

Community Based Tourism: Rural Villages in Ethiopia

More and more tourists are fascinated by experiencing not only interesting cities and landmarks but also real cultural exchange at their destination. Most tourism sites are packed with tourists which makes it quite difficult to experience real interaction with the locals.



For cultural exchange it is necessary that the tourist number is low and that the interaction is natural meaning the hosting locals are unaffected or unpretentious in their approach.

Among all the sub divisions of tourism activities, community based tourism is thought to be the best mechanism to address the intended goal with the minimum involvement of other beneficiary lines (tour operators, hotels) because it facilitates a direct contact with the local communities.

In Ethiopia this kind of tourism is being practiced by a nine-year old project in the Northern part of the country by the name called TESFA Community based Tourism. TESFA is a local NGO (Ethiopian residents charity) working with rural farmers in two regions - North Wollo and East Tigray. The organization helps them earn additional income from tourism business along with their livelihood activities. In the next three years, TESFA plans to expand to other administrative zones of these regions.

Thanks to this initiative visitors have a unique opportunity to interact with the local farmers and see the wonderful landscape both scenic and cultural. At the same time the tourists help the villagers by being one of their clients.

A visit to the rural villages gives a rare opportunity to experience genuine interaction with local people. On the other hand, the communities can also learn from the interaction which leads to social and cultural changes in the hosting communities.

TESFA is working as a facilitator by linking Ethiopian rural communities and tourists from different countries. Visitors trek from one village to another crossing rural countryside, enjoying the landscape, scenery, agricultural lands, flora and fauna. These give visitors an idea of the rural way of living in Ethiopia.



So far the organization has developed eleven community sites near Lalibela (six in Meket Woreda). By keeping the traditional community structures, TESFA enables them to run tourism hosting facilities to improve their quality of life and environment. It contributes to a long term benefit to both the environment and local communities.

The number of guests in a group visiting one village at a time is limited to six. This allows for smooth and modest interaction with local people in addition to preventing any damage in the natural environment. This is one of the principles of the organization - protecting the natural and cultural resources.



The communication between the guests and hosts is facilitated by trained guides from Lalibela who are skilled mediators that avoid any control of the process. Thus the visitors can meet the people, learn about the village and discuss various issues in a natural way.

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