

## Ethiopia and Tourism II

By G.E. Gorfu

When I visited Lallibela some four years ago there was a newly opened airport and newly paved all whether road from the airport, some twenty-five kilometers up hill all the way to the top of the mountain. All that was great. But once we reached at the mountain, the road suddenly ended. We needed to walk on foot from the hotel to the monasteries and to each of dozen or so site seeing places, which took the best part of the following day.

Developing tourism means training and advising the local people to come up with means of transportation to save tourist the hassle of walking on foot on those dusty and dirty roads, often littered with trash and human excrements. Mules or horses could serve the purpose. Developing tourism means training the local people and authorities to clean up the dirty roads and plant beautiful trees and flowering bushes all along the tourist tracks.

The only stores selling any keepsakes were located at the airport, and it was just one or two stores at the most. These were well stoked with parchment paintings and other good products, but the site was too far away from the actual place where these stores should have been located. Where could additional stores be created? We have a suggestion:

After seeing one site and walking to the next, there were hosts of beggars lined up along the route. Developing tourism means creating a 'Rescue Mission' type facility where all these beggars could be housed and taken care of. The spots these beggars now occupy are the ideal places for building small stores or kiosks that greet tourists with the various artifacts to buy and take home. If between five to ten small kiosks were built outside each site, for the more than fifteen or so sites, counting the various churches in Lallibela, Bete Mariam, and Neakuto-Leab, one can quickly create between a hundred to a hundred and fifty stores around these sites for vending the types of artifacts listed earlier.

As was mentioned, from a single motif of a church, a holy pattern, a cross, etc. scores of handcrafts can be produced to sell to tourists to take home. Developing tourism means bringing the artisans and vendors from Markato in Addis Ababa, where the concentration is high, and the competition is stiff, and training and giving them incentives to relocate, not only to Lallibela, but also to Gonder, Axum, and all other tourist sites in the country.

These small kiosks can be put on a low monthly rental, or given out on long leases to enterprising individuals, where they can pay back the material and building costs towards a government guaranteed loan from the national bank over a ten to fifteen year period. As these people work and generate taxes to the local economy, part of that would go towards the housing and taking care of the beggars, cleaning the town, and planting the trees.

When one reads the sad and heartbreaking story of the lions in Addis Ababa zoo being poisoned and killed for lack of revenue, it is clear that officials in the Ministry of Culture and Tourism are napping in soft leather chairs, and do not seem to know what needs to be done to develop the market. Tourism is not just printing cultural photos depicting coffee ceremony, or the clothes and musical instruments of various ethnic groups in Ethiopia. This takes us to marketing for tourists, which we will look into in our next article.

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