

Assessment and Identification of the Tourism Resources of Bale Zone, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Although Bale Zone is endowed with diversified potential tourism resources, there were no clear assessment, identification and inventory of the tourism resources. Therefore, this study focused on assessment and identification of tourism resources of Bale Zone. Local communities, tourism experts from culture and tourism offices of Bale Zone and woredas, NGO's, destination managers, staffs of agriculture and administration offices of Bale Zone and woredas were subjects of the study and 150 samples were selected for survey questionnaires purposively. In addition to this, four focus group discussions were held and 51 key informants were purposively selected. The result revealed that the zone is bestowed with spectacular scenery such as BMNP scenic beauty, Wabe Shebele and Gasera gorges, Konodria standing stone, Sof Umar, Welmel waterfalls and endemic plant, animal, and bird species. Tangible and intangible cultural and historical tourism resources such as, Dirre Sheik Hussein Shrine, Oda Roba, Madawalabu and Oda Jila historical place are the major resources of Bale. However, Bale is limited potentials in terms of tourism infrastructural facilities and services. Financial and human resource incapacity, inaccessibility and less community awareness were the major problems identified in the study. Since, Bale has tourism potentials and to exploit its tourism potentialities, there should be development package.

Keywords: Bale zone; Assessment; Identification; Potential; Tourism resources

Introduction

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries and has become one of the fastest growing economic sectors [1,2]. The management of tourism affects the conditions of destinations and host communities, and more broadly the future of ecosystems, regions and nations. Tourism has a multitude of impacts; it can be a positive force, bringing benefits to destinations, or an engine for degradation [3].

Tourism is now the world's largest industry, capturing 10% of the global economy [4]. Specifically, tourism in developing countries: forms the principal source of foreign exchange in 37 developing countries, grows at over 4% annually, 5% in many less developed regions, comprises 35.6% of international tourists, includes roughly a quarter of a billion of the wealthiest people traveling to some of the least developed countries in the world, and accounts for 14 of the top 20 long-haul destinations [4].

Tourism as a tool for sustained socio-economic development is increasingly utilized by donors and beneficiary countries [5]. Frequently, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers incorporate tourism activities as a means to generate alternative incomes in rural areas, finance infrastructure improvements, diversify employment opportunities, and attract foreign direct investment [5]. Along with generating revenue, tourism also acts as a driver for general economic development, supporting a variety of local and national businesses, such as restaurants, hotels, transportation and guiding within areas of high biodiversity [3].

In many sites of Ethiopia, particularly sites of rift valleys, Adwa, and Debre Tabors Gafat, tourism development projects has been developed in line with tourism resources identification, inventory and mapping due to different initiatives carried out by different ecotourism societies and co-operatives [6-8].

Speaking to tourism, Bale Zone is moneyed in diversity of tourism resources [9]. However, it is not benefited from the sector due to different problem. Firstly, potential tourism resources were not

clearly assessed and identified in appropriate way [10]. Due to this, tourism resources in Bale Zone were not promoted and positioned; local communities were not aware of the tourism resources; tourism resources were not promoted domestically and internationally and planners and decision makers could not be able to plan and develop tourism appropriately [9].

Culture and Tourism Offices at Zonal and woreda level tried to study the tourism potentialities of Bale Zone so far [9]. However, potential tourism resources were not studied intensively at a desired level through proper identification and inventory. In light of this, supportive tourism facilities and services, and challenges were not clearly shown and proverbial for the general public. Thus, the present study focused on the assessment and identification of tourism resources and supportive tourism facilities and services so as to promote the area regionally, nationally and internationally as a brand tourism destination (Appendix 1).

Site Description

Bale Zone is a prominent area to develop tourism sectors. The Zone is located south eastern part of Oromia Regional State in Ethiopia at distance of 430 km from Addis Abeba. Geographically, the Zone is located between 3° 18' 46" - 10° 09' 04" N and 3° 18' 03" - 43° 04' 24" E and it is found within altitude ranges of 300 m measured at Riytu and 4377 m, above sea level measured at Tulu-Dimtu which is the highest

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mountain peak in Oromia Regional State and it is the 2nd highest mountain peak in Ethiopia next to Ras-Dashen [11] (Figure 1).

Objectives of the Study

The main objective of the study was to assess and identify the tourism resources of Bale Zone and specifically:

- To assess tourism potentials of Bale Zone.
- To make inventory of the existing and potential tourism resources of Bale Zone (Appendix 2).
- To identify challenges in relation to tourism resources identification.

Methods and Materials

This study focused on assessment and identification of tourism resources of Bale Zone. To achieve the intended objectives local communities, tourism experts from culture and tourism offices of Bale Zone and woredas, NGO's, destination managers, staffs of agriculture and administration offices of Bale Zone and woredas were subjects of the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 150 samples based on the assumption that respondents have direct and indirect involvement in tourism activities and they are responsible body to administer the tourism sectors of the Zone.

Both primary and secondary data sources were used. The primary data were collected mainly through questionnaires, in depth interviews, FGD, and field observation. Both open and close-ended questionnaires were designed and distributed for 150 respondents. From the total questionnaires distributed, 134 questionnaires were properly filled and collected, and the remaining 16 were not collected due to respondents' related problems. In the study to support the quantitative data, in depth interview was conducted among 51 purposively selected key informants and four focus group discussions were held from different

backgrounds based on the distribution of the mega tourism resources and their experiences, skills and knowledge highly related to the problem.

The researchers collected data via field observation about the potential tourism resources and infrastructural facilities and services based on the checklists, challenges in major tourism resources in each woreda were viewed and cross checked with the data gathered through other instruments and pictures and photos of mega tourism resources were took and GPS was used to record X/Y co-ordinates of the tourism resources.

Results and Discussion

Tourism potentialities of bale zone

Undeniable, Bale Zone is endowed with plentiful and untapped natural, cultural, historical and other archaeological and geological tourism resources ($M=1.167$ and $SD=.376$). In fact, all woredas do not have equal tourism potentials based on the availability of potential tourism resources, accessibility, and tourism infrastructure facilities and services. The findings revealed that, Dinsho, Gololcha, Dalo Menna, Harensa Buluk, and Madawalabu woredas have high tourism potentials and in the contrary, woredas like Dawe Serer, Lega Hida, Sinana, Goro, Ritytu, Guradamole and Seweyna are the least tourism potential woredas due to inaccessibility (Appendix 1). As it is presented on Table 1, the Zone has unique biodiversity resources which includes plant, animal, and bird species ($Mean=1.364$ and $SD=.572$) (Appendix 3). Specially, Bale Mountains National Park is the largest area of Afro-alpine habitat on the continent [12].

In addition to biodiversity resources, the cultural and historical values of the area also can be tourist attractions ($Mean=1.424$ and $SD=.609$). As per the response of key informants from each woreda and researchers observation in the field, the rural communities of Bale Zone have colorful cultural values which include both tangible

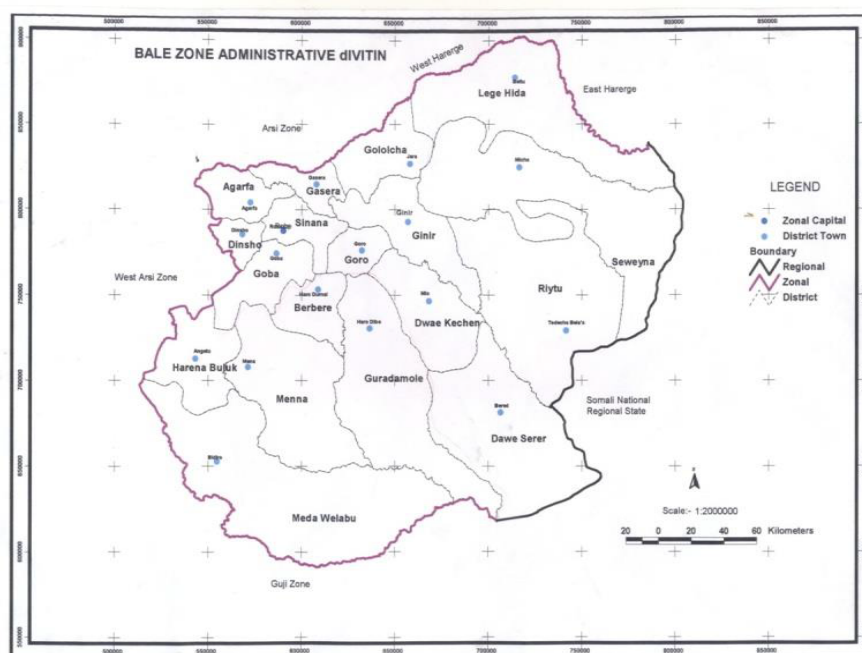


Figure 1: Study area map.

No	Statements	N	M	SD	Min	Max
1	Bale Zone has tourism potentials	66	1.167	.376	1.00	2.00
2	There are abundant biodiversity resources like fauna, flora and wildlife in the Zone that draws tourist	66	1.364	.572	1.00	3.00
3	Cultural and historical values of the area can be a tourist attractions	66	1.424	.609	1.00	4.00
4	Agricultural activities carried out in the area can be a tourist attractions	66	3.182	.875	2.00	5.00

Note: M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, Min=Minimum and Max=Maximum of 1 is very high and 5 is very low

Table 1: Tourism potentialities of Bale Zone.

Infrastructure development	Mean of development N is valid (listwise)				
	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Accessibility/transportation facilities and services	134	3.037	.991	1.00	5.00
Educational access	134	2.679	.881	1.00	4.00
Health care facilities	134	2.537	1.045	1.00	4.00
Public water fountain	134	3.052	1.113	1.00	4.00
Information communication	134	3.664	.660	2.00	4.00
Electric supply	134	3.358	.871	2.00	4.00
Accommodation facilities	134	3.343	.997	1.00	4.00
Safety and security	134	2.798	.783	1.00	4.00
Destination facilities and services	134	3.021	1.198	1.00	5.00
Public facilities and services	134	3.530	.882	1.00	5.00

Note: M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, Min=Minimum and Max=Maximum and the likert scale value of 1 is excellent and 5 is not available.

Table 2: Infrastructure facilities and services development in Bale Zone.

and intangible cultural heritages like living styles, traditional systems, artifacts, built environment, social structure, architecture, paintings, and other historical values like Bale history, history of the known people (like General Wako Gutu and Kolonel Husen Bune), historical buildings, palace, battle fields, story, and oral tradition. These resources have indispensable values to develop tourism sector in the Zone.

The other less tourism potential of the area is the agricultural activities carried out in many areas of rural communities (Mean=3.182 and SD=.875). Due to this potential, agro-tourism activities might be developed in the rural area of Bale (Table 1). The Zone has high potentials in nature based tourism resources (Mean=2.239) and limited potentials in historical tourism resources (Mean=2.889).

Nature based Tourism Resources

The nature based tourism resources of Bale Zone is preferred as it has diverse range of geographical features like land forms, water basin, gorges, cliffs, native biological diversity like fauna and flora in line with scenic beauty. Comprehensively, the result indicated that the scenic beauty of landscapes is the big nature based resources and wildlife resources including fauna and flora with their habitats are the second and climatic related resources such as variation of rainfall, wind, temperature and humidity are the least nature based tourism resources of Bale zone. The main nature based tourism resources of Bale Zone are: scenic beauty of Bale Mountain National Park (BMNP) [10] and the wildlife species living in the park, Wabe Water Fall, Konodria Standing stone, Harena Forest, Wabe Shebele and Gasera Gorges, Wabe water fall in Dinsho, Welmel Water Falls, Shella Cave, Furme hot spring and Dink water fall, Holqa Sof- Umar (Sof- Umar: Caves of Mystery).

Culture based Tourism Resources

Ahead of the nature based tourism resources, built features and cultural artifacts are also important tourism attractions in Bale Zone. The data obtained from focus group discussion also showed that the Zone is much endowed with intact tangible and intangible cultural heritages. For instance, the people in Bale have their own cultural

values composed of traditional activities and religious ceremonies with old aged traditional dances, music, dressings, hair styles, language dialect (Afan Oromo), handicraft production, architecture, and traditional cuisine preparation. The majority of respondents (68.1%) believed that, tangible cultural sites such as churches, monasteries, shrines, mosques, monuments, buildings and palaces are the most important cultural attractions of the Zone. Secondly, the living cultures of local communities like ways of living, hospitality and friendliness, festivals and social holidays and events are the other potential cultural tourism resources of Bale Zone. As per information gained from focus group discussion among local communities of *Melka Amana kebele*, the people of Bale have enormous colorful cultural values and norms. For instance, gastronomic habit, dressing code, language, social ties and organizations, traditional ceremonies and events like *Gada System*, *Muda ceremony*, *Oda ceremony*, funeral, and weddings ceremonies, dance and traditional and modern music are the living in tangible cultural assets which attract both domestic and international visitors.

Historical Tourism Resources

Based on the data collected from interviews and field observation, Bale Zone has not much historical tourism resources comparing to natural and cultural tourism resources. The majority of respondents (74.2%) suggested that the main historical tourism resource are historical buildings, palace, the legendary people of Bale like General Waqo Gutu and their birth place, Bale peasant rebellion, battle fields and related historical sites are the potential historical tourism resources of Bale.

To support immediate demands of tourists and to satisfy the locals' interest, tourism infrastructural development is among the prime issues which need consideration while developing tourism in the area of Bale. But, Bale Zone has less tourism potentials in terms of infrastructure facilities and services to support the tourism development (M=3.772 and SD=.973). Transportation, accommodation and public and institutional facilities and services are very low in quality and quantity in major potential tourism sites of Bale (Table 2).

Major problems	Mean of the major challenges				
	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>
Lack of budget	134	2.358	1.351	1.00	5.00
Shortage of manpower	134	2.381	1.168	1.00	5.00
Less community awareness	134	2.887	.589	1.00	4.00
Inaccessibility	134	3.120	1.176	1.00	5.00
Poor facilities and services	134	3.052	1.503	1.00	5.00

Note: M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation, Min=Minimum and Max=Maximum of 1 is very high and 5 is very low.

Table 3: Mean of the major problems in major tourist destinations.

As it is presented in the above Table 2, the transportation facilities and services are said to be moderate in the study area ($M=3.02$ and $SD=.991$). Destination facilities and services in the area of Bale Zone are limited in type, variety and quality of services ($Mean=3.131$ and $SD=1.046$). In the Zone the public and institutional services and facilities are very poor in quality and availability ($Mean=3.530$ and $SD=.882$), actually, communities are access for education ($M=2.679$ and $SD=.881$), health care facilities ($M=2.537$ and $SD=1.045$) and safety and security facilities and services ($M=2.798$ and $SD=.783$). The other problem which is observed in the area is shortage of electric power ($M=3.358$ and $SD=.871$), inaccessibility of information communication ($M=3.664$ and $SD=.660$) and tapped water supplies ($M=3.052$ and $SD=1.113$), there are poor level of accommodation facilities and services and limited in number ($Mean=3.343$ and $Std. D=.997$) (Table 3).

Major Challenges in Relation to Potential Tourism Sites of Bale Zone

In addition to the above problems, based on the data generated from in depth interviews, FGD and field observation, as it is noted in the above Table 3, the major challenges of developing tourism sector in Bale Zone are: poor tourism infrastructural development, less community awareness, poor co-ordination effort of stakeholders at different level, incapability of financial and human Resources.

Conclusions and Recommendation

Tourism sector has been emerged as part of the new development strategies for developing countries. It is primarily focused on participation of marginalized communities and local development. Within this scheme tourism development in Bale Zone is indubitably essential. This study ascertained that Bale Zone has huge tourism potentials and it is one of the potential sites to develop tourism projects successfully. The potential tourism resources are consisting of natural, cultural, and historical tourism attractions. Although, infrastructure facilities and services have pivotal roles for the exploitation of tourism potentials of Bale Zone, the findings of this study revealed that tourism infrastructural facilities and services are very poor in quality and number which are incapable to exploit its tourism potentials.

Although Bale Zone is enriched with potential tourism resources, the Zone is not capitalized on by exploiting the tourism potentials due to different problems. Budget limitation, dearth of skillful manpower, inaccessibility, less community awareness, poor infrastructural facilities and services developments, less conservation activities, poor administration and co-ordination effort of stakeholders are the major problems which highly affects the tourism sector in Bale Zone.

In order to develop the tourism sector, potential tourism resources should be supported with basic tourism infrastructural facilities and services (accommodation establishments and road) should be

constructed and other public and institutional facilities and services should be improved in the potential woredas. Therefore, the following recommendations were also forwarded:

1. It is necessary to improve and establish different accommodation establishments (standardized hotels, restaurants, cafes, guest house, campsites, eco-lodges and etc.) in potential tourism sites of Bale Zone so as to exploits its tourism potentials by answering the growing demands of visitors. Here, the concerned bodies should give priority to construct standardized hotels or lodges in Dinsho, Robe and Rira and at least tourist recommended hotels should be established in the towns of the woreda such as Goro, Agarfa, Madawalabu, Angetu, Jara, Dawe kechen, Berbere, and Agarfa.

2. The road and transportation systems should be improved so as to connect the potential sites of Bale Zone and to make the travel easy for potential visitors especially woredas like Dawe Serer and Lega Hida have no road facilities, therefore, Transportation and Road Authority should be allocate budget for the construction of roads in theses woredas.

3. Public and institutional facilities and services (like improving and access of health care centers, electricity, drinking water, sewage, telephone line, public lighting, safety and security, training schools or institution, banking, and etc.) should be provided especially in the remote areas of Bale.

4. To make Bale Zone as one of brand destinations in the country, the potential tourism resources of the area should be well promoted in a desired way through different promotional tools like leaflets, folders, brochure, magazines, catalogs, maps, websites/ internet and different radio channels and TVs at regional and national level.

5. It has to have broader awareness creation program for the wider communities towards the potential and existing tourism resources of Bale Zone to build positive images in their mind so as to increase their pride and sense of ownership to conserve the resources in a desired level.

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