



## ASSESSMENT OF HERITAGE INTERPRETATION INFRASTRUCTURES AND THEIR CHALLENGES PERTAINING TO THE AREAS OF AKSUM, ADWA AND SHIRE OF TIGRAY REGION IN ETHIOPIA

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### ABSTRACT

The sustainable interpretation and presentation of the fragile, unique and irreplaceable heritage is becoming a major challenge. Currently, there are some improvements in tourist and infrastructural development in the country as a whole and Tigray in particular which make access easier for visitors. This is both a necessary step and at the same time a dangerous one as legitimizing the tourist developments will only bring more visitors and perhaps cause in deterioration and falsification of the heritages. It is only when the heritages are sustainably interpreted, presented and managed that tourism can be developed in a sustainable manner and contributes for sustainable development of the country and the region. So, the major purpose of this study is to assess the Heritage Interpretation Infrastructures and their Challenges in Tigray (Cases from Aksum, Adwa and Shire). The collected data were analyzed and processed both qualitatively in a descriptive and narrative notion and quantitatively through the help of SPSS 16.0 versions. It is recommended that heritage interpretation should be understood as a social process, one that includes the work of many individuals and groups, not just interpreters in order to achieve sustainable tourism development in this area.

**KEYWORDS:** Challenges, Heritage, Interpretation

### INTRODUCTION

With the increasing numbers of tourists and tourism activities, management and interpretation of heritage become major issues of maintaining heritage sites. Proper management and interpretation are keystones for the success of conservation and heritage management in general. Sustainable development of a Heritage Site includes several fields such as interpretation of the site, knowledge of visitor profiles, conservation, protection and partnership between the different stakeholders involved in the management. The interpretation of that heritage, within a framework of internationally recognized and appropriately applied standards, is usually the responsibility of all the stakeholders.

Historical sites and visitor experiences can be preserved and improved by effective interpretation and presentation that monitors the flow of visitors, provides clear directions for safe behavior, and provides direct and indirect information that fosters visitors' appreciation and conservation of the monuments.

Ethiopia possesses the highest number of UNESCO world heritage sites in the continent. Ethiopia has also a lot to bring to such international level of significance if conservation, interpretation, promotion and management of the heritages are strengthened. According to World Bank, much of the heritages of Ethiopia are being eroded by rapid development and urban growth. Accessibility to historical heritage sites, conservation, interpretations and

presentation at historical heritage sites, visitor information and quality of guides are among the problems which need attention. Only negligible progress is made in Ethiopia as far as uncovering and promoting the country's heritage in sustainable manner.

### Statement of the Problem

Cultural heritage by its nature is unique, fragile and irreplaceable and requires sensitive use and management to make it the basis of tourism enterprises in a sustainable way. So, it is imperative to understand how to interpret and present these sites sustainably while protecting and conserving them for the long term.

The interpretation and management of heritages in Ethiopia is much less successful and the state of public-private sector coordination is still poor. Poor quality information and interpretation of heritage products is among the prevailing problems stated by visitors in Ethiopia Current heritage interpretation services are far from enough to accomplish the goals of enhancing heritage tourists' experiences and the heritages themselves. In Tigray region study conducted, to evaluate interpretive services such as interpreters, brochures, signs, interpretive media, maps and heritage interpreters' competencies are almost non-existent. Most of the studies conducted on Aksum (the hub destination in Tigray) focus on how to exploit the cultural heritage in Aksum through tourism so as to maximize the revenue.

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

**General Objective**

The overall objective of the study is to assess the Heritage Interpretation Infrastructures and their Challenges in Tigray (Cases from Aksum, Adwa and Shire).

**Specific Objectives**

- To assess the adequacy of interpretation infrastructures in the area.
- To assess the prevailing challenges of heritage interpretation practices/services.

**Scope of the Study**

This study has conducted to assess the prevailing challenges and prospects of heritage interpretation and presentation in Tigray region focusing on Aksum, Shire and Adwa, and it is confined only to main areas of Axum, Adwa and Shire.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Heritage Interpretation and presentation**

Interpretation of cultural heritage is an integral aspect of both visitor experience and conservation of heritage.. Heritage interpretation is an integral part of heritage tourism. It is about communicating a site’s heritage values to others. By communicating the meaning of a heritage site, interpreters facilitate understanding and appreciation of sites by the general public. They also create public awareness about the importance of heritage and its protection. Interpretation refers to the full range of potential activities intended to heighten public awareness and enhance understanding of cultural heritage site. Good and effective heritage interpretation is crucial for the experience and satisfaction of heritage visitors. Heritage interpretation is about building on warding experiences to encourage visitors to be receptive to a management or

sustainability message by encouraging visitors to behave in ways that minimize their negative impacts.

**Infrastructures needed for heritage interpretation and presentation**

**Tourism Infrastructure**

Tourism infrastructure includes the roads, railway lines, harbors, airport runways, water, electricity, drainage, sewerage, solid waste disposal systems, interpretative points and other utilities to serve not only the local residents but also the tourist influx (accommodation, restaurants, recreational facilities, shopping facilities and passenger transport terminals form the superstructure of the region.

Tourism infrastructure also includes organization whose products are mainly sold to visitors, though they do not form a major share of tourist consumption. It includes several infrastructure sectors like power, telecommunication, and some production sectors like travel items, sports equipment, photographic materials, medicines and cosmetics.

**Conceptual Framework**

The data was collected through descriptive research methods: a literature review, interviews, observation, questionnaire, FGD and finally, expert feedback and comment regarding the researchers proposed progress notes. There are three phases: background research, data collection and analysis and the creation of empirical report based on evidence. Each phase is built upon the previous phase in order to comprehensively respond to the research objectives. The overview of the data analysis approach and how it utilized is shown below. The essential concepts under the focuses of this study area are two fundamental notions clarified here: heritage interpretation infrastructure, and the challenges.

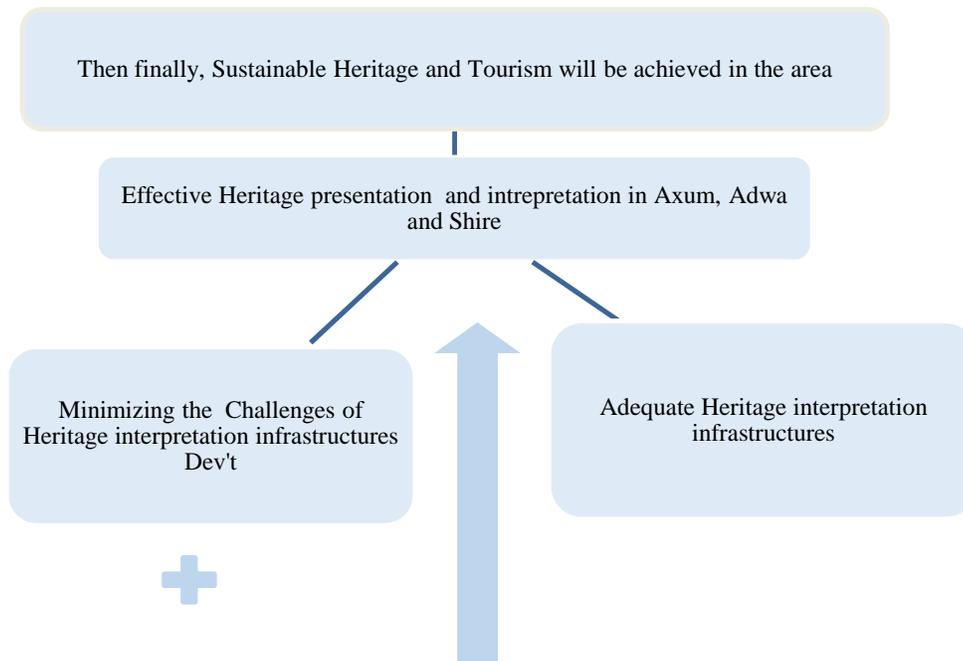


Figure 1. Conceptual framework (Source: Own Compilation, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

### Description of the Study Area

Tigray is the northern most part of Ethiopia's federal states located at 12°15' -14°57' latitude and 36°27'-39°59' longitude. Excluding Mekelle City, the state capital, there are five administrative zones: comprising a total of 47 weredas (districts) and 673 tabias (sub-districts). With a total population of 6.2 million which is about 8% of the total population of Ethiopia, (49.2% male and 50.85 female), 85% of which live in the rural

areas. The economically active age group accounts about 51.8 % of the total population. In terms of religion 95.5% of the population is Orthodox Christians. Regarding ethnic composition, 94.98% are Tigrawai, 2.6% Agew/Amhara, 0.7% Erob and 0.05% Kunama. This research focused on Aksum, Adwa and Shire. Assessment of all the research inquiry was conducted in most cultural, natural and historical attractions found in the case studies.

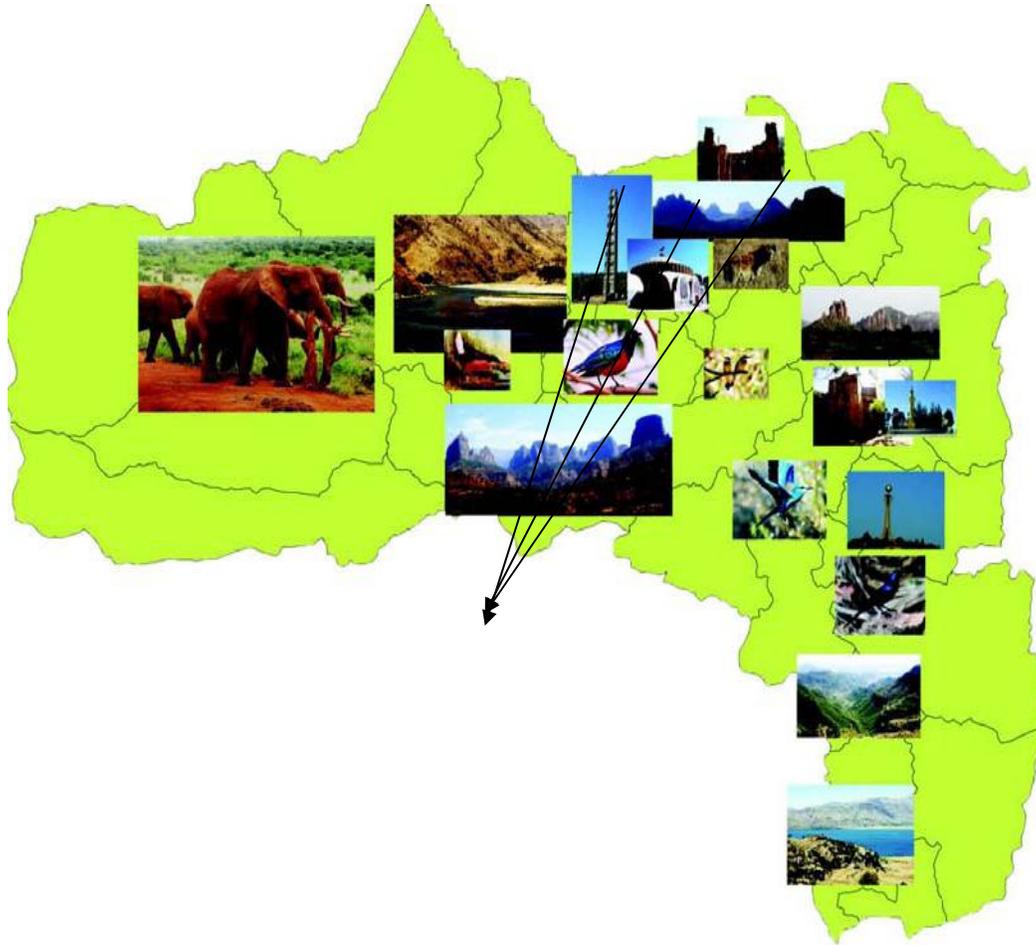


Figure 2: Map of the study area

### Research Design

The linkage between mixing methods and strategic alliances, collaboration and networking in heritage and tourism is fundamental to increase quality. This study focusing on the of heritage interpretation is mainly descriptive in its design as its main rationale is to describe and interpret existing conditions, process that are going on and effects that are evident in relation to the interpretation of heritage.

### Target Population/ Subjects

The subjects of the study are limited to the key stakeholders of heritage and tourism management of the were used.

study area and includes mainly tourism service providers (tour guides, travel agencies, managers and owners of hotels and artisanal crafts), targeted professionals in tourism, heritage and related fields (Culture and Tourism offices, and scholars from educational institutes in the study area), church staff, local community representatives and visitors.

### Sampling Design and Sample Size

To take representative sample from the target population both probability (stratified and random) and non-probability (convenience and purposive) sampling designs

Table3.1. Summary of sample respondents

S.No	Subjects		Sample		Remarks
			Quantitative	Qualitative	
1	Service providers	Guides	60		
		Hotels	50		
		Artisanal Crafts	80		
2	Targeted professionals	Professionals from Culture and Tourism office, site manager, and Aksum University	15		
3	Intermediaries	Tour operation and travel agency	5		
4	Religious staff	Representatives from church and mosques,	30		
5	Visitors	Both international and domestic	280		
	<b>Total</b>		520		Up to saturation (12)

## SOURCES OF DATA AND RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS

### Data collection methods

To achieve the objective of the study, data were collected from both secondary and primary sources by employing combined research methods of multiple data sources that include different activities.

Secondary data were used for background information to build constructively the research and the reader to comprehend more thoroughly the research outcomes. So, the researchers made use of different data sources including books, journals, articles, websites, and policy documents and memos ,reports.

Primary data were collected by applying designed questionnaire, interview, focus group discussion and personal observation with participation and informal discussions to get first hand information on-site.

### Data Analysis Methods

The collected data were thoroughly processed, analysed and interpreted to get the realized and detailed insight of

the problem in the study area. In the qualitative instruments of the study, once the data were collected and processed manually, descriptive analysis were used for analysis and interpretation of the data through narrations and description based on systematic grouping and content analysis to describe phenomena in to their respective objectives. Here, ideas were refined and revised in light of information gathered in to their thematic areas. Information reduction were done at different phases via editing, classifying, sorting, verifying and summarizing carefully in order not to miss relevant information.

In analyzing the quantitative data from questionnaire, statistical package for social science (SPSS) software 16 versions was used as a facilitator for analysis. Descriptive statistics like frequency, percentage, standard deviation and mean were obtained and majority of the results were presented in tabular and graphical forms. Lastly, triangulation of data between the qualitative and quantitative techniques was undertaken to get a more thorough understanding of the issues under consideration.

**Table 1.** Statistics from tourists for Heritage interpretation & presentation infrastructures & their challenges  
1= Very poor, 2= poor, 3= Average, 4= Good, 5= Very Good

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.
Sign board Availability	280	1.000	4.000	2.19286	.737101
Bill board availability	280	1.000	5.000	2.25357	.857178
View Tower availability	280	1.000	4.000	2.22857	.751036
Folders availability	280	1.000	5.000	2.35357	.887985
walk ways to sites availability	280	1.000	5.000	2.55357	.985916
Boundary and demarcation	280	1.00	5.00	3.3000	.95565
Tourist maps	280	1.000	5.000	2.35357	.887985
Site Cleanliness	280	1.00	5.00	3.1179	.81013
Display (if needed)	280	1.000	5.000	2.35357	.887985
Guiding Manual	280	1.000	4.000	2.22857	.751036
Traditional transport	280	1.000	4.000	2.22857	.751036
Authenticity of products	280	1.00	5.00	3.1179	.81013
Tour guides appearance	280	1.00	5.00	3.1179	.81013
Tourism product readiness	280	1.00	5.00	3.1179	.81013
<b>Group mean</b>				<b>2.71</b>	

**DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION****Basic objectives Analysis and Interpretation****Assessment of Heritage interpretation infrastructure and their challenges.**

Heritage interpretation and presentation infrastructures are very important parts of sustainability of heritage and tourism, but they are also the areas where government & other stakeholders have to face problems.

**Sing board, bill board and View tower availability:** as indicated from the above table, the tourists' response on

the availability of Sing board, bill board and View tower in the tourist attractions of Adwa, Axum and Shire is poor. Most respondents replied that the sites need infrastructures of the listed variables. The mean as indicated in the table above is 2.19286, 2.25357, 2.22857 while of the response of service providers on this facilities is 1.9167, 1.9917 and 1.9917 that shows the poor availability of Sing board, View tower and bill boards respectively. The researchers induce that the concerned bodies should work on these facilities enhancement to increase customer satisfaction.

**Table 2** Statistics from service providers *1= Very poor, 2= poor, 3= Average, 4= Good, 5= Very Good*

	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Dev
Sign board Availability	240	1.00	3.00	1.9167	.57250
Bill board availability	240	1.00	4.00	1.9917	.69059
View Tower availability	240	1.00	4.00	1.9917	.69059
Folders availability	240	1.00	4.00	2.0750	.76166
walk ways to sites availability	240	1.00	4.00	2.0792	.74175
Boundary and demarcation	240	2.00	5.00	3.6000	.67098
Tourist Map	240	1.00	4.00	2.0500	.71855
Site Cleanliness	240	2.00	5.00	3.4500	.65136
Guiding Manual	240	1.00	3.00	1.8875	.54105
Traditional Transport	240	1.00	3.00	1.9167	.57250
Product Authenticity	240	2.00	5.00	3.6000	.67098
Guides Appearance	240	2.00	5.00	3.2583	.73747
Tourism Product Readiness	240	1.00	5.00	3.5042	.75433
Display Availability	240	2.00	5.00	2.6000	.67098
Electronic Media	240	1.00	3.00	1.9167	.57250
Group mean				2.58	

Source Own calculation from SPSS, 2016

**Folders availability and walk ways to sites availability**

The tourists' response on the availability of folder and walk way in the tourist attractions of Adwa, Axum and Shire is poor. Most respondents replied that the sites need infrastructures of the listed variables. The mean as indicated in the table above is 2.35357 and 2.55357 while of the response of service providers on this facilities is 2.0750 2.0792 respectively. The researchers encourage that the concerned bodies should work on these facilities enhancement to maximize customer satisfaction by offering ease access to the information about the sites through folders and other printed materials as well as to the site its self through proper development of walk ways to the sites.

**Boundary and demarcation:** It is evident from the above table that the tourists' response on the availability of boundary and demarcation in the tourist attractions of Adwa, Axum and Shire is average. The mean as indicated in the table above is 3.3000 while of the response of service providers on these facilities is 3.6000 which is more than an average. But the level of protection, conservation and respecting the yards is not good as supported by interview and personal observation.

**Tourist maps and Site Cleanliness:** The tourists' response on the availability of tourist map and site

cleanliness in the tourist attractions of Adwa, Axum and Shire is poor and average with mean value of 2.35357 and 3.1179 respectively. Similarly the response of service providers on this facility is 2.0500 and 3.4500 respectively where more needs to be done by concerned body to avail tourist maps for the selected sites of Adwa, Axum and Shire supported by strategic works to make the destinations environments neat and clean which can highly contribute to maximum customer satisfaction.

**Display and Guiding Manual:** From the above table, the tourists' response on the availability of display and guiding manual in the tourist attraction sites of Adwa, Axum and Shire is poor with mean value of 2.35357 and 2.22857 respectively. The researcher recommends the concerned stakeholders to develop these facilities for attractions in and around stated towns of Adwa, Axum and Shire for proper heritage presentation and interpretation.

**Traditional transport:** The tourists' response on the availability of traditional transport in the tourist attraction sites of Adwa, Axum and Shire is poor with the mean value of 2.22857. Similarly the response of service providers on this facilities is with the mean value of 1.9167 which indicates poor. These results shows that there should be future strong effort from government and local communities to provide traditional transport service

for which is significant to involve the residents around the attractions in tourism business operation as well as for sustainable tourism development through minimizing air and noise pollution which can be caused by vehicles (modern transport).

**Authenticity of products Tour Guide Appearance and Tourism Product Readiness:** The tourists' response on Authenticity of products Tour Guide Appearance and Tourism Product Readiness in the tourist attraction sites of

Adwa, Axum and Shire is on average good with the mean value of 3.11 equally. Similarly the response of service providers on these variables is average with the mean value of 3.6000, 3.2583 and 3.5042 respectively which still needs more work to enhance the readiness of tourism product and its authenticity supported by proper appearance of professional tour guide to minimize the challenges of heritage interpretation and presentation.

#### Source Own calculation from SPSS, 2016

**Table 3:** local stakeholders' responses on heritage interpretation and presentation challenges *1= Very poor, 2= poor, 3= Average, 4= Good, 5= Very Good*

	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic
Tourist Information center performance	240	1.00	3.00	1.9167	.57250
Skilled manpower	240	1.00	3.00	1.9167	.57250
Budget	240	1.00	4.00	1.9917	.69059
Stakeholders awareness	240	2.00	5.00	3.6000	.67098
attention by government	240	2.00	5.00	3.6000	.67098
Benefit to local community	240	1.00	3.00	1.9167	.57250
Planning and Policy	240	2.00	5.00	3.6000	.67098
Group mean				2.64	

**Tourist information Center performance:** in the case study there is only one center located in Axum. As indicated in the table above, the level of performance of the center to provide timely, accurate, punctually, and comprehensively is poor. The mean of performance is below average i.e. 1.9167 out of 5. This is supported by interview to tourism and culture officials in the town of Axum. As a result, it calls for appropriate, skilled and fulltime access to the center.

**Attention by government and Policy, Budget, stakeholders awareness and Skilled manpower:** Although the number of foreign travelers who were interested in the natural, cultural, and historical attractions of Ethiopia has been increasing from year to year since Minilik's time (late 19<sup>th</sup> century), tourism as an economic activity and important industry was given due attention in the early 1960s. Thus, in Ethiopia, modern tourism activity was started not more than 45 years ago. This infancy of the sector causes to have little skilled manpower in its implementation. It is supported by the respondents that one of the major heritage interpretation and presentation challenges is lack of skilled manpower in the study area. The mean indicates poor availability of professionals. In addition, budget and benefits to locals are poor. Now, the attention, policy, and awareness are improving.

## CONCLUSIONS

Heritage interpretation infrastructures are very important parts of sustainability of heritage and tourism, but they are also the areas where government & other stakeholders have to face problems.

In brief, based on the results & discussions through questionnaire, interview, FGD, secondary sources and

field observation, the following are the main findings of the research study.

**Heritage interpretation and presentation infrastructure:** the area has poor infrastructural endowments like:

- **Less sing board, bill board and View tower availability:**  
As indicated from the analysis on the availability of sing board, bill board and view tower in the tourist attractions of Adwa, Axum and Shire is poor.
- **Poor folders and walk ways to sites availability**  
It is concluded that availability of folder and walk way in the tourist attractions of Adwa, Axum and Shire is poor. Most respondents replied that the sites need infrastructures of the listed variables.
- **Boundary and demarcation of sites are good**  
There is good boundary and demarcation works in most of the tourist attractions. But the level of protection, conservation and respecting the yards are not good.
- **Poor availability of tourist maps**  
Tourist map being key important in giving highlight information about the sites in each towns are poor as it can be observed from this study which needs further work by the concerned body.
- **Site Cleanliness**  
There is average site cleanliness in most sites of Adwa, Axum & Shire.
- **Display and Guiding Manual**  
As indicated from the analysis the availability of display & guiding manual in the tourist attraction sites of Adwa, Axum & Shire are poor.

- **No Traditional transport at all**
- **Authenticity of products, Tour Guide Appearance and Tourism Product Readiness**

The Authenticity of products, Tour Guide Appearance and Tourism Product Readiness in the tourist attraction sites of Adwa, Axum and Shire is on average good.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The researchers induce that the concerned bodies should work on these facilities enhancement to increase effective heritage interpretation and presentation. The researchers encourage that the concerned bodies should work on these facilities enhancement to maximize customer satisfaction by offering ease access to the information about the sites through folders and other printed materials as well as to the site itself through proper development of walk ways to the sites, view points, sign boards, tourist map and guiding manual. This can be solved through cooperation with training institutions. Supported by strategic works to make the destinations environments neat and clean which can highly contribute to maximum effective interpretation. The researchers recommend the concerned stakeholders to develop these facilities for attractions in and around stated towns of Adwa, Axum and Shire for proper heritage presentation and interpretation.

As the results indicated that there should be future strong effort from government and local communities to provide quality services for heritage interpretation and presentation to be comprehensive. For instance, local communities in providing traditional transport service, supporting in beautification and interpreters are also from local people. It also still needs more work to enhance the readiness of tourism product & its authenticity supported by proper appearance of interpreters, infrastructure development, and making potentials ready for visit to maximize tourist length of stay while minimizing the challenges of heritage interpretation & presentation.

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