



An investigation of destination attributes and service quality of tourism in Amhara Region, Ethiopia

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Abstract

The general objective of this study was to examine tourist evaluation of the destination attributes and how these associate with tourists' satisfaction in Amhara Region, Ethiopia. This study employed a cross-sectional research design utilizing a quantitative research method to pursue the research objectives. The target population consisted of 152 international tourists who visited the four tourist destinations in Amhara Region namely: Gondar, Debarq, Bahir Dar, and Lalibela. A self-administered questionnaire was used to measure tourists' perceptions of the eight destination attributes. Descriptive analysis revealed that the potential tourists visiting the major tourist destinations in Amhara Region are females, aged between 50-59, single, and highly educated. In terms of travel behavior characteristics, the majority of the respondents arrived to the major tourist destinations by air, got information from word-of-mouth, came primarily for culture experience followed by leisure. Descriptive analysis also revealed that tourists rated the eight destination attributes at a high level, and they were generally satisfied with the major tourist attraction areas of Amhara Region. The regression analysis showed that destination attractiveness, hospitality, and cost had positive relationship with tourist satisfaction, while infrastructural, accessibility, and destination cleanliness had negative relationship with tourist satisfaction. Accommodation and safety and security did not make a significant contribution to the prediction of tourists' satisfaction. Based on the results of this, the research makes recommendations for the various parties like culture and tourism offices, service providers, NGO's, local administrators, should involved for increasing the satisfaction of foreign tourists.

Keywords: Tourist satisfaction, destination attributes, tourists' demographic and travel behavior characteristics, Amhara region.

Introduction

Realizing the role of tourism as an important driver of economic growth to national GDP (Huh, Uysal, & McCleary, 2006; WTTC, 2013), governments worldwide have continuously intensified their efforts to compete for the tourism market. In this regard, tourist satisfaction is one of the



most often studied topics in the tourism literature, since it is considered as key to the success of the tourism industry (Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 2010). The main purpose for measuring and explaining tourists satisfaction is to understand how well suppliers at a particular destination recognize and respond to the needs of its visitors and to identify which elements of the destinations offer need improvement (Kim & Brown, 2012; Kotler et al., 2010).

In the tourist literature tourists' satisfaction is defined as the emotional state emerging as a result of experiencing a tourism product and tourism activities (Rajaratnam & Nair, 2015). There are many studies which have been carried out by different researchers in different contexts to identify the factors that affect the tourists' satisfaction (Zabkar et al., 2010). The literature indicates that a more appropriate strategy for understanding tourists' satisfaction would be to examine tourists' perceptions of the destination attributes (Rajaratnam & Nair, 2015; Zabkar et al., 2010).

In the existing literature, many approaches have been suggested to measure consumer perceptions of the attractiveness of the tourism product (Middleton, 2001). Though there exists a diversity of definitions of tourism destinations, the majority of studies acknowledge that tourism destination is a complex activity of goods, services/ facilities and production units which offers a tourism experience to individuals or groups of people (Murphy et al., 2000; Rajaratnam & Nair, 2015).

On the basis of these notions several studies examined the critical role of destination attributes in determining tourists' satisfaction (Nicolaidis, 2008, 2012, 2016; Ramphal & Nicolaidis, 2014) and each of these found inter alia, that service quality excellence and the ambience of a place are the key to happy tourist experiences. Studies show that tourism-related infrastructure, such as transportation facilities and accessibility (Eraqi, 2006; Kozak, 2002; Poon & Low, 2005; Rajesh, 2013), accommodation facilities (Kozak, 2002; Poon & Low, 2005), staff service quality (Eraqi, 2006; Kasper et al., 2006), quality of food and beverage (Poon & Low, 2005), hospitality and customer care (Kozak, 2002), security and safety (Chiang, 2000; Poon & Low, 2005; Rajesh, 2013), destination cleanliness (Keyser, 2004; Kozak, 2002), and destination attractiveness (Middleton 2001; Murphy et al., 2000) are important factors in determining tourists' satisfaction.

In the review of the tourism literature, several studies also indicated the critical role of tourists' demographic and travel behavior characteristics in order to help tourism marketers better understand their customers (Huh et al., 2006). Scholars argue that the characteristics of tourists, such as their income, age, and motivations are important factors when the researcher analyzes tourists' satisfaction (Kotler et al., 2010; Moutinho, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

Ethiopia is rich in cultural and natural tourism resources. Amhara region, the focus of the present study, possesses a plethora of tourist attractions. However, this potential has not been exploited to any great extent (Robinson & Jonker, 2016). Indeed, the tourism industry in Ethiopia could be described as one that is still in its infancy (Kidane-Mariam, 2015). The few available studies indicated that the industry is plagued with numerous challenges, including poor marketing and promotion, lack of well-developed tourist related infrastructure and services, and low level of human capacity both at managerial and operational levels (Robinson & Jonker, 2016).

Complicating the problem, little research has investigated about the current destination attributes and tourist' satisfaction in Ethiopia in general and Amhara region in particular. The



little available research failed to include several measures of destination attributes. Thus, the present research is an effort to remedy the paucity of research on tourists' perceptions of the destination attributes and the levels of their satisfaction and the effects these have on satisfaction in Amhara Regional State. Therefore, the general objective of the present study was to investigate tourist evaluation of the destination attributes and how these associate with the tourists' satisfaction. The specific objectives of this study are: (1) to identify the potential profile of the tourists in terms of demographic and travel behavior characteristics, (2) to assess tourists' evaluation of the destination attributes, (3) to assess the level of tourists' satisfaction, and (4) to determine the relationship between destination attributes and tourists' satisfaction.

Research Methods

This study employed a cross-sectional research design utilizing a quantitative research method to pursue the four research objectives. The study was conducted among the major tourist destinations of the Amhara Region. The study area covered four tourist attraction sites, namely: Gondar, Debarq, BahirDar, and Lalibela where the Castle of Fasiledes in Gondar, the Simien Mountains National Park, the island monasteries of Lake Tana, and the monolithic rock-hewn church of Lalibela are found, respectively. The population for this study was composed of international tourists who visited the four tourist destinations in Amhara Region. As the exact number of visitors was not known beforehand, a convenience sample was chosen as a non-probability sampling technique.

A self-administered questionnaire was developed to measure tourists' perceptions of destination attributes and satisfaction. The questionnaire used in this study consisted of four sections. The first part consisted of the demographic profile of the respondents which was designed to obtain information on sex, age, marital status, and educational status. Section two included travel behavior characteristics of tourists, such as means of arrival at tourist destination, source of information, and purpose of visit.

Section three contained the major variables of the study in order to measure the destination attributes. For the present study the eight destination attributes included were accommodation (8 items), accessibility (9 items), attractiveness (18 items), hospitality (13 items), safety and security (8 items), infrastructure (4 items), prices of products/service (12 items), and destination cleanliness (2 items). The measures were adapted from prior researches (Rajaratnam & Nair, 2015; Zabkar et al., 2010).

Respondents were asked to rate each of the destinations attributes variable on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (very poor) to 5 (very good), with a high mean score indicating greater levels of the attribute performance on that particular variable. The fourth section included measures related to tourists' satisfaction. In this study, the measurement of satisfaction was adapted from a questionnaire developed by Robinot and Giannelloni (2010) and based on previous research (Kotler et al., 2010; Rajaratnam & Nair, 2015; Zabkar et al., 2010). Sample items were: 'My choice to visit tourism destinations in Amhara region was a wise one'. Respondents were requested to rate on the levels of satisfactions on 23 items using a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).



Results

Demographic and Travel Behavior Characteristics of the Respondents

The first objective of the study was to investigate the profile of the tourists in terms of demographic characteristics and their travel behavior characteristics who visited the major tourist destinations of Amhara Region. The summary of the demographic characteristics and travel behavior characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic and travel behavior characteristics of Respondents (N=152)

Variables	F	%
Sex		
Male	53	34.9
Female	99	65.1
Age		
Under 20	11	7.2
20-29	34	22.4
30-39	33	21.7
40-49	9	5.9
50-59	44	28.9
Above 59	21	13.8
Marital status		
Single	69	45.4
Married	83	54.6
Education level		
High school	31	20.4
College diploma	10	6.6
1 st degree	22	14.5
2 nd degree	68	44.7
PhD	21	13.8
Mode of Transport		
4 wheel	19	12.5
Bus	11	7.2
Air	122	80.3
Sources of Information		
Family friends	68	44.74
Media/ website	37	24.34
Magazine/news paper	18	11.84
Travel guide book	29	19.01
Purpose of visit		
Relax/ entertainment	31	20.4
Business	13	8.6
Education	28	18.4
Culture	80	52.6

Source: (Own survey data, 2017)

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

In total, 170 questionnaires were distributed out of which 152 questionnaires were returned or usable giving a response rate of 89.41%. The gender distribution of the respondents showed that the majority of respondents (65.1%) were female and 34.9 percent were male. It is evident that 7.2 percent of the respondents were under 20, 22.4 percent were between the age bracket 20-29 years, 21.7 percent were between the ages 30-39 year, 5.9 percent felt between the age bracket 40-49 year, 28.9 percent between the ages 50-59 year, and 13.8 percent were over sixty years old. With regard to respondents' marital status most of the respondents 54.6 percent were married and 45.4 percent of the respondents were single. In terms of level of education,



the majority of respondents (44.7%) had 2nd degree; 20.4 percent completed high school, and 13.8 percent had a PhD degree, demonstrating that the majority of the samples are highly educated.

Travel Behavior Characteristics of Respondents

The travel behaviors of the respondents analyzed in this study were means of arrival at tourist destination, sources of information, and purpose of visit. With regard to the means of arrival the largest group of respondents (80.3%) arrived by air. 12.5 5 percent arrived by 4 wheel and the smallest group of respondents (7.2 %) arrived by bus. As far as tourists' sources of information is concerned, the largest groups of respondents (44.74%) heard from friends, 24.34 percent from media/ website, 11.84 percent from magazine/newspaper, and 19.01 percent from travel guide book. The majority of respondents (52.6%) came for culture experience, 20.4 percent for relaxation, 18.4 percent for educational purpose, and 8.6 percent for business.

Descriptive statistics on Tourists' evaluation of destination attributes

The second objective of the current study was to assess tourists' evaluation of destination attributes in Amhara Region. Responses to the eight destination attributes items were summed to yield a summative score for each scale. The results of descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics on Destination Attributes and satisfaction (N=152)

Variables	Number of items	Min.	Max.	M	SD
Satisfaction	23	63.00	24.00	102	17.12
Accommodation	8	21.00	40.00	31.12	5.40
Accessibility	9	25.00	45.00	34.356	6.17
Attractiveness	18	32.00	90.00	9.51	15.98
Hospitality	13	24.00	65.00	47.84	11.71
Safety and security	8	11.00	40.00	25.53	7.19
Infrastructural	4	3.00	20.00	11.84	4.57
Prices of products/service	12	30.00	60.00	46.25	8.97
Destination cleanliness	2	3.00	10.00	5.44	1.46

Source: (Own survey data, 2017)

As shown in Table 2, on a scale from one to five the mean score for destination accommodation was 31.12($SD= 5.40$), accessibility 34.35 ($SD=6.17$), attractiveness 69.51 ($SD=15.98$), hospitality 47.84 ($SD=11.71$), safety and security 25.53 ($SD=7.19$), infrastructural quality 11.84 ($SD=4.57$), prices of products/service 46.25 ($SD=8.97$), and destination cleanliness5.44 ($SD= 1.46$).

Descriptive statistics on Tourists overall Satisfaction

The third objective of the study was to investigate the level of tourist satisfaction (dependent variable) at tourist attraction sites in Amhara Region. As shown in Table 2, mean score for satisfaction was 102 ($SD=17.12$), ranging from a low of 63.00 to a high level of 124.00. The result indicates high satisfaction of the tourist at destination sites.



Predictors of Tourists' Satisfactions

The fourth objective of the study was to determine the relationships between the destination attributes and overall tourist satisfaction. Multiple regression analysis was conducted using overall tourist satisfaction as the dependent variables and the eight destinations attributes as independent variables. Table 3 shows the results of the regression analysis.

Table 3. Regression analyses of destination attributes as predictors of tourist satisfaction (N=152)

Variables	B	SEB	β	Sig.
Accommodation	-.45	.35	-.14	.197
Accessibility	-.51	.22	-.18**	.015
Attractiveness	.59	.11	.55***	.001
Hospitality	.76	.13	.52***	.001
Safety and security	.26	.17	.11	.127
Infrastructural	-1.40	.32	-.36	.001
Prices of products/service	.93	.11	.49**	.001
Destination cleanliness	-1.50	.58	-.13**	.011

Note. $F(8, 143) = 77.90$, $R = .90$, $R^2 = .813$, Adjusted $R^2 = .803$, *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$.

Source: (Own survey data, 2017)

The results of the regression analysis indicated that there was a significant relationship between destination attributes and tourist satisfaction = (8, 143) = 77.90, $p < .001$. The regression model, presented in Table 3 explained 80.3 percent of the variance in overall tourist satisfaction. The results of the regression analysis indicated that attractiveness ($\beta = .55$, $p = .010$), hospitality ($\beta = .52$, $p = .000$), prices of products/service ($\beta = .49$, $p = .001$), infrastructural ($\beta = -.36$, $p = .000$), accessibility ($\beta = -.18$, $p = .015$), and destination cleanliness ($\beta = -.13$, $p = .011$) are significant factors contributing to the prediction of the overall satisfaction of tourists. The regression results indicated that accommodation ($\beta = -.14$, $p = .19$) and safety and security ($\beta = .109$, $p = .13$) had no significant association with tourists' satisfaction.

Discussions

The first objective of the present study was to investigate the demographic and travel characteristics of tourists. Findings from this study showed that the majority of tourists visiting tourist destinations in Amhara Region were females, were between 50 to 59 years, were married, and hold 2nd degree. In terms of travel behavior characteristics, the majority of the respondents arrived by air, hear about tourist attraction sites from friends, and came for cultural experiences.

The demographic data collected in the present study were therefore important in order to develop a profile of the tourists and can serve as bases for segmenting customer group since consumer wants, preferences, and usage rates are often associated with demographic variables (Huh et al., 2006). In fact, the literature suggests that demographic analysis can be used to develop customer profiles (Kotler et al., 2010; Moutinho, 2000).

In terms of travel behavior characteristics, the majority of the respondents arrived by air and the smallest group of respondents arrived by bus. This implies that tourists may have limited possibility to observe the rich natural factors such as natural beauty, waterfalls, and a wide range of wildlife and vegetation along their way to different attraction sites. As far as tourists' sources of information about the major tourist destinations in Amhara Region is concerned, the



result revealed that the largest groups of respondents heard about tourist attraction sites from friends, indicating the importance of word of mouth recommendation. Tourism research indicated that word-of-mouth recommendations from family and friends are the most important influential source contributing to destination image formation (Huh et al., 2006). This study also investigated what motivated tourists in selecting the major tourist destinations in Amhara Region.

Findings from this study show that the majority of respondents came for cultural experiences. This is not surprising given that the Amhara Region has a rich religious and cultural history endowed with cultural heritage with ancient historic centers, including the monolithic rock-hewn church of Lalibela; the Castle of Fasilades in Gondar; the island monasteries of Lake Tana making them more attractive for visitors (Robinson & Jonker, 2016). The results supported the previous research which shows that historical attractions give tourists an opportunity to experience the uniqueness of that destination (Keyser, 2009). As a second reason behind tourists' choice of the destinations includes relaxation. In fact, the Amhara Region has a rich 'pull' of numerous natural wonders, such as the Simien Mountains National Park and Lake Tana that are attractive for visitors and could fulfill their relaxation motive.

The second objective of the current study was to determine tourist evaluation of the destination attributes in Amhara Region. It appears that the mean value for all destinations attributes were above average, suggesting that tourists evaluated the good performance of the major tourist destinations attributes in Amhara Region in terms of tourism services and nature of tourism products / offered by the destinations. Therefore, the findings from this study suggest that the high level ratings of destination attributes performance has significant influence over tourists' choice of destination, consumption of tourism products and services, and intention to return (Neal & Gursoy, 2008; Middleton, 2001; Rajaratnam & Nair, 2015; Ritchie et al., 2001). In the literature, the importance of tourist perception or evaluation on the standard of tourism products at the destination are overemphasized (Moutinho, 2000). In fact, the current scholarship on destination attractiveness demonstrates that the features of the destination are the most important elements which tourists enjoy (Middleton, 2001).

The third objective of the current study was to determine tourist overall satisfaction at tourist attraction sites in Amhara Region. It appears that the mean value for satisfaction was above average, suggesting that respondents tend to have positive attitudes toward destination attributes. The overall result implies that this level of satisfaction is important to the success of the tourism business in general and for destination marketing because it can influence tourists' behaviors such as to expand the length of stay and destination loyalty (Huh et al., 2006).

The fourth objective of this study was to determine the relationships between the destination attributes and overall tourist satisfaction. The regression results indicated that six of the eight destination factors were found to be significant. More specifically, results highlight that the quality of the attractions has a positive influence on tourists' satisfaction. This suggests that tourists who reported high levels of destination attractiveness were more likely to report a more positive satisfaction. In this regard, the Amhara Region is endowed with beautiful natural scenarios-mountains, lakes, rivers, and natural vegetation making them more attractive for visitors to Amhara Region (Ministry of Culture and Tourism, 2015). The findings that attractions have a positive relationship with satisfaction is in close alignment with other studies, such as Middleton (2001) and Murphy et al. (2000), whose results indicated that attractions as the major positive determinants for tourists' higher satisfaction levels.



In this study, we also identified a positive relationship between hospitality and tourists' satisfaction. This implies that tourists are satisfied about the behavior of the local residents, vendors, and service staff and quality services offered by the hoteliers. The findings have supported the literature studies, which contend that hospitality, as a service attribute, would contribute to an increased overall satisfaction (Kozak, 2002). In addition, in agreement with other study findings, the present study found a positive relationship between price and tourist satisfaction. These findings highlight visitors appear to have received value for the money they spent for accommodation, food and transports. The findings were consistent with those of Poon and Low (2005), Eraqi (2006), Kozak (2002), and Middleton (2001) who explained that price as one consistent satisfaction attribute.

However, the results of the regression analysis indicated that there were negative relationship between destination infrastructural, accessibility, and destination cleanliness and tourist satisfaction. The findings have supported the literature studies, which contend that inadequate transportation, poor transportation facilities, and poor accessibility (Eraqi, 2006; Kozak, 2002; Poon & Low, 2005; Rajesh, 2013) were negatively related to tourist satisfaction. The regression results also indicated that destination cleanliness had negative relationship with tourist satisfaction. The results from this study are in keeping with other studies that reported hygiene and sanitation and cleanliness (Keyser, 2004; Kasper et al., 2006; Kozak, 2002; Presbury et al., 2005) relate with tourists' satisfaction.

The regression results indicated that accommodation and safety and security did not make a significant contribution to the prediction of tourist satisfaction. The lack of significant associations between safety and security and tourist satisfaction is also somewhat unexpected because the literature indicates that accommodation service quality especially at hotels (Kozak, 2002; Poon & Low, 2005; Singh, 2006) and safety and security (Chiang, 2000) are important contributor to visitor satisfaction at host regions (Presbury et al., 2005; Singh, 2006).

Conclusions

This study has yielded several findings of interest to the tourism industry literature. The study's results are considered to be valuable to destination management in Amhara Region. Based on the results of the analysis of the study the following conclusions are drawn:

1. From the result of the analysis, it might be concluded that the major international tourists visiting tourist destinations in Amhara Region are females, with age range between 50-59, and highly educated. In terms of travel characteristics, the majority of the respondents arrived to the major tourist destinations by air, got information about the destinations from word-of-mouth, came for culture experience and leisure. The findings suggest that the effort of tourist industry in advertising other potential tourist attributes through websites was so weak and limited.
2. Tourists rated the eight destination attributes of Amhara Region at high level, implying the good performance of the destinations attributes of the tourist destinations sites.
3. From the findings it can be concluded that tourists were generally satisfied with tourism product and services available at the major tourist attraction areas of Amhara Region.
4. Destination attractiveness, hospitality, and cost had positive relationship with tourist satisfaction, while infrastructural, accessibility, and destination cleanliness had negative relationship with tourist satisfaction. Accommodation and security and safety had no significant association with tourists' satisfaction.



Recommendations

This study provides information that can be useful for tourism industry to improve the quality of destination attributes and tourist satisfaction. Based on the results of this, the research makes the following recommendations.

In order to truly satisfy tourists visiting the major tourist destinations in Amhara Region, tourism marketing professionals and service providers need to be aware of the potential tourists visiting the tourist destinations in Amhara Region. The result of the present study highlights that tourism marketing professionals and service providers should adapt their products and services to specific potential tourists, such as to females, whose age is between 50 and 59 years, single, and highly educated. Because this study revealed that the majority of respondents came for cultural experiences, tourism policy makers and practitioners should continue maintaining to promote the cultural attributes so as to fulfill their expectation and satisfaction. In addition, given the region has a plethora of tourism resources, the Regional state authorities as well as the tourism organization should give special attention to promoting other tourism products and destination attributes through effective promotional channels and marketing strategies.

Given that tourists rated the eight destinations attributes and their satisfaction at high level, all tourism-related stakeholders should continue maintaining their efforts toward the tourist satisfaction endeavors. Furthermore, in order for the region to maintain its competitive edge and continue to attract tourists, tourism policy makers and practitioners should evaluate the level of their current destination attributes performance on a regular basis. The Federal Government, Regional state, the local authorities, and tourism organization should identify areas of dissatisfaction where Amhara Region as a destination has proven to be weak. Results highlight that special attention should be given to improving the quality of destination infrastructure, accessibility, and cleanliness factors in order to enhance tourists' satisfaction at the major tourist attraction areas of Amhara Region.

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