

Research Article

Potentials and Challenges for Religious Tourism Development: The Case of Qoma Fasiledes Church, Ethiopia

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Abstract

Religious tourism is one of the fastest-growing tourism sectors, expressing tourists' desire to engage for religious reasons and travel from their usual environment to another sacred place. Therefore, this study was intended to identify potentials, challenges and opportunities for religious tourism development at Qoma Fasiledes church. To this end, a qualitative research approach and a cross-sectional descriptive study design was employed to achieve the objectives of this study. The target populations were Zone and Woreda's culture and tourism office experts, Qoma Fasiledes Betekihinet leaders and church scholars in Qoma Fasiledes church. 13 respondents were selected by non-probable sampling technique, using purposive sampling. Both primary and secondary data sources were employed. Hence, primary data were collected from interviews, focus group discussions and field observation. Whereas, secondary sources from published and unpublished documents. Findings indicate that; the long history of Qoma Fasiledes church, religious festivals, school education, Qomie Zema, mural painting, the Church building itself, treasure house and many movable heritages made from gold and silver including crosses, crowns and yisma Qoma Negarit as well as monastic activities were potentials for religious tourism development. Challenges were lack of infrastructure, lack of promotion, lack of professionals, absence of museums and lack of awareness. Therefore, to develop religious tourism in Qoma Fasiledes church, all stakeholders should collaborate to use potentials and mitigate the hindering factors by examining the opportunities.

Keywords

Potential, Challenge, Religious Tourism, Qoma Fasiledes

1. Introduction

Tourism is one of the most innovative and revenue-generating sector [2]. The main sector from which a country's economy will be profitable is terms of tourism business [30]. However, during such collapsed period; the tourism industry is highly suffered due to COVID-19 pandemic diseases [30]. In recent years, it has been increasingly

recognized for its economic potential, which helps to develop countries to reduce poverty [4]. There are different types of tourism like business tourism, mass tourism, pro-poor tourism, dark tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, sex tourism, religious tourism etc. From there religious tourism is the most common type, and it has existed since the begin-

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ning of human history [14, 29].

Most religious tourism attractions are related to monasteries, churches and ancient sites, especially temples and shrines which most people want to visit to feel good [19]. To fully take advantage of the potential religious or Christian heritage sites and attractions, cooperation is crucial [26]. Africa has a tremendous appreciation of religious tourism potential [20] and the continent has a wealth of resources, including a diverse collection of cultural and historical attractions for the development of religious tourism. Ethiopia is unique and rich with enormous churches, monasteries and mosques with various historical and cultural resources used for religious tourism development [8]. Religious tourism, or visiting religious sites, is encouraged and constitutes the majority of the country for domestic tourism [7].

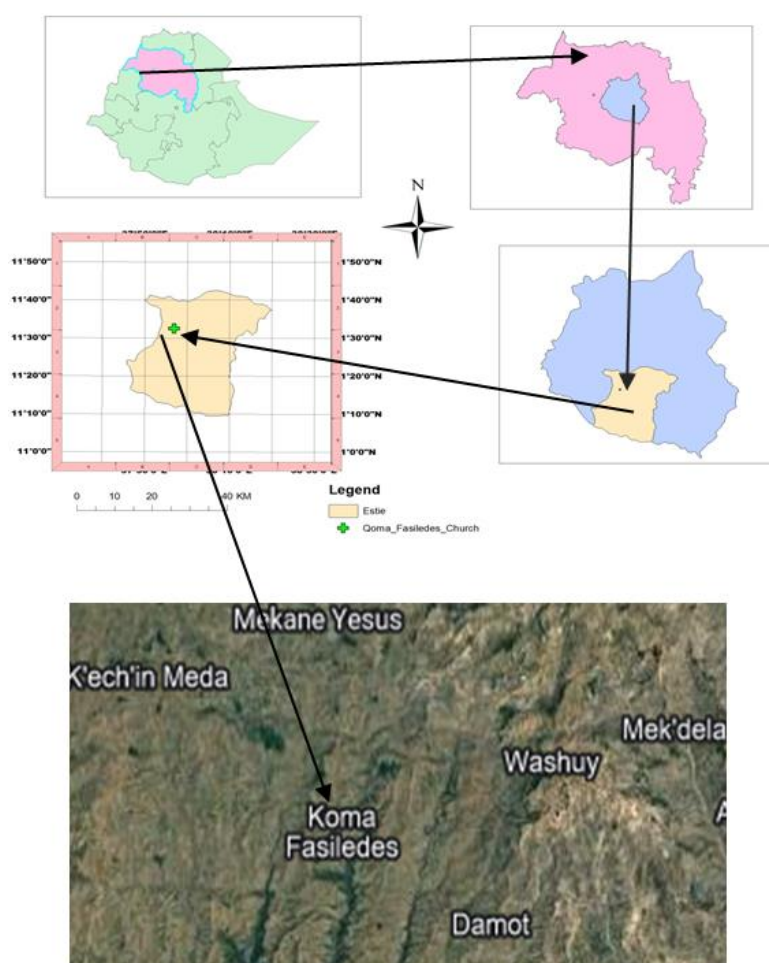
As compared to other parts of Ethiopia; the Northern part of Ethiopia is mostly experienced for religious tourism. Axum TSION [27]; Lalibela [3]; Gishen [9] South Gondar Zone has a wealth of natural and cultural tourism resources that can attract local and international visitors. According to [7], tourism resources in the South Gondar Zone include Nature-based tourism in Guna Mountain, Water Tourism in parts of Lake Tana,

Health and spa tourism or Medical Tourism in Wanzaye Spring, Cultural / industrial heritage at Gafat Industrial Village and Religious tourism such as Betelhem Church, Zoz Amba Giorgis, Tara Gedam Monastery and Qoma Fasiledes church.

2. Research Methodology

2.1. Location

Qoma Fasiledes church is located in Este Woreda and it is far from Addis Ababa by 653 km, from Bahir Dar by 114 and from Mekane Eyesus which is the capital of Woreda by 52 km [10]. Geographically, the total area of the Woreda is 132,373.9 km²; it is located at 11° 39' 59.99" N, latitude and 38° 09' 60.00" E, longitude. Moreover, it is located on the south surrounded by the Abay River, on the north by Farta, on the northeast by Lay Gayint, on the northwest by Fogera, on the east by Simada and on the west by Dera Woreda. This district is endowed with Qoma Fasiledes, which is located 52 km from the district town [10] as cited by [5].



Source: Developed by the researcher from GIS App & Google map (Researcher's Own, 2024)

Figure 1. Map of the Study Area.

2.2. Research Design and Approach

From the two research designs time series, a cross-sectional study design motivated the researcher to employ this study and to collect data in a single specified time and with respondents. Moreover, this study utilized a descriptive research design to give a description and to answer questions from the collected, analyzed and interpreted data about what Qoma Fasiledes church has, what are the bottlenecks and what are opportunities for religious tourism development. This study utilized a qualitative approach, to collect, analyzes and interpret the data obtained on the spot (study area) and to give details for the objectives of the study as well as to gather truthful and accurate data deeply qualitative is better and was employed for this study.

2.3. Research Paradigm

Epistemologically, the constructivist paradigm recognizes a subjectivity-based connection between the researcher and reality. The relationship between the studies of reality to be investigated and the researcher is the subject of epistemology because it is subjective and social science [23]. Based on interpretive assumptions, which primarily assume that a social phenomenon is subjective and dynamic, a qualitative approach is recognized. Consequently, the interpretivism assumption served as the basis for this study. Because of this, a qualitative approach was used to investigate potentials, challenges and opportunities for religious tourism development in Qoma Fasiledes church.

2.4. Population of the Study and Sample Size

The researcher employed non-probability sampling techniques. Specifically, Purposive sampling was utilized. This means based on the judgment of the researcher as to who has provided the best information to succeed for the objectives of the study rather than random selection. And as there is no definite number and mathematical system to determine the appropriate sample size in qualitative research; the researcher considered the theory of data saturation for the study. In addition, the researcher measured 13 sample sizes based on the saturation level of data collected as long as the object of the study. Potential participants were chosen in a variety of ways for incorporation in this study, and the method of selection was influenced by several variables including the research questions, the research design and approach and the availability of appropriate numbers for this study.

2.5. Criteria for Inclusion and Exclusion

The selection of Qoma Fasiledes as a study area was based on its age and resources compared to other religious sites in South Gondar. Complexities in studying all churches led to choosing one for detailed analysis. Proximity to the church

provided rich information on religious tourism potential. Inclusion criteria included exposure, literacy, proximity, position, age above 19, and detailed knowledge of the church. Exclusion criteria included those under 18 and lacking the necessary characteristics for the study.

3. Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter deals with the analysis and presentation of data collected from Interviews, Focus Group Discussions and Personal Observation by supporting others finding. The findings were analyzed by making four major themes those are; intangible religious tourism potentials; tangible religious tourism potentials; challenges for religious tourism development and opportunities for religious tourism development. Moreover, under those major themes; there were other sub-themes and those themes and subthemes were coded with the help of Open Coding 3.1 B1 software.

3.1. Potentials for Religious Tourism Development

3.1.1. Intangible Religious Tourism Potentials

(i). History of Qoma Fasiledes Church

There is a legendary speech about how Qoma Fasiledes church was built, the FGD and key informants also confirmed that the information about the history of how Qoma Fasiledes church was built is really true. The interview from Qoma Betekihinet and government officials from the culture and tourism office state that; There was legendary speech (ግጥም) for *Suseneyose*; if you married a woman named *Walda Sa'ala*; if you have a Server named *Hellosa* and if you ride a horse named *Chato* then you will be reined. Moreover, if you stay in a place with the first letter called "Go" or "ጎ" then your kingship will be announced. As he was walking along, he found *Walda Sa'ala* by fetching water around North Shewa then he had sent for her family and married. On the way, he heard that they were riding a horse called *Tewachito*, then he bought the horse at a high price, and he found a server named *Hellos* and go to *Gojam*. But His reign fail; then He turned to *Gorgora*; still, his reign was unsuccessful. Lastly, he goes to *Gondar* and his reign was succeeded...." (Informant 3, 5 & 10, May 3, 4 & 5:2024 respectively).

The key informant interview from Qoma Betekihinet church support the legendary was true and realized it as:

...after *Atse Suseneyose* become the emperor; then he rejects Orthodox Christianity and accept Catholicism he was shut up and he can't speak. Then monks came from *mahiberekidusan* and told him, you write “ሐይማኖት ይመለስ፤ ፋሲል ይገባል፤ ሲሰጥህ ይርከስ” literal meaning religion should return; *Fasil* should reign and *Sisuniyos* would be unclean; he agreed with their idea and wrote. Then his tongue was

normal and Emperor Fasil reigned. After Emperor Fasil became emperor, he reestablished the Orthodox as a national faith. Queen Walda Sa'ala established Qoma Fasiladas during this time. The queen leave from Biru Adage and start to build on the new Fasiladas Monastery at the spot where the slaughter ox had stood in Qundi Beret. The name Qoma was derived from the Amharic word Qome (ቆመ), which literal meaning "stand still." Queen Walda Sa'ala began construction on the Qoma Fasiladas monastery in 1618 during the reign of Atse Susinyos. Queen Walada Sa'ala erected the Martyr Fasiladas monastery to commemorate Emperor Fasiladas. As a response, the queen ordered that their necks be cut in the place of Qundi Beret, and construction of the Qoma Fasiladas monastery began. After the Derg regime, Qoma Fasiledes monastery is changed into a church still now (Informant, 5 May 11:2024 respectively).

Many studies support the history and reasons that Emperor *Susenyose* changed to Catholicism. In those days, emperors did not bargain for power, even if, they killed their brothers. And there was a war during the reign of Emperor *Susenyose*, and the Western powers said to the king, "Accept our religion, Catholicism, and proclaim it in Ethiopia. In return, we will support you with a military weapon." He agrees with their ideas, and proclaims Catholicism in Ethiopia.

(ii). Religious Festival

The basic potentials of tangible religious attractions are intangible religious festivals [21]. Qoma Fasiledes church has an impressive intangible religious tourism potential. One of the important functions of the monastery for religious tourism development is a festival celebration. As per from the key informants, there are numerous holy holidays held at Qoma Fasiledes church all year round. Many religious tourists visit the church to attend the religious ceremonies during its annual festivals. One of the most well-known annual holy days is St. Fasiledes, which is celebrated twice a year in Qoma Fasiledes church in September and December. It is celebrated uniquely; a large number of pilgrims travel to the Qoma Fasiledes church from various locations throughout the district; numerous religious events take place during this time, and numerous religious programs are offered all year round to religious travelers (Informant, 1 & 2 May 9:2024).

As most interviewees agreed that the religious festival of Qoma Fasiledes is attractive and another key informant interview also states:

The annual religious festival of Qoma Fasiledes church is on September & December 11; During September, the most fascinating events are started from the eve of the holy day. Like Kidasie by Vergin monks; preaching by religious fathers who come from different places; spiritual songs by school students; Qine Mahlet through mergatas; reading of poems regarding the Death date of the St. Fasiledes. Huge numbers of religious travelers come to Qoma Fasiledes church at such time to get blessed by St. Fasiledes.

And during December 11 is another annual celebration by local communities to generous their food and drinking for the guest who came from everywhere. Since September is the rainy season and not comfortable for hospitality. The local communities believe that; if we give our food to the guest, we will get heaven on behalf of St. Fasiledes (Informant, 5 May 11:2024).

The observation also supports the religious festival in Qoma Fasiledes church has a potential for religious tourism development by attending the monthly religious festival on May 11 2014, they showed that the interesting religious program.

Similarly, the finding of [21], study support this finding that the basic potentials of religious tourism are intangible religious festivals. Again, the findings of [9], study in 2014 support this study that the religious festival in Gishen Debrekerbie Mariam is one key potential for religious tourism development. Moreover, the findings of [6]; Under Adyame Yordanos Wonkishet, each monastery has its special days to be observed, So Wonkishet monastery have huge tourism potential with special feature during the annual celebration. Furthermore, the findings of [4], (2018), also support the potential of religious festivals in Lalibela is astonishing and colorful.



Source [10].

Figure 2. December 11 Fasiledes Annual Chant.

(iii). Monastic Life

For religious followers, Monasticism is a life whereby individuals live for the sake of the spiritual especially, for Christianity churches and monasteries are built for this purpose [9].

As written in Fetha Negest “የምንኩሰና ሕይወት የክርስቲያን ሕገ ጥበብ ነው፤ እናም መነኩሳት ምድራዊ መላእክቶች ወይም የሰማይ ሰዎች ሲሆኑ እነሱም የጌታችን የመድሐኒታችን የኢየሱስ ክርስቶስ ደቀ መዛሙርት ናቸው...” ምዕራፍ 10:1 Literary meaning “Monastic life is Christian law wisdom, and monks are earthly angels or heavenly humans who are as much as humanly possible disciples of Jesus Christ...” (Chapter 10:1).

As FGD assures about the monastic activities in the study area, that kidasie is performed only by the Virgin Monks.

Monastic (monk) services were also performed like that of St. Lalibela churches. One of the key informants also support monastic life in Qoma Fasiledes is held. In other areas, like Gondar; Bahir Dar and others, when the right-hand man and the left-hander, or Mrs. and Blata, “*ቅኝ ጌታ እና ግራ ጌታ ወይም አፍ ወይዘሮ እና ብላታ*” re-ordained by the church, the diocese appoints; instead, it is the Church itself that is ordained by the law and order of the Church (informant 4 & 6, May 10 & 11:2024 respectively).

Similarly, the monastic life and actions of religious members of communities are key potentials for religious tourism development in Adyame Yordanos monastery [6]. In the same manner, the findings of [28], also support this finding that to develop religious tourism in Northern Ethiopia monasticism is a major religious tourism potential and gives high credit to the local communities in Debre Damo Monastery, Eastern Tigray.

(iv). Church School

Qoma Fasiledes is the one who gives Qomie Zema solely in addition to the Traditional school church. One of the key informants from the church states:

First of all, Qome song “*ቆሜ ዜማ*” those descend directly from St. Yared is still being given in this church. The word “Qomie” does not only refer to the name of the place; but also, during the reigns of yodit Gudat and Ahmed Gragn; there were burning of the church, displace priests; and their song or “Ziema” were converted by others but here in Qoma, there is the first song which helps to remind this Qomie song (Informant 6, May 4:2024).

As the researcher assured from the FGD; all individuals learn their education from everywhere and come to Qoma Fasiledes church to test the song by Qomie Zema since Qoma Fasiledes church is the only one who give Qomie Zema. After he take and passed the exam, he will serve for Qoma Fasiledes church for some period of time and he will take a certificate. Religious heritage sites have enormous value both naturally and as a source of knowledge, identity, and pride for the general people. It is beneficial for tourism planners and decision-makers to “keep it genuine” and resist the temptation to over-commercialize their linked goods and services to promote religious tourism [15].

The traditional school of Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido churches are the one and the basic in terms of keeping spiritual and cultural heritages [12]. Traditional Ethiopian Orthodox Church schools are ancient historical learning places where spiritual and secular knowledge, talents and arts, as well as a huge variety of cultural and spiritual heritage, are transferred from generation to generation [17]. From this old aged and historical church traditional church school is still offered.

3.1.2. Tangible Religious Tourism Potentials

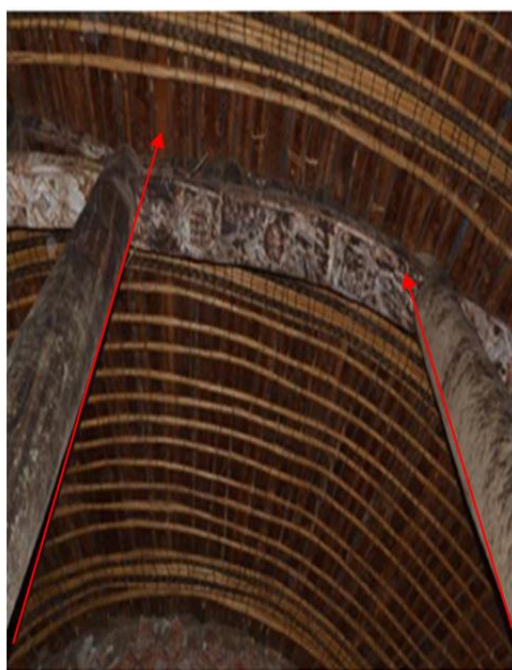
(i). Church Building

The materials for the church building of Qoma Fasiledes church is incredible. The as the Key informant interviewee from church clearly states:

Yes...During the construction of Qoma Fasiladas church, Queen Walda Sa'ala brought one hermit (monk) from Gojjam, whose name was Abune Arsaniwos. He came with a large number of monks and stayed in Qoma until his death. He prayed during the entire construction process, from the beginning to the end. The monastery's fence was initially constructed by the Queen using limestone and mortar. Nora cement was used for these construction materials. Its height is 3 meters, and its length is almost 330 meters. She had ordered the construction of the storehouse (eqa bet) next to the fence within the same materials. Queen Walda Sa'ala had ordered the workers to build the main church using cement, Nora, and other materials after the fence and the store were finished. However, a hermit Abune Arsaniwos told unexpected news to her; your life span is not as long as until the completion of the church with cement concert Nora. Therefore, the main church should be finished within a short period. She had accepted the advice and ordered the workers to do using mud and stone rather than limestone and mortar. Since the mixture of Nora takes a long time. The main church's wall is built by mud, stone, and in some parts wood (Informant 2, May 9; 2024).

The FGD also verified that the art and architecture of Qoma Fasiledes church is dates back to the 16th century and is a permanent heritage site in Estie Woreda. The church is encircled with 16 Amdework (gold pillars) made up of three parts and filled with a safe mansion; they are about 5 meters deep and are about the same height as the church; It is said that their version was made from Embacho in tears by Abune Arsanius. In addition, the skeletons of Abunu and the Queen are put safely. Abune Arsanius is the Saul father of Queen Walda Sa'ala. On the other hand, earlier types of paintings: Drums; Crosses: It contains about 80 parchment books and gold cups.

The personal observation also confirmed that the art and the design of the church building is impressive and remarkable and far old again it is stand within 16 Amdework or pillars and their height is almost equal to the church. The findings of [7], about Investigating the Potential of Ancient Religious Sites in the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church for Religious Tourism Development: The Case of Kristos Semra support that the very old aged monastery built in the 12th century with the spectacular shape is a potential for religious tourism development.



Source (Researcher Own, 2024).

Figure 3. (A) Qoma Fasiledes Church Building (B) Amdework (Gold Pillar) of Qoma Fasiledes.

(ii). Treasure House

The name of the Treasure-house for Qoma Fasiledes church is Enqual Gimb made by *Queen Walada Sa'ala* and now it contains a huge number of movable heritages, such as parchment books; Gifts of kings; Coats; Crowns and many more that may not be mentioned. And while the importance of these heritages to the development of tourism is not as great as Ethiopia's overall tourism situation, it is now a

source of income for visitors (Informant 7 & 11, May 11 & 17: 2024).

The FGD and Observation also assured about the treasure house of Qoma Fasiledes church, the treasure house or store is called the "Egg Tower or Enqual Gimb" and is located inside the compound and south of the church. It contains a huge number of priceless treasures, such as gold crowns; Crowns: Crosses: drums.

Correspondingly, the finding of [32], about the church museum of Entoto church supports this finding, Among the domestic tourists that are currently visiting the site, school-children who come from both private and government schools for educational purposes contribute the lion's share. Again, the finding of [11], about the treasure house in Tedbabe Mariam church supports this finding that, the treasure house of Tedbabe Mariam church is served as a shelter for those priceless heritages for a century.

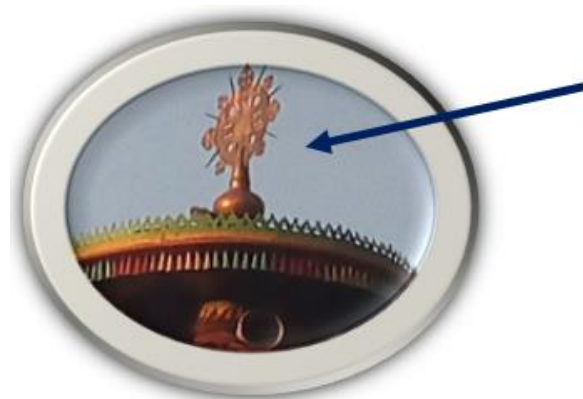


Source (Researcher Own, 2024)

Figure 4. Eqa bet Called Enqual Gimb.

(iii). Church Dome "Gulilat"

Observation and FGD assure that this is an alarm for the heritage robbers since it is Gold Made and it attracts from very far away since it was very colorful, and now the very white and attractive color of the golden dome of the church becomes a shadow to minimize the attention the theft.



Source (Researcher Own, 2024).

Figure 5. Gold-Made Dome of the Church.

3.2. Challenges for Religious Tourism Development

3.2.1. Lack of Infrastructure

A major challenge for tourism is adequate infrastructure like road accessibility, water, electricity, and accommodation [25]. The observation proved that Qoma Fasiledes church is one of the famous destinations of religious tourism and it is a heritage ground but poor accessible to reach Qoma from Estie Bus station the travelers should go on ISUZU Obama or wait for a bus and seat in a very congestion way.

Again, the Key informant interviews also confirmed the infrastructure problem in Qoma Fasiledes, Qoma Fasiledes church experienced in transportation problems as compared to others, this is the result of the quality of roads and possibly the distance to Mekane Eyesus the capital of Woreda as well government attention. In addition, pure water, electricity, accommodation and other ancillary service also under question mark.

Similarly, the result of a study by [9], also confirmed that lack of electricity and lack of access to transportation as major challenges at many religious sites in Ethiopia. In addition, findings studied by [4], about Religious Tourism Practices, Potentials, and Challenges: The Case of Dire Sheikh Hussein Area, South East Ethiopia and supported with the area also has a lack of accommodation facilities. Infrastructure like transportation is an integral part of the successful development of religious tourism [24].



Source (Researcher Own, 2024).

Figure 6. Estie Woreda Bus Station with Single Car, Traffic Congestion during Our Trip and We Were Go on Such Road.

3.2.2. Lack of Promotion

One of the components from the “seven P’s” (Product, Price, Promotion, Place, People, Process and Physical Evidence) marketing mix, Promotion is an important component of tourism development [16]. The FGD session assure about promotion in Qoma Fasiledes church; EWCTO and SGCTO try to make an effort to publicize the church through printed brochures and electronic media like television and radio. Still, Qoma Fasiledes church and the surrounding Qoma towns are unable to get the anticipated benefits for the preservation of cultural heritage, the creation of museums, and to improve their living standard as an alternative livelihood option for the people who are living in rural areas due to inadequate marketing and promotion.

Again, the interviewee from tourism expert also supports the FGD, As Qoma Fasiledes church is home of valuable treasures and to address those priceless for domestic and foreign tourists in terms of electronic media, printed media, newspaper, leaflets, radio, TV, and even social media; it is still in the infant stage (Informant 12, May 11: 2024).

Tourism promotion means the spreading of information trying to encourage actual and potential customers to travel to a destination [16]. Similarly, the findings of [13]; that religious sites as tourist attractions with a lack of effective promotion and the absence of tourist information centers in most regions is one of the main challenges for the development of religious tourism. In the same way [9], when there are other challenges like infrastructural problems and if there will be successful promotion, then the tourists are inspired to visit a destination.

3.2.3. Absence of Museum

A museum is purposely used to collect, preserve, interpret and display objects of artistic, cultural or scientific importance for the study and education of the public [31]. The key informant interviewee assured that, In Qoma Fasiledes church the precious treasures are kept in Eqa bet i.e., old aged building called “Enqulal Gimb”; and surely, we will lose those treasures due to their outdated documentation and even this Eqa bet is moving westward due to in 1965 there were struck by lightning (Informant 7, May 4: 2024).

The FGD also confirmed that there is no modern museum that heritages are open for visitors and researchers. But there was a plan and even there was a base stone to build a museum and unfortunately, the budget to build a museum was shifted to build a house for Abune Endriase, he is born in Qoma town and was archbishop. Nowadays there is also a plan to build a museum.

Observation also confirmed that treasures are placed in the treasure house and no one can see it. This is the result of the absence of modern museum that the treasures are displayed for any researcher or visitor freely. Similarly, the findings of [11], in their study in South Wollo Tedbabe Mariam church share this study’s finding; Tremendous and priceless treasures are housed in an old small treasure house for hundreds of years.

3.2.4. Theft and Illicit Trafficking

Most often, crosses, old books, manuscripts and other religious treasures are the focus of the thefts (Mengistu, 2008) as cited by [8]. The interviewee assured that the security system of the Qoma Fasiledes church is comparatively good. They have modern weapons including sniper but most of the heritages were made from gold and their price is very high and even more than three times thefts and heritage robberies were come practically to take the church dome “ጉልላት” which is made from gold (Informant 5, May 4: 2024).

As assured from FGD session, comparatively the security system of Qoma Fasiledes church is wonderful as compared to others. But we don't say there will not be theft and illicit trafficking. Because there were theft and illicit trafficking in Qoma Fasiledes church. Specifically, robberies were come many times to take dome of the church.

The study of this findings shares the findings of [3], who studies about Potentials and Challenges of Religious Tourism Development in Lalibela, Ethiopia that illicit trafficking in the holy land was another major challenge for religious tourism development in Lalibela town. Similarly, this finding also shares the findings of [8], at Adyame Yordanos Wenkishet monastery; theft and illicit trafficking are available everywhere and another major problem for religious tourism development since not only religious tourists who are going to the monastery but also the thieves also come to do such evil activities.

3.2.5. Lack of Awareness

The FGD session clearly states that lack of awareness is the principal challenge in Ethiopian tourism. Local communities for Qoma Fasiledes church have little awareness of tourism and tourism-related businesses. They don't want to open their heritage to visitors, even for the Culture and Tourism office. Since they are unaware of what tourism will bring to the local community, they don't want to open their heritage to visitors.

The key informant interviewee from a tourism expert assured, that even though local communities have high level of concern for Qoma Fasiledes church, their awareness about tourism revenue from Qoma Fasiledes church is low. Their focus is just showing our heritage to visitors is exposing our heritage to robberies and thefts (Informant 9, May, 12: 2024). Similarly, this finding is agreed with [11], finding in 2018 about Potentials and Challenges to Heritage Tourism Development: The Case of Tedbabe Mariam Church, South Wollo Zone, Ethiopia because of awareness problem, local communities considered that exposing heritage to tourists is exposing assets to theft, illicit trafficking, losing of holiness and damage.

3.2.6. Lack of Well-Trained Manpower in the Field of Tourism

The very brief FGD at South Gondar culture and tourism office and management professionals to position the right

person in the right place is central to achieving the desired goal in any organization. When we talk about tourism development, the first thing that comes to mind is the presence of skilled personnel in the tourism sector. The same goes for religious tourism; there should be employees in the tourism discipline at the federal, regional, zonal and woreda levels. And nowadays there are tourism man powers at Zone and Woreda levels. However, the government's inspiration to recruit tourism skilled manpower is low. This finding is also shared the finding of Ermias in 2018; on their study of challenges of the religious tourism development at Gishen Debrekerbie, Ethiopia.

3.2.7. Occasion of COVID-19

In terms of economic, social, food, job, and faith-related implications, COVID-19 is degrading the religious tourist business [22]. Religious sites around the world have been the subject of pilgrimage, worship, spiritual well-being, and visitor travels. As a result, religious tourism is very adaptable and will fulfill the COVID-19 problems [18]. The key informant from the South Gondar Zone of culture and Tourism office states;

Well, COVID-19 has occurred all over the world and in our country Ethiopia especially our zone is affected by this world pandemic disease but Qoma Fasiledes is not that devastated by COVID, since the travelers are domestic (Informant 13, May 11: 2024).

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

4.1. Conclusions

The study was focused on potentials, challenges and opportunities for religious tourism development in Qoma Fasiledes church. The area has an incredible religious tourism potential are a long history of Qoma Fasiledes church and religious festivals; All year-round various holy holidays are held at Qoma Fasiledes church. Many religious tourists visit the church to attend religious services during the church's annual festivals. St. Fasiledes celebrated twice a year in Ethiopia's Orthodox Tewahido Church in September and December, is one of the most well-known holy days. School service especially Qomie Zema, Monasticism, Mural paintings, Church building, treasure house “Enqulal Gimb”, and Birru Adegie fragmented heritages are the potentials found in Qoma Fasiledes church.

The challenges for religious tourism development in Qoma Fasiledes church are; the Qoma Fasiledes church is a prominent religious tourism destination and a heritage site, but it is inaccessible due to infrastructure problems like road quality, motor vehicles, accommodation, electricity and pure water. Lack of promotion is another challenge in Qoma Fasiledes church event though Estie Woreda's culture and tourism office attempt to market in print (bro-

chures), Promote within electronic media such as television and radio is low. The absence of museum, lack of awareness, theft and illicit trafficking and well-trained manpower are another challenge for religious tourism development in Qoma Fasiledes church.

The results of the study also specify various opportunities like Government policy, and the availability of other religious sites nearby; like Kidist Bethlehem Mariam Church is located near Qoma Fasiledes Church in Tach Gaynt woreda, Bethlehem kebele, Qoma Fasiledes church is a historical connection with Fasil castle Gondar, now a day increasing religious tourist are among the major opportunities for the development of religious tourism.

4.2. Recommendations

- 1) Infrastructure facilities like roads, electricity, lodges, guest houses and other facilities should be developed. In particular, the government is highly responsive to the basic infrastructural development at Qoma Fasiledes.
- 2) Awareness for the local community; SGCTO, Estie Woreda culture tourism office and other government stakeholders should take the lion's share by giving awareness to local communities and the monastery administration; then the church scholars should also again create awareness for the local community because awareness is the key actor in developing a destination.
- 3) Lightning struck the treasure house and moved westward. This means that the rich heritage found inside will be jeopardized, so the government should construct a modern museum to protect the heritage.
- 4) Promotion campaign the church should promote its potential through different printing and electronic media for the public. So, Tourism stakeholders should promote those enormous heritages and make them under tour roots.
- 5) The exterior part of the church's painting of the temple is partially cut and half-blurred due to old age, so ARCCCH, government, academic institutions, and other stakeholders should see it in a very serious way.
- 6) Preservation and restoration should be done as quickly as possible since those heritage items are placed in a much-challenged way.
- 7) The church scholars, local communities, Estie woreda culture and tourism office should work together in collaboration with SGZCTO and even with the region form to alleviate the major challenges.
- 8) There should be well-trained and professional human resources that have tourism and religious tourism backgrounds from the church and government officials. So academic institutions give tentative and continuous training and prepare training manuals.

Abbreviations

ARCCCH Authority for Research and Conservation of

	Cultural Heritage
SGZCTD	South Gondar Culture and Tourism Office
EWCTO	Estie Woreda Culture and Tourism Office
GIS	Geographical Information System
UNWTO	United Nations World Tourism Organization
MOCT	Ministry of Culture and Tourism

Author Contributions

Derebe Demelash is the sole author. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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