



The Potential and Challenges of New Tourism Product Development and Promotional Practices of Kilde- Awlaelo Woreda Rock Hewn Churches, Tigray, Ethiopia

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Abstract

New tourism product development is the process by which the resources of a destination are shaped to meet the requirements of international and domestic customers. Ethiopia's tourism destination awareness is very low and destination image is very poor until today. The purpose of this study was to explore the potential of new tourism product development and promotional practices for the Rock Hewn Churches in Kilde- Awlaelo District, Tigray, Ethiopia. To achieve the research objective of the study, a qualitative research approach was employed and the data was collected through personal observations, photographing, semi-structured interviews and documented arts information. The researchers found nine historically endowed rock hewn churches namely: Abraha we Atsbaha, Debre Tsion Abune Abraham, Debre Mear Abune Gebre Meskel, Medhane Alem AdiKesho, Michael Milihai Zengi, Michael Minda'e, Michael Abi-Adi, Yaid Kidanemhired and Yohannes Maequdi. The findings of the study indicated the rock-hewn churches of the Wereda have unique architectural features. The most finely carved cross-section and near-circular free-standing pillars are common elements of the churches. In tourism, such uniqueness plays a great role in boosting the potential of destinations to attract visitors, and it is also an important basic characteristic for visitor attractions. These selected rock hewn churches are potentially very good tourism products at the current time and can entice potential tourists. However it is critical to make both domestic and foreign tourists aware of the rock hewn churches and their immense heritage value.

Keywords: New tourism product, heritage sites, promotional practices, rock-hewn Churches, Kilde- Awlaelo District,

Introduction

Tourism marketing is an integral component of destination growth and development. While product development is associated with the creation of attractions or experiences, marketing plays a key role in communicating the value and appeal of the products to would-be consumers. Marketing is also an essential tool for enhancing destination competitiveness (Ministry of Culture and Tourism (MOCT), 2015). New tourism product development is the process by which the resources of a destination are shaped to meet the requirements of both international and domestic customers alike. This covers



everything from manmade facilities or attractions to activities requiring varying levels of physical input, and organized events such as festivals and conferences (Geremew, Alemayehu & Meskele, 2017).

Political choices, in particular, must reconcile immediate returns and longer-term benefits, which requires a clear and well-defined vision. Sustainable tourism development thus represents a very complex task. A comprehensive communication strategy, which should identify how information, awareness creation, advocacy, network building, conflict mitigation, and communication platforms will be supported, is essential for any successful sustainable tourism development activity (Grenna, Hilbrune, Santi, Scuppa & Vereczi, 2006). Iamsoo, Niroomand & Rafsanjani, (2013) indicated that in order to remain competitive in the tourism marketing, organizations in both public and private sectors should know their customers and be aware of their demands. They should also be able to make their potential customers aware of their products and services, and convince them and suggest to them that they benefit if they turn into real customers, namely to travel to the same location and desired destination that has been prepared with the purpose of travelers in mind. Marketing in the tourism industry is related to these and other issues.

Governments in Africa are showing increasing interest to tourism as a source of growth and diversification. Recent work indicates that tourism in Africa can, in the right circumstances, contribute effectively to economic development (Nurhssen, 2016). Many African countries are known for their natural attractions like national parks, sanctuaries and mountainous areas. Even though Ethiopia has many natural attractions, the country is not benefiting from these sites; the competition in the natural segment of the market is high from the neighboring and other more remote African countries. Nature based tourism is well developed and promoted in the other countries tourism markets, and more so than in the case of Ethiopia, i.e. Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa are well developed tourism destinations (Tafesse, 2016).

Ethiopia, located on the Horn of Africa, and is the only African nation which has never been colonized. The country has glorious tourist attractions and it is the first in Africa to have twelve world heritage sites inscribed by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO] (Ministry of Culture & Tourism - hereafter, MoCT, 2015 & <http://www.deepethiopian.com/>) cited by Getahun & Dhaliwal, 2017). There are archeological, cultural, historical and natural grounds that make Ethiopia unique (Getahun & Dhaliwal, 2017). Ethiopia is endowed with rich cultural and abundant natural resources. It is a land of remarkable features. In terms of history, Ethiopia is a very old country, with over 3,000 years of rich history.

The Axumite Kingdom was a powerful realm during the early Christian era, and a great civilization. Great religious civilizations in Lalibela expressed great faith and architectural skills and these also flourished during the ancient period. In modern societies, tourism development in all economic, social and cultural dimensions has interested public and private planners in all national, regional and international areas. All countries came to the conclusion that tourism makes substantial foreign exchange earnings to the economy of a country MOCT (2016, as cited in Gebreeyesus, 2017). Iamsoo et al, (2013) also indicated a society should compete to attract the incoming travelers, in the process of marketing, tourism organizations in their marketing processes should pay special attention to the specific cultural groups, and emphasize the attractiveness of the products they offer.

Tigray region is one of the nine regions of Ethiopia. Its capital city is Mekelle, which is 783 kilometer far from Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. The researchers agree that both manmade and natural attraction sites are important, thus, they focused on rock hewn churches built through human efforts as well as naturally occurring ones from one rock or semi-monotonic churches. The attention given to this industry is increasing, even though this is not enough. That is why the researchers focused on the potential and challenges of new tourism product development and the promotional campaigns



of amazing rock hewn churches of woreda Kilde Awlialo, which is 15km from Mekelle, the capital city of Tigray National Regional State.

Research Problem

Tourism is the mainstay of the economy for many small developing countries. Being highly labor intensive, this sector provides vital employment for native people. Tourism has become a popular global leisure activity (Dube, 2012). However, Getahun & Dhaliwal (2017) indicated that Ethiopia's tourism destination awareness is very low and destination image is very poor until today. Stăncioiu, Botoș, Ozan, Pârgaru & Arsene (2013) described the communication of the elements of a tourism product to the target public as representing a difficult task (mainly because of its complexity). Thus, based on a complex buying decision process, it is necessary that the elements of the tourism product are communicated through a large number of promotional instruments, and at the same time, being relevant for the consumers with which they should have contact from the moment they wish to visit a destination until the end of the consuming act (including purchasing souvenirs, promotional objects, which may act as a stimulus for repeating the touristic experience), which is the focus of this study.

Most researchers focus on the most known historical and cultural destination sites; Axum, Lalibela, Gondar, Semien mountains and Bahridar. They also assessed the marketing strategies and practices in these destination sites. Until now, Tigray is well known for its Axum monuments and St. Marry Zion churches and Negash mosque, but there are numerous tourists' attractions like rock hewn churches. The authors focused on the two Ps of marketing mixes; tourism product and promotion aspects because they argue that they are the two hardest marketing elements to set tourism development strategies and budgetary decisions on course. they also argue that to explore new tourism sites all public and private organizations and individuals should give higher priority the two P elements of marketing mix.

Ethiopia possesses a remarkable range of existing and potential tourism products and assets. To realize their market and economic potential, these require to be developed in a holistic fashion in order to create a total, compelling visitor experience. Ethiopia has a great potential to develop diversified range of cultural heritage based tourism products including historical trail, educational tour, paleo-anthropological and archaeological routes (paleo tourism), religious tourism among other events and festivals. Rock hewn churches are also one of these assets. Ethiopia has more than 150 rock hewn churches situated at different sites (MOCT, 2015). Although this result is encouraging, no new tourism product creation and making public awareness towards the Rock Hewn churches has been conducted until now. Even Tafesse, (2016) listed Rock hewn churches of Tigray under his title of 'other Attractions along the historic route' but not in any detail. He noted that in Ethiopia, the historic route is the area which covers most of the northern part of Ethiopia. MOCT, (2015) also found that in the case of Ethiopia, unlike in other traditional economic sectors such as agriculture where there has been significant investment in research to inform the development of the sector. The role of research in the development of the country's tourism sector has not been hitherto developed. The eastern zone of Tigray itself has many tourist attraction sites. That is why the researchers tried to investigate the specific Woreda Rock Hewn churches which are located within this zone. These potential tourist attractions/ sites have not been receiving any well strategized promotional tools/campaigns to announce their tourism value to potential tourists.

Today tourists have become more demanding, requesting high-quality products and value for their money and perhaps more importantly, value for time. This reflects people's shortage of time. Having been exposed to several tourism products and destinations, experienced, sophisticated, demanding



travelers rely heavily on electronic media to obtain information about destinations, as well as to be able to communicate their needs and wishes to suppliers rapidly (Bethapudi, 2013). However, this is very poorly performed in the region in question.

The researchers argue that promotion is also another heritage management aspect which plays a great role in supporting conservation efforts and increases tourist flows to a site. The promotion of cultural heritage should be a combined effort of the public, scholars, governmental and non-governmental organizations and the community. It is collective efforts of different organization to bring about better perceptions for international and domestic tourists. Thus, disseminating written reports about the destination sites enables the community living around the churches and the general public demands to visit the heritages sites.

Promotion on webs and through electronic media is a very important promotion means, however, some of the churches of the Wereda tried to promote themselves on a few WebPages of tour and travel agencies. Ethiopia is rich in both natural and cultural tourism resources and conversely, it's economic, socio-cultural and environmental role is insignificant due to problems mainly related to the lack of infrastructural development and poor marketing of destinations. In order to make tourism development more sustainable, it is important to look into the problems associated with promoting and marketing of the tourist destinations. There is lack of studies concerning challenges in promoting tourist destinations of Ethiopia. Among other challenges mentioned, lack of local tour operators, lack of public awareness, lack of attention from the stakeholders including the government, limited distribution of promotional materials, and absence of tourist information center, tourist route map, tourist guide book, websites and documentary film were some of the major concerns (Bayih & Tola, 2017). The promotion through printed the use of medias such as magazines, newspapers, and brochures is also very poor.

Objective of the Study

General Objective

The general objective of this study was to explore the potential and challenges of new tourism product development and promotional practices of Tigray Region with special reference to Rock Hewn Churches in Kilte- Awlaelo woreda. The Specific objectives were;

- To document the rock-hewn churches found in Kilte- Awlaelo woreda, as possible potential tourists destination sites of Tigray, Ethiopia.
- To assess the potential heritage value/ tourists attraction places in the Kilte- Awlaelo woreda.
- To assess the promotional practices used to promote the rock-hewn churches.
- To recommend possible promotional campaigns to enhance the potential visitors awareness of the heritage sites.

Review of Related Literature

New Tourism Product Development and Promotional Practices

Tourism marketing is a management process including forecasting and meeting current and future needs of tourists (Iamsoo et al., 2013). According to Hailemariam Deslalegn, the Prime Minister of Ethiopia, Ethiopia is a country with untapped tourism potential. Tourism is a sector that holds a bright promise for the country of Ethiopia (MOCT, 2015). However, nothing is without challenges. Kidane and Berhe (2017) suggested that the socio economic impact assessment is also useful to identify the costs and benefits of tourism, which leads one to formulate strategies in order to reduce the costs and



maximize the benefits of tourism. They also recommended developing pro-poor and community-based tourism as a key approach to minimize the negative impact and maximize the positive multi-dimensional impact of tourism. That is why many studies have been conducted and findings disseminated, and discussions have been held to attract tourists to cover the high infrastructure and related costs. Thus, promotional campaigns can play a role to develop new products. Electronic devices and the Internet used in the distribution chain of tourism including: airlines, hospitality, tour operators, and travel agencies have created a dramatic change in the industry. The entrance of e-commerce is an undeniable necessity and countries are forced to use this technology in their tourism industry (Iamsou et al., 2013).

Identifying information sources influential to travel decisions helps tourism planners strategically utilize resources to improve marketing efforts and create a strong destination image (Assante, Sukalakamala, Wen & Knudson, n.d.). They also noted that as far as destination images are concerned this information comes from sources such as brochures, the opinions of others (i.e., word of mouth); advertising, media reporting in the form of newspaper, magazines and television reporting, popular culture through literature, movies and the Internet. The use of media as a form of tourism advertising has been a popular topic of interest in recent years. Tourism can be generated by books, movies, TV shows and every level of cultural and sporting activity. The media greatly impacts the image a person forms about a destination. Consumers are sometimes able to make a better formed opinion by viewing or reading information for reasons other than that which are strictly promotional. Film tourism is perhaps the most well-known and influential type of tourism media. It has gained much attention in the last few years.

The findings of one local study by Geremew et al. (2017) indicated that radio is too expensive nowadays and it yields very small results. Newspaper advertisements do not reap the benefits the sector would like, compared to the cost of running the advertising. Much of the advertisement campaigns have failed and they have tried many different marketing approaches, but they have never really monitored their efforts for success. Advertising, personal selling, public relation/ publicity and internet promotion are promotional tools used to promote tourism products and services. Within promotion, Electronic media has playing a great role in the efforts to make heritage sites known to the general public, which in turn creates a platform for the overall heritage management to work. It provides a good way for people to share their experiences within a short time and in very easy way. Except for a few of the heritage rock churches, most of them are not accessible to tourists.

Potentials and Challenges of Tourism Industry

With increasing globalization and disposable income, tourism has, over the last few decades become one of the largest and fastest growing industries (Iamsou et al., 2013). However, in many developing countries, tourism linkages remain weak and underexploited. Many developing countries consider tourism to be important for economic progress and poverty reduction. However, it is also clear that the link between tourism and economic growth and poverty reduction is not automatic. It very much depends on whether tourism generates employment opportunities, creates linkages – in particular with agriculture and service-providing sectors – and stimulates the development of basic infrastructure through the construction of roads, port and airport facilities and the provision of financial services from which the economy as a whole can benefit (United Nations Conference, 2013).

The challenge of capturing and maintaining travel markets constantly faces Tourism stakeholders. Destination marketers are confronted with an even more complex additional challenge: the necessity to develop a destination campaign that is alive and offers added value to travel consumers (Assante, n.d.). The well-being of the local people was in some cases affected by insufficient projects and a lack of marketing their products effectively. Environmental conservation was also affected by ex-poachers



in the parks who used to kill animals in the parks, and destroy fauna and flora by fire for their personal benefit. Such problems can be mitigated by designing the appropriate marketing strategies such as good product strategy, price strategy, promotion strategy, place (distribution) strategy, the people component strategy. The service delivery process strategy and managing physical evidence and design strategy in the pursuit of providing better services to tourists and meeting or sometimes exceeding their expectations is equally vexing but important nonetheless (Ndahimana, Musonera & Weber, 2013).

Within the Ethiopian context, despite the immense opportunities that exist in the country in terms of both cultural and natural resources for tourism development, the country continues to lag behind other economies in the region in terms of tourism growth and development. This could be attributed to several challenges the country's tourism industry faces including, the narrow range of extant tourism products, lack of effective marketing strategies, human resource capacity dearth, lack of research to inform tourism growth and development, weak institutional and legislative frameworks, industry quality and standards issues, insufficient tourism and support infrastructure, and, uncoordinated and fragmented tourism planning and development both at the national and regional levels (MOCT, 2015). Marketing is getting higher priority to exploit tourism resources, and product development and promotion are very significant issues in particular. Making the product available and beautiful cannot be enough though. The Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau should define and develop different promotional strategies for the domestic and foreign tourist markets so as to create awareness of these important and unique heritage rock hewn churches.

Material and methodology

Description of the study area

Tigray National Regional State is one of the nine regions of Ethiopia, which has a full range of tourist attractions and destinations sites including monuments, beautiful churches, cultural foods, traditional holidays and handicraft arts. The study was conducted at Kiltse- Awlaelo district rock hewn churches during January-September 2017. The researchers selected this specific area because it represents 90% of the rock hewn churches of Tigray region. According to a MOCT report (2016) as cited in (Gebreyesus, 2017) Ethiopia is home of nine United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Sites and 12 world literary and manuscript heritage artefacts. Tourism in Ethiopia is becoming an attractive industry which can generate higher revenues using fewer resources. Ethiopia is known for its historical, cultural and social attractions and these must be promoted meaningfully.

Research Design

In this study, a qualitative type of study was employed. Geremew et al., (2017) argued that qualitative research is viewed as being a qualitative research report because qualitative research is typically rich with detail and insights into participants' experiences of the world. Both primary and secondary data were used to achieve the research objectives and to confirm the accuracy of the report. The primary data was collected through direct observation, photographing, and interviewing key informants. The secondary data that was utilized also comprised of reports and documents from government bodies and different published and unpublished documents, books and articles, theses and reliable web articles. For a deep understanding of the study issue, related written materials such as books, articles, journals, etc., and the primary data gathered in the field work were analyzed.

To achieve the research objective of this study, both exploratory and descriptive research designs were utilized to assess and describe the promotional practices towards rock hewn churches. Exploratory research was conducted to identify the potential destination sites and Assante et al., (n.d.)



noted information sources that influenced travelers' decisions to visit the country. More specifically, the researchers observed in person, with the help of a camera/ photographing and unstructured interviews which were held with the assigned history and guidance experts from various departments. During the qualitative study, nine potential tourists attraction sites/ rock hewn churches were found. The Individual churches are described below in terms of their locations and overall structure.

Sampling Techniques

For this study, a purposive sampling technique was employed. Purposive sampling is common in qualitative research. According to Stăncioiu et al., (2013) and Geremew et al., (2017) the samples of informants were drawn within the local community and other concerned bodies (i.e. tourism and culture office workers of the Wereda based on the criteria of age, experiences and willingness to be interviewed. Interview questions were prepared and the informants were selected from the community and from the Culture and Tourism Office of the Wereda. From the nineteen localities of the Wereda, three localities were selected where the rock-hewn churches of the Wereda were located. Debre Tsion, Abraha We Atsbaha, and Negash localities have five, two and two selected churches respectively.

Data collection tools

Documented materials were read to understand the manmade and natural tourists sites in Tigray region and to determine their basic value and the feasibility of the study and then the researchers interviewed history experts to get to know the factual information. The qualitative data was collected through personal observations, photographing, interviewing and documentary analysis using content analysis to get manageable themes for the study.

Major Findings: Demographic Information of the Respondents

Semi-structured interview were conducted with ten informants who had detailed information on the selected rock hewn churches. The respondents ages were between the intervals of 50-70 years. They were priests, history and expert guides but most (85%) were priests and church administrators whereas 15% were expert guides.

The Potential Tourist Destination Sites of Kilte- Awlaelo Woreda

The researchers found nine wonderful eye-catching and historically endowed rock hewn churches namely: Abraha we Atsbaha, Debre Tsion Abune Abraham, Debre Mear Abune Gebre Meskel, Medhane Alem AdiKesho, Michael Milihai Zengi, Michael Minda'e, Michael Abi-Adi, Yaid Kidanemhired and Yohaness Maequdi. These nine rock-hewn churches are registered under the Culture and Tourism Office of Wukro Town and discovered in this study below. More specifically:

Table 1. Name, locality and distance of the rock-hewn churches in Kilte Awlaelo Wereda

No	Name of the church	Locality	Distance from Wukro Town (Kms)
1	Abraha We Atsbaha	Abraha We Atsbaha	15 Gravel
2	Debre Tsion Abune Abraham	Debre Tsion	31 Gravel
3	Debre Mear Abune G/meskel	Debre Tsion	33 Gravel
4	Medhane Alem AdiKesho	Negash	33 Asphalt +Rural road
5	Michael Milihai Zengi	Negash	28 Asphalt +Rural road
6	Michael Minda'e	Abraha We Atsbaha	18 Gravel
7	Michael Abi-Adi	Debre Tsion	24 Gravel
8	Yaid Kidanemhired	Debre Tsion	31 Gravel
9	Yohaness Maequdi	Debre Tsion	31 Gravel

(Source; Wukro Town Culture and Tourism Office, 2015)



The churches are distributed across a wide area and in difficult geographical terrains. Most of the churches are built on hills, escarpments and mountains. Churches except for Yaid Kidanemhret, the remaining rock-hewn church of Abune Abraham, Michael Abi-Adi, Yohaness Maequdi, and Debre Mear Abune Gebre meskel are examples of churches located on remote and inaccessible mountains. Due to this, they are not well known and poorly visited churches. While the rock-hewn churches of Abraha We Atsbaha and Michael Minda'e, and Michael Milihai Zengi and Medhane Alem AdiKesho are the churches which are relatively accessible and frequently visited by domestic and foreign visitors alike.

Two of the nine sites are discussed below for reader edification.

1. Abraha we Atsbaha

This semi-monolithic rock-hewn church is located 15 kilometres to the west of Wukro (Wereda's town), in Abraha We Atsbaha Kebele. The church is located at an elevation of 2035masl (Gedlu, Girmay, Tadele & Takele, 2015). It is the most well-known and famous of all the rock-hewn churches of the region. The church was carved into a thick succession of Adigrat Sandstone (Asrat, Demissie & Mogessie, 2008). This church offers the occasion for the most important pilgrimage in Tigray, apart from the Cathedral Church of Axum Tsion. The church is said to have been carved in the 4th century by the twin Axumite kings who are traditionally known as Abraha We Atsbaha (they introduced Christianity to Ethiopia) (Lepage, & Mercier, 2005: 72).

The exterior roof of the church is conserved with flat stone and cement in order to protect it from the seeping of water into the interior. The church's back wall, roof, and floor are attached to the rock. Both side walls are partly carved from the outside. According to the informants;

"The church was partly destroyed and burnt by the Agaw ruler Yodit Gudit during 9th or 10th century A.D. When Queen Gudit arrived at that place she ordered her savants to fill the church with a dug of animals and woods. But, later the front facade of the church said to have been constructed by Italians during their occupation period".

The church has three doors and seven windows with frames that are also evident in many other rock-hewn churches. The southern and northern doors (the entrance for males and females respectively) and windows, have wooden frames and are adorned with monkey heads. The church has fourteen free-standing pillars. Eight of the pillars are cruciform shaped with bracket capitals supporting the arches, while the other six are also near-circular shaped pillars with brackets supporting the arches and lintels.

The church (Abraha We Atsbaha) has three sections. These are kine Mahilet (chanting place), Kidist (Holly), and mekdes (sanctuary or Temple). Kine Mahilet (chanting place) of the church is very richly decorated with religious paintings of the 19th century. The Holy or central part of the church is also partially decorated with paintings and it has a barrel-vault ceiling decorated with friezes which cover all parts of the nave and are worked into rectangular blind windows with monkey heads. This part also has a flat ceiling decorated with a big carved cross and geometric patterns in front of the holy sanctuary. There are three cross-section with bracket capital pillars which support the ceilings carved beams which rise from south to north part in the central area. The inner part of the church where the Ark of the Covenant resides, the so called Holy of Holies, is the most sacred area and only priests can access it. This part is separated from the Holy area by a stone wall which is decorated with different geometric designs and paintings and it also has three cruciform shaped pillars with bracket capitals. Internally, the church has three temples, the temple of the Archangel Michael at the right, the temple of Mary, Mother of God at the center, and the temple of the Archangel Gabriel on the left side. According to the information obtained from the local elders;



“There are about 350 rock-hewn tombs in and around the fence of the church. The tombs are said to be have been the same age of the church. These are used for burial still now. The sizes of the tombs are not uniform. The tomb of Abraha We Atsbaha found at the temple of Gabriel in the church”.

2. Debre Tsion Abune Abraham

The Debre Tsion Abune Abraham church is located in Kilte Awlaelo Wereda Debre Tsion locality at a distance of 31 Kilometres to the south-west of Wukro Town. It is 4 kilometres from the main road of Wukro- Hawzen which is accessible by vehicle and a 45 minutes hike. It is located at an elevation of 2280masl (Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2015). According to the informants, “this church is believed to have been built by the sons of Abune Abraham (Sibuh Amlak and Gebre Mariam) in the 14th century during the reign of Emperor Amde Tsion”.

The exterior roof of the church has recently been conserved with stone and cement by the Wukro Culture and Tourism Office. In the southern part of the church, there is one dome shaped room which is said to be the prayer place of Abune Abraham (a holy monk from Barka area, Atsbi Wenberta Wereda, eastern Zone). This room is finely decorated with carved paintings of the Apostles, angels, Abune Abraham holding a processional cross and the Ever Virgin Mary, and at the top of the dome there is a carved cross. This church has an ambulatory or outer hallway, that makes the three side walls (south, west, and north) of the church distinct from the main rock. It has seven windows which are worked into rectangular shapes but without frames, and they are filled with lattices and rubble.

The church also has three doors made of iron with wooden frames and monkey heads which are very common in rock churches of the Wereda. The main door in the middle, leads to the chanting place (entrance of priests and Men), the right door (entrance of women), and the left side door the entrance to the prayer room of Abune Abraham and to the ambulatory or outer hallway. The main door and the door entrance to the ambulatory also have wooden frames and monkey heads. The church has six very tall columns with cruciform shapes and branch at the tops into four arches with bracket capitals supporting a curved ceiling.

The internal part of the church is beautifully decorated with frescoes, carved crosses, friezes, and geometric designs. Internally, the church has the standard three divisions, the chanting place, the holy, and holy of holies. Each part is separated by two cross-sectional arch shaped pillars which are ornately decorated with paintings and carved crosses. The walls of the church are beautifully ornamented by paintings of Angels, local saints, and they too have widows with monkey head frames. There are also amazing figures of the Apostles and saints painted in curved frames. The ceiling has cupolas decorated with painted and carved crosses, paintings of saints, different geometric designs, and decorated curved beams.

This church also has three temples, the temple of Archangel Gabriel at the left, the temple of Saint Mary at the middle, and the temple of Archangel Michael at the right side. The Saint Mary temple is decorated with a large carved cross. This church has an Axumite period timber frame with horizontal layers and monkey heads carved into round shapes in the exterior front cliff of the church. A copy of an Axumite timber frame is sketched into the exterior face of the cliff, which is unusual in Tigray and this bears witness to the influence of the art of the Lasta region (Lepage, and Mercier, 2005). It indicates that the builders tried to decorate the exterior part of the church. This church also includes a range of different movable heritages like, a hand cross, a bed, and walking stick of Abune Abraham. There ae also various parchment books and a large ceremonial fan with a wooden framework in the church.



Promotional Practice of the Rock Hewn Churches

Promotion is also one of the marketing mixes which plays a great role in supporting conservation efforts and increases tourist flows to a site. Written reports on the state of heritage are used to disseminate information which enables the community living around the churches and the general public to better understand the heritage. On the other hand, like any other heritage management activities, promotion of cultural heritage should be the combined effort of the public, scholars, governmental and non-governmental organizations and the community. It is collective efforts of different organization and the public which ultimately bring about the better promotion of the heritage sites.

One expert who is a guide stated:

“We are conserving the rock hewn churches in simple ways but other professional studies were not conducted. There is less attention from the responsible bodies and NGOs”. “We are using radio advertising using local language and personally guiding service for both potential and current tourists respectively. Other promotional tools are not practiced and implemented due to lack of promotional budget”. Radio is often used in Amharic language which is limited to only domestic tourists. Personal selling such as guiding experts are recruited and placed. Electronic media is a great improvement in the efforts to make heritages known to the general public which in turn create platform for the overall heritage management works. It provided good way for people to share their experiences within short time and in very easy way. However, Except few rock churches of the Wereda which tried to promote on few WebPages of tour and travel agencies, most of them are not accessible to tourists. Promotion through electronic media, webs and printed Medias like magazine, newspaper, and brochure are also very important but very poor”.

The Potentials and Challenges of Rock Hewn Churches of Kilde Awlaelo Wereda

We appreciated the above nine rock hewn churches for their special and wonderful archaeological features. According to ETO (2015) as cited in Getahun & Dhaliwal (2017) numerous challenges were attributed to the low performance of the tourism sector in the country. Among other things, in Ethiopia, for a long period of time, there were no clear policies and strategies that would show the direction for the cooperation and coordination that should exist amongst various tourism stakeholders. As a result, it has not been possible for the country to obtain adequate returns from the sector, and the sector's growth has remained less coordinated and underdeveloped. Most the churches are endangered due to natural causes. The exterior roof of the churches exposed to rainfall and the rocks become cracked with water seeping into the internal part of the churches is problematic. The architectural features and engineering skills might be in a very early period context so that the excavation of later refined rock-hewn monolithic churches of Ethiopia is favoured. Even though some conservation activities carried out by the local community and the Culture and Tourism Office of Wukro Town, is not nearly enough as the churches need immediate conservation and restoration works such as those conducted at the church at Debre Mear Abune Gebre Meskel. But, these precious heritage sites are not well preserved and protected due to poor resources handling and poor heritage management systems. However, currently the country's structural and infrastructural reforms and development plans are paving the way for the prosperity of the country and this includes getting a good return from tourist destination sites.

Nurhssen (2016) also noted tourism is an ever expanding service industry with latent vast growth potential and has, therefore, become one of the largest and dynamically developing sectors of nations. Ethiopia's potential to earn foreign currency for the host community, its high growth and development rates, infrastructure development, the introduction of new management and educational experience, have made this industry greatly desirable for all stakeholders. The outcome of increasing tourism has been found to be a critical and crucial catalyst in accelerating the rate of socio-economic development. These selected rock-hewn churches can also be potentiall amazing places and attraction sites for domestic as well as foreign tourists.



To sum up, there are a number of challenges facing tourism such as inter alia, a difference in languages, differences in religion such as for example, Christians allowed and Muslim tourists being prohibited, lack of effective road infrastructure, lack of internet access and poor website creation, making the pictures of sites available and accessible and uploading them efficiently, and a poorly designed administration system, are some of the current challenges the rock hewn churches of the Woreda are facing.

Conclusion

The focus of the study was the two Ps of marketing mixes i.e. tourism product and promotion aspects of marketing with special reference to rock-hewn churches of the Kilde Awlaelo Wereda. The researchers explored qualitatively and described findings using procedural means. The study can offer an insight into potential tourists. The rock-hewn churches of the Wereda have unique and common architectural features. The most finely carved cross-section and near-circular free-standing pillars are common elements of the churches. In tourism, such uniqueness plays a great role in boosting the potential of destinations to attract visitors and they are also the basic characteristic of visitor attractions. Uniqueness is the desired edge that sets an attraction in a given destination apart from the competition somewhere else (Tafesse, 2016). The rock hewn churches of the Wereda are admired for their unique architectural elements. The monkey heads which features in the doors and windows, pillars, pilasters, and cupolas are clear features and examples of what is useful to refresh tourists' minds. In addition to the architectural elements, the churches are endowed with tangible and intangible heritage which provides a diversified experience for tourists. Besides the church buildings and architectural values, the other heritage aspects in the churches provide a wealth of information on the cultural, political, socio-economic and religious history of the area. Gebreeyesus (2017) asserts that using interactive marketing methods to promote such unique attributes gives the suppliers and marketers the capability of being aware of the attitudes of the tourists.

Knowledge of attitudes and the internal desires of the tourists provides a lot of help in offering personalized products and designing of innovative products that will meet the needs of the tourists. In Ethiopia, the responsible bodies are playing their role in documenting and conserving the above rock hewn churches and creating greater awareness for the public, especially domestic tourists. Thus, these selected rock hewn churches have huge potential as tourism products and can satisfy potential tourists needs and wants. Making the product available and beautiful cannot be enough though; Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau should define and develop different promotional strategies for the domestic and then foreign tourists, so as to make the public aware of these rock hewn churches. Both online and offline means of communication have their role to play in heritage tourism industry development.

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