

Heritage Resources Conservation for Tourism Growth and Development: A Study of Selected Historical Sites in Lokoja, Kogi State

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Abstract

Foremost among the cities in Nigeria with abundant cultural sites and historical relics is Lokoja, the Kogi State Capital, a former colonial seat of power. Cultural and historical sites are established for their intrinsic values. But to derive these values, efforts must be made to conserve and manage the sites optimally. This paper examines some important cultural and historical sites in Lokoja so as to determine how they could propel tourism growth and development in Nigeria if well conserved. The study uses ethnographic research method to elicit they required information. Findings revealed that the challenges confronting the sites included their inadequate preservation and protection, threats of urbanization, among others. For these sites to optimally contribute to tourism development in Nigeria, the study suggests that conscious efforts should be made towards their restoration, protection and maintenance, among other things.

Key Words: Historical sites, preservation, heritage, tourism, development.

Background to the Study

Nigeria with a landmass of about 923,733 sq km is Africa's most populous country with about 170 million people. It has over 250 ethnic groups within its geo-polity, and each of them is identified with unique cultural heritage. The richness, beauty and diversity of Nigeria's culture are remarkable manifestations of the socio-cultural differences of the ethnic nationals that inhabit the land. Each city in Nigeria has distinctively interesting things to offer a tourist who is bound to enjoy not only the hospitality of the people, but also the physical beauty of the land.

Foremost among the cities in Nigeria is Lokoja, the Kogi State capital. Lokoja was formerly the colonial headquarter of Nigeria. It

also played a prominent role during the slave trade era, as the River Niger was used as major route to transport slaves to the western countries. The city is also a confluence city where the two biggest rivers in West Africa (Niger and Benue) meet. It is a town with a very rich history. No wonder it is often referred to as 'the museum city of Nigeria's colonial history'. Numerous relics and heritage sites of Nigeria's colonial past adorn every nook and cranny of the town. Visiting historical and cultural sites, technically referred to as cultural tourism, is the most popular tourist activity today. Cultural heritage tourism means travelling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past and present www.culturalheritagetourism.org.

As pointed out by Cooper et al (2008:319) "cultural and historical sites are established for their intrinsic values". But to derive these values, efforts must be made to conserve and manage the sites optimally. The numerous historical sites in Lokoja could serve as viable attractions to both tourists and other researchers, if well preserved. Page and Connell (2006:185) posit that; "attraction face a number of threats from the external and internal environments that pose risks to product quality, operational viability and the visitors' experience". It therefore becomes essential for attraction managers to devise strategies that recognise threats and focus on managing potential impacts in attempt to strive for long term viability.

This study attempts to unravel and examine the state of some historical sites in Lokoja so as to suggest the way forward. It identifies major heritage sites in Lokoja, highlights their present state and challenges and recommends a way of mitigating them. This will hopefully help to reposition the city as a viable heritage and tourism destination in Nigeria.

Study Area

Kogi State was created on 27th August, 1991. It was carved out of the former Kwara and Benue states with Lokoja as the capital. Lokoja is an ancient town located west bank of River Niger, a confluence town where the two famous Rivers (Niger and Benue) meet. Lokoja is the most centrally located state capital in the country. It is located between Latitude 7, 47N and Longitude 6, 47E. Lokoja is

approximately 162 kilometres away from Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory.

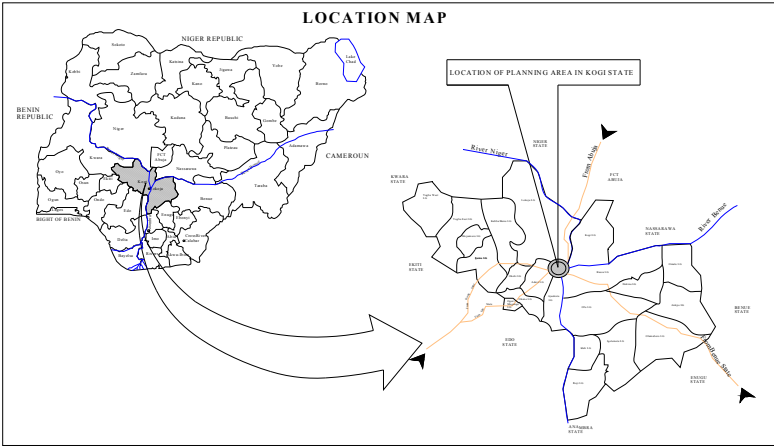
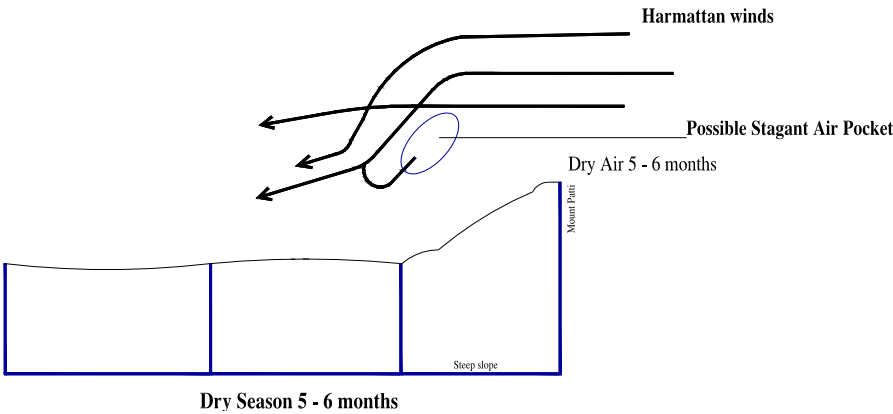
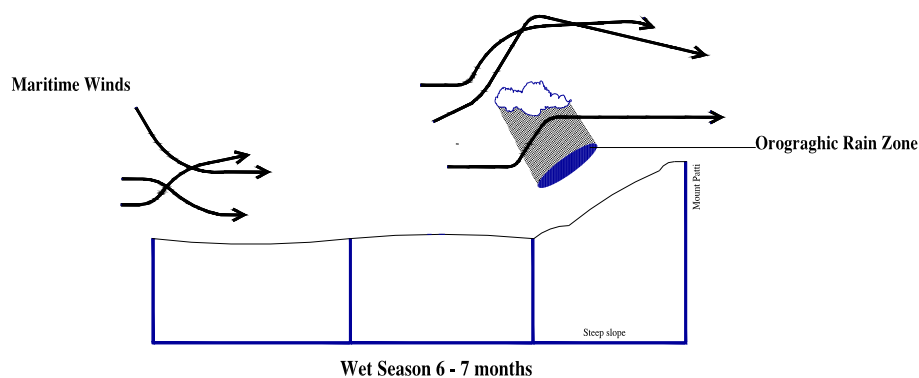


Figure1: Location Map
Source: Field Survey 2011.

Several factors have contributed to the geographical outlook of Lokoja. A major factor is climate. Lokoja, like other cities in the tropics, has two main seasons, namely dry and wet seasons as obtain throughout Nigeria. The wet season starts from the month of April and ends in October, while the dry season starts from November and continues till the month of March.

Figure 2: Seasonal wind pattern





Source: Micro Climate of Lokoja: Adopted from Alaci and Baba (2007).

The two seasons are affected by the South-Westerly winds coming from the Atlantic Ocean and North-Easterly winds which come from the Sahara Desert. Two major Air masses dominate the climate of the study Area, these are; the Tropical Maritime Air mass which formed over the Atlantic Ocean to the South of the country, and is therefore warm and moist moving inland in South-West to North-East direction. And the Tropical Continental Air mass developed over the Sahara Desert and is therefore warm and dry, and blow in the opposite direction (North-East to South-West). The oscillation between these two Air masses produces high seasonal characteristics of weather conditions in our study Area, dry season (Alaci and Baba, 2007).

Methodology

This study is primarily aimed at bringing to the fore, some major historical sites and heritage tourism attractions in Lokoja. In view of this, the qualitative research/ethnographic fieldwork is the most appropriate method through which this study could be tackled.

The instruments for data collection are key informants interviews, personal observation and documents. Purposive sampling method was used to select the key informants who were deemed to be knowledgeable of the study under review. These personalities include two palace chiefs of Maigari of Lokoja, the General Manager of Kogi Hotel and Tourism Board, the Curator of the National Museum of Colonial History, Lokoja, the Director of Tourism, Ministry of Culture and Tourism, Lokoja and some local residents. The interviews were

carried out using open-ended questions which enabled the interviewees respond freely, thus giving the researcher the opportunity to ask follow-up questions. As Veal (2006:199) pointed out, "an important skill in interview is to avoid becoming so taken up in the conversational style of the interview that the interviewee is led by the interviewer. The interviewer should avoid agreeing- or disagreeing- with the interviewee or suggesting answers". This assertion was strictly adhered to by the researcher.

A good understanding of the industry helped the researcher in the personal observation and profiling of the sites, which have enriched the paper. Qualitative descriptive analysis was used to analyse the data.

Presentation of Data and Discussion

The trappings of the slave trade and colonial legacies are very much visible in Lokoja our study area. Hence, the details of some of these are hereby presented and analysed.

Mount Patti

'Patti' is a Nupe word for a Hill, and the early Europeans to Lokoja in the early 19th Century added the English word 'Mount'. The hill towering over Lokoja stands at a height of about 458 metres above sea level, with a wide flat top (a Plateau of about 15km²). The ancient inhabitants of Lokoja were said to have settled a top the hill before they finally moved down the bank of the River Niger after the era of inter- tribal wars and slavery. The Hill was more of a refuge site for these early inhabitants.

Lord Fredrick Lugard discovered the Hill during the colonial era and subsequently built a relaxation centre, a radio house and a focal point to monitor the activities on River Niger while ensuring proper security for the colonialists in Lokoja. Interestingly, one can have an aerial panoramic view of Lokoja together with the confluence of Rivers Niger and Benue from the top of the mountain. The entire area including the top and slope of Mount Patti constitute about 3000 hectares of land.

The Hill is a tourist delight for curious visitors who cherish natural attractions. The climate a top the hill is ever inviting and a contrast from what is obtainable down the ancient town of Lokoja. Regrettably,

all the colonial relics a top the hill are in dilapidated state. Lord Lugard Rest house has been taken over by weeds, with part of the roof blown off by winds. It must be noted that the Kogi State government has developed plan aimed at turning the hill into an enviable tourist Resort comparable to that of Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State. It is curious enough to note that, there is no sustained attempt in the plan to preserve those colonial relics a top the hill.

Iron of Liberty

The location of Lokoja at the bank of Rivers Niger and Benue made the town a prominent centre of slave trade in the 18th and 19th Centuries, coupled with the fact that the confluence attracted Europeans, explorers, missionaries, and administrators.

The slave merchants and barons used to station slaves in Lokoja for buying, selling and finally exportation. Soon after the enactment of the Act to end slavery in British Empires, slaves who were in the custody of the slave merchants were consequently set free in a spot within the Holy Trinity Bishop Crowther School in Lokoja. To commemorate this historic event, the British Government created two poles indicating a freedom square and named it 'the iron of liberty'. At the top of the iron poles was a bell. Aside the first set of freed slaves, any slaves who escaped from their captors to the spot, rang the bell to regain their freedom and will get registered as freed slaves

The Cenotaph (War Armoury)

This is a war armorial erected in remembrance of the British and Nigerian officers and other ranks that lost their lives in the first and second world wars of 1914-1918 and 1939-1945 respectively. The cenotaph is a massive concrete block with old Artillery mounted on it, located along Murtala Mohammed way, besides the Federal Medical Centre. The Cenotaph presents relics of Weapons used by the British forces against the German forces in defence of their occupied territories in East Africa and Cameroon.

A glance at the list of the names of some military personnel inscribed on the Cenotaph who served in the two world wars makes an interesting reading. One could deduce from the cannon on display, the technology of the old era in comparison with present day technology in military weaponry and warfare.

The First Primary School in Northern Nigeria

This is a monumental old building that was built for the education of the people in the year 1865 by late Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther and named 'Holy Trinity School', which was later renamed, 'Holy Trinity Bishop Crowther Primary School. The school is located within the compound of the Church Missionary Society (CMS), Lokoja.

The school building shows the ancient Architectural design of a generation. Though some innovations have been added when it was rebuilt in 1907, the shape looks like a pyramid and it was the first primary school in the present Northern Nigeria. It is regrettable that this great monument is in a deplorable state. A section of the building has been broken down to create room for the Cathedral building project. The main school block was collapsing at the time of our field visit. The school compound currently hosts the Anglican Church



Plate 1: The Holy Trinity Primary School Lokoja (First Primary School in Northern Nigeria)

Cathedral, the famous iron of liberty and the Tomb of Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther.

The European and African Cemeteries

This is one of the evidences behind the notion that Lokoja is a city of colonial history of Nigeria. Lokoja has one of the largest concentrations of European cemeteries in Nigeria. The cemeteries are the final rest places of Europeans and Africans (Missionaries and

military) who either worked with Bishop Ajayi Crowther or Lord Lugard. Three of such cemeteries are found within Lokoja.

The first is located opposite the Unity Bank Plc, where mostly the British soldiers were buried. The second, which is the biggest of the cemeteries, is located along the Murtala Mohammed Way behind the Kogi Travellers Terminal, while the third, purely an African cemetery, is located at the end of the Cemetery Road. There are over six hundred tombs in all, each of which bore different designs, with name of the deceased inscribed on it. Some of the identification plaques made of marble, concrete, metals, stones etc, stated the names, causes of death, the year and their countries of origin. The cross or crucifix as a symbol of Christian belief can be found as the trade mark on almost all of the tombs.

The Magazine Hill

This is another important historical relic left behind by the colonialists. The magazine hill is located in the Northern part of Lokoja within the native town in the area called Angwa Rimi (Rimi Quarters). The name 'magazine hill' was given because it once served as the military armoury, a store house for military ammunitions especially by the Royal Niger Company Constabulary and later by the West African Frontier Force (W.A.F.F). The place was strategically located at a vantage view point, with a rectangular stone wall and gate built when George Toubman Goldie was the Governor of the Royal Niger Company. The bungalows within this stone wall, served as the 'store' for guns and other military weapons and ammunitions. Magazine hill also served as police station and jail yard for accused persons from the native town. Regrettably this relic has been turned into toilet and dumping ground by the people living around the hill.

Other notable monuments and sites in our study area, which could not be fully presented due limited space, include:

- The first Cantonment Church in Northern Nigeria.
- The safe of the first bank in Northern Nigeria.
- First Prison Yard in Northern Nigeria.
- UAC Ware house.
- Lord Lugard Senior Staff Quarters.
- National Museum of Colonial History.
- River Niger water Front.

- The spot where the Royal Niger Company's flag was lowered in 1900.
- The Confluence of Niger and Benue Rivers.
- Tombs of the deposed Northern Emirs.

Problems Associated with Heritage Sites in the Study Area

There are major problems identified in the study area, which by no means have weighed down the contribution of these heritage resources to the growth and development of tourism in Lokoja.

These include:

- **Inadequate Preservation and Protection of the Sites and Monuments**

This is a major problem confronting the monuments and sites in Lokoja. The sites are expected to be protected, preserved and given due attention by the stakeholders. But the reverse is the case. For example, the Europeans and Africans cemeteries, and the magazine hill, were found to be badly littered with cellophanes and other extraneous materials. They are poorly maintained and lacked sanitary facilities for visitors. Some of these sites are now used as refuse dumps, thereby eroding their values and significance. According to Okpoko and Ezeadichie (2002), the conservation and advertisement of designated... historical sites when backed by the provision of adequate infrastructural facilities can make them appealing to visitors.

- **Threat of Urbanization**

The present drive for urbanization in Lokoja constitutes a major threat to most of the historical sites. As noted by Kendall (2007) "Urbanization accompanied by modernization and rapid process of industrialization" generally, push "traditional religious belief and cultural traits to become less important" (Bill and Hassan, 1983). Some of the colonial relics and sacred tombs in Lokoja are gradually giving way to urbanization in the form of residential and office buildings, roads construction, and other economic activities. A case in point is the site of the 'Cenotaph' which almost gave way for the expansion and perimeter fencing of the Federal Medical Centre. Also the European and African cemeteries are being threatened by the

activities of the Road Transport Workers' Union and Kogi State Transport Company.

- **Untidy Physical Environment**

The physical environments of some of these sites leave much to be desired. Some of these historical monuments are threatened by poor landscaping or lack of it around the facilities. While some are found to be badly littered due to the dumping of solid wastes, indiscriminate placement of posters and bills on some of these monuments make them not too fascinating to visitors.

- **Lack of Institutional Framework**

There is no duly established institutional arrangement for the management and maintenance of the sites. Although the State Hotel and Tourism Board is empowered by Decree 81 of 1992 sub-section 7 to preserve, protect, and develop tourism assets and resources within the state, the Board as presently constituted is doing little or nothing in this regard. The Board has little data on tourist arrival to these numerous sites. There is also no conscious effort to promote these monuments because the Board is poorly funded by the state government. There is also gross inadequacy of staff with requisite qualifications in tourism or related courses in the Board. All these are impediments to the sound and effective management of the sites and monuments.

- **Inadequate Infrastructure**

There is acute shortage of parks and recreational spaces in Lokoja. The existing open spaces are not properly maintained and managed for tourism activities. The road network needs to be improved upon especially the interior part of the township, because gaining access to some of the sites during wet season is difficult.

- **Lack of Public Appreciation of the Sites**

There is no gain saying the fact that majority of Nigerians are apathetic to cultural sites such as sacred grooves, tombs and even museums and monuments. Among the educated elites who are supposedly aware of the existence and values of these cultural landscapes, a vast majority hardly bother to visit them. This lack of

public appreciation is a major challenge to the existence and conservation of these monuments.

Conclusion

Lokoja occupies a special space in the historical evolution of Nigeria. Some of the important historical sites and monuments are in a deplorable state and the associated problems have been identified. The paper posits that conscious effort should be made to ensure that these cultural landscapes are properly protected, conserved and managed. Sustainable cultural tourism is reliant upon the continued maintenance of a healthy and attractive environment for available cultural resources, and it is a task for all stakeholders.

Recommended Steps to Mitigate the Problems

- There must be conscious effort to restore, protect and maintain the sites and monuments. This can be achieved through urban environmental protection policies and conservation anchored on polluter pays principle in and around the sites and monuments. There should be immediate renovation and redesigning of the wall and fencing of some of the sites. The need for collaboration between the Kogi State government and the federal government through its agency; the National Commission for Museums and Monuments, in achieving this is inevitable.
- The cultural landscapes in the study area should be gazetted and infused in the Lokoja master plan currently being considered. This will go a long way to curb the threat of urbanization presently facing those sites. Kogi State government should as a matter of urgency relocate the motor parks in front of the European and African cemeteries.
- For any meaningful development to take place in the cultural sector, attempt must be made to ensure a practical execution of the principles of cultural resource management. Hence, the Kogi State Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the State Hotels and Tourism Board, the State Council for Arts and Culture as presently constituted need to be reorganized in such a way that can enhance their efficiency towards the protection and maintenance of the monuments and historical sites.

- The problem of funding for these aforementioned agencies should be addressed. The Kogi State government must recognise and appreciate the existence and importance of these heritage resources and provide the necessary funds for their management.
- Obviously, infrastructure is the life support system for tourism. It is the bedrock of any meaningful tourism development. Therefore, massive rehabilitation of roads in the interior parts of Lokoja, provision of portable water, good drainage system, among others, are solutions to the present decay and dearth of infrastructural facilities in the area. Maps and sign post should be mounted at strategic places within the Lokoja for self guided tour.
- One of the most important methods for site and monument protection is public enlightenment. This entails educating the general public on the values of those heritage sites and monuments, and the roles they play in nation building. If the general public are well informed of their inherent values, the incidence of willful destruction, defacing and other negative attitudes towards these sites would be minimized or even eradicated.

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