



## **Festival of Wonders: How the Ashendye Celebration Boosts Lalibela's Tourism Zemenu Bires**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Ashendye is an annual celebration that takes place in Lasta-Lalibela in August. The objective of this study was to investigate impacts of Ashendye cultural festival on the growth of tourism in Lalibela and its vicinities, Amhara Region, Ethiopia. Descriptive design was used to investigate practices of Ashendye festival celebration while explanatory research design involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches was employed to analyze its impacts on tourism development. The participants were selected using purposive and simple random sampling techniques and were composed of the religious leaders, tourism and culture experts, local guides, and staff from tourist information centers, souvenir shop owners, and local community members. Data had been collected through key informant interviews and focus group discussions for the qualitative approach and survey questionnaire was used for the quantitative approach to collect data from 203 sample respondents. The information gathered from primary and secondary sources was carefully checked, explained, examined, and interpreted using SPSS version 23. The results of the study highlighted Ashendye cultural festival and its dynamic beauty, both in the environmental and performance aspects. The study also revealed that tourism development at the Amhara Region Level is desirable. The Ashendye cultural festival can be influential in tourism development through the enhancement of the social image of the region, the provision of entertainment opportunities, the application of socio-cultural changes, and the triggering of economic development. To ensure that its valuable inputs are sustained, the socio-cultural, economic, environmental, historical, spiritual, educational, and informational dimensions of the festival must be conserved to develop cultural tourism. Based on findings, the study recommended that all stakeholders should collaborate to address management issues and focus on the festival's values for effective cultural tourism development.

**Keywords:** Cultural festival; Intangible cultural heritage; Ashendye festival; Tourism Development; Lalibela

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### **INTRODUCTION**

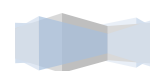
Culture is one of the fastest-growing sectors in the world; according to

UNWTO statistics, over 35% of international travel involves cultural activities, with an annual growth of 15%.

Various studies have confirmed that the development of cultural tourism persuades the growing interest in authentic cultural experiences (UNWTO, 2019). Cultural heritage is recognised as the means of holiday tourism destination that provide separation in all endowed countries in the world (Dagnachew, 2018).

Siyabonga and Lihle (2018) defined intangible cultural heritage to be an abundant and evolving living heritage that keeps diffusing, being transmitted from one generation to the next as it develops and accommodates to its environment. Its constant transmission gives it a relationship between the past, present, and future. Intangible cultural heritage consists of many customs, skills, and practices, including Christmas traditions, festivals, craftsmanship, languages, and culture knowledge with which tourist attractions are associated. Ethnic festival exhibitions by various ethnic communities connect local political and economic needs to national policy concerns that aid in building collaboration among community leaders, national and local festival planners, and participants (Kifleyesus, 2007). Festivities are foundations of cultural and societal interaction that are infused with the culture of the society which serve as major sources of marriage arrangement and morality issues as well as source of pride and development (Fentaw

& Nigus, 2021). Amongst the richest areas with such heritages, Lalibela and its vicinities among the most well-known touristic sites of the region encompassing heritages such as rock-hewn churches, monasteries and festivals (Kebede, 2018). Ashendye is a magnificent festival that marks a unique characteristic of intangible cultural heritage in and around Lalibela. The festival, celebrated during the month of August, marks the culmination of a fortnight's fasting referred to as 'Filseta' to commemorate the resurrection of St. Mary's corpse<sup>1</sup>. Ashendye festival incorporates most of the intangible components of daily life like stories, holidays, family gatherings, celebrations by communities, languages, songs, artistic performances, place traditions, beliefs, rituals, and celebrations (Dagnachew, 2018; Waltenigus, 2018). The cultural values of Ashendye festival encourage peace and harmony between nature and human beings, between women, and in society. It is a celebratory day that is practiced in northern Ethiopia, particularly in the Tigray and Amhara lands, and it is solely a celebration of girls and young women. Ashendye is a cultural festival that usually occurs from August to September and takes anywhere from three days to a month, depending on geographical location; the festival takes shorter periods in towns and longer periods in rural areas



(Dagnachew, 2018). Girls and young women converge on an open area, splitting themselves into small groups and then going around homes to sing, dance, and entertain their people (Waltenigus, 2018). Participants, to whom the festival is dedicated, wear traditional cotton attire (Kemise in Amharic), which is well decorated with exquisite needlework from neck to toe. They style their hair differently based on age and marital status and adorn themselves with jewelry and grass named *Ashendye*. As the end of the two-week fast of *Tsome Filseta*, when the faithful gather to celebrate the Virgin Mary, the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church links the *Ashendye* celebration to religious history (Lasta Woreda Culture and Tourism Office, 2008). *Ashendye*, being an important intangible cultural heritage, is celebrated in Lalibela and the surrounding areas. It is a valuable cultural festival to host communities, governments, and tourism through its role in sustainable use and conservation for coming generations (Dagnachew, 2018). Dagnachew also added that through good management and promotion, *Ashendye* can generate economic gains and preserve environmental, historical, cultural, and spiritual assets, and hence contribute to the development of cultural tourism. The Rock Hewn Churches of Lalibela have been referred to as exceptional

heritage attractions, one of the wonders of the world (Medhin, 2005). Lalibela, once called Roha, was the capital city of Priest King Lalibela, during whose reign these incredible churches were hewn out of one rock. The city and the churches were named after him, and visitors are never left in wonder at their uniqueness (Lalibela Culture and Tourism Office, 2015). Apart from this physical attraction, Lalibela is rich in intangible cultural heritage, including *Beza Kulu Alem*, the Christmas spiritual dance, and *Ashendye* cultural festival. Such cultural or religious festivals are critical to supporting the economy by attracting tourists who spend money (Fang, 2020). Festivals are necessary for tourism promotion because they provide powerful incentives for tourists to travel to Lalibela and its surroundings. *Ashendye* offers a different experience from other sites, and therefore it is vital in tourist attraction to Lalibela. It not only brings in new tourists but also repeat visitors to allow guests to enjoy and discover new cultural experiences (Dagnachew, 2018; Waltenigus, 2018).

The role of cultural festivals in tourism development is an important issue since cultural festivals have the potential to draw visitors and bring economic and social development to host communities. Tadesse (2020) discussed cultural festivals' role in tourism development with respect to the



Ashendye festival in Lalibela, Ethiopia, based on interviews with locals, festival committees, and visitors to obtain data on the festivals' effects on tourism. Results showed that cultural festivals have a positive contribution to local enterprises, generate job opportunities, and promote pride among communities. Another study conducted by Gebremedhin and Gebrehiwot (2019) evaluated the contribution of cultural festivals, such as Ashendye, towards promoting tourism in Lalibela. Based on survey and interview data obtained from participants and local stakeholders, the study established the contribution of the festivals in impacting tourism infrastructure, tourist satisfaction, and destination image. The study evidence revealed that cultural festivals play an important role in promoting tourism since they draw both domestic and international tourists and support cultural exchange.

Mekonnen and Bekele's (2018) study also investigated the role of Ashendye festival in tourism development, reviewing secondary data and conducting interviews with festival organizers and local officials. Their results indicated that the festival plays a substantial role in the regional economy through expenditures by tourists and the creation of jobs, with conservation of cultural heritage and the participation of local inhabitants in festival administration being vital.

In total, the foregoing studies offer perceptive information on the contribution of cultural festivals, such as Ashendye, to the development of tourism in Lalibela. Well-planned festivals are able to draw a wide variety of consumers and boost the economic impact on the community (Jimada, 2014). In order to maintain or raise economic revenues, understanding the attributes of Ashendye that make it attractive to visitors is crucial. An analysis of the tourists' intention to visit cultural festivals will lead promotional and communication efforts. It is necessary to explore these interests for ensuring visitor satisfaction, and this satisfaction can lead to repeat visits and word-of-mouth communication.

Even though there is some research on festivals in the region, there are still gaps in uncovering its contribution to the cultural tourism development. The contribution of the Ashendye festival and how it can be measured using a metric system have not been studied specifically for this festival. Most of the major cultural attractions in Lalibela, Ashendye being one of them, are managed poorly, under promoted, and not well known because of a myriad of problems (Mengistu, 2008).

The present research covered practice, state, documentation, promotion, and protection issues of the Ashendye festival for cultural tourism development. Yet,



there have been limited studies on the contribution of cultural festivals to tourism development in Ashendye, Lalibela, Ethiopia. This contribution is crucial for sustainable tourism development of the area and for the preservation of Ashendye's cultural heritage. This refers to the necessity for additional in-depth research with the purpose of determining the long-term viability and prospective problems of cultural festivals in the region. Hence, the present study focused on exploring the potentials of Ashendye festival and its role in the development of cultural tourism.

### **Undiscovered Benefits of Cultural Festivals for Tourism Growth**

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Cultural festivals allow destinations to promote themselves successfully to investors, tourists, policymakers, and other relevant stakeholders. The initiatives catalyze economic development via inward investment, new business, and higher levels of tourist expenditure. Economic gains also result from enhanced stability and better infrastructure and facilities, which are essential for emerging destinations. Festivals are significant in the host community, providing activity and spending to residents and tourists, thereby enhancing the economic image of the community (Jimada, 2014). Well-organized festivals can aim at different consumers, thereby enhancing the economic impact on the community (O'Sullivan & Jackson, 2000; Kifleyesus, 2007). Festivals promote and celebrate cultural heritage and also stimulate the local economy (Aisyah, 2013; Jimada, 2014). In order to

maintain or maximize economic gains to the community, one must determine the most important festival attributes that are appreciated by tourists. Cultural festivals play a role in tourism development through the facilitation of relationships between locals, volunteers, participants, and visitors in which new skills and experiences can be gained (Abdulkadir, 2018). Festivals add value to attractions through the provision of other activities for tourists and the enhancement of a more favorable destination image. Festivals provide opportunities for locals to become actively involved (Nguyen, 2008).

As Jimada (2014) noted that cultural festivals generate a spirit of celebration, improving the well-being of locals and tourists. To be realized optimally, however, festivals need to be adequately promoted, planned, and managed. Their simplest role is to initiate local economic development by igniting investment, new businesses, and higher tourist expenditure. Economic dividends could also be generated through improved stability and infrastructure, which are vital for emerging destinations (Quinn, 2009).

Cultural festivals are key drivers of tourism and at the heart of most destinations' development and promotion strategies (Drummond et al., 2022). The role of festivals in tourism is long established, becoming more vital for destination competitiveness, and substantiates the co-relation between festivals and tourism (Getz, 2008). Globally, there is growing interest in festivals as economically and socially sustainable attractions with various benefits (Quinn, 2009). Planned festivals are designed with precise aims and implications in mind, and Getz (2008) stresses assessing the implications of these findings for stakeholders and host societies. Justification and measurement of the returns on the incredibly large financial investments in festivals are required.



Festivals are methods of sustainable economic development, such as tourism (Darvishmotevali et al., 2023). Festival tourism, as part of cultural tourism, is developing fast and is a preference for tourists (Horaira & Devi, 2021). The visitors are able to observe the perceptions regarding culture based on history, tradition, food, music, and dance that result in distinctive and long-lasting experiences (Dagnachew, 2018; Getz, 2008).

### **Conceptual framework of the Study**

Cultural festivals are a significant component of tourism development in the world, influencing society and various stakeholders, including local and national governments. Cultural festivals can be utilized as tourism products, with opportunities and challenges. To achieve their beneficial roles in tourism development, cultural festivals must overcome the challenges and maximize available opportunities.

### **Materials and methods**

#### **Description of the study area**

The ashendye cultural festival takes place in and around Lalibela. Lalibela lies in the Lasta woreda of the North Wollo Zone of the Amhara Region of Ethiopia and at an altitude of approximately 2,500 meters (8,200 ft) above sea level. It is the administrative center of Lasta woreda and lies in a hill area about 645 km from Addis Ababa. It has renowned rock-cut monolithic churches and lies on a World Heritage list since 1978. Lalibela is a very important town for the post-medieval and antique as well as medieval civilization of the country of Ethiopia. Lalibela is the second holiest city in the nation for Christians after Axum and a very important pilgrimage center. Unlike Axum, the majority of the populace of Lalibela consists of Ethiopian Orthodox Christians (Kristen et al., 2016). The Lalibela ancient churches date from the 7th to the 13th centuries. The architecture and naming of the churches are globally accepted,

especially by native priests, as a symbolic duplication of Jerusalem (Black, 2023). During the period of Gebre Mesqel Lalibela, who was part of the Zagwe dynasty in the late 12th and early 13th centuries, the town was known by the name Roha. The saint-king earned his title when a bees' swarm surrounded him at birth, which his mother interpreted as a sign of his future kingship.

The majority of the names for places in modern Lalibela and the layout of the rock-hewn churches follow names and protocols Lalibela had acquired growing up in Jerusalem and the Holy Land. The saint has been attributed to having dreamed of Jerusalem and wanting to construct a new Jerusalem as his capital after its recapture by Muslims in 1187. All the churches were carved out of one rock in order to depict spirituality and modesty, and there are a lot of things that are inspired by the Christian faith, including Lalibela's river, the River Jordan. Lalibela was the capital of Ethiopia in the later 13th and 12th century.

#### **Research Methodology**

Explanatory and descriptive research designs were employed in this study. Descriptive approach was employed to observe, describe, and document the prevailing state of cultural festivals for tourism development in Lalibela. Descriptive research, according to Burns and Grove (2003), is employed to provide a clear picture of things as they occur naturally. Explanatory design was employed to analyze the impact of cultural festivals on tourism development (Nunan, 2020).





A mixed-methods design, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, was employed. Harrison et al. (2020) describes that the design involves the collection and integration of both types of data, with separate designs that may have differing philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. The mixed-methods design allows research questions to be more completely answered and enhances the trustworthiness of findings (Bell et al., 2022), allowing triangulation.

The study targeted Ashendye festival attendees, festival organizers, household heads, culture and tourism office professionals of Lalibela, the town of Lalibela's tour guides association members, tourist information center staff, souvenir shop owners, and religious leaders.

A mixed sampling technique was employed for this study. Purposive sampling of key informants for interview and focus group discussion was conducted based on experience and knowledge regarding such cultural festivals as Ashendye. A simple random sampling technique was followed for survey questionnaire administration to prevent any

sort of bias and give equal chance for respondents (Taherdoost, 2016). In the selection of key informants, purposive sampling was followed within the predesignated study area (Maestriperi et al., 2019).

The study population consisted of approximately 600 individuals from respective stakeholders who were aware of the festival and tourism development. In order to choose the sample respondents, Taro Yemane's finite population sampling formula (Yemane, 1967) was employed with a 95% confidence level as well as a significance level of ( $P = .05$ ), as the population data were secured from respective government offices within the study area. i.e.,

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} \dots \text{Equation 1}$$

Where,  $e = .05$  is the precision level,  $N$  is the study population, and  $n$  is the sample size.

Using the formula:  $n = 600/1 + 600 (0.05)^2 = 240$ .

Therefore, 240 sample respondents were used in the study, and the sample distribution was carried out using the proportionate sampling technique as follows:

**Table 1: Research Sample Size by Population Proportion**

No	Respondents	Population	Proportion	Sample drawn
1	Households (participants and religious people)	312	$(308 \times 240)/600$	123.2
2	Culture and tourism office	24	$(24 \times 240)/600$	9.6

3	Tourism business operators (guides, souvenir, etc)	268	$(268*240)/600$	107.2
	Total	600		240

*Source: Lalibela Town and Lasta Woreda Population Office, 2021*

Based on the study parameters, 123 samples were drawn from event participants and religious households, 10 from Lalibela Town culture and tourism office, and 107 from tourism and related business operators.

The research used primary and secondary data sources. The primary sources used surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions (FGDs), while the secondary sources used document reviews and other published and unpublished literature. Surveys gathered data from households, tourism operators, and the culture and tourism office. Interviews included religious individuals, tour guide association leaders, and heads of the culture and tourism office, while two FGDs gathered data from household members and business operators.

Exploratory methods, particularly multiple linear regressions, in SPSS version 23 were utilized for data analysis to explore the role of Ashendye Festival in contributing to tourism development. Descriptive statistics for frequencies, means, and percentages, together with correlation analysis, were employed in looking for relationships between

variables. Quantitative data were presented in tables, graphs, and pie charts, while qualitative data from FGDs and interviews were thematically analyzed by using content analysis.

### **Validity and Reliability Analysis**

A pilot test was conducted before the actual study to test the reliability and validity of the research instruments. For testing the validity, content validity was employed to assure the validity of the instruments whereby the research used standardized questionnaires from previous works of empirical literature and the items were checked by consulting the research advisors and subject area experts. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha is the most often used technique for assessing internal consistency. Cronbach's Alpha is an indicator of the degree of internal consistency of scales. Besides, the reliability concerns the extent to which a measurement of a phenomenon provides stable and consistent result (Carmines & Zeller, 1979) or it is all about the repeatability of the result (Taherdoost, 2016) to measure inter-item homogeneity of each construct using Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.70 (Cronbach, 1951) in which where the inter-item correlations



were greater than or equal to 0.30 (Tavakol & Dennick, 2011) were included to collect data and include in the analysis. Moreover, the quantitative data were triangulated through the qualitative instruments and previous conceptual and empirical studies were duly consulted. The higher the coefficient the higher degree of consistency denotes. In this study, reliability was tested by  $\alpha$  value.  $\alpha$  measure of reliability that ranges from 0 to 1, with values of greater than .70 deemed the best of acceptability (Hair et al., 2006). Thus, the reliability of variables in this study is within the acceptable ranges (between 0.632 and 0.908).

**Table 2: Reliability Analysis**

Variables	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
Social Image and Entertainment Opportunity (SIEO)	.908	7
Infrastructure and Urban Development (IUD)	.817	5
Socio-Cultural Changes (SCCH)	.720	4
Economic Development	.632	3
Local Promotion (LocPro)	.652	3
Tourism development (TourD)	.877	6

Source: Field Survey, 2022

### ***Ethical Considerations***

In conducting this study, all values of the community and rights of respondents were highly considered. To collect data from all subjects of the study through the interview, questionnaires first the voluntariness of them were asked in advance. The responses of all respondents were kept and were confidential and used solely for

academic purpose. This study also considered gender issues by giving equal chances for both sexes while gathering data through interviews and questionnaires.

## **Results**

### **Respondents characteristics**

The gender division of the respondents revealed the majority of the respondents were female; i.e. 53.7% representing the bigger part of the sample group whereas 46.3 % of the respondents were male. Regarding the level of education most of the employees (105, 51.7%) are BA/BSc holders, followed by Diploma/TVET 57 (28.1%) and certificate 24 (11.8%). The rest 17 (8.4%) of the respondent are MA/M.Sc. and above holders. This implies

that star-rated hotels hire educated personnel and they can read and understand the messages and contents of this questionnaire. Moreover, the respondents could better understand the significance of cultural festivals like Ashendye that could enhance the tourism development that shall be better through proper utilization and management of festivals. In addition, 109 (53.7) percent

of the respondents indicated that they had between the ages of 18 – 35 years whereas 68 (33.5%) percent of the respondent are between the ages of 36 – 45 years old. The rest 26 (12.8) were found between the ages of 46-59 years old. Furthermore, as the result 31.5% and 42.9% of respondents confirmed, that most of respondents in the organization had more than 2-5 years and 6-10 years of residence in the area, this figure implies that most of the respondents are experienced and can respond to the questionnaire. Regarding the level of education most of the employees 51.7% are BA/BSc holders, followed by Diploma/TVET 28.1% and certificate 11.8%. The rest 8.4% of the respondent are MA/M.Sc. and above holders. This implies that there are potentialities to properly promote and manage festivals for better improvement of the tourism due to the availability of educated personnel. Moreover, the finding shows that 53.7% of the respondents indicated that they had between the ages of 18 – 35 years whereas 33.5% percent of the respondents are between the ages of 36 – 45 years old. The rest 12.8% were found between the ages of 46-59 years old. This figure implies tourism industry could get employees in their productive ages and could be energetic in the process enhancing tourism development.

## **Practices of Ashendye Festival as a Tourism Attraction**

### **Ashendye as both Religious and Cultural Heritage**

Data found from literatures and information got from the interview and focus group discussion confirmed that Ashendye was and is being celebrated as both religious and cultural festival. The research observed that the public also believes the festival is originated from religion and then transformed to cultural event. This fact has been seconded by all members of the focus group discussion and it also accepted by the interviewee. Findings from the observation is also supported this fact that Ashendye is being celebrated in churches also. Participants of the festival (girls and young women) come to church play their traditional dance in the church before going anywhere else.<sup>8</sup> Both the church father (from the group) and the interviewee elaborated that Ashendye, even though it is being celebrated as cultural annual festival, it cannot be detached from its origin – the church. If we try to detach it from the church, it will automatically lose its authenticity<sup>9</sup> even.





Figure 2: Ashendye celebration in the study area (Field Survey, 2022)

### The Ashendye Celebration Setting

From the study it was found the setting of Ashendye is argumentative. From the focus group discussion, two members out of five argued that the setting of Ashendye is started to be changed gradually due to the interference of stakeholders including the government. They reasoned out the case by stating examples. For instance, they said that Ashendye is being celebrated in Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa cities recently just for political and economic purpose while the natural setting of the festival is in specific place of the countryside. Participants are selected from their villages and go to the cities to show their culture in artificial settings even after the real time is passed. They strongly argue that celebrating cultural festivals in artificial settings is meaningless and it was one means of losing the authentic value of the Heritage like Ashendye.

Arguers in this side also believed that artificial setting will affect the real places of festivals even in tourist number. For this case, tourists may easily go to Addis Ababa and Bahir Dar<sup>11</sup> to attend Ashendye while the natural setting is here in Lasta/Lalibela. This will reduce the number of visitors come for the purpose of attend the cultural heritage – Ashendye.

Other members of the group and the interviewee did not agree with the former arguers. They took it as normal. They argued that people move from one place to the other with their culture. There are many persons living in Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa whom their original place is around Lalibela/Lasta. Therefore, Ashendye should be celebrated to them where they are living and their children also have the right to perform the festival there. The interviewee elaborated this idea by saying that the natural setting of culture is human itself. There is no



culture out of human. Human beings go anywhere, with their cultural practices so that they will practice it at a place of living.

However, the former arguers did not accept this logical reasoning. They strongly believed that Ashendye's natural setting should be respected and conserved even. The natural grass, called

Ashendye/Ashenda/Shadey, is the best example for them to respect its natural setting. This grass is not found everywhere especially in capital cities. For them, this by itself shows that Ashendye should be celebrated where the grass is found naturally.



**Figure 3: Ashendye setting during festive period** (Field Survey, 2022)

### **Role of Ashendye Festival for Cultural Tourism Development**

#### ***Descriptive Statistics***

The descriptive statistics result regarding the potential benefits the cultural festival might provide in the study area revealed that Ashendye Festival has significant contribution as depicted in the following table. As presented in the table below, the festival is contributing for creating and enhancement of social image and entertainment opportunity (Mean= 3.4293; Std. Deviation= .53025). The

result also revealed the celebration and development of the festival also supports for infrastructure and urban development (Mean= 3.4227; Std. Deviation= .50235). Besides, socio-cultural changes can be enhanced through the festival which has high potential for creating socio-cultural interaction with people from other areas of the country as well as from abroad (Mean= 3.4323; Std. Deviation= .41925).

Furthermore, the study revealed that Ashendye festival could play for economic development of the area with Mean=

3.4811 & Std. Deviation= .42869 and fosters local promotion (Mean= 3.8818; Std. Deviation= .44156) as a tourist site which may draw tourists to the area for sake of celebrating the festival and visitation of attractions in the area. Thus, according to Pihie & Akmaliah (2009), overall mean (M) score between 4.21-5.00 is considered as the respondents' strongly agreed, score between 3.41-4.20 means agreed (A), the score between 2.61-3.40 is considered as the respondents' are

neutral(N), those who scored from 1.81 to 2.60 disagreed, whereas those whose scores ranged from 1 to 1.80 strongly disagreed. With a cut-off mean of 3.2 as suggested by Castro and Martine (2010), one can conclude that the Ashendye festival contributes positively to different areas, as all the cultural festival measure items are above this cut-off. Specifically, all the mean scores range from 3.41 to 4.20, with the lowest mean of 3.4227 and the highest of 3.8818.

**Table 3: Role of Ashendye Festival (N= 203)**

Role of festivals	Mean	Std. Deviation
Social Image & Entertainment Opportunity (SIEO)	3.4293	.53025
Infrastructure and Urban Development (IUD)	3.4227	.50235
Socio-Cultural Change (SCCH)	3.4323	.41925
Economic Development (EcoD)	3.4811	.42869
Local Promotion (LocProm)	3.8818	.44156

Source: Field survey, 2022

## Inferential Statistics

### *Test of Assumptions*

**Normality:** Regression analysis assumes that the variables are normally distributed. Highly skewed and large outlier variables, however, will bias relationships as well as significance tests. The data, from the results of the survey in the following table, were normally distributed as seen with

most of the Skewness and Kurtosis values ranging between -1.0 to +1.0. This is okay and indicates that the error term for each of the variables is constant. Even if there were some variables that had Skewness and Kurtosis of less than 2, then this is all right. Thus, the assumption of normality stands as +2 and -2 values are acceptable for normal univariate distribution (Brown, 2011).



**Table 4: Normality Test (N=203)**

Items	Skewness	Kurtosis	Items	Skewness	Kurtosis	Items	Skewness	Kurtosis
SIEO1	.237	.022	IUD3	-.164	.881	LocPro1	-.064	-.530
SIEO2	.762	.002	IUD4	.560	-.225	LocPro2	-.047	-.508
SIEO3	-.164	-.277	IUD5	-.164	-.267	LocPro3	.513	-1.450
SIEO4	.560	-.525	SCCH1	.213	-.168	TourD1	.846	-.493
SIEO5	.436	.061	SCCH2	-.069	1.506	TourD2	.516	-.745
SIEO6	.237	.022	SCCH3	-.705	-1.519	TourD3	.006	-.889
SIEO7	.762	.002	SCCH4	-.262	-1.446	TourD4	-.427	-.091
IUD1	-.164	-.277	EcoD1	.258	-.674	TourD5	1.043	.099
IUD2	.560	-.525	EcoD2	-.200	-.274	TourD6	-.290	-.080
			EcoD3	.542	-.911			

Source: Field survey, 2022

**Correlation**

Pearson correlation table showed a significant relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable, tourism development, at .05 level of significance. Local promotion failed to relate to economic development at a significant level. On the other hand, Social

Image and Entertainment Opportunity, Infrastructure and Urban Development, Socio-Cultural Change, and Economic Development correlated strongly with Cultural Tourism Development at the level of  $r = .803$  (sig = .000),  $r = .772$  (sig = .000),  $r = .726$  (sig = .000),  $r = .610$  (sig = .000), and  $r = .189$  (sig = .003). Hence, those indicators related to local promotion were left out of the regression model.

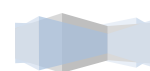
**Table 5: Correlations (N=203)**

	Correlations						
		TourD	SIEO	IUD	SCCH	EcoD	LocProm
Pearson Correlation	TourD	1.000					
	SIEO	.803**	1.000				
	IUD	.772**	.862**	1.000			
	SCCH	.726**	.626**	.697**	1.000		
	EcoD	.610**	.521**	.470**	.474**	1.000	
	LocProm	.189**	.200**	.192**	.168**	.017	1.000

Source: Field survey, 2022

**Linearity:** Linearity is an indication that predictor variables in regression are linearly associated with the outcome variable. Standard multiple regressions are only able to accurately measure cause-and-

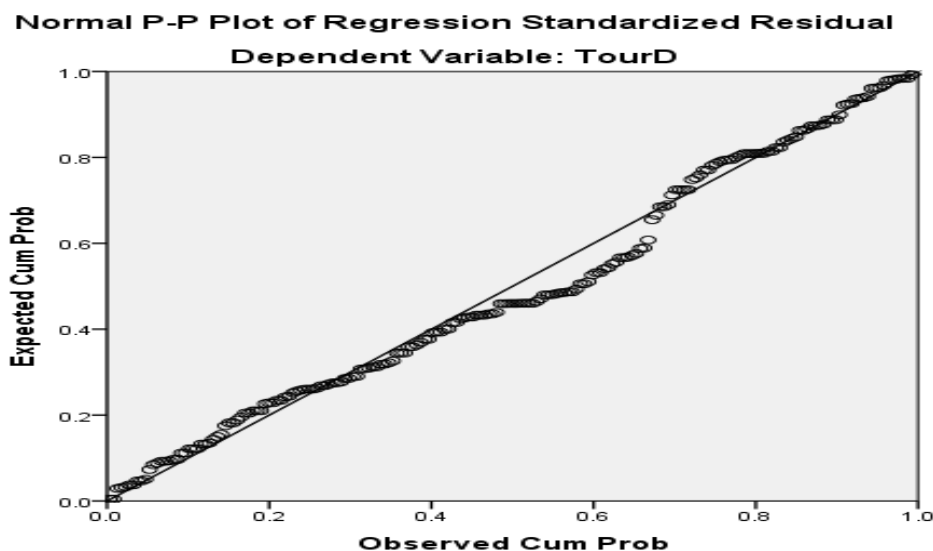
effect associations when such associations are linear. The above table shows that linear associations exist between the predictor variables and the outcome variable. All the predictor variables, viz., Social Image and Entertainment





Opportunity (SIEO), Infrastructure and Urban Development (IUD), Socio-Cultural Change (SCCH), Economic Development (EcoD), and Local Promotion (LocProm),

were linearly correlated with the dependent variable, Tourism Development (TourD).



**Figure 4: Test of Linearity** (Field Survey, 2022)

**Multicollinearity:** Multiple regressions assume that independent variables do not correlate with each other highly. When they do correlate highly with each other, it leads to multicollinearity. Both Tolerance should be  $> 0.1$  and Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) should be  $< 10$  (Daoud,

2018). Based on the survey output in the above table, the multicollinearity test was fine as both Tolerance and VIF met the criteria. Tolerance was more than 0.1, and VIF was less than 10, indicating that there were no multicollinearity issues among the independent variables in this model.

**Table 6: Test of Multicollinearity**

Collinearity Statistics		
Constructs	Tolerance	VIF
SIEO	.238	4.202
IUD	.216	4.629
SCCH	.484	2.065
EcoD	.682	1.467
LocProm	.943	1.060

Source: Filed survey, 2022

**Homoscedasticity:** This assumption describes the fact that the difference in the residuals (or model error) is constant at all

points of the model. This can be described as the normal probability curve of the scatter plot, which meets the requirement of the homoscedasticity assumption. And



the result of the Durbin-Watson test of 1.992 describes the fact that values are constant, guaranteeing the absence of heteroscedasticity.



**Figure 5: Test of Homoscedasticity** (Field Survey, 2022)

### Regression Analysis

The "R" column in the above table indicates the value of R, the multiple correlation coefficient, in accordance with the model summary. A good degree of prediction is indicated by an R-value of 0.871, which shows a positive strong cause and effect link between a set of potential benefit impacts from cultural festivals as described in the model and the growth of cultural tourism in Lalibela and the

surrounding area. The remaining 24.8% of the changes may be influenced by other factors, according to the Adjusted R<sup>2</sup> value of .752 (75.2%), which indicates the contribution of  $\beta$ -cultural festival benefit indicators on the development of cultural tourism. The percentage of the dependent variable's explained variance that may be attributed to the independent variables is displayed by the Adjusted R Square statistic.

**Table 7: Model Summary**

Model Summary <sup>b</sup>					
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Durbin-Watson
1	.871 <sup>a</sup>	.758	.752	.24437	1.992

a. Predictors: (Constant), LocProm, EcoD, SCCH, SIEO, IUD  
b. Dependent Variable: TourD

Source: Field survey, 2022

ANOVA tables' F-ratios show how well the regression model fits the data. Because of the high value of  $F = 123.432$  at  $P < .001$ , the preceding table therefore demonstrates that the collection of festival indicators

indicated in the model has statistically significant ability to forecast tourism development. As a result, the regression model was found to fit the data well.

**Table 8: ANOVA<sup>a</sup> Model Fit**

ANOVA <sup>a</sup>						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	36.854	5	7.371	<b>123.432</b>	<b>.000<sup>b</sup></b>
	Residual	11.764	197	.060		
	Total	48.618	202			
a. Dependent Variable: TourD						
b. Predictors: (Constant), LocProm, EcoD, SCCH, SIEO, IUD						

Source: Field survey, 2022

Because the p-value was statistically significant (less than 0.05), the table below provided extremely strong evidence to test the hypotheses for the five independent variables. Based on the evidence, the study concluded that the Ashendye cultural festival indicators—Social Image and Entertainment Opportunity, Infrastructure and Urban Development, Socio-Cultural Change, Economic Development, and Local Promotion—that were included in the model were statistically significant in predicting the growth of cultural tourism in Lalibela.

### Standardized Coefficients $\beta$

To determine whether cultural festival benefit attribute has a greater influence on the growth of cultural tourism, the standardised coefficients are helpful. It

was employed to compare how the independent variables listed in the model affect the growth of cultural tourism. Social Image and Entertainment Opportunity had the highest standardised coefficient (.379), indicating a comparatively stronger effect, followed by Socio-Cultural Change (.333) and Economic Development (.236), as seen in the regression coefficients table. Ranking fourth and fifth, respectively, Infrastructure and Urban Development (.114) and Local Promotion (.037) were not shown to be significantly predictive of the growth of cultural tourism.

### Unstandardized Coefficients $\beta$

With a unit change in the set of cultural festival benefit qualities listed in the model as independent variables, the



unstandardized coefficient indicated the mean or average change in the development of cultural tourism. The regression equation between cultural festival benefit attributes and cultural tourism development is written as follows:

$$\text{TourD} = -.270 + .379\text{SIEO} + .333\text{SCCH} + .236\text{EcoD} + \varepsilon$$

Where;

TourD = cultural tourism development,

SIEO = Social Image and Entertainment Opportunity,

SCCH = Socio-Cultural Change, and

EcoD = Economic Development.

The constant value ( $\beta_0 = -.270$ ) illustrated how important cultural festivals are for the growth of cultural tourism. 227, if the model's indicated coefficients for the benefits of cultural festivals were zero.

However, a beta coefficient of .379 means that the development of cultural tourism changed by .379 for every unit change in Social Image and Entertainment Opportunity. The development of cultural

tourism increased by .333 for every unit change in socio-cultural change in the festival experience and development and by .236 for each unit change in its support for economic growth, both of which were significant predictors. On the other hand, the development of cultural tourism increased by .114 for every unit change in infrastructure and urban development and by .037 for each unit change in the importance of festivals in local promotion, however these increases were not significant at the .05 threshold of significance.

With a  $B = 0.379$ , the model's five cultural festival benefit attributes—using festivals as a viable tool for social image and entertainment opportunity—had the greatest impact on the growth of cultural tourism, while the study area's tourism development was not significantly predicted by the attributes of infrastructure, urban development, and local promotion.

**Table 9: Coefficient of Determination**

Coefficients <sup>a</sup>								
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
		B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
1	(Constant)	-.270	.214		-1.264	.208		
	SIEO	<b>.379</b>	.066	.409	<b>5.698</b>	<b>.000</b>	.238	4.202
	IUD	.114	.074	.117	1.554	.122	.216	4.629
	SCCH	<b>.333</b>	.059	.285	<b>5.653</b>	<b>.000</b>	.484	2.065
	EcoD	<b>.236</b>	.049	.206	<b>4.859</b>	<b>.000</b>	.682	1.467
	LocProm	.037	.040	.034	.931	.353	.943	1.060

a. Dependent Variable: TourD

Source: Fields Survey, 2022

## Results of Hypothesis Testing

The regression model's test findings validated the hypotheses put out in this study, as the table below illustrates. Economic development, socio-cultural change, and social image and

entertainment opportunities were among the benefits of the cultural festival that were bolstered. The .05 degree of significance did not promote local promotion, urban development, or infrastructure.

**Table 10: Decision Line for Hypothesis**

Hypothesis	Independent variables	Dependent variable Cultural Tourism Development (TourD)		
		B	Sig.	Decision
H <sub>1</sub>	Social Image & Entertainment Opportunity (SIEO)	.379	.000	<b>Supported</b>
H <sub>2</sub>	Infrastructure and Urban Development (IUD)	.114	.122	Not Supported
H <sub>3</sub>	Socio-Cultural Change (SCCH)	<b>.333</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>Supported</b>
H <sub>4</sub>	Economic Development (EcoD)	<b>.236</b>	<b>.000</b>	<b>Supported</b>
H <sub>5</sub>	Local Promotion (LocProm)	.037	.353	Not Supported

Source: Field Survey, 2022

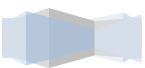
In addition to the survey analysis, the qualitative tools showed that the interviewee and the FGD participants agreed on Ashendye's potential and important role in the growth of the tourism industry. One of the tourism offerings that distinguish Lalibela and the surrounding area as a distinctive travel destination is the Ashendye festival. Lalibela receives more visitors during Ashendye celebrations than it does during other times.

Since this function recognizes its potential as a tourism product, local and regional cultural and tourism agencies are genuinely working on it. According to Nega's (2018) research, the abundance of knowledge and skill that is passed down

through cultural demonstrations from one generation to the next is what makes them appealing rather than just the performance itself.

Because of this, Ashendye is a very important festival for the growth of tourism, as seen from the various perspectives below;

*The festival is endowed with aesthetic worth, as seen by Ashendye's truly appealing music. Observing the festival's events can provide amusement for visitors. On the other side, the main reason visitors stay in the festival area for an extended period of time is the celebration time. According to our group conversation, everyone agreed that it would take over two*



*weeks to attend every cultural ceremonial component that was held in the destination, Lalibela, and the surrounding area. They went on to say that both domestic and foreign tourists are emotionally invested in staying for a long time.*

(FGD discussant, August 24, 2022)

Participatory observation during a festive occasion provides the focus group participants with confirmation. According to an interviewee, Ashendye's ornamental utilisation of traditional and genuine cultural items is the main factor that makes it so alluring. In Lalibela, one of the interviewee respondents (the tour guide) said:

*He noted that the festival's visual worth is colourful and expansive during his more than five years of escorting tourists during a festive period. He continued by saying that the splendour of the Ashendye festival festivities in and around Lalibela tourism destination areas greatly attracts travellers. The Ashendye festival adds even more alluring qualities to Lalibela's rock-hewn churches. He went on to say that tourists enjoy watching girls express their emotions and feelings through dancing, singing, and wearing stylish clothes while moving*

*freely and in order. (Interviewee 1, August 27, 2022).*

The results revealed that the Ashendye festival has the potential to generate revenue and employment opportunities by drawing numerous tourists. The Lalibela local people, surrounding villages, tourist suppliers, and the government can all benefit economically from the festival. The local communities can increase their revenue by selling local foods and drinks such as *tej*, *injera*, *honey*, and *tela* to tourists, as well as souvenirs and other products. These events contribute to the economy supported by evidence of the festival contributing foreign exchange as well as local growth. Previous studies have shown that festivals are intangible cultural heritage with significant economic potential (Bouchenaki, 2012) and part of the local and regional economy (Getz, 2008).

### Discussions

The findings of this study validated earlier studies on the advantages of tourism for various development factors such as business ventures, cultural heritage, economic benefits, local people's pride, and the development of skills. Literature validates the presence of prospects for the development of various business ventures through tourism. Earlier studies revealed economic benefits in the form of the generation of employment opportunities





and increased revenue for local businesses (Jamal & Robinson, 2009), in support of our finding that tourism offers employment opportunities for seekers of employment.

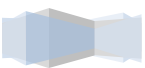
Furthermore, previous studies verify that tourism promotes a country's natural and cultural heritages to the rest of the world. For example, cultural tourism evokes domestic traditions, art, and customs, aiding in preserving cultural heritage (Richards, 2007). This corroborates the finding of the present study that tourism grants citizens local pride in culture and country. Moreover, the review confirms that tourism is valuable to both private and government sectors in terms of foreign exchange revenues. Tourism is known to be one of the major sources of revenue that contributes significantly to the development of economies (Jamal & Robinson, 2009). This is in agreement with our discovery that tourism boosts foreign exchange revenues, aiding in economic development.

The study also corroborates evidence that supports the role of tourism in encouraging the production of souvenir items. Pike (2018) highlights the importance of effective promotion at the local level in attracting tourists to cultural events, which complements our observation that tourism increases production and creates the production of souvenir items.

Moreover, previous research confirms that tourism-related activities such as hotels, handicraft industry, and tour guiding generate multiple employment opportunities and skill-developing avenues (Jamal & Robinson, 2009). This proof confirms the study's conclusion that tourism aids in developing the skills of the local community. The current research provided strong support for the beneficial impacts of tourism towards business enterprises, heritage culture, economic benefits, pride among locals, and expertise buildup. The evidence is supported by prior literature, pointing out tourism's contribution to development. However, it is important to acknowledge that the discoveries can be context-specific and only applicable to the context and sample population used in the study, indicating the need for further research in diverse contexts.

The research also indicated that festivals enhance social image and provide entertainment opportunities. This is in agreement with literature that point out the role of festivals in the promotion of social cohesion and community spirit (Richards, 2007). Festivals encourage unity among people, fostering social interaction and a good community image.

Also, previous research indicated that festivals create incentives for infrastructure and urban development



through the attraction of tourists and promotion of economic activity (Pike, 2018). This agrees with findings of the present study that the observance of festivals contributes to infrastructure development. The finding revealed that festivals ease socio-cultural changes and interactions is also evident in literature. Festivals provide channels whereby people from diverse regions assemble to exchange cultural traditions and learn from one another (Richards, 2007), agreeing with our observation that festivals ease socio-cultural interactions both at home and abroad.

It is also amply documented that festivals hold potential for economic development. Festivals attract tourists and generate high levels of local business revenues, resulting in economic growth (Jamal & Robinson, 2009). This is similar to the finding of the current study that confirms the role of festivals in enhancing local economic development.

The literature supports the belief that festivals promote local tourist sites. Festivals attract tourists who visit in order to attend events and view regional attractions (Pike, 2018), which aligns with our findings on the festival's role in local promotion. This study is bringing out the positive impacts of festivals to development, including social image, entertainment activities, infrastructure,

socio-cultural exchange, economic development, and promotion at the local level. However, it needs to be noted that these findings may be specific to the Ashendye festival and location, and future studies on the impacts of festivals in other contexts need to be conducted.

The results showed how important cultural festivals are to the growth of tourism, as they draw visitors and improve a destination's social standing. Getz (2008) concluded that festivals facilitating social interaction and entertainment generate positive word-of-mouth, supporting our finding that social reputation and provision for entertainment are significant to the development of cultural tourism.

Socio-cultural change and unique experience are significant factors in cultural tourism. Richards (2007) reaffirmed that promotion of local culture through festivals contributes towards the preservation of cultural heritage as well as economic development. This reinforces our proof that socio-cultural experience significantly affects tourism development. There are proven economic benefits through festivals. Jamal and Robinson (2009) noted that employment is created, local business revenue is increased, and the economy is stimulated through festivals. Our study agrees with this, indicating economic support towards



development as critical for cultural tourism growth.

Meanwhile, contrary to existing literature, the non-significant findings of the current study on infrastructure and urban development and local promotion might be otherwise. Hall (2005) emphasized having the right infrastructure to facilitate tourism, while Pike (2018) emphasized local promotion in attracting tourists. These contrasts may be reflected through the specific context of our investigation such that there is a need for further research into infrastructure and local promotion's significance in different cultural tourism destinations.

The study yielded important insights regarding the contribution of cultural festival attributes to tourism development. Festivals that target socio-cultural change, entertainment appeal, social image, and economic development have a higher chance of attracting tourists and supporting cultural tourism development. The absence of notable findings on infrastructure and local promotion, nonetheless, suggests room for further research in these vital areas.

### **Practical Implications**

Unearthing hidden potentials of cultural and religious festivals need collaborative engagement and multimodal solutions to uncover the potential and enhance the developments. Raising awareness must be

done aggressively and consistently in accordance with a clearly defined strategic plan in order to improve the Ashendye festival's development on a wide scale and elevate its contribution. Planning and development must then be carried out by stakeholders who are well-coordinated and integrated. The local community participation in protecting environment including the cultural values and assets via fundamental changes in the people's thoughts and behavior of the residents is brought through greater awareness creation programs (Ghaderi et al., 2022). It is assumed that promoting Ashendye's contribution to the growth of Lalibela and the surrounding area's tourism industry through concerted action will be crucial. It has been defined that festivals are essential stimulators to galvanize prospects for economic development or rejuvenation and enhancing social connectedness by cultural activities that depend on native culture and historical fabrics (Mair & Duffy, 2018). Moreover, Festivals can contribute to a broader field of heritage, where the unanswered question of what and how heritage might be, if aggressively pursued, has the potential to be radical and transformational (Harrison, 2015) support of economy, society and culture.

By organising all potential stakeholders, the government would show the proper attention for resolving issues associated



to this cultural festival; in order to promote growth and minimise adverse consequences, discussion forums are required among them. Thus, such cultural events can be deployed as an inducement for holidaymaker turnout that marks in tourism and economic growth as festival events draws a sense of belonging and cultural pride among local dwellers and can be strengthened by strategic planning and management (Sibiya et al., 2023). The efforts of assurance of economic prosperity of communities' cultural awareness to the relevant stakeholders including local business, special and festival event organizers as well as public sectors and local communities shall be provided to guide development of tourism through reducing negative impacts and enhancement of quality of life and heritage conservation (Stankova & Vassenska, 2015). Additionally, the celebration atmosphere and authenticity of Ashendye and other festivals of a similar nature will be the primary subject of future research.

### **Conclusion**

The relationship between the development of tourism and cultural heritage has been explored in this study. It investigated Ashendye's contribution to tourism in Lalibela, which is one of the most important heritage sites in Ethiopia. The study recognizes Ashendye as an

intangible cultural heritage founded on religious practice and highlights its contribution to the development of cultural tourism. The festival attracts more visitors to Lalibela, creating market potential for local products and services, and enhancing the region's appeal as a unique tourist destination. Yet, Ashendye is confronted with difficulties, especially in terms of authenticity, since the same festivals are now being celebrated in other cities such as Bahir Dar and Addis Ababa. This transformation brings up questions about the festival's authentic representation when performed in artificial environments. According to critics, these settings devalue the cultural worth of the festival, but according to others, cultural practices do get adjusted to new environments. This argument raises the need for further research to explore the effects of such changes on Ashendye's authenticity and contribution to community cohesion and economic growth. A compromise between adaptation and tradition will be crucial to Ashendye's future and its position in Lalibela to unearth the potentials by leveraging Ashendye festival as a catalyst for cultural tourism development while conserving the heritage and enhancement of socioeconomic welfare.



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