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## Contents

1. Background.....	3
2. Major Research Thematic Areas .....	4
<b>2.1. Tourism Resources</b> .....	4
<b>2.2. Tourism Development and Management</b> .....	5
<b>2.3. Tourism Marketing</b> .....	6
<b>2.4. Hospitality and Service Management</b> .....	7
<b>2.5. Innovation and Technology in Tourism</b> .....	7
<b>2.6. Tourism Policy and Governance</b> .....	8
<b>2.7. Sustainability of Tourism and Hospitality</b> .....	9
<b>2.8. Culture and its Development</b> .....	10
<b>2.9. Cross-Cutting and Contemporary Themes in Tourism</b> .....	11
References .....	12

## **1. Background**

Tourism continues to be a key driver of economic growth and development through foreign receipt earning, job creation and value creations through imposing relatively fair distribution of earnings (UNWTO, 2021). The sector's total contribution to the global economy has reached US\$ 9.2 trillion, equating to 10.4% of global GDP and accounted for 1 in 4 of all new jobs, 10.6% of all jobs (334 million) created across the world (WTTC, 2020). Additionally, the sector represents over 27.4% of the global service exports. As the fastest growing sector second only to manufacturing, tourism generates over 20% growth in 2018 (WTTC, 2019). The industry plays key part in enhancing destination image and serves as a means of capitalizing the natural and cultural resources of any given country (Ageeva & Foroudi, 2019).

Ethiopia stands top in the African continent in terms of tourism resource endowments, with the country inscribing, with 13, more UNESCO world heritages (UNESCO, 2021), in addition to 4 biosphere reserves and the 12 World Literary Heritages. The country also enjoys a resource competitive edge in that it owns natural, cultural, paleontological, and mixed heritages, over most African destination who offers specialist appeals and experience. Ethiopia has plenty of opportunities to become one of the middle-income countries by effectively and efficiently using diversified and unique natural cultural tourism products through research and development (MoCT, 2021). According to World Travel and Tourism Council (2019), travel and tourism constitutes 6.8% of the country's economy, and 7.1 % of the total jobs generated in the nation. Through its 10 year strategic plan, the country has envisaged to increase its UNESCO registered heritages from 13 to 33 by 2030 and its inbound tourists to 7.3 million by the stated time (PDC, 2021).

Despite tourism's immense potential for growth and development of nations and the emphasis given to the sector by government and private sectors, it has not been actively supplemented by research activities by academia and research institutions. There are over 15 universities in Ethiopia offering Bachelor and Masters Degree level studies in the areas of Tourism, Hospitality and Cultural Heritage Management. Few universities have their own priorities of thematic research areas. Similarly, institutions under federal and regional government bodies have set up their own research wings, delivering their periodic enquiries into culture, heritage, tourism and components dealing with hospitality sector. It is pertinent that the country's tourism sector has been jeopardized by combinations of factors such as poor product and destination development, management and marketing; mediocre service quality provision, irregularities and absence of legislative and robust governance systems; and human resources development and management concerns.

While these pressing issues demand broadly vested inter-disciplinary research efforts, so far however, there has been no harmonized and organized thematic tourism research exists at national level. The absence of which further weakens addressing the challenges at hand comprehensively. Hence, this document has been prepared to deal with the problems apparent in this regard. As is the case in international arena, tourism research activities remain fragmented and thematic areas may help in identification and analysis major tourism problems (UNWTO, 2007).

The document identifies major 8 themes and enlists sub-themes and provides introductory narratives on the themes. Yet, it would be good to note that there are also other thematic areas that were not covered in this document. Accordingly, the 9 thematic areas that have been identified include: Tourism Resources; Tourism Development and Management; Tourism Marketing; Hospitality and Service Management; Innovation and Technology in Tourism; Tourism policy and Governance; Sustainability of Tourism and Hospitality; Culture and its Development; and Cross-cutting and Contemporary Tourism Issues. Each of the themes and sub-themes are discussed below

## **2. Major Research Thematic Areas**

### **2.1. Tourism Resources**

Tourism resources theme will comprise and help the inventory & mapping of tourism resources in the country. They also encompass economic valuation, forecasted life of heritages, identifying values of tourism resources of natural, cultural and historical heritages sites. The natural tourism resources include biological (fauna and flora, protected areas) and physical (i.e. mountains, spectacular landscapes, escarpments, viewpoints, favourable weather, lakes, hot springs, waterfall, and natural cave), while cultural tourism resources include both tangible and intangible resources such as castles, palaces, battle fields, archaeological sites, handicrafts, World Literary Heritages, traditions (custom/belief), history of a region, architecture, local food, art and music, folklore (traditional local story and legends), monuments, ways of life, religion, language, traditional dresses, costumes, etc.

The major research sub-themes include:

- Natural Tourism Resources,
- Cultural Tourism Resources,
- Religious and Historical Tourism Resources and
- Palaeontology and Archaeological Tourism Resources.

## 2.2. Tourism Development and Management

Ethiopia is the home of untapped natural, cultural and historical tourism resources. These tourism resources of the country have not been properly documented. In addition, the attractions and destinations are found under different ownership and management; the majority of them are managed by federal and public authorities, regional offices, religious institutions, individuals, community members and educational institutions. However, the level, determinants and prospects of development and management of tourism as an industry warrants specific clustered attention and hence, it is set up here as an independent theme of enquiry.

The sub-themes under Tourism Development and Management are:

- Tourism Resource Mapping and Portfolio Development,
- Tourism Route Identifications and Attractions ,
- Heritage Tourism Management,
- Museum Development and Management,
- Integrating Tourism and Hospitality Management in Education,
- Tourism Investment and Entrepreneurship,
- Tourism Destination Competitiveness and Performance,
- Tourism Support Infrastructure and Services,
- Tourism Projects for Inclusive Development,
- Protected Areas Management,
- Destination Lifecycle and Tourism Planning,
- Crisis, Shocks and Vulnerability Management and Resilience Building,
- Domestic Tourism,
- Outbound Tourism,
- Tourism Information Systems and Statistics,
- Tourism Product Development<sup>1</sup> and Diversification,

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<sup>1</sup> Such as Community based Eco-tourism Development, Wellness Tourism, Sport Tourism, Water Based Tourism, Geo-Tourism, Educational Tourism , Bird Watching etc.

- Human Capital Development and Management in Tourism,
- National Resource Ownership and Patent Rights,
- Tourism and Livelihoods,
- Transportation Management in Tourism and Hospitality,
- Change Management in Tourism and Hospitality.

### **2.3. Tourism Marketing**

Marketing in the context of tourism can be studied from the perspectives of information gathering, marketing mix, marketing planning and customer relationship management point of view (George, 2021). The tourism sectors are prone to the influence of the fundamental changes in the orientation of marketing. Innovative experience design will become an increasingly important component of tourism that firms core capabilities. Those who go beyond service excellence and market experientially will lead the creation of value in the sector (Williams, 2006).

Nonetheless, tourism marketing is one of the least covered thematic area in Ethiopia. The emerging approaches would demand the full scale marketing of destinations. This calls researchers for looking deeply into the level, approach, effectiveness and performance of tourism marketing by all actors in the industry. As a result, research in this sub theme would cover areas such as:

- Tourism Marketing Package Development,
- Destination Image and Attractiveness,
- Branding and Brand Management,
- Market Segmentation, Targeting and Positioning,
- Marketing Intelligence,
- Demand Analysis and Modelling,
- Business Tourism and Event Marketing,
- Tourism Value Chain Analysis and Management,
- Visitor's Satisfaction,
- Tourist Behaviours and Experiences,
- Tourism Marketing Performance and

- Tourism Marketing Tools and Strategies.

## **2.4. Hospitality and Service Management**

Hospitality industry is one of the service businesses with relatively high level of customer contact that needs a special consideration on maintaining the quality (Widjaja, 2014), as it is crucial on customer satisfaction and image building. In today's competition service providers' considered delivering a quality service that meets customers' expectations is an essential strategy for success and survival.

To make the hospitality industry competitive, effective and efficient that satisfies the need of customers a research based hospitality and service management. As a result, research in this sub theme would cover areas such as:

- Consumer behaviour and Hospitality marketing,
- Service Quality and Management,
- Human Resources Management and Development,
- Business Forecasting and Applied Economics,
- Operational Management in Hospitality,
- Strategic Management,
- Financial Management,
- Planning and Design.

## **2.5. Innovation and Technology in Tourism**

Innovations and technology are critically important for the tourism sector. Tourism research in innovation and technology can be a bridge between academia and industry through the intellectual exchange of ideas, trends, and paradigmatic changes in the fields of tourism, information technology, innovation, and e-business. This research thematic promotes the use of innovation and modern technologies to redesign tourism products and enhance the Ethiopian tourism industry to cope up with other similar competitive markets. Research in this thematic area offers a platform for scholars and tourism industry operators to document the impact and influence of innovation and technology on the tourism sector. Some of the sub themes in innovation and technology in tourism include:



- Artificial intelligence, Augmented Reality/Virtual Reality applications (AR/VR),
- ICT and Applications in Tourism,
- Online Travel Agents (OTA), Electronic Distribution Channels, or e-Intermediaries, E-Word of Mouth (e-WOM),
- Social Media in Tourism and Hospitality, User Generated Content (UGC) Analysis,
- Website Design and Evaluation,
- Self-Service Technologies in Hospitality and Tourism,
- Smart Tourism and Smart Destinations,
- Automation and Robotics,
- Big Data / Tourism Satellite Account (TSA) Analytics,
- Tourism Business Intelligence and Visualization,
- Digital/ Internet Marketing of Hospitality and Tourism Organizations,
- E-Learning in Hospitality and Tourism,
- Revenue Management and Technology,
- Technologies for Tourism and Hospitality.

## **2.6. Tourism Policy and Governance**

Many approaches have been tried by various researchers to address concerns about tourism policy and tourism policy making from different perspectives (Hsu et al., 2013). Based on the comprehensive analysis of the tourism industry of Ethiopia, the availability of coherent policy, strategy, regulatory and institutional framework is becoming critical concern in creating conducive environment for destinations to be attractive and competitive (OECD, 2010). This involves institutional capacity, partnership and cross-sectorial linkage, marketing, tourism supplies, technology and innovations, sustainability and community engagement (MoCT, 2009).

Developing a multi-actor system that includes public-private partnerships and greater horizontal and vertical co-ordination of relevant government bodies requires consideration of the accepted elements of good governance, both at the central and sub-national levels (OECD, 2012). In addition, reviewing, updating and formulating the existing frameworks and international laws are essential for developing tourism in Ethiopia. It is also pertinent to examine the governance of tourism with regards to the institutional linkages. The major sub-themes under this major theme are:

- Tourism Development and Management Policies and Strategies,
- Tourism, Diplomacy and Regional Integration,
- Tourism Development Financing and Incentives,
- Public-Private Partnership,
- Tourism and Cross-Sectoral Integration,
- Tourism Stakeholders', Networking and Partnership,
- Tourism Legal Frameworks,
- Standardization of Tourism and Hospitality Services,
- Leadership and Political Commitments,
- National and International Legislation,
- Models in Tourism Governance (Tri-Partite, Bi-partite)
- Total Quality Management (TQM) in Tourism and Hospitality,
- Fair-Trade, Ethics and Tourism,
- Corporate Social Responsibility and
- Tourist Safety and Security.

## **2.7. Sustainability of Tourism and Hospitality**

Particular to tourism, sustainability takes full account of its current and future economic, social and environmental impacts through addressing the needs of visitors, the industry, and the environment and host communities. Pertaining to environmental aspects, making optimal use of resources that constitute a key element in tourism development, maintaining essential ecological systems and helping to conserve natural heritage and biodiversity need to be taken into account. Respecting the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities, conserving their built and living cultural heritage and traditional values contributes to inter-cultural understanding and tolerance falls under the socio-cultural dimensions. To meet the needs of the future generation, tourism should ensure viable, long-term economic operations, providing socio-economic benefits to all stakeholders that are fairly distributed, including stable employment and income-earning opportunities and social services to host communities, and contributing to poverty alleviation (UNEP and UNWTO, 2005)

Sustainability in the hospitality industry explores innovative ways to tackle the ever increasing costs of energy and water as well as the moral, ethical, social and political commitments. Moreover, it contains stimulating new ideas, solutions and strategies which are essential to every scholars and practitioners in the hospitality industry (Sloan et al, 2009).

Therefore, this theme will cover the research enquiries on the dimensions of economic, socio-cultural and environmental aspects: Tourism Practices and Measurements, Conservation and Preservation of Natural and Cultural Resources, Community engagement, benefit and empowerment, Carrying capacity issues, Equity issues in destination development and Shocks vulnerability and resilience. The major sub-themes under this theme are:

- Sustainable Tourism Practices: Measurement and Indicators,
- Conservation and Preservation of Natural and Cultural Resources,
- Community Engagement, Benefit and Empowerment,
- Employments, Revenue Generation and GDPs,
- Economic Valuation of Tourism Resources,
- Carrying Capacity,
- Equity and Destination Development,
- Responsible Tourism and
- Knowledge Generation and Sustainability.

## **2.8. Culture and its Development**

Culture covers a diversity of social, economic, political, moral, religious and psychological practices which can be expressed with languages, traditions, folklore, building styles, food customs, costumes, implements, arts, beliefs and new cultural creations (MoCT, 2016).

According to UNESCO report, culture and creative goods are the most swiftly growing sector of the world economy employing about 30 million jobs worldwide whose ages are 15-29 more than any other sectors. Creative goods export increased to US\$ 11.5 million in 2014 which was less than US\$1 million. Moreover, globally, the market value of creative goods was US \$208 billion in 2002 and reached to US \$509 billion in 2015 which is increasing more than double (UNESCO, 2018).

Ethiopia is known for its diversity of culture and multilingual society. It is necessary to identify, document, protect, preserve and promote the cultural values, industries and heritages. It is also

important to improve infrastructural development of cultural institutions and ensure human resource development so that the cultural assets and heritage of Ethiopia could play a key role in nation-building and inclusive development & prosperity. The products of Culture (values, industries and heritages) are basic inputs to attract tourists, and hence, they are inseparable. The major sub-themes under this theme are:

- Cultural Values and Multiculturalism in Ethiopia,
- Valuation of Cultural Industries,
- Ethiopian Languages, Communications, Dialects and Folklore,
- Heritage Conservations, Development and Management,
- Culinary, Gastronomy Tourism and
- Indigenous Knowledge.

## **2.9. Cross-Cutting and Contemporary Themes in Tourism**

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the tourism industry and global dynamism, there are emerging and contemporary cross-cutting sub-themes both at national and global level in the tourism sector. As a result, having exposure and taking proactive steps to address them is critical for competitive and long-term tourism sustainability.

Under this theme, common cross-cutting and emerging issues to be mainstreamed in the development of tourism are:

- Food Security and Tourism,
- Volunteerism,
- Gender Equality and Inclusiveness,
- Green- Tourism,
- Climate Change and Global Warming,
- Space Tourism and
- Dark Tourism.

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