

GEO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL ENDOWMENTS AND THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ERITREA

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Abstract

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Eritrea is one of the countries located in the horn of Africa. Geo-Archaeological sites of the country have been the main focus of the study area. This paper presents an overview of the research and includes a discussion of the tourism potential of Eritrea and potential benefits of Geo-Archaeological endowments in the development of its tourism industry. She is having diverse Geo-Archaeological endowments which are capable of attracting large number of tourists from all over the world. This country enjoys unique and exciting landmarks, such as breath-taking escarpments, mountains, depressions, open plains, plateaus, Sea with immense variety of marine life, islands, beautiful coastal lines etc. Furthermore, as Eritrea is situated in the region of the cradle of life, it owns rare archaeological and historical sites with unraveled cultural heritages. Though, Eritrea's tourism industry is currently rated as one of the lowest foreign exchange earners in the country, the potential of tourism industry to become a leading source of foreign exchange earnings in Eritrea has not been far realized. It is evident that the country's tourism potential has not been fully explored and marketed. Though several attempts have been made to enhance its rapid development, but these efforts have suffered some major drawbacks i.e. because the richness of the sites is not fully exploited to such an extent that it can revitalize the tourism sector and due to lack of a comprehensive spatial database of tourism facilities and destinations. In the present paper an attempt has been made to investigate the role of Geo-Archaeological Sites in the Development of Tourism with respect to tourism potentials in the country.

Key words

Geo-Archaeology, Eritrea, endowment, tourism

1. Introduction

Eritrea is located in the horn of Africa. It sprawls between 12° to 18° north and 36° to 44° east, is bounded by Red Sea in the northeast and east, by Djibouti in the southeast, by Sudan in the north and northwest and Ethiopia in the south. No doubt, Eritrea's tourism industry is a new sector but the Government is working on plan to develop it. Eritrea is a land of startling contrast from sweltering heat of the Denakil Depression to the cool but stark mountains of the highlands. Although Eritrea possesses tourist attractive natural landscapes, archaeological and historical sites, it gets little benefits from the tourism sector. Eritrea is believed to be the place of human origin and the place of strategic geographical rift valley which make it an attractive country of the world. This great fault zones witnessed an expansion of ancient human kind especially from the coastal areas of Eritrea. This has been supported by some archaeological findings in Denakil Depression in a place called Buya with one million years old human fossils (Buya Man) (Melake 2008,5-6).

Eritrea is a beautiful country with fascinating treasure of history comprises most of the Axumite Kingdom, which was one of the great four world powers of ancient time, where one can visit the evidence of ancient civilization. It is a wonderful land of nature and culture, a land that has a heritage that stretches back to the far distant days of human history. The legacy of Eritrean history, monasteries, ancient sites and monuments, dense archaeological sites, material culture of various type and rock art sites are reminders of glorious past that goes back to three millennium years. In addition to 40,000 archaeological sites, material culture of various type and rock art sites, Eritrea owns a divers natural features, cold atmospheric rugged mountain peaks of Emba Soira (3010 m), Forest of Semenawi Bahri (green belt), Denakil Depression (300 feet below sea level), big trees like Ficus-Vasta, off shores Islands, coral reefs and beaches along the coastal line which extends 1216 km.

The above mentioned Histo-Geo-Archaeological sites of this country have great potentials for the development of tourism industry. Tourism Industry in Eritrea has experienced great fluctuations during various periods. During the pre-Independence period especially in the Haillesilase regime, it had shown both quantitative and qualitative progress in terms of arrivals of tourists. However, this progress has declined with the coming of Derg-regime. All these attractions were undermined during the colonial period, especially during the Derg-regime. The few infrastructure that were in existence had been fully damaged. Consequently, the number of visitors reduced drastically. This was due to the devastating war and destructive policy of the regime. In post independence period particularly until 1998, tourism activity kept accelerating rate, but this dramatic growth was hindered by the Ethio-Eritrea border conflict.

2. Methodology

The present study is more akin to collection of primary and secondary data. The compiled data on different subjects have been tabulated. Synthesis, perusal and analysis of data have been carried out wherever it can explain the trend with the outcome of results and facts. Personal interviews were conducted with various authorities viz, concerned officials in the Ministry of Marine Industry (Shipping Line of Tourism Sector) and in the Ministry of Tourism, National Museum Asmara etc. Besides, questionnaires were designed to collect information on different geo-archaeological sites regarding tourism in Eritrea as a whole.

Secondary data pertaining to the present study was collected mainly from published documents of Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation Authority Service, Asmara, different journals, magazines, and pamphlets and off course also from browsing the Internet.

Descriptive method is used for data analysis. The obtained data sets were analyzed by percentage calculation. Equally, graphs and tables are presented in an appropriate manner.

3. The Study Area

In the present paper an attempt has been made to investigate the role of Geo-Archaeological endowments in the Development of Tourism with respect to tourism potentials in the country which covers an area of about 124,000 km², lies in the north of the equator and just north of the horn of Africa. It sprawls between 12° to 18° north and 36° to 44° east. Eritrea shapes like a hatchet and the handle of the hatchet is on the Red Sea in the east. It is bounded by Sudan in the north and north-west, by Ethiopia in the south, by Djibouti in the south east and by the Red Sea in the north east, Fig.1.

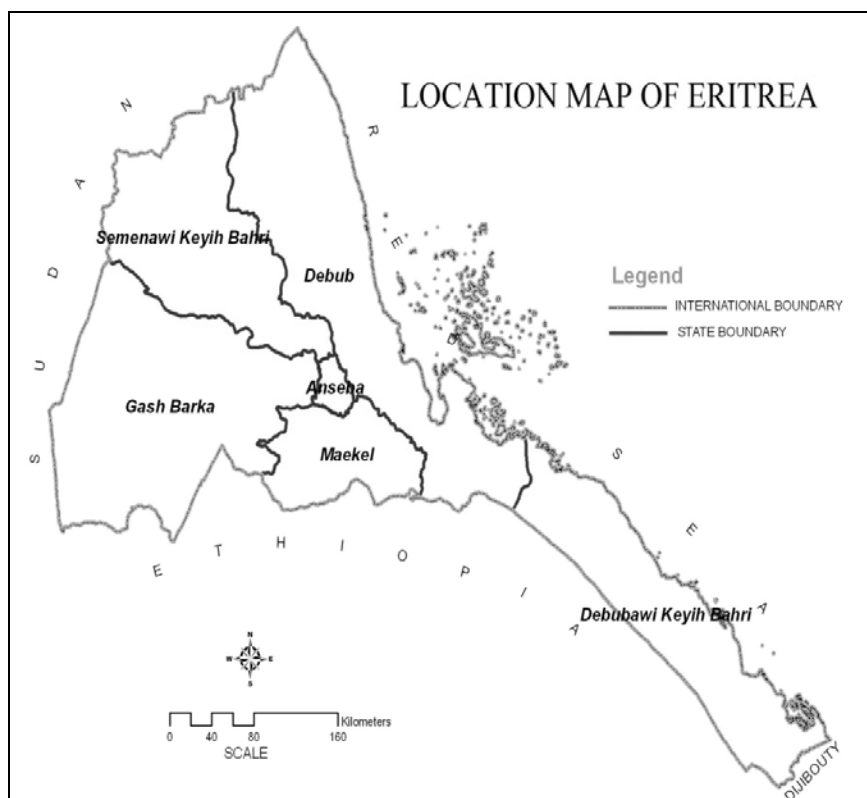


Fig. 1: Location map of Eritrea.
Source: Ministry of Tourism, Eritrea.

The country has coastline of about 1,200 km. with more than 350 islands. Eritrea is a land of fascinating contrast with its scenic and contrasting landscapes and one of the loveliest tropical coastlines in Africa. Eritrea has enormous potential as a tourist attraction. Massawa, 117 km from the capital city of Asmara is one of the main ports of Eritrea, known as the pearl of the Red Sea. Its Mediterranean ambience and settling and its peripheral environs make a perfect location for such tourist's related developments as yachts marinas, hotels and beach resorts. It will serve as springboard for the development of tourism in the Dahlak islands and along the coast, from west to east. In addition, Eritrea's topographical features provide the greatest climatic contrasts. Each of the geographical zones offers unparallel experience for the tourists. The claim that Eritrea offers "three seasons in two hours" is not an idle boast. In two hours the tourist can rise from the extremely hot pristine and unspoiled beaches of the coast to the moderate weather of the forests of plains and hills and the fertile fields of Eritrea. Above 2000 meters the tourists encounters the cool highlands which are pleasant at any time of the year (Britain Informaton seivces 1950; Mery and Leonardo 1995).

Tab.1: Number of international visitors by nationality (2004-2008).

Nationality	2004	2005	% change	2006	% change	2007	% change	2008	% change
Ethiopia	57	65	14.03	53	-18.46	70	32.07	38	-45.71
Sudan	3275	3090	-5.64	3550	14.88	3505	-1.26	3570	1.85
Eritrea (overseas)	61851	60935	-1.48	58938	-3.29	61904	5.03	55171	-10.87
Other Africa	1402	1150	-17.10	939	-18.34	640	-31.84	488	-23.75
Europe	7690	7260	-5.10	5951	-18.03	5374	-9.69	5151	-4.14
Middle East	4280	3605	-15.77	2803	-22.24	2108	-24.79	1884	-10.62
Asia	6295	5250	-16.60	4949	-5.74	4641	-6.22	2028	-56.30
America	2250	1660	-26.23	1474	-11.20	983	-33.31	858	-12.71
Australia	301	292	-2.99	221	-2.42	267	20.81	235	-11.98
Total	87401	83307	-4.68	78678	-55.72	79492	-1.03	69423	-12.66

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Asmara, Eritrea.

Tab. 2: International tourist arrivals by purpose of visit (2004-2008).

Purpose of visit	2004	2005	% change	2006	% change	2007	% change	2008	% change
Business	14340	13457	6.15	11557	14.11	9874	-14.56	7726	21.75
Tourism	63439	66550	4.90	64840	2.56	69804	7.65	62031	-11.13
Others	2350	2150	-8.51	2064	-4	825	-60.02	160	-80.60
Total	80129	82157	2.53	78461	-4.49	80503	2.60	69917	-1.14

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Asmara, Eritrea.

4. Geo-Archaeological endowments and the tourism development

Eritrea is abundantly rich in terms of geo-archaeological endowments, especially diverse physical features and potential tourism resources with great natural attractions. Geographical factors have significant role in the development of any country. Eritrea has a very attractive landscape which consists of different landforms and unique natural structures which have favorable climatic conditions for

settlements. These landforms range from 100 m below sea level in the Denakil depressions, to mountain peaks greater than 3000 m above sea level. The country has uncharted coastal line which stretches for more than 1216 km, with a variety of islands and untouched marine life and coastal beauty. Thus, geographical factors play important role in the development of tourism in Eritrea. Geographical factors might be divided into three broader categories i.e. landscape, Seascape and the coasts.

5. Tourism and landscape of Eritrea

The present landform of Eritrea is the product of all geological geomorphic processes. As the landscape of a country attracts large number of tourists from any corner of the world, the Eritrean landscape is not different. It has a significant role in the development of tourism in the country. The Eritrean landscape is further divided in to highlands, lowlands and escarpments.

The highlands of Eritrea stretch from north to south. They occupy the central part of the country, separating the western and eastern lowlands into two parts. These are the product of uplifting, rifting and basaltic flow created various features and shapes that one wonders in their natural creation. High land of Eritrea consists of plateaus, mountains and gentle western slopes. The highlands of Eritrea are situated at an elevation of higher than 1000 m above sea level. Eritrean highlands have an immense potential for tourist attraction. These highlands stretched over a large portion of the central part of the country. They are distinctively classified in to highlands and plateaus.

5.1 Highlands

Highlands are divided into Sahel highlands to the east and Halhal highlands to the west. Some of the highest peaks in this region are Hager-Neus (2770 m) and Aiget Tseada (2573 m). These highlands had served as a strong hold and sheltering area for the Eritrean liberation fighters. Thus, it can attract military experts to study the military significance of the area. Historians and domestic tourists can also be attracted to trace the historic events of the armed struggle which happened in these highlands.

Upper Anseba highlands extend from Aditekelezan and Zaghir in the south to the Keren zone in the north. These highlands have strategic and historic significance as decisive battles were fought between Italians and British. This battle altered the balance of power in the Second World War in Africa. And for these reasons, the historians and descendants of both sides can be eager to visit this place and this gives the area potentially huge impact on the development of tourism (Kubrom and Yonas 2010).

The eastern highlands extends from Dekemhare area in the north to the border in the south. These highlands are the most elevated of all physiographic regions in the country. The highest peaks of the country are found in this region such as Mt. Soira (3018 m) which is the highest peak in Eritrea. Education tourist interested in studying landforms can visit and study such sites with ease. Mountain climbers and hikers can be interested in the adventures of this region. This region also served as historic natural trade route.

5.2 Plateaus

Central plateau extends from Dekemhare-Teraemni road in the south to Aditekelezan-Zaghir in the north. Major rivers of Eritrea originate from this plateau. Emba-Tekera (2579 m) is the highest peak in this region. The central plateau occupies an important geographical location in the country. Major accommodation and communication facilities are relatively developed in this plateau. The suitable climatic condition is a component of attractiveness in this region. The outskirts of the region is covered with trees making it calm from windy conditions bringing the area a decent, undisrupted weather almost throughout the year. Asmara the capital city of Eritrea is located in this region. The city's tourism significance is widely notable. Thus, it acts as a major tourism attraction site (Efrem 2010; Kubrom and Yonas 2010).

5.3 Lowlands of Eritrea

In Eritrea the lowlands are found in the western and eastern parts of the country separated by the highlands, i.e. Western lowland and Eastern lowlands. The western lowland is not as significant as the Eastern lowlands.

5.4 Eastern lowlands

The Eastern lowland is low-lying strip of land along the Red Sea coast. It has an average elevation of less than 500m. They are nearly flat plains covered by sandy alluvium brought by flash floods and sheet wash from the escarpment. There are a series of alluvial fans. The hot desert-like sandy landscape lying in between the coastal area in the east and towering escarpment to the west has given the plain a unique and myth appearance for the tourists who are interested in viewing sand hills.

The Denakil Depression, one of the lowest and hottest points on the planet is located to the southern part of the Eastern escarpments. This Depression which is 100 meters below sea level with a temperature over 50° Centigrade is part of the Great Rift Valley, which runs through Eritrea. The vast salt plains, the volcanoes and other strange salt and mineral shapes make this place unique. It is very inhospitable climate and people interested to visit this place could only be with the academic reasons and tourists which are thrill seekers. Adventure Safaris focused on the unusual through harsh natural environment. The Denakil Depression has also a good amount and potential of generating geothermal energies. Thus, the energy researchers, study groups and companies may travel and survey the area, which in turn can facilitate business tourism in the region (Yohanns 2006). Some limitations though need to be addressed as the place has poor transportation and accommodation facilities which hinders the tourism and energy activities of the region.

5.5 Eritrean escarpments

The Eritrean escarpment is tectonic in origin caused by series of faulting and steep faulting. Later, it has been modified and roughened by strong erosion. The resulting dissected and rugged terrain has produced a spectacular and majestic landscape with breath-taking wilderness beauty. This Escarpment providing spectacular views from the highland plateau to the coastal plains has strong attraction to the visitors. Some parts of the escarpments have a historic significance as they served as natural guides for foreign travelers and invaders in the past. As the escarpments of Eritrea receive rainfall twice a year, they are almost evergreen throughout the year. Thus, the natural beauty and forestry has facilitated the area to be home for diverse

wild animals, birds and flora species. This amazing scenery is added to the presence of hot springs and varied temperature. Thus, this area could have a potential for outdoor activities such as bang jumping, parachuting and air gliding, satisfying the tourists with various appetite and taste. The scenic beauty and diverse fauna and flora beauty can also be a factor for further incentive for more tourist visitors. The escarpments of Eritrea are the most prolific landscapes of Eritrea which can be a driving force for the development of tourism in Eritrea as they have the components and materials for different types of tourism and travel activities. The main part of the escarpments which is dominantly acting as a tourism site is the Semenawi Bahri at the eastern part of the escarpments.

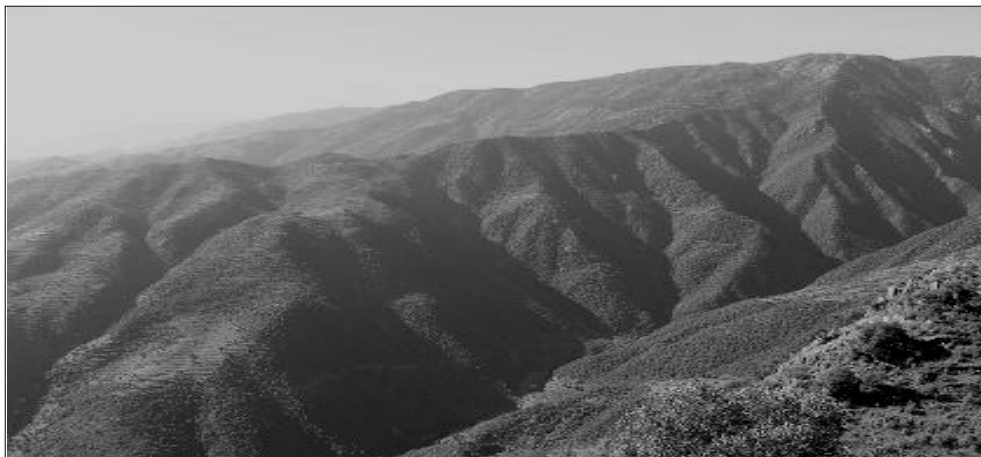


Fig. 2: The Semenawi Bahri (Eritrean Green Belt).

Semenawi Bahri is a region in the eastern escarpment which extends from Biet Giorghis through the slopes of Adi-Nefas and Sealezghi, Emba Seiat (Eastern side of Quazien). It has an abundance of bird life and numerous species of plants. Its scenery is stunning lying beautifully making the green belt one of the ideal places for tourism activities in Eritrea.

Among the major tourism attraction roads that Eritrea boasts of is the Filfil-Massawa road. This newly built road is an outstanding accomplishment among the various infrastructure projects undertaken by the government of Eritrea (Petros 2010; Hagos 2010; Kubrom and yonas 2010). What makes this road very important is that, it is a part of the Eritrean green belt region, which gets rainy season twice a year. For that reason the road is always green and the forestry is very thick. With such thick forestry that covers every square inch of the surroundings, one can imagine the variety of wildlife that uses the area as a heaven. All of these summed up with the unpolluted natural scenery while descending towards Massawa makes the road one of the must-visit places in Eritrea.

In Meg'o which is 43 km from Asmara, the view attracts and observes the wonders of Semenawi Bahri in every direction. Sabur which overlooks the lush forests of Filfil valley simply amazes tourists with large number of sought birds, which seem to be everywhere. Visitors cannot fail to experience the soothing sound of birds that bring peace and delight. Wildlife species like Leopard, bushbuck, Klipspringer, Greater Kudu, and a number of bird species have ascertained recently (Hagos 2010).

Just by the side of the road upon starting, the beautiful scenic perspective of forestry and mystic condition is a huge writing, which says, Take nothing but photos, and Leave nothing but footprints. Indeed, the place is so tempting that everyone would want something but of course would ruin the beauty and it would be so polluting to leave some waste behind. This region is designated as a Protected Area and will be developed into a National Park in the future.

6. Climatic pattern and its significance in tourism

Climate is one of the important geographical factors that determines and affects the activity of people. Climate has a major impact on the tourism sector of any country. Eritrea is a tropical country with significant physical diversity. It is characterized by highlands and lowlands. Thus, its climate is influenced by its tropical location and physical diversity. The most important factors which influence the climate of Eritrea are latitude and altitude. The mean annual temperature of the country ranges from less than 15°C in the highlands to about 40°C in the lowlands. There are places that experience extreme conditions of temperature, like the Denakil Depression, where the temperature condition is over 50°C. The extreme heat can affect the movement of tourists, but it can also attract a huge number of tourists who are thrill seekers. Because of the difference in altitude, different parts of the country experience variation in temperature. For example, Massawa which is located in the eastern lowland of the country with an altitude of 8 meters above sea level has a tropical climate (locally known as Kolla). The town of Ghindae which has an altitude of 962 meters above sea level experiences a sub-tropical climate (weinedega). The capital city of Asmara which is located in the highlands at an altitude of 2321 meters above sea level enjoys a temperate climate (dega). Thus, as one moves upward from Massawa through Ghindae to Asmara he/she can feel three different climatic conditions such as tropical, sub tropical and temperate climates within few hours. Because of this, the country can provide the visitors a chance to experience "Three seasons in Two hours", which cannot be found in other countries easily (Efrem 2010).

The Eritrean coast is a dry and arid area, with mild beauty that is appreciated by many people. The annual rainfall at Massawa is about 173 mm. The daily maximum temperature ranges between 29°C and 40°C and average humidity ranges between 54 per cent and 78 per cent.

There are no climatic records for the islands, but it is assumed that the temperature is higher and rainfall is lower. The lower rain fall in the coastal area and the small nature of the majority of the islands results in very limited and localized water supplies, which is of major consideration (Nielson 2008).

The mean annual temperature on the eastern slopes of the escarpment is 25°C. Along the Red Sea and on the offshore islands it rises to 31°C. At the Denakil Depression temperature ranges between 38°C to 50°C. The difference in temperature between the hot and the relatively cold season is about 5°C to 10°C. The mean daily duration of maximum possible sun light for the month of the year ranges between 11 hours a day in December to 13 hours in June; with daylight virtually constant throughout the year, seasonal changes in day light vary by only about an hour.

7. Sea-scape and coastal configuration

Eritrea, bestowed with more than 1216 km of mainland coastline and more than 350 islands and islets with an additional coastline of more than 1950 km. It is characterized by an array of highly distinguished marine and coastal ecosystems. These ecosystems incorporate a variety of habitats tourism industry; the sandy beaches and the colorful coral reef communities that attract tourists for snorkeling and diving.

At a national level, future tourism in Eritrea heavily relies on the coastal environment. The establishment of different tourism centers, hotels, resorts, ecotourism opportunities and related supporting facilities; diving centers, marinas and recreation centers pulls in the tourism activities towards the coastal environment.

Different from many coastal environments of the world, the pristine and unpolluted waters of Eritrea draw the attention of many beach and sea hobbyists. Accordingly, as one of the leading resources, the government is working conscientiously on developing and expanding coastal tourism, for it to play its role in building the national economy.

The Eritrean coastal configuration and seascape is immerse and diverse. The coastal line is bordered by deserted unspoiled and hot beaches. It also has natural bays and harbors which are a unique characteristics in the coastal lines of the Red sea. Marvelous landscapes which are formed by sand dunes, volcanic surfaces and salty features are distinctive features in the coastal line of Eritrea.

The Eritrean coastline has all the qualities of an idyllic holiday destination. In the north lies endless stretches of soft undulating sands, bounded by dramatic mountains and the Red sea. The historic south offers, natural harbors and volcanic islands bathed by limpid waters. All these are the forgotten paradise of Eritrea's coast line areas (MOT). The coastal line of Eritrea is largely dominated by the landscape, harbors and bays which are naturally formed.

7.1 Islands

There are about 350 islands in Eritrea. They vary in size from tiny islets of about 50 meters in length, to the giant island of Dahlak Kabir that is over 60 km long and 642 km² in area with eight inhabited villages in the islands. Most of the islands i.e. 78 per cent (276) are less than 1 km² in area and have little relevance except as supplement to the main possibilities for tourism. Another 63 islands are between one to ten km² in area and offer some possibilities for development. Fifteen of the islands have an area of over 10 km² while 59 per cent (209) of these islands lie in the well-known Dahlak Archipelago offshore from Massawa, the remaining lesser known islands (south along the coast as far as the southern border) should not be ignored especially when coastal infrastructure developed (Eritrea Horizons 2010,34).

More than 200 of Eritrea's islands belong to the Dahlak Archipelago which forms the natural gateway of Eritrea, guarding the approaches to the modern part of Massawa and the ancient one of Adulis, the larger island Dahlak Kabir, covering several Sq.Km is one of the most suited for development as a tourist resort. This is due to the fact that the island is endowed with natural and man- made attractions. Among these potential attractions include 365 cistern rocks which are well structured, the

500 hundred years old necropolis of gravestone carried with beautiful kufie script and an interesting people who were thought as descendants of Nigeria intermarried with local settlers in that area (Yohanns 2006).

So far as tourists are concerned, Dahlak islands are attractive to visit, even if the transport and accommodations are still in a rather initial stage. The diving and bird life are the major attractions.

According to Ministry of Tourism the islands open for tourists are: Dessie, Durehalla, Duri, Dehul, Noera, Harat and Dahlak Kebir. Besides, the above mentioned islands, there are 13 additional islands open for tourists. These are: Aderbara, Shuma, Ajuje, Dardes, Aukan, Hawatib, Esratu, Bulisar, Madat, Delef, Tore and Durgham. These islands have relatively calm waters, unpolluted and clear continental shelf and diverse marine life (Eritrea Horizons 2010,6-7 and 30-34).

The waters of the Eritrean coast are shallow and relatively safe for swimming. There are beaches on both the mainland coast and islands, very suitable for recreation and family retreat. Thus, beach resort and recreation can be developed easily. With its expensive coastline, numerous islands and relatively calm waters with steady winds in some areas, the shore and marine environment of the country offers significant potential for water based tourism. Tourists visit islands of Eritrea in small numbers. Fair share of international tourists arrives to the islands and are amazed with the attractions they offer. The most visited islands of Eritrea are stated in the Tab. 3.

Tab.3: Island visitors by year.

Island Name	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	Total
Dahlak	146	454	315	434	373	1722
Dessie	406	580	506	543	486	2521
Nakura	27	102	102	64	91	386
Asaraka	47	191	116	36	104	494
Shuma	94	240	134	89	116	673
Madot	0	465	373	458	461	1757

Source: MOT, Department of Statistics 2010.

8. Importance of Archaeological endowments in tourism

Eritrea is one of the countries having largest concentration of the archaeological heritage in Africa. The Geographical location and Geological formation of the nation attract the human being since Pleistocene period until recent. The site Buya, famous for the discovery of the Homo-Heidelberg located in the southern part of Eritrea comes under the east African rift valley (Melake 2008,5-6), the ancient port city of Adulis in the Gulf of Zula is a natural harbour dated back to the early Christian era, the historic city Qohaito in the southern plateau, the well planned city and stela of Metera, Deber'bizen monastery of the Christian monks, the colonial built heritage of Massawa and Asmara are the important attractive archaeo-tourism centre of the country which attracts people from different corners of the world. Each site has its own inherent uniqueness in the form of material culture and geographical location. The southern parts of the country possess more archaeological sites in comparison with the rest part of the country. If anyone can visit the major archaeological site he

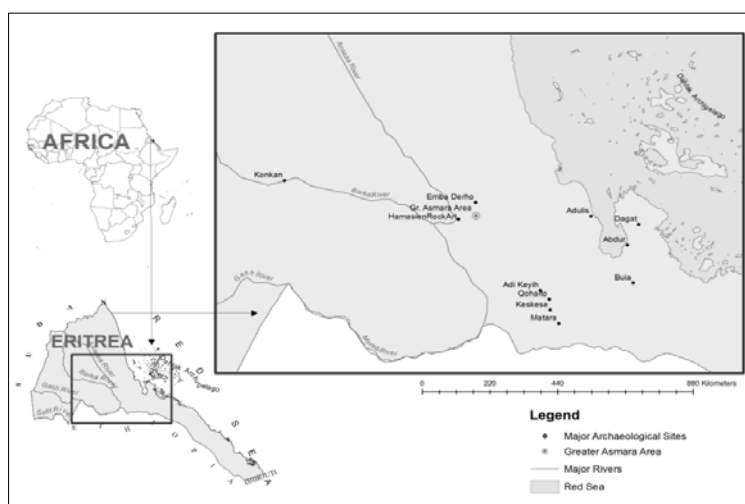
or she can easily understand the story of the rise and fall of civilization in this country from the prehistoric period to the early historic period as well as the phases of incipient urbanism through successive growth, culmination, decline, transformation to complete de-urbanization (Fattovich 1988,85;1997,484-489; Shillington 1995).

This paper throws light on the geo-archaeological potentiality of Eritrea on tourism. In this study we have discussed the geo-archaeological condition of the country from the time of prehistoric period to the historic period.

The fossil remains revealed from the Buya now kept in the National museum of Eritrea became most attractive tourist point for the inbound as well as out bound tourist. Many people, particularly the researcher of different country made Buya as the tourist destination. The site not only attracts people for its potential for research in the human evolution but also the land escarpment itself is more charming for adventurous tourism (Lalmba 2010).

The rock art shelter of the southern part of the country gives first hand information about the environment of the region from the prehistoric time to the historic period. The depiction of hump less and humped cattle, camels, donkey etc. in the rock art shelter panels associated with human figurine and other abstract motifs itself gives a message about the socio-economic life of the region in general and pastoralism in particular (Clark 1954; Brandt and Carder 1987,194-213; Schmidt and Curtis 2008, 49-61; Smith 1992). The important sites of the southern region are the rock art shelters of Qohaito, Hesmele, Hawatsu, Dera' Hawatsu etc. The landscapes of these sites are praise worthy for their beauty and are the place of tourism.

Fig. 3: Eritrea: Location of major archeological site.



The Sembel archeological site located in the southern outskirts of the city is easily accessible by arteries of roads and this can be taken as an incentive for the prospective archeological visitors. Apart from the aforementioned site, there are also sites in and around Asmara including Maitemenai, Embaderho, Tsada kiristian and Maichehot. In the excavation at Sembel within the greater Asmara area yielded

rich archaeological material culture dated to approximately 500 BC or much earlier by the archaeologist (Anfray 1967; Schmidt and Curtis 2001,849-59; 2008,110-126). These sites are now became the interested tourist destination in Asmara. All the major sites of archaeological importance are located in Fig.3.

8.1 Qohaito

Qohaito site is located in (Lat. 14° 51'58"N to Long. 39°25'27"E; MSL 2615 m) 15 km east of Adi-Keih and 120 km south of Asmara. Today the plateau is inhabited by Saho ethnic group of Cushitic speaking community. According to the Saho ethnic group 'Qohaito' means 'rock', due to the rocky environment of the place. Qohaito is important for its highly elevated mountain (second highest plateau in the region), and enchanting windy climate and scenic beauty and strategic location. It has played a crucial role in the 30 years of Eritrean struggle for independence. In addition to that it is the center of trade and communication during Axumite civilization. The plateau area is of 17 km long from south to north and 4 km from wide east to west, and preserves hundreds of archaeological sites, out of them 11 are of rock art site, which found surrounding the plateau. Between 700 B.C and 700 A.D Qohaito site grow dramatically, but some researchers said its civilization extended before the ancient Metera site. So, further research and excavation required to identify whether Qohaito is older than Metera or not. Generally, Qohaito has feasible for understanding ancient complex society in the northern Horn of Africa based on the survey conducted by German archaeological mission to Eritrea and Adi-Keih archaeological survey project.



Fig. 4: Qohaito Structural Remains.

In this ancient city, structures are found standing in columns of monumental arrangements possibly temples. Among Qohaito's most important ruins is the so called temple of "Mariam Wokiro" that was built on a rectangular plain on a solid platform and may have been the site of a very early Christian church. Near the Mariam Wokiro temple lies a tomb discovered in 1894 by Germans, nicknamed "Mekaber Ghibtse" or the Egyptian tomb. The distinctive features of this tomb are the two quatrefoil (flower shaped) crosses curved on the inside wall. There also

exists a dam dating back to first century A.D and it is still in operation for the local Saho people around. This dam goes by the name Safira dam. It is 67 m long and 60 m deep. The longevity of the dam is credited to the masonry skill of its builders. On one of those walls of the dam, there exists an intricate Geez inscription which consist 79 words. It is also assumed to be the longest inscription yet found in geez. The site is unique in nature, as they spread over a large area of land with diversified historical remnant and a place for heritage as well as eco-tourism (Schmidt and Curtis 2008,287-300 and 359, 367, 370, 376).

8.2 Belew-Kelew / Metera

This site is situated 20 km south of Qohaito, and south east of the town Senafe is a most important historical site. The site is known as Metera or Belew Kelew. It is famous for its well town planning and the tall stele of 3rd century AD. The material culture of the site dated back to the 5th century BC. The ruined of the site is spreads over an area of about 20 hectares (Anfray 1967,7;33-88).

One of Metera's most important features is its enigmatic stele. Unique in Eritrea, the stele is known for its pagan, pre-Christian symbol of a south Arabian divinity, a disc over a crescent. Standing 5m tall, the stele has an inscription near the middle in Geez. An unknown king dedicated the stele to his ancestors who had subjugated the 'mighty people of Awanjalon, Tsebelan'.

One of the more remarkable things in Metera is its architectural richness and material culture of indigenous as well as foreign. It has been identified by the historian Kobishchanov as the ancient city of Koleo, which currently seem to be more acceptable theory that the one put forward in the 1890s by Bent, that Koleo was Qohaito. Metera with all its mystery could be a wonderland for local as well as the outsiders for its archaeological heritage (Schmidt and Curtis 2008, 311-20).



Fig. 5: Auksumite Stela at

Metera.

8.3 Adulis

Adulis is laying 59km to the south of modern port city Massawa, near the village of Foro, sub-zone of Zula, once numbering among the greatest ports of the ancient world. Adulis is mentioned in the Periplus of the Erythrean Sea, over two millennia ago, was an important port through which much trade with the African hinterland took place. As the Roman Empire declined, Adulis assumed a great significance as the primary trading port of the Axumite Empire, which reached its height between 4th and 7th century AD. It was an important port of the Abyssinian Empire. Adulis is connected to the Axum region of Ethiopia via Qohaito, Metera. A highly complicated path through the mountains leads the way to Axum (Peacock and Blue 2007, 1-7; Schmidt and Curtis 2008, 301-309). The basaltic constructions that have been unearthed from the sandy soils are the chief focus of the site. Adulis is considered as a major tourist attraction in the region. Nonetheless, Adulis and its vicinity, especially Zula are the historical sites that are attracting a number of tourists comparing with other historical sites in the country. It is hoped that Adulis will eventually be declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The number of tourists that visited the three major tourist sites is increasing steadily after 2009. The data shows the increasing trend of visits by tourists to these sites. The reason could be allowing access to these sites after the border conflict, rehabilitation of the transportation facilities to the sites and growing stability and security of the country (Tab. 4).

Tab. 4: International tourist arrivals to major Archaeological sites in 2009.

Sites visited	Adulis	Qohaito	Metera & Keskesse
Number of visitors	96	100	199
Number of visitors in first quarter of 2010	37	41	63
Total	133	141	262

Source: MOT, Department of statistics 2010.

9. Religious monasteries

There are numerous Christian religious monasteries in Eritrea. These places attract thousands of local and also outsiders for religious purpose every year. The ancient monastery of Debere- Bizen is one of them. Debre Bizen Monastery was founded by monk Abune Philipos, who is rumored to have said that he would "rather stare into the face of a lion than into a woman's eyes." It is for this reason that you will find a sign at the foot of the rocky path that reads "No Females beyond This PointOf Any Species" and the monks don't always treat visitors with smiling face. This monastery is visited by thousands of local Christians on the 14th of August each year. This place is found 2500 foot vertical ascent from a small town of Nefasit, halfway between the capital city and Massawa. Debre Bizen's library is famous for its over 1000 illustrated manuscripts; its 500 years old library holds a number of manuscripts, some written as early as the 1200s. The monks have had to defend it with their lives, so they have reason to fear unknown visitors. Only male visitors are allowed to the monastery. Besides this monastery the other monastery of the country are of Debre-Libanos, Debre-Dehuan, Debre-Menkerios and Debre-Sina which attract tourists from different corners of the world (Eritrea Horizons 2006, 2007, 2010; Mery and Leonardo 1995, 34).

Tab. 5: International tourist visitors to major Monasteries.

Monastery	2007	2008	2009
Debre Sina	114	127	153
Debre Bizen	66	94	105
Debre Libanos	3	7	16

Source: Ministry of Tourism, 2010.

The above mentioned monasteries apart from being religious places, could also serve as important tourist sites (Petros 2010).

10. Colonial heritage: Asmara art deco and unique monuments

Asmara was essentially built between 1935 and 1941 when Eritrea's Italian colonizers used the city as a blank canvas to design and build their own urban utopia in East Africa. Although the Italians occupied the region they called Eritrea (after an ancient Greek word meaning red) in 1889, a massive influx of Italians in the colony's capital after 1935 necessitated development on an unprecedented scale. In just six years, the population grew from 4000 to 45,000. Asmara was transformed into the most modern city in Africa. Apart from its mild climate, its long history and beautiful colonial buildings make Asmara a very important tourist center in Africa. The Harenet Avenue and also the Sematat Avenue which lie at the heart of the city are majorly consisted by such type of buildings. The Liberation Avenue is well known for its partying culture. The Liberation Avenue of Asmara houses many important buildings.

Al Khulafa Al Rashiudin Mosque is one of the major tourist attractions and religious places in the city of Asmara. The Al Khulafa Al Rashiudin Mosque is located in the Peace Street of Asmara in the close proximity of the much coveted markets. The palatial mosque was built some sixty-nine years ago in the year 1938. The building structure is majestic and most of the daily visitors are worshipers, there are also a large number of tourists (Petros 2010).

Asmara has been settling fast and the tourism industry is earning handsome revenue. There are ample tourist attractions in Asmara of which, the Synagogue of Asmara is one. Nda' Mariam Orthodox Church is also located within the city. The Nda' Mariam Orthodox Church is also called as, the QdistMariam Church, St. Mary's Cathedral at Asmara or the Cathedrale Ortodossa di Nda Mariam. This beautiful Orthodox Church is located in the center of the city and its architecture is such that the four corners of this edifice point to the four directions of the city. Though a Christian religious place, it also comprises a major tourist interest in Eritrea.

In 1922, the Cathedral of Asmara was built. The architecture of the cathedral resembles Lombard-Romanesque style of architecture. Cathedral of Asmara is an important Eritrean attraction. The main attraction of this cathedral is the bell tower constructed in the Gothic style. One can go up this 52-meter tall bell tower by the steep stairs to get a magnificent view of the city. The melodious sound of the bell chimes can be heard from distant parts of the city (Mery and Leonardo 1995; Eritrea Horizons 2010, 25).

As Asmara is considered as the uniquely built city of Africa, with marvelous buildings and architectural designs, it is obvious that the city itself is a huge attraction site for

different tourists and visitors. Tourists who visited the city always vie to come again. The city's moderate climate, wonderful citizens, architectural settings are some of the preferences of most tourists which the city can easily offer. These major attributes are the richness of the city, and thus, they should be properly managed and preserved as they could attract all sorts of tourists and generate huge amount of economic advantages to its people and the country.

10.1 Massawa

Massawa is a beautiful port city with vast history. Because of its strategic location, Massawa has attracted foreign powers since early 16th century. The building styles represent the culture and history of the people. Most of the buildings in Massawa are of Italian style, Arabian style, the influence of Turks and Egyptians style. These styles of buildings are one of a kind, so they have lot of admirers from domestic as well as from abroad. These buildings are major tourist destinations in support to the attractive coastal area (Eritrea Horizons 2010, 6-7).

11. Steam locomotive and tourism

This site is one of the rarest yet valuable tourist sites in Africa if not in the world. The construction of the Eritrean Railways was commenced in 1887 and was finalized 41 years after under the supervision of an Italian engineer Mr. Emilio Oliver. The total length of the railway from the port city Massawa to Akordat via Asmara and Keren was 306.4kms. Its route ascends from Sea level -Massawa- to an altitude of 2394 meters in Asmara and descends to an altitude of 606 meters in Akordat (Eritrea Horizons 2010, 27; Tekleyos 2010).

These sharp fluctuations in altitude within a short distance coupled with the beautiful scenery make the journey so captivating. "This [The Eritrean Railway] is one of the most spectacular rail lines in the world, and climbs almost 2400 meters in only just over 100 kilometers amidst breathtaking mountainous scenery," wrote worldsteam.com, a website dedicated to steam engine enthusiasts.

Tab 6: Steam Engine Train Travelers in 2009.

Train	Foreigners	Eritreans
Steam engine	717	5448
Lotorina	122	28

Source: MOT department of statistics.

12. Monuments and national museum

Museums introduce tourists to the history, culture and environment of the country and are educational for residents, especially students and young people. Museums in Eritrea though few in number are fully organized so that tourists can get an excellent idea about the historical background and the long lost cultural heritage. Asmara, the capital city houses only one museum of Eritrea, the Asmara National Museum. This museum was originally housed in the present day state Palace in Asmara (Lalmba 2010).

The Asmara National Museum is located opposite to the Selam hotel of Asmara. The main artifacts on display are the findings from different parts of Eritrea. There are a large number of scrolls in Geez, which were made from Sabean material. Tourists

can also check out the rich collection of the remains from the Adulis region. Adulis is a port dating back to ancient times, The Adulis findings belong to the era between first century AD and 7th century AD. The port was used by the Axumite people. There is also a famous old skull which is dated as one million years that was found in Buya region.

Tab. 6: Tourist visitors of national museum in Asmara.

Months	2007		2008	
	Domestic	Foreigners	Domestic	Foreigners
January	145	19	192	22
February	105	22	225	24
March	295	13	328	10
April	205	15	219	21
May	350	18	463	15
June	145	12	130	8
July	101	9	86	18
August	180	20	126	39
September	150	11	195	6
October	299	23	155	5
November	149	7	96	0
December	175	26	133	4
Total	2299	195	2348	172

Source: National Museum of Eritrea, 2010.

13. Conclusion and Recommendations

Eritrea is a beautiful country with fascinating treasure of history comprises most of the Axumite Kingdom, which was one of the great four world powers of ancient time, where one can visit the evidence of ancient civilization. It is a wonderful land of nature and culture, a land that has a heritage that stretches back to the far distant days of human history. The legacy of Eritrean history, monasteries, ancient sites and monuments, dense archaeological sites, material culture of various type and rock art sites are reminders of glorious past that goes back to three millennium years. In addition to 40000 archaeological sites, material culture of various type and rock art sites, Eritrea owns a divers natural features, cold atmospheric rugged mountain peaks of Emba Soira (3010 m), Forest of Semenawi Bahri (green belt), Denakil Depression (300 feet below sea level), big trees like Ficus-Vasta, off shore Islands, coral reefs and beaches along the coastal line which extends 1216 km.

Although Eritrea possesses tourist attractive natural landscapes, Geo-Archaeological and historical sites, it gets little benefits from the tourism sector. Eritrea is believed to be the place of human origin and the place of strategic geographical rift valley which make it an attractive country of the world. This great fault zones witnessed an expansion of ancient human kind especially from the coastal areas of Eritrea. This has been supported by some archaeological findings in Denakil Depression in a place called Buya with one million years old human fossils (Buya Man).

It possesses breath taking landscape sceneries incorporating escarpment, mountains, depressions and extensive plains. Geo-archeological sites seeing can be the major tourist activities in the escarpments. Bang jumping and air gliding are

also a prospective for thrill seeking visitors to these areas. As these places are endowed with hot springs, health tourism and leisure tourism can also be carried out in these places. The climatic condition is also another factor which changes abruptly in just two hours from Asmara to Massawa, where one can experience three seasons in two hours. Eritrea possess clean and unpolluted climate favorable for the prospective visitors. Eritrea also has a landscape ranging from three thousand meters above the sea level in Mount Soira to below hundred meters in Denakil depression. The different landforms, unique structures, changing environment and attractive sceneries are some of the attributes that the country possesses. The above mentioned Histo-Geo-Archaeological sites of this country have great potentials for the development of tourism industry.

In addition to these, as the country is close to the Middle East and Europe, it has an advantage over other far off countries regarding tourist preferences. Thus, Eritrea being a young nation has all the incentives for the tourism industry to develop easily. The country has all the potentials to develop as a tourist nation in the near future. But having said the aforementioned points, there are also draw backs and constraints in the development of tourism in Eritrea which needs mentioning.

The tourist attraction sites are still not been fully exploited to such an extent that it would rejuvenate the tourism sector and the reasons are multidimensional.

- The devastating war for independence has greatly crippled the road networks, communication services and social services.
- The more recent border conflict with Ethiopia and political stalemate that followed has diverted the human power and capital to the war effort. This also has aggravated the economic condition of the local people hence lowering the frequency of the local people visiting the sites leading to lower income for preserving and developing the sites.
- The confrontation with Yemen regarding the disputing islands of Hanish has also affected and imprinted a negative mark in the coastal tourism of the country.
- The transportation and accommodation sectors are not well developed to facilitate the movement and expectations of visitors and tourists especially out-side the capital city.
- There is lack of properly trained labor force. Even though, there are efforts made to increase the human resources of the tourism sector, they are either inadequate or not properly managed.
- There is lack of cooperation and coordination among different sectors of the government in general and departments of the tourism sector in particular.
- The public awareness about travel and tourism within Eritrea is very low. There are efforts made by the promotion department and Ministry of information to acquaint citizens and visitors, but these efforts are minimal.

In order to develop tourism in any part of the world, there should be proper planning and management of the sector (Ray 1998). Therefore, for the development of the tourism industry in Eritrea, the above mentioned limitations and constraints needs to be addressed properly. Thus, the following recommendations and suggestions are advisable.

13.1 Recommendations:

- As per the information we gathered from various sectors, there is lack of coordination and cooperation among various sectors of government in general

and the tourism sector in particular. Hence some kind of mechanisms to alleviate this poor level of interaction should be implemented. The different sectors of government and tourism sector should have a common network of understanding and guidelines in working to improve the tourism industry.

- There are lacks of properly deployed skilled man power, tour operators and travel agents who are incapable of promoting the attraction sites and accommodations as per the expectation. Therefore, the tour operators and travel agents should be encouraged by government to execute their full potential in order to promote tourism development in the country. Furthermore, the tour operators, managers and CEO should promote professionalism among their subordinate to cultivate and nurture the facilitation and speedy tourism activities. Frequent lectures, seminars and other measures to increase the awareness of the public and other service sectors like tour guides, dive-boat operators, hotel managers, car-hire operators and other bodies should also be conducted.
- As much as possible, some governmental intervention in subsidizing the cost of transportation, accommodations and other related services should be executed in promoting domestic tourism.
- There should be a proper budget and investment provided and allotted in preserving and collecting historical/archeological sites and components by the National Museum and other concerned bodies. The rehabilitation and conservation programs of the architectural sites should also grow in a higher intensity as they encourage city tour circuits and architectural studies.
- The State of Eritrea, particularly the National Museum of Eritrea should work for the inclusion of many archeological sites of Eritrea in the world heritage sites for the advantages of financial helps and political boost.
- Well managed and documented information related to site seeing should be dispensed by tour operators and major hotels in the form of brochures. Furthermore, general information on how to get permission paper and other legalities that goes with it should be clearly provided.
- Since the Eritrean Red Sea is endowed with a number and varieties of fishes and coral reefs which are not found anywhere else on this planet, Eritrea has to develop deep Sea diving, scuba diving and snorkeling industries along the coastal area. Beach resorts and swimming activities should also be encouraged to develop as they are part of coastal tourism. Therefore, this gives the country huge potential on coast and underwater tourism.
- Since clean and protected environment is required for tourism sustainability "Take nothing but pictures leave nothing but foot prints" should be the guiding principle (Bhatia 1995).
- Finally, suggestion has been forwarded for further research to strengthen the findings of the study pertaining to the Geo-Archaeological endowments and the tourism development in Eritrea.

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GEO-ARCHAEOLOGICAL ENDOWMENTS AND THE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ERITREA

Summary

Eritrea is endowed with numerous tourist attracting sites ranging from various natural sites to historical sites and cultural heritages. It possesses breath taking landscape sceneries incorporating escarpment, mountains, depressions and extensive plains. Geo-archeological sites seeing can be the major tourist activities in the escarpments. Bang jumping and air gliding are also a prospective for thrill seeking visitors to these areas. As these places are endowed with hot springs, health tourism and leisure tourism can also be carried out in these places. The climatic condition is also another favorable factor which changes abruptly in just two hours from Asmara to Massawa, where one can experience three seasons in two hours. The different landforms, unique structures, changing environment and attractive sceneries are some of the attributes that the country possesses.

The people of Eritrea are peace loving and welcoming to any outsider. Though, Eritrea does not have a well-developed infrastructure. But the security and safety of visitors and tourists is the major advantage the country has over other nations. The government of Eritrea, alongside its ministries and regional administrations, is trying to improve the transportation and accommodation facilities all over the country. The Massawa-Assab road has been constructed to improve the transport network between the two ports. It is built side by side to the coast in consideration of it becoming a major tourist attraction site. The newly tarred Filfil-Solomuna road is also acting as a network for improving the tourism activity in the green belt. Other road networks also have the potential to be corridors for the beautiful tourist sites of the country. The accommodation/service sector is gradually developing. As the country has well established facilities which the Italians built, there is a good infrastructure of service sector especially in the capital city (Asmara) in which the development efforts are well placed to go forward. The accommodating nature of the people can be another factor for such development. As the country is close to the Middle East and Europe, it has an advantage over other far off countries regarding tourist preferences. Thus, Eritrea being a young nation has all the incentives for the tourism industry to develop easily. The country has all the potentials to develop as a tourist nation in the near future.

Eritrea has a strategic location, the geo-archeological and historical sites of the country engrave the history of many generations from Europe, Asia and Africa which are waiting to be explored and discovered. These sites can be a major attraction sites for historians and academicians, as they are imprinted with huge heritage potentials. They can also be used for tourists interested in site seeing activities. Above all, they are the identity of Eritrean history and culture and thus if properly managed and presented, a large number of domestic tourists can be interested in visiting them.

