

RELIGIOUS PLACES AS TOOLS FOR ADVENTURE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN TIGRAY, ETHIOPIA

Gebreslassie DANIEL ALEMSHET*

Aksum University, Ethiopia,
e-mail: daniofaxum@gmail.com

Gebreyesus TEKLEBRHAN LEGESE

Aksum University, Ethiopia,
e-mail: teklebrhan2112@gmail.com

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Abstract: The main objective of this article was to assess the potentials religious places of Abune Selama, Abune Yemata, Mariam Qorqor, and Abune Daniel and Abune Aregawi as tools for adventure development in Tigray, Ethiopia. It used the explorative research design. Data were collected from interviews, observations, photos, and document analysis. The data collected were processed, analyzed and interpreted through exploratory technique. The result shows that the monasteries have abundant adventure tourism products and activities like hiking, climbing, trekking and magnificent scenic views. Hence, the concerned bodies should develop adventure tourism products so as to enhance the overall community benefits.

Key words: religious places, tools, adventure, tourism development, monasteries

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BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

All forms of tourism such as eco-tourism, religious tourism, sport tourism, medicine tourism and others are rapidly growing as it is the case with adventure tourism (UNWTO, 2014). The travel and tourism industry continues to make a real difference to the lives of millions of people by driving growth, creating jobs, reducing poverty and fostering development and tolerance (Wanfei et al., 2015; WTTC, 2018). Increasingly, countries in all stages of economic development are prioritizing adventure tourism for market growth, because they recognize it's ecological, cultural, and economic value as it protects the important "lungs of the earth", and gives people a reason to stay rural and be proud of their cultures (UNWTO, 2014). Tourism like activity in Ethiopia dates back to the pre-Axumite period when the first illustrated travel guides to Ethiopia can be found in the friezes of the pyramids of ancient Egypt (Yabibal, 2010). In the history of Ethiopia, tourism was made part of economic development during the 1960s when it was included

* Corresponding author

in the Second Five Years Plan, 1963-1967 (Ayalew, 2010). Since then successive governments have tried to use the sector as a means of economic development. However, little is achieved due to the limited tourism infrastructure development and political instability (Yabibal, 2010). In terms of tourism resources, Ethiopia is very rich as it is the home of twelve world heritages registered by UNESCO. In addition to these, the country has numerous under-utilized natural and cultural tourism resources (Yabibal, 2010). Since ancient times, traveling for fervor and religious devotion purposes had been present in humanity (Mason, 2016). In this way, religious tourism starts from the moment people begin a journey due to a question of belief (Ayalew, 2010).

In the Ethiopian case, the people have a long history of traveling for religion purposes before and after the major religions introduced: Judaism, Christianity and Islam (*Ibid*). The tangible and intangible heritages associated with these three religions and others are among the main sources of travel to Ethiopia. However, the potential resources are not yet studied and used for tourism purpose (Erimias, 2014).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Tigray, one of the regional states of Ethiopia, is considered as the “cradle of human civilization” just to indicate the numerous natural and cultural tourism heritages found in its sovereigns. All of the three major religions- Judaism, Christianity and Islam- were introduced to Ethiopia in ancient time via this region. Because of this, the region owns long and attractive tangible and intangible heritages associated with these religions. Tigray regional state owns the Ark of Covenant, first constructed church, the first monastery church, the monastery of Abune Selama Ksatie Brhan, the first bishop in Ethiopian history, the monasteries of nine Saints, came to Tigray in 5th century AD, more than 120 rock hewn churches, number of ancient churches and monasteries, numerous religious books, crosses and other heritages used for religious purposes. They are sources of religious tourism development but not to the appropriate and desired level so far.

Therefore, the main objective of this article was to assess the potentials of mountain based adventure religious tourism for tourism development in Tigray on the exemplary ancient monasteries-Abune Selama, Abune Yemata, Mariam Qorqor and Abune Daniel, and Debre Damo- monasteries. They are not well documented, poor infrastructural development, lack of promotion, lack of tourist accommodation centers in the areas and less attention given to tourism sector are among the few reasons. Thus, the article tried to reveal their potentials for adventure tourism development.

GENERAL OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of this study was to assess the potentials of religious places of Abune Selama, Abune Yemata, Mariam Qorqor and Abune Daniel and Abune Aregawi (Debre Damo) as tools for adventure tourism development in Tigray, Ethiopia.

Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of the study are:

- To explore the adventure religious tourism potentials of the religious places
- To indicate the potential benefits that the adventure religious tourism products contributes to visitors and to the host communities.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Religious Tourism in Ethiopia

Ethiopia was made serious and continual commerce relationships with the then ancient states like with Greek Romans, Israel, Egypt and Yemen through the Red Sea and Mediterranean Sea. Because of this, the country didn't take time to accept the three monotheistic religions (Sergew, 1972; Tadese, 1972). Before the acceptance of

Christianity as official religion people, were worshiped in different gods, and travel from place to place to worship different gods (Ayalew, 2010). Ethiopians accepted Christianity as the official religion in 330 A.D. during King Ezana, the first African king to accept Christianity as the official religion of his empire (Sergew, 1972).

But before it is difficult to say there were no individual believers before 330 A.D (*Ibid*). The first Ethiopian bishop is called Frumentius, appointed by Patriarch Athanasius of Alexandria in Egypt (Taddesse, 1972). In Ethiopians *Abba*, a title, Frumentius called Abune Selama Ksate Birhan, which literary means father of peace, the revealer of light (*Ibid*). Abune Selama Ksate Birhan served as the father of all Christian's followers and expanded Christianity to all directions of the country. Christianity is also expanded rapidly in Ethiopia with the advent of Syrian missionaries to Ethiopia at the end of 5th century called, the *Tsa'ate Qudsan* or The Nine Saints, who came from the Mediterranean world to escape the religion conflict in their home (Yolande, 1972). The Nine Saints established education centers, expanded Christianity to the non-believers, converted Bible from Greek to Gees Language, built many churches and probably started the first monastic life in Ethiopia (William, 1981).

With the exception of very few Ethiopian rulers, the successive Axumite rulers expanded Christianity to non-believers, built many churches and monasteries, and religious education centers through peacefully and forcefully (Taddesse, 1972). All the churches and monasteries have unique tangible heritages such as crosses, the buildings, religious books, the ark/replica of covenants, dress and drums and intangible heritages such as festivals, gatherings and ceremonies. Most of the ancient and medieval churches and monasteries were built in a very inaccessible area for political and religious reasons. As Sergew (1972) and Tadesse (1972) explained that the churches and monasteries were built in difficult and inaccessible areas for the reasons of the hermits want to live far away from residents to have conducive environment for praying, to escape from enemies and to represent as the Jesus Christ was born in a forest and inaccessible area. Most of the religious tourism sites in Ethiopia belong to the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. However, few are recognized and visited by both international and domestic tourists. Whereas many of them are not well recognized and still not visited (Erimias, 2014). Despite its rich treasures, very few different foreign writers, diplomats, believers, and those who want to learn the culture of the people come to see the heritages and history of Tigray starting to the ancient times (Georg, 1970).

The Concept of Adventure Tourism

Originally adventure was associated with the exploration of faraway places to search for new land, wealth, and scientific advance (Weber, 2001). Later in the late 19th century, the reason for adventure shifted away from the search for land and wealth to reasons related to an individual's own personal desire (Ewert, 1989 cited in Weber, 2001). Until the end of the 19th century, outdoor adventure recreation did not have the widespread acceptance as it got in the following decades are an outdoor adventure involved around interaction with the natural environment, that requires an element of risk, that often is exposed to physical danger (*Ibid*). Based on these factors, adventure travel has been defined as: "Any number of leisure pursuits which provide exposure to physical danger" (Meier, 1978). Humans have been engaged in adventurous travels for hundreds of years. But commercial adventure travel as known today, where professional guides are hired to provide technical support and equipment, is a relatively new phenomenon (UNWTO, 2014). Adventure tourism is a vibrant, dynamic and fast-changing sector where new variants are added to the experience.

Within adventure tourism, there are two main categories of adventure activities, soft adventure and hard adventure (UNWTO, 2014). Soft adventure travel is travel to

novel or exotic locations (Goodnow, 2005; UNWTO, 2014). The activities undertaken during the trip are low risk and low-intensity activities. Soft adventure travel is a more luxury form of traveling. These types of tourists like to enjoy high-quality food, stay in quality lodging and use quality transportation (Goodnow, 2005).

Activities such as bird watching, fishing, hiking, horseback riding, sailing and scuba diving are examples of soft adventure activities (UNWTO, 2014).

Hard adventure travel is a travel to new or exotic destinations. The activities are at a higher level of risk, that requires greater skills and a higher intensity level of activities (Goodnow, 2005). When it comes to accommodation, hard adventure travelers are looking for more rustic types of accommodation such as rustic lodges, tents or basic hotels. The food consumed during the trip is generally the traditional food of the region (ibid). Caving, climbing and trekking are examples of hard adventure activities (UNWTO, 2014). The excitement causes a feeling of interest and enthusiasm for undertaking an adventure. Whereas the daring element of an adventure indicates that tourists during an adventure expose themselves to danger (Webster, 2017).

Adventurous Features of Rock-Hewn Churches and Monasteries in Tigray

In Tigray region, there are above 120 rock-hewn churches and a number of historical monasteries. Most of the rock-hewn churches are monolithic, semi-monolithic and cave churches either carved out of existing caves or out of the cliffs or still attached to their host rock. The monasteries and rock-hewn churches are found hidden away high up on cliffs and inside the sides of hills and mountains (Georg, 1970). As can be observed, anyone to reach the monasteries requires strength, commitment and willingness to learn as some of them are demonstrated in the figure below (Figure 1). To mention the name of the monasteries from left to right are Abune Yohani, Wukro Mariam Check Slassie, Dengelat and Teklahymanot Tamba.

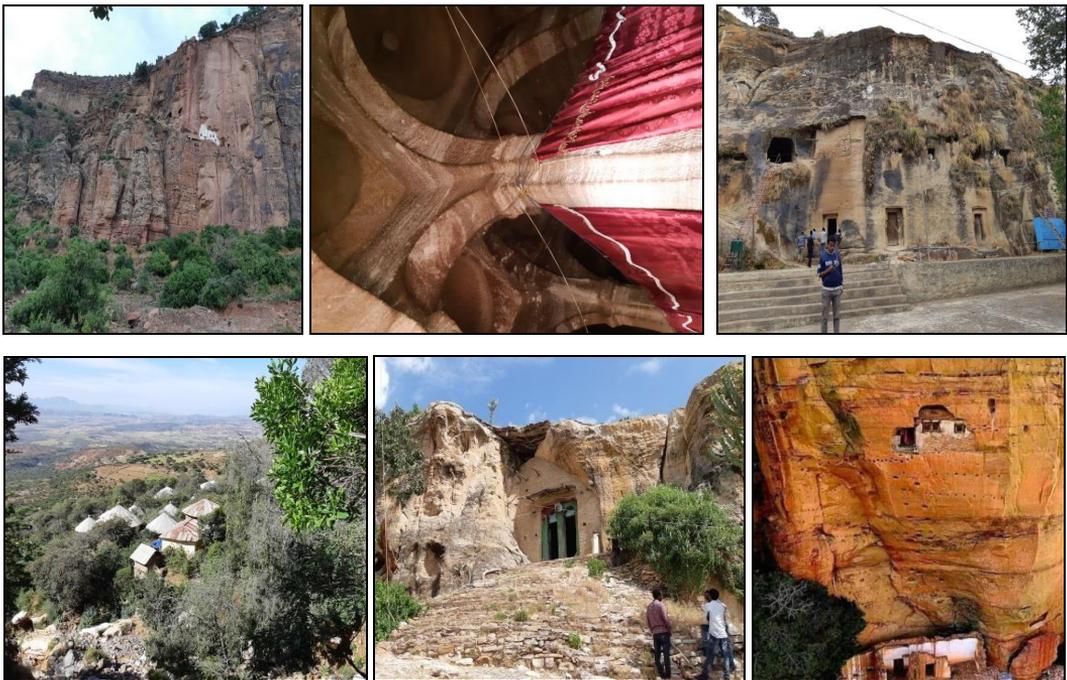


Figure 1. Some of the physical features of Tigray rock-hewn monasteries

Though it is little known of their actual origins, it is believed that most of the rock-hewn churches and monasteries of Tigray were created from the 4th century of the Axumite period and continues to the 15th century of the medieval period (Tadesse, 1972; Ruth Plant, 1985). Most rock-hewn churches and monasteries consist of or have three rooms: these are an ante chamber or chanting room, a sanctuary, and a “Holy of Holies,” the last of which only the high priest may enter. The Holy of Holies keeps the original rests in the church/monastery of Axum, the famed Biblical Ark of the Covenant (Sergew, 1972). All the monasteries and rock-hewn churches have very historic tangible and intangible heritages.

Motivation of Adventure Tourists

The motivations for adventure tourists could be the quest for self-awareness, self-actualization, self-discovery and achievement (Sung et al., 1997). Adventure travelers are motivated to participate in adventure travel as they have a need for new learning (Schneider & Vogt, 2012). Furthermore, it explained that wanting to learn about other places, people, and cultures as well as to get unique experiences forced peoples to engage in adventure tourism (Schneider & Vogt, 2012).

The diversified activity within an adventure tourism destination also attracts people to participate in adventure travel (Ewert, 1989; Sung, 2004).

METHODS AND MATERIALS

Description of the Study Site Areas

All the selected sites are located in Tigray Regional State of Ethiopia, but, they are found in different woredas, equivalent to districts, of the region. The monasteries are rock-hewn churches except for Debre Damo, it is also highly attached to the massive rock. Debre Damo monastery is considered as the first monastery in Ethiopia found in Eastern zone, Gula Mukada woreda. The three, Mariam Qorqor and Abune Daniel, and Abune Yemata are found in Eastern Zone of Hawzien woreda in the Gheralta’s mountain. The last, Abune Selama monastery is found in Central Zone Qola Tembien woreda. All these historic monasteries can be visited via one route: with either itineraries of Debre Damo- Mariam Qorqor and Abune Daniel- Abune Yeamta then to Abune Selama or Abune Selama-Abune Yeamta-Mariam Qorqor and Abune Daniel then to Debre Damo.

The geographical location of the monasteries is provided in the left in the figure below while the map of Ethiopia is in the right (Figure 2). Exploratory type of research through cross-sectional research design was adopted to provide answers to the objectives. The study adopted with a qualitative approach that helps to find out the uniqueness of each particular situation by explanation and understanding of the situation’s specific phenomenon through naturalistic, qualitative inquiry.

Research Design

Sampling Techniques, Instruments and Method of Data Analysis

The target populations in the study were the religious leaders and monks in the monastery, the respective woreda’s head of tourism and culture, tourism experts, and key informants. Since information can be found in the hands of few people, a non-probability sampling technique and purposive in specific was used, where there is no attempt to create a sample that is statistically representative of the population. Rather, people or cases are chosen ‘with purpose’ to enable the researchers to explore the research questions. Thus, all religious leaders and monks in the monasteries which are 102 in number, all tourism heads and experts of the respective woreda (16 in number) and five key informants from each of the woredas were selected purposively based on their experience, interest, proximity, knowledge, duties and responsibilities in the monasteries. Primary and secondary data were collected to reach the objectives. Primary data was collected by using techniques of interviews, field observation and photographs. Whereas,

secondary data were collected from documents such as books, magazines, research reports, journal articles and websites. Finally, the collected data were sorted and categorized in accordance with their source and type. Data obtained through observation has been described in text with the support of pictures. While the data obtained through interviews with different key informants have been analyzed thematically.

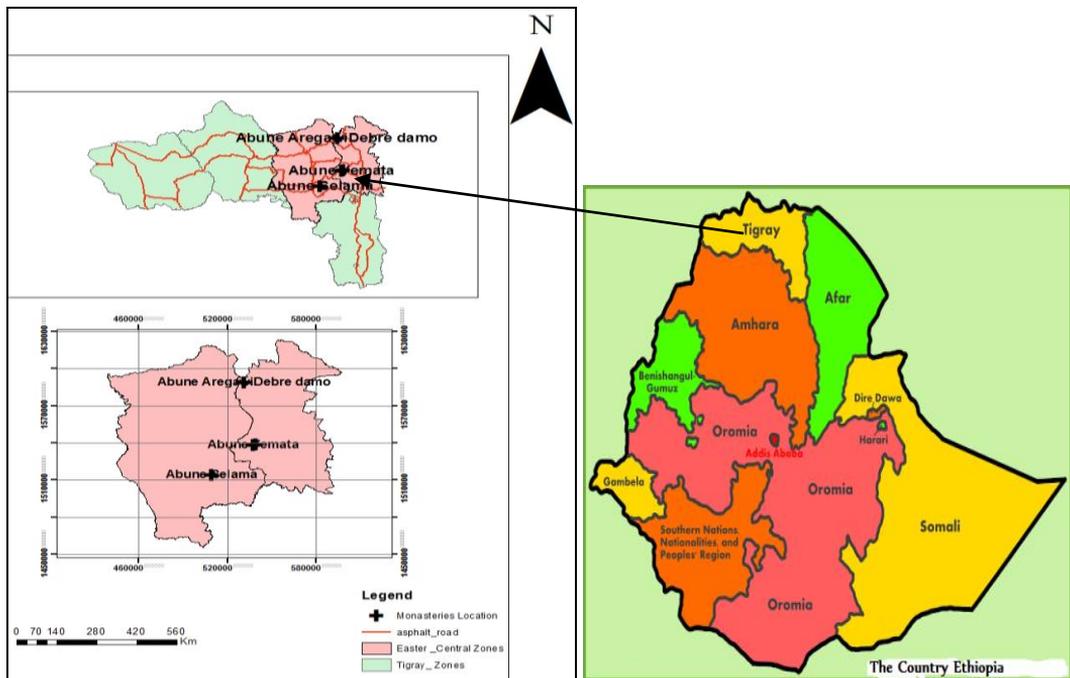


Figure 2. Geographical location of the Monasteries (Sources: Weldemariam Weldeabzgi, 2019)

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Geological and Geomorphologic Characteristics of the Monasteries

The geology of the rock-hewn of Tembien-Gheralta-Wukro-Adigrat is characterized by Precambrian rocks, Permo-Carboniferous sedimentary rocks, Middle Jurassic–Triassic to Early Cretaceous sedimentary rocks (Hagege & Ataklti, 2000). The monasteries in this locality area are all carved into Enticho Sandstone or into Adigrat Sandstone (Ibid). Enticho and Edaga Arbi are glacial in origin (shale and tillites). The rock-hewn monuments of Tigray, which are located at altitudes varying from approximately 2100-2500 metres above sea level, have been carved into various levels of the sandstone, from the bottom to the top of the outcrop (Yemane et al., 2016). The monasteries under this study are characterized by these geological and geomorphologic features.

Description of the Selected Monasteries

Abune Selama Monastery

Abune Selama monastery is found in the central zone of *Qola* Tembien woreda on Mekelle-Abi Addi road. It is found around 9 km North-East from Getski Mleslay, a small town. It probably takes one and a half hours by foot to reach the monastery from Getski Mleslay. The geographical location mark on the map of the monastery is displayed below in (Figure 3). The monastery of *Abune* Salama, probably one of the most inaccessible churches in the world, the ascent of Debre Damo being trifling in comparison. We have observed many rock- hewn churches and monasteries in Tigray and other parts of

Ethiopia, but, probably this monastery is the most difficult to climb up. Most of the time you cannot get robes to climb however; if the monk is there he provides you the robes to climb up. The general view and the horizontal narrow walking edge (100m) to reach the stiff vertical is presented in the below (Figure 4).

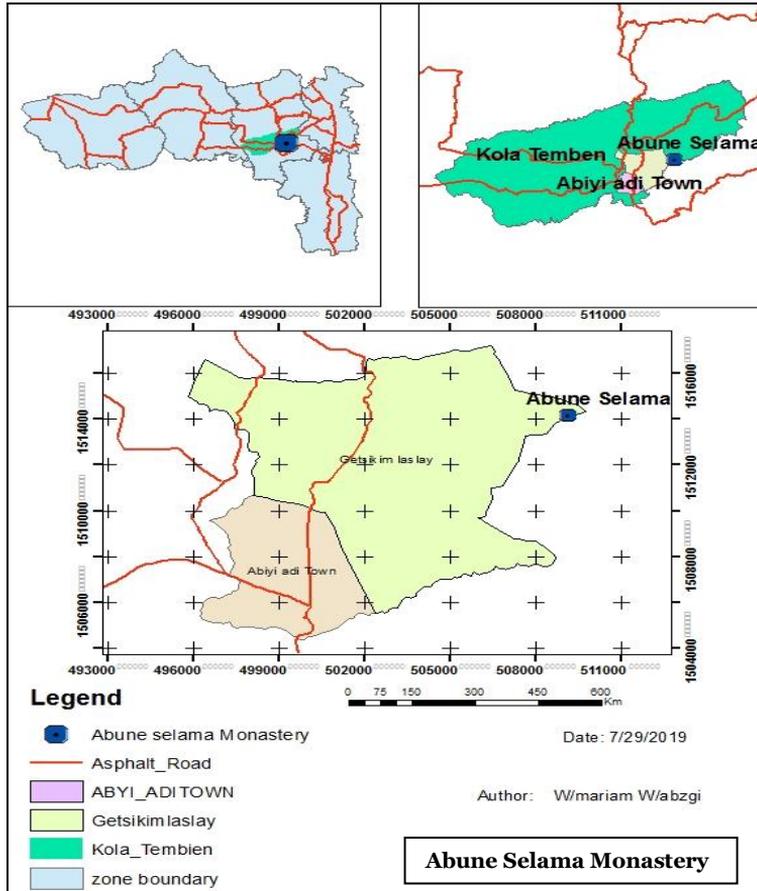


Figure 3. The geographical location of the monastery’s mark on Map
(Source: Woldemariam Weldeabzgi, 2019)

As Ruth Plant (1985) explained, after some preliminary scrambles, one reaches the face of the mountain itself, and it is then necessary to follow an extremely narrow ledge, invisible from a distance and lacking handholds of any kind, which cuts across the middle of a tremendous precipice. Having completed this perilous traverse, the visitor must ascend a vertical rock face (45m long), then climb higher while straddled between two parallel rock faces, then clutch a bundle of chains which enable him/her to surmount the final cliff face presented in the below (Figure5). Since the cliff overhangs, the goal remains disconcertingly invisible, but on this last lap the unseen monks above assist the climber by hauling at a thong tied round middle. After climbing up the top cliff (a church in plateau and forest area), one can see similarities with cliff top of Debre Damo. On the top there are a number of houses of the monks, two deep water cisterns (300m deep each), and graves of different monks and the grave of Abune Salama himself. The area is also covered by dense forests and grasses (Figure 6).



Figure 4.The path to and the magnificent view of the monastery



Figure 5: The way to up and down to the monastery



Figure 6. Deep water cisterns in the left and the house of the monks on the right

The monks have used these water cisterns for many purposes such as planting trees, drinking and for holy water. All round the year they do not dry. The monastery is

rock-hewn, the outer one can see on the below figure provided in the left is constructed just to protect rain, established on the escarpment of the top founded by Frumentius, the first Ethiopian bishop, later named as Abba Selama Ksate Birhan probably dates back to 385 AD. After Frumentius had been appointed as Ethiopian bishop, he did a lot of things just to mention some translated of several sacred books from the Hebrew, Greek and Coptic to Ethiopian liturgical language, *Geez*, and preached Christianity throughout the country until his death, finally buried in the monastery.

The external part of the monastery was rebuilt and renewed at different time. The interior part of the monastery is divided into three sections; the chanting room, the sanctuary and holy of holies with 6 pillars. The pillars are rounded in sections, which are unusual, and they tend to expand at either end, while the arches support approximately to a triangular form. The monastery is home to many monks from all corners of the country. They choose it because as we interviewed them, the monastery is situated in an ideal place to be a monk's house and the monastery is the center of theological excellence for centuries. The feast of Abune Salama is celebrated within the Ethiopian Orthodox Church on the 26 of *Hamla*/ August 02 in Gregorian calendar.

During the feast, a number of Christian followers and visitors attend the ceremony. The figure below shows the external part of the monastery in the left and the burial place in the right on the top of the monastery (Figure 7).



Figure 7. The external part of the monastery and burial place of Abune Selama

Abune Yemata Monastery

Gheralta is the home of many rock-hewn churches/monasteries such as Abune Yemata, Mariyam Qorkor, Abune Daniel, Abune Abrham and others. Abune Yemaeta is one of the 'Nine Saints', who came from Syria in the 5th century, established the monastery, monastery, in Debre Selam Kebelle, North of the main road, Hawzen-Worka'Amba road. From the main road, it takes around 20-30 minutes on foot to climb to the top of the church. The geographical location of the monastery mark on location is presented in the figure below (Figure 9). To climb up the church, a tourist requires almost a vertical ascent. After a few minutes' drive from South of Magab or East of Work Amba one can find a signboard that shows the monastery. It does not take a long time to reach there from the drop of car and the visitor walks through the ancient olive trees, small farmsteads and then after, starts to climb up. The below figure shows the way to the top of the monastery ones can climb either through helping robes or with the help of local guides (Figure 10). To climb up there are no ladders and ropes rather taking off your shoes and climbing over a bridge of rock on footholds and handgrips in the rock face. Ewald &

Kleidt (1999) stated that the ascent is the test of one's trust in God: it goes up the sheer rock face, tree trunks lead over an abyss and then one sees the dry stone masonry in which the window to the sanctuary is set. A narrow path leads on the outside along the south wall and ends in front of the unevenly hewn hole. After mounting, a tourist find the small hewn used for baptism and a marvelous view of Gheraleta. When the people of Debre Selam get newborn babies, they baptize here on the top of the monastery.

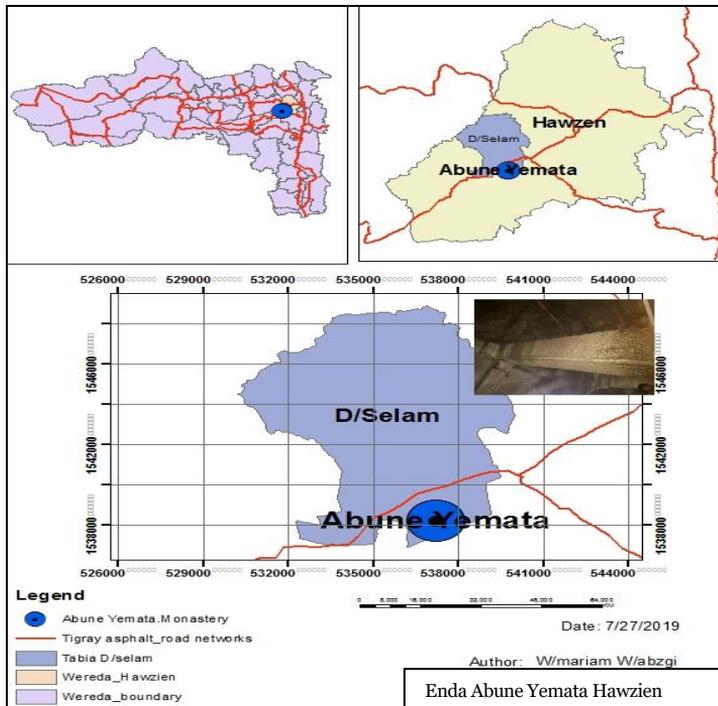


Figure 9. AbuneYemata monastery's mark on Map
 (Source: Weldemariam Weldeabzgi, 2019)



Figure 10. The path to the top of the monastery

A tourist after climb up finds the baptizing place illustrated in the figure below in the left and the view of the other nearby cliff from the window of the baptizing place in the right (Figure 11). On the cliff top, the monastery lies in the middle of a needle of rockiness,

the entrance on the side facing the masonry rock. The path leading to the get of the monastery is too narrow, possible to reach through holding the main rock. Not many visitors are comfortable to even attempt the scary ascent, although it is extremely rewarding to enjoy the view from above of sharp drop of the cliff (Yemane et al., 2016). And also Ruth Plant (1985) described the church as the most unusual church in the most unusual place, that the place being splendid and awesome. On the top of the monastery, one can see the view of the mountain chains of Gheralta (Figure 12).



Figure 11. The baptizing place in the left and the magnificent view from the window baptizing



Figure 12. The general view on the top of the monastery

Painting as you can see in (Figure 13) is the main feature of the monastery. The paintings were probably painted during the 6th century as per the interviewed people. The dominate figures painted on the top of the ceiling are prophets from the Old Testament, apostles from the New Testament (in the dome behind the entrance), and monk saints, Isaac, Abraham and Jacob, Moses, Elijah, Enoch.

The interior of the church reached via a small crack in the rock is notable for its extensive and perfectly preserved wall and ceiling frescoes. Four pillars divided the sanctuary into three aisles. They are a chanting room (*Mahlat*), a sanctuary (*Kiddist*) and Holy of Holies (*Bata Makdas*) are the three sections of the church respectively from the outer to the inner part of the church. The monastery was uncovered before two-three

decades to the public. Because of this, the number of visitors visiting it is not such significant comparing to its historic and richness in treasures. This time couples of visitors are visiting the monastery during the annual ceremony of the monastery, *Tkinti* 28 in Ethiopian calendar / November 07 in Gorgonian calendar.



Figure 13. Painting on the ceiling and on the one three of pillars

The Qorkor’s Monasteries: Mariam Qorqor and Abune Daniel

Mariyam Qorqor and Abune Daniel monasteries are established North East of Abune Yemata monastery. The geographical location the monastery is marked on map (Figure 14).

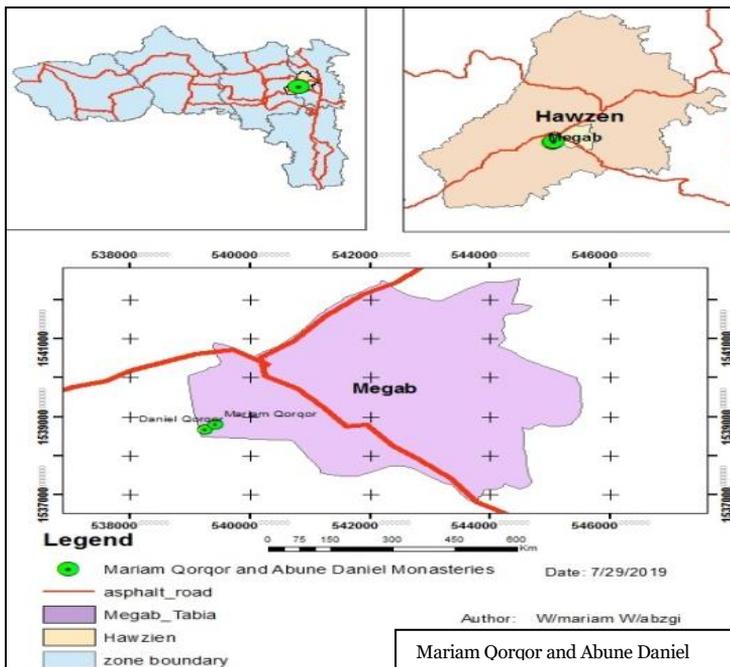


Figure 14. Mariam Qorqor and Abune Daniel’s monasteries mark on Map

They are situated on one of the highest mountains of Gheralta in Magab Kebelle. They are found south of Hawzen-wukro main road. It probably takes 40 minutes to one hour walk on foot to reach the top of the church from the Megab village. From the village of Megab to the cliff top of the monasteries one finds sheer stones, olive oil trees, the very

narrow path seems excavated rock, slid cliff up and a down rocky path and at the top one could entertain the magnificent view of Gheralta mountains and Abune Yamata monastery. The way to the monasteries is narrow and cliff which is illustrated in (Figure 15).



Figure 15. The way to reach to the top of the monasteries

The local people asserted that Mariam Qorkor monastery was established during the Abrha We Atsebeha in the 4th century. Most of the Gheralta, Wukro and Atsbi and others rock-hewn churches of Tigray were established during the Axumite Kings of Abrha We Atsebaha in the 4th century. The establishment of the monastery of Mariam Qorqor is facing east and with basilica ground plan with a nave and two aisles.

The interior part of the monastery has three sections namely: *Mahlat*, *Kiddist* and *Bata Makdas* as similar to the other Ethiopian monasteries. The internal part of the monastery is demonstrated in the figure below in the left and the external one is in right (Figure 16). The columns have bracket capitals and are cruciform in design which are eye catching. There is also a series of beautifully decorated arches. The arches and ceiling of the church are decorated with bas reliefs. One can see different animals, apostles, and St. Marry paintings on the walls, pillars and ceiling of the church. One of the columns a magnificent painting depicts Archangel Ruphael can be inspected.

And also the church has a wide collection of parchment manuscripts, crosses, musical instruments and many other liturgical objects. Abune Daniel monastery is probably established in the 6th century who came from Atsbi We Mberta, Tigray, only takes few walk along the side of the mountain from the monastery of St. Marry/ Mariam Qorkor, and consists of two interconnecting rooms. In the two rooms, there are primitive decorations.

In general, to climb up to the hilltop of the two monasteries is really terrifying. However, when one reaches the top, it is really best to relief since one can see chained mountains and magnificent landscapes being from the top of the mountain. The figure below shows the splendid view of the Gheralta from the top of the monasteries of Mariam Qorqor and Abune Daniel (Figure 17). Though there is a slow increase of tourists from year to year, it is not much as the monastery deserves as per to the interviewed people. A number of visitors come to this monastery during the annual ceremony of the monastery, *Hidar 6* in Ethiopian calendar or November 15 in Gorgonian calendar.

Debre Damo Monastery: Abune Aragawi

Debre Damo monastery is considered as the first monastery and one of the top monasteries in Ethiopia (Sergew, 1972). It is located in Tigray Regional State in the

Eastern Zone in Mazabir Kebele, Gula Mukada Woreda. The monastery is found 25Km far from Adigrat to the west direction and 15 Km east far from the small town Bizat, on a mountain/*Amba*-900 feet high- north of the Adigrat/Adwa main road (Ruth Plant, 1985). The geographical location of the monastery is marked on Map (See Figure 18).

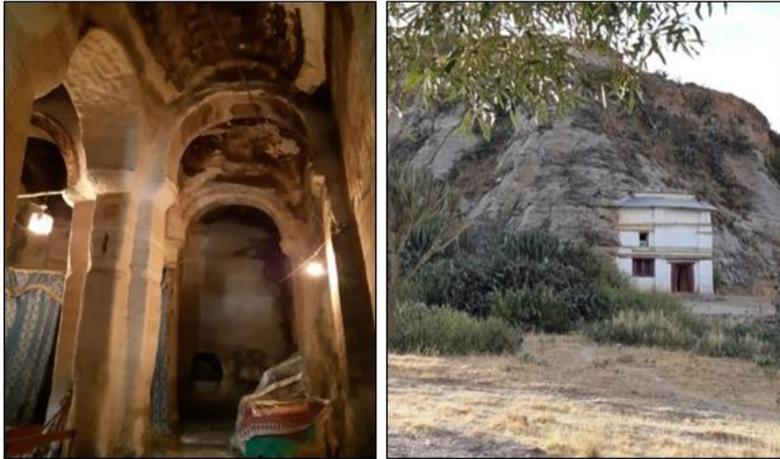


Figure 16. The external and internal part of Mariam Qorkor monastery

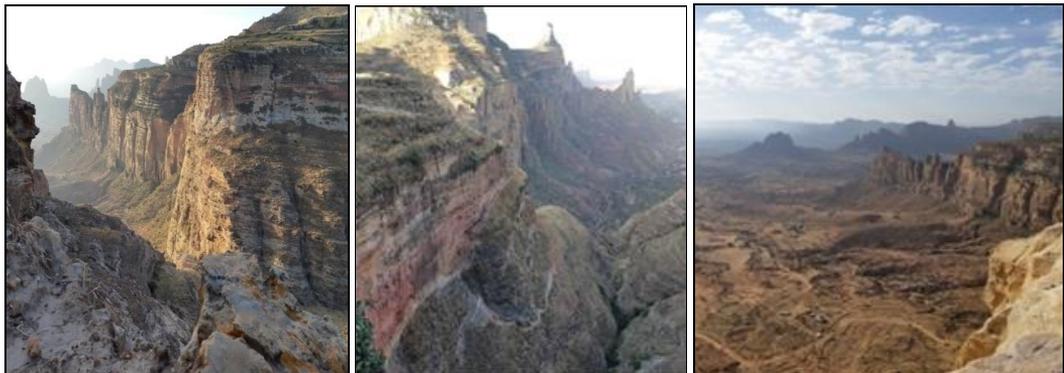


Figure 17. The glorious scenery view from the top of the monasteries

It traces its foundation back to the most respected of the nine saints who called Abune Za-Mikael or Aregawi, who came from Syria in the 5th century and sought refuge in Ethiopia during the Axumite king called *Atse* Gebremeskel (Taddese, 1972). The Monastery is on the clifftop (vast plateau at the top) only accessible by climbing or being hoisted on a 16-meter plaited leather rope, locally called *Janda*, which is used for pulling up to the Monastery and hanging down (lowered) from the top of the cliff. The precipitous cliffs soar up some 30 meters, no gentle slope, no place offerings a possibility for climbing up. The ropes are two in number which helps to climb to the top of the monastery.

The one is used for hauling different materials, equipment's, animals and corpses and the other rope is used for transporting monks and other guests up and down. The way of ascending to the top of the monastery with the help of robe is presented in the figure below (Figure 19). Ewald & Kleidt (1999) stated that Debre Damo stands like a rocky island in the sky. As to the local people believe, Abune Aregawi has been taken to the top of the mountain or *amba* with the help of the serpent which was commanded to do so by

God. Today, the ropes symbolized the serpent instead. Before one climb to the mountain, it seems the cliff top is small only hosts the monastery. However, on the top, everything looks like a quite normal small village in the Tigrean Village Mountains. As the data obtained from the interviewed monks, on the top, there are more than 150 stone houses of the monks, 150 series of water cisterns, used for drinking and baptism, more than 150 cove graves buried in different periods and a number of male animals, females are not allowed to climb, one can find male hen, ox, got and sheep. In addition to these, there are a few trees provide shade and grasses used for the animal graze on the sparse stalks (Ruth, 1985). The the figure below shows water cisterns and home of the monks, typical Tigrian house building (Figure 20). Debre Damo was the center of spiritual and theology dogmatism which has experienced brilliant epochs and the medieval periods (Taddese, 1972; Ruth, 1985; Ewald & Kleidt, 1999). Debre Damo possessed one of the most valuable and richest collections of manuscripts. In addition to the holy books, musical instruments and liturgical objects ancient coins were found which date back to early as the 1st and 3rd century AD (Ruth Plant, 1985). The monastery was renewed and re-built by the successive Ethiopian rulers. Just to mention some it was repaired in the 9th and 12th centuries, reconstructed in the 12th and 14th and again the 19th (Georg, 1970; Segew, 1972; Taddese, 1972). The impressive external part of the architecture of the monastery is presented in the figure below (Figure 21). Like the other Ethiopian monasteries, the interior part of the monastery has three sections: the chanting room, the sanctuary and the holies of holies. On the ceiling of the monastery one can observe wooden carvings of different animals such as cattle, elephants, birds which have stories with the Old and New Testaments.

The annual ceremony of the monastery takes place on Tikmti 14 in the Ethiopian calendar or on October 24 in Gregorian calendar. In the ceremony, thousands of Christian followers and hundreds of visitors attend the ceremony in a colorful way.

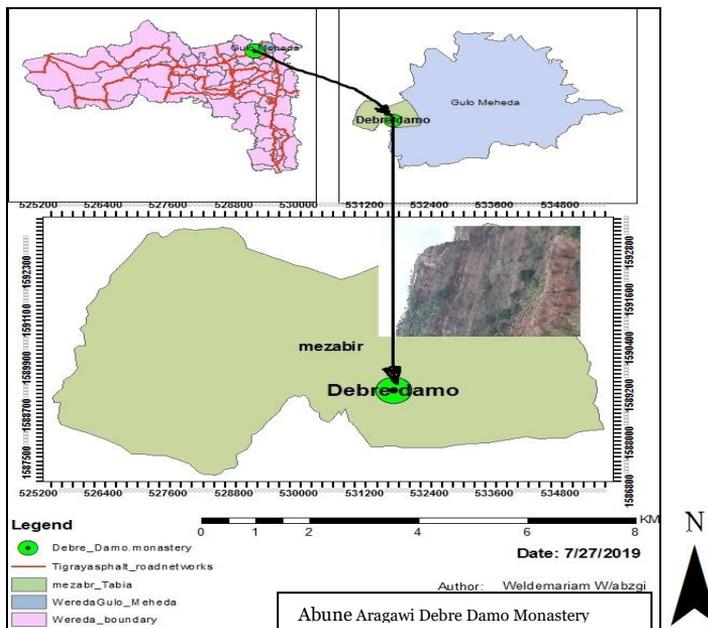


Figure 18. Debre Damo's Monastery Mark on Map

In general, all the monasteries under study have magnificent natural, splendid view and cultural heritages such as the replica of the Ark of Covenant, the original is in Axum

St. Marry church; a number holy books; crosses made up from wood, silver and gold; crowns given as gift by the kings and other lower rulers; the external and internal architecture of the monasteries, musical instruments like drum, cestrum, stick- prayer and great harp; and other liturgical objects like church bell, umbrella, incense burners, skull caps and trophy etc. In the figure below a sample of common treasures of the monasteries (holy book, bell, crowns and cross, drums, church close and stick-prayers) are demonstrated (Figure 22). Based on the data gathered through internal observation and interview, all the monasteries have a shortage of tourist facilities, no clear time for entry and exit, no entrance fee, no risk management task, no professional guides, and above all the way of preservation of the heritages are not satisfactory.



Figure 19. The way of ascending to the cliff top with helping of rope

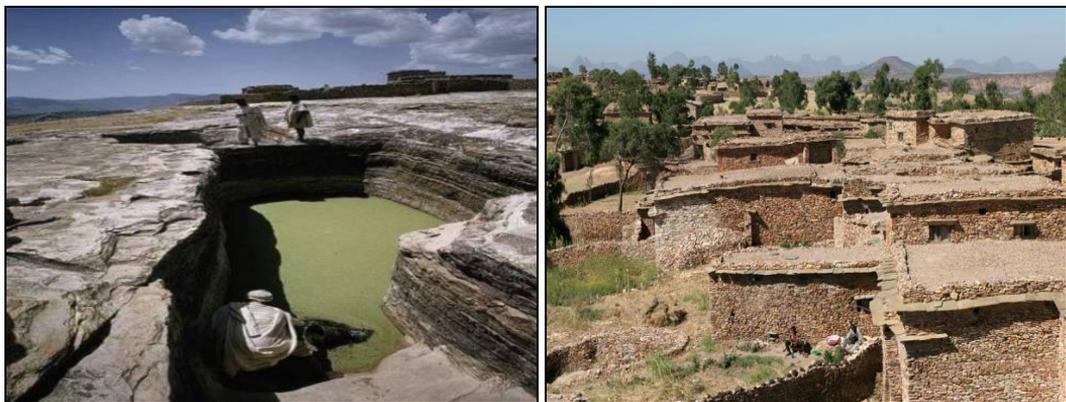


Figure 20. Sample of the cisterns and the home of the monks

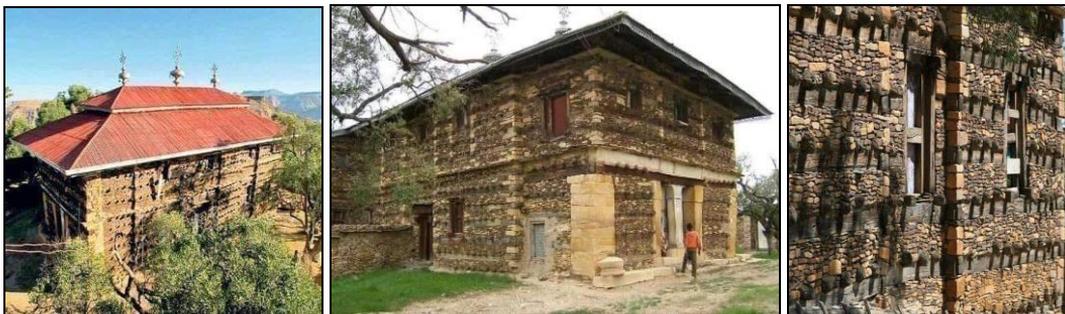


Figure 21. The external part of Debre Damo monastery



Figure 22. Sample of the treasures in the monasteries

Adventure Tourism Activities in the Monasteries

The rock hewn churches of Tigray, particularly those of under study, provide tourists both hard and soft adventure. The monasteries are known for their fame and mystery in terms of inaccessible location, religious treasures and hidden in the far rocks of Tigray, Ethiopia. The climbing to the monasteries is really pleasant and worth reporting. The monasteries of Abune Selama, Debre Damo, Yemata, and Mariam Qorqor and Daniel Qorqor respectively can be classified among the most inaccessible sites in the world. Within adventure tourism, there are two main categories of adventure activities, soft adventure and hard adventure (UNWTO, 2014). The following are the major activities that can be experienced in the monasteries under study provided in (Table 1).

As indicated in the above table the monasteries have the potential to provide 20 adventure activities out of the 33 activities recognized by UNWTO. Out of these 20 adventure activities that visitors can experience in rock-hewn churches of Tigray, the three activities are hard adventures i.e. caving, trekking and climbing.

The Potential Benefits of the Monasteries as Adventure Tourism Sites

The tourism sector is known for its ability to create jobs and generate foreign exchange, and as such, many local authorities seek to encourage tourism activities and attract visitors (WTTC, 2017). Adventure tourism can have enormous benefit to tourist destinations, creating employment and income and providing a strong incentive for conservation (Rannvá, 2017). The rock-hewn churches of Tigray are contributing about 2% of the regional GDP (Tigray Culture and Tourism Bureau, 2019).

Table1. Activities and their adventure classification of the Rock-hewn churches of Tigray
(Data sources: ATTA, 2013, as cited in UNWTO, 2014)

No.	Activities	Rock hewn Church under study	Type	No.	Activities	Rock hewn Church under study	Type
1.	Archeological expedition	-	Soft	18.	Hunting	-	Soft
2.	Attending local festival/fairs	All	Other	19.	Kayaking/sea/whitewater	-	Soft
3.	Backpacking	All	Soft	20.	Learning a new language	All(Geez)	Other
4.	Bird watching	Abune Selama	Soft	21.	Orienteering	-	Soft
5.	Camping	All	Soft	22.	Rafting	-	Soft
6.	Canoeing	-	Soft	23.	Research expeditions	All	Soft
7.	Caving	All	Hard	24.	Safaris	All	Soft
8.	Climbing (mountain/rock)	All	Hard	25.	Sailing	-	Soft
9.	Cruise	-	Other	26.	Scuba Diving	-	Soft
10.	Cultural activities	All	Other	27.	Snorkeling	-	Soft
11.	Eco-tourism	All	Soft	28.	Skiing/snowboarding	-	Soft
12.	Educational programs	All	Soft	29.	Trekking	All	Hard
13.	Environmentally sustainable activities	All	Soft	30.	Walking tours	All	Other
14.	Fishing/fly-fishing	-	Soft	31.	Visiting friends/family	-	Other
15.	Getting to know the locals	All	Soft	32.	Visiting historical sites	All	Other
16.	Hiking	All	Soft	33.	Volunteer Tourism	All	Soft
17.	Horseback riding	All	Soft				

It can also raise public awareness of the many goods and services provided by biological diversity and of the need to respect traditional knowledge and practices (UNWTO, 2014). In particular, adventure tourism is attracting attention for its emphasis on rural areas, local culture, and because it can often be developed within existing infrastructure. Often, it is the presence of visitors that makes it a destination, rather than destinations seeking to create a tourism activity (*Ibid*). The monasteries under study have potential benefits to:

Benefits to Visitors

As data gained from the interviewed people and field observations, the benefits of visiting the adventurous monasteries are discovering new experiences, health, scenic view and unique environment, flora and fauna, escapism, education, history, extreme sports activities like climbing, skiing, walking, fun and excitement, interaction with environment/people and self-fulfillment. In so far, the religious aspect is the other benefit to get from visiting these historic monasteries.

Benefits to the Host destinations

Local communities: The local communities have high potential benefits if these momentous monasteries have been used fully for tourism purposes. Though these monasteries could offer very important economic, socio-cultural, environmental and educational benefits to the local people, they do not get the expected benefits.

Economic benefits: From the macroeconomic perspective tourism is becoming clearly an important source of economic growth in Ethiopia and Tigray too. It is real that tourism can have significant direct benefits at the local level by generating employment and improving wages, and several indirect effects such as stimulating growth in tourism-related activities such as services, transportation, and handicrafts.

Socio-cultural benefits: As we observed, and data obtained from interviewed monks of the monasteries though it is still encouraging the number of monks in all of

the monasteries is decreasing because of the situation of the monasteries far away from urban centers and the economic issues. Therefore, if tourism is well planned, developed and managed in a socially responsible manner, it will encourage the monks to live with the respective monasteries. In addition, if tourism is well developed on all of the monasteries, the people in the villages will have a sense of pride, maintains their culture, customs, and the priceless tangible and intangible heritages. Furthermore, the people living near the monasteries can an opportunity for interacting and exchanging cultures, experience and ways of living from others.

Educational values: All the selected monasteries were and are center of religious excellence for a long period of time. Before modern education was started in Ethiopia in the 20 century, these monasteries served as center of religious education, particularly Debre Damo monastery. The monasteries own very significant national heritages that could serve as center of research and education. The present society can find their truly forefathers identity from these valuable monasteries.

Environmental values: The geographical settings of all the monasteries are situated in a very inaccessible mountain/ hilltop areas. A little bit the areas have better forest coverage and home of different animals and species. The indigenous forests, animal and species found there help to know well the environment for what to do and not to do. In addition to the potentials of adventure tourism, the monasteries environs could be best place for exercising eco-tourism. If eco-tourism is exercised and developed then the forests, animals and even the quality of the environment get rich. Furthermore, the Chain Mountains found in Gheralta, Abune Selama and Debre Damo are the best laboratories for researchers to know the land formation history of the area and Ethiopia at large.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Tigray, one of the nine regional states of Ethiopia, is the cradle of civilization which owns abundant natural, cultural, historical and archaeological treasures. From the abundant tourism resources of the region, this paper has investigated the potentials of mountain adventure religious tourism in Tigray's selected monasteries: Abune Selama, Abune Yemata, Mariam Qorqor and Abune Daniel, and Debre Damo, and the potential benefits from the adventures tourism. The authors choose these monasteries because of their indispensable heritage potential; geographical settings that all the monasteries are found very inaccessible areas, the visitor activities could be done in all of the monasteries and one can visit them in one way of itinerary either the way of Debre Damo- Mariam Qorqor and Abune Daniel-Abune Yemata,-and Abune Selama or vice versa. All the monasteries are the best ideal sites for both hard and soft adventure tourism. Climbing and trekking to the sites makes them ideal sites for hard adventure tourism and then on the top one can see and visit very historic and plentiful heritages makes the sites ideal sites for soft adventure tourism. If well and planned adventure tourism is developed in all the sites many benefits can be achieved to both visitors and to the host communities. Visitors could get experiences, education, sport, history, unique environment, flora and fauna, fun and excitement, interaction with environment and self-fulfillment where as the host destinations could get tourism business, income, employment, educational values, the sustainability of the heritages and environmental richness.

Recommendations

Based on the discussions and results the following recommendations are forwarded to the concerned bodies:

- All the monasteries require professional guides and facilities.
- All the monasteries require having full service delivery, entry and exiting time.
- There needs to develop risk management to climb up and down in each of the monasteries.

- The migration of the monks and deterioration of the heritages particularly the holy books requires attention.
- Well planned and organized adventure tourism development (specific interest tour package) is needed and leading role should be started by culture and tourism of the region and the respective Woredas.
- Almost all the monasteries have a problem with the road. Therefore, the Regional Government, the Regional Culture and Tourism Bureau and the respective Woredas should work in cooperation at least to have a rough road to the monasteries.

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