

# Amanchor Cave As A Potential Tourist Destination

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## Abstract

*Caves are very important to tourism because of their utilitarian values to extinct societies and the appeal they hold for nature lovers. Amanchor cave, found in Amanchor Village in Edda (Afikpo South) Local Government Area of Ebonyi State was studied using the qualitative approach. The specific objectives of the study were to: (i) evaluate Amanchor cave as a tourist destination, (ii) identify other tourist's attractions in Amanchor community. Results show that the cave is a rich geotourism destination, there are other tourism attractions which can be developed alongside the cave. These include: wrestling (Igba-ngba), waterfall (Iyi mosi), Eyirighaya (a popular female dance), Egburuegbu (local cuisine) and the New Yam Festival (Ikeji). Absence of basic infrastructure and lack of political will were identified as major challenges facing the development of the cave. However, the people showed high interest and commitment in developing the cave and are willing to partner with both government and private sector. This paper contends that Amanchor cave holds great promise if concerted effort is made towards its development.*

**Keywords:** Cave; development; tourism destination; Amanchor

## Introduction

Caves have always been a source of immense fascination for human beings. Primitive people made use of caves as security platforms, shelter, for rock art, for burial as in rock-cut tombs and as religious centres. For researchers, tourists and adventurers of today, cave is among the very few remaining unexplored ecosystems of the universe. Thus, caves are subject of great interest for disciplines such as Archaeology, Geography, History, Anthropology and Tourism. As the socio-economic significance of tourism continues to soar globally, caves are becoming invaluable to tourism.

A Cave could be described as a cavity or hollow space in the surface of the earth large enough for a person or persons to enter. The formation or development of caves is known as Speleogenesis. Speleology, on the other hand, is the scientific study and exploration of caves including cave environment. Caves result from various geologic processes. "These may involve a combination of chemical processes, erosion from water, tectonic forces, microorganisms, pressure, and atmospheric influences" (Gunn & David, 2016). According to Cavendish (2005:237), "A cave system may be a single, readily accessible cavity several feet deep or an extensive and complex network of interconnected tunnels of different sizes and shapes that extend underground for hundreds of miles". Caves are of various types such

as solutional caves, sea or littoral caves, erosional cave, glacier cave, fracture cave and anchialine cave.

Cave-inhabiting animals, often categorized as *troglobites* (cave-limited species), show a number of characteristics associated with their adaptation to subterranean life. These characteristics may include loss of optical functionality, an elongation of appendages, and an enhancement of other senses such as the ability to sense vibrations in water (Cave, 2017). Another feature is loss of pigment. Deep cave ecosystems, lacking the sunlight necessary for photosynthesis depend on bacteria that use chemosynthesis to create energy (Columbia Encyclopedia, 6<sup>th</sup> edition. 2015).

Caves were made use of by primitive people; many caves contain deposits of animals, plants and human remains as well as artifacts. Thus, caves provide rich data base for paleontologists, archaeologists and historians, including the field of tourism. And as natural attraction, much has been written on caves and tourism development.

Lobo and Moretti (2009) studied speleotourism in the Serra Da Bodoquena region of Brazil, and advocated the use of carrying capacity principle as a starting point for the management of caves. They posited that since the space in caves is limited, speleotourism must move beyond the basic issues of carrying capacity to provide management because a robust management plan can diminish negative impacts on the environment. Similarly, Emeafor (2016) studied the Cave of Nkpurukem in Ebonyi State and found that the various engravings on the rocks by visitors pose serious threat to the cave. He blamed this unethical conduct on lack of well-articulated management plan for the cave. Chipping of rocks as well as microliths by tourists has been reported by Fennell (1999:251), in his study of the Great Ayers Rock of Central Australia, as unethical.

Ibeanu (2006) viewed cave from archaeological perspective, explaining that caves served as transient habitation sites for man at different epoch in the past. Caves, according to him, are believed to have preserved the cultural sequence of human occupations that made use of them at certain points in time, because most artifacts and ecofacts were *in situ*. Onwudufor and Odum (2015) reported on Ufuma cave in Anambra State. They found that the cave is not gazetted and attributed this to lack of knowledge about the existence of the cave by Anambra State Ministry of Culture and Tourism. They observed that the deification of the cave to the Ogbannehi spirit has helped to preserve the cave.

A study by Itanyi, Okonkwo and Eyisi (2013) identified the economic and cultural benefits of caves and rock shelters in tourism development. According to them, the Owerre-Ezukala cave has brought some economic benefits to the people in form of entrance fees, income generated from local

transportation, guiding activities, and food. They opined that indigenous culture is preserved and promoted for posterity through the annual organization of picnic/carnival every last Saturday in the month of May. Available empirical research closely connected to this study was done by Anyanwu (2009). In the study, titled *Tourism and its Development in Ebonyi State: A Case Study of Selected Sites*, she identified lack of basic amenities such as poor accessibility, lack of electricity and pipe-borne water as major weaknesses of the Amanchor cave. The present study, among other things, attempts to bolster what has been done on Amanchor cave in relation to tourism development.

Amanchor holds great promise as a tourist destination. This explains why the cave appears as the number one tourism attraction in magazines, leaflets and brochures produced by Ebonyi State Ministry of Culture and Tourism. However, not much has been researched about this cave in relation to its tourism potential. For instance, there is dearth of information on the location of the cave in physical space, the infrastructural facilities that can boost tourist interest in Amanchor, the socio-cultural values of the cave to host community, and other tourist attractions available in Amanchor. There is equally the need to uncover the prospects and challenges of developing the cave into a robust tourism destination. Motivated by this kind of situation, the general goal of the paper was to conduct an ethnographic study of Amanchor cave as a potential tourist destination. The specific objectives of the paper were to: (i) position Amanchor cave in physical space (geo-referencing Amanchor cave), (ii) discuss the uses of the cave (iii), identify other tourist attractions in the community of Amanchor, (iv) ascertain the prospects of Amanchor cave for tourism development and (v) identify the challenges of developing the cave.

## **Materials and Methods**

The qualitative or naturalistic methodological approach was adopted for the study. Instruments for primary data gathering were in-depth interview, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and field observation. Others were a hand-held GPS (Global Positioning System) for collecting coordinates, a ranging pole and tape for measurement as well as a still-life camera for photographic documentation. These were supplemented with secondary sources of data such as books, academic journals, unpublished thesis and public library.

## **Study Area**

Amanchor is one of the hamlets in Etit community of Edda (Afikpo South) Local Government Area, Ebonyi State. Etit comprises the following

hamlets: Amaoso, Ezi-Edda, Ndi-Edda, Ndiofio-Edda, Amanchor, Amaigbo, Ama-oba, and Ekeje. Oral tradition identified a certain hunter by the name Ofia Uko as the progenitor of Amanchor. Amanchor has two principal family groups viz: Ezi-Ukwu and Ndiorie. The former consists of the following families in order of seniority - Ezieze, Amankpa and Eziofuru with Ezieze as the royal family of Amanchor people. The latter comprises Ndiagha, Ndiama, Ndichimarowa and Ndiogba, according to order of seniority. Amanchor people, like the entire Afikpo group, practice the *Ikwu* kinship system. *Ikwu* is a form of kinship based on matrilineal family relationship, thus, the people are characteristically marked by the double descent phenomenon (see Otternbeg 1968). Double descent implies that a child has full inheritance rights on the mother's side, but such rights are limited on the father's side (Obasi, 1998).

Generally, Afikpo, which Amanchor belongs to, is located on the west bank of the Cross River where it turns southwards. It is a hilly region which lies in the trough of a syncline of undulating sandstone ridges (Aja, 1976:1-2). Amanchor community is located on a hill about 120 meters above sea level. In the Afikpo area, Orizu (2015) remarked that the valley terrain mostly brings about thick vegetation as a result of the availability of surface water caused by the impermeable nature of shale. In the raining season, fairly withered grasses are found on the hills with irregular occurrences of shrubs and trees with the valley containing mostly denser vegetation. Vegetation, Orizu notes, is mostly Guinea Savannah owing to extensive deforestation. Trees found in Amanchor include: *Achi* (*Brachystegia nigerica*), Iroko (*Chlorophora excelsa*), *Akpu* (*Ceibapent andra*), Gmelina (*Gmelina arborea*), Palm tree (*Elaeis guineensis*), *Udara* (*Chrysophllum albidum*), while climbers like *Utazi* (*Gongronema latifolium*) were seen near the cave environment.

Amanchor is endowed with rich cultural practices. *Egbela* Edda is a secret cult observable among the Amanchor people. According to the traditional leader of Amanchor, Agwuibe Boniface, *Egbela* is an initiation rite for boys which symbolizes passage into manhood. For Ikwugwu (2007), the cult is reputed to have religious, social and political influence on the lives of the Edda people. It plays a protective role on its subjects and demands strict reverence and moral purity from its members.

Amanchor community is a poor agrarian community with no government presence. People still live in mud houses, with pockets of houses made of blocks. There is no hospital, tarred road, and pipe-borne water. Electricity supply was extended to the community for the first time on 10<sup>th</sup> December, 2016 through community effort. At present, Amanchor has only a nursery school managed by the Reformed Presbyterian Church. The result is

that the children of Amanchor go through untold hardship to attend primary and secondary schools in neighbouring communities.



**Plate 1: A View of Amanchor Community**

## Findings

### **Amanchor Cave as a Tourism Destination**

The principal tourist attraction in Amanchor is the *Ogba-Ukwu*. *Ogba* is an indigenous name for cave among Igbo people. The cave was discovered by a renowned hunter, Ofia Uko, the progenitor of Amanchor village. In one of his hunting expeditions, he was said to have noticed that all animals he aimed at scampered off towards a particular direction. Following the same direction, he trailed the animals to a house-like structure which was later discovered to be a cave. Ofia Uko called it *Ogba Amanchor* and invited people to come and see the cave. The visits to the cave, after some time, metamorphosed into an annual festival known as *Orie-Ogba*. It is usually celebrated on the last *Orie* (one of the four market days in Igbo cultural calendar) of the year in the month of December. Amanchor cave is:

*An expansive opening branching into several directions under the whole stretch of a massive rock. Amanchor cave is something of great sentimental value to the villagers, and the center of a long, unbroken tradition. It is seen as a sacred gift from God to the people. (Ebonyi State Ministry of Information and Sports Handbook, 2001).*

Ogba-Ukwu (Amanchor cave) is an abode of different species of bat (*Chiroptera*). "Nocturnal bats, with their ultrasonic radar guidance system, are particularly well suited to life in caves" (Cavendish 2005:238). The community admitted that the bats come out in the evening and go back during late hours of the night. These species are probably frugivores (fruit

eaters), or insectivores (insect eaters). Trees within the cave environment provide food for the bats.

The upper part of the cave environment is made up of broken 'sizeable' pieces of rocks. One of such rocks is in plate 2. It is called *Okpara Ogba*. A sacrifice is made at the spot prior to going to the cave. It is about 70 metres away from the entrance to the cave. The cave has an entrance with natural step-like structure; this has been enhanced by a wooden ladder provided by the community. The height of the entrance to the cave is 6 metres from the center and less than 6 metres from left or right of the cave. The thickness of the upper layer is 3.4 metres. The highest observable height inside the cave is 17.5 meters.

The second opening is called the 'window' of the cave based on oral tradition. The 'window' to the ground floor of the cave is 6.8 meters deep, 4.8 metres long and 3 metres wide. From the 'window', one can clearly view the floor of the cave. The third opening which is called the door of the cave is 2.3 meters in height and 7.1 meters in length. It is 37 metres away from the window of the cave.

Amanchor cave serves the following purposes to the local people. During the Nigerian/Biafran war, the cave served as a refuge for the people and their neighbours. Secondly, it is perceived as a god who answers all the prayers of the people, protects them and assists them in times of spiritual needs. The people believe that bats help to protect the cave by biting anyone who visits the cave with evil intention. In some situations, the ear of an evil visitor to the cave runs the risk of being blocked permanently.



**Plate 2: OkparaOgba**



Plate 3: Inside view of the Ogba (Cave)

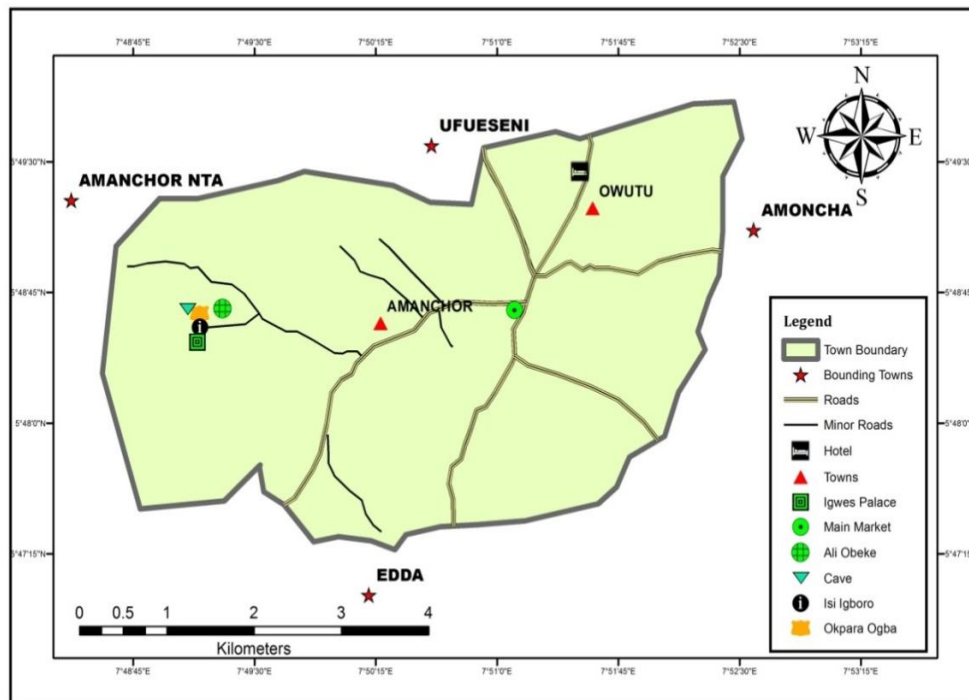


Fig 1: Map of Amanchor showing the location of Ogba-Ukwu and nearby features

### Other Tourist Attractions

Another tourist attraction in Amanchor is the shrine of *Ali-Obeke*. The deity is perceived as a god of fertility, and a place where the wishes of the people could be presented and granted. Once a family is blessed with the

first male child, the parents bring items of thanksgiving in clay bowl to the shrine to thank the gods after which the clay bowl is dropped at the foot of the deity. Interestingly, and for the villagers, the deity closely tied with the cave. Oral tradition revealed that the people of Amanchor discovered one morning that a huge chunk of rock had been carved out from the cave and deposited at a distance of about 300 metres away from the cave. The chunk of rock, which fits squarely into the cavity in the cave supposedly called the 'window', lay in such a curious position that the villagers thought it was hanging slightly above the ground (Ebonyi State Ministry of Information and Sports Handbook, 2001). What the people observed was an enigma to them, and they concluded that only the gods could accomplish such feat. Consequently, the people initiated a tradition of thanksgiving offering in honour of the 'mysterious' rock. Today, the shrine is surrounded by clay pots of all sorts, and in their thousands (see plate 4).



**Plate 4: Ali-Obeke Shrine with thousands of clay bowls around it.**

Amanchor community is blessed with other tourism attractions (material and non-material) which can be developed alongside the cave such that Amanchor can be transformed into a robust tourism destination. The community has a unique local cuisine, the *egburuegbu* soup, which is prepared with pumpkin leaves. According to an informant, Ngozi Orji, a staff of Ebonyi State Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the local cuisine won a national award for Ebonyi State in the annual Abuja Carnival. This holds huge potential for the development of culinary tourism. Another cultural resource is wrestling (*igba-ngba*) usually done after the planting season to lessen the stress associated with cultivation of plants. The wrestling competition is accompanied by a special dance known by the people as *er-ingba. Eyirighaya*. It is a popular female dance where young women dance half naked, symbolizing innocence and purity, to the admiration of the audience.

Waterfall, which the people call *Iyi Mosi*, and other water bodies such as *Osuwowo*, *Enyimoku*, *Iyi-Ogo*, *Ndioko-Afor*, *Ngeleelulu*, and *Isi-Igboro*, are some other resources yearning for development. Like every other Igbo group, Amanchor also boasts of the rich and colorful New Yam Festival which the people call *Ikeji*.

### **Discussion of Findings**

It is undisputable that while attractions bring visitors to destinations, the availability of adequate infrastructure makes their stay worthwhile. Amanchor community lacks basic amenities; electricity supply is a very recent phenomenon in the hamlet. Thus, absence of basic amenities is seen as a major weakness of Amanchor cave. Anyanwu (2009) also identified lack of electricity, poor accessibility and pipe-borne water as some of the weaknesses of Amanchor as a tourism destination. This suggests that Amanchor may not compete favourably, for the time being, since infrastructure is regarded as an integral part of tourism package. Tourism infrastructure is recognized as a top priority in determining the flow of tourism and the strength of infrastructure in any destination influences the destination's appeal to tourists (Gunn, 1988; Inskeep, 1991).

A major implication of lack of infrastructure is economic leakage. Leakage in the context of this study includes the amount or percentage of money which eludes host communities as a result of dearth of infrastructure and inability to supply quality goods and services at competitive prices and in a reliable way so as to meet market demand. The percentage of tourism revenue which flows out of the local economy in this way is regarded as "a deficit item in the balance of payments" (Ross, 2000:351) of tourism host country. Apart from accommodation, hospitals and other services, economic leakage can result from spending which visitors could have made within the community, but lost to the city or nearby community like Owutu. Ayeni and Ebohon (2012) equally discovered that due to lack of basic infrastructure for tourism, tourists do not stay overnight at destination communities; hence, the income expected to accrue to the local economy in terms of tourist spending is diverted to the city. However, the present study showed that rural electrification has reached the community although it is a very recent infrastructural achievement.

Whether the electrification is functional or not is yet another issue. Again, poor accessibility raised by Anyanwu is no more a significant issue as the present findings revealed that the road leading to Amanchor community has been well-graded, and access to and from major towns such as Amasiri is being enhanced by the ongoing construction of road. However, it is admissible that accessibility may have been a nightmare at the time

Anyanwu conducted her study. While research result confirmed the non-availability of pipe-borne water as reported by Anyanwu, it is arguable that the availability of six water bodies (*Osuwowo, Enyimoku, Iyiogo, Ogba-nta, Ndioko-afor, Isi-Igboro and Ngeleelulu*) in the community seems to diminish the challenge posed by pipe-borne water, at least for now. A tourist can drink from the *Isi-igboro* stream at the entrance of the hill leading to the community and other spring water bodies in the community. Spring water is equally considered to be one of the purest forms of water since it passes through layers of different sand and rock formations and contamination free storage areas called aquifers (<http://springwaterman.com.au/water-facts>). Moreover, one cannot tell whether tourists might want natural water instead of pipe borne water, especially, ecotourists or adventure seekers who may yearn for total experience.

Amanchor cave has very bright prospects as a tourist destination. For now, the benefits manifest in form of increased income for the community through entrance fees payment by visitors to the cave and tips given to local guides by visitors. Another is community recognition. Today, the community of Amanchor is recognized across the globe chiefly because of the cave; information about Amanchor can now be accessed on the internet (World Wide Web). This culminates in self-esteem by members of Amanchor community. However, the cave holds a lot more promise if concerted effort is made towards its development. Such prospects include: diversification of local economy, infrastructural improvement, opportunity to meet important people, preservation of cultural resources, etc.

Amanchor cave can become part of a tourism circuit within the Afikpo area known to be a repository of various tourism resources. "Circuit tourism involves visits to more than one destination during a trip away from home" (Ozment, 2000: 80). Burr (1995) beautifully remarked that "at an extra-community level, building and strengthening relationships with other communities in a particular region becomes important especially in terms of coordinating a variety of events and other tourism opportunities throughout that region". Developing Amanchor cave together with other tourism attractions in the Afikpo area as a tourism circuit will definitely enhance the quality of the sites because deficiency in one may be complemented by the other.

## **Recommendation and Conclusion**

Building the capacity of Amanchor people to effectively participate in tourism planning and development is highly recommended. 'Community capacity' is about increasing the personal and collective resources of individuals and communities in order to help them develop the skills and

capacity they need to respond to challenges and to seize opportunities that come their way (Fennell and Scougall 2004, cited in Aref and Redzuan 2009:22). Meanwhile, the people of Amanchor have expressed great desire to partner with government or individuals in the development of the cave. It is recommended that Ebonyi State Government should take proactive steps to lure the private sector into the development of Amanchor cave and tourism at large in the state. One of the ways to achieve this is to create the enabling environment for investors through infrastructural development, security of lives and properties as well as tax incentives, etc.

As a poor, agrarian community, we submit that tourism is one of the few options to bring development to Amanchor community, given the presence of the cave, other attractions, hospitality of the people and the pristine environment. What is required is the political will from government to make tourism a complementary path to development not just in Amanchor, but also in various rural communities that have tourist resources yearning to be tapped.

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