

IMPACT OF ACCOMMODATION FACILITIES ON GURARA WATERFALLS

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Abstract

The Gurara Waterfalls represents one of the undeveloped and interesting gifts of nature in Gurara, Niger State, North Central Nigeria. As a tourists' delight, the ambience and environment of the waterfalls present potentials for sightseeing, boating, canoeing, fishing and hunting. The shorter time spent by visitors and obvious lack of accommodation at the Gurara Waterfalls prompted this study, as accommodation provision could improve local economy, enhance tourists' arrival and length of stay. Accommodation is essentially a vital tourist product required to meet visitors' expectations of sleep, rest and relaxation at the destination. This study aimed at assessing visitors' preferences for accommodation types and factors responsible for the unavailability of accommodation facilities at the Gurara Waterfalls. Validated questionnaire was used to obtain data from Gurara residents, staff of Niger State Ministry of Land and Housing and visitors at the waterfalls. With the aid of the SPSS and EXCEL packages, data were coded and presented in statistical diagrams and tables, while frequency count and percentage were used to describe the variables pertaining to the respondents. The alternative hypothesis, which states that the provision of accommodation at the Gurara Waterfalls will have positive impact on tourists' arrival, was accepted. This implies that increased tourists' arrival will lead to patronage of local arts and crafts, cuisine and enhanced revenue for the government. It was reported that finance adversely affected the provision of accommodation at the Gurara Waterfalls. Findings also indicated that visitors at the waterfalls desired accommodation facilities like hotel, apartments, luxury lodge, floating hotels and resorts to be provided. The study recommends that Niger State government should engage the services of competent developers to build and manage the desired tourists' accommodation and earn revenue from the operations of the waterfalls for a certain number of years before relinquishing ownership to it.

Keywords: Accommodation facilities, Gurara Waterfalls, tourism development, sustainable tourism.

Introduction

As Hudson (1998) puts it, very many waterfalls may be regarded as tourism destinations, while many are simply attractions. In this respect, the Gurara Waterfalls presently belongs to the latter category. Accommodation provision is necessary to boost the potentials of the Gurara Waterfalls. The NIOS (2013) defined accommodation as establishments that provide a place for the tourist

to stay i.e. lodging facilities which are paid for the duration of the stay by the tourist. It is one of the basic needs for any tourism activity, as travellers and tourists need lodging for rest, while they are on a tour. In corroboration, Poudel (2013) reports that tourists in their travel require locations where they can rest and revive during their travel, as accommodation entails the base of tourism and a vital and fundamental part of tourism supply. Turnley and Milliman (2008) assert that the influence of the physical environment on consumer behaviour has received significant attention of researchers as well as gaining a wide acceptance from scholars and practitioners. In fact, after reaching his destination; the tourist craves for some form of accommodation that provides the necessity for rest, sleep and relaxation. Availability of accommodation not only improves the ambience of the physical environment but increases tourists' arrivals and length of stay at the destination. This thought is amplified by Butt (2019) that tourist accommodation performs an important function both within the context of rural and urban tourism. It provides the opportunity for visitors to stay for a length of time to enjoy the locality and its attractions, while their spending contributes to the local economy. Accommodation forms a base for tourist's exploration of the urban and non-urban environments. Accommodation imposes a distinctive image for waterfalls. For example, Low and Lamb (2000) describe image as the reasoned or emotional perceptions consumers associate to specific brands. Ryu, Lee and Kim (2012) maintain that arriving at a better perceived image should be the goal of every service provider due to its potential impact on repeat purchasing behaviour and profits. There is no doubt that tourism is dependent on the quality and quantity of accommodation facilities available. It is a very vital factor of tourism development. To imagine a successful tourism development, the development of accommodation should be considered as a core factor of the tourism planning. In other words, like Saxena (2008) puts it, accommodation is required in order to expand and develop the tourism industry. The results of this study, therefore, will provide the government the impetus to revolutionize the undeveloped Gurara Waterfalls, which will amount to significant economic benefits to the Gurara communities, as well as its visitors.

Statement of the Problem

The ambience of the Gurara Waterfalls presents rocky, cool, quiet and lush vegetation with the potentials for sightseeing, boating, canoeing, fishing and hunting. The Gurara Waterfalls is an amazing gift of nature, undeveloped, yet visited briefly by some few lovers of nature, mainly on excursions, thereby making very minimal impact on the local economy. The unavailability of accommodation at this tourists' delight is probably one major reason for the little number of visits to this tourist attraction. This situation could be changed if there are lodging facilities at the waterfalls, which would attract both domestic and foreign visitors to the attraction. For example, Josephs (2017) clarifies that foreign visitors accounted for just 20% of the more than 58 million

people who visited New York in 2015, but they contributed nearly half of the total \$42 billion these visitors spent. A foreign visitor spends about \$1,600 per trip, compared with just \$400 spent by Americans, who also includes day trippers. The provision of accommodation at the Gurara Waterfalls is likely to change the image of the attraction, bringing in more overnight visitors and increasing length of stay as well as impacting positively on the economy.

Research Questions

1. What are the visitors' choices of accommodation at the Gurara Waterfalls?
2. What are the factors responsible for the absence of lodging facilities at the Gurara Waterfalls?
3. To what extent will accommodation provision impact positively on tourists' arrivals at the Gurara Waterfalls?

Research Objectives

1. To ascertain visitors' preferences for accommodation types at the Gurara Waterfalls.
2. To identify factors responsible for the lack of lodging facilities at the Gurara Waterfalls.
3. To investigate whether or not accommodation will impact positively on tourists' arrivals at the Gurara Waterfalls.

Conceptual Framework

Description and Significance of Waterfalls

Waterfalls are one of the amazing tourist attractions that bring delight and pleasure to man. Today, many tourists travel to destinations just to experience beautiful landscapes including spectacular waterfalls. The National Geographic Society (2019) asserts that waterfalls also called cascades are a river or body of water's steep fall over a rocky ledge into a plunge pool below. Water, particularly from a stream or river, falling from mountains or hills to a lower place, is known as a waterfall or cascade. From their coolness to sound to aroma, they make perfect sites where one can spend hours to feel the real beauty of the natural world (BASICS, 2019).

In Nigeria, the major motivation for visiting waterfalls is for sightseeing. However, waterfalls are beneficial in many other ways. The Murchison Falls National Park (2019) outlines the following advantages of waterfalls:

1. Purification of water- As they flow into the different rivers, waterfalls purifies the water. Purification of water helps the different aquatic life to live through provision of oxygen. So without waterfalls and their purification of water, we would have no fish to eat, and other animals that live in water would die which would affect the eco system.
2. Health benefits of waterfalls- Waterfalls create calmness especially during day. Most people get tired especially during day and the negative ions from the waterfalls bring in calmness. They also help in

reduction of the free radicals which cause the damage of cells, DNA and proteins in the body through the release of the negative ions. Waterfalls also help in reducing stress and depression. The negative ions released causes calmness and this somehow alleviates stress and depression. Corroborating, Garden Ponds Unlimited (2019) opines that waterfalls provide soothing sights and sounds that help you relax from the stress of today's busy world, thereby lowering your blood pressure and improve your physical and mental health as you prop your feet up and enjoy the therapeutic effects of Mother Nature. In their report, the SpaDreams Blog (2019) emphasize that scientists have shown the benefits of fresh air and its abundance of negative ions from waterfalls, revitalizes cell metabolism, enhances immune functioning, helps to purify the blood, alleviates depression and stress and boosts daytime energy and balances autonomic nervous system, promoting deep sleep and healthy digestion.

3. Economic importance of waterfalls- Waterfalls attracts tourists who end up buying local produce and hence we earn money. The waterfalls can also be used to produce hydro electric power. Fishing can be carried out in waterfalls and the fish sold to get income and improve on the living standards of people. There is provision of jobs in waterfalls like cleaners, tour guides and this has helped in reducing the unemployment levels in the country.

Contributions of Accommodation Provision at Waterfalls

Travellers and tourists need lodging for rest, while they are on a tour. Accommodation in the form of low budget lodges/hotels to world class luxury hotels is available at all the major tourist destinations to provide the tourist a home away from home (NIOS, 2013). A major concern of tourists before embarking on travels is whether there is good accommodation at the destination. Accommodation, therefore, is essentially a vital tourist product required to meet visitors' expectations of sleep, rest and relaxation at the destination. So, it could be said that accommodation is at the core of tourists' experience. Like Poudel (2013) puts it, accommodation is a base of tourism industry as it is a vital and fundamental part of tourism supply. Tourists in their travel require locations where they can rest and revive during their travel. Sharpley (2000) declares that the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the supply of accommodation have a direct influence on the overall success of tourist destinations.

Tourists staying in tourist accommodation spend their money both inside and outside their accommodation, which means increased footfall for other local traders and service providers, and additional chain of economic activity generated beyond the accommodation itself. The provision of paid tourist accommodation in an area also increases the choice of accommodation options available to prospective tourists to a destination, and thereby makes it more attractive for those (a) who prefer to stay in paid accommodation such

as hotels, guest houses or (b) do not have the option of staying in unpaid accommodation (i.e. with friends and relatives) (Failte Ireland, 2019).

Background Information of the Study Area

Gurara Waterfalls is found in Gurara Local Government Area of Niger State, North Central Nigeria (see figure 1). Gurara Local Government Area has 10 Wards which includes; Bonu, where Gurara Waterfalls is found, Diko, Gawu, Izom, Kabo, Kwaka, Lambata, Lefu, Shako and Tufa. It has a total land area of about 1,126.3km² and an estimated population of about 90,974 people in 2006 (Niger State Department of Budget and Planning, National Population Commission, 2015). The Falls originated from River Gurara which is a large tribute of the famous River Niger. It is located in Gurara Local Government Area at Latitude 7^oE and Longitude 9^oN. This impressive waterfall is located 2km off Minna-Suleja Road, about 68km from Minna by road and 35km from Suleja by road. The Niger State Government allocated a total of 1,105.759 hectares for the development of the Falls (Niger State Culture and Tourism Corporation, 2015).

The falls is located in a tropical climate characterised by annual two distinct seasons: the wet or rainy season and dry season. The area has an annual rainfall of less than 1000mm, which occurs between April and September having a peak period between July and August. The dry season occurs within a period of six months, between the months of October and March. The temperature of the study area differs within seasons. Through the dry season, temperature is relatively high because, the sun is in the southern hemisphere. High temperature of between 30°C and 40°C are recorded within December to April while the wet season experiences lower temperature of between 26°C and 30°C highest within the season occurring at mid-days between May to July.



Figure 1: Map of Niger State Showing Gurara Waterfalls.

Research Methodology

Study Procedure:

In this study, three types of structured questionnaires were used to obtain data from Gurara residents, staff of Niger State Ministry of Land and Housing and visitors at the waterfalls. While the complete enumeration was used to sample senior staff of the Niger State Ministry of Land and Housing, systematic sampling was used to select the households where residents were dwelling using random sampling. The convenience sampling was adopted in selecting the visitors at the Gurara Waterfalls, especially at weekends. In the administration of questionnaires, 3 research assistants who are fluent in English and Gwari languages were employed especially for the purpose of effective communication with Gurara locals using their native language. Frequency count was used to analyse the data collected, while the Chi-square analytical technique was adopted to test the variables in the null hypothesis.

Results and Discussion

Analysis of the responses of staff of the Niger State Ministry of Land and Housing is presented in Tables 1 and 2. Table 1 shows the extent financial constraint has hampered the provision of suitable accommodations at the Gurara Waterfalls. While 25% of the respondents indicated that finance had hindered accommodation provision to a little extent, 25% of respondents did not make any decision. In this analysis, a whopping 50% of the respondents unanimously maintained that finance was a barrier to the provision of accommodation at the Gurara Waterfalls. This analysis also suggests that the government might not have seen tourism development as a priority area in the quest to diversify, grow the economy and provide jobs. As Eko, Utting and Onum (2013) observe, dependence on oil has adversely affected other sectors of the economy in Nigeria, relegating them to the background, as management of oil revenues has proven inefficacious in driving the economy in order to bring about the needed level of development. However, Eko et. al (2013) recommended agriculture and tourism as possible options for diversifying the Nigerian economy. In Table 2, analysis shows that government does not see any need to provide accommodations for visitors at the Gurara Waterfalls. 70% of the respondents were of the view that government's disposition to the provision of accommodation at the Gurara Waterfalls is low. This confirms the findings in Table 1 and could be attributable to government's inability to see the benefits of accommodation provisions at waterfalls. No doubt provision of accommodation at Gurara Waterfalls will lead to increased overnight stays by visitors. For instance, Wilson-Mah (2019) reports that in Canada, approximately 25% to 35% of visitor spending is attributed to accommodation, making it a substantial portion of travel expenditures, earning \$16.7 billion alone from overnight stays. Today tourists love to take accommodations close to nature, in peaceful and tranquil domains. Waterfalls hotels offer this great opportunity. Accommodations are necessary to provide restful and relaxing opportunities. When provided at waterfalls, accommodations enable visitors to have a more relaxing effect thereby enhancing mental health (World of Waterfalls, 2019).

Table 1:Extent of finance hindrance to accommodation provision at Gurara Waterfalls

Option		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Little extent	5	25.0	25.0	25.0
	Great extent	10	50.0	50.0	75.0
	undecided	5	25.0	25.0	100.0

	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork (2018)

Table 2: Government’s disposition for accommodation provision at Gurara Waterfalls.

Option		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	High	6	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Low	14	70.0	70.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Source: Fieldwork (2018)

In Table 3, the residents of Gurara showed significant level of apprehension about threat accommodation provision at Gurara Waterfalls could bring to their culture. This anxiety, which was demonstrated by 92.2% of the respondents, aligns with the findings of Mdusman (2016) that the intrusion of outsiders in the area may disturb the local culture and create unease among the people. The local people may copy the lifestyles of tourists through the demonstration effect, and the result could be loss of native customs and traditions. Some people may enter into criminal activities to fetch easy money from tourists, which leads to increased crime, anti-social activities and loss of moral and religious values. This indicates the powerful influence of tourists on the host community as they flaunt their wealth in their purchases and dressing, which in many cases negate real decency and piety. Talking about the negative effects of tourists on the host community, UK Essays (2019) emphasize that with the increasing amount of international travellers, and increasing number of tourist destinations, the amount of people entering the country can often be a disturbance to the country’s culture and beliefs. This may occur because of the fact that the vast majority of tourists are from First World countries, therefore it is difficult for host Third World countries to maintain their unique cultures and traditions when there are constant pressures to adapt to the various needs of the First World. This is also a way to notice that tourism is another form of old colonial practices, because they are trying to transform another culture into their own. Contributing, Kostalova (2017) found that tourism has a socio-cultural impact, which affects mainly the society and culture of a destination. Tourists also affect the main elements of the culture, such as the customs, beliefs and values. If adequate measures are

not put in place, tourists advertently or inadvertently transmit and impose their cultures on the host destination, which might result into cultural erosion or extinction.

Table 3: Accommodation provision: threat to the culture of indigenous people of Gurara

Option		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	83	92.2	92.2	92.2
	No	7	7.8	7.8	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

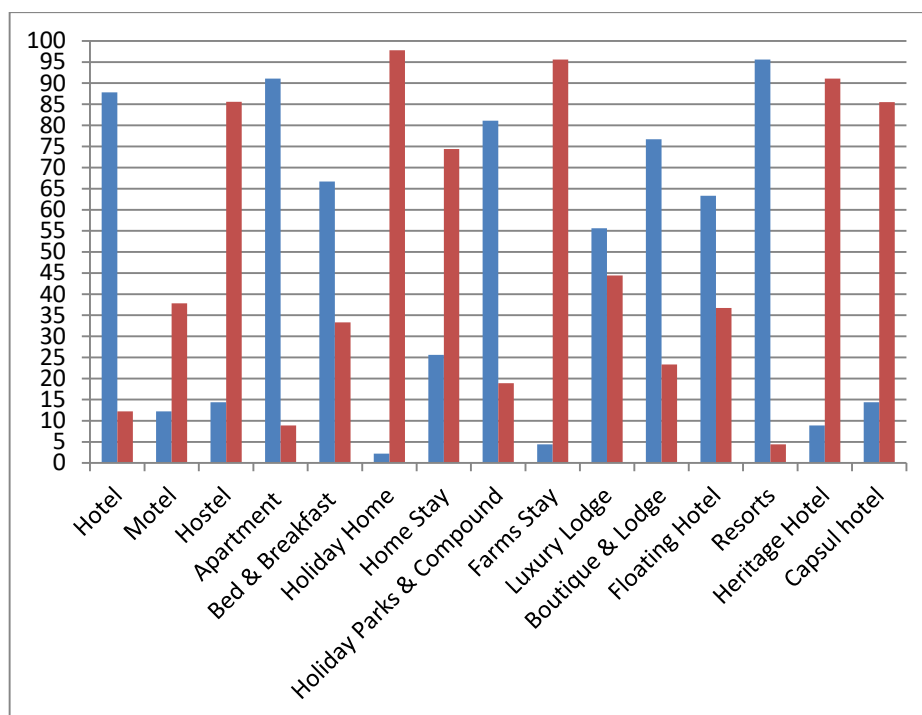


Figure 2: Tourists preference for various Accommodation types

Table 4: Accommodation Provision Increases Length of Stay at the Gurara Waterfalls.

Option		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Yes	79	87.8	87.8	87.8
	No	11	12.2	12.2	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Figure 2 presents a graphical illustration of tourists' choice of accommodations that should be provided at the Gurara Waterfalls. Analysis in Figure 2 clearly shows that tourists at the Gurara Waterfalls preferred accommodation facilities such as hotel, apartments, bed and breakfast, Holiday Park and compound, luxury lodge, boutique and lodge, floating hotel and resorts. In attaining the goals of providing accommodations at the Gurara Waterfalls, pragmatic efforts should be made to provide visitors desired accommodation types in order to meet their expectations as well as make profits. According to Ononogbo (2014), it is paramount that preferences for a product or service should be respected to enhance interest and acceptance of such services whenever it is established. One way of satisfying customers (tourists) is by providing them with services they desired. Bello and Majebi (2018) defined tourist satisfaction as the pleasure derived from consuming an offer that meets one's expectation. While citing Kamdampully and Hu, 2007 and Chang, 2008), Anyanwu (2018) emphasized that tourist satisfaction, and loyalty are derivatives of service quality.

Tourist satisfaction is a business philosophy that seeks to create value for tourists, provides and manages their expectations and demonstrates the ability to meet their needs (Curakovic, Sikora, Garaca, Curcis and Vukosav, 2013). One important reason the preferences of tourists for accommodation types at Gurara Waterfalls should be respected is because it is a key factor in formation of customer's desires for future purchase and drives tourists to a consistent patronage of products and services (Mittal and Kamakura, 2001). This will no doubt increase tourist loyalty and influence repurchase intentions (Dimitriades, 2006; Oloruniwo and Hsu, 2006), even for the Gurara Waterfalls.

In Table 4, 87.8% of the respondents were of the view that they would spend more nights at the Gurara Waterfalls if accommodation were provided. This implies that the more days spent at the waterfalls, the more money is generated from visitors and tourists not only on accommodation but also from food, beverages and local arts and crafts. It also suggests higher occupancy rate for waterfalls hotels. According to Abdul and Noorya (2000), occupancy rates are considered of utmost importance for the hotel's management in general, and for sales department in particular. The existence of occupancy

rate that are less than the hotel capacity means that there are lost selling opportunities, which leads to depletion in the hotel revenue. In the view of Lad (2017) the room's occupancy percentage and the average daily rate is often a primary concern for most hotel owners because they lend a boost to profits. They also act as a strong indicator of a hotel's performance and profits.

Chi-Square Test for Table 4

	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2Sided)	Exact sig. (2 sig) (1sided)	Exact (Sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	4.820	1	.001		
Continuity Correction	3.372	1	.001		
Likelihood Ratio	7.733	1	.001		
Fisher's Exact Test				.001	.001
Linear by Linear Association	4.733	1	.001		
N of Valid Cases ^b	90				

- a. 1 Cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.06
- b. Computed only for a 2 x 2 table

Hypothesis of interest:

H₀: The provision of accommodation at the Gurara Waterfalls will not have any positive impact on tourists' arrivals

H₁: The provision of accommodation on the Gurara Waterfalls will have positive impact on tourist arrivals

Decision Rule: Since p-value is less than 0.05 (i.e. 0.006 < 0.05, and 0.001 < 0.005), we reject H₀ and conclude that the provision of accommodation at Gurara Waterfalls will have positive impact on tourist arrivals. This implies, like table 4 has shown that more visitors will be willing to visit the Gurara Waterfalls especially those with overnight intentions. This no doubt, like Stynes (2019) has found, will contribute to sales, profits, jobs, tax revenues and income in the local economy.

Conclusion

Insights from literature and results of this study have shown that accommodation is very central in tourism business, as it provides the platform for meaningful rest and relaxation at the destination. Though a fascinating and undeveloped attraction, the Gurara Waterfalls can be upgraded to provide accommodation facilities for overnight visitors. However, this has been

difficult due to lack of finance and government's inability to see the need to build accommodation facilities at the waterfalls. Other findings also suggest that accommodation provision will be a threat to the culture of the indigenous people of Gurara, just as tourists believed that they would be willing to spend more days at the destination if their desired accommodation facilities were provided.

It is suggested that there should be a cultural /information desk at the waterfalls to educate tourists on arrival the expectations of the locals. As Harcourt (2016) emphasizes, cultural norms are the agreed upon expectations and rules by which a culture guides the behaviour of its members in any given situation. So, understanding a destination's norms is crucial to avoid conflicts or unpleasant reactions from locals. It is also expected that the Niger State government should engage the services of competent developers to build and manage the desired tourists' accommodation and earn revenue from the operations of the waterfalls for a certain number of years before relinquishing ownership to it.

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