

# Tourism Potentials and Challenges of the Somali Region, Ethiopia

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## ABSTRACT

The main objective of this study was to explore tourism potentials and challenges of the Somali National Regional State, eastern Ethiopia. A qualitative research approach was employed and both primary and secondary data were collected using focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, observation, and document analysis. Rely on the thematic analyses made; this research found out that the study area has ample cultural, historical, natural, archaeological, and religious tourism products or resources. Besides, the study divulged the deficiency of awareness on the regions' potential for tourism development, weak promotion and deficiency of coordination among stakeholders, limitations of tourism infrastructures, and bad image of the region are the main drawbacks for tourism development in the study area. The study has policy implications and contributes to the tourism development of the Somali region. Finally, the Somali region has plentiful tourism products, however; various challenges paved the way for the underdevelopment of the tourism industry in the region.

**Keywords:** Tourism; Somali region; Ethiopia

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism has experienced continued growth and to become one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors [1]. It is broadly recognized that Ethiopia owns notable tourism potential in its unique and predominately unexplored archeological, cultural, historical, and natural resources. All the listed resources are fundamental to pull visitors and are the cornerstone on which to build a potent tourism industry. Ethiopia, having 3,000 years of history and over 80 ethnic communities with its discrete traditions, cultures, and languages, excels as a unique nation in Africa [2]. However, contrary to its potential, tourism is not well developed in Ethiopia at large and Somali region to the specific. There are a lot of natural and cultural tourist attractions in different parts of the country, which are not yet well studied and documented. Not all of Ethiopia's attractions are very widely known, but some are quite famous [3].

Somali region is one of the potential destinations that are neglected by researchers and tourism stakeholders. Somali region has tremendous and untapped tourism potential, however, according to Somali region culture and tourism bureau, the number of tourists visiting the region and the annual revenue incurred out of the tourism business is very low. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to identify the major tourism potential resources

and challenges hampering tourism industry in the Somali region, Ethiopia.

### Specific objectives

To identify the major cultural and natural tourism attractions of the Somali region in Ethiopia.

To describe the major challenges faced in developing tourism industry in Somali region.

### World perspectives of tourism

According to the United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), tourism is one of the fastest-growing industries within the world. In 2018 international tourist arrivals grew 5% to succeed in the 1.4 billion scores. This figure was attained two years before of UNWTO forecast. Half the world's international arrival was held by Europe, next Asia, and the Pacific with 1 in 4 arrivals. Pacific and Asia showed the foremost prominent growth in arrivals, intimately complied by Africa [4].

Most of developed nations of the world, identified, developed and promoted their tourist attraction sites and overcome some of challenges. In return the smokeless industry has the lion's share in the overall economic growth and they have been benefiting a lot from the tourism industry. According to UNWTO, the top 10 tourism earners (United States of America, France Thailand,

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United Kingdom, Italy Australia, Germany, Japan, and China) account for almost 50% (688 billion US Dollars) of total tourism receipts in 2018.

### African perspective of tourism

In the past decades, developing countries are giving attention to the tourism sector because it is becoming a relief for their economy constancy [5]. Africa offers considerable potential for environmental and ecotourism, cultural tourism, sports tourism, and discovery tourism [6]. Nevertheless, this potential remains mostly untapped, African Union set tourism agendas at the top-level endorsed the continent's Tourism Action Plan (TAP) developed by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), renamed African Union Development Agency (AUDA) make priority sector strategies across Africa destination 21st century. Sub-Saharan communities' 15 members of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) also introduced a visa policy that allows free movement of people across a member of states which contribute international traveler market and also the local level the public and the private sectors fully tap Africa's potential in the tourism industry [7].

Africa has tremendous tourism products and has the potentials to attract tourists from all over the world. However, Africa's tourism potential remains largely untapped. According to UNWTO, international tourist arrival in 2018 was 67 million and international tourism receipts in 2018 were USD 38 billion.

Contrarily to its potential, Africa has not been benefited from tourism when compared to America, Asia, the Pacific, and Europe. The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) statistics indicate that Africa and the Middle East has the lowest percentage share of international tourist arrivals by region.

Different challenges halted tourism industry in Africa. Lack of tourism related infrastructure, lack of knowledge and awareness, lack of tourism safety and lack of tourism diversification, lack of technical knowhow and weak promotion activity, lack of consistent tourism strategy and policy, are the main problems of OIC countries [8]. On the other hand, Poor image and perception of Africa-political instability, limited connectivity, high operating costs -fuel prices and limited and expensive air access are the most challenges of tourism industry [9].

### Ethiopian perspective of tourism

Ethiopia, located in the Horn of Africa, has long enjoyed international prominence with a home of varied cultural, natural, and historical attractions [10]. Some unique cultural and natural features set it different from other African destinations [11].

Ethiopia has vast tourism potential due to its natural, historical and cultural gifts [12]. It has almost all types of main tourist products: historical attractions, national parks with endemic wild life and cultural and religious festivals. Moreover, UNESCO recognizes world heritage sites [13]. As a land of multiple tourist attractions and a visitor friendly people which is conscious of its historical heritage, Ethiopia is genuinely a country of great tourism potential. It was this realisation of a great potential that advocated Ethiopia in the 1960's to commence a tourism industry [14]. Ethiopia's tourist attractions are not very widely known, but some are quite notable.

Ethiopia is a land of wonder and fascination, a country with one

of the richest histories in the African continent as well as in the world with more than three thousand years of history, and home to friendly people who descended from some of the world's oldest civilizations. Most part of the country is diversified with both natural and cultural potential tourism resource [15].

The natural beauty of Ethiopia astonishes the first-time visitor. Ethiopia is a land of lakes and rivers, rugged mountains (some 25 are over 4000 meters high) and broad savannah. On the other hand, tourism potentials include pale-anthropological sites-the famous finding of a hominid, Lucy; historic architectures such as the stelae and temples in Axum and Yeha; the monolithic rock-hewn church of Lalibela; the Castle of Fasilades in Gondar; the island monasteries of Lake Tana; the Camelot of Harar; the holiest mosques of Negashi in Tigrai, the Sof Omar in lowland Bale; the scenic beauty of the mountains of the Semien, Wag and Lasta, and Bale; the Rift Valley lake; the Omo valley; and the fauna and flora that flourish in the natural terrains of the country. Besides, the multitudinous peoples of Ethiopia are very lofty to present to tourists the original version of their subcultures including languages, social organizations, music, religion, artifacts, etc. None mentioned from Somali region [16].

The country has a outstandingly rich heritage and spectacular environment worth visiting by tourists interested in gaining knowledge of its history, culture, diversity of landscape, unique indigenous plants, birds, and mammals, and a great variety of interesting locations. Bird watching, Safari Tours, Fishing, Caving, Camping, Water Sports, Trekking, climbing, Hiking & Walking, etc could be noted as some of the interesting chances to endow on Ethiopian tourism [17].

Currently, tourism industry has become a major source of income for several stakeholders engaged in the industry. In this regard, despite Ethiopia's endowment with various natural and manmade heritages, it had not benefited much from the sector for years due to various challenges [ibid]. Accordingly, lack infrastructure, problems of securities, lack of museum, lack of service and facilities, lack of preservation and protections of heritage, financial constraints are the major challenges of tourism development [18]. On the other hand, studies conducted in this regard identified challenges including lack of effective marketing strategies, lack of human resource and capacity, insufficient tourism and support infrastructure, weak institutional and legislative frameworks, and, uncoordinated and disconnected tourism planning and development both at the national and regional levels in Ethiopia [19]. However, in the Somali Regional State, major tourist attraction resources and major challenges of tourism development have not been properly examined.

According to the Ethiopian Tourism Organization, (ETO), the best way to explore Ethiopia is along with one or two of the established routes; the Northern Historic tourism routes and the Southern ethnological and nature-based circuit. However, the concern of this paper Somali region is not noticed to its potential. The researcher believed that it is because of tourism potential resources of the region are not well identified and documented. Nevertheless, the Somali region is identified as a major tourism destination neither by tour operators and travel agents nor by other concerned bodies. Somali region is an area which includes places, sites, people, and culture which exhibit the nature, history, society, religion,

and political environment. Also, the region includes intangible heritages like wedding and dance, oral traditions, and tales. Thus, this study was planned to study the tourism potentials and challenges of the Somali region, and shows how much the area is essential in Ethiopian tourism development.

## RESEARCH METHODS AND MATERIALS

Tourism does not go on arbitrarily; it passes with knowing and utilizing its potentials. Any tourism activity in a region cannot commence unless resources are assessed, identified, realized and categorized [20].

### Study area

Somali Region is one of the ten regional states of Ethiopia, located in the southeastern corner of Ethiopia. The region bordering Djibouti to the north, Somalia to the east and north-east, Kenya to the south, Oromiya Region (Ethiopia) forms its western border, Afar Region (Ethiopia) lies to the northwest. The region has 11 administrative zones.

### Data source

To collect, analyze, and interpret the data obtained from the study area and to describe the objectives of the study, a qualitative research method was employed. The qualitative approach to data collection was hence used to address the research objectives. This research was carried on by employing a descriptive survey during which all data relevant to the study was collected and analyzed. The study employed both primary and secondary sources of knowledge. Primary data included in-depth open-ended and semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions and field observation. The data of primary sources was also supported and triangulated by a document analysis of sources of secondary data derived from different reports, surveys, and academic peer-reviewed articles.

### Target populations

The study was undertaken on purposively selected areas of the Somali region i.e. Fafan zone (Jiggiga, Tuliguled, and Awbare districts), Nogob zone (Duhun district), Dawa zone, Shebele zone, and Siti zone (Erer district). These areas were selected purposively since they are presumed to have high tourism potential or due to their profound significance in tourism development and opportunities for tourism growth. After identifying the target areas, the respondents were selected by the researcher using purposive sampling methods. A sample of respondents was identified by using purposive sampling because of their extensive knowledge, experience, and expertise, based on their contribution to the sector and the overall research objectives stated above. Therefore, regional culture and tourism bureau experts, woreda (district) level administrators, local elders, and religious leaders were purposively selected in the study areas.

### Methods of data collection

To achieve the aims and objectives of this research, it is vital to have a comprehensive research approach. For this study, various techniques of data collection were employed to gather both primary and secondary data. To this end, the following instruments were developed by the researchers.

**Interviews:** This study employed open-ended and semi-structured interviews to collect firsthand information from several relevant stakeholders in the tourism sector. The in-depth interviews allowed the researcher to probe to and unearth respondents' overall perception of tourism resources and challenges in the Somali region. Thus, primary qualitative data were collected mainly from our target groups namely Somali region culture and tourism bureau experts, woreda level administrators, local elders, and religious leaders to get firsthand information about tourism potential, opportunity, and challenges of the study area.

**Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** Two focus group discussions were held from different background at each the purposively selected areas mainly relied on the distribution of tourism resources of the study area. A semi-structured checklist was employed to administer focus group discussions.

**Field observation:** checklist guided field observation was conducted mainly focusing on tourist attraction resources and challenges. Besides, photographs were also taken.

**Document analysis:** Documents (reports, surveys, newspapers, magazines, and academic peer-reviewed articles) were used.

### Methods of data analysis

The data collected using interviews, FGD, and field observations were analyzed and discussed in the form of qualitative thematic analysis. Moreover, to make the research observable, it was supported by different figures of cultural and natural heritage. Some facts and points were also supported by the use of secondary sources obtained through document analysis.

Eventually, based on the available information which was obtained from the analysis part, a conclusion and recommendation were made by taking into account the most important points related the objectives and problems of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Somali Region, naturally rich in fascinating landscape, endowed with rich biodiversity, soaked in history, and having culturally hospitable, traditionally sensitive, and intrinsically religious people has the potential to become a tourist paradise.

The study outcome indicates that the Somali region has ample and unutilized potential tourism resources. These potential resources can be generally classified into natural and cultural tourism resources. Moreover, the tangible and intangible cultural heritages and historical sites and values of the region can also be used as tourist resources.

Potential cultural/historical tourism products of the Somali region

The study result revealed Somali region has high potential in culture and history-based tourism products. The region has abundant tangible and intangible cultural heritages and varieties of historical remnants that can be used as tourism products or resources. Some potential products are discussed as follow:

### Derbiga and derbi belanbel historical and cultural sites

Derbiga cultural and historical center is located in Fafan Zone; Tuliguled Woreda (district) about ten kilometers from Tuliguled

town. On the other hand, the Derbi Belanbel site is located in Duhun woreda (district) of Nogob Zone. The site is located about six kilometers from Duhun town, the administrative capital of the woreda.

According to informants, the origin of the two sites was connected to the Harla civilization of the medieval Ethiopian period in the 13th to 15th century. The Harla people formerly recognized by the locals as the “race of the giants”, the source of civilization in the region, and prospering traders. Over a thousand years ago they were exercising trade from inland to abroad including with China, the Middle East, and India [21]. Field research by the researcher in 2018 and 2019, identified ruins of buildings; these structures include stone necropolis, store pits, Mosques, and houses on both sites, and steles in Derbi Belanbel. Most of the northern historic tourism routes in Ethiopia relied on historical buildings and remains. Thus, the researcher believed that both sites have huge tourism potential. If Derbiga and Derbi Belanbel sites are well developed and promoted they will be one the major tourist product or resources of the Somali region (Figure 1).

### Historical mosques

Due to its relative proximity to the Middle East, the Eastern part of Ethiopia is a place where Islam and Islamic civilization first flourished in the country. Therefore, Eastern Ethiopia is known for its ample heritages of ruins of mosques, tombs, and areas of Islamic educations. For instance, a Mosque located in Derbiga (Tuliguled district), the Somali region considered as among the historical long-aged Mosques located in the region (Figure 2). On the other hand, long aged ruined Mosques were also observed in Derbi Belanbel (Nogob zone) and Tarime (Fafan zone). Moreover, according to informants, there are various historical Mosques in different zones of the region. Thus, if they are well identified and promoted they have high potential to attract different tourists; especially will pave the way for the development of pilgrimage tourism in the region.

### Ayanley historical site

This historical and cultural site is located in Awbare Woreda (district), Fafan Zone. According to local informants, the site is associated with the Harla civilization having different historical and cultural heritages. It was also served as a major trade center during the Ethiopian medieval period (Figure 3). Different types of fragmented pottery, shells, and coins discovered on the area supported the oral tradition as the area were served as a major trade center across the Zeila trade route. The researcher believed that if



Figure 1: Ruined stone built house at derbi belanbel.



Figure 2: One of the still standing structures of the derbiga mosque (Source: Somali region culture and tourism bureau).



Figure 3: A picture showing the ruined harla town, ayanle historical site (Awbare district).

the site is well managed and promoted it will be one of the major tourist sites in the Somali region.

### The former palace of emperor haile selassie I

The other interesting historical site of the Somali Region is the former palace of Emperor Haile Selassie I who ruled Ethiopia from 1930 to 1974. This palace is located in Somali Region, Siti Zone, specifically in Erer Woreda (district). It is found seven Kilometer away from Erer town in the Western direction. The palace was built during the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie in the pre-Italian invasion period (in the pre-1935).

The building of the palace is ground plus one which consists of a total of 20 rooms. The various rooms of the palace had different functions. These include meeting hall, kitchen, store, guest house, bedroom, dining room, and bathing room (Figure 4). Besides, the historical building, there is natural hot spring water inside the palace enclosure. According to informants, this natural hot spring water has medical value to cure different disease (Figure 5). This palace and the surrounding environs have huge potential to attract tourists mainly, combining nature, historical and medical based tourism.

### Somalis customary law of “Xeer”

Xeer (pronounced He’er) is the indigenous legal system of the Somali People. Within this system, elders play preponderant roles as judges and assist arbitrate cases employing precedents.



**Figure 4:** The old palace of emperor hailesilassie I located around erer town, somali region. The palace was recently repainted.



**Figure 5:** A picture showing natural spring water inside emperor haile selassie palace compound around erer town, and a woman using the spring water as a medical treatment

According to informants, ‘elder’ is not associated with old age. The Somali believe that “not all old men are elders, nor are all elders aged.” Being old enough is thus neither essential nor adequate circumstance for constituting acknowledged as a Somali elder: several discrete and surely as well developing, behavioral, and sometimes genealogical features are essential. Thus, if this indigenous legal system found in the region is protected and promoted, undoubtedly it would be a significant intangible resource for the tourism development of the region.

### Traditional dances of the Somali

The Somali People have many traditional dances performed in different zones of the region. According to informants, some of them include: dhantur (Dhaanto), jaandheer, buraanbur, gaaleeyso, kabeebey, diisow, and boondheere, are the main ones performed in different zones of the region. For instance, nowadays dances named dhantur (also known as Dhaanto) are becoming popular even beyond the region. It is performed by groups of men and women, who dance face-to-face, sometimes talking dance partners and sometimes dancing in their gender groups (Figure 6).

Today, indigenous dances in Southern Ethiopia (mainly, Hamer, Mursi, and other people) are attracting tourists to the area. Alike, the researcher believed that with the fulfillment of certain tourist facilities and promotion indigenous dances found in Somali region, they would be important intangible resources for the tourism development of the region.

### Ethnological museum of jigjiga

Another important heritage site in the Somali Region is the Ethnological Museum of Jigjiga town. This ethnological museum is established by the government of Somali Regional State to collecting, preserving, and promoting the cultural and historical

objects of the Somali People. The ethnological museum of Jigjiga is perhaps the only museum in the Somali Regional State that is currently playing an irreplaceable role in ensuring the transmission of cultural and historical objects of the Somali People to the next generation (Figure 7).

However, in the neighboring towns of Harar museums are playing a preponderant role for the tourism development of the town. Thus, if the ethnological museum of Jigjiga is well organized and promoted, undoubtedly it would be one of the major tourist destinations of the region and would contribute a lot as a tourist destination of the region.

Those above-mentioned tourist attraction areas and artifacts are not included all the potential tourism products but, the majors. Besides, the Somali region has more other cultural and historical heritages like the Statue of Ethiopian patriots in the Korahe zone, old age Mosques, and Churches, Darabalayo palace of Seyyid Mohammed Abdullah Hassen who is well known Somali religious and nationalist leader, died in 1920. His palace and artifacts have a huge potential to attract tourists.

### Potential natural tourism products of Somali region

Ethiopia’s unique geological history and diverse topography and climate have made it known to the world as one of the few countries in Africa that harbor diverse biological resources with actual and potential ecological, economic and cultural values of both local and global importance.



**Figure 6:** Somali youth performing traditional dance dhaanto (source: www.pinters.com).



**Figure 7:** Some of cultural objects found in the jigjiga ethnographic museum.

In addition to the above noted potential cultural/historical tourism products, the study outcome shows that the Somali region has prominent potential in nature-based tourism resources such as Caves, entrancing landscape, waterfall, rivers, and animals.

### **Karamara Mountain**

Karamara is that the mountain that encircled the city of Jigjiga, the capital of the Somali Region. It is a beautiful landscape with several chained mountains (see figure 8). Karamara Mountain is perhaps the highest altitude in the region. Besides, according to informants, this mountain has also historical value. The researcher believed that Karamara Mountain has huge tourism potential specifically on mountain hiking based tour.

### **Camel based tourism**

The Somali region has a huge number of camels in its different zones (see figure 9). These camels can be used in tourism development of the region like that of how camels used in the Arabian Peninsula majorly for camel based tourism in UAE and Saudi Arabia for camel racing and transporting tourists.

### **Babile elephant sanctuary**

This sanctuary partakes in Oromia and Somali Regional National States. According to Somali and Oromiya regional culture and tourism bureaus, the Sanctuary extends to an area of about 6982 square kilometers and is a wonderful destination for those who like to view wildlife especially, elephant. Babile elephant sanctuary is

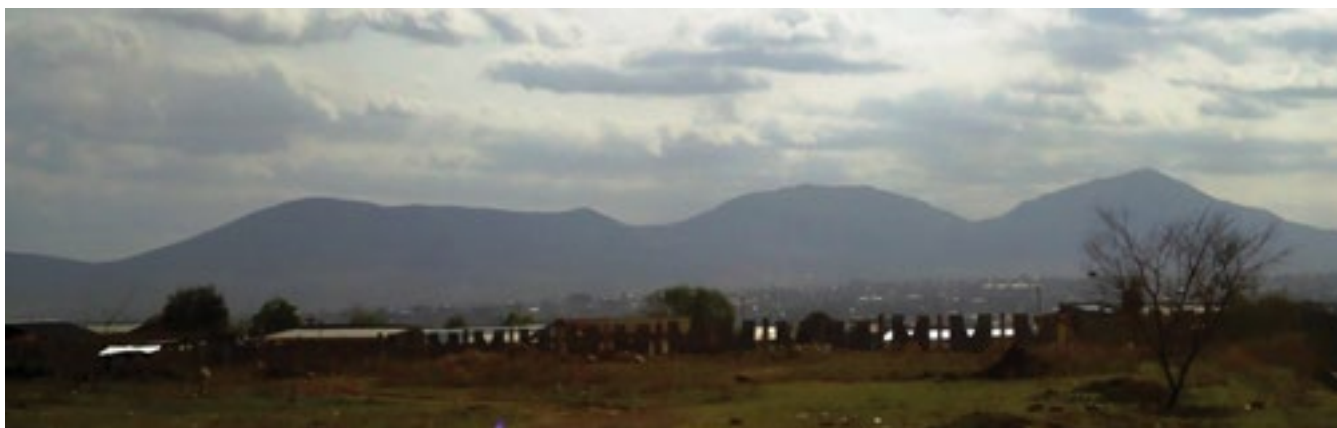
located at about 50 KM from Jigjiga city (the capital of the Somali Region). The sanctuary has been appropriated for the shelter of the indigenous *Lodinta Africana Oreleansi* elephant subspecies (Figure 10). Besides, there are also 227 bird species which includes the endemic *Salvadori's serine*. Babile is also dwelling the hot natural spring of water, wont to render lots of eastern Ethiopia on bottled mineral drinking water. On the other hand, merely outside the primary entrance road into the park is the fascinating geologic rock formations at Dakata's Rock Valley with a tremendous equilibrating rock as well as lower unusually shaped rocks. All these features are a huge tourism potential to the add-on tourism development of the region.

### **The unique rock of babile**

These uniquely shaped rocks with admirable features are found in a place called Dakata at the distance of 43 kilometers from Jigjiga town, 5 kilometers from Babile, or at the distance of 40 kilometers from Harar. Babile wonderful natural rocks can easily be seen with their structural settings on the road from Harar to Jigjiga town (Figure 11). Anyone can easily visit this unique rock formation on the way from Harar to Jigjiga town. The Dakata Valley, which is made full of these strange volcanic formation rocks, can be a good attraction for excursionists, nature fans, and explorers.

### **Rock art and cave paintings**

The Somali region has different rock arts and cave paintings in its different zones. For instance, there is the pre-historic cave of Alibilal



**Figure 8:** Karamara Mountain encircled jigjiga town.



**Figure 9:** A Group of camels in jerer zone.

in the Erer district of Siti Zone. According to Seyoum et al, this cave is an important archaeological and the interior part of the cave is decorated with paintings (pictographs) of camel, anthropomorphic and un-deciphered figures (Figure 12). The pictogram of what looks camel is often noticed in the internal wall of the cave [22]. However, unfortunately, most of the rock arts and cave paintings in the region are not well studied and unknown to the wider community. Accordingly, potentially significant archaeological and paleontological sites found in the Somali Region remained unknown. However, they have ample tourism potential.

On the other hand, there is also a cave named Wanbarka located in Fafan zone, Jigjiga Woreda (Figure 13). According to informants, this cave was used as a depository system by Garad Wil Waal who is well known and considered as a philosopher-king in the first half of 19th century by the local people. It was also a strategic place to control the surrounding area at the time. Currently, the Sof Oumer cave located in the Bale zone, Oromiya region has been playing a valuable role in Ethiopian tourism development. Therefore, the researcher believed that wanbarka cave with the fulfillment of certain tourist facilities like road and promotion it would be one of the most important tourist destinations in the region and country.

## Wildlife in the Somali region

In addition to its various historical, cultural, and natural heritages, Somali Region is also home to different kinds of wild animals. These wild animals are scattered and found in the different parts of the region. The wild animals found in the Somali Region include Cheetah, Lion, Giraffes, and others. Although there is no organized park in the region, the absence of illegal hunting creates favorable habitat for wild animals.

For instance, El Kere Woreda (district) in Afdheer zone is gifted with several species of Wild animals. The natural dense forest located in the woreda is an enormously significant home ground for the wild animals; Dik-dik, lion, giraffes, Gerenuk, and leopard are widely available in the dense forest of El Kere. Especially, it is a dwelling to the reticulated giraffe which is also known as the Somali Giraffe [23].

Moreover, there is also Gerale National Park (also called Geraille National Park) is a new park and it lies in Dawa Zone, the eastern part of Moyale Woreda in the Southwest part of the Somali National Regional State. The park is approximately 709 km south



Figure 10: African elephant (*Loxodonta africana*) in babile elephant sanctuary (Source: Somali region culture and tourism bureau).

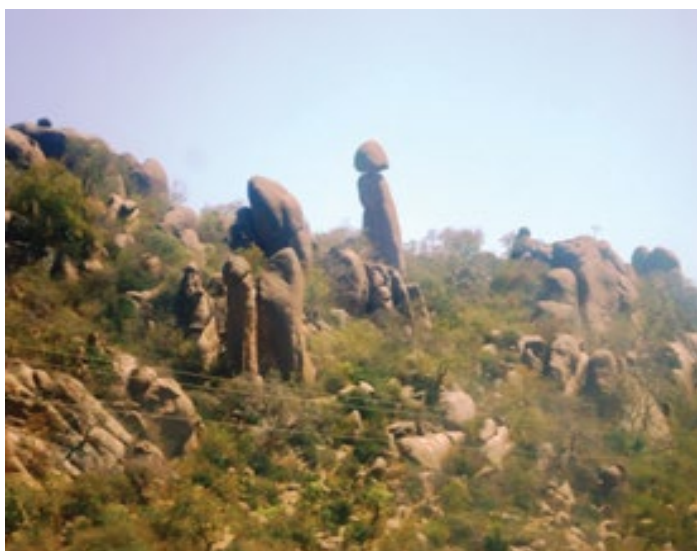


Figure 11: Uniquely shaped of natural babile rock.



Figure 12: Ali bilal cave painting depicting camel.

of Addis Ababa via the Nagele Borena highway, 901km via Moyale, and 1450km from Jiggiga via Gode.

This park was proposed by the Somali National Regional state, although it is now under the supervision of the Ethiopian Wildlife Conservation Authority (EWCA), to conserve a unique collection of wildlife in the Somali-Massai Biome. This Biotic community covers prominent parcels of land in Ethiopia and the park is known to hold Cheetah, Giraffe, and few Elephants. The park also renders harbor for various antelope species. The most prolific antelopes are Guenther’s Dikdik, Beisa Oryx, Grant’s Gazelles, and Gerenuk (also known as the Giraffe Gazelle or Garanuug in the Somali language) (Figure 14). This species of a wild animal is endemic to

the drier parts of East Africa and Lesser Kudu. Amongst birds, the endemic white-tailed Swallow has been recorded here.

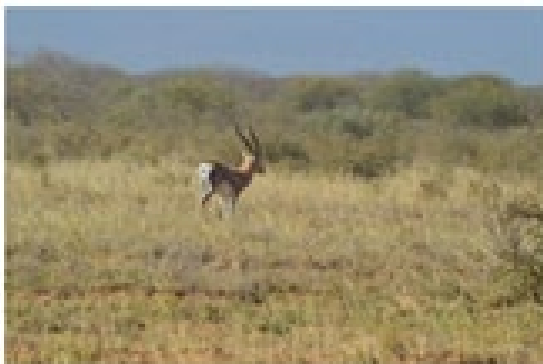
Currently, national parks in different regions of Ethiopia has been playing a vital role on the tourism development of the country. Therefore, if Gerale national park is well promoted surely, it has great potential to attract tourists and would play its role for the tourism development of the Somali region.

**Important bird areas (IBA) in the Somali region**

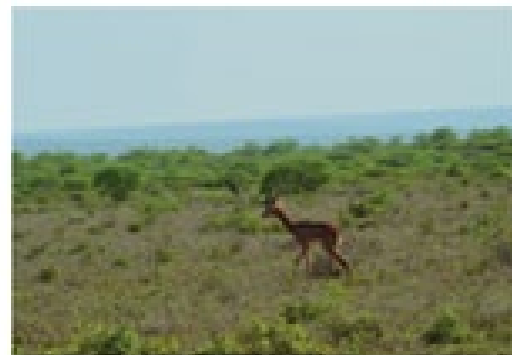
The Somali Region is known as “paradise of birdwatchers”. The birds found in the region are large in number and various in their



Figure 13: Wanbarka cave (Source: Somali region culture and tourism bureau).



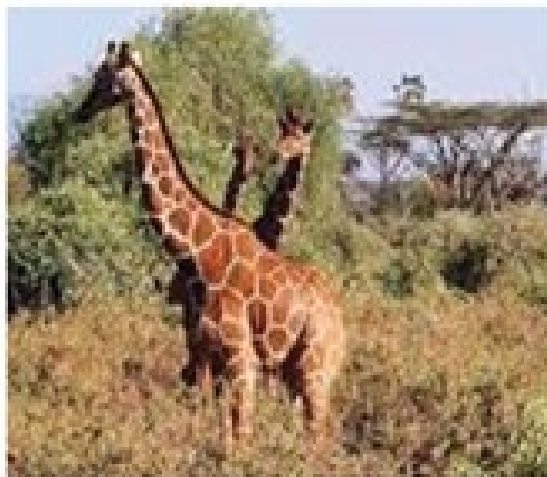
Grant's Gazelles



Gerenuk (Litocranius walleani)



Lesser kudu (Tragelaphus imberbis)



Giraffe (Giraffa Camelopardalis)

Figure 14: Wild animals in Somali region: Gerale national park (Source: Somali region culture and tourism bureau).





Somali bee eater (coraciiform bird)



Yellowthroat pick horn bill

Figure 15: A pictures showing among beautiful birds in the Somali region (source: Somali region culture and tourism bureau).

species (Figure 15), even some are the globally threatened species of birds. There are three places in the region as Important Bird Areas (IBA). These include; the IBA of Central Korahe Zone, the IBA of Lower Shebelle Valley, and the IBA of Jigjiga Dam (now it is on the verge of being dry out, because of overuse) and Reservoir Area. The researcher even observed different bird species inside Jigjiga University around staff residents. These three Important Bird Areas has huge tourism potential to attract tourist.

### The rivers in Somali region

The Somali Regional State is a place where several permanent and seasonal rivers are found. Among these, the three big permanent rivers in the region include; Ganale River, the Shabelle River, and the Dawa River. These perennial and seasonal rivers offer Somali Region various kinds of biodiversity. Nowadays riverine areas are the major tourism potential areas. Thus, the researcher believed that these rivers have huge potential to become one of the tourism resources or products of the region.

### Challenges of tourism development in the Somali region

The study revealed the following challenges of tourism development in the region.

#### Deficiency on constituents of the tourism industry

As per the data of this research, the first challenge related to limitations on constituents of the tourism industry. According to Akhabue, tourism does not exist in isolation. It has certain basic constituents. To realize tourism consistently, it is essential to know the several components of the tourism industry. Major constituents of the tourism industry comprise of the providers of tourist services as under; accommodation, transportation, and travel Intermediaries (travel agencies and operators) [24].

As mentioned above, the Somali region has tremendous tourism products. However, most of them are not easily accessible for tourists mainly lacks of road to the destinations. As the author of this article has observed, most of tourist attraction destinations in Somali region are accessed through gravel roads which are not

suitable for tourists and other sites even lack this road. Besides, Similar with the infrastructure, there is lack of accommodation facilities with a few rooms, food and beverage services for visitors.

Moreover, the lack of adequate travel intermediaries (travel agencies and tour operators) in the region became a challenge for tourism development in the region. Some of the travel intermediaries in Ethiopia focused on the northern historic tourism route and to the south ethnological and nature-based route which paved the way for the Somali region to be neglected.

#### Deficiency on promotion and marketing of tourism resources of the region

Lack of promotion and marketing is another challenge of tourism development observed in the study area. The Somali region has the potential to attract different types of tourists from different part of the world and even from parts of Ethiopia. However, some of the region's tourist products are not well known and not promoted by stakeholders including travel intermediaries. According to informants, unlike other regions of Ethiopia, Somali region's tourist attraction resources are not well promoted by the concerned stakeholders including the region's culture and tourism bureau.

#### Limitations on regional tourism office

There are eleven regional tourism offices in different regions of Ethiopia. In the study area, there is a regional office named Somali regional state government, culture, and tourism bureau located in Jigjiga city. Unlike other regions, there is no culture and tourism office at zones and district levels. This is becoming the major challenge on the tourism development of the region.

#### The most common function to these all regional tourism offices are as follows:

'To promote and develop the foreign tourist movement into the region; to study tourist problems in the region and take necessary measures towards the growth of national tourist economy; to improve tourism infrastructures; to take actions for the development of tourist attractions and resources; to coordinate

in the region, all activities of a tourist nature exerted by various organizations concerns with tourism; to maintain relations with ministries and the federal Tourism Commission regarding issues related to tourism; to collect and analyze regional tourism statistics; to carry out inspection and classification of hotels, travel agents; to recognize and license tour guides' [25].

However, the researcher observed that beyond a few attempts made regional tourism office is not actively implementing all the above-mentioned functions. Moreover, there is a low attempt to study tourist problems in the region and take necessary actions, lack of well-trained professionals; limitations on assigning the right professional to the right position are also another challenge.

Furthermore, the following additional challenges of tourism development are identified in the data gathering process: a bad image of the region which was portrayed by drought and conflict (currently it is one the stable and peaceful region in Ethiopia), lack of communication, understanding, and cooperation between regional, zonal, and woreda (district) administrations, lack of integrated engagement among tourist-related private, public and non-governmental institutions; lack of government attention to preserve and conserve monuments, ancient building and the heritage in general, lack of tourist map, and fake news of social media influenced tourism development of the region.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Ethiopia has as several cultural and natural tourist attraction sites dispersed in different parts of the country. The Somali region has also ample cultural and natural heritages with high potential a tourism product. Unlike tourism potential found in the region, a considerable emphasis is not given by the concerned stakeholders starting from national and regional governments and tour operators and travel agents who are working on tourism. Besides, deficiency on constituents of the tourism industry, deficiency on Promotion and Marketing of tourism Resources of the region, and limitations on Regional Tourism Office challenged tourism development in Somali region.

To make the Somali region one of the major Ethiopian tourist destinations, different improvements should have to be implemented. Rely on the finds of the study, the researcher recommended the following points:

Major constituents of the tourism industry; types, and quality level of accommodation and other tourist facilities and services should be identified and implemented, transportation and road access to the sites should be improved, and travel Intermediaries (travel agencies and operators) should be well informed about tourist attraction sites of the Somali region and should include in their tour packages.

Promotion and Marketing of tourism resources of the region should be improved. Somali region culture and tourism bureau should identify the overall tourism marketing strategies and promotion programs through printed, electronic and broadcast Medias.

Limitations on Regional Tourism Office should be improved; the office should develop tourism organizational structure to zones and district levels, professionalism should be adopted and followed, there should be also area of land use planning. On the other hand, when cities are expanded the plan should have to consider heritages

or should be compatible. Besides, all stakeholders should work on the promotion and publicity of tourism products of the region.

In general, So, to make this region as one of the great tourist destinations: all concerned bodies should have to work collaboratively to utilize tourism resources of the region; awareness creation, and promotion for local and international tour operators and travel agents; there should be improved accommodations and the infrastructure on destinations.

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