

HARNESSING MAJOR TOURIST SITES FOR TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN SOUTHEASTERN NIGERIA: A CASE STUDY OF OGBUNIKE CAVE.

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Abstract

The paper examines major tourist sites for tourism development in southeastern Nigeria. Southeastern Nigeria is endowed with potential tourist sites yearning for development. Many of these tourist sites are neglected and some are not well developed. The availability of tourism products and services are essential for effective implementation of tourism development plans. The development of these potential tourist sites reduces the pressure for Nigerians to travel out of the country for a unique experience and also increase foreign visitors to Nigeria. The paper also examines Ogbunike cave, a potential tourist site in Anambra state and its economic benefits to Nigeria if properly developed and managed. The evolutionary and modernization theories of tourism development are relevant to this study. Both primary and secondary sources of data were used for gathering information for the study. The findings reveal that the only way to have sustainable tourism development is through the development of these neglected tourist sites in Southeastern Nigeria by provision of standard tourism products and services in the areas. This would increase contribution toward Gross Domestic Product, (GDP), employment generation, improved standard of living and socio-economic wellbeing of Nigerians.

Keywords: Tourist sites, Attractions, Tourism and Tourism development.

Introduction

Southeastern Nigeria is endowed with potential cultural and natural attractions, which if harnessed can promote tourism development in the region. The major tourist sites and/or attractions in southeastern Nigeria yearning for development include Ogbunike Cave in Anambra State, National War Museum in Umuahia, Abia State, Oguta Lake in Imo State, Ngwo Pine Forest and Ngwo Cave in Enugu State, Okposi Salt Lake in Ebonyi State. These natural and historical sites appear to have the characteristics of important

tourist destinations and therefore need to be developed and professionally managed.

Our purpose is to examine the economic benefits of these tourist sites to their host communities and the larger tourism industry in Nigeria. We will also consider the necessary infrastructural facilities that should be put in place for these tourist sites to function effectively.

Significantly, the study is meant to illuminate to the public and practitioners in the tourism industry on the need for the development of these tourist sites. The public need to be aware of the economic potentials and benefits of these tourist sites in Southeastern Nigeria, which if properly developed and managed would increase the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria and enhance further development of our tourism industry. The research paper relied on information sources such as academic journal articles, books, library, conference papers, focused group discussion, interview and personal observations.

Conceptual Clarification Tourism and Development

Tourism as a concept has taken many meanings owing to its composite nature which has allowed multi-disciplinary approach to its study. Van Harsseel (1994) notes that "tourism experts have not been precise or totally consistent in the usage of the concept". Ogundele (2006) also points out that "tourism has been used, re-used and misused by different people who have one or two things to do with it". According to Holloway (1989) the taste of defining tourism is not nearly as easy as it may appear. Most scholars connected with the discipline often easily forget that tourism goes beyond the practice of travelling for such things as pleasure, conference, religion and education.

According to Aremu (2001:20) tourism can be seen as "the science, art and business of attracting and transporting visitors, accommodating them and catering for their needs and wants". The entire world industry of travel, hotels, transportation and all other components including marketing serve the needs and wants of travelers.

A tourist needs accommodation when he gets to his destination because he is basically a visitor there. In addition, to this is the provision of good road networks, both at the national and international levels, comfortable accommodation, roads and healthy socio-political climate are indispensable ingredients of tourism Onu (2007:3). Mill & Morrison (1985) liken tourism to a "system of interrelated parts and any development in one area affects other areas". For them, the tourism system includes four component parts viz:

- ❖ Travel (the purchase of travel)
- ❖ Market (reaching the marketplace)
- ❖ Destination (the shape of travel demand)
- ❖ Marketing

Smith (1990) and Steck (1991) reiterate that “tourism is made up of systems of activities and services that are provided and utilized with numerous regional to global interrelationships into other economic and social areas”.

From the above definitions, we can say that “a tourist is someone who travels for pleasure and relaxation and as well as a holiday maker”. And in doing these various services are employed such as transportation, accommodation at destination points, etc. Traveling is strongly linked to tourism as Okafor (2007:4) points out, “all tourism involves travels but not all travel is tourism. A tourist is a “man who travels for leisure or culture, visiting a number of places for their objects of interest, scenery” According to World Tourism Organization (WTO) “a tourist is a visitor staying longer than twenty-four-hours in places outside his place of work or his normal place of residence”. This means that he comes to go. Consequently, as a visitor he would require some comfort, entertainment, enlightenment and the company of others while he is around and the tourist industry usually organizes such. Adinna (1993) makes a distinction between a visitor, tourist and an excursionist thus:

Earlier in 1968, the United Nation statistical Commission accepted the distinction between a visitor (tourist) and an excursionist, the former visits for either leisure (recreation, holiday, health, study, religion and spirit) or for business transactions, family unions, special missions or for meeting. The excursionists are temporary visitors for less than twenty-four hours. These include people who visit a country in transit without leaving the country's transit area. The definition of tourism by WTO denotes international and possibly inters regional travels whereas travelers could be making even domestic movement. Thus, there are also movements within a political region that pass for tourism”, (Adinna, 1993).

Again, according to Okafor (2007:4) in the developed world, United Kingdom, Japan, France, Italy and so on, holiday is the third most expensive thing that families may want surpassed only by a house or a car in that order. Many save to visit places like the Malta Island, Kenya, Rome, London and so on. Obviously, holiday expenditures are made to the benefit of the tourist industry. Okpoko and Okpoko (2002:21) observe:

“a common attribute of most definitions of tourism is that tourism involves the temporary movement of persons from one destination to another, and such movement must be aimed at achieving some desired objectives. In addition, the movement may be within, or outside a given geographical boundary and the money spent is from home and not derived from the place visited. It reveals that tourism is thus “about people being away from their own home, on short term temporary visit for particular tourism purposes”, (Okpoko and Okpoko, 2002:21).

World Travel and Tourism Council (2014) cited in Shaibu, Ogunjinmi and Adeyemo (2018) note that tourism today has become one of the engines for Nigeria's economy with a contribution of 3.2% to Gross Domestic Product in 2013". However, tourism resources in Nigeria ranges from abundant forest, reserve, games and community reserves to existing festivals rich mosaic, cliffs, rivers, lake, spring, waterfalls, relics, savannah, woodlands endowed with flora and fauna resources of various kind (Asije 2012).

Current literature on tourism reveals that it is very essential for the social, cultural, and economic wellbeing of the people. This is because of its contribution to foreign exchange, employment, attraction of infrastructure, national integration and international cooperation. But its prospect lies in the development of tourism sites by provision of tourist products and services as well as effective marketing strategies, promotion and publicity using brochure, video tapes on the availability of attractive sites and their tourism benefits.

Development

The concept development has been given adequate attention in existing literature (Okpoko, and Okpoko 2002). In this study, however, we use development to mean a process of socio- cultural and economic change which is as a result of economic growth and modernization. Reime and Hawkins (1979:68) cited in Okpoko and Okpoko (2002) note that "a successful tourism development is one in which the attraction serves as facilities for both residents and visitors". It also makes use of the indigenous qualities of the region whether social or natural to satisfy the expressed need of selective clientele. In developing a tourist site, questions that should come into mind include is it economically viable, socially compatible, physically attractive and environmentally sustainable? These need to be considered, (Pearce, 1989).

The consumer, the producer and the society should be taken into consideration for successful tourism development (Reime & Hawkins 1978). Tourism development relies on the availability of tourism products and services to attract tourists to a given tourist site. So, the level of economic and infrastructural development around the area is crucial to a healthy and viable tourist flow. Restaurants and facilities for sports and recreation which support tourism is a function of the level of economic development, catering for tourism involves providing all these infrastructures and other services like guides, and shops selling products that will attract tourists, (Okpoko & Okpoko, 2002)

Asije (2012) identified the challenges of tourism development in Nigeria to include lack of awareness and participation, poor policy framework on the part of government, poor level of promotion and packaging initiative corruption and high poverty level among communities in Nigeria.

Tourism development requires meticulous planning and the cooperation of governments and private concerns. Planning has to do with organizing human and material resources in order to achieve specific

objectives. Cooper, Flentchen, Yall, Albert and Wanhil (2005) in their study reveal the following processes essential for tourism development planning:

1. Study, recognition and preparation: Recognition by planning authorities of government, private industry and local communities that tourism is a desirable development option.
2. Selection of goals for strategy: Clear understanding of the objectives is necessary.
3. Survey of existing data: Very important to understand the existing data.
4. Implementation of new survey.
5. Analysis: Once the objectives have been formulated the analytical framework chosen will determine the precise set of data to be collected
6. Policy and planning formulation: The alternative plans are then evaluated in terms of their potential economic, physical, social, cultural cost and benefits.
7. Recommendations.
8. Implementation of the plan.
9. Monitoring and reformation: Once tourism development plan has been implemented, it must be monitored to detect any deviation that may occur, (Cooper et al., 2005)

Tourism Attractions

MacCannel (1981:411) asserts that "tourism attractions are empirical relationship between a tourist, a site and a marker. The tourist represents the human component, the site includes actual destination or physical entity and the marker represents some form of information that the tourist uses to identify and give meaning to a particular attraction. Tourism attractions are places of interest where tourists visit typically for its inherent or an exhibited natural or cultural value, historical significance, natural or built, offering leisure and amusement. Heritage tourism attractions are often the reason for visiting a particular destination, where they provide activities and experiences Rojeck (1997) argues that "the urge to travel to witness the "extraordinary" or the "wonderful" object seems to be deep in all human culture". It is not surprising therefore that a great deal of attention has been lavished on the production and consumption of services (Lieper, 1990). Smith (2003) also asserts that "attractions have exercised a magnetic pulling power over people since the classic times. He argues further that the "magnetism of attraction comprises not only the interests and preferences of the visitor but also the quality of design, development and operation of the attraction".

Attraction can be seen as anything that has the power to draw one toward it- the drawing power makes people feel compelled to go and visit the attraction. It is also the reason people travel and consume the experience. Attraction is the focal point around which destinations develop. Destinations are engaged in development of attraction in order to give a variety of experiences to the tourists and in the process increase tourist in the

destination. A heritage tourist destination is a city, town or other areas that is dependent to a significant extent on revenue for tourist or country, state, region or town which is marketed. Market refers to a place where tourists visit. The following list suggests examples of heritage sites that have become cultural tourist attractions:

- Built heritage attraction: Historic townscape, architecture, archaeological sites, monuments, historic buildings.
- Natural heritage attraction: - National parks, cultural landscape, coastline, caves, geological features
- Cultural heritage attraction: Arts, crafts, festivals/traditional events, folk history and museum.
- Industrial heritage attraction: Mines, factories and mulls.
- Religious site and attraction: - Cathedral, abbeys, mosques, shrines, pilgrimages, routes and cities
- Military heritage attraction: Castles, battlefield, concentrated camps, military museum, examples war museum.
- Literary or artistic heritage attraction: Houses, gardens or landscape associated with artist (Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1996).

Therefore, these potential tourist sites in Southeastern Nigeria need to be developed because of numerous cultural and socio-economic benefits to Nigeria. These are some major potential tourist sites and their locations in Southeastern Nigerian yearning for development.

Table 1: Showing Tourist Sites in Southeast Nigeria and Their Location

S/N	Tourism Sites/Attractions	Location
1	Agulu lake, Ogbunike caves, Igbo ukwu archaeological site, Rojenny tourist village, mmowu festival	Anambra state
2	Azumini Blue River, National War Museum at Umuahia, Long Juju Of Arochukwu National Museum Of Colonial History Aba	Abia State
3	Nike Lake Resort, Coal Mine at Enugu, Range of Hill Around Enugu And Nsukka, Onunu Festival At Nsukka Wide Range Of Local Craft, Zoological Garden At Enugu, Ezeagu Tourist complex, Ngwo Pine Forest/Ngwo Cave, Awhum Water Falls National Unity Museum Enugu	Enugu State
4	Okposi Salt Lake, Fati Abubakar Amusement Park	Ebonyi state
5	Oguta Lake, Mbari Cultural and Arts Centre	Imo state

Sources: Fieldwork (2022).

The above is some of the tourist sites in Southeastern Nigeria. The development of these major sites for example Ogbunike Caves and others will be of immense benefit to the economy of Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The use of tourism development theory based on evolutionary approach to tourism development is very relevant in this study. The theory was propounded by Buttler and Miossee (1993). The theory explains that development can be adapted to tourist sites for tourism development. The writers identify four importance of tourism development. These are resort, transportation, tourism behaviour, attitude as well as attractive nature of the area. These are self-evolving and provide better result for tourism development. According to Streimikiene and Bilan (2015), the merit of this approach to tourism development is not only seen as physical changes that occurs but also based on psychological evidence related to the tourist behaviour. The evolutionary theorists see changes taken place when products and services are available to meet the need of tourists in the area.

The first change is to arouse the interest of the first-time tourists through effective packaging and attractive image. However, when the promotion becomes successful in these tourist sites, the tourists become interested in the area as it undergoes rapid changes in response to the success of the first-time tourists visit and other visitors engaged in tourism business and investment. Supporting critical infrastructure like transportation networks are rapidly developed. The obvious land use is changed since the new areas are filled with new tourists serving items. At a point, the planning and development control deficiency create condition for negative changes in socio-cultural and natural environment of the tourist sites.

Theory of Modernization

Modernization theory was propounded by Winton in 1954. This theory is also known as Rostow's theory of growth and development; it shows the various stages that are involved in developing tourist sites. Modernization is a ritual process because of its systematic and transformative nature that builds change into system. According to Rostov (1990), the principal application of modernization theory has been in the economic field and public policy. The economic theory of modernization centers on four stages. The four stages are the traditional society, (pre-industrial) preconditions for takeoff, the take-off process, the derive maturity

The application of this theory becomes relevant as a process of developing tourist site in the state. The criteria in this development process helps in the provision of infrastructure to the people in the area and social amenities to the sites. It also involves the process of providing tourists and interacting communities with good roads, communication network, banks, medical centre and other facilities to sustain and maintain the sites which

guide in protecting and preserving these sites. This in turn creates jobs for people and leads to further development.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a survey research approach and was carried out in Ogbunike town in Oyi Local government area of Anambra state. The choice of this area of study becomes necessary on account of the existence of cave in the area.

Findings and Discussion

Caves are wonders of nature which are naturally enriched and possess touristic potential (Taylor and Michael 2001). They are large underground opening space which may have resulted from an underground solution of limestone (Barbara, Brian and Stephen 1996 cited in Oguamanama and Nwankwo 2015).

Ibanu (2006) suggests that “caves may have been used by the earliest humans,” and can provide useful information on paleo ecology and paleo climatic changes (Umeji and Ibanu 2001). Ogbunike Cave is located in Ogbunike town of Anambra state in Southeastern Nigeria. Ogbunike cave stands in a trough around the Ogba hill. His Royal Highness Igwe (King) Umenyiora John Ositadinma reveals that the depth of the site could be likened to the height of a story building. It is one of the wonders of nature.

Ogbunike Cave a system of sandstones has been used for centuries by local people for its spiritual significance. The spiritual value remains extant to this day. History has it that the cave was discovered by an unnamed hunter about a century ago. Okani (1996) cited in Oguamanama and Nwankwo (2015) state that “the discovery of the cave, dates back by experts to 800 AD”. The indigenous people then began to see the cave as one of the greatest gifts from God, as they believe that the cave has been in existence since creation.

The people observe an annual festival in respect of the discovery of the cave called Ime Ogbe. Traditionally, in the past the cave was probably used for trial by ordeal where suspects of certain crimes were thrown into. Where the accused person eventually survived the ordeal, the person would be adjudged innocent, whereas those that did not survive were believed to be guilty of whatever allegation leveled against them. It is also believed that the vindicated ones did not just climb out of the recesses. We gathered that they were thrown out by perceived spiritual forces in the cave.

The role of Ogbunike Cave in the community's judicial process is corroborated by National Commission for Museums and Monuments (NCMM) in a memo to World Heritage Centre that compared Ogbunike Cave to the temple of Ubini Ukpabi in Arochukwu Abia State. The finding reveals that during the rainy season Ogbunike cave dry-out and in the dry season it rains inside this cave. Also, the sand inside Ogbunike cave is a surprise because if you write your name with this sand, it stays there forever because the sand is like indelible ink. Visitors get to the entrance of the cave by

descending into the valley, climbing down 317 kilometers. The main entrance of the cave is a massive chamber of about 5 meters high, 10 meters wide and 30 meters long.

Like Ajalli cave and other caves in Nigeria, Oguamanama and Nwankwo (2015) observe the challenges faced by Ajalli cave like dearth of good road, which restrict adequate accessibility to the community and the cave proper, Ogbunike cave is not left out, there is no sustainable interest by the public.

The cave complex consists about ten tunnels leading to different directions. There are eleven entrances to the cave. Some parts of cave are so low that visitors must crawl to access them. The cave has waterfall, which emptied into the river. The waterfall at the northwestern part is similar to the Kalambo falls in East Africa. The cave is occupied by a colony of bats which add to the thrill while moving around the cave.

The thick rainforest vegetation around the cave in its original state. The members of the community have been enforcing some of the traditions of the cave by demanding that visitors remove their shoes before entering the cave, forbidding women from entering the cave, etc. UNESCO (2007) recognizes the value of the cave and listed it as a world heritage site. Ogbunike cave is unique not only because of its natural beauty, but also because of its tourism attraction.

Ogbunike Cave and Tourism Development in Southeastern Nigeria

Ogbunike cave has the economic potential to boost tourism industry in Nigeria if properly developed and managed. However, apart from the steps leading into the cave and the restrooms at the top of the valley, nothing has been done to the cave environment in terms of development. It remains underdeveloped as a result of inadequate basic infrastructure that will encourage visitors from different parts of the world to visit and relax at the site. There are no hotels to lodge for security, comfort and enjoyment, no supermarket, pipe borne water, restaurants, banking service.

However, to make Ogbunike caves viable tourist destination, the government has to step in by constructing roads leading to the cave. Ogbunike is just ten (10) kilometers from Onitsha the commercial hub of Southeastern Nigeria. This would also encourage tourist to visit the cave for unique experience. A dim of lighting can be put in the cave complex that is completely dark to ease movement around the cave but not to disturb the large colony of bat inhabiting the cave. Restaurants can be constructed close to the cave valley where local dishes could be served to visitors/tourists who are exhausted after crawling through the tunnels. Shops for local and unique souvenirs should be built. Comfortable and secured accommodation should be put in place for visitors.

These essential products and services if provided will make the cave marketable and increase its profile in tourism ranking. The economic

outcomes will include increased revenue to the host community, improved job opportunities for the guides, security personnel, transporters and other service providers. The tourism industry in Nigeria will also benefit from new developments. Marketing of the site is very crucial to its development could be done through advertisement, both locally and internationally to attract domestic and international.

Conclusion

Tourism is an industry that can improve the economy of a country if properly developed. Ogbunike is one of the major tourist sites and attractions in Southeastern Nigeria that can be developed to boost the economic activities of the host communities. New opportunities will spring up that will engage people like hotel and restaurant services, grocery trade leading to overall improvement in the local economy and better standard of living and wellbeing for the local population. Asije (2012) cited in Shaibu, Ogunjinmi and Adeyemo (2018) note that “efforts have been made towards developing some tourist sites across Nigeria, but statistical records show that these sites were found to be poorly funded, have inadequate modern infrastructure and technologies, low level of skilled manpower, low level of community participation and involvement where the sites are located. It is also pertinent to note that there is little or no funding for caves in Nigeria. Lack of good policies implementation have led to low level of development of tourism potentials.

The economic and tourism potentials of Ogbunike cave have been identified. What remains is to employ human and material resources to transform the site into an important tourist destination. Ogbunike cave and other caves are facing these challenges that should be addressed by the government, stakeholder and the public. All hands should be on desk to preserve, protect, conserve and sustain these caves and other tourist sites in Nigeria for tourism.

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