

Ethiopia: Opportunities and Challenges of Tourism Development in the Addis Ababa-upper Rift Valley Corridor

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Abstract

In spite of a long history of promotion and development, Ethiopia's tourism industry is in its initial stages of development. Changes in governance systems have resulted in different social constructions of the role of tourism in national development. Since 1990s, the partial opening up of the economy to private investment, the liberalization of national economic management and a modicum of political decentralization of administration and decision-making have contributed to significant growth in both the number of inbound tourists and the generation of foreign exchange.

This research examines the opportunities and challenges of tourism development in the Upper Rift Valley corridor extending from Addis Ababa, the capital city, to Nazret-Sodere, Shashemene-Hawasa and Debre Berhan-Ankober. Based on field visits and semi-structured interviews of key private-public stakeholders and archival research, the study argues that the corridor has tremendous opportunities for developing a spatial/geographical pattern of tourist destinations ranging from single destinations, to en-route, base camp, regional tour and trip chasing ones.

Keywords: Tourism; Ethiopia; Upper rift valley

Introduction

The tourism industry in Ethiopia could be legitimately described as one that is still in its infancy. Its current low level of development is often attributed to changes in governance systems and development policies, weak promotion, lack of trained manpower, finance, and knowledge and management capacity. In particular, the sudden and dramatic shift of the country's political leadership and development ideology from Monarchical absolutism and markets to military dictatorship and socialism in 1974 had a dramatic arresting impact on both foreign and domestic tourism development. In 1991, the assumption of power by the Tigrean Peoples Liberation Front (TPLF) and the subsequent creation of a broader front under the banner of Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) introduced yet another major shift in governance and development ideology in the direction of 'ethnic' federalism and a more market-oriented economic development and management system. The highly truncated system of tourism development under the previous administration was changed when the new government allowed the participation of the private sector and strengthened its institutional guidance through the creation of a new ministry of culture and tourism in 2005.

This research examines the major challenges and opportunities in the Addis Ababa-Upper Rift Valley Corridor and makes a series of recommendations on a future path to sustainable tourism development in the study area. The upper rift valley corridor is the most intensely developed part of the country. The concentration of significant investment in industry, commerce, infrastructures and services in the corridor since the 1950s has led to the establishment and development of number of smaller towns with significant economic, social and physical infrastructures, services and resources. The capital city, Addis Ababa, is already the most important tourist destination. The other two major areas of tourist attraction have been and remain to be the historic northern route focusing on the ancient cities of Axum and the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela along with the castles of Gondar and the Bahr Dar monasteries and Tissesat falls and the southern pastoralist communities focusing on the rift valley lakes and the indigenous communities of the Omo and Gambella basins.

Ethiopia's tourism has been more focused on the socio-cultural

and historical aspects of the country's development. The nature-focused tourism of Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda has attracted more foreign tourists though Ethiopia's outstanding biodiversity and agro-ecological zones could match and even surpass the East African nature tourism potential. Unfortunately, the low level of development, marketing and promotion of nature tourism has resulted in many foreigners going to East Africa side-stepping Ethiopia. The Addis Ababa -Upper rift valley corridor could easily develop into a vibrant and sustainable tourist destination for both domestic and foreign visitors. The wide range of natural resources and most developed infrastructures and services along the corridor lend it special significance.

The methodological approach used in the study is based on a relaxed interpretation of Butler's tourist area cycle model in which tourist sites in the upper rift valley corridor of Ethiopia are viewed from a transitional vantage point involving six interrelated stages, namely: exploration, involvement, development, consolidation, stagnation and rejuvenation. It is evident that not all tourist sites go through all these stages. Hence, a relaxed interpretation of the theoretical construct was invoked in this study. The corridor's significant overall development in the last 10 years is well reflected in the tourism development sector and the use of the transition model is more than justified by ground realities.

Based on field visits, semi-structured interviews of stakeholders and archival research, the study contributes to a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities that the upper rift valley corridor presents as a tourist destination. The semi-structured interviews

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Received September 16, 2015; **Accepted** October 17, 2015; **Published** October 25, 2015

Citation: Kidane-Mariam T (2015) Ethiopia: Opportunities and Challenges of Tourism Development in the Addis Ababa-upper Rift Valley Corridor. J Tourism Hospit 4: 167. doi:10.4172/21670269.1000167

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ranged in approach from one that facilitated more unguarded interactions from interviewees about work place experiences and the overall dynamics of the tourist industry to more formal discussions with relevant stakeholders. The use of informal verbal exchanges with hotel workers, managers, tour operators and nonverbal expressions at places of work was useful in teasing out information about the sector's challenges and opportunities on the ground. Nonverbal expressions at places of work places are manifested not only in the degree of efficiency in the delivery of services but also in the conditions of the physical settings or environments in which they are delivered. My interaction with stakeholders in the field was deliberately designed to extract information about the sector in a manner that reflects ground realities in more objective ways. When the political environment for open and unencumbered discourse on any aspect of development is not conducive, structured approaches to information gathering could lead to politically correct social constructions of local and national dynamics of tourism development. The unencumbered expressions of workers at Sodere, Ankober, Nazret and Hawassa contrasted with the extreme caution and reserve at the Ministry of Water Resources and Mines. The study was conducted during my sabbatical leave from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania between the months of August / December, 2012.

Following a brief introduction, section 2 synoptically introduces some conceptual bases of tourism. In section 3, a general background on the national tourism scene contextualizes the situation in the Addis Ababa-Upper Rift Valley corridor. In section 4, a general inventory of site and situation of the study area provides information on location and physical resources, demography, economy and infrastructure and services. In section 5, a synthesis of major issues, opportunities and challenges is presented along with a recommendation of needed policy, strategy and program initiatives for a sustainable and viable tourism industry development (Figure 1).

Conceptual Bases of Tourism

Tourism is an important component of the service economy and incorporates such services as entertainment, hotels and leisure [1].

As the world's largest industry, tourism brings the tourist and service provider together and produces an experience for both. John Urry [2] has introduced the concept of the 'tourist gaze' to signify "the experience gained by the tourist in encountering scenes and landscapes that are distinctive from those associated with everyday life". Hunter and Green [3] have identified four purposes of travel by tourists, namely: pleasure, visiting friends or relatives, work-related business (conferences) and personal business. Literature on different modes of tourism recognize Fordist, Post-Fordist, Heritage, Ecotourism and Themed space modes of consumption [4,5]. The Fordist and Post-Fordist modes are based on mass consumption, economies of scale and highly standardized in their delivery of services and amenities. They are promoted by large tour companies, hotels and airlines. Heritage tourism has been and is a dominant mode of consumption in Ethiopia's case and tourists consume history as a commodity. Visitors to Lalibela, Axum, Gondar, Bahr Dar and other historical sites essentially buy the interpretation, reinterpretation and reconfiguration or reconstruction of the long and checkered history of these places. Ecotourism and adventure holidays are another mode of tourist consumption. The proliferation of private tour operators in the country has attracted tourists who are interested in such tourist sites as the Afar active volcano, the Semien, Bale and Awash national parks, Ankober's magnificent landscapes and ecology. Lastly, the development of themed spaces in Addis Ababa, Hawassa attracts leisure and entertainment spaces for both local and foreign tourists. These are family oriented spaces such as Debre Zeit's (Bishoftu's) Afro-Ashu, Babogaya, Kuriftu resorts; Hawassa's Haile G/ Sellassie's hotel/resort, Edna Mall and YodEthiopia in the Bole District of Addis Ababa (Annex 3).

Economic geographers explain the evolution of tourist destinations using Butler's tourist area cycle model based on the principles of economics and management of product life cycles. The central idea behind the model is that tourist destinations, resorts or cultural heritage sites undergo several stages starting from initial exploration to ultimate decline or rejuvenation [3]. The development of the various tourist destinations in the Addis Ababa-upper rift valley corridor can be seen through the prism of a relaxed interpretation of the area cycle model



Figure 1: Ethiopia: Major parks and centers of tourist attractions.

as follows. The exploration stage is often associated with small scale tourism development in which limited number of tourists explores new experiences at sites. In the involvement state, tourist sites experience slow growth as local entrepreneurs participate in the provision of tourist facilities. The experience in the capital city is symptomatic of the rapid growth and consolidation stages in which local and foreign businesses invest in a wide range of tourism-related infrastructures and services. The Sheraton, Hilton, Radisson, Intercontinental and Marriott have invested in the city, marketed their products internationally and contributed significantly to the local economy. The dilapidation and mismanagement of the condition of infrastructures and amenities in the once thriving Sodere hot spring resort about 100 kms from the capital city is an excellent example of the stagnation phase. The addition of new attractions, facilities and tourists in Addis Ababa and Hawassa reflects the rejuvenation phase of tourism development (Table 1).

It is also useful to note that there seems to be a growing interconnectedness between the cultural landscape and political development. As Lefevbre noted, every society produces a space, its own space. The cultural landscape is thus conceived as “an emblematic site of representation, a locus of both power and resistance and a key element in the heritage process [6]”. The building, rebuilding and representation of the cultural landscape for the tourist gaze are continuous and show change and fluidity. Political developments in the country in the post-1991 period have revolved around the concepts of decentralizing and democratizing governance based on ethnic nationalism and federalism. The cultural landscape of the study area shows interesting physical manifestations of the new general trajectory of the politics of place.

Positive and negative impacts of tourism

Tourism plays a very important role in the political, economic, cultural and environmental development of countries. On the positive side, its role as a foreign exchange earner; employment generator, developer of infrastructures, promoter of industries, businesses, tax revenues and redistributor of domestic wealth can be cited. At the local level, it helps to diversify the local economy and reduce dependence on trade and extractive activities. It also has a multiplier effect on all local businesses and attracts new money from both local and external sources. It enhances community aesthetics. The negative impacts are often attributed to its contribution to inflation, the multiplication of social ills, the perpetuation of low wages for workers, the diversion of scarce resources and high cost of infrastructures and environmental degradation.

General Background and Context

History of tourism development in Ethiopia - a synopsis

Successive Ethiopian governments have promoted tourism during their tenures. The monarchy that mediated politics, economics, culture,

environment and technology for most of the 20th century initiated the promotion, marketing and development of tourism as an integral part of the overall dynamics of national development. Ethiopia's existence as an independent country for thousands of years and the diversity of its ecology and culture were images that captivated foreigners for a long time. The promotional logo of “Thirteen months of Sunshine” was interjected by an imaginary of a proud and cultured people professing the two major universal religions of the world-Christianity and Islam and an ethnic religion of Felasha Jewry. The magnificent material iconographies of Ethiopian culture were relayed to the visitor through the timeless architectural wonders of Axum's stele, Lalibela's rock-hewn churches, Gondar's Castles, Harar's medieval walled city and archeological sites that traced the origin of homo-sapiens to the Rift valley where the skeletal remains of Dinkinesh (Lucy) and Selam were discovered.

Marketing and promoting have been, however, the weakest areas of tourism development. The negative imageries that framed the country following the famines and political strife of the 1970 -1990 period defined tourist perceptions of the country to a considerable extent. Some tour promoters have even gone further by proposing that the tourist gaze in Ethiopia was a moralistic experience. Such perspective was suggested by “Lonely Planet” in the following introduction of the tourist experience in Ethiopia as “testing, inspiring and heartbreaking-a journey you will never forget. You do not explore Ethiopia for a relaxing getaway, you venture here to be moved and moved you should be” (<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/Ethiopia>) Introducing Ethiopia: Overview.

Of course, such uni-dimensional construction of social reality about the tourist gaze diminishes the beauty, richness, complexity and extremely rewarding experience that the tourist gets from visiting the ancient country and civilization. Tourism not only enriches the lives of tourists but also improves the lives of people by transforming societies from underdevelopment and deprivation to a more developed and caring political and socio-economic environment.

The cultural landscape

With an estimated population of 95 million - 2015, Ethiopia is the second most populous country in Africa. Culturally, the population is diverse constituting more than 80 ethnic groups. The diversity and unique features Ethiopia's ethnic identities and culture have been used to market tourism with some success. The highly diverse physical environment, climate, flora and fauna have also been important attractions for both domestic and foreign tourists. Ethiopian tourism promotional pictures have used these spectacular features to attract visitors. The Imperial government wove the history of Ethiopia's statehood and monarchical system to the time of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon whose liaison resulted in the birth of Minelik 1st who is reputed to have brought the True Cross on which Christ was

Stage of development of tourism	Tourist destinations in the corridor	Major features/attributes of destinations
Exploration stage	Bishoftu (Debre Zeit)-Babogaya, Afro Ashu, Adadula, Kuriftu; Ankober	Small scale tourist development - crater lake centered hotels/resorts
Involvement stage	Addis Ababa, D/Zeit, Nazret, Hawassa	Significant domestic tourism activity
Rapid growth stage	Hawassa	Significant growth of tourism and facilities
Consolidation stage	Addis Ababa	High rate of growth of tourism and economy
Stagnation stage	Sodere hot springs resort, Langano lake resort	Dramatic decline of once thriving domestic tourism
Rejuvenation	Addis Ababa, Hawassa	Significant tourist activity due to redevelopment

Source: Mackinnon and Cumbers [1].

Table 1: The evolutionary stages of the various tourist destinations in the Addis Ababa-Upper Rift Valley Corridor.

crucified to Ethiopia. The promotion of exotic places and peoples was part of the trajectory of the tourism trade.

The success of Emperor Haile Selassie in attracting the headquarter offices of both the UNECA (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa) and OAU (Organization of African Unity) (now AU) (African Union) was a monumental contribution to the development of tourism in Ethiopia. Tourist flows rivaled that of neighboring Kenya and Ethiopian Airlines, the national carrier had as many as seven flights a day to the historic route during the 1968-1973 period. Significant investment was made in tourism infrastructure and the sector was becoming a key contributor to national socio-economic development [7].

Political changes and tourism development

Tourism development was highly regarded and promoted during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie. The captivating history of the country's three thousand years of independent existence and the unique contribution of Ethiopia's Orthodox Church to the literary and cultural development of a diverse population were interjected into the "Thirteen Months of sunshine" logo in promoting tourism abroad. The famous historic route linking Axum, Lalibela, Gondar, Debre Damo, and Bahr Dar became the clarion call for all Ethiopia visitors. The Ethiopian Tourism Commission employed the services of artists, the Ethiopian Airlines, tour promoters and investors to build and manage the necessary infrastructure to cater to the tourist industry. In spite of these and other efforts, the tourism infrastructure of the country was underdeveloped and rudimentary in comparison with such neighboring countries as Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

The military government that toppled the monarchy in 1974 brought about a sudden and radical development for tourism. The hardline socialist ideology and development policy that the military government introduced into the country and the subsequent social upheaval virtually killed tourism for a long time. The great political turmoil that ensued in the wake of the nationalization of all lands and extra urban houses, businesses, banks, insurance offices and the commanding heights of the economy drove the private sector from the tourism industry. The considerable infrastructure and services developed to cater to the tourism sector collapsed and the number of foreign visitors to the country plummeted significantly. The lack of security in the country essentially closed the tourism sector for good. Those who ventured into the country were largely on official missions or specialized visitors associated with government institutions. In the early and late 1980s, the tourism commission tried to promote tourism by improving special tourist bus services to local destinations but the overall socio-economic and political environment was such that the sector could not regain its pre-revolution days. In fact, the sector was largely neglected and the tourist infrastructure built earlier became neglected and in some cases disintegrated.

The post-1991 period has seen a reorientation of the development trajectory of the country from a centrally-managed into a quasi-capitalist market system in which the role of both public and private sectors has been significantly reconfigured and promoted. The impact of the structural shift in economic policy and political ideology has been felt quite significantly in the tourism sector. The proliferation of tour operators, the increase in investment in accommodations, transport and food services and the improved security condition in most parts of the country and the flow of foreign investment to various sectors of the economy were some of the major changes that have had a positive bearing on tourism development. One can see a general

reduction in the engagement of the public sector and the opening up of market possibilities for the active participation of the private sector both nationally and regionally. The explosion of tourist facilities, particularly hotels and other accommodations in the capital city and the major towns along the rift valley and elsewhere in the country is a clear testimony to the increasing role of the private sector in the tourism industry.

Role of the sector in the national economy

The impact of the tourism industry on the national economy is quite significant. The wider socio-economic benefits of the sector are particularly important since most of the accommodations; transportation service, tour operations and financial intermediaries are owned and operated by nationals. On the other hand the import of many of the inputs from abroad leads to significant leakages. On the social front, tourism has been responsible for cultural exchange facilitating the education of visitors about Ethiopian history and culture. The level of development of tour companies, hotel chains and promotional services in the sector needs to be significantly improved in order to package the tourist experience more satisfactorily.

There have been few systematic studies about the significance of the tourism industry at national, regional and local levels. National level statistical information varies in detail and reliability. Kauffman [8] in his study of the tourism potential of the central rift valley region of the country noted that Ethiopia's tourism development policies and programs have been defined in terms of promoting the objectives of changing the prevailing negative image of the country in the world, increasing foreign exchange earnings and reducing poverty through sustainable tourism development and other sectoral development efforts. The 2008 national tourism policy of the country saw six critical areas in its 5 year development strategy focusing on human resource development, infrastructure development, strengthening information and management capacity, service improvement, image change, promotion of domestic tourism [8].

Since 2002, the tourism sector has been growing at an average rate of 13% per year. In 2005, the country received about US\$ 132 million from 150,000 inbound tourists. Arrivals grew from 81, 581 in 1997 to 227, 256 in 2005. Of these 19% was accounted by international tourist arrivals while the remaining 81% was accounted by business people, transit travelers, conference attendees, visiting relatives and others. The country expects to increase the flow of tourists to 381,325 arrivals by 2015 [8]. The market share of Ethiopia from the international tourism market was a pitiful 0.017% during the 1991/2003 period. The significance of tourism to the national economy has been growing significantly since the adoption of market economy as the guiding ideology of the state since 1991.

The impact of the travel and tourism industry on national employment was estimated at 1,388,000 jobs in 2007 - about 7.1% of the total employment in the country or 1 in 14 jobs. It is anticipated that the number of employment in the sector will grow to 1,527,000 by 2017 or a share of 6.1% of total employment. In 2006, the sector was the 3rd highest foreign exchange earner after coffee and oilseeds - US\$ 132 m from 150,000 inbound tourists. In 2009, it became the largest foreign exchange earner with receipts of \$1.1bn from 330,000 tourists. The number of inbound tourists has also increased significantly over the last decade from 81,581 arrivals in 1995 to 227, 398 in 2005; 330,000 in 2009- an average growth rate of 13% since 2002 [7,9].

The revenue generation performance of Ethiopian tourism was much lower than the countries of Eastern Africa. In, 2012 Ethiopia's

revenue from tourism was USD 460 million as compared with Tanzania's USD 1.7 bln; Kenya's 1.2 bln and Uganda's USD 800 million. The poor showing of Ethiopia in generating revenues from the tourism sector was partially attributed to the low admission fees that parks and tourist sites charge visitors. It was reported that current admission fees to all parks were US\$5.0 for visiting tourists; \$3.0 for expatriates; \$1 for Ethiopians and \$ 0.5 for students. Kenya and Tanzania charge US\$ 35 and US \$ 65 respectively. Ethiopia plans to charge foreign tourists US\$ 13.0 -16.0 for premium parks and US\$ 6.5-8.0 for other sites [10]. In a recent article on the promotion of tourism in Ethiopia, Reuters reported that tourism had earned Ethiopia an estimated USD 2 billion in 2013. Ethiopia is also preparing to build a unique archeological museum at a cost of 10 million Euros to attract tourists interested in early hominids [11].

Data on the purpose of visit indicated that 28% of tourists came for vacation; 22% as transit passengers; 10% to visit relatives; 7% to attend conferences and 14% for unspecified reasons. Regarding the geographical origin of tourists, 37% came from Africa; 24% from Europe; 18% from America; 10% from the Middle East; 8% from Asia and 2% from other parts [7].

In spite of the significant improvement in the performance of the sector since 2000, Ethiopia's tourism is still woefully underdeveloped when compared with many countries in Sub-Saharan Africa (Annex 1). The country's hotel infrastructure has yet to reach a critical mass to attract more tourists. It was noted that there were only 900 high end hotel rooms (Sheraton, Radisson Blu and Hilton). The figure will likely grow to 1700 by 2017 with the completion of a number of important hotel investments. Likewise, the road network of the country would reach 136,000 kms from less than 50,000 kms in 2010 [10].

Emerging government policies and tourism

The Federal government has opened up possibilities for more regional level participation in decision-making and resource mobilization and allocation for different sectors of the economy. The concepts of sustainable development, 'development list state', public/private partnership, poverty reduction, equity, decentralization and regional and local development have defined the thinking and praxis of the federal government. The government has defined tourism as a comprehensive sustainable development activity in which the objectives and goals of promoting economic growth, raising the standard of living of people, the protection of the environment and the rational use of natural resources are central to its overall operation and management [7].

The state has been enacting policies, implementing rules, regulations and laws, promoting marketing and facilitating the expansion of infrastructures and services. The focus of the federal government on critical policy, strategy, program, rules and regulations has expanded the possibility for the active engagement of the private sector in promoting, marketing and managing tourism. Yet, the gap between the rhetoric of decentralization and regional/local decision-making powers and processes seems to be quite significant. The results of semi-structured interviews of managers and workers of hotels and resorts in the upper rift valley indicated that the sector suffers from a number of challenges including bureaucratic red tape, rent seeking behavior among some government officers, intermittent power outage, water shortage and high cost of imported inputs [12,13].

The low level of tourism development in the country had been attributed to a number of mitigating circumstances including poor international image and visibility as tourist destination, weak demand

among international tour operators and travel agencies, weak local tour operators, weak supply chains serving the sector, weak management and coordination, weak products, unfocussed institutional structures. The World Bank Study, in its conclusion saw 'collective national vision, leadership, guiding government policy, shared strategic priorities, public and private sector implementation capacity and resources' as prerequisites for successful tourism sector management and growth [7]. These broad areas of concern were likewise reflected in the opinions of tourists.

The researcher's field visits indicated that there was an interesting and increasing interconnection between landscape and political development. Since the early 1990s, a national and regional process of disavowing the past and rebuilding the present on the grand narrative of equality of nations and nationalities is expressing itself in spatial forms. The Addis Ababa-Upper Rift Valley Corridor comes under three regional states, namely the Addis Ababa federal state, Oromia and the Southern Peoples and Nationalities regional state. The entire corridor has benefited from significant growth in economic production and infrastructural development. The changes in identity politics are also visible in the cultural landscape as is evidenced by monuments and emblematic sites of heritage representation. The grand monuments at the entrance of Adama (Nazareth) and main street Hawassa are attempts at creating public spaces that signify, promote and commodify the new-born ethnic identities of the respective regions. They are definitely meant to engage the population in the new discourse of ethnic nationalism and erase past historical processes and experiences. Likewise, the art exhibits at Bishoftu (Debre Zeit), Adama (Nazareth) and Hawassa are clear examples of the growing attention of both Federal and Regional administrations to promote pride in ethnic identity.

The attempt to create socio-spatial arrangements and landscapes that purportedly represent the new political ideology of ethnic democracy is visible in the landscape throughout the corridor. Correspondingly, the neglect of the Ankober historical site (capital city of Ethiopia in the 19th century) barely 165 km from the Addis Ababa can be seen as an attempt to delegitimize and decrystallize any nationalistic sentiments among the traditional power elites that mediated national politics in a dominant manner in the past. The attempt to resurrect Ankober as an important historical site and potential eco-tourist destination by a private entrepreneur was an alternative discourse that contrasted significantly from the official government construction of the significance of the historical site.

While Ethiopia's diverse physical and cultural resources provide excellent opportunities for the development of tourism, such challenges as poor image abroad, poor marketing and promotion, lack of well-developed tourist related infrastructure and services; lack of knowledge about tourism, low level of human capacity both at managerial and operational levels, nonobligatory nature of legislation; concentration of institutional capacity at the capital city, Addis Ababa; contradictory rules, regulations and expectations at national, regional and local levels as critical challenges facing Ethiopian tourism.

National tourism development strategy

Based on the findings of the 2006 World Bank study, a strategic framework for the development and management of a sustainable and productive tourism sector was elaborated using following four fundamental and interlocking issues: sector management and governance; enabling environment; tourism enterprises cluster and the resource base. The five year tourism development plan had incorporated human resources development, strengthening information and

management capacity, mage reconstruction strategy, improvement of services, infrastructure development and the promotion of domestic tourism as priority areas. The key generic tools to translate the strategies into actions included well developed sector strategies and policies; a strong public investment program; public-private partnerships; strong community involvement; reliable and timely information; strong coordination among sectors and strong public promotion campaigns [7].

Ethiopia was recently reported as launching a major revamp of the tourism sector. Based on a recent study under the title of “Economic Growth and Tourism Sector in Ethiopia”, the government indicated that the lack of skilled manpower, poor infrastructure, lackluster marketing, weak financial system and poor government support were the key obstacles for the under-exploitation of the rich and diverse tourism potential of the country. The new tourism development policy that came out in 2010 encouraged the more vigorous participation of the private sector in tourism development. According to the National Growth and transformation plan, the tourism industry will be expected to garner an annual revenue of \$US 3 billion beginning 2015. It also envisaged the creation of 1.5 million jobs in the sector (60% of the 3 million new jobs to be created) [10]. In a March, 2014 statement, the Minister of Culture and Tourism indicated that government support for tourism was visible. The recent establishment of the Ethiopian Tourism Transformation Council headed by the prime minister was a clear demonstration of the priority attention that the sector was getting from the government. The establishment of the Ethiopian Tourism Organization (ETO) was cited as another important strategic move in promoting destination development and marketing [12,13].

The degree to which these strategies and actions will be implemented in the coming years will determine the development of the sector in the Upper rift valley corridor. Against this general background on the state of tourism development in the country, it is appropriate to focus on the opportunities and challenges of tourism development in the specific study region.

The Upper Rift Valley Corridor: Physical Setting, Resource Base and Socio-economic Features

Physical setting and resources

The physical resources of the Addis Ababa-Upper Rift Valley Corridor are many and diverse (Annex 1). The 265 km stretch from Addis Ababa to Hawassa presents a wide range of physical and ecological resources and experiences. Addis Ababa, the capital city (pop. 3.0 m+) is located at an elevation ranging from 8-9,000 ft. above sea level. Located at 9 degrees N latitude, it lies in the tropical zone yet has a predominantly temperate type climate due to the influence of elevation. The Entoto Mountains in the north and northeast, the Wechecha and Menagesha in the west, and the Yeka mountain peaks in the east encircle the capital city giving it one of the most aesthetically pleasing visual experiences to the visitor. The fact that each of these mountain chains and tops has a church and an old forest growth makes the trailing experience of the tourist most rewarding. The Menagesha Park in the west is the oldest forested park in the region and provides a majestic visage of the entire basin in which the capital city lies. Such famous churches as Entoto Mariam, Raguel, Church of the Savior and St. Gabriel are closely associated with the establishment and early growth of the city. They are important cultural destinations to the faithful and other tourists. Likewise the grand Anwar mosque and other recently built ones are important tourist attractions.

The area is well drained by a number of streams such as the Kebena, Kechene, Akaki and Legedadi. Further south, the headstreams of the Awash River basin start in the region. Its economic and touristic significance is well recognized as it features such modern structures as the Koka dam and Gelila palace ground, the hippopotamus park nearby, the Melkasa I and II hydroelectric dams, Wonji sugar plantation and factory, Horizon fruit farm and packing plant among many [14-18].

As one drives to the east and southeast of the capital city, the beautiful landscape features a number of interesting natural sites such as the Bishoftu crater lakes and adjoining fertile agricultural plains. Akaki, Bishoftu and Mojo towns have grown significantly since their establishment taking advantage of the rich agricultural resources of the region and the significant investment made in political and economic infrastructures and services. The famous Hora lake restaurant overseeing one of the crater lakes is a visual delight to the visitor as are the other crater lakes in Bishoftu town. Now cordoned off from public use, the lake represents a resource for future touristic development. The national Air force base, the institute of agricultural research, the management institute and other government and nongovernmental institutions complement the beautiful natural scenery in the region. The significant resort developments on lakes Bishoftu, Babogaya and Kuruftu nearby clearly indicate the tremendous possibilities (Table 2).

Socio-economic conditions and dynamics

Population: The region’s population has grown fast as a result of its position as the political commercial, industrial and diplomatic center of the country. The following table provides a time series analysis of the changes that the towns in the corridor made between 1984 and 2011 (Table 3).

The significant growth of the population in less than 30 years indicates the vitality of the corridor in terms of economic and infrastructural development. In particular, the growth dynamics of the population of the two smaller towns of the corridor, Debre Zeit (Bishoftu) and Nazareth (Adama) illustrates their potential as important attractions for domestic tourism. As the most preferred investment location for major industrial, commercial and modern agricultural enterprises, the demographic future of the region is definitely one of

Name of Lake	Surface area km ²	Basin type	Depth m	Vol. mm ³
Ziway	423	Open	9	755
Abiata	166	Closed	10	200
Langano	233	Open	42	258
Shalla	310	Closed	252	340
Hawasa	1095	Closed	23	143

Source: FDRE [19].

Table 2: Major Lakes in the Upper Rift Valley Corridor.

Urban center in corridor	Pop. Size 1984	1994	2007	2011	% change 1984-2011
Addis Ababa	1,412,575	2,112,737	2,739,551	2,980,000	107
Debre Zeit/Bishoftu	51,143	73,372	99,928	118,500	102
Mojo	13,945	21,997	29,547	35,000	177
Nazareth/Adama	76,284	127,842	220,212	260,600	240

<http://www.citypopulation.de/ethiopia.html>; Dr. Aynalem Adugna’s <http://www.EthioDemographyAndHealth.org>; based on CSA 1994, 2007 and 2011 web figures

Table 3: Demographic dynamics of towns in the Addis Ababa-Sodere Corridor.

further growth and expansion [19-21] (Annex 4).

The economic base: The dominance of the capital city as the political seat, industrial, commercial and diplomatic center of the country, has attracted the largest share of national investment in economic, social infrastructures and services. The Addis Ababa-upper rift valley corridor has therefore attained the status of the most intensely developed part of the country. Thousands of government, private, nongovernmental organizations and civil society establishments provide employment for the population. The immediate hinterland of the corridor is a vast and fertile agricultural economy capable of supplying the raw material and market needs of the economy and society [22,23].

Cultural Resources

The cultural history of Ethiopia's local communities is virtually unknown to both its residents and visitors. The lack of codified knowledge of local conditions permeates both urban and rural communities. The visitor is often fed anecdotal and often times conflicting information about the origin and dynamics of transformation of the community. The lack and/or inadequacy of readily available information on the most rudimentary physical and cultural attributes of the major towns in the Addis Ababa- Upper Rift valley corridor was a glaring deficiency that the researcher faced during the field survey. A small tour operator in the town of Debre Zeit (Bishoftu) was completely at a loss when I asked her some information on the key places that she would show me if I employed her services. Her response was that I would find out when we reached the sites to be visited. Neither textual nor graphic information was locally available about the places of tourist interest. The picture was not different even in Nazareth and Hawassa, the much larger tourist destinations in the Upper Rift Valley. The brochure provided by Haile G/selasse's modern hotel/resort complex on the shores of Lake Hawassa was woefully inadequate and had very little to say about the facility and the immediate environment. Everywhere, the tourist is faced with formidable challenges of finding out places of interest [24].

As the most intensely developed part of the country, the cultural history of the corridor is rich. Its current level of development and significance to the national and regional economy is very much associated with the broader dynamics of modernization that was ushered by Emperor Minelik II towards the end of the 19th century. The choice of Entoto hills in the northern part of the metropolis as the original site of the capital city ended the history of wandering capitals of former Emperors and governance systems. The corridor has played an important role in expanding the boundary of the Ethiopian empire to where it is now.

The introduction of the Ethio-Djibouti railway line in 1917 opened a new era of international trade and diplomatic activity. The current development surface in the corridor is the result of this technological innovation and the subsequent building of roads. The entire corridor's development was also affected by the rich agricultural land that supported a productive agriculture capable of meeting the ever increasing demand of the capital city for food, water, and energy.

The establishment of modern industrial plants along the corridor was also facilitated by the railway and road networks that developed in the corridor. Flour mills, oil, textile, cement and saw mills were among the first group of industries that were established along the corridor [25].

The tourism infrastructure of the corridor was very much the result of the development of Addis Ababa as the political, cultural, economic

seat of power and the rich agricultural hinterland that supported its growth. The corridor's tourist potential was greatly facilitated by the Assab-Addis Ababa and Addis Ababa-Moyale roads. The fast pace of growth of the towns along the corridor was facilitated by the increasing demand for such critical tourist services as dining, resting, recreation and commercial exchange. The Ministry of culture and Youth prepares promotional materials that serve as historic markers. Historic markers usually identify important historic sites, events and resources that are recognizable by local people, tourists and travelers. Yet the level of public awareness, knowledge system and institutional support is weak at best and non-existing in most instances and places. The AA-Sodere corridor abounds with many such markers but very few sites, objects and structures in the corridor are identified as such. For example, the Airforce base in Bishoftu, the Hora lake former palace/hotel complex, the Akaki textile and Mojjo tannery, the railway yard in Nazareth, the Koka I and II dams, the Gelila palace/hotel ground, the Melkasa power station and palace ground, the hippopotamus park and others deserve such recognition and designation [26].

Most of the historic cultural sites, objects, structures of the corridor are found in and around the capital city. Such sites as the Grand palace, the national palace, the railway station, Adwa victory monument, liberation statue and monument, Arada's Minelik monument, Abune Petros statue, The trinity, St George, St. Mary, St. Gebriel, St. Michael churches and the Grand Anwar Mosque, the national museum, the national theatre, the national library, the old telecommunication building, Minelik's Mausoleum, the piazza, Mercato, the Taitu, Ghion and Genet hotels are some of the cultural sites of historical significance. In more recent years such magnificent structures as the Sheraton Hotel, The UNECA and AU Head offices, Bole Medhane Alem church, new mosques have added cultural resonance to the fast growing metropolis. The diplomatic quarters of many embassies such as those of Italy, Germany, Britain, Russia, France, USA and Belgium have also been significant cultural icons in the history of Addis Ababa's and Ethiopia's development. Likewise such unique institutions as the Fistula hospital and Minelik II hospital attract the attention of scrutinizing tourists.

The low level of public awareness and institutional support for archeological and historical inventory of worthy objects, structures, sites and resources at national, regional and local levels is a mitigating factor in exploring the rich tapestry of nature-society relationship in the corridor. It is unfortunate that such database as the location, historical name or designation, status in national cultural heritage register, resource category associated with objects, structures, places and resources is unavailable [21].

Geographic Patterns of Tourist Destinations in the Corridor

The future development of the tourism industry in the corridor requires a careful analysis and understanding of its spatial, economic, environmental and cultural dimensions. It is possible to identify a number of spatial configurations on the geographic patterns of tourist destinations in the upper rift valley: base camp -Addis Ababa; Single destinations - Sodere hot spring and spa, Langano, Hawassa; en route - the entire corridor-Addis Ababa-upper rift valley and the Debre Berhan-Ankober corridor; regional tour - the Addis Ababa-Nazareth-Sodere, Langano/Zway central rift valley lakes, Shashemene and Hawassa and the Debre Berhan-Ankober corridor and trip chasing - a touring circuit of several destinations [27].

The current volume of foreign tourism in the corridor is largely associated with the multifaceted role and activity of the capital city,

Addis Ababa. However, domestic tourist activity is very high since the corridor serves as a weekend resort for those who can afford to travel. The tourism infrastructure is associated with accommodations and food service, recreation and entertainment establishments, tourism and general retail and service establishments and transportation. The number and employment structure of these establishments is difficult to establish accurately.

There are few systematic studies relating to the profile of the tourist in the corridor. Hence, it is difficult to know such vital statistics as the median age, median household income, primary purpose of stay, average length of stay, accommodations, top activities such as sightseeing, dining, swimming/bathing and the average expenditure of the tourist in the corridor. The high cost of overcoming distance limits the mobility of people for leisure. Yet, the corridor is the most accessible and highest volume traffic zone of the entire country. The narrow market segment that uses the infrastructures and services largely resides in the capital city. The Sodere hot spring resort, the Langano lake resort and Hawassa were being used lightly when this researcher visited the sites. Significant deterioration in the physical infrastructure was readily visible at the Sodere hot spring and hotel complex [18].

The sale of the previously government-owned and run complex to the Rift Valley private investment company had resulted in neglect, the deterioration of the physical infrastructure and low worker morale. One of the employees at the Abadir shower site at the Sodere complex was so livid when I asked her about working conditions and the dynamics of change in the complex after the privatization move of the government transferred ownership of the facility to the new owner. Her tears, flowing over her emaciated face, the middle aged woman accused the new owner as a soulless 'sorcerer' mercilessly exploiting the workers and turning the famous resort grounds into 'chat' (a stimulant widely grown in eastern parts of Ethiopia) chewing sites for addicts. The deterioration of the physical infrastructures in the hotel and bungalows as well as in the swimming areas of the resort was definitely worse than the situation in 1997 when the researcher had last visited the site. Likewise, the extremely poor condition Wabe Shebelli I hotel/resort on the beautiful shore of Lake Hawassa was highlighted by the poor condition of the site and the services available to the tourist. The neglect of the hotel/restaurant at Langano and the Ankober historical site near Debre Berhan show disturbing signs of lack of public interest in protecting and enhancing the attractiveness of these sites to both internal and foreign tourists [14].

On another plane, the efforts of the owners and managers of the tourist infrastructures along the corridor in Addis Ababa, Debre Zeit, Nazareth, Hawassa, Debre Berhan and Ankober were exemplary and worthy of praise on all counts. Complaints about municipal inefficiency, heavy taxes, poor municipal services, corruption and lack of transparency in municipal business dealings were commonly cited by managers of hotels and resorts. The frequent electric blackouts and shortage of water were cited as major problems affecting the delivery of service to visitors. Likewise, the lack of trained manpower in the hospitality business was highlighted though increasingly more and more trained workers are coming into the labor market thanks to the proliferation of catering related training institutions. An employee of the Ankober palace historical site was full of praise for the owner for his selflessness, dedicated civic responsibility and fair treatment of workers. At the Haile hotel/resort in Hawassa, one of the front desk employees was also very positive about the working environment at the hotel. She noted that the world famous athlete who owns the complex,

Haile Gebre Selassie, was not only a generous employer but also an exemplary businessman who made sure that the complex was supplied with all necessary materiel and support at all times.

At the Wabi Shebele 'tukul' restaurant on Lake Langano, the picture was entirely different. One of the hostesses at the old resort lamented the lack of attention and proper management of the facility after it was sold to the Filwoha hotel complex management group. The deterioration of the restaurant/resort facility was apparent not only in the dilapidation of the floors, ceilings, bar counters and roofs but also in the slow and inefficient service provided to customers. Seated on the circular porch of one of 'tukul' restaurants, our party was privy to poor service when it had to wait for more than 20 minutes to get its coffee and cappuccino. When the server came, the cups were chipped and the presentation was sloppy. Worker morale was visibly low at the once thriving and beautiful lake resort. A grotesque container was converted into a restaurant and floated on the shore adjacent to the traditional 'tukuls' with catastrophic aesthetic consequences. The container was not only a visual blight but also a blockage of the wonderful view of the southern flank of the beautiful lake and its environs. When author went to the office of the manager and complained about the deleterious effect of the floating metal container on the beautiful vista of the natural setting, he was not aware of the colossal mistake and shrugged the complaint as a mere trifle (Annexures 5 and 6).

Synthesis of Major Issues, Challenges and Opportunities

The tourism sector is one essential component of Ethiopia's national development and transformation. It is set in a national environment that faces tremendous opportunities such as fast rate of economic growth, significant expansion of transportation and communication facilities, a massive construction boom and an entrepreneurial population. At the same time challenges of widespread poverty, massive unemployment, recurrent food insecurity, high rate of annual population growth, worsening environmental degradation and underdevelopment of the productive forces of the economy. Tourism, as a labor intensive sector of the economy has the potential of improving the lives of people and the economies of communities at different geographical scales. It should capitalize on the country's rich and diversified cultural heritage and natural resources. The promotion of both domestic and international tourism should address such important issues as poor standards of accommodations and services; poor international image and visibility as a tourist destination; weak demand among international tour operators and travel agencies; weak capacity of major Ethiopian tour operators; weak supply chains serving the tourism sector; weak management and coordination structure; weak products; unfocussed institutional structure to generate policies, regulate sector and define strategies and neglect of domestic tourism (Annex 2).

In the Addis Ababa-Upper rift valley corridor, the practical challenges facing the tourism development sector include: significant absence of textual information on tourist destinations' physical and cultural features; poor sanitation standards and conditions in smaller hotels and restaurants; chronic begging and 'tourist baiting' on streets and tourist sites; mismanagement and/or neglect of existing tourist destinations and resources (e.g. Sodere, Langano, Ankober); lack of trained manpower in the tourist corridor; neglect of important cultural sites and facilities (e.g. Addis Ababa Museum, Ankober historical site, Langano resort) and lack of strict control and regulation of tourist-related infrastructures and services and site developments.

Conclusion

The upper rift valley corridor has diverse physical environments and cultural resources, significant social infrastructures, reasonably well-developed roads and pathways, well-developed hotels and restaurants, secure and dependable environments, welcoming populations and significant private sector involvement in resort development and management. The implementation of the national tourism development strategy will contribute to the overall development of the region in the medium and long term. In the short term, such practical measures as identifying new significant attractions, improving marketing through the use of promotional materials, establishing clear working relationships between central and regional and local systems and forging a common approach, identifying major domestic/foreign tourist markets, improving transport, familiarizing tourists with products, services, offerings and providing special incentives to private developers in terms of access to land, finance, training, information can bring about significant changes in tourist flows and earnings for the region and the nation at large. The continuous training of workers in the tourism industry and the institution of stronger control and regulation over tourist related institutions/facilities should also go hand in hand with the measures.

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