

**Political Challenges Facing Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Routes: Analytical Study of
Lalibela, one of Ethiopia's most Sacred Locations**

Muhammad Umar Riaz Abbasi

PhD Islamic Philosophy, National University of Modern Languages Islamabad Pakistan

<http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6977-9516>

drumarabbasi101@gmail.com

Dr. Hafiz Muhammad Idrees

Lecturer & Researcher Maahad Islami Denmark

Rabia Aamir

Assistant Professor, Department of English, National University of Modern Languages

Islamabad. Pakistan

Corresponding Email: drumarabbasi101@gmail.com

Abstract

Scholars and organizations around the world are increasingly acknowledging the importance of tourism in general and religious tourism in particular. Several countries are considering religious tourism as a viable development strategy for rural and secluded religious locations. There is still a lack of research and identification of religious tourism in Ethiopia as a viable development option. Lalibela, one of Ethiopia's most sacred locations, has a lot of untapped potential and present challenges that need to be examined in this study. Study results show this site is Ethiopia's most spectacular religious tourism destination, thanks to its rich religious legacy, including centuries-old annual religious festivals and multiple living rock-hewn churches with a vibrant local cultural scene. In addition to the town's religious atmosphere, the residents are quite welcoming. Poor infrastructure, harassment, beggarly behavior, trafficking in cultural property, lack of community involvement, social deprivation, and an absence of government interest to the region are just a few of the challenges facing the study area's religious tourism industry. Consequently, more productive and corrective steps are needed from all tourist stakeholders to eliminate growth impediments and to expand the area's potential.

Keywords: Potentials, Lalibela area, Development and Progress, Political Challenges, Tourism, Religion.

Introduction

One of the world's most important economic sectors is the travel and tourist business, which generates enormous economic, social, and environmental benefits. Over 200 million jobs have been created by tourism in recent years, which generates the most foreign exchange and provides 10% of the world's GDP. Furthermore, it is one of the world's fastest-growing industries, with a long history of uninterrupted expansion. The number of international travelers has increased by 44 percent in the recent decade, from 2001 to 2011. According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), the number of international tourist arrivals (ITAs) is expected to rise to more than 1.6 billion in 2020.

Since antiquity, religion has been a major factor in people's decision to travel, making it the oldest kind of travel (Creswell and Tashakkori, 2007). The term "religious tourism," which is among the earliest forms of travel, has been defined in a variety of ways by different authors. Respect for sacred sites and complete stewardship have been outlined by the UNWTO as the characteristics of religious tourism, a type of tourism that shows its socially responsible behaviors. The term "responsible and sustainable" connotes religious tourism. Tourists who seek spiritual grace through religious tourism are seeking proximity to, immersion in, or engagement with the Sacred parts of life; on the other hand, religious tourism can also be regarded as a tourist activity. As a result, it is primarily concerned with religious views and entails individuals seeking some form of religious experience in order to confirm their religious beliefs. Alternatively, you might think of religious tourism as a sort of travel that is primarily motivated by religious considerations (Ebrahimzadeh and ESKANDARI, 2011).

Objectives

The main objective of this paper is to identify the political challenges faced by religious tourism and pilgrimage routes. For this purpose, the most spiritual and religious site of Ethiopia, Lalibela is selected because of its ample religious heritage which are centuries old, and also the religious churches. To find the corrective measures regarding the challenges faced by the area, and the overcome the obstacles. As the area is a demanding site for the tourism stakeholders.

Research Questions

1. What kind of political challenges are faced by religious tourism?
2. Describe the correct meaning of religious tourism related to pilgrimage routes?
3. What kind of corrective measures should be adopted by Ethiopia to overcome the religious tourism obstacles?
4. What are the recommendations in solving the political challenges in religious tourism in Ethiopia?

Statement of Problem:

The problem that this research paper will solve is determine the political challenges faced by the religious tourism and pilgrimage routes.

Literature Review

Religious Tourism Concept

Travel has been a part of human culture from the dawn of time, and the reasons for doing so were as varied as they were numerous. People in the ancient world travelled for a variety of reasons, including, but not limited to, religious reasons. As a matter of fact, tourism as known, it now is a rather recent development. Visiting new places for the purpose of recreation, business, or any other reason other than earning money from the destination is included in tourism, according to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO). Tourism is not tied to the activity of earning money from the location visited, according to UNWTO. According to various classification systems, (Gil and Curiel, 2008) there are also a wide range of different sorts of tourism. It can define several types of tourism based on the motivation of travelers, such as vocational, social, traditional, economic, political, and religious and eco.

Various terms for religious tourism have been used in the literature, such as spiritual tourism, religious heritage tourism, religious-based tourism, pilgrimage tourism, faith tourism, sacred tourism, and so on... Aside from the obligatory explanation, pilgrimages and other similar visits are viewed as a form of religious tourism.

Religious tourists are persons who travel to religious destinations for the purpose of experiencing their faith. There are two types of religious tourists: pilgrims or travelers and religious tourists with dual purposes. Tourists in the first category are solely interested in religious matters, and the length

of their stay is unrelated to their activities; in contrast, pilgrims in the second category attend religious services and other tourist attractions, but their primary focus is on the trip itself. Travelers on pilgrimages to sacred destinations aren't looking for luxury, but rather a difficult journey or a modest life. A pilgrimage tourist takes pleasure in sight-seeing, travelling, and visiting a variety of locations, and may do it via land, air, or sea. Once there, they may stay for a few hours or several days, buying souvenirs, eating at local eateries, and taking in the distinct culture, but their primary motivation is spiritual. This encompasses spiritual and religious tourism, which is often related with religious historic sites. One of the first motives for travel is a desire for religious experience (Archer and Syrratt2012).

Many people use the terms spiritual tourism, pilgrimage tourism, and religious tourism interchangeably. The term "spiritual tourism" refers to travel that is influenced in some way, shape, or form by religious or spiritual beliefs. There is a difference between pilgrimage tourism and other types of tourism in which religious motives play a significant role, either directly or indirectly, in the decision-making process. There is a strong connection between religious tourism and other types of vacation and cultural tourism. Pilgrims and religious tourists have the opportunity to explore the surrounding area and learn about the customs and culture of the people who live there (Finneran, 2012).

Religion in Ethiopia

An endless series of inquiries into teachings, beliefs, and dogmas that eventually spawned diverse religious traditions has been going on for as long as humanity has existed. Defining religion is difficult because on belief and behavioral structures, that allows individuals to conquer the complexities of living. Religion has a strong connection to the supernatural. People's deepest desires can be attained in a systematic, well-coordinated, and widely accepted manner through religion. There is a notion that there is a power that can transform obstacles into the proper solutions beyond the known world (Takele, 2006).

In the 1980s and 1990s, the majority of Falasha's(Ethiopian jews) who remained religiously committed to Judaism moved to Israel. Despite the fact that the majority of the Falashas have moved to Israel, Ethiopia still has a small population of Falashas.

When the Prophet Mohammed's disciples and their families took sanctuary in Aksum during the 7th century CE, they brought the Islamic religion with them. The Aksumite King Aderaz was said to have requested protection for Mohammed's kin in Mecca from the persecutors of Mecca. Aksum's monarch Armah, as he was known at the time, welcomed them and showed them respect for their faith by providing them with the necessary security. Urban Islam and Rural Islam are two complementary expressions of Ethiopian Islam. Cities with mosques, Koranic schools and religious organizations that adhere to an authentic Sunni Islam belief system are the primary home of the latter. Many parts of Oromia, southern region, Afar and Somali regions have the latter.

Challenges to the Growth of Religious Tourism

Every country's economy, culture, and ecology benefit from the tourism business. Employment, earnings, tax receipts, and currency exchange are some of the most well-known benefits of tourism. As with any other sort of travel, religious tourism is susceptible to change. Inflation, currency volatility, infectious disease, and political turmoil all have a negative impact on religious tourism.

Religion-based travel is and can be a more powerful force for global peace and harmony than globalization, violence, racial discrimination, financial crisis, as well as potential self-enforced tourism restrictions owing to worries about environmental transformation (Nicolaidis and Grobler, 2017). Spiritual travelling can be impacted by diplomatic uncertainty, other constitutional impediments, and economic difficulties, environmental along with physical condition issues, advertising, facilities, and insufficient infrastructure as well as amenities.

Development of Religious Tourism

Traveling to religious destinations is one of the world's oldest forms of tourism. However, in 1967, Cordoba, Spain, the World Tourism Organization (WTO) organizes first ever conference on religious tourism, which contain the content that, "Tourism and Religions: A Contribution to the Dialogue of Cultures, Religions, and Civilizations," which focused on the sociology of religions in global travel. The ancient major civilizations of Mesopotamia and Egypt, which left behind written records and other archaeological evidence, reveal that tens of thousands of people have travelled to various sacred sites over the course of time. Long distance travel has been a common habit for mankind for thousands of years. Religion is a collective concept centered on characteristics such as faith, quality of living, and health. This underscores the importance of

proper marketing of sites. In this regard, a tourist viewpoint that emphasizes segmentation is believed to be an appropriate method to use in promoting spirituality.

Research Methodology

Study Description

A municipality called Lasts woreda administered Lalibela at first, but that authority was later abolished in favor of the Lalibela town administration. Located at 12002'034"N and 39002'611"E, Lalibela is situated at an altitude of 2480m as, l. Addis Ababa is about 701 kilometers away. Lasta woreda borders the whole town administration of Lalibela, with the exception of a few areas in the west that are surrounded by Meket woreda. At 4190 m.a.s.l., the Mount Abune Yoseph dominates much of the northern half of western Ethiopia and is located northeast of Lalibela. The Tekeze River's headwaters may be found to the southeast of Lalibela. The town of Lalibela is situated in a landscape of rocky, mountainous, along with swaying landforms, with just a modest amount of simple ground. With valleys, gorges, and rough mountains, the landscape around Lalibela consists of flat-capped highlands and steep-sided volcanic plugs that make up the current terrain (Nicolaidis, 2016).

Strategy, Studies, and Informational Resources

The base of the research questions is typically the driving force behind the research approach. In order to determine the possibilities and challenges of religious tourism, a descriptive survey was used as the primary research method. Methodological pluralism was applied in this study by using both qualitative and quantitative research designs to enrich and augment it. It was important to incorporate all of the interested parties in the research process by selecting study participants at random and on purpose. Local Lalibela residents, spiritual advisers, proprietors, resort administrators, trip instructors, LTACTO (Lalibela Town Administration Culture and Tourism Office) connoisseurs, as well as domestic and international tourists were the primary focus of the study's participants. This study relied primarily on primary and secondary data sources for its investigation. Various tools, such as surveys, conversations, non-participating subject interpretations, records, and acoustic-graphic sources, have been used to collect the primary and secondary data (Norman, 2004).

Techniques of Sampling and the Size of the Sample

In order to meet the objectives of this study, a diverse group of Lalibela town's tourism stakeholders was hand-picked for an interview. A total of forty-eight (48) individuals were given a copy of the semi-structured in-depth interview to consider. Random sampling was used to select households in the local community centered on their vicinity to cathedrals along with the participation in travelling. The entire sample size was approximately 390 people. However, due to time and money constraints, the questionnaire survey sample size was limited to 130.

Methods for Analyzing Data

The SPSS programme version 20 was used to code, enter, process, and analyze the quantitative data acquired from the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics and frequency analysis were both used in the statistical analysis. A narrative was utilized to examine the qualitative data acquired through surveys, strategic informer conversations, examination along with analysis of documents. Pictures, graphs, tables, and charts were used to display the study's findings.

Findings and Suggestions

Possibilities for the growth of religious travel as a tourist industry As a result of its abundance of religious tourism resources, Lalibela has become one of Ethiopia's most popular tourist attractions

Lalibela's Rock-hewn Churches and other Surrounding Places of Worship

Lalibela's 11th century monumental, semi-solid, and hollow cathedrals are some of the most impressive in the world. Ancient rock-built churches are the most popular tourist attractions in Lalibela and Ethiopia in general, according to the results of a poll completed by local residents (87.7%). They also think that the eleven rock-hewn cathedrals in Ethiopia are the most popular destinations for tourists. The Jordan River divides these churches into three groups of three (Norman, 2004). To begin with, there are six congregations north of the Jordan River, namely: the Bete Medihane Alem, Bete Maryam, the Bete Meskel, the Bete Denagil, the Bete Debre Sina, and the Bete Golgota. This set of churches, according to local priests, symbolises the Earthly Jerusalem. East of the Jordan River, Bete Amanuel, Bete Merkorios, Bete Abba Libanos and Bete Gabriel-Rufael make up second class of churches that represent the heavenly Jerusalem, all of

which are named after Biblical characters. Bete Giyorgis is the lone church in the third group (Petroman et al., 2011).

The Concrete and Intangible Heritages

The churches, in addition to the rock art, are a treasure trove of historical artefacts. One of the most compelling reasons for people to come to the area is its history. More than two-thirds of respondents, or 62.3 percent, felt that Lalibela's rock-hewn churches have a great deal of capability for spiritual travelling. While the other side describes, that 37% of the overall defendants did not believe Lalibela's rock-hewn churches to be a viable source of religious tourism in the region. There are many ecclesiastical artefacts in the churches, including processional crosses, bells, chandeliers made of gold and silver and priestly robes and vestments, as well as paintings and manuscripts. These include King Lalibela's hand cross and prayer stick, both of which date back to the time of the churches itself.

Observances of Religion

The vast majority of people surveyed (61.5% of them) agreed that religious festivals are essential for the growth of religious tourism. 38.5 percent of the survey participants were unaware of the importance of religious festivals in the research area's religious tourism development. There appears to be a widespread misunderstanding about religious festivals and their significance in the local community. It doesn't matter if a festival is a religious celebration, a public holiday, or something else else. Ethiopia has a slew of eye-catching celebrations throughout the year. Additionally, some researchers have claimed that the village of Lalibela is a pilgrimage destination for Christians (Tomaselli, 2012).

Because of the figures and transcendental moments of pilgrimage, I discovered that pilgrimage had a direct effect on social order. It gives a platform for individuals to address their urgent social needs and perform to the particular problems of an economically deprived yet very hierarchical society that is increasingly dominated by a liberal capitalist social logic. Even though this is an unrestricted field, it is a hard and fruitful place to demonstrate one's resolve, talents, and good faith (Singh, 2013).

Every year, tens of thousands of Ethiopians and visitors from all over the world come to celebrate Christmas, Epiphany, and Easter. Christians and further travelers as of all over the globe flock to

Lalibela during these holy days to take part in the festivities and partake in the spiritual graces of the region. In addition, the Saint Lalibela Monastery Administration (SLMA) reports that the town hosts numerous religious festivals and holidays that, if well-managed, might help attract tourists and encourage the development of religious tourism. It has been reported by reliable sources that increasing the number of religious festivals will bring in a bigger number of domestic and international tourists, so increasing both the local economy and the overall GDP of the country.

Inviting People in Religious Occasion

According to important informants, the hospitable nature of the Lalibela residents has a significant impact on the influx of tourists to the region. Only 50.8% of the overall respondents perceived a deep appreciation in the township to be a possible factor in further developing religious tourism.

Respondents, 49.2 percent of those were polled, did not believe that welcoming locals had an impact on tourist choices. Tourists will flock to the area as extended as nearby are rock-hewn cathedrals, regardless of how welcoming the locals are. For many in the 10 community, the importance of the concept of "welcoming guests" was not widely appreciated.

A picture of the Place

The rock-hewn churches of Lalibela are UNESCO World Heritage Sites, and many Ethiopian Christians and others from around the world visit them on pilgrimage. With this massive representation of the location, religious tourism may become more popular in the area. Lalibela's image equally nationwide as well as globally is a prospective for spiritual travelling growth, according to a poll performed. 43.1 percent of respondents answered "yes" to this question. More over half (56.9 percent) of those polled said no. This indicates that a large majority of those polled said that the town's image was not a key factor in the growth of religious tourism (Phukan and Devdutt, 2012).

Excitement for Tourists

Tourists from throughout the world and the United States have been questioned regarding the impressions of the rock-hewn cathedrals. They seemed to be overjoyed by what they had just witnessed. The following are examples of tourist slang:

Incredibly beautiful and historic, it's 'the additional furthestmost attractive spiritual place in the domain, only after Jerusalem'; 'It is a actually lovely place to perceive, a very moral trip, and it's the greatest in Africa' (Raj and Morpeth, 2007)

In legend of Lalibela as a 'Second Jerusalem,'

King Lalibela may have been trying to build a New Jerusalem in Africa available to every bit of Ethiopians, which the Orthodox Christians rescued from a lengthy journey to Jerusalem by building their cathedral there. There are biblical ramifications for everything in Lalibela and every church. Symbolically, what can be found in Lalibela can be found in Jerusalem because it is located there. A "Second Jerusalem" was born from this very reason. Symbolic images in some of the churches of Lalibela, Ethiopia, demonstrate that Lalibela is akin to Jerusalem. The majority of the main sources believe that the Christian community's belief in the myth of Lalibela as the second Jerusalem has drawn a large number of visitors to the region. Because Lalibela is a second Jerusalem, the town and the country might benefit greatly from promoting it as a tourism destination (Raj and Griffin, 2015).

Development of Religious Tourism has many Difficulties

Ripping heritage objects from the town of Lalibela:

1. a lack of infrastructure are among the issues with religious tourist development.
2. Lack of involvement of the local community
3. The dominance of wealthy individuals
4. Nightclubs and Bars
5. Improper sewage treatment and disposal
6. Trafficking in cultural property
7. The Administration's lack of interest
8. Assassinate traffickers
9. Lack of planning in the city
10. Mismanaged Religious Holidays (Rinschede, 1992).

The Absence of Necessary Facilities

Developing religious tourism is hampered by the lack of adequate infrastructure, as can be seen in the graph above. More than half of the respondents, 58.5 percent, identified a lack of infrastructure as a major obstacle to the growth of religious tourism in the research region.

Lack of Involvement in the Local Community

Another obstacle to the growth of religious tourism in the city was an absence of public involvement. Religious tourism development is hindered by a absence of regional population involvement on 53.1%, according to the results of the survey. Contrarily, a sizable 46.9% of those polled disagreed, citing a lack of local community involvement as a reason for the slowdown in the growth of religious tourism in Lalibela. Key informants, on the other hand, believe that for a few traveler growth to be fruitful, the regional population must remain completely integrated into the development, execution, along with conclusion processes (Rotherham, 2007).

Domination by the Wealthy

52.3 percent of respondents say that the town's tourism business has been hindered by the dominance of a few wealthy individuals. Respondents who disagreed with the premise that 'a few rich and important people solely effect religious tourism development' comprised 47.7% of the sample. According to key informants, tourism requires the full participation of local residents as it is to stay raised in a balanced approach despite the presence of other enterprises (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005).

Unspiritual Business and Activity Expansion

Another threat to the growth of religious tourism in the town was non-spiritual endeavors in addition to companies, such as taverns, prostitution, and other entertainment activities, as noted by key informants and a large percentage of local community respondents (48 percent). There has been an increase in "hazardous" behaviors against Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church (EOTC) religious doctrine, such as prostitution, attending bars, and other immoral nightlife, according to key informants and the researcher (Smith, 1992).

Many of the community's young people were losing their sense of self and becoming careless with their own priceless history as a result of the nightlife's inability to reflect their true cultural values.

Theft and destruction of cultural assets are also possible outcomes of this. For these reasons and others, the anti-religious and agnostic ventures in Lalibela's "holy land" were seen as major obstacles to the growth of religious tourism in the area.

The Inability to Properly Dispose of Garbage

Lalibela town's poor trash disposal and management is a major impediment for religious tourism development, according to 41.5 percent of the respondents. In contrast, 58.5% of those polled believe that the town is clean and free of sanitary problems. In spite of this, the town was littered with dirty, smelly, and disgusting regions. Furthermore, several of these locations were in or near the town's most treasured historical landmarks. According to some of the tourists who were interviewed, poor waste management was a major issue that needed to be addressed. In the town, the absence of community bathrooms, along with the absence of concrete garbage accumulating containers, as well as a absence of involvement by the entire participants in maintaining the town's hygiene were some of the primary waste management issues that were observed (Stark, 2009).

Theft of Historically Significant Objects

Lalibela town's religious tourism growth faces a huge obstacle from both inhabitants and tourists, according to the survey respondents. In contrast, 63.1 percent of respondents stated that religious tourism development in the research area was not hampered by the theft and robbery of religious artefacts. Historic property theft and robbery have decreased in Lalibela since 1997, according to the town's police department. The local community is to be commended for their cooperation and assistance in preserving precious artefacts and other cultural relics (Suleiman and Mohamed, 2011).

The Administration's lack of Interest

Only 35.4 percent of the respondents to the poll cited a lack of government support for religious tourism as a difficulty. the fact that the majority of those surveyed did not view the administration's lack of attention to be an issue.

According to the majority of Lalibela town's primary sources, another important hurdle for religious tourist development was the presence of illegal trafficking in the holy area. However, just 29.2 percent of the overall local community respondents viewed religious tourist development

to be an issue. Illicit trafficking is not a major danger to religious tourist development, according to 70.8 percent of the respondents (Ancel and Ficquet,2015).

Failure to Plan

28.5% of the defendants believe about the absence of a Lalibela city project as well as plan has negatively influenced spiritual travelling. Seventy-one and a half percent of those polled did not link religious tourism to a lack of urban planning. A master plan was in place, but the plan itself was incomplete and difficult for a variety of reasons, according to conversations with the town administration municipality office. In addition, the municipality lacked an LDP (Local Development Plan). This could have a significant impact on the town's growth plans and the system of governance as a whole. As a result, the lack of a town plan could have an adverse effect on the development of religious tourism.

Management of Religious Celebrations is Non-Existent

Less than two-thirds of those polled (21.8%), said that religious festivals were a problem for the growth of religious tourism.

"Those who believe, and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah: for without doubt in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction." (al-Ra'd, 13:28).

However, the majority of respondents did not consider religious festival mismanagement or other issues associated to spiritual events as a concern that impacts spiritual travelling. However, if events are not properly handled, they will undoubtedly have a negative impact on the economy and society in general in the years to come. It would be more expensive to have a religious event because of the delicate state of the industry. As a result, the majority of key informants agreed that adequate administration should be implemented in addition to the development of religious festivals (Hawkins, 2004).

Seasonality

The tourism sector is by its very nature seasonal, with peak periods of high traveler traffic followed by periods of low traveler traffic. There are advantages and disadvantages to doing business in a seasonally dependent industry, which has both low and high seasons. Yet seasonality is only a problem in Lalibela because the country and town were not welcome visitors at their full capacity.

The main informants agreed with Nicolaides that seasonality was a challenge for religious tourism growth in Lalibela town (2016). Major festivals brought in the bulk of the year's tourists, according to reliable sources. As a result, the town was largely deserted for the rest of the year, since it is heavily dependent on tourists.

Prolonged Disputes and Requests

The term "hassling" refers to a persistent or ongoing annoyance of tourists. When it comes to religious tourism growth, hassling was one of the most common complaints made by both tourists and locals. It's common for the local children to solicit travelers for money to travel or study abroad, and while many of these requests are bogus, some are tragically true. Scams and 'rip-offs' abound in the form of petitions. In Lalibela, the issue of hassling is at a critical juncture, and has been for a long time. Scams and rip-offs were seen as usual by the study's participants, but all of the visitors interviewed agreed that hassles should be avoided at all costs. Lalibela's city security and the police administration, on the other hand, are doing everything they can to keep people from harassing each other (Wals, 2012). One of the most disconcerting elements of visiting in poorer nations is the begging tourists encounter in Lalibela. Compounds for the elderly and disabled have been set up by church leaders. Even if the scope of the project has been significantly decreased, the issue of beggars in Lalibela town continues to be a major obstacle to the growth of tourism.

Various other Issues to Consider

Additionally, Lalibela's religious tourism development faces these additional hurdles, according to key informants. Many factors contribute to the bad handling of tourists, overcharging, acculturation and the lack of tourist support centers (Carbone and Costa, 2012).

Sustainable Development through Religious Tourism

Sustainable tourism development satisfies the current demands of tourists and host regions, while also conserving and developing the future potential of the tourism industry. We envision it leading to the management of all our resources in order to meet our basic economic, social and aesthetic demands while also preserving our culture's unique environmental practices, genetic variety and other living-sustaining structures.

Recommendations

The Lalibela area is a popular destination for pilgrims and tourists from around the world because of its religious significance. It is a source of revenue, a source of employment, and a source of infrastructure development. The subjects of this survey likewise agreed that the heritages were in jeopardy and that the community was the best hope of saving them. On the other side, the local community's participation in heritage conservation has been influenced by the bias in benefit-sharing (Choe and O'Regan, 2015). More than any other industry, the local community is crucial to the success of religious tourism. In addition, nearly all of the study area's tourism resources, including religious artefacts, are in the hands of the local population. Tourists also require the assistance of locals in one or more ways as a tourist – host. Tourists' happiness is heavily influenced by their personal relationships with hotel staff. Tourism, on the other hand, is essential to the survival of the impoverished local population. Consequently, the local community should be involved in the planning, decision-making, and benefit-sharing processes of tourist development in order to improve the quality of life for its citizens (Manimekalai and Karthik,2016).

For the sake of boosting community involvement in tourism and promoting its growth, regional administrations should pay more attention to religious tourism and designate curious and well-trained tourism department executives. Furthermore, the local community's capacity in general, as well as its knowledge, financial, and skill capabilities in particular, will be raised through ongoing training and financial assistance. It is expected that the local community would be given the opportunity to influence some of the most important aspects of the tourism industry (Vukonić, 1998). Organization of small and micro tourism companies, especially in giving inputs to hotels and service delivery unions, should be encouraged among youth. Corruption, uncertainty, and domination in the administrative system should be addressed. It is imperative that all tourism players work together, including lodging providers and destination governments; transportation suppliers; guiding unions; community leaders; and others. Furthermore, only benefit-sharing measures that benefit the local community will be implemented. There should be a platform that allows the big income-generating lodging, transportation, destination, and guiding sectors to

contribute to the poor community of the area (pro-poor or people first approach) and/or the development of the place (Kartal and Atlı, 2015).

Conclusion

When it comes to tourism, few African countries can match Ethiopia's in-depth understanding of religion, which dates back to ancient times. In 330 CE, the Orthodox patriarchate of Alexandria introduced Christianity to the country, and in fact, Judaism had already been established there. Islamic law came into effect a few years later, in 615 CE. As a result, the country's whole history and the lives of its people are heavily influenced by these religions. This can be seen in the number of people who gather to celebrate and take part in festivals and other special days. In addition, Ethiopians begin each day with the Islamic call for Solat, which is observed by the Orthodox Christian bell for prayer, demonstrating the nation's devotion to religion. Religions in Ethiopia have a rich endowment of tangible and intangible heritage due to their history being practically same to that of the country. Because of its long history in relations of both tradition and record. Exhibits, animations, and signs should be used to help travelers learn more about the places they are visiting.

As a sacred or religious location, Lalibela's heritage includes both concrete and intangible aspects. Lalibela, on the other hand, has a number of issues that have a significant impact on religious tourism. More non-religious activities and businesses such as illicit trafficking and nightclubs have been allowed to expand in areas where there is little infrastructure or community engagement in decision-making. There is also a lack of decent administration. These and other issues had a direct or indirect impact on the studied area's tourism industry, particularly religious tourism. Tourist and religious tourism development face additional challenges, as well: There is a lack of understanding among the local community and administration, as well as a absence of collaboration among participants in the city's tourism industry. Taking preventative or corrective steps will be necessary if tourism is to be developed and sustained in the long term.

Despite the fact that religious tourism has the potential to transform religious communities like Lalibela, these benefits will not materialize unless effective controls are put in place and enforced. So as issues are, spiritual-established travel may take the lead to the destruction of irreplaceable cultural artefacts as well as environmental contamination and so on. It is imperative that

government officials balance resource enhancement and conservation with management of known risks associated with religious tourism development in their jurisdiction.

Limitations

This research will concentrate on the potential challenges faced by the religious tourism site of Ethiopia, Lalibela. This study is based on secondary data, along with some basis from the primary data.

References:

- Creswell, J. W., & Tashakkori, A. (2007). Developing publishable mixed methods manuscripts. *Journal of Mixed Methods Research, 1*(2), 107-111.
- Ebrahimzadeh, I., Kazemizad, S., & ESKANDARI, S. M. (2011). Strategic planning for tourism development, emphasizing on religious tourism (case study: Qom City).
- Gil, A. R., & Curiel, J. D. (2008). Religious events as special interest tourism. A Spanish experience. *Comité Editorial Director: Agustin Santana Talavera, 6*, 419.
- Archer, J., & Syrratt, G. (2012). *Manual of travel agency practice*. Routledge.
- Finneran, N. (2012). Lalibela in its landscape: archaeological survey at Lalibela, Lasta, Ethiopia, April to May 2009. *Azania: Archaeological Research in Africa, 47*(1), 81-98.
- Takele, Y. S. (2006). Cultural Heritage Management Practices-in the Medieval Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela. *Science, 4*(1), 8-20.
- Nicolaides, A., & Grobler, A. (2017). Spirituality, Wellness tourism and quality of life. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 6*(1), 1-37.
- Nicolaides, A. (2016). Marian tourism: Eastern orthodox and roman catholic pilgrimage.
- Norman, A. (2004). Spiritual tourism: Religion and spirituality in Contemporary travel.
- Petroman, I., CORNELIA, P., Buzatu, C., DIANA, M., Dumitrescu, A., Statie, C., & Rus, I. (2011). A religious and ethnic tourism profile of Europe. *Scientific Papers Animal Science and Biotechnologies, 44*(2), 490-493.

- Tomaselli, K. G. (2012). The researcher's guide to Ethiopia: what travel guides don't tell you. *Critical Arts*, 26(3), 237-253.
- Singh, V. (2013, June). Work, performance, and the social ethic of global capitalism: Understanding religious practice in contemporary India. In *Sociological Forum* (Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 283-307).
- Phukan, H., Rahman, Z., & Devdutt, P. (2012). Emergence of spiritual tourism in India. *International Journal of Marketing and Technology*, 2(4), 300.
- Raj, R., & Morpeth, N. D. (2007). Introduction: establishing linkages between religious travel and tourism. *Religious tourism and pilgrimage festivals management: an international perspective*, 1-14.
- Raj, R., & Griffin, K. A. (Eds.). (2015). *Religious tourism and pilgrimage management: An international perspective*. Cabi.
- Rinschede, G. (1992). Forms of religious tourism. *Annals of tourism Research*, 19(1), 51-67.
- Rotherham, I. D. (2007). Sustaining tourism infrastructures for religious tourists and pilgrims within the UK. *Religious tourism and pilgrimage festivals management: An international perspective*, 64-77.
- Sharpley, R., & Sundaram, P. (2005). Tourism: A sacred journey? The case of ashram tourism, India. *International journal of tourism research*, 7(3), 161-171.
- Smith, V. L. (1992). The quest in guest. *Annals of tourism research*, 19(1), 1-17.
- Stark, D. J. (2009). Religious Tourism in Roman Greece.
- Suleiman, J. S. H., & Mohamed, B. (2011). Factors impact on religious tourism market: The case of the Palestinian territories. *International Journal of Business and Management*, 6(7), 254.
- Ancel, S., & Ficquet, É. (2015). The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC) and the challenges of modernity. *Understanding contemporary Ethiopia: monarchy, revolution and the legacy of Meles Zenawi*, 63-92.

Hawkins*, D. E. (2004). Sustainable tourism competitiveness clusters: application to World Heritage sites network development in Indonesia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 9(3), 293-307.

Wals, A. E. (2012). *Shaping the education of tomorrow: 2012 full-length report on the UN decade of education for sustainable development*. Unesco.

Carbone, F., Oosterbeek, L., & Costa, C. (2012). The educational and awareness purposes of the Paideia approach for heritage management. *Natural hazards and earth system sciences*, 12(6), 1983-1986.

Choe, J. Y., & O'Regan, M. (2015). Religious Tourism Experiences in South East Asia.

Manimekalai, D., & Karthik, V. (2016). *Journal of Recent Research and Applied Studies*.

Vukonić, B. (1998). Religious tourism: economic value or an empty box?. *Zagreb International Review of Economics & Business*, 1(1), 83-94.

Kartal, B., Tepeci, M., & Atlı, H. (2015). Examining the religious tourism potential of Manisa, Turkey with a marketing perspective. *Tourism Review*.