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LEISURE & TOURISM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Potentials, challenges and economic contributions of tourism resources in the South Achefer district, Ethiopia

Endalkachew Teshome^{1*}, Melkamu Dereje² and Yirdaw Asfaw³

Abstract: This study is aimed at assessing potentials, challenges and the economic contributions of tourism resources in the South Achefer district. A descriptive research design and mixed research approaches were employed. 161 samples were selected from target populations. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were employed. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 22. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage and mean were computed. Qualitative data were triangulated. The result confirmed that the study area has huge potential resources to develop community-based ecotourism with the cumulative mean values of 1.66. These resources include: *Zhbst* forest; *Zhbst and Klti* caves; *Ashare* waterfalls, varied wildlife species, as well as cultural resources such as ancient churches, festivals, funeral ceremonies and monasteries. There are, however, many challenges to using this potential. These include a lack of infrastructure and poor coordination of stakeholders. In the South Achefer district, the levels of community agreement on the economic contributions of tourism were high with a cumulative mean value of

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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Endalkachew Teshome is a full-time professor and researcher in the department of tourism management, college of business and economics at the University of Gondar, Ethiopia. He has an MSc degree in environmental forestry from Bangor University, Bangor, Gwynedd, UK, and a Ph.D. in natural resources management from the University of Natural Resources and Life Sciences, Vienna, Austria. Currently, he has been teaching several courses such as biodiversity and ecotourism, ecotourism and wildlife, tourism resources of Ethiopia, tourism destination development and management, forest ecology, ecotourism management, and value chain, and wildlife and protected area conservation both undergraduate and postgraduate level in different departments at the University of Gondar. His research areas of interest are lie in researching tourism destination development, community-based ecotourism development, protected area management, tour guiding and visitors satisfaction, human-wildlife conflict, livelihood and income diversifications in protected areas, tourism potential survey, benefits sharing mechanisms, and watershed management.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Tourism is one of the world's largest industries and fastest-growing economic sectors. Despite its challenges, tourism has positive socio-economic contributions to local residents such as economic benefits, cross-cultural exchange, creating employment opportunities, conservation of historic sites, and improvement of infrastructures. Following those benefits, the Government of Ethiopia wishes to utilize its rich tourism resources like rich ancient historical and cultural heritage, enormous wildlife resources, and scenic landscape. To develop a new tourist destination, the potentials, challenges, and economic contributions of tourism should be studied. The South Achefer district tourism resources should be protected and promoted in order to increase the flow of tourists, and enhance the economic development of the local communities. In the interest of the public, this paper proposes to develop the South Achefer district as a new tourist destination the current tourism potentials, challenges, and economic contributions should be conserved, communicated, and promoted using different Medias.

1.7. The potential tourism resources of the area need to be promoted by the tourist office using a variety of promotional tools. To develop these potential tourism resources, concerned bodies must collaborate to provide basic tourism infrastructure facilities and services.

Subjects: Cultural Studies; Hotel Management; Events; Hospitality; Tourism; Tourism Society and Culture; Tourism Management; Heritage Tourism; Tourism and the Environment

Keywords: Tourism; potential; Challenge; contribution; South Achefer district

1. Introduction

Tourism is increasingly becoming a key service industry to many developing and developed countries. As the world's largest industry, tourism development must develop in a sustainable way to provide resources at target destinations (Fentaw, 2016). In 2019, tourism is estimated to contribute about 10% of global gross domestic product (GDP) and to be the largest contributor to employment worldwide, and was responsible for creating 1 in 4 of all new jobs across the world (WTTC, 2021). Though Ethiopia contribution of tourism to GDP fluctuated substantially in recent years, it tended to increase through 2000–2019 period ending at 9% in 2019 (UNE, 2020). Thus, tourism can impact positively on local economic development and, in turn, can lead to poverty reduction in destination communities and countries (María José Zapata et al., 2011).

Tourism activity is a combination of the use of tourism products like transportation, accommodation, infrastructure, attractions, and support services to form an industry. Tourism attractions sector form part of the basic tourism resources and are one of the major reasons why tourists visit a destination (Melese & Belda, 2021). In Ethiopia, our unique nature, culture and history merge to form a timeless appeal. Ethiopia comprises many high mountains and most of the longest rivers, highest plateaus and plains in Africa. It has spectacular alpine terrain including the Simien Mountain National Park (4543 m above sea level) and the lowest place on earth in the Danakil depression (121 m below sea level).

Ethiopia is gifted with ancient historical and cultural heritage, wildlife resources, natural attractions and attractive geographical sites (Eshetu, 2010; Teshome & Demissie, 2018b). These resources highlight opportunities for tourists and other visitors to experience Ethiopia's ecology and natural beauty (Phillips, 2002). Ethiopian cultural tourism attractions include historical monuments, archeological sites, battlefields, religious buildings, museums, festivals, indigenous architecture, dress, artifacts and handicrafts; they also include intangible components and feelings such as fantasy, nostalgia, pleasure and pride which are presented through various cultural manifestations and interpretation of physical cultural attributes (ICOM, 2012; Teffera, 2019; Teshome et al., 2021). The above mentioned resources attract tourists from every corner of the world to Ethiopia, further increasing the growth and development of the tourism industry (Fentaw, 2016; Wondirad, 2020).

Because of these unique features, Ethiopia has great potential for further growth in tourism (Nurhssen, 2016). Cultural villages aim to represent local indigenous cultures and their related traditions and ways of living. Ethiopia endeavors to harness the untapped potential of its tourism sector to create, jobs, growth, food security and livelihood improvement (Teshome & Demissie, 2018b). However, despite these abundant resources, the country has not yet benefited fully (Ali, 2016; Wondirad et al., 2021).

Tourism is the largest worldwide service-based industry and makes significant contributions to service sector growth and infrastructure development in airports, roads, schools, and retail areas. These then benefit local communities and aid economic development, encouraging more trade and better flow of goods and services in developing countries (Dwyer & Edwards, 2000; Honey,

2009). Additionally, tourism linked with cultural villages yields positive and direct benefits to local communities across the country (Moswete et al., 2015). For instance, it has contributed to poverty alleviation, employment creation for local communities and income generation, as well as encouraging cultural pride and strengthening community identity (Mthembu & Mutambara, 2018). Economically, it contributes to the economic wellbeing of local residents, generating relatively sustainable and equitable income for them and other stakeholders (Aref et al., 2010). Regarding socio-cultural contributions, tourism can be a vehicle for better understanding among people and regions at local, national and global level (Asker et al., 2010). Education and interpretation are important tools in creating an enjoyable and meaningful nature-based tourism experience. People share their cultures, lifestyle, their festivals and their special experiences (Alison & Anne, 2007). It contributes to development and maintenance of cultural attractions such as monuments, historical sites, museums and of art and handicraft industries for tourism. It can also encourage the further development of a national identity and the maintenance of pride in authentic national and local culture (Denman, 2001). Hence, tourism should be viewed as a tool for community development and economic diversification, particularly for local communities and local development agencies in South Africa (Panasiuk, 2007; Wondirad et al., 2021). It also adds value to local tourism projects and initiatives for environmental protection, preservation and rehabilitation activities (Ermias & Azmach, 2017).

Studies conducted in this regard have identified many challenges, including lack of effective marketing strategies, lack of human resource and capacity, weak institutional and legislative frameworks, industry quality and standards issues, insufficient tourism and support infrastructure, and uncoordinated/fragmented tourism planning and development at national and regional levels in Ethiopia (Gebremariam, 2018; Gemechu, 2014; Ketema, 2015; Melak et al., 2016; Tesfaye, 2017; Teshome et al., 2018; Wondirad, 2020; Wondirad et al., 2021, 2020; G. Worku & Feyssa, 2016; M. Worku, 2017). According to (Kidane-Mariam, 2015; Wondirad, 2020) the challenges facing the tourism industry in Ethiopia can legitimately be described as putting the industry 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, poor coordination of stakeholders, lack of government attention and knowledge and poor management capacity (Ali, 2016; Teshome & Demissie, 2018b; Teshome et al., 2018; Wondirad, 2020). Low community participation and poor knowledge in society about tourism, lack of suitable community organizations, lack of benefit sharing mechanism, lack of funding for tourism development, poor facilities and services in a destination, poor infrastructural development and stakeholder coordination were reported as key challenges in Amhara Regional State major tourist destination (Tefaye, 2017; Teshome et al., 2020, 2018).

Tourism strengthens the local economy when tourists visit an attraction; it generates local employment and also leads to the upgrading of infrastructure facilities such as tarred roads and telecommunications (Panasiuk, 2007; Wondirad et al., 2021). To assess the unique features of tourism resources in terms of natural, cultural, historical, and religious tourism resources and unique biodiversity, and to address the objective of the study, a cross-sectional study with a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) research approach was used. This paper was structured in different sections. The first section deals with background of the study with detailed review of the previous work; the second section describes the scale of the problem, objectives of the study, significance of the study; the third section describes the research methodology used; the fourth section deals with the results and discussion; the last section includes conclusions and recommendations based on the findings.

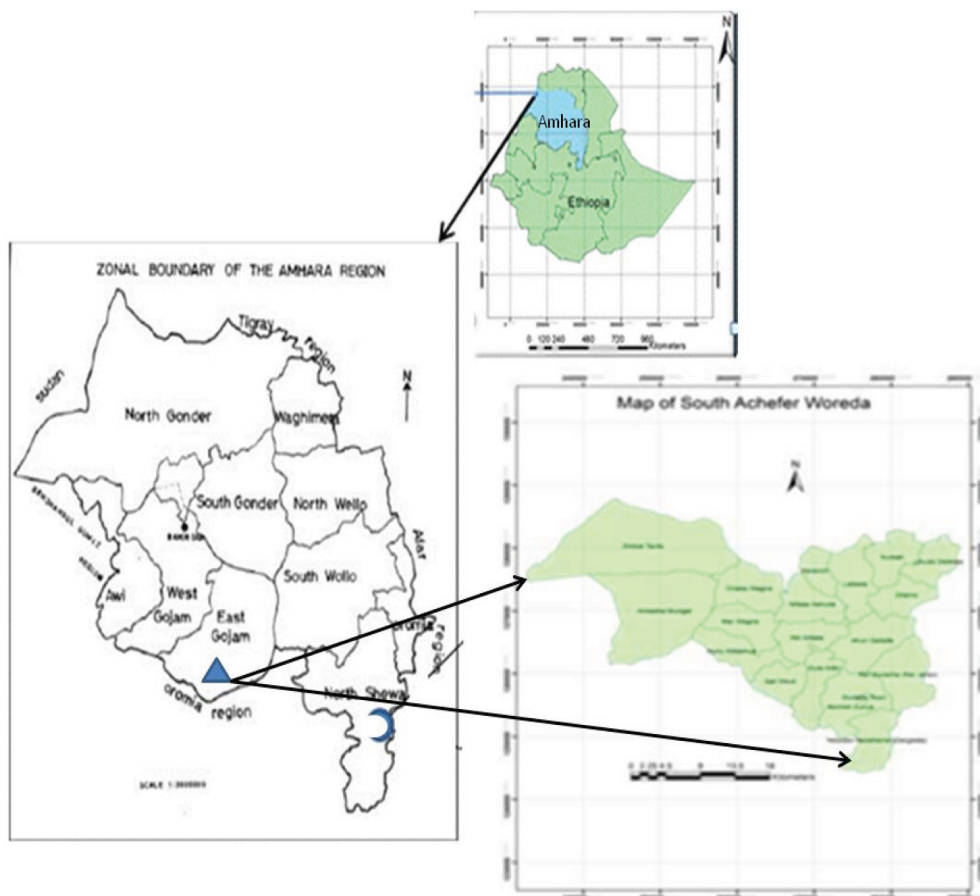
2. Statement of the problem

As a country Ethiopia is endowed with numerous tourist attractions ranging from physical to cultural, all of which are important for the country's tourism development. It has unique natural features, with cultural, historical, and religious resources and unique biodiversity; it has great potential for tourism resources. Studies conducted in identifying tourism resource potentials in

parts of Amhara National regional State in Ethiopia, highlight, for example, Choke Mountain and it's natural environ (Aseres, 2015), Wunania Kosoye and the surrounding environment (Teshome et al., 2015), Borena Sayint Wurehimenu National Park (Eshetu, 2010), Eshetu, 2010), Wofwash National Priority Forest (Teshome et al., 2019), Guna Mountains (Young, 2012), Zege peninsula in Lake Tana (Molla et al., 2011; Wondirad & Wondirad, 2019). These destinations are endowed with potential tourism resources (such as scenic landforms, mountains, gorges, unique biodiversity), and exceptional cultural and related resources (Nurhssen, 2016).

Challenges to maximization of these resources include lack of effective marketing strategies, lack of human resource and capacity, weak institutional and legislative frameworks, industry quality and standards issues, insufficient tourism and support infrastructure, and uncoordinated/fragmented tourism planning and development both at the national and regional levels in Ethiopia (Teshome et al., 2018; Wondirad, 2020). Often these destination areas' resources do not directly benefit local residents for various reasons (Nurhssen, 2016). However, in the south Achefer district, tourism resource potentials and the challenges presented in developing tourism destinations have not been examined. Therefore, to fill this gap and provide empirical evidence, the objective of this study was to identify the major potentials, challenges and economic contributions of tourism in the south Achefer district, Ethiopia. The significance of this empirical study hinges upon the fact that it especially contributes knowledge about the tourism resources potential, the economic contribution, and challenge occurred in the study area. Such a study would be of great value for resource managers, and tourism and heritage experts who work in this area, and serve as baseline data for future researchers.

Figure 1. Map of study area:
Sources: Developed by
Melkamu.



3. Research methodology

3.1. Study area description

Achefer is a district in the Amhara National Regional State of Ethiopia (Figure 1). It was named for the historic district of *Achefer*, which was first mentioned in the 16th century (SADCTO, 2017). The study area is bordered on the south and west by the Awi Zone, and on the east by *Mecha* district. Its administrative center is *Durbete* and it is subdivided into 20 rural and 2 urban Kebele¹ administrations (CSA, 2007). The study area is located 502 km from Addis Ababa and 60 km from Bahir-Dar (Molla et al., 2011).

25–29 °C; annual rainfall is around 1450–1594 mm. 87% of the South *Achefer* district has a temperate climate and the remaining 13% has cold climatic conditions (Molla et al., 2011). The altitudinal range of the study area is between 1,500 and 2,500 masl and is a mixture of flat and undulated topography. The total population of the South *Achefer* district is about 148,974 (CSA, 2007).

3.2. Research design and approach

A descriptive cross-sectional study with a mixed (quantitative and qualitative) research approach was used to address the objectives of the study (Creswell, 2014). Descriptive cross-sectional studies provide data for describing the status of phenomena or relationships among phenomena at a fixed point in time.

3.3. Target population

The target population considered in this study was 270 individuals who permanently live in south *Achefer* district, and the study population is:- religious fathers/leaders, *Mahibere-kidusan* and famous elders from the three kebeles, the high-school travel and tourism club, permanent hotel employees, tourism and history teachers, technical college tourism services department students, the *Abie Gubegna* cultural group, culture and tourism officers, and natural resource experts. Key informants were included from different stakeholders and service providers: the guide association, the tourism and culture office, hotel owners and travel agents.

3.4. Sample size and sampling techniques

A systematic random sampling technique was used to include participants for the quantitative study and key informants were selected by purposive sampling.

3.5. Sample size determination

According to South *Achefer* district culture and tourism office annual report (SADCTO, 2017), the target population of the study area is religious fathers, *Mahibere- kidusan* and famous elders from the three *kebeles* (108), high-school travel and tourism club (72), permanent hotel employees (20), tourism and history teachers (8), technical college tourism services department students (20), *Abie Gubegna* cultural group (18), culture and tourism officers and natural resources experts (24); total 270 study population In order to determine the sample size for this study, using single population proportion formula to determine the sample size by using (Yamane, 1967).

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where n is the sample size, N is the population size, e is the level of precision.

$$N = 270$$

$$e = .05$$

$$n = \frac{270}{1 + 270(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \approx 161$$

The sample size of the study is 161 which incorporate from the target groups. Under stratified sampling, the populations are divided into sub populations or strata (Table 1). Furthermore, (Kothari, 2004) formula was used for proportional sample size allocation as:-

$$n_i = \left(\frac{N_i}{N}\right)n \text{ where; } n_i = \text{required number of participants from each group}$$

N_i = total population of each strata

N = total population

n = sample size of total population

3.6. Data collection techniques and tools

Quantitative data were collected using self-administered structured questionnaires. For the qualitative parts of the study, data was collected using open-ended questions and interview guides to catch data, which could not be addressed by the survey.

In this research, a pre-designed questionnaire was given to foreign tourists after informing them of the purpose and procedure of the study and obtaining oral consent for participation. It used 36 items with a five-point Likert rating scale to indicate participants' level of agreement, employing the following ratings: 1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree. For the qualitative aspects of the study, the informant was contacted for scheduling a convenient time for interview, and a semi-structured interview guide was used.

3.7. Data analysis

Data were coded, cleaned, then entered into statistical software (SPSS, version 22) for analysis. Descriptive analysis such as frequency, mean, and percentages was computed, and tables and texts were utilized to present the result. Content analysis was used to present qualitative data in triangulation with quantitative findings in accordance with research objectives.

3.8. Ethical considerations

During data collection, all respondents and key informants were informed about the purpose and procedures of the study. Due consideration was given to the culture, social norms and values of the community. Oral consent was taken from the research participants and confidentiality of the information was assured.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Demographic profile of the respondents

From the total of 161 questionnaire distributed to the respondents, 12 were not returned and four were rejected due to being inappropriately filled or considered as incomplete. Therefore, 145 questionnaires were used to analyze the result of this study. Out of the total sample size, the number of male respondents was 88 (60.7%) and female respondents 57 (39.3%). Most, that is 239 (81.1%) of respondents fell into the age group of 51 and above, and at least 56 (38.6%) of respondents were or had been married, and the majority of respondents were single.

With regard to education level, the majority group of 55 (37.9%) had a master's degree or above. This shows that most participants have had an educational background and understand the cultural tourism potential resources of the study area (Table 2). According to the observation,

Table 1. Stratified sample size

Target population (participant)	total	$ni = n \frac{N_i}{N}$	Sample size
Religious fathers, Mahibere- kidusan and famous elders	108	$161 \times 108/270$	64
High school travel and tourism club	72	$161 \times 72/270$	43
Permanent hotel employees	20	$161 \times 20/270$	12
Tourism and history teachers	8	$161 \times 8/270$	5
Technical college, tourism Services department students	20	$161 \times 20/270$	12
Abie Gubegna Cultural group	18	$161 \times 18/270$	11
Culture and tourism officers and natural resources experts	24	$161 \times 24/270$	14
Total	270	Total = 161	161

Source: Authors, 2018

the study participants were involved directly or indirectly in the tourism sector, and they can provide valuable information about the potentials, challenges and economic contributions of tourism resources of the study area.

4.2. Potential tourism resources

4.2.1. Natural tourism resource potentials in South Achefer district

The majority, 126 (86.9%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “water-based tourism examples; swimming, fishing and others are available”. A few, 3 (2.1%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 2). The result confirmed that the study area can provide swimming, fishing and other water-based tourism activities. These potential water resources includes the Lake Tana, rivers such as less Abbay, Ashare, Jamma, Kelti, and the Koger. In line with our finding, it was reported that Ethiopia is the water tower of Africa (Degefu et al., 2019).

A greater proportion, 142 (97.9%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “geographic features, i.e. waterfalls, rocks, and spectacular landscape are available”. Another 3 (2.1%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, with mean values of 1.51 (Table 3). The result shows South Achefer district has different types of geographical features, with altitudes ranging from 1,500 to 2,500 m above sea level, and including mountains, plateaus, caves, water basins, gorges, waterfalls, cliffs, forests, deep incised valleys, escarpments and plains; there are many spectacular views (Figure 2).

Similar results were reported from another Ethiopian highland (Bekele et al., 2017; EWNHS, 1996; Teshome & Demissie, 2018b). Collectively, the results indicated that the scenic beauty of the landscape is a major nature-based resource with potential for development as a nature-based tourism project.

A greater proportion, 138 (95.2%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “There are unique indigenous species of plants and animals in the study area”. An additional 2

Table 2. Demographic characteristics of questionnaire participants

Demographic Variables		Frequency (N)	(%)
Gender of respondents	Male	88.0	60.7
	Female	57.0	39.3
Age of respondents	18–25	84.0	57.9
	26–35	39.0	26.9
	36–45	17.0	11.7
	46–60 & > 60	5.0	3.5
Marital status of respondents	Single	87.0	60.0
	Married	56.0	38.6
	Divorced	1.0	0.7
	Widow		
Educational Level of respondents	Illiterate	0.0	0.0
	Non formal education	0.0	0.0
	Grade 1–8	2.0	1.4
	Grade 9–10	17.0	11.7
	Grade 11–12	37.0	25.5
	TVET	2.0	1.4
	Diploma	32.0	22.1
	Degree & above	55.0	37.9
	Total	145.0	100.0

Source: Authors, 2018

(1.4%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, with mean values of 1.71 (Table 3). This result was also supported by key informant interviews and field observation, that south Achefer district is endowed with varied wildlife species such as Klipspringer (*Oreotragus oreotragus*), Serval cat (*Leptailurus serval*), Leopard (*Panthera pardus*), Golden/Common Jackal (*Canis aureus*), Common Bush Back (*Tragelaphus scriptus*), Abyssinia Colobus monkey (*Colobus guereza*), Spotted Hyena (*Crocuta crocuta*), Anubis Baboon (*Papio Anubis*), Bush Pig (*Potamochoerus porcus*), Common Duiker (*Sylvicapra grimmia*), and unidentified Amphibians and reptiles. On the other hand, there is a natural forest that covers 4850 hector of total area and having a diversity of bird species which makes the study area attractive for tourists (SADCTO, 2017). Moreover, it is also reported that the country has a diversity of tourism attractions, which includes some of the highest (Ras Dejen Mountain, 4543 m above sea level) and lowest places (Danakil Depression, 116 m below sea level) in Africa along with immense wildlife species including some endemic species (Aseres, 2015).

The majority, 137 (94.5%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “the study the area holds attractive and clean nature”. However, few, 7(4.8%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 3). Indeed, all parts of Ethiopia have attractive and clean nature, this is due to those different geographical features the district consists of temperate and desert climatic conditions that could be favorable to visitors who come to any climatic regions (Young, 2012). Although this result is encouraging to establish community-based ecotourism, no new tourism product creation and making public awareness towards the attractive and clean nature has been conducted until now.

The majority, 130 (89.7%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “the area is endowed with fascinating places for bird watching, mountain trekking and wildlife viewing”. A few- 7(4.8%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 3). The result confirms that the area provides a fascinating place for bird watching, mountain trekking and wildlife viewing,

Table 3. Community level of agreement on presence of tourism potentials (161)

Variables	Response rate	SDA	DA	N	AG	SAG	Mean
There are water based tourism examples; swimming, fishing and others are available	F	3.0	11.0	5.0	59.0	67.0	3.21
	%	2.1	7.6	3.4	40.7	46.2	
Geographic features i.e. waterfalls, rocks, and spectacular landscape	F	-	3.0	-	65.0	77.0	3.49
	%	-	2.1	-	44.8	53.1	
There are unique indigenous species of plants and animals	F	1.0	1.0	5.0	59.0	79.0	3.48
	%	0.7	0.7	3.4	40.7	54.5	
Has attractive and clean nature	F	1.0	6.0	1.0	52.0	85.0	3.48
	%	0.7	4.1	0.7	35.9	58.6	
Endowed fascinating place for bird watching, mountain trekking and wildlife viewing	F	-	7.0	8.0	62.0	68.0	3.32
	%	-	4.8	5.5	42.8	46.9	
There is the concept of tourism development by the host community and willing to accept to their area	F	3.0	14.0	8.0	61.0	59.0	3.1
	%	2.1	9.7	5.5	42.1	40.7	
Community willingness to participate in preservation and conservation of tourism resources	F	4.0	17.0	4.0	58.0	62.0	3.08
	%	2.8	11.7	2.8	40.0	42.8	
Natural cave for cave expeditions	F	1.0	6.0	12.0	72.0	54.0	3.19
	%	0.7	4.1	8.3	49.7	37.2	
Average		1.2	5.4	3.6	42.6	47.2	3.29

Source: Authors, 2018

Note: SDA = Strongly Disagree, DA = Disagree, N = Neutral, AG = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree and M = Mean of 1 is very high and 5 is very Low.

Figure 2. Ashare waterfall,
Sources: South Achefer Woreda
Government Communication
Affairs Office, 2014.



which could have major tourism potential. Some of the common wetland bird species for bird watching and viewing practices were Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), and Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*), Sacred Ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*), Fulvous Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*) Open-billed Stork (*Anastomus lamelligerus*) and Common Crane (*Grus grus*), Wattled Crane (*Grus carunculatus*). This potential is also supported by the key informants. The study area is endowed with many types of bird species to attract bird watchers, mountains for mountain climbing/trekking and varied wildlife for wildlife viewing activities (Aseres, 2015).

The majority, 120 (82.8%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there is a concept of tourism development by the host community and willingness to accept tourists to their area”. However, few, 17(11.8%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 3). People who lived in south Achefer are renowned for being considerate, welcoming, cooperative and non-confrontational people. The result indicated that although the respondents do not have any training related to tourism development and heritage preservation, they are willing to accept tourism-related projects. This is also because agricultural productivities are not sufficient to feed households throughout the year (Molla et al., 2011).

The majority, 120 (82.8%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there is community willingness to participate in preservation and conservation of tourism resources”. However, a few 21(14.5%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 3). In Amhara Region State there are four World Heritage Sites, and there is an awareness of the value of its heritage conservation. Therefore, in the study area, the communities are willing to participate in preservation and conservation of tourism resources.

The majority, 129 (86.9%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there are natural caves for cave expeditions”. However, not many, 7(4.8%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 3). Of the popular caves, the unique feature *Klti* cave is an outstanding phenomenon in combination with the *Klti* waterfall that flows over the cave entrance. This is an extraordinarily beautiful combination. Moreover, beside the cave there is a breathtaking view, and

Table 4. Cultural tourism resource potentials in South Achefer district (161)

Variables	Response	SDA	DA	N	AG	SAG	Mean
There are indigenous handicrafts practiced in the study area	F	-	-	-	42.0	103.0	1.29
	%	-	-	-	29.0	71.0	
There are religious places that serve for pilgrimage	F	1.0	2.0	3.0	48.0	91.0	1.44
	%	0.7	1.4	2.1	33.1	62.8	
There are fascinating religious practices that can attract tourists	F	1.0	2.0	4.0	50.0	88.0	1.47
	%	0.7	1.4	2.8	34.5	60.7	
There are museum's collections which show evidence for ancient civilizations	F	3.0	8.0	16.0	60.0	58.0	1.88
	%	2.1	5.5	11.0	41.4	40.0	
There are historical monasteries and churches with unique religious collections	F	2.0	6.0	6.0	48.0	83.0	1.59
	%	1.4	4.1	4.1	33.1	57.2	
There are religious sites which attract health tourists	F	-	11.0	4.0	63.0	67.0	1.72
	%	-	7.6	2.8	43.4	46.2	
There are historical sites and culture in the study area	F	-	13.0	15.0	63.0	54.0	1.91
	%	-	9.0	10.0	43.4	37.2	
The battle fields are known by the host community with its history	F	2.0	11.0	11.0	77.0	44.0	1.97
	%	1.4	7.6	7.6	53.1	30.3	

(Continued)

Variables	Response	SDA	DA	N	AG	SAG	Mean
Sport tourists promote cross cultural exchange and mutual understanding in the study area	F	2.0	1.0	7.0	67.0	68.0	1.63
	%	1.4	0.7	4.8	46.2	46.9	
Average mean							1.66

(Note: SDA = Strongly Disagree, DA = Disagree, N = Neutral, AG = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree and M = Mean of 1 is Very High and 5 is Very Low).

Source: Authors, 2018

during the Italian invasion the between years 1828–1933 the cave served as a human shelter. The other important tourism potential “Zhbst cave” is located 39 km North West of *Durbete* in *Zhbst Kebele*, on a mountain top. According to key informants, this cave has a significant role for heritage, historical, and cultural importance. Caves can be of great potential for tourism development and in turn enhance the growth of the economy of its host residents (Okonkwo et al., 2017).

4.2.2. Cultural tourism resource potentials in South *Achefer* district

All 161(100%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there are indigenous handicrafts practiced in the study area”. The availability of indigenous handicrafts practices were agreed by the entire respondents, these could provide materials for souvenir sellers. Handcrafts in the study area include *pottery* products, traditionally woven cloth, and jewelry manufacture (Table 4). It was reported that in *Woleka* village in *Gondar*, local people are also produce very famous handicrafts (Yechale et al., 2017).

A greater proportion, 139 (95.9%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there are religious places that serve for pilgrimages”. Another 3(2.1%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, with mean values of 1.44 (Table 4). There could be potential for religious tourism/pilgrimage and health tourism development (Kahissay et al., 2020). The result was also supported by key informants and field observation. Based on their responses religious places such as; *Wegeda Mariam* monastery, *Ankesha St Georges* monastery, *Anquaseg Lalibela* rock-hewn monastery, *Sekela Georges* and *Tanfa eyesus* monastery, *Korenych* church, *Gedema Mariam* church, *Jarso Gebrael* church, *Chure Kusquam* Church and holy waters were mentioned. These show that south *Achefer* possesses a remarkable range of existing and potential tourism products and assets.

A greater proportion, 138 (95.2%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there are fascinating religious practices which could attract tourists”. Hardly any, 3(2.1%) respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed, with mean values of 1.47 (Table 4). The key informants supported this finding, stating that there are fascinating religious practices and festivals which celebrate with interesting cultural activities, chanting, unique dressing styles; these include festivals such as *Meskel*, *Gena*, and *Epiphany*. Also included are traditional weddings and funeral ceremonies which, in combination with interesting and welcoming hosts, add further potential for attracting tourists (Table 4). Previous studies show that in most parts of Ethiopia there are fascinating religious practices that can attract tourists (Kahissay et al., 2020).

Table 5. Challenges of tourism development in South Achefer district (161)							
Variables	Response	SDA	DA	N	AG	SAG	Mean
Lack of transport services such as public bus, bicycle, mules and horses Ggdss	F	8.0	32.0	1.0	55.0	49.0	2.28
	%	55.5	22.1	0.7	37.9	33.8	
Lack of awareness	F	6.0	31.0	5.0	59.0	44.0	2.28
	%	4.1	21.4	3.4	40.7	33.3	
Lack of telecommunication services	F	4.0	33.0	4.0	61.0	43.0	2.27
	%	2.8	22.8	2.8	42.1	29.7	
The study area does not have sufficient electric power.	F	8.0	32.0	8.0	61.0	36.0	2.41
	%	5.5	22.1	5.5	42.1	24.8	
Lack of health service and related facilities	F	4.0	15.0	5.0	65.0	56.0	1.94
	%	2.8	10.3	3.4	44.8	38.6	
Culture, tourism office has poor relation coordination with stakeholders	F	1.0	5.0	6.0	73.0	60.0	1.72
	%	0.7	3.4	4.1	50.3	41.4	
Parking areas and toilets are not available in the destination	F	9.0	33.0	6.0	41.0	56.0	2.30
	%	6.2	22.8	4.1	28.3	38.6	
The monasteries are not secure and become exposed to theft.	F	-	2.0	-	77.0	66.0	1.57
	%	-	1.4	-	53.1	45.5	
Security is major challenges to the tourism and travel industry	F	10.0	28.0	7.0	65.0	35.0	2.23
	%	6.9	19.3	4.8	44.8	24.1	

(Continued)

Variables	Response	SDA	DA	N	AG	SAG	Mean
Political condition can cause challenge for tourism industry	F	13.0	31.0	8.0	60.0	33.0	2.55
	%	9.0	21.4	5.5	41.4	22.8	
Cumulative mean (CM)							2.2

Source: Authors, 2018

Note: SDA = Strongly Disagree, DA = Disagree, N = Neutral, AG = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree and M = Mean of 1 is Very High and 5 is Very Low

The majority, 118 (81.4%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there are museum collections which show evidence for ancient periods”. Only a few 11(7.7%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 4). These museums were mainly church museums near monasteries that have big collections of religious items and evidence for ancient periods of Ethiopia. Information obtained from key informant interviews further confirm that churches and monasteries have wonderful museums with large collections. Some of these churches were founded as early as the third and fourth centuries in the reign of Emperors Abrahā and Wo-Atsbāha. In these churches and monasteries, there are more than 1326 collections (movable tangible heritages).

The majority, 130 (89.6%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there are religious’ sites which attract health tourists”. Very few, 11(7.6%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 4). The resources that attracted health tourists were holy water i.e. *Jarso Gebrael*, *Korenych Baeta* holy water, and *Gedema Mariam* holy water. Visitors to these health tourist destinations mainly come from Gondar, Addis Ababa, Awi zone, north Achefer, *Mecha* district, and other nearby cities.

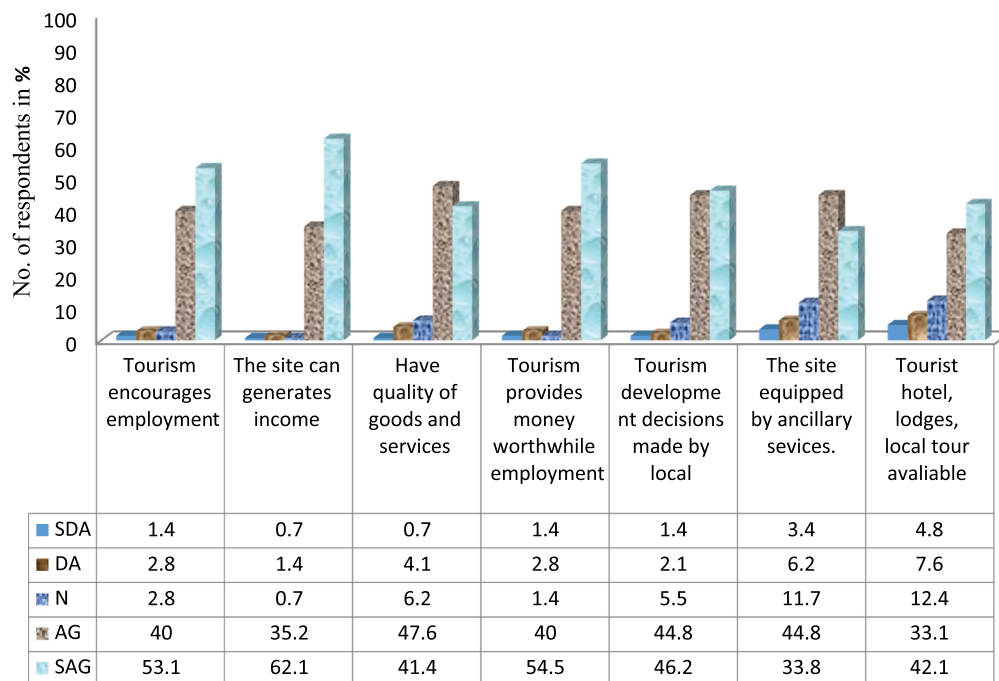
The majority, 117 (80.6%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there are cultural places and historical sites in the study area”. However, few, 13(9%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 4). These historical sites and cultural resources were lifestyles, social structure, artifacts and traditional management systems, architecture, paintings, and other places of historical values such as historical buildings, battlefields, with connected stories and oral tradition. These resources give indispensable values in developing tourism in the area (SADCTO, 2017).

4.2.3. Challenges of tourism development in South Achefer district

The majority, 104 (71.7%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there is a lack of transport services such as public bus, bicycle, mules and horses”. However, a few, 40 (77.6%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the mean values of 2.28 (Table 5). The result shows a lack of infrastructure is confirmed as a challenge in the study area. Key informants depicted that insufficient traditional transport (mules, horses, and donkeys) is not a challenge but rather an opportunity for tourism development in the area.

The majority, 103 (74%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “lack of awareness” as a challenge. However, a few, 37(25.5%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 5). On the statement: “there is a problem with telecommunication services” (71.8%), and lack of electricity (70%) and “lack of health-related services and facilities’ (83.4%) of respondents agreed or strongly agreed. Moreover, a greater proportion, (91.7%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “the culture and Tourism office has poor relations and coordination with stakeholders”. These results were also supported by key informants that

Figure 3. Community perception on economic contribution of tourism, Source: Authors, 2018. Note: SDA = Strongly Disagree, DA = Disagree, N = Neutral, AG = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree



culture and tourism office coordinates poorly with different sectors. For example, the agriculture office is a source of forest conservation but culture and tourism office has poor coordination with this sector (Table 5).

A fewer more than a half, 96 (66.9%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “there is a lack of parking areas and toilets”. However, few, 42(29%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 5). Key informants and field observation support the finding that most of the destinations in rural areas do not have parking areas and toilets. Lack of parking sites and toilets were reported as a challenge in many tourist destinations in Ethiopia (Teshome et al., 2021).

A greater proportion, 143 (98.69%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “monasteries are not secure and become exposed to theft, and there is a lack of parking areas and toilets”. However, a few, 2(1.4%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 5). These challenges were supported by key informants, who said that the main challenges include lack of security to monasteries, man-made damage, and natural destructions of resources, theft; flooding, wildfire, and fire. Example: *Ankesha St.Georgis, Tanfa Eyesus, and Wegeda Mariam* monasteries have been damaged by robbers and fire. Currently in Ethiopia many heritage and cultural treasures are looted from the church museums and stories. A fewer more than a half, 93 (64.2%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “political conditions can cause challenges for the tourism industry”. However, only some, 42(30.4%), of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Table 5). Those challenges were reported from most Ethiopian tourist destination sites (Aynalem & Simane, 2016)

4.2.4. Level of community agreement on economic contributions of tourism

Tourism has evolved into a global phenomenon and is one of the most important economic sectors and social activities of our time. Today, it contributes directly to 5% of the world’s GDP; one in 12 jobs globally, and is a major export sector for many countries, both in the developing and developed world. The next 20 years will be of continued growth for the sector (Goran, 2012; WTT, 2019).

A greater proportion, (93.1%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “tourism encourages a variety of employment activities for the local population”. Another (4.2%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 3). Similar findings were reported in different countries (Asker et al., 2010; Kiss, 2004; Wondirad et al., 2021) that tourism encourages and creates a variety of employment activities for the local population. Another (4.2%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. Information obtained from key informants’ interviews suggests that local populations participate in the accommodation sector, infrastructure development, and cultural dresses, indigenous handcraft, monastery leaders and church leaders. This brought income and work within the local community. This finding was supported by South *Achefer district* Culture and Tourism Office (SADCTO, 2017). The office gives some details about the number and types of employees where 247 persons engaged in accommodation sector and 37 employees in hotels construction, and more than 35 employees in handicraft production and souvenir shops. These types of job opportunities were reported by scholars in different study areas (Eshetu, 2010; Robinson, 2016; Teshome et al., 2015), where tourism supports a variety of local business such as restaurants, hotels, transportation and guiding within areas of high biodiversity.

A greater proportion, (97.3), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “the study area has a potential to generate income”. Another (2.1%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 3). This potential includes both natural and cultural resources, and its economic contributions were income generation, employment opportunities, and infrastructure development. In addition to subsistence agriculture, people who lived in a rural area generate income from tourism-related activities in many Ethiopian highlands (Teshome et al., 2020). The economic contribution of tourism to economic growth and development in such areas is a catalyst for economic growth that tourism is most favored (Richard, 2002; Wondirad & Wondirad, 2019).

A greater proportion, (89%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “quality goods and services for tourism development are available in the study area”. Another (4.8%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 3). Different findings were reported in the Simien Mountains National Park (Teshome & Demissie, 2018a, 2018b) that the quality of goods and services for tourism development were not adequate.

The majority, (89%), of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the statement: “tourist hotels, lodges, campsites, local tour operations, etc. benefited from tourism development in the study area”. Another (12.4%) of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed (Figure 3). According to the key informant and field observation, in south *Achefer district* there are more than 12 hotels, 1 lodge, and more than 15 cafes. Those accommodations benefit from tourism development in the study area. Respondents cumulative mean (CM = 1.7) shows tourism can be a major source of income and employment for the economic development in *Achefer District*. Tourism can provide work opportunities; support the establishment of small, medium and large enterprises; lead to skills development in tourism and support services; contribute to rural development; improve infrastructure; and ultimately contribute to the government’s coffers (Robinson, 2016; Wondirad, 2020).

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

This study addressed a research gap by establishing empirical evidence for the development of sustainable tourism through describing the tourism research potentials, challenges, and economic contribution in the study area. South *Achefer district* has huge natural and cultural tourism resources with great potential to develop community-based ecotourism. These potentials include beautiful landscapes, unique wildlife and indigenous plant species, a clean and attractive natural environment, caves, waterfalls, escarpments and mountains; cultural tourism resource potentials are accompanied by other tangible and intangible cultural tourism resources.

Lack of funds for promotion and tourism development; lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, lack of accessibility, lack of skilled human resources, and lack of coordination among stakeholders are major challenges in South Achefer district. Moreover, both natural and cultural tourism resources were not well identified recorded and documented.

The current economic contribution of tourism in the study area delivers a variety of employment opportunities for the local population in south *Achefer District*. These include participation in accommodation, in government offices, in infrastructure development, and in souvenir production development (such as the production of cultural dresses, indigenous handicraft).

5.2. Recommendation

Increasing the awareness of local communities in and around the *district* towards ecotourism resources is very important. To make South *Achefer district* and its environs attractive eco-tourist destinations, the potential tourism resources of the area should be well promoted through different media/tools. The main challenges facing the development of these major tourism resources include lack of funds for promotion and development, lack of awareness, poor infrastructure, lack of accessibility, lack of skilled human resources, and lack of coordination among stakeholders; they must be solved.

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Note

1. The smallest Government administrative unite.

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Compliance, ethics approval and consent to participate

The purpose of the study, its procedures, and the confidentiality of the information was clearly explained to all research participants, verbal consent was obtained from participants, and questionnaires were answered based on their preference. Moreover, no any clinical data of any respondent was used in any section of this research.

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