relaxation, healing various ailments like skin conditions. Hot springs hold cultural significance for the local communities. They are often associated with traditional beliefs and rituals that have been passed down through generations. Hot spring tourist can have the potential to buy souvenirs, local foods, and local drinks and any cultural things from the local community.

### **Environmental Contributions**

Many hot springs are located within or near to protected areas, wildlife reserves, national parks, ecotourism sites and rift valley areas in Ethiopia. This area provides habitats for diverse flora and fauna species that contribute to biodiversity conservation efforts. The presence of the hot spring raises awareness about the importance of preserving natural resources among both local communities, governments, non-governmental organizations, private sectors and tourists. The following text witnessed this issue as follows;

*Wondo genet local community have a care for the hot spring environment and ecotourism sites for sake of environmental conservation of the hot spring is necessary (Interviewee WLETGA5, 2023).*

As per local guides interview, there are some adventurers who came to Wondo Genet with the aim of having adventurer activities like: bungee jumping and Para shot, but because of the underdeveloped ecotourism infrastructure, tourists are unable to practice and enjoy in the area. Generally, the highly suitable section of Wondo Genet area has the potential to provide ecotourism activities like: forest walking, backpacking, mountain trekking, biking, camping, photographing and video-graphing, ballooning, bird watching, picnicking and cultural tripping.

## Health Contributions

Hot spring baths can be used for mentally uplifting and relaxing for people seeking alternative ways for healthy lifestyle and wellbeing (Erfurt-Cooper, 2010). Mostly domestic and international tourists have been using the hot spring water for the treatment of different diseases/physical problems besides the relaxation, recreation and leisure. The medicinal powers of hot springs have been used for the past many years and have been widely acknowledged in Europe and Japan as natural treatment alternatives for an assortment of common sicknesses. Hot springs healing have been used for over a thousand years and have been widely accepted in Africa, Europe, china and Japan as a natural treatment option for a variety of common ailments and is well known for several therapeutic benefits such as treating illness with bath (Danielle Pope, 2020). The participant mentioned above explained the truth on the ground as under;

*The majority of visitors who suffered from skin illness claimed that this hot water had a satisfying impact, similar to how rheumatism sufferers reported that this hot water therapy provided a sensation of comfort in the aching body parts. However, many people came only for pleasure, wanting to experience the sensation of bathing in a hot spring (Interviewee WLETGA3, 2023).*

## Barriers of hot spring tourism development in Wondo Genet hot spring

### Deforestations

Deforestation is the replacement of forest cover by other land use types. It is continued reported that there is deforestation of the remnant forest catchment for fuel, construction, and charcoal making purposes, in the upper hill part of Wondo Genet. In addition, Italemahu (2015, p. 162) conferred the mass destruction of forests results disappearing of avian species which also consequences tourists decline whose primary motive is nature. Based on the interview and focus group discussions many of the forest cover a being deforested at a fast rate mainly for agriculture, charcoal production, fuel and settlement. Therefore, the exploitation of forest resource is one of the most and critical challenges facing the ecotourism resources of Wondo Genet Woreda.

### Lack of Infrastructure Development

According to Seetanah and et al, (2011) infrastructure is a fundamental component of tourism industry i.e., road infrastructure enhances accessibility of tourists to different parts of the destination country ensures that tourists experience a comfortable transition from the plane into the borders of the destination country and vice versa. Wondirad, (2020) has also remarked the presence of inadequate infrastructure and amenity development in Wondo Genet area as a key challenging factor for domestic tourism development. At the moment, the lack of tourism facilities and infrastructure, absence of health service and absence of souvenir shops, are the main constraints for the expansion of the ecotourism demand in Wondo Genet. The FGD discussants echoed the infrastructure of the hot spring as under;

*The tourism infrastructure of Wondo Genet area is not developed to hold tourism industry. It is also the main factor that hinders the development of tourism in the study area (FGD Participant, 2023).*

Furthermore, infrastructural development is the most significant part of tourism industry because it is the hub of tourism development. With good infrastructure it is impossible to think and develop tourism industry at any place, so infrastructural development is a backbone to ensure the development of tourism. According to Lamport (2011), the infrastructural base of a country has a power to challenge the development of tourism in a country's infrastructure as forms of an integral part of a tourism package. Further, community empowerment in road infrastructure development leads to efficient and effective utilization of public resource. The participant mentioned above explained the truth on the ground as under

*The local, regional and national government commitments in all levels of the hot spring development are very low. As a result of this, it is occurred failure to fulfill basic infrastructures such as quality road, bank, and insurance, basic facilities such as sanitary water and services (Interviewee LCR1, 2023).*

### **Lack of Awareness**

Any development activity needs to be known by all responsible bodies in order to get recognition in the area. Tourism industry should be recognized as economic sector by go, private sectors and local community. Local communities also do not know the importance of tourism to themselves locality. The following text from the said participant explained as;

*The level of awareness of local community on the importance stakeholder involvement and sustainable tourism development plays a vital roles to determine the level of participation of the local community to take part in the in sustainable tourism activities at hot spring (Interviewee WWCT04, 2023).*

### **Lack of Marketing and Promotion**

Frida (2014) explains that hot spring is significant tourism products that tourism industry offers to the visitors should be promoted and marketed through an effective and continuing promotion and marketing work. Promoting tourism destination has a great value to the recipient communities and to the traveling public. It is difficult to develop tourism industry in the study area without promotion and marketing. Since promotion and marketing are one of the basic elements to develop tourism. By considering these, respondents were asked about promotional and marketing activity

*A lot of natural and cultural tourism resources found in Wondo Genet. But the big problem is promotion and marketing of tourism resources of the woreda. There is no any kind of promotion and marketing activity is started in Sidama region to introduce and announce the tourism potential of the zone to the general public and visitors (Interviewee WWCTSO5,2023)*

Marketing and promotional activities are core in helping small indigenous businesses promote core messages about their products and services and access potential customers. The need to develop marketing opportunities is of major importance in overcoming the problem of accessing local enterprises 'on appropriate market. Moreover market accessibility is very important in business not only for enhancing quality of the products or services, but also for technical matters that helps to increase the revenues and sales. The following text from FGD explains this issue as beneath

*To promote and increase market access of the attractions as well as goods and services that local communities supplied, we are working together with private sectors through promotion, preparing of annual events, festivity, bazaar and various sport events. Hence, local business providers, souvenir shop sellers, coffee and breakfast vendors and other business enterprises in the town can provide their products in these occasions (FGD Participant, 2023).*

### **Lack of Budget**

Budget is important to manage protected areas sustainably. Without budget it is impossible to achieve the objectives of protected areas. The FGD discussants from local communities and tourism experts aired that budget has hindered stakeholder involvement in the study area to manage the hot spring resources in sustainable manner. As Participant one participant from WWCTSO1 pointed, lack of budget hampered training and awareness creation campaigns which are backbones of stakeholder involvement in building knowledge and skills gaps among the stakeholders of protected areas. The following text from the said participant explained as;

*The hot spring had faced scarcity of budget to promote the services and facilities, to fulfill the required infrastructures and to paid well wage for the hot spring employees. As a result of this, it is happened limited number of domestic tourist flow and the created dissatisfied with the incoming tourists (Interviewee WWCTSO5, 2023)*

All of the FGD and interview participants responded that,

*The budget allocated to the tourism sector is very low and is not enough to run any kind of development and collaborative activity in the study area. Some of the respondents said that budget allocated to tourism is not compared with any sector why because the officials themselves do not well understand tourism and the benefit the sector.*

### **Lack of Adequate Manpower**

Hot spring tourism development requires skilled man power working on collaborative activities rather than the routine work. However, in most stakeholder organizations, there is scarcity of skilled manpower for such activities in tourism sector. One interviewee from WWCTSO4 narrated that:

*In Wondo Genet, a big problem in tourism industry is emanated from lack of professional in the field of tourism. In culture and tourism offices there is little number of professionals in the field of tourism most of the workers are from other discipline. Many number of employees come to this office as a demotion from higher positions and other come from another discipline. If somebody failed in other sectors, the administration demotes the individual by sending to culture and tourism office. Sometimes, many people refer this office in Wondo Genet as office of demoted people. Hence, more effort and collaboration is needed to hire professionals in the office.*

### **Lack of Training Institutions**

Training institutions are one of the major crucial elements in the development of tourism industry by producing educated professionals to the industry. Their existence and absence can also play great role. Education and training can consist of the encouragement of individual development, the need to advance knowledge and to be practical and relevant to the business necessities of the sector. Even though it may be debated what exactly should be taught, in general tourism training helps understanding the phenomenon of tourism and becoming more managerially oriented (ILO, 2010).

*Interview with the WLETGA3 stated that,*

*Most of the tourist service centers of Wondo Genet town such as hotels, café and restaurants, pensions and others have no professional workers. Most of them told that this is due to lack of training institutions in the study area.*

*On the other hand, one interviewee with WWCTSO1 stated that*

*Most of the owners of the hotels and restaurants are not volunteer to employ the professional workers. They give a chance to serve their relatives and family members on their hotels and other centers. Owners of hotels in Wondo genet town do not like to pay better salary to professional workers rather they are interested to hire uneducated workers from their family or relatives. This is also one of the major factors challenging the tourism development in the area.*

### **Poor Stakeholders' Collaborations**

According to Pforr's (2001) discussion it is generally accepted that the cooperation of various stakeholders in tourism development activities are vital. However, lack of stakeholders' cooperation in the field of tourism is the main challenge in tourism industry for its development. In the case Ethiopia in general and the study area particularly in Wondo Genet hot spring the cooperation of all stakeholders for developing tourism are highly needed.

From this discussion one can understand that the interconnection among stakeholders is the most vital thing for developing tourism in a destination. However, lack of cooperation among stakeholders is the determining factor for tourism development. The lack of regulation was considered to be the result of poor coordination between different government departments. Multiple government departments, including the ministry of tourism, natural resources, and rural development, should coordinate policies and programs in order to pursue the success of tourism development. International organizations,

### **Poor Government Commitment**

Commitment is important to accomplish means and to arrive at ends in personal life as well as at organizational level. The stakeholders of hot spring should be committed to sustainably. If they are not committed, they cannot achieve their objectives like protecting the hot spring from illegal activities. Not only this, they need to be committed to work in collaboration with their partners in managing the resource of in the hot spring. However, in Wondo Genet hot spring lack of commitment among the stakeholders hindered collaborative efforts to protect the resources of the hot spring. The stakeholders of the hot spring are from kebele to regional level but the most functional one is the collaboration between the hot spring administration and the local community. A study conducted by Li (2019) on hot spring tourism in china found that poor government commitment was one of the

main challenge faced by the industry. In contrast countries with strong government commitment towards hot spring tourism development have seen significant success in attracting visitors and generating economic benefits.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following possible recommendations should be suggested to concerned stakeholders for betterment of hot spring tourism in sustainable tourism development in the study area.

- **With respect to designing Development Program/Strategy:** In order to increase the contribution of hot spring tourism as a means of employment creation and income generation, there is a need to establish and design effective development programs at the community level that will create opportunities for the local people to take part and be employed in various tourism businesses.
- **With respect to awareness Creation, Training and Capacity Building:** Awareness creation and training are important for successful developing hot spring tourism and domestic tourism development activities. So the local authorities, NGOs, local universities, industry partners, private sector education institutes and potential training providers cooperation is important to meet the objective of hot spring tourism development.
- **With respect to empowering Local Community in Tourism Investment:** The finding of the study showed that there is low level of hot spring tourism practice in the study area. So empowering local communities in tourism and related business is important for sustainable tourism development is essential. An investment must be promoted in different business such as restaurants, hotels, lodges, tour operators, car rental, souvenirs, cultural cloth and others.
- **With respect to infrastructural Development;** Infrastructural development plays a vital role in the development of hot spring tourism and domestic tourism development. A tourist attraction is not sufficient to satisfy the tourist since it must be complemented by other tourist facilities and a supporting infrastructure. Tourist infrastructure and other amenities should meet at least a certain minimum acceptable standards.
- **With respect to linking Hot spring Tourism with Local Economy;** Tourism has the biggest potential, if linkages with the local economy are existent, to contribute to sustainable tourism development and thus to poverty reduction. So as to realize and ensure the development of the local community, economically, socially and financially viable linkages should be made between the local economy and tourism business.
- **With respect to marketing and promotion campaign:** Establishing strong marketing campaign especially promotion of Wondo genet hot spring. Using of both broadcast and printed media should be established to raise the awareness of tourists to visit the area. An inclusive e]tourism marketing strategy has to be developed by accompanying tourism packages such us; (ecotourism, adventure tourism, hot spring tourism ,agro-tourism, and cultural tourism) in the tour packages or made part of the tour transits of visitors who would like to go to other nearby sites.
- **With respect to stakeholders Collaborations:** The role of the local community and the local authorities becomes very important for the proper management of the hot springs. The local communities, municipalities, and provincial governments should work in joint collaboration adapting clear policies and upholding law and order to develop and manage physical infrastructures required.

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