



The role of Religious Tourism for Sustainable Tourism Development: the case of Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Monastery, Ethiopia

Dagnachew Nega
Head of Tourism and Hotel Management Department
Debre Tabor University, Ethiopia
Contact E-mail: Dagnetour36@gmail.com

Abstract

Religion for Ethiopia is the basis of everything. It is known that in Ethiopia, religious tourism is one of the most important types of tourism, but we can confidently say that nothing has been done to support it. Though the country is endowed with a variety of religious tourism activities and treasures going back centuries, the role of religious tourism has not been identified and properly utilized in a professional way for sustainable tourism development to be effective. Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Monastery is one of the most outstanding sites where many religious travelers are going and religious tourism activities are held. Thus, this study has as its objective the assessing of the roles of religious tourism for sustainable tourism development using the case of Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Monastery. To study this, a descriptive methodology design was employed. Both primary and secondary sources were employed. A mixed research approach was conducted. Data instruments such as interviews, focus group discussions, field observation, questionnaires and document analysis were undertaken. A total of 235 respondents were selected through purposive and convenience sampling techniques. After this, content analysis was undertaken. Findings revealed that the Monastery has an economic roles, as well as socio-cultural, environmental and spiritual roles. To ensure sustainable tourism at the local and regional levels, all the target stakeholders should be integrated and work together regarding the further examining of the role of religious tourism practices at the monastery.

Keywords: Religious tourism, sustainable tourism, wonkshet, Ethiopia

Introduction

Religion is increasingly significant for tourism and vice versa (Stausberg, 2011). Religious tourism also always creates new jobs in the tourist destinations through restaurants, cafes, hotels and other opportunities for small, medium and micro-enterprises which also promote sustainability (Nicolaidis, 2016). Religious heritage can stimulate a greater understanding in the local history, feeling of pride and patriotism and event for foreign tourists, and heritage can boost care for, and provide a sense of respect and understanding of other cultures (Kasim, 2011). Religious buildings are spaces where tourists can develop their faith and find peace, and it is common to find peace and calm at a monastery (Nicolaidis, 2016; Rinschede, 1992). Because they are located away from urban places monasteries enable tourists to separate from the materialistic world and experience pure religiosity and even have a chance to be away from the noise and pollution of busy cities (Rinschede, 1992). Religious travel is growing fast and becoming a source of money for many tour and travel operators and it is also studied with the many other relevant issues (Kasim, 2011). It can generate revenue in different ways. For instance, money spent by tourists enhances the scale of the local businesses and spending by local government and residents, which in return accelerates economic activities (Farhat et al, 2016).



Religious heritage sites have an infinite value, both inherent and as a source of public education, identity and pride (Nicolaidis, 2016). Their integrity and authenticity must be conserved, so that the roles they represent are available to the exchange of culture in the next generation (Rodosthenous, 2012; UNWTO, 2014). The roles of religious tourism include education and training, events, fairs and expositions, feasts and festivals, healing, purchasing of religious objects, and church growth (Stausberg, 2011). Religious tourism can bring the exchange of cultural accomplishments and pave the brotherhood of peoples. Moreover, peace which is preached by Christianity is established and guaranteed through this contact of tourists or pilgrims from other countries (Rodosthenous, 2012; Nicolaidis, 2016). In the field of religious tourism, tens of thousands of travel agents are now selling tours to the religious market and it will not take much time for the global industry to double or triple in size (Wright, 2008). Religious tourism is one the important engines for improving the economy (Panoraia, 2015; UNWTO, 2007; Rotherham, 2007).. There are many destinations and sites that are by their very nature of great religious, cultural, architectural or historical importance and thus of great curiosity to both domestic and foreign tourists (Nicolaidis, 2016). If there are deficits in marketing communication, poor infrastructure and other areas, this could deter the development of pilgrimage and religious tourism which is an enormous sector and niche market. Changes will invariably arise from the need to meet and exceed the requirements of travelers to holy sites as consumers. Religious pilgrimage tourism is premeditated to meet the need for spirituality arising out of a highly secular global society and it is thus inextricably laden with great personal spiritual and also figurative meanings (Nicolaidis, 2016).

In recent years, the concept of religious tourism has become gradually more widespread, however it is one of the least studied areas in tourism research (Stausberg, 2011; Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Fernandez, et al, 2012). Religious tourism has only recently been recognized as making a noteworthy economic contributions to many nations. Religious tourism is according to some researchers, the least well-known tourism type (Kasim, 2011; Okonkwo, 2015). However, there are many places known by their very nature to be of great religious, cultural, architectural or historical value and not for their religious conversion motives (Nicolaidis, 2016). For instance In Ethiopia, cultural attractions or man-made attractions are not developed well (Kauffmann, 2008). Ethiopia is endowed with a variety of religious practices. For instance, the Christmas religious festival at Lalibela, the Epiphany religious festival at Gondar, the Ashendye festival at Lasta, Lalibela and surrounding areas, the True Cross finding religious festival at Gishen, and others, are among many religious events that the country is proud of still and which still make the country famous (Amhara Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2015). Famous religious sites in Ethiopia have been mostly visited for their historical and archaeological value rather than for their religious values, for instance, Axum and Lalibela are cases in point. Only religious events such as the findings of the True Cross and Epiphany are being promoted for their religious tourism significance (Ermias, 2014).

Currently, Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Gabriel Monastery is becoming the most important sacred place in which religious tourism activities are practiced (Dagnachew, 2018). However though it is one of the favoured religious tourism destinations; no research has been undertaken regarding assessing the roles of religious tourism for sustainable tourism development, especially relating to the monastery. Having huge religious tourism potential and the varied practices that Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Gabriel Monastery is endowed with, is great but a lot remains to be done. The monastery can to stand among the site of the globe that possess great value, but dealing with safeguarding the roles of religious tourism for sustainable tourism development in it and the neighbouring area has been very poor.



Location and religious composition

Following the Blue Nile which decants out of Lake Tana and crosses the Alta Bridge over the Blue Nile in the east of the village of Tis Abay, it is a mere 3 kilometers to the Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Monastery. It is one of the many homes of valuable religious tourism resources and practices which is known to many people. It resides in the *Wof Arigf Tamre Kebele in Dera woreda* (DWCTO, 2015). It is bordered to the South by the Abay River which separates it from the Mirab Gojjam Zone, and on the west by Lake Tana, in the north by Fogera, in the northeast by *Misraq Este*, and in the east by Ento and Mirab Este (DWCTO, 2015).

The topographical nature of the area is spectacular. A varieties of features can be observed in the woreda, for instance rugged mountains, a plateau, plains, hills, rivers, and green and fertile land areas (Hagerie Media and SGZCTO, 2015). Dera woreda is the home of many religious festivals. However the most important religious festivals which are celebrated yearly are December 19 (*Tahisas 11*) the Holy day of *Gelawudiwos*, December 28 (*Tahisas 19*) and July 26 (Hamile, 19) the Holy day of *Wonkshet St. Gabriel* (Hagerie Media and SGZCTO, 2015).There are many religious followers in the district. For instance, there are Muslims, Orthodox, Protestants and others. However, in the woreda, the dominant religion is the Orthodox Tewahdo religion (DWCTO, 2015).

Method and Materials

Research Design and Research Approach

For this particular study, a descriptive design was selected to provide answers to the questions of the particular research problem at the monastery. It was used to obtain information concerning the current status of the phenomena and to describe what exists with respect to variables or conditions in the situation at the monastery (Creswell, 2003). The study employed both mixed research approaches to gather information through different data instruments. According to Creswell (2003), a mixed approach is a research approach involving collecting both quantitative and qualitative data and the core assumption of this form of inquiry is that the combinations of quantitative and qualitative approaches provide a more complete understanding of a research problem than using either approach alone.

Target Populations

The target populations of the study were the domestic tourists of the monastery, the monastery leaders, the Dera Woreda Culture and Tourism experts, South Gondar Zone Culture and tourism experts, South Gondar zone diocese leaders. To take the right respondents from the target populations, a non-probability sampling technique was employed. Ethical aspects were observed throughout this study and no participant was paid or obliged to take part. They could also remove themselves from the study at any time they wished.

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

According to SGZCTO (2018), the maximum length of stay in the monasteries is one to seven days and the average visitors who are visiting these monasteries and its surroundings are estimated to be 50 000 per year. According to the Yamane formula $n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$ Where, n = the sample size required, N = the total population size, e = the level of precision which is = ($\pm 5\%$), where confidence interval is 95% at $p = \pm 5$ and $N=50,000$, $e=0.05$, $n=395$. Under this, the



researcher selected respondents using available sampling methods to get them. Based on the factors of seasonality and fluctuations of the tourists, the researcher used only 210 religious visitors for the purpose of getting data through the questionnaires. Regarding the qualitative approach, there was no attempt to create a sample that is statistically representative of a population. Rather, people or cases were chosen through a purposive sampling method. The cases were selected on the basis of characteristics or experiences and research questions, and will allow the researcher to study the research topic in-depth (Matthews & Ross, 2010). Considering the target population, 8 tourism experts, 10 monastery leaders, 7 South Gondar zone dioceses and 25 other respondents were asked to partake in interviews and focus group discussions. The total number of respondents was 235. To obtain the data, the researcher used both primary sources and secondary sources.

Data Analysis

The collected data was sorted and categorized in accordance to its source and type. Data obtained through observation was described in text with the support of pictures. Data obtained through interview with different key informants was analyzed through explanatory and category methods. Some of the results were then presented in the form of tables, graphs, charts and pictorial devices. The data from the questionnaires (quantitative) were analyzed with the help of version 22 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. Thus, the major findings of the study were presented in the form of descriptive statistical method such as frequency, percentage, standard deviation and average mean. Qualitative data was undertaken through content analysis by interpreting data through tables, graphs and word descriptions.

Result Interpretation and Presentation

Economical Roles of Religious Tourism for Sustainable Tourism Development

Table 1: The mean results of the economical roles

What is your agreement level on the economical roles		S. agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	S. disagree	Mean	total
Create job opportunity	Frequency	104	77	29	-	-	4.3571	210
	Percent	49.5	36.7	13.8	-	-		100
Increase living standard	Frequency	89	102	19	-	-	4.3333	210
	Percent	42.4	48.6	9.0	-	-		100
Increase foreign exchange	Frequency	102	90	18	-	-	4.4000	210
	Percent	48.6	42.9	8.6	-	-		100
Provide infrastructure	Frequency	39	90	59	22	-	3.6952	210
	Percent	18.6	42.9	28.1	10.5	-		100

Source: Author's survey, 2019

Create Job Opportunities

The monastery is developing fast in recent times. Among many roles that the monastery can provide for sustainable tourism development, is the creating of job opportunities for many jobless pilgrimages. The result of the respondents was (M=4.3573 and SD=0.71288). 150 peoples are employed in the monastery (An interview with one of the leaders of the monastery interview on December, 2018). Most of them are pilgrims who want to stay in the monastery to obtain the holy water from a service, for curing themselves from different diseases. So they work on different



tasks in the monastery and they get some small amount of money for staying on longer. The monastery is employing more professionals for constructing different buildings for the sake of religious tourism. For instance churches, a museum, roads, and others.

One of the workers of the monastery stated the following:

I am sick. I am attending the holy water service in the monastery. However I haven't money and foods to stay more here. Thanks to the monastery. I asked, as I need to stay more but I can't. I am employed here and get some money to be here and get cured from my disease.

Increase Foreign Exchange

The monastery is known globally. As depicted from the table 1 (M=4.4000 and SD=0.64296). Lots of foreign tourists are traveling to the monastery during the annual festivals of the monastery. Moreover many tourists who are visiting Tis Abay waterfall, also visit the monastery since it is found only three from the great falls. It has a lot of potential to be further explored. These cases open opportunities for the increase of foreign exchange for the country. As per the World Religious Travel Association information, 18 billion dollars is gained yearly by the religious tourism industry (Tala, 2014). As per the interviews of most of the respondents of the monastery suggest that the flow of foreign tourists to the monastery is growing gradually.

Providing of Infrastructure for the Local Communities

What is your agreement level on The socio-cultural roles?		Somewhat agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Mean	Total
Creates and promotes peace	Frequency	127	70	13	-	-	4.5429	210
	Percent	60.3	33.3	6.2	-	-		100
Preserves cultural heritages	Frequency	151	59	10	-	-	4.6238	210
	Percent	67.1	28.1	4.8	-	-		100
Motivates helping and caring each other	Frequency	153	45	12	-	-	4.6714	210
	Percent	72.9	21.4	5.7	-	-		100
Source of education, identity and pride	Frequency	88	79	43	-	-	4.2143	210
	Percent	41.9	37.6	20.5	-	-		100

The development of the religious tourism in the monastery has a roles regarding the growth of infrastructure in the local communities. The results revealed that (M=3.6952 and SD=0.89254) and since lots of the foreign and domestic tourist are visiting the monastery yearly, it is an opportunity to provide more infrastructure in the nearby the communities.

One of the respondents from the local communities illustrated the following:

We are lucky and thanks to God for re-establishment of the monastery after 500 years back. In the past there was no road coming this way but now there is a road which was constructed through the help of the monastery.



Table 2: The socio-cultural roles of religious tourism
 Source: Author’s survey, 2019

What is your agreement level on The socio-cultural roles		Some what agree	Agree	Neutral	Dis-agree	Somewhat disagree	Mean	Total
Creates and promote peace	Frequency	127	70	13	-	-	4.5429	210
	Percent	60.3	33.3	6.2	-	-		
Preserves conserve cultural heritages	Frequency	151	59	10	-	-	4.6238	210
	Percent	67.1	28.1	4.8	-	-		
Motivates helping and caring each other	Frequency	153	45	12	-	-	4.6714	210
	Percent	72.9	21.4	5.7	-	-		
Source of education identity and pride	Frequency	88	79	43	-	-	4.2143	210
	Percent	41.9	37.6	20.5	-	-		

Increase Living Standard of the Local Communities

During the peak season, more than 50,000 religious tourists travel to the monastery. Around 500 pilgrims are travelling and staying at the monastery daily (DWCTO, 2015). There are the local markets such as Anbesame town market place, Tisa bay town market place, Arb Gebeya town market place to provide goods for them. Religious tourists can get food and any equipment which is needed for staying at the monastery from the market place. Due to the existence of the monastery and its power to attract lots of tourist daily, Tis Abay open air market is available seven days per a week. The study also revealed that (M=4.3333 and SD=0.63648). Religion tourism produces revenue in different ways. For instance, money spent by tourists improves the scale of the local business and spending by local government and residents which in return accelerates the economic activities (Farhat, et al, 2016). Observation proved that there are lots of shops which provide different products for the religious tourists in the local towns.

Socio-Cultural Roles of Religious Tourism for Sustainable Tourism Development

Preaching Peace

Preaching peace is one of the unique features of the monastery. Praying to God for the existence and maintenance of peace for the country of Ethiopia is common practice of the pilgrims during their stay in the monastery over a 24 hour period. The results also showed that fact (M=4.5429 and SD=0.61135). Religious tourists have different ways of life and a variety of languages however they stay in the monastery with peaceful inter-relationship amongst themselves. The government and the various churches should work together in promoting such harmonious practices and this makes religious tourism and tourism in general able to support peace initiatives as prayer helps to provide peace in the diverse regions (Rodosthenous, 2012).

Preserving and Conserving Cultural Heritages

The monastery is the home to much tangible and intangible cultural heritage. The response of the results showed that (M=4.6238 and SD=0.57575).The respondent’s responses have revealed that creating awareness for conserving cultural heritages is one of the day to day instructions of the monastery to the various religious tourists. Religious tourism can also be a powerful instrument for raising awareness regarding the values of conserving national heritage (UNWTO,



2007). Currently, religious tourism is closely connected with holiday and cultural tourism (Rinsched, 1992). Religion is the best instrument to preserve and conserve the cultural aspects of the local communities. Most of the respondents agreed that the existence of the monastery and its development through religious tourism, enables the peoples to conserve and give greater value to their own cultural heritages (Dagnachew, 2018). The monastery is currently producing cultural clothing and sells this to religious tourist at very reasonable prices.

Promote Helping and Caring Each Other

In the monastery, it is evident that many religious tourists come from different regions and nations and corners of the world. They have different cultures, traditions, norms, ethics, languages, and ways of life. However no one is selfish there and the result of the respondents also show this (M= 4.6714 and SD=0.58009). Religious tourists are clearly helping and caring for each other. It is an amazing practice to see the level of care and concern demonstrated by people for total strangers. Religious tourism can strengthen the interrelationship between different stakeholders associated with the tourist destination and this bodes well for sustainable tourism development (Kumar, 2014).

Observations proved that there is one interesting practices noticeable at the monastery. This is when religious tourists who have planned to stay for longer periods, but have finished their program earlier and are ready to return home, tend to give all their leftover food items to the monastery and the monastery then disseminates this food amongst poor patients.

Source of Education, Identity, and Pride

Their integrity and authenticity of the society must be conserved, so that the values the people represent regarding identity and pride are available to current and future generations (UNWTO, 2014). Religious heritage sites have an immeasurable value, both inherent and as a source of public education, identity and pride. As per the results of the study (M=4.2143 and SD=0.76201), religious tourism will help tourism planners and decision makers to “keep it real” and not be tempted to over-commercialize their products and services which are associated with religious tourism (Kasim, 2011).

Environmental Roles of Religious Tourism for Sustainable Tourism Development

Table 3: The environmental roles of religious tourism

What is your agreement level on the environmental role?		S. agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	S. disagree	Mean	total
Plantation and horticulture	Frequency	64	88	51	7	-	3.9952	210
	Percent	30.5	41.9	24.3	3.3	-		100
Preserve the natural environment green and clean	Frequency	86	97	27	-	-	4.2810	210
	Percent	41.0	46.2	12.9	-	-		100
Preserve flora and fauna	Frequency	121	75	14	-	-	4.5095	210
	Percent	57.6	35.7	6.7	-	-		100

Source: Author’s survey, 2019

Preserve the Natural Environment green and clean

At Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Monastery, every in any given direction, everything is evergreen and clean. As depicted from the above table, respondents revealed this (M=4.2810 and

SD=0.67923). The leaders of the monastery take this practice seriously and assign coordinators who can make the environment green and clean. The responsible person, a volunteer, always motivates religious tourists to participate in different tasks in keeping the monastery green and clean. The majority of the world's religious sites are attached to mountain or hills. Pilgrims often regard the journey they take as a physical expression of an internal holy trip, with the pathway travelled being a framework for the travel 'within' (Hall, 2006). As the monastery is the home of dense forests, it is the home of much unique flora and fauna. The sound of the birds has the power to 'take one's soul to heaven'. There are also plants like coffee, *tid*, *wanza*, banana, papaya, lemon, mango, *tirngo*, *zeyiton*, avocado and others. If there were no the monastery in the area, such natural heritages might not be seen today.



Figure 1: The left, the green areas of the monastery and the right, the great fall in the compound of the monastery
Source: Author's own, 2019

Preservation and Conservation of Ancient Flora and Fauna

The monastery is the home of many ancient plants. It is strictly forbidden to cut these plants down. The holy fathers in the monastery always tell the religious tourists to care for and use plants and flora found in the monastery wisely. Most of the respondents agreed with the role of conservation of flora and fauna with the response of (M=4.5095 and SD=0.62055).

One of the coordinators at the monastery said the following:

Plants are properly protected and have values in the monastery. They are the home of monks and nuns. Preserving and conserving floras and fauna is one of the rules and regulations of the monastery.

One of the leaders of the south Gondar Zone diocese said the following on the roles of preserving natural and ancient forests:

"...ancient forest is used as the best shelters for religious fathers, nuns and monks. Forest is everything for monks. Monastery means forest. Being the monk is leaving the materialistic world. Their vision is to scarify themselves on the earth throughout their life time. So the forest is one of the sources of food and also shelter for monks. So it is not without reason that churches and monasteries are based in the dense forests. Its base is founded on biblical

evidence of the same. If there is no forest around the monasteries, what makes them differ from the buildings in the urban settings?"

Promote Plantations and Horticulture

One of the common practices held in the monastery is the creation of plantations and horticultural activities. As per the result of the respondents (M= 3.9952 and SD= 0.82716), this agreed with. Many religious tourists travel with some unique flowers to be given to the monastery. Plantations are one way of making the monastery attractive and greener and this entices people to stay longer.



Figure 2: The founder and the leaders of the monastery, *Aba Yohannes Tesfa Maryam* watering plants
 Source: Author's own, 2019

Spiritual Roles of Religious Tourism for Sustainable Tourism Development

Table 4: The mean results of spiritual roles of religious tourism

What is your agreement level on the spiritual roles in sustainability issues?		S. agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	S. disagree	Mean	total
Promoting the religious festivals	Frequency	128	72	10	-	-	4.5619	210
	Percent	61.0	34.3	4.8	-	-		100
Mass praying, preaching and religious music	Frequency	148	47	15	-	-	4.6333	210
	Percent	70.5	22.4	7.1	-	-		100
Preserve religious products	Frequency	159	41	10	-	-	4.5619	210
	Percent	75.7	19.5	4.8	-	-		100
Spiritual healing	Frequency	151	45	14	-	-	4.6524	210
	Percent	71.9	21.4	6.7	-	-		100
Spiritual commitment	Frequency	92	79	39	-	-	4.2524	210
	Percent	43.8	37.6	18.6	-	-		100

Source: Author's survey, 2019

Promoting the Religious Festivals

As described in the table, the responses agreed ($M=4.5619$ and $SD=0.58570$). They revealed that promoting festivals is one of the significant roles of the monastery for sustainable tourism development promotion. In the monastery there are many religious festivals which are celebrated throughout the year. During the annual festivals in the monastery, many religious tourists travel to the monastery for the purpose of attending the religious ceremonies. The St. Gabriel holy day is one of the most well-known holy day's which is celebrated annually in December and June, in Ethiopia's Orthodox Tewahido Church. It is celebrated in a special way at the monastery. During this time, many religious tourists come from different parts of the world to the monastery at least five or six and days before it commences. During this period, many religious activities are held, and many religious programs are conducted throughout for religious tourists. As per the field observations during the annual festival of December 28 (*Tahisas* 19), in 2018, they showed that, the most interesting programs which are held start from the eve of the holy day and included: preaching through religious fathers who come from different places, spiritual songs by Sunday school students, a candle lighting night, *Qine* through *mergatas* by interested religious tourists, reading of poem and literature from diverse religious tourist groups, a healing ceremony through *Aba Yohannes*, a time for religious tourists to testify as to what God has done for them regarding their problems, spiritually and physically, and the conducting of mass prayers at the end of the program.

As per the aggregate response of the interviewees, under Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Monastery, every monastery has its own holy days to be celebrated. All the festivals have their own unique characteristics and commemorations. Likewise the following holy days are highly celebrated: October 06 (*Meskerm* 26) at *Kal Awadi* St. Jones monastery, *Debrezeyit* Atised Maryam at Atised Maryam Monastery, *Abune Kesate* Birhan holyday annually, the annual religious festivals in December and July for St. Gabriel, Palm Sunday, June 23 (*Sene* 30) at *Kal Awadi* St. Jonas monastery, September 11 (*Meskerem* 1) at *KalAwadi* St. Jones monastery, January 29(*Tir* 21) at *Debrezeyit Atised* Maryam Monastery (Yohannes, N.D).



Figure 3: Annual festival during December St. Gabriel
Source: Author's own, 2018



Figure 4: Religious festivals of Palm Sunday at the monastery
Source: Author's own, 2019

Provide Mass Praying, Preaching and Spiritual Music for the Welfare of the World

In the monastery, there is a mass prayer practice which is held regularly by all the people at the monastery. Everybody is recommended to participate in the mass prayer ritual. The study revealed this through the ($M=4.6333$ and $SD=0.61390$) response result. Spiritual music and preaching are among the most important religious potentials for the monastery which attract the deep intentions of religious tourists to visit the place. Observations clearly showed that the spiritual music and preaching services given in the monastery have the power to attract the intentions of many religious tourists to stay even longer in the monastery. Psalm 9:11 tells us "sing praises to the Lord". Many religious tourists testify on the stage at the monastery, that spiritual music has the power to 'burn evil' and many claim to have been saved through hearing the secular music of the monastery as it invigorates their souls.



Figure 5: The left, mass praying for the whole world and on the right -spiritual music with attending priests
Source: Author's own, 2019



Preserve and Conserve Religious Products and Instruments

There are many religious products which are used for providing the religious services to its followers. Many of the religious products are found in the museum and many of them are found in the church, and they provide different religious services for the religious tourists. Most of the respondents also agreed with this notion ($M= 4.7095$ and $SD=0.55025$). Most of the religious materials found in the museum were found under the ground and have been devastated and hidden though the war of Ahmed Gragn around 500 years ago. This indicates that conserving the religious products is one of the many roles of religious tourism practice and this is important for sustainable tourism development.

Provide Spiritual Commitment and Strength

Through following religious practices at Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Monastery, one can understand and be committed to practicing many of the religious codes of conducts in life. There are many pilgrims travelling to the monastery to empower themselves and to become stronger in their level of religious commitment. The response of the respondents showed this aspect as well ($M=4.2524$ and $SD=75020$). Findings further showed that Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Monastery has the power to make pilgrimage hopeful and strong in keeping the rules and regulation of the religion's teachings.

Provide Spiritual Healing Service

Healing Through *Aba Yohannes*, the Founder and Leader of the Monastery

Informants proved that what makes the monastery famous is its healing role in society. The healing ceremony is one of the most crucial religious tourism practices which captures the attention of many people of the world. Many patients travel to the monastery most days of the year to hopefully obtain some form of healing and to be blessed through God. The healing ceremony is conducted by the founder and leader of the monastery. As depicted through the informants, the healing practice is the promise which is given through God to the founder and leaders of the monastery, *Aba Yohannes*. Biblical evidence supports that healing practices have existed since the creation of human beings and it is given to the selected persons through God, Mark 16:15-20 states the following:

And He said to them, "Go into the world and preach the gospel to every creature. He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned. And these signs will follow those who believe: In My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay hands on the sick, and they will recover.

In addition to the above Biblical justification, those who are selected through God have the ability to heal the sick and perform other miracles on human beings, "And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul" (Acts 19:11). "In so much that they brought forth the sick into the street, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them"(Acts 5:15). Likewise, as proved through interviews and observations, *Aba Yohannes* has the ability to heal different evil spirits in patients based on his immense faith and gifts from Jesus Christ.



Figure 6: Healing ceremony through the leader and founder of the monastery, *Aba Yohannes*
Source: The monastery website(www.wonkshet.com), 2019

Healing through natural Holy Water

The use of the natural holy water is based on the Biblical justification. “And he went forth unto the spring of the water, and cast the salt in there, and said, thus said the lord, I have healed these waters; there shall not be from thence any more death or barren. So the waters were healed unto this day, according to the slaying of Elisha which he speaks” (2 Kings, 2:21). In the New Testament it is also written as “For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: who so ever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of what so ever disease he had.” (John 5:4).

So as per these Biblical evidences, one of the most important religious potential attractions which make the monastery unique is its holy water and its power in healing patients. Holy water is believed to relieve a person of all their sins. The holy water in the monastery comprises of two types, cold holy water and warm holy water. It is rising from the mountainous part of the monastery. Many religious tourists stand on the stage and speak to the public from what types of disease they have been cured and saved though the natural holy water. For instance, disease like HIV AIDS, cancer, evil eye, mental and physical illness, mood disorder, depression, anxiety, epilepsy, insomnia, headache and others have all been cured via water. The monastery has around forty holy areas (interview with one of the monks of monastery on March, 2018; <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BjOpQarHY0A>). As the observations and interviews with the monastery staff revealed, most of the monasteries and churches are providing services by charging a payment fee to pilgrims. However in this monastery, there is no payment to get any services from the use of sanctified holy water.

One of the pilgrims from the monastery asserted the following:

If there was no Adyame Yordanos Wonkshet Monastery with its amazing healing power, I would not be here now. Modern health institutions requested me to pay much money to save me from my disease but I paid nothing here at Wonkshet monastery. My families hated me since they thought that I cannot be healthy. Look!! Now I am normal and will restart my previous life. Thanks to St. Gabriel.



Figure 7: The natural holy waters of the monastery
Source: on the left Author's own

Conclusion

Religious tourism is now becoming the prime business for many tour and travel marketers. It contributes much towards the sustainable tourism development of nations. The results revealed that it has diversified roles in economic, socio-cultural, environmental and spiritual aspects. The economic roles of religious tourism are increases in foreign exchange, creation of job opportunities, and the providing of needed infrastructure. The environmental aspects include preserving and conserving the unique natural environment, plantation and horticultural activities, conservations of ancient flora and fauna. The socio-cultural aspects such as promoting peace, teaching about helping and caring for others, preserving and conserving the cultural heritage are all essential aspects. Spiritual roles includes providing spiritual commitment and strength, preserving and conserving the religious instruments, providing spiritual healing services, promoting of various religious festivals, mass praying, preaching and liturgies and spiritual music for the public. All these aspects are vital for sustainability and growth to be sustained.

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