

Tourism Aesthetics and Values

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DOI:<https://doi.org/10.33281/JTHS20129.2015.4.1&2.4>

Abstract

Aesthetics deals with the principles of beauty and artistic taste. It concerns itself with the critical statements that describe, interpret, or evaluate the works of arts. However, the sense of value, significance, form and perceptions are the business of aesthetics. Tourism aesthetics in particular, is a branch of aesthetics. It is an emerging trend in cross-disciplines and relates itself to not only geography but also landscape science, literature, religious culture, folk customs, calligraphy, painting, sculpture, music, dancing, and crafts, among others which are the study of aesthetic activities and aesthetic values by way of traveling. Tourism aesthetics, therefore, lends itself to guiding people appreciate the natural beauty, artistic beauty and social beauty by applying the principle of Aesthetics, that assist us to better appreciate the natural scenery, understand culture and art, and also understand folk customs from different countries of the world. The study which draws its life-line from books, journals, newspapers and other internet sources seeks to examine the place of aesthetics and values in the tourism industry.

Introduction

Tourism aside from its entertainment needs serve both social and economic needs of the society. As such tourism has been recognized globally as an important but invaluable activity both nationally and internationally. In *A Handbook of Tourism*, Stephen L. J. Smith (1995:9) defines tourism as the “set of activities of a person traveling to a place outside his or her usual environment for less than a year and whose main purpose of travel is other than the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited.”

It could be inferred from the above that tourism is a kind of pastimes and a means of relaxation from active work by holiday makers and honey-mooners. Tourism lends itself to those enterprises and organizations involved in enhancing travel and activity away from people’s usual, leisure or business environment. Wikipedia (2012) describes tourism as, “a travel for recreational, leisure or business purposes.”

Nevertheless, tourism is a major force in global trade and it plays a vital role in the social, cultural and economic development of most

nations, and has equally the potentials to both preserve any heritage as well as to destroy. This shows that tourism can make or mar a nation. The threats of insurgencies in most part of the world and the recent threats of some viral diseases like Ebola, have become a Sword of Damocles to tourism and the society at large. These threats have also eroded the social and economic development of many nations.

Like other disciplines, tourism has developed into various genres since becoming a global phenomenon. Tourism can now be discussed under mass tourism, winter tourism, adjectival tourism, ecotourism, pro-poor tourism, recession tourism, medical tourism, education tourism, creative tourism, sports tourism, sustainable tourism, among others.

However, this study will concern itself basically with the aesthetics and values of tourism as discussed in this study.

Aesthetics and Values

Aesthetics is derived from Greek word aesthetes, meaning sense of perception. It evokes different ideas to different people and to different cultures. Baumgarten (2002:7) notes that earlier philosophers described aesthetics as the “theory of beauty” or “the philosophy of taste.” He maintains that aesthetics deals with the principles of beauty and artistic taste. It concerns itself with the critical statements that describe, interpret, or evaluate particular works of art. The sense of value, significance, form and perceptions are the business of aesthetics.

Aesthetics also is the adoption of poetic, means through words, sentences, figures and images to poetic ends. The validity of the aesthetic principle extracted from the criticism of a work depends to a large extent on how far the critical statement and the works of art share common culture (Mbunda, 2002:8). From the ideological view of Mbunda, it could be inferred that criticism in one form or the other is the subject matter of aesthetics. In like manner, Nketia (1958:21) re-echoes the above view and asserts that, “the place to go for a people’s critical criteria is thus their contemporary criticism.”

Aesthetics can be reflected through the medium of aesthetic beauty or value; aesthetic meaning, symbolism, representations, expression, truth, and the work of art. To this end, Hosper citing Mbunda (2004:24) maintains that, “people admire the works of arts for their intelligence, wisdom, sincerity, depth of feeling, compassion and realism, but each culture exerts its influence in the definition of these terms.”

Writing on *The Elements of Art*, John Hosper (1969: 4) posits that, regardless of its motivation, no work created by man would have come

to be considered great unless it had proved throughout the ages since its inception to be an enduring source of aesthetic contemplation to many people at many different times and places. To be a work of art is one thing, and to be a good work of art is another. There are various ways of analyzing works of art and one of them is aesthetic surface. Works of art contain certain sensuous elements which are usually the most easily grasped of all their ingredients – the sheen of silk, the pellucid colors of precious stones, the shimmer of violins in a symphonic suite, the hard white marble of a statute. All these are instances of what Prall calls aesthetic surface. It is an instantaneous source of appeal, and one must go beyond it to discover the work's more subtle and enduring qualities; but the pleasure one gets from it is nevertheless considerable (Hosper, 1969: 5).

Traditional and modern dramas like tourism as an art forms are equally rich in aesthetic values and signs. Traditional dramas in particular are regarded as total theatres because they incorporate a number of artistic elements or encompass many art forms that could lend to an artistic ensemble. The concept of beauty (aesthetics) in traditional African drama is the ability of the performance to achieve its goals, set up by the performers themselves and emphasized by the chorus and the audience in accompanying songs, chanting, costuming, dancing, drumming, masking, use of symbols and other art forms (Obasi, 2011:49).

Semiotics also contributes extensively to the visual impact of tourism and traditional drama. Semiotic theory otherwise known as semiology or structuralism involves examining the structure of cultural artifacts by splitting them up into individual bits or signs. Semiotics is the act of representation and a concept being represented according to Saussure (2008: 57). Both aesthetics and semiotics are inherent in tourism heritage that enhances and facilitates its social and economic values.

Tourism Aesthetics and Values

There are many places worldwide that attract tourists and other visitors not only for economic gains but also to provide opportunities for creation and sightseeing. The major elements which constitute the physical resources of tourism are landforms, river bodies, and banks, lakes, forests, wildlife, artifacts, and mountains, among others. These physical tourist resources attract visitors across the globe.

Tourism aesthetics as a branch of aesthetics, is a new-emerging cross-discipline and according to Yang Gingwei (2013:1), it relates not only to geography, landscape science, literature, aesthetic psychology, social psychology, folk customs, religious culture and anthropological

culture, but also to painting, calligraphy, sculpture, music, dancing, opera, arts and crafts, which is the study of our aesthetic activities and aesthetic value through traveling.

Tourism aesthetics as the work of Gingwei reveals, dedicates itself to guiding people to appreciate natural beauty, artistic beauty and social beauty by applying the rationale of aesthetics which helps in better appreciating the natural scenery, comprehend culture and art, and understand folk customs from different countries of the world, so that people are able to get deeper aesthetical pleasure and education or understanding. Tourism aesthetics requires visitors to reflect on their aesthetic world and aesthetic experience in order to compare their experiences with that of others to comprehend its universal defining characteristics that will enhance the regulation and guidance of aesthetic activities. Gingwei (2013) maintains that, culturally-speaking, tourism aesthetics aims at pursuing a harmonious state; which includes harmony between man and nature, harmony between man and man, and harmony between man and himself.

Tourism aesthetics can be characterized into philosophical, practical and cultural attributes. Philosophically, tourism aesthetics though its objects are common specific and grounded in reality, requires comprehensive analysis and abstract generalization on facts from a philosophical view point. Only in this way as Gingwei (2012: 69 - 77) submits, can people construct an excellent framework of aesthetic theory as well as have a fuller picture of tourism. Tourism aesthetics also involves practical activity as well as a transcendental activity whose value lies in pursuing infinity in a limited life so that people understand the eternal and absolute and learn the meaning of their existence spiritually. And culturally, tourism aesthetics aims at pursuing harmonious state between man and nature, between man and man and between man and himself (Gingwei, 2013).

In many parts of the world, tourism attractions abound and how tourists and visitors perceive these natural habitats and architectural edifices constitute their tourism aesthetics. Okpoko (2014:18) notes that shrines, alters and tombs located in awe-inspiring places characterized by solemnity... and fear constitute significant parts of Sukur heritage. He says that both Al Ula and Sukur kingdom have a number of things in common that host architectural masterpieces, built mainly of stones which were functional and aesthetic thereby showcasing the creativity and ingenuity of the builders.

In Nigeria, there are many remarkable and enviable ranges of tourist attractions. These include aesthetically located beaches such as

Calabar beach, Lekki beach, Eleko beach and Tarkwa bay. Yankari Game Reserve, the Obudu ranch, Argungu Fishing festival, National museums, Kano Die Pits, is also sources of tourism attractions. In Igboland in particular, the landforms of the region are varied and some of the units are clearly of tourist attractions. According to G. E. K. Ofomata and F. C. Okafo (2002:618) the landforms of the Nsuka-Okigwe cuesta and the residual hills of Nsukka plateau present scenic beauty when viewed panoramically with the dry and water-borne valleys that intersperse the region. They enumerated other tourist sites to include Okigwe, Abakaliki, Ogwu, and Enugwu areas with residuals and rock outcrops which constitute features of tourist interest. The caves of Ogbunike (Ugwu Ogba) and that of Agbogwugwu are spots of attraction because of their natural beauty and impressive work of nature. The Agulu-Nanka erosion sites, albeit, a menace have gained national and international attention with the result that any foreigner interested in erosion badlands would like to visit them. In fact, the present governor of Anambra State, Chief Willie Obiano in a recent visit to the sites, promised to turn them into tourist centres of international standard.

The varied forests and forest reserves of Igboland are tourist resources, though not fully tapped. Also the forests range from the savanna-like low forests to the high and mangrove forests of Owerri, Ahoada and Port Harcourt areas which normally is the sanctuary of wildlife are on their own have considerable tourist and recreational values (Ofomata and Okafo, 2002:622). The resources that provide tourist attractions in Igboland are also many and varied. There abound in Igboland, the Uli paintings, the Awka iron works, blacksmithing and carving; the Akwete cloth weaving, the Okigwe pottery; the Atilogwu, Ijele and Ohafia war dances; and the ritual specialists of Nri, Nando and Arochukwu have attracted curious anthropologists and sightseers to these parts of the Igboland.

In their work titled, *Cultural/Traditional Resources of Tourism*, Ofomata and Okafo (2002: 625) reveal certain historical features and monuments in Igboland with great tourist appeals such as palaces, shrines, temples of deities, gods and goddesses, archaeological sites and excavations, monumental buildings and museums. The Nri museum they specified is the repository of ancient Igbo history. All these physical, cultural and traditional resources of tourism found in Igboland and Nigeria in general, constitute tourism aesthetics.

Tourism value on the other hand, can be discussed here in terms of the worth and other goods which can be exchanged or derived from tourism heritage and also in terms of the quality and usefulness of

tourism to man and society. The value of tourism to natural heritage places is already well-established. To this end, the release of the Commonwealth Government's Draft Guidelines - Draft Heritage Tourism Guidelines (1999:1) explains the importance of cultural heritage tourism in which the document highlighted a number of case studies which illustrate the interest in visitation to places of cultural heritage significance. The document among other issues reveals the sustainability of cultural heritage tourism and the capability of the industry to generate sustainable economic growth.

The value of tourism in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large cannot be over-emphasized. The potential benefits of tourism development among the developing nations include training, employment, income, health services, transportation, and recreational facilities. According to Desmond Omotayo Brown (2000: 276) "tourism can help improve educational standard and, if properly managed, bring new life to the culture and crafts of people while preserving the cultural heritage of local populations. In line with Brown's thinking, as far as there are cross-national and cross-continental travels to places of tourist attractions, the tendency for increases in educational, cultural and economic exchanges become common occurrence that help to benefit the host communities or nations.

As a major source of income to many nations, especially the developing ones, "tourism brings in large amount of income in payment for goods and services by contributing to an estimated 5% to the worldwide gross domestic product (GPD); as well as creates opportunities for employment in the service industries, such as airlines, cruise ships, and taxicabs; in hospitality services such as accommodation, hotels and resorts; and entertainment venues such as amusement parks, casinos, shopping malls, music venues, and indeed, theatres (Prendergast, 1997: 4).

Writing on the economic relevance of tourism, Stephen L. J. Smith (1995: 7) sees tourism as an invaluable source of national and international cash flows and advises that government at all levels should encourage its development because it generates new wealth through export sales, which invariably creates new jobs. Though little has been done in practice to provide the means for expansion of tourism in most of the developing areas of the world, but proponents of tourism in developing nations point to the foreign exchange receipts on gross domestic product either directly or indirectly through the operation expenditure multiplier.

Against the bedrock of tourism's foreign exchange potentials, Michael Peters (1969: 1) argues that the economic gaps between rich and poor nations have widened over the years; that to create new industries and to transform rural life in Asia, Africa and Latin American countries is a gigantic task. The relevance of tourism to this situation, therefore, is that income from international travel can bring the foreign exchange essential for major investment. Peters, however, identified 5 potential benefits of tourism to include: a contribution to the balance-of-payments as an earner of hard currency; the dispersion of development to non-industrial regions; the creation of employment opportunities; the effect of general economic development through the multiplier effects; and the social benefits arising from a widening of people's interest generally in world affairs and foreign tastes.

Tourism is a source of income to hundreds of millions of individuals worldwide such that both employers and employees and other stakeholders in the industry benefit immensely from researches that would improve the efficacy of business structure and administrative arrangements; improve the strategies for coping with the risk and uncertainty inherent in the industry, offers a stronger basis for profitable marketing; offers improvement in the terms and conditions of employment; pride, professional development and rewarding careers in the industry (Stephen L. J. Smith, 1995: 6).

The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) (1993) in collaboration with the Wharton Economic Forecasting Association (WEFA) enumerated some economic gains of tourism as:

1. Provision of direct and indirect employment for more than 200 million people;
2. An increase of over 350 million on tourism-related jobs;
3. Generation in tourism by 10.3 percent of the global wages (US\$1.7 trillion);
4. Tourism accounts for 10.1 percent of direct and indirect world GDP (US\$3.4 trillion); and that
5. Tourism accounts for 11.0 percent of all consumers spending (Handbook of Tourism, 1995: 1).

Tourism has been described as geography in action because geography is said to be fundamental to the selection of a development site for any tourism business. Tourism enable people to make special memories by traveling away from their usual to unusual environment – traveling to see new places, experience new cultures or just to enjoy the journey.

A new concept or genre has evolved in the tourism industry known as sustainable tourism. Sustainable tourism has led to the movement of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetics needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems. World Commission Environment and Development (1987: 29) describes this new genre as, "meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Sustainable tourism or development so to say, has regard for ecological and socio-cultural carrying capacities that involves the community of the destination in tourism development planning. It also involves integrating tourism to match current economic and growth policies in order to surmount some of the negative economic and social impacts of tourism.

Conclusion

Tourism aesthetics and value are the bedrock of this discourse. As an emerging trend in cross-disciplines, it relates itself not only to geography but also to landscape science, literature, religions, culture, folk customs, calligraphy, painting, drama, sculpture, music, dancing, crafts, among others which are the study of aesthetic activities and aesthetic values by way of traveling.

With the attendant increases in tourism destinations, development and sustainability tourism aesthetics and value has become more exigent and will assist tourists and other travelers to better appreciate the natural scenery, understand culture and art as well as understand folk customs from different countries of the world.

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