

**PLANNING FOR CULTURAL TOURISM IN
KENYA: AN ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL IN
KISII REGION**

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Abstract

Tourism development in Kenya is mainly concentrated in a few national parks, game reserves, and the coastal beaches. These constitute a small fraction of the country's attractions. There is need to diversify the country's tourism products through its enormous culture-based resources. These resources range from archaeology and prehistoric sites, historic sites, spiritual relics in the form of sacred forests or sites, ethnographic material culture, political heritage to traditional songs, music and dance. Some of these cultural products have cut a niche in Kenya's tourism industry. Yet there are hardly any plans to develop these resources into distinct tourism products.

This dissertation is therefore an attempt to present a more detailed work on the approach to cultural tourism product development in Kenya. The Kisii region provides a special case study of the underdeveloped tourism regions that is in need of tourism development. This need has been stipulated in government development policy for the region. The study interviewed a total of 343 people. The general objective of the study was to analyze culture-based attractions with a view to developing and enhancing them for tourism. The first objective was to assess culture-based resources within the Kisii region, which can be developed as tourism products. The second objective was to assess potential visitors market demanding specific Gusii cultural heritage elements /attractions. The third objective was to evaluate constraints/difficulties hampering development and promotion of cultural tourism in the Kisii region. The fourth objective was to suggest community-based planning and management programs for the Kisii region, which incorporates cultural tourism. The study population is ethnic Gusii community members residing in the three districts of Nyamira, Kisii and Gucha, herein defined as the Kisii region; visitors to Kisumu regional Museum; and local people on whose land Gusii cultural attractions are found. In addition, Clerks to County councils/ Town councils / Municipal councils on whose land some of these attractions are found were interviewed.

The study used random sampling method and structured questionnaires for data collection. Secondary data was used in the identification of the cultural attributes of the community as

well as understanding the physical attributes of the area. Qualitative and quantitative techniques were used in the data analysis.

The study has established that Gusii ethnic community is fast losing its cultural heritage and the community is instrumental in the identification of their cultural heritage elements that should be preserved and developed for tourism. The nature-based cultural attractions in the region are being visited by local people and in some case a few international tourists. Most of the nature-based cultural attractions are located in attractive physical environment, including that of the surrounding area and are located in areas that have sufficient amounts of available and developable land that does not have a more important economic, conservation or other resource use. There is positive attitude of the local people to developing tourism in the region. It was also found that there does exist sufficient water supply in places where the cultural attractions are located and good access to the major gateway.

However, tourism development in the region is affected by infrastructure constraints particularly lack of electricity supply and potential access from major highway to cultural attractions in the region. Lack of proper marketing strategy is also a major constraint. It was also found that Institutional constraints relating the planning agencies at the local and national level has led to lack of awareness of cultural tourism potential in the region. Lack of accessibility to members of the public to cultural attractions was found to be a constraint to tourism development particularly in Kisii district. Also lack of availability of telecommunication and lack of positive attitude by local people to develop and work in tourism were found to be a constraint to cultural tourism development in parts of the region. Finally, lack of compatible land use and potential compatible land use in adjacent areas to cultural attractions and lack of waste disposal, with regard to where cultural attractions are located, was found to be a constraint also to tourism development.

The study also identified three potential market segments for the region's nature-based and cultural heritage elements (attractions). These markets include those who travel for holiday, leisure and study tour. The study also found that most of the nature-based cultural attractions are located on private land.

The study concludes that the Kisii region has a potential for cultural tourism development based on its nature-based cultural and cultural heritage. The identified outstanding cultural heritage sites/areas should be gazetted by the government and be managed jointly with local communities. The region's tourism attractions should be developed and marketed to the three market segments identified. Scholars and people from diverse professional background should be involved in the development and management of the tourism designated areas. The research findings will be useful to policy-makers, planners and researchers in the formulation of policies and regulations that will enhance the status of various aspects of cultural tourism product development in Kenya, and the study area in particular. Further research needs to be carried out on how effective local authorities could be co-ordinated in the provision of tourism in rural areas. Also intensive research should be carried out at micro level to establish the multiplier effect of tourism within the regional context and how increasing population in both urban and rural areas will be better planned for with regard to, respective, leisure needs that also enhances tourism development.

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