

HARNESSING THE TOURISM RESOURCES OF NIGER STATE FOR SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION

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Abstract

Harnessing the tourism resources of Niger State for sustainable tourism development and promotion is a sure way to alleviate poverty, create job opportunities, improve the living standard of the host communities, among others. The paper attempts to x-ray the Niger State's potential tourism resources and offer how best to harness them for sustainable tourism development and promotion. Ethnographic techniques were used to elicit information and data collected were adequately analyzed. The result shows that Niger State is endowed with natural and cultural resources (both archaeological and ethnographic resources), that are potentialities for both nature-based tourism and cultural tourism respectively.

Keywords: Tourism resources, Natural and cultural resources, Archaeological and ethnographic resources, Niger State.

Introduction

Tourism is becoming a dominant sector and is ranked high in the economic development efforts of many nations. The industry creates jobs for employment from her diverse inter-related sectors and disciplines. Apart from jobs creation, tourism remains a good source of income generation and foreign exchange; it further promotes culture and peace among host communities. The industry is also valuable in heritage management and conservation. On the other hand, tourism development if not properly planned and prosecuted can lead to social and environmental problems such as threat to natural environment and culture, pollution, increase in criminal activities and the prices of used resources.

In view of the numerous values of tourism potentials when fully planned and developed; it becomes very crucial that if we are to harness the huge heritage resources of Nigeria for tourism, planning should therefore, be the bane of every development geared towards tourism. As noted by Christie and Crompton (2001) most countries have not developed their exceptional tourism potentials. Nigeria is among the countries of the world blessed with diverse natural and cultural resources that constitute tourism potentials; of which when fully harnessed would place the nation in a notable position in the world tourism map. In Nigeria, one outstanding State that is endowed with huge tourism potentialities is Niger State. The State's tourism resources include natural and cultural resources as well as man-

made attractions. How fully are the State's tourism stakeholders utilizing these resources for tourism is still questionable.

This paper therefore attempts to x-ray the Niger State's potential tourism resources and offer how best to harness them for sustainable tourism development and promotion with a view to maximize its benefits; while minimizing the social and environmental problems of unplanned tourism. The paper uses ethnographic techniques to elicit information and data collected were adequately analyzed.

Background Information

Niger State is located in the Western part of Nigeria and was formed out of the defunct North Western Nigeria in 1976. She lies on the 3.20° East and Longitude 11.30° North covering a total land area of 76, 363km/74, 244sqkm. The State is bordered to the North by Zamfara State, Kebbi State in the West, Kogi State in the South, Southwest by Kwara State, Northeast by Kaduna State and Southeast by FCT. The State has an international boundary with the Republic of Benin to the Northwest.

Niger State has an estimated population of about 3, 950, 249 based on 2006 census (NPC, 2006). The Nupe, the Gwari and the Hausa are the three major ethnic groups of the State. Most of the State's populations are farmers, producing crops like yam, beans, cassava, rice, groundnut, maize etc. However, some percentages of the populace are involved in vocations such as white-collar jobs, business, and arts and crafts.

The State has a total of twenty five local government areas, which include Agaie, Agwara, Bida, Borgu, Bosso, Chanchaga, Edati, Gbako, Gurara, Katcha, Kotangora, Lapai, Luvum, Magama, Mariga, Mashegu, Mokwa, Muya, Paikoro, Rafi, Rijua, Shiroro, Suleja, Tafa and Wushishi. Religiously, the people of Niger State are predominantly Muslims and Christians with very few adherents and admirers of traditional religion. The State possesses fertile land as a cherished asset and the potentials are yet to be fully explored. She is therefore, one of the richest State in the country endowed with tourism potentialities.

Descriptive Presentation of Tourism Resources in Niger State

The origin of the word 'resource' is traced to the Old French term '*res-sorcere*' meaning source. Resources in tourism may be defined as all those natural and cultural attractions as well as man-made objects that can be advantageously utilized for the purpose of tourism in a given place.

Many scholars (Okpoko and Okpoko 2002, Okoli 2001, Knezeric 2008, Inskeep 1991) have categorized tourism resources into two or more: natural features, cultural attractions and man-made objects. However, the basic classification of tourism resources is done based on specific criteria – genetic and anthropogenic origins. From genetic perspective, resources are classified as natural (that which nature has created) and anthropogenic (that which humans have created). Furthermore, anthropogenic tourism resources

are classified as cultural assets (movable and immovable assets), ethno-social resources (folklore, handicrafts products etc) and artistic resources (music, drama, paintings, sculpture, architecture etc).

Howbeit, whether a given place possesses natural, cultural or man-made attractions (or even all put together); it may either be actual tourism attraction or potential tourism resources. In some cases, both actual and potential tourism resources may coexist in a given place. In the words of Knezevic (2008:80) original resources are high-quality (attraction) resources, the properties of which attract tourists and which can be said to be direct resources. Thus, direct resources that have been valorized in tourism purposes are said to be actual tourism attractions; whereas those that exist in a given area but have not been valorized are considered potential tourism attractions. For the purpose of clarity, I shall examine both potential and actual tourism attractions of Niger State, and which constitute her primary tourism resources.

1) Nature/Eco-based Resources

Natural tourism resources consist of all natural elements and factor that posse a high degree of attractiveness and that reflects their geographical environment and can be valorized for tourism purposes (Djukie 1999 in Knezevic 2008:80). Such resources are classified based on their features like geo-morphological, climate-based, hydro-graphical and bio-graphical features.

The concept of natural beauty as an attraction for tourists was reinforced by the designation and development of national parks in Nigeria. Therefore, a travel that primarily involves direct enjoyment of undisturbed natural environment would be said to be nature-based tourism. Most scholars, however, qualifies nature-based tourism as being specifically concerned with the conservation and preservation of the ‘nature’ on which the tourism is based. For many researchers, it is this qualification that distinguishes eco-tourism from nature-based tourism. While nature-based tourism is derived from the existence of natural areas with no specific concern for their protection, eco-tourism is concerned with the protection of natural areas. Table 1 below presents nature/eco-based tourism resources of the study area.

Table 1: Nature/Eco-based Tourism Resources in Niger State

S/No	Name of Resources	Location	Local Government Area
1.	Zugurma National Park	Zugurma	Mashegu
2.	Zuma Rock	Suleja	Suleja
3.	Regge Hill	Bassa	Shiroro
4.	Sanjir Mountain	Rijau	Rijau
5.	Rataya giwa Mountain	Rijau	Rijau

6.	Kusherki Magnetic Hill	Kusherki	Rafi
7.	River Chimbi	Chimbi	Paikoro
8.	Hwa-hwa Stream	Ezhi	Mokwa
9.	Crocodile Pond	Mokwa	Mokwa
10.	Ibbi National Park	Ibbi	Mashegu
11.	Gwagwade Moving Rock	Gwagwade	Magama
12.	Like O. Mystic River	Salka	Magama
13.	Dagina Games Reserve	Dagina	Lavun
14.	Gurara Waterfall	Bonu village	Gurara
15.	Pati-woli (Mountain)	Lemu Essan	Gbako
16.	Baro Empire Hill	Baro	Agai
17.	A Bee Tree	Agwara	Agwara
18.	Kainji Lake National Park	New Bussa/Ibbi	Borgu
19.	Awaru Rapid falls	Kainji	Borgu
20.	Bosso Dam/Hill	Bosso	Bosso
21.	Federal College of Wildlife Management	New Bussa	Borgu
22.	National Institute for Fresh Water Fisheries Research	New Bussa	borgu

2) Cultural Resources

Cultural resources refer to those rich non-material and material attributes acquired within the society and transmitted through generations. Included among them are the diverse beliefs, festivals, diets, dances, drama, metal working and wood carving, characteristic of a given society (Okpoko 1990). Some of these resources may remain in actual use as do some historic and ethnographic materials, or they may consist only of partial remains and the traces of past use, as with archaeological sites (Lipe 1984 in Okpoko and Okpoko 2002:38).

Our cultural attractions remain the captivating cultural norms, values, beliefs, customs and traditions with their features which a given society is endowed. Such cultural resources are often learned within the society and transmitted from generation to generation. In parts of Nigeria like Niger State, cultural attraction remains the bane of tourism in the State; constituting a good percentage of the State's tourism resources.

Cultural tourism is build upon cultural resources, which constitute cultural tourism features. Midlik (1995) described cultural tourism in both narrow and broad terms. In the narrow sense, it includes movements of persons for essentially cultural motivations such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals, visits to sites and monuments. In a broad sense, it entails all movements of persons, which satisfy the human need for diversity, giving rise to new knowledge, experience and encounter. Table 2 below presents notable cultural resources of Niger State.

Table 2: Cultural Resources/Attraction in Niger State

S/No	Name of Resources	Location	Local Government Area
1.	Mungo Park Cenotaph	Jebba North	Mokwa
2.	Growing Pot	Gbara	Mokwa
3.	Wushishi Engine Tramway No. 1	Minna	Minna
4.	Nagwamatse Well	Nagwamatse (along Tegiina-Kontagora)	Mariga
5.	Local Dyeing Centre	Kutigi	Lavun
6.	Dauda Maza Weaponry	Lapai	Lapai
7.	Dabo Mosque	Gulu	Lapai
8.	Nnamdi Azikiwe Centre	Zungeru	Wushishi
9.	Shiroro Hydro-electric Dam and Lake	Zumba	Shiroro
10.	Kainji Hydro-electric Dam Complex	Kainji	Borgu
11.	Baro Port	Baro	Agale
12.	Soje Hut	--	--

There are two aspects of cultural resources upon which cultural tourism is also based and which arouse the curiosity of tourists, thereby motivating cultural movements. These are archaeological and ethnographic resources. As noted by Inskeep (1991:77) types and numbers of attractions have greatly increased and the proliferation of attractions and related activities is still underway.

Furthermore, the three categories of attractions (natural, cultural and man-made) are divided into more specific sub-categories and can be applied in virtually any tourism planning area with the subdivisions created for the specific area being planned based on its particular characteristics. It is based on the above that the researcher identified some tourism resources in Niger State that falls under archaeological as well as ethnographic resources.

i) Archaeological Resources

These comprise cultural materials of extinct societies such as artifacts, features, ecofacts, sites etc. In essence, they constitute the raw material or data for archaeology. Niger State is dotted with archaeological sites and features. Sites here refer to as any distinctively marked portion, space and/or area that contain evidence of past human activities often referred to as artifacts by archaeologists. Features on the other hand, are non-portable artifacts, which cannot be recovered from their matrix. Any attempt to remove them will either alter or destroy their original form; thus, they are studied or admired *in-situ*. Archaeological resources identified in our study area are presented in table 3 below.

Table 3: Archaeological Resources in Niger State

S/No	Name of Resources	Location	Local Government Area
1.	Tsoede Tomb	Gwagwade	Magama
2.	Niger State Museum	Minna	Minna
3.	Nagwamatse Tomb	Mamba	Magama
4.	Capt. G.F. Tabman's Grave	Gulu	Lapai
5.	Binna Foot Print	Binna	Lapai
6.	Essan Old Kingdom Ruins	Essan	Gbako
7.	Zarumai's Grave	Bosso	Bosso
8.	Pissa Cave	Pissa	Borgu
9.	Kisra Museum	New Bussa	Borgu
10.	Old Settlement Site	Ibbi	Mashegu
11.	Manko Tomb	Rabba	Mokwa
12.	Lord Lugard Colonial Ruins	Zungeru	Wushishi

ii) Ethnographic Resources

Ethnographic resources here consist of cultural materials of extant societies such as landscape features, shrines, monuments, arts and crafts, oral tradition and traditional festivals. Ethnographic resources are classified into two broad groups as material and non-material culture. Material culture refers to the concrete things that are made and used by man in a society such as carved objects, houses etc; while non-material cultures are those non-tangible things, which cannot be seen, touched or feel such as music, dances, festival etc. Landscape features (like river, tombs, caves/rock-shelters, grove/shrines) on the other hand are also ethnographic in nature. These landscape features may qualify as cultural resources because human beings modify them and also because they attach names, myths and affective values to features of the territory they inhabit. According to Okpoko, *et. al.* (2008:72) landscape features are conserved in Nigeria for recreational purposes because of their scenic beauty or scientific importance. While some are reserved areas converted into parks; others are left solely in the care of indigenous peoples because of the beliefs, myths, and traditional values such places hold for them. Table 4 below buttress ethnographic resources identified in Niger State.

Table 4: Ethnographic Resources in Niger State

S/No	Name of Resources	Location	Local Government Area	Time/ Season
1.	Akpazuma Festival	Adunu	Paikoro	December Period
2.	Harguwa Festival	Rigua	Rigua	Harvest Period

3.	Durbar Festival	All Emirates	All Emirates	Sallah Fest period
4.	Gani Festival	Kutigi	Lavun	March/April
5.	Big-Yama Festival	Gunna/Yakila	Rafi	After Harvest
6.	Bassange Rege	Bassa	Shiroro	After Harvest
7.	Gupya Festival	Gusoro	Shiroro	Before Planting Season
8.	Odire Festival	Kaffin koro	Paikoro	December Period
9.	Anakpe Festival	Guni	Munya	After Harvest
10.	Ebiko Fishing Festival	Nuwankota/Lemu	Gbako	After Harvest
11.	Brass Work Tswata-makun	Bida	Bida	----
12.	Massage Glass Work	Bida	Bida	----
13.	Tatiko Cottage Industry	Tatiko	Paikoro	----
14.	Arts and Crafts Centre	Uregi	Rafi	----
15.	Local Dyeing Centre	Kutigi	Lavun	----
16.	Makwalla Dyeing Centre	Auna	Magama	----
17.	Ladi-kwali Pottery Centre	Suleja	Suleja	----

Harnessing the Tourism Resources for Sustainable Tourism Development and Promotion

The process of harnessing and developing the potentialities of tourism resources in Niger State into tourism product with a view to enhancing tourist flow is termed tourism planning and development. Tourism products here simply refer to a combination of attractions, accommodation and entertainment. Thus, tourism products are those resources that the tourists pay for as well as the services rendered during their stay in the destination.

A look at the nature/forms as well as the various locations of tourism resources of Niger State arguably informs us that they are known beyond the host or local community/communities; they provide experiences that can be consumed; they are unique, interesting and accessible; and they are close to a large population and/or gateway to a major city (Okpoko, *et. al.* 2008:34). Thus, the above factors influence the choice of potential tourism resources for development.

Some scholars have developed models and procedural steps for tourism development. Such models like the 4Ds of Discovery, Dream, Design and Delivery (TMI 2000) constitute the sequential process of participatory community-based tourism planning that builds upon local or regional tourism assets. On the other hand, procedural steps (like Okoli 2001:55) are aimed at identifying or discovery of an area(s); evaluating the attractions, providing infrastructure to enhance tourist flow; and publicity/promotion in other to reach wide audience. Whether an attraction is developed using an existing model or procedural steps, the overall aim is to make them (model/procedural steps) fit into the proposed site earmarked for development. Where such is not adaptable holistically, it can be modified bearing in mind the environmental settings of the area under investigation.

Again, the overall objective of harnessing tourism resources for development is to maximize its potential benefits ranging from economic, cultural, political to environmental benefits as well as to minimize the negative consequences of unplanned tourism on the environment, economy and society at large.

The following steps are proposed for harnessing Niger State tourism resources for development and promotion.

- i. **Identification or Discovery of Tourism Resources:** This is done either by chance or design. However, since our study area is not virgin site, the identification/discovery phase may not apply.
- ii. **Evaluation:** This is done to determine its market potentials with the aim of identifying the probable customers (tourists), where they are likely to come from, what they would want, how much they can pay etc. So as to package the product to meet their needs (Okoli 2001:55).
- iii. **Provision of Infrastructure to Enhance Tourist Flow:** Following the availability of these resources and its evaluation, government at all levels should collaborator with tourism stakeholders to provide infrastructure that would cater for the inflow of visitors. Among such required infrastructure are access roads to the resources, potable drinking water, electricity supply, communication networks etc. Such infrastructure has to be adequate to serve the need of both residents and visitors.
 In collaboration with the private sectors, the tourism resources are developed to tourist attractions by providing some tourism facilities to accommodate the growing number of visitors and service their needs. Such facilities include hotels and other eating establishments, tourist information offices, banks and money exchange, safety, personnel services like barbers and beauticians etc (Okpoko *et. al.* 2008:35).
- iv. **Publicity and Promotion:** The aim of publicizing and promoting the attractions is to bring them to the attention of potential customers. Promotional avenues include all modes of

communication either through print media (like newspapers, magazines, books, handbills, billboards, pamphlets, flyers etc) or radio and television (like television adverts, radio jingle, documentaries etc). Again, publicity of these attractions could also be achieved through satellite communication. Here, cable services are best option as it is subscribed by wide range of customers and covers wide range of areas beyond the host country.

Furthermore, communication within the tourism industry in some parts of the developed and developing countries of the world is now principally conducted through the medium of Computerized Reservation System (CRS) and view-data, which together have replaced the use of telephone and the post. Thus, an added impetus to the improved communication in all parts of the world, particularly in Nigeria is the Internet.

A website hosting varieties of Niger State attractions can be hosted on the Internet. Video clips showing episodes and scenes of cultural festivals, arts performances and services delivery can be uploaded on the website with the aim of facilitating and/or promoting tourism in the State.

The developers of Niger State attractions should also bear in mind of the values of wildlife, archaeological/ethnographic resources and religious sites to tourism, and as such should explore them. It should be noted that in countries where wildlife is given priority, tourism activities are on the increase, since many tourists are often motivated to travel to such destinations for sight-seeing and to enjoy other leisure and recreational facilities that may be provided in such places (Okpoko *et. al.* 2008). For instance, in Niger State, endangered species like Elephants, Hippopotamus, Warthog, Buffaloes, Lions, Monkey of various species, and other bird species etc are all conserved in such protected areas like Kainji Lake National Park. These animals have high visitor appeals and thus, explain why people travel to Niger State from different parts of the country just to enjoy themselves by having a feel of these animal species.

As rightly noted by Aremu (2008:90) tourists want to see curious features made by unknown populations of old, discovered by archaeologists. All archaeological resources are marketable for tourists. These include monuments and monumental sites, settlement sites (natural and man-made) including caves, rock-shelters and architectural settlement structure. Man's cultural resources tell of his socio-behaviour and socio interactions.

In some parts of the world, efforts are also made to explore religious/sacred sites that would attract tourists. Such efforts have promoted religious tourism in places like Israel, Saudi-Arabia etc; where

sites with biblical significance were explored and now attract pilgrims from far and wide.

Again, developing Niger State's tourism resources in collaboration with the education sector is advantageous in the sense that tourism will be taught at primary and secondary schools as well as tertiary institutions. It should be noted that tourism industry will be employing undergraduate students at the conclusion of their tourism related courses such as hotel management, catering services studies, event management etc. It is therefore my believe that once our education sector such as Ibrahim Badamesi Babangida University, Lapai; Federal Polytechnic, Bida etc incorporate tourism as part of the curriculum taught, it will undoubtedly make education establishments to respond to the needs of the tourism industry.

According to Odunsanwo (2010) the collaboration of tourism industry with education sector should extend beyond the development of a curriculum, but should also be aimed at improving the technical and management skills of entrants into the hospitality industry. He further stated that partnership in delivery is a strong feature and should include provision of up-to-date case study materials direct from industry; selecting guest lecturers from industrialists; arranging for students' industrial studies in tourism related areas as well as improving career prospects for grandaunts. Such collaboration will also provide tourism students with immediate access to the latest technologies, human relations, work/employment international best practices adopted in travel agencies, accommodation industries, airline operators, transportation companies, communication and catering industries.

Conclusion

An attempts has been made to x-ray the Niger State's potential tourism resources and offer how best to harness them for sustainable tourism development and promotion. To achieve this, ethnographic technique was employed to elicit information. Both potential and actual tourism attractions of Niger State were examined. Findings includes identification of nature/eco-based resources, and cultural resources (archaeological and ethnographic resources). The archaeological resources comprise cultural materials of extinct societies such as artifacts, features, ecofacts, sites etc. as noted previously, sites in this context refer to as any distinctively marked portion, space and/or area that contain evidence of past human activities often referred to as artifacts by archaeologists. On the other hand, ethnographic resources consist of cultural materials of extant societies such as landscape features, shrines, monuments, arts and crafts, oral tradition and traditional festivals.

The procedural steps as advocated by Okoli (2001:55) is adjudged adequate because it allows for identification of an area(s); evaluation of the attractions, provision of infrastructure to enhance tourist flow; and finally, promotion of the attraction in other to reach wide audience. It should be

noted that the overall objective of harnessing tourism resources for development is to maximize its potential benefits ranging from economic, cultural, political to environmental benefits as well as to minimize the negative consequences of unplanned tourism on the environment, economy and society at large.

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