Endnotes:

References


"The conventional definition of management is getting work done through people, but real management is developing people through work."

- Agha Hasan Abedi
Tourism Development In Post-Independent Eritrea: Problems And Prospects

Ravinder Rena

Abstract
Modern tourism in Eritrea had begun in the second half of the nineteenth century with the development of industrialized society in Western Europe and North America. Eritrea has natural resources with an immense amount of cultivated land and fascinating plants all surrounded by the most beautiful and fertile mountains. Most of the explorers in the past surveyed Semhar, Menashe, Bogos, and the Barka region which was covered with grassland, deciduous green forests along the river bank and sheltered a diversity of wild life. Based on Eritrea’s historical importance and its strategic location on the Red Sea coast, this paper assesses the tourism development in Eritrea in the pre and post-independence periods. It identifies and assesses the range of issues and problems related to tourism development, and suggests necessary actions for facilitating and accelerating development of tourism in Eritrea. The article also analyses the countries’ tourism development policies and programmes. This analysis would seem to hold out lessons for management and development of tourism in a large number of developing countries.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an activity essential to the lifeline of nations because of its direct effect on the social, cultural, educational and economic sectors of societies. The world-tourism can contribute to the establishment of a new international economic order that will help to eliminate the widening economic gap between developed and developing countries. It can further ensure the steady acceleration of economic and social development, in particular of the developing countries. Today tourism is a major item of international trade; the biggest international activity after oil. International tourism is the largest single item in the world’s foreign trade and export industry and earner of foreign exchange. The relevance of tourism is indeed crucial in that the income from international tourism can bring the foreign exchange essential for major investments. When tourists come in contact with other people social exchange takes place (World Tourism Organization, 2001). Tourism has educational significance too. The contact between the nations creates exchange of ideas among them. It also results in cultural exchange and cultural enrichment of those who travel as well as of those at the receiving end. The most important point is economic significance of tourism. Money earned in places of normal residence is spent in places visited. The outstanding economic effect of tourism lies in the purchasing power generated in receiving areas through the expenditure of visitors, who tend to spend at a much higher rate than when they are at home. It corrects the balance of payments accounts of individual countries and is of major significance in international trade (Dieke, 1989; World Tourism Organization, 2003). Thus tourism industry is

* This article is a revised version of the paper presented (in absentia) in the IAABD 8th annual International Conference (29 May - 2 June 2007) held at London Metropolitan University, London, UK.
very important to a small and young country like Eritrea.

Eritrea is a newly independent young nation in Africa. It is located in the Horn of Africa, bordered in the North and West by Sudan, in the South by Ethiopia and Djibouti and in the East by the Red Sea. It has a population of 4.2 million and a geographical area of 125,000 sq. km. This country shares over one thousand kilometers coastline along the southern Red Sea placing Eritrea in a most strategically important and sensitive position of the region. This could be one important reason why this country had a continuous contact with other countries from far and near since ancient times. It has been historically witnessed that Eritrea was a sanctuary and a migratory destination during the early days of its history. Some of the people who travelled to this place made their settlement in the coastal areas and later advanced to the hinterland where they mixed with the indigenous people to form Africans of mixed blood. From 1557 the Turkish imperial expansion established in Eritrea a sphere of influence, which controlled most of the coastal regions for about three hundred years. After the Turks left, the Egyptians and Italians took over Eritrean rule successively until the end of the second half of the 20th Century when Ethiopia followed suit. So this country was the victim of colonization for most of its history. Finally, Eritrea got its independence on May 24th 1991, after thirty years of freedom struggle with Ethiopia. One way or the other, all the contacts have left significant historical and archaeological traces, which have enriched the country with vestiges of ancient human activity.

Tourism resources related to cultural heritage including archaeological and historic sites, rich and varied building architecture in the cities and unusual features such as scenic historic railway - play a pivotal role in attracting foreign visitors. Culture and cultural heritage are crucial to people's identity, self-respect and dignity. This may be an avenue through which the conscious tourist starts to grasp a basic understanding of the past and a living culture. Historic places, archaeological sites, built environment and monastic tradition, colonial railway - all together form what is known as cultural environment (Dieke, 2000; Kotler, at al, 1999). This diversity, which is a common feature in the Eritrean cultural heritage, records and expresses the long processes of historic development forming the essence of indigenous and local identities. It is a dynamic reference point and positive instrument for growth and change. The particular heritage and collective memory of each locality or community in fact is irreplaceable and important foundation for development. Domestic and international tourism continues to be among the foremost vehicles for cultural exchange, producing personal experience, not only of that which has survived from the past but also of the contemporary life and society. In its forecast Tourism: 2020 Vision, it predicts that cultural tourism will be one of the key tourism market segments in the future, and notes that, growth in this area will present an increasing challenge in terms of managing visitors flow to cultural sites (Ministry of Tourism, 1996).

Tourism does not only make an important contribution to economic development, but also generates a variety of other impacts, both positive and negative. It has become an increasingly complex phenomenon, with political, economic, social, cultural, educational, bio-physical, ecological and aesthetic dimensions (World Tourism Organization, 2000). The potentially conflicting expectations and aspirations of visitors, and the host or local communities present many challenges and opportunities.

Tourism serves as catalyst for the expansion of agriculture and fisheries, manufacturing, handicrafts, and pays for infrastructure improvements. Visit to a country
may result in cultural and social exchange and it may also result in attraction of foreign investment in Eritrea. And all these factors have economic significance and tourism is becoming a well-known business out of which a nation can make profit with fewer competitors.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

In order to study the problem the following objectives were formulated: 1] To probe the tourism policy in the development of tourism and analyze the achievements made so far pertaining to the policies; 2] To find out the problems of tourism and provide some possible solutions; 3] Status of tourism; and 4] To explore the potential of tourism in Eritrea economically as well as socially.

The data was mainly collected from the Ministry of Tourism and related articles from journals, magazines, and books. The data was also collected from various reports. This article deals with the performance and profile of tourism in Eritrea in recent years. The problems and potentials of the tourism sector are identified and assessed. The paper is organized as follows: the following section 2] provides conceptual framework related to the tourism sector and its importance in the economic development. Section 3] imparts a detailed account of the Eritrean tourism in pre and post-independence periods with development programs and strategies of the government. Section 4] presents the case study of Eritrea. The fifth section deals with the implications and ends with some concluding remarks.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Tourism as a form of education is part of civilized existence. Human beings need a change at optimum levels; tourism provides that change through travel. Tourism is an activity that takes place when people move to some other places for leisure or business and stay at least for twenty-four hours. Tourism is also a system consisting of inter-related parts. The tourist system consists of four parts-market, travel, destination and marketing. Once a person decides to travel decision has to be taken as to where, when and how to go. The second segment of tourism system analyses these choices. The destination is the third part of the system. The destination mix consists of the attraction and services used by the traveller. The destination encourages people to travel through the process of marketing. The product of tourism is an experience rather than a goal. There is no tangible return on investment (Ghosh, 1998).

Revolution in transport, technological progress and emergence of middle class with time and money to spare for recreation, has led to rapid growth of tourism. It has two main aspects. The first is the purpose of travel or visit, which expresses a particular motivation. Second, it is usually necessary to define the time element. The minimum period is twenty-four hours as pointed out above and six months can be the maximum period.

Tourism may be viewed as an economic activity and thus as an industry. Tourism has been identified as one of the fastest growing industries in the world. It has grown from the pursuits of a privileged few to a mass movement of people.

Tourism is the world's largest export industry, which according to the World Tourism Organization (WTO) generated about US$372.6 billion during 1995 by some 567 million tourists worldwide. In the same year, travel and tourism provided direct and indirect employment for
212 million people accounting for 10.7% of the global workforce. International arrivals are expected to more than double by 2020 (reaching 1.6 billion arrivals), while tourism expenditure will more than quadruple to reach US$ 2 trillion (WTO, 1998). From the perspective of this global tourism industry, tourism to and in developing countries may seem of minor significance.

The economic significance of tourism varies from country to country. Tourism receipts as a percentage of total export earnings range from 1.1 percent for Japan to 22 percent for Spain. In a developing country the economic significance of tourism may be measured in terms of its ability to generate an inflow of foreign exchange. On the other hand, in the developed countries, its significance may be measured in terms of its ability to assist diversification and combat regional imbalances (Cleverdon, 2002).

It was recognized that, within the current body of scientific analysis, research and prediction, there remain considerable uncertainties about the magnitude of the impact of many effects of a changing global climate - for example, the extent of rise in temperatures, changes in precipitation, and the extent and location of extreme events, floods and droughts (Dieke, 2000). Scientific studies into climate change are ongoing and, in some specific areas, are still at a relatively early stage. While such studies progress, there may well be changes in the long-term predictions for climate change, which currently cover the period to the end of the present century (World Tourism Organization, 2003).

THE TOURISM AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT

PRE-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD:
Modern tourism, in Eritrea, began in the second half of nineteenth century with the development of industrialized society in Western Europe and North America. Reports indicate that it was Parkyns, who made the first visit in 1840s to Eritrea, traveling from the coastal area through the eastern slope across the central plateau. He visited Ailet, an area of hot mineral springs and described the greatly varied composition of the wild life. An Italian monk G. Stella who was operating an agricultural colony in Bogos during the 1850s expressed that Eritrea had natural resources, with an immense amount of cultivated land and fascinating plants all surrounded by the most beautiful and fertile mountains (Rena, 2005: 127-130). Theodor Von Heuglin, German explorer who surveyed Semhar, Menasae, Bogos and found that the Barka region was covered with grassland, deciduous green forests along the riverbank and sheltered a diversity of wild life; he described the region as 'a natural zoological garden' (Ministry of Tourism, 2002).

Available evidence fortify that even before the second half of the nineteenth century there was domestic and international tourism in Eritrea. The people were travelling for various purposes. The travels were for trade, for religious purposes, especially after the coming of Christianity in the fourth century AD, and for various social purposes such as marriage and funeral ceremony.

In the second half of nineteenth century, development of infrastructure by the Italians was another factor, which indicates presence of tourism in Eritrea. The Italians joined most of the cities and towns in Eritrea through highways. Railways connected the port of Massawa to the capital city, Asmara and the town of Keren and Agordet. A cableway considered to be the largest, from Asmara to Massawa was constructed in 1937. The Italians built a network of telegraph and telephone, which connect the Eritrean towns to the outside world (Rena, 2005: 178-190).

It is a known fact that tourism sector cannot function without the necessary
Table -1 No. of Tourists who Visited Eritrea Prior to Independence During the Year 1960 to 1990

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>No. of tourists visiting Eritrea</th>
<th>% increase over previous year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>3302</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>4092</td>
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<td>1966</td>
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<td>18339</td>
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<td>1979</td>
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<td>1980</td>
<td>451</td>
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<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>261</td>
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<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>261</td>
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<td>1983</td>
<td>276</td>
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<td>1984</td>
<td>115</td>
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<td>27</td>
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<td>1986</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>75.3</td>
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<tr>
<td>1987</td>
<td>1240</td>
<td>384.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Various Reports of the Ministry of Tourism, Government of the State of Eritrea

infrastructure. The Italians played a major role in developing infrastructure. The Italians joined most of the cities and towns in Eritrea by a system of highways. Railway lines connected the port of Massawa to the capital city; Asmara to the towns of Keren and Agordet. The Italians built a network of telephones which connect the Eritrean towns with the outside world. Even though the then built infrastructure was for the benefit of the colonizers it however helped greatly in the development of tourism. The Italians were not only concentrating on the communication system but also on the accommodation. They built the first hotel in Asmara in 1899, Albergo Italia (formerly known as Keren hotel). Later on in the 20th century the number of hotels and restaurants increased in Asmara and other principal towns such as Keren, Massawa, Asseb, Mendefera, Dekemhara and others.

In 1963 the Ethiopian government gave a new permission that fostered the coming of tourists to the territory. The number
of tourists has steadily risen till the end of the Haile Selassie regime in 1973. During this period, sightseeing, fishing, swimming, visits to historical sites and games were some of the major attractions available for tourists in Eritrea.

It can be seen from table 1 that tourists considerably declined during the Dergue regime from 1974 to 1990. This was the time when an intensive war for the independence of Eritrea was fought. As a result of which the few travel agencies operating in Eritrea were closed. Besides, the military government of Ethiopia nationalized the hotels, and resorts that were privately owned by individuals. Some of them were later converted to hotels. Although Eritrea has some tourist places to offer to tourists, tourism industry has never been developed to its potential. All the colonizers gave little attention to tourism industry in Eritrea. Worst of all, the Ethiopians Dergue regime, was engaged in an intensive war against the liberation. As a result, the tourism industry virtually collapsed.

### POST-INDEPENDENCE PERIOD

Today, despite the fact that Eritrea has inadequate tourist accommodation and other services, the number of tourist is increasing. After independence the government of Eritrea is working to develop tourism sector by providing opportunities to both domestic and international investors. It launched the Tourism Strategy paper in the year 2000. It is to be observed that the government gave a reduction of 2% tax for building material of tourism and tourism related projects. Besides, visitors could buy duty free items such as perfumes, wines, spirits, and cigarettes which are popular items and the cost of which ranges from 10 to 79US$ (Ministry of Tourism, 2002; Ravinder Rena, 2004: 29). Table 2 provides a clear picture of the tourists who visited Eritrea and there is a dramatic increase of tourists from 1991 to 1997.

### TOURISM PROMOTION AND DEVELOPMENT IN ERITREA

Agricultural development, industrial development and tourism development are three ways to bring money and business into Eritrea. Tourism development is perhaps the quickest method of the three. The goal of promotion is as behavior modification. Tourism is as much a part of socio-economic development as other related activities. The industrialized West (including Europe and North America) underline the importance of tourism and its linkage with the other two sectors. Besides, tourism development envisages increased availability and improved organization of different components of tourism infrastructure. To meet the requirements of tourism infrastructure, the different components have to work in perfect coordination to ensure overall performance. Thus the development of tourism facilities is essential for promotion of tourism. Government tourism policy should lay greater emphasis on environment and heritage conservation. It is necessary to plan tourism in such a way that it neither has a negative impact on the environment nor does it destroy the heritage.

### TOURISM DEVELOPMENT POLICY AND STRATEGIES

The Tourism development policy and strategy...
provides the basis for developing tourism in the six regions of Eritrea. Tourism development policy establishes the framework for guiding decision-making in planning, developing and managing tourism so that this sector achieves its intended objectives. It also reflects overall national development policy so that tourism is integrated into the country's overall development patterns. The tourism proclamation defines the function of the Ministry of Tourism as developing and implementing the national policy in the following ways:

1. To co-ordinate all public and private sector agencies, organizations and interests, involved with tourism.
2. To establish and maintain the legislative and regulatory framework for tourism sector.
3. To encourage the provision and improvements of tourist amenities and facilities in Eritrea.
4. To help to conserve and protect the physical environment, enhancing the use of sites and attractions.
5. To encourage investment in hotels, restaurant and tourism enterprises.
6. To promote and undertake research and provide technical assistance to those engaged in the tourism industry and to potential investors.
7. To encourage the development of tourism related small business and local entrepreneurship, with linkage to stimulate the growth of other sectors.
8. To co-ordinate and implement, as appropriate, a tourism human resources development strategy.
9. To co-ordinate the development of tourism in a manner which is socially and culturally harmonious.
10. To keep the general public informed about the growth of tourism, explaining its development and its contribution to the country's social and economic well being.
11. To carry out any other tasks related to tourism as may be determined by the government.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN

1. Develop tourism in a sustainable manner. This means conserving the natural, archeological and cultural resource of tourism, avoiding socio-cultural problems and improving the environment quality of tourism areas.
2. Develop international tourism as a major economic sector of the country so that it generates substantial employment, income, and foreign exchange earning and government revenue.
3. Develop international tourism to introduce the unique environment, historic and cultural heritage of Eritrea to the world.
4. Develop domestic tourism so that Eritrean people have the opportunity to engage in recreational activities and learn about their environmental, historical and cultural heritage leading to a greater sense of national unity.
5. Develop tourism in a manner that encourages conservation and enhancement of the natural environment especially protection of scenic areas, watershed, ecosystem, biodiversity and expansion of forests and wildlife population.
6. Create opportunities for spreading the benefit of tourism widely throughout the society and the country and especially to local communities, developing SMEs (small and medium scale tourism enterprises) and establishing strong linkage between tourism and other economic sector.
7. Provide suitably designed and environmentally appropriate, good quality tourist facilities, services and infrastructure that serve the needs of quality tourism and do not result in environmental problem.
8. Ensure the effective management of tourism based on co-operation between the public and private sector and co-ordination among central region, municipality and local governments.
9. Continue developing tourism-training
facilities and programmes to provide the qualified personnel to work in tourism. Offer good quality services in tourism and maximize local employment benefits.

ISSUES OF GOVERNMENT POLICY

Government National policy on Tourism covers various issues related to tourism in the country. The following is a suggested list of adaptation measures aimed explicitly at the tourism sector.

These might include: 1) Introduction of fiscal incentives or financial assistance for changes to the built tourism infrastructure (e.g. provisions in hotel properties, or re-development, new hotels in vulnerable coastal zones in Denkalia); 2) Greater public investment in infrastructure for new tourism developments (e.g. land preparation, coastal defences or supporting infrastructure investment); 3) Passing legislation to change planning policies, zoning, land use priorities, as necessary; 4) Introducing changes to the school year in order to change peak holiday times; 5) Providing direct training to the tourism sector in dealing with the problems and solutions; 6) Re-casting national transport policies where, say, aviation should be given a lower priority and internal transport higher priorities.

It is therefore essential that the tourism industry should get involved in joint initiatives - with Government, local authorities or the international agencies - in assessing the implications of tourism development. In line with this, Government at Central level and tourism ministry should always have a key role to play in defining and promoting action in the tourism sector in Eritrea. However, since such initiatives will need to be implemented at a sub-regional or local level, it is important to take into account local conditions and needs.

THE CASE STUDY AREA

Eritrea's tourist attractions are its sea front, colonial architecture, its sunlit mountains, its teeming marine depths and the welcoming smiles of the Eritreans themselves. Besides, the pleasant and unique climatic conditions of Eritrea are known as "three seasons in two hours." Tourism could become one of Eritrea's main sources of income. Although Eritrea has no World Heritage sites, five-star hotels or developed beaches - or perhaps because of this - it is one of the most rewarding destinations in Africa (Ministry of Tourism, 2003). It has one of the most inhospitable deserts in the world, populated by primitive nomads - for the adventurous - or an art deco capital (Asmara) with sidewalk cafes serving cappuccinos and cold beers for the more sedate traveller. The battle scars of recent wars with Ethiopia are everywhere - rusting tanks litter the landscape and bombed-out buildings can still be seen. But the people - both Muslims and Christians - are cooperative and amazingly friendly. They are the real stars for any visitor. Indeed, most such features are the USPs of tourism in large part of Europe.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3: Inflow Of Visitors From Different Parts Of The World During The Year 1992 To 1999.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eritrean (overseas)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4: Inflow of visitors During 1999-2003

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>2002</th>
<th>% Change</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>% Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eritrean</td>
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<td>52929</td>
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<td>84549</td>
<td>59.74</td>
<td>74357</td>
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<td>58804</td>
<td>-20.92</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
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<td>4498</td>
<td>3.26</td>
<td>7683</td>
<td>70.81</td>
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<td>Africa</td>
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<td>9626</td>
<td>56.22</td>
<td>8167</td>
<td>-15.16</td>
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<td>3538</td>
<td>207.38</td>
<td>3275</td>
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<td>3913</td>
<td>19.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>2226</td>
<td>3286</td>
<td>47.62</td>
<td>4524</td>
<td>37.67</td>
<td>4056</td>
<td>-10.34</td>
<td>4178</td>
<td>3.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>783</td>
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<td>167.31</td>
<td>2829</td>
<td>35.16</td>
<td>2094</td>
<td>-25.98</td>
<td>2321</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>245</td>
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<td>275</td>
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<td>60.65</td>
<td>100828</td>
<td>-10.79</td>
<td>80029</td>
<td>-20.63</td>
</tr>
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</table>

TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN ERITREA

It is surprising to note that the contemporary Asmara sites are considered to be one of Africa's most ancient and have a vibrant history and culture. In this context, Asmara resembles other capitals that boast great antiquity such as Rome or Athens. In Africa, Asmara stands as one of the safest and beautiful capitals where there is no crime.

The tourist in Eritrea can have a long list to chose from, such as ancient heritage, unpolluted beaches & greenery (of the Des Island), architectural heritage, water based tourism, monasteries, rifts & escarpments, and cultural festivals.

DEVELOPMENTS IN TOURISM

According to the recent report by the Minister of Tourism in the Cabinet meeting October 2005 some campaigns were conducted to better acquaint the public on tourism and efforts were made to organize trips to different parts of the country. Besides, various measures were taken to encourage international tourism. These included close contact with international institutions as well as travel agencies, organizing exhibitions on the nation's tourism potential and related activities. In line with this, the Ministry has a plan to reduce hotel fares to encourage and develop tourism in Eritrea. Similarly, the Eritrean Tourism Fair in Milan, Italy, has gained wide attraction on the part of visitors, 2.5 million people visited Eritrean stands at the Fair and a number of them expressed their desire to visit Eritrea and look for investment possibilities.

At a work assessment meeting held on 3rd February 2004 in Asmara, Ministry Of Tourism announced that the 2003 program has been implemented effectively. The Ministry further disclosed that the government will give top priority to the development of tourism sector, and more than 74 million Euros was secured in 2002 from tourists, and that satisfactory income was also obtained last year due to increasing number of tourists visiting the country. Studies have been conducted in different part of the country in 2003, and consequently funds disbursed for the setting up of infrastructure facilities. Hotels, which have been administered by the Ministry of Finance, are now being administered by Ministry Of Tourism.

TOURIST DEVELOPMENT IN ERITREA

The inflow of visitors in Eritrea began to increase starting from the year 1994 and the highest inflow is observed in same year from Africa and M.East. Highest inflow is observed in 1996. In 1997 there was high inflow from Europe and America. In the year 1995 the inflow of visitors from Asia was rising. But in 1998 and 1999 it declined.

From 1999 onwards the inflow of Eritreans residing abroad was increasing till
2001 and later declined due to various political and economic reasons. It can be understood that the percentage declined to negative during the year 2002 and 2003. In the year 2001 visitor arrival from Asia, Europe and America holds the highest when compared with the remaining years. Visitor arrival from Africa was the highest in the year 2002. Visitors number from Middle East and Oceania in 2003 was the highest when compared with rest of the years. Generally in the year 2001, there was a large inflow of visitors to Eritrea when compared with the years 1999, 2000, 2002 and 2003. The percentage change for the first three years was positive but in 2002 and 2003 the percentage change is negative which shows a drastic decline in visitor arrivals (see Tables 3 and 4).

Infrastructure development like the Serejeka-Shebah Road, has enhanced the tourism industry in the country. It is reported that since the opening of the Serejeka-Shebah road on July 16, 2006, more than 5,000 Eritrean tourists and hundreds from other parts of the world have visited the Semenawi-Bahri area. One of the pre-requisites for a tourist attraction area is the presence of recreation centers established in Mugoo, Sabur and Medhanit, all along the Serejeka-Shebah Road. Furthermore, since the road passes through the agricultural areas of the eastern lowlands, it may play a leading role in facilitating the transportation and marketing for the farmers of the area. This road, which has 42 switchbacks, could also serve as a subsidiary to the Asmara-Massawa road. Besides, Semenawi-Bahri has a rich variety of birds, trees and wild animals and the Ministry of Tourism is working for their conservation.

It is to be noted that the highest number of visitors arriving in 2001 came for business, for visiting friends and relatives (VFR) and other purposes. In 2002 the visitor arrival for holiday holds the first when compared with the rest.

The percentage change from 1999 to 2001 is positive as it shows a considerable rise but for 2002 and 2003 there is a decline in visitors arrival and it shows a negative change.

ROLE OF TRAVEL AGENCIES

Most of the tourism in Eritrea revolves around travel agencies and tour operators. Travel agency which is an organization in the private sector plays a crucial role in the promotion of tourism in the country. It is one way of reaching a geographically diverse market place. According to the Ministry of Tourism report in 1999 the number of travel agencies in Eritrea was 32 which are privately owned. And most of them are located in the capital city Asmara, and some are in cities like Massawa, Asseb, Keren etc.

PROBLEMS OF TOURISM

All the above-mentioned issues emphasize the positive aspects of tourism. But tourism also has a negative impact. The first challenge of tourism is its social and cultural impact.

Tourism damages not only the landscape but also the indigenous way of life, culture and sets of values. The farmers and the foresters often see tourists as intruders. Tourist traffic en route and where it concentrates in particular locations affects the rural areas of Eritrea. Cars and buses create congestions on the road as well as noise and other forms of pollution. Aircrafts noise disturbs the residence and causes damage to wild life. Without tourism the rural area would have a better chance of being preserved.

In the process of developing tourism, crimes have also developed. As a result of the friction between the host population and tourists many criminal activities have been generated. And there is a positive correlation between tourism and prostitution, as a result of which AIDS has spread among the nations.
The following are the situations when tourism might harm the environment: 1] Change of environment quality which was previously in good condition 2] Destruction of landscape and natural habitat; 3] Creation of activities producing irreconcilable land-use conflict; 4] Damage to traditional values in the zones concerned and lowering of standards on the human scale in existing developments.

Finally, tourism is a seasonal activity. Most of the facilities of the town are used for few months. This leads to a wasteful use of resources, particularly in small countries like Eritrea, and may also result in seasonal unemployment.

Accommodation is a very important part of tourism infrastructure and development of tourism. The service accommodation includes hotels, pensions, guest and boarding houses. In Eritrea the highest rate of occupancy, which is 47%, recorded in hotels in Keren, followed by Asmara 38% and Massawa 32%. According to the length of stay recorded in hotels, Asmara is followed by Massawa and Keren. It is evident from this information that the longest stay of an international visitor in Eritrea is for business purpose. Problem of hotels in Eritrea is intensified particularly during holidays. During this time the number of visitors on holiday increases. This indicates the high demand for hotels by the visitor. There is acute shortage of hotels and facilities in the existing hotels particularly in the cities of Massawa because of large flow of people to the area for the holiday (Ministry of Tourism, 2002). Further, the common problem related to such sectors is unsatisfactory services. The services rendered by the hotels are unsatisfactory and most visitors complain of its need for improvement. This is due to the lack of training of its staff members, and also lack of sanitation.

Banking plays a major role in promotion of tourism. When visitors come to a particular place, they need a place where they can change the currency of their home country. In doing so, the service and number of banking sectors comes into question. In Eritrea, the banks are very few like Commercial Bank of Eritrea, Housing and Commerce Bank. They have very few branches in Massawa, Asseba, Berentu, Adi Keyha with limited facilities (Rena, 2006b). Theses banks do not cater to the needs of the foreign tourists and the services rendered by banking institutes are not satisfactory because most of the work is done manually resulting in delay. This adversely affects the visitor sector.

Tourism involves the movement of people. As a result the relationship between transportation and tourism is a very important aspect of the tourism sector. Transportation is a means to reach to a destination and means of movement at the destination. In most cases tourism has increased in areas where extensive transportation network are available.

The Government of Eritrea issued a proclamation in June 2006 which restricts the movement of all foreigners’ resident and non-resident, diplomatic and non-diplomatic staff. Whoever wants to visit certain places in the country has to take special permission from the Ministry of Tourism or Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This measure will have a serious impact on the tourism development of Eritrea.

UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF TOURIST ATTRACTION AREAS

It is to be understood that there are different places in Eritrea, which attract visitors. It is reported that Asmara being the capital city is more developed than the other areas in the country and thus attracts more tourists than other areas in the country. The tourists visit to historical places, the islands and other important towns seems to be insignificant because of poor infrastructure.
LACK OF INFORMATION CENTERS, ADVERTISEMENT AND SALES PROMOTION

As stated earlier, the role of travel agencies in promoting tourism is rather nominal. In Eritrea almost all of the travel agencies are located in the capital cities. Those located outside of the capital cities are limited to cities like Massawa. Due to lack of information strategic places like Dahlak islands remain undiscovered.

POOR CONDITION OF ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE

The architecture of Eritrea presents a dramatic range of styles and many fine examples exist demonstrating the neo-Florentine and neo-classical (art deco) movements in Italian Architecture during the 1920s and 1930s. Buildings in Eritrea reflect the Arabic or Moorish, Turkish, Egyptian, and Italian architectures. All the art deco buildings located particularly in Keren, Eritrea (like in many developing countries) are experiencing deterioration and are getting older. Even though the Cultural Asset Rehabilitation Program (CARP) is making efforts to improve the position of such buildings with the help of World Bank, but a lot more needs to be done.

PROSPECTS FOR TOURISM

Eritrea is the youngest visitor destination in Africa located by the Red Sea and in proximity to the prosperous regions of Europe and Middle East. It has the potential and can participate in the growth and benefits of tourism. The obvious manifestation of Eritrea's cultural heritage is its archaeological sites. Trade contacts with ancient Egypt, the Mediterranean world, and South Arabia have really encouraged the evolution of urbanism and civilized life in different parts of Eritrea. Prehistoric rock art or cave paintings are also remarkable aspect of Eritrean archaeology. Spread from the north to the south of the country, this kind of heritage is a practical testimony of agro-pastoral development that reflected ancient life ways in artistic sketches. The location of historical and archaeological sites is not limited to any single region of Eritrea (Ministry of Tourism, 1999). It is now recognized that every corner of the country exhibits remains of past cultural achievements. The coasts, the hinterlands, the islands of the Red Sea, the deserts of Dinkel are each in their own way keepers of history. One of the key features of tourism is the diversity in attractions, destinations, and business characteristics.

An abundance of natural, historic, recreational and educational resources provide Eritrea the right ingredients to make it a desired destination. Many inland roads, four airports at Massawa, Asmara, Assab and Sawa and two harbours at Massawa and Assab provide easy access to the country and its tourist sites. The peace and tranquility within the country is also one of the factors that make Eritrea a site of tourist attraction. The government of Eritrea have given priority to the tourism sector as a means of national and regional development because the country's tourism assets have remained untouched.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF TOURISM

The benefits of tourism from economic point of view are: Eritrean economy has experienced stagnation or decline for the last 8 years, the tourism sector helps the economic growth. The service sector contribution in Eritrea is about 45 per cent of its GDP. Tourism becomes a source of employment particularly for areas with limited alternative sources of employment i.e. non-industrial areas deficient in natural resources. The tourist industry benefits from the tourists by supplying tourist needs. Holiday camps, restaurants and souvenir shops are mainly dependent on tourism for their business. Besides, tourism is a source of amenities for the resident population of tourist
destination. Because of which there is improvement in living standard and presence of more sophisticated technology.

ECOLOGICAL IMPACT OF TOURISM

The environment, whether it is natural or manmade is the most fundamental ingredient of the tourism product. As soon as tourism activity takes place, the environment is inevitably changed or modified to facilitate tourism. The impact can be negative or positive (Ministry of Tourism, 1996). It is not possible to develop tourism without incurring environmental impacts; but it is possible, with correct planning to manage tourism development in order to minimize the negative impact while encouraging the positive impacts. Eco-tourism is an alternative tourism and it respects social and cultural traditions. It is decentralized in nature and seeks to integrate rural development. Eco-tourism would ideally generate revenue for conservation of natural and cultural wealth and afford cultural exchange among rural and urban population.

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Tourism being one of the economic activities, enables a country to earn income by using its own local resources. At the same time tourism can be a social evil creating social problems and environmental degradation. After independence there was an increase in visitor arrivals in Eritrea but later from 1997 onwards a decline in visitors is observed due to the war with Ethiopia.

As the motivation survey conducted by Ministry of Tourism indicates, most visitors complain of the poor services rendered by hotels. This calls for improvement of hotels, by providing training to the staff members, and maintaining hygiene and sanitation. It is necessary to establish a well integrated information center both in cities and other regions of the country, to improve infrastructure including: 1) Transportation 2) Highways 3) Water and Electricity System 4) Telecommunication.

Eritrea needs a small-scale tourism development, which is compatible with the size of the country, its population, and its stage of development. To minimize the challenges of tourism in Eritrea, Government should stake enormous amount of money in the development of tourism. It includes: 1) A sound traffic system, security and encouraging foreign investment; 2) Development of tourist attraction areas; 3) Improvement of banking services to encourage the visitors. 4) Effective implementation of tourism development plan.

Tourism promotion programmes in Eritrea should create realistic expectations and responsibly inform potential visitors of the specific heritage characteristics of a place or host community, thereby encouraging them to behave appropriately. Places and collections of heritage significance should be promoted and managed in ways which protect their authenticity and enhance the visitor experience by minimising fluctuations in arrivals and avoiding excessive numbers of visitors at any one time. The promotion, distribution and sale of local crafts and other products should provide a reasonable social and economic return to the host community, while ensuring that their cultural integrity is not degraded.

CONCLUSION

Tourism is a major item of international trade; the biggest international activity after oil. International tourism is the largest single item in the world’s foreign trade and export industry and earner of foreign exchange. Although there is significant scope to develop tourism in Eritrea, this sector has been facing lot of problems. The government is working ceaselessly to develop this sector as one of the prime movers of the economy. Tourism sector
has just begun to rise and the developments that have taken place thus far are insignificant. This young and economically dependent nation can concentrate more on tourism development and thus develop its economy.

END NOTES

1. This cable was considered as the largest cableway in the world in those days.

2. According to the new ruling, all tourists can reach any of the international airports within Ethiopia, without any entry visa, which is granted for a month’s stay, at any of the international airports on arrival.


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