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Tourism Participation: Attractions, Influences and Key Trends in Ekiti State, Nigeria (Pp. 244-258)

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Abstract

The heart of this research is concerned with the level of participation in tourism activities in Ekiti State, Nigeria. The broad objectives of the study are to appraise the tourism potentials of the state vis-à-vis the level of patronage and the influences on the choice of attraction, as well as the constraints to tourism development. The research methods include indepth fieldwork, observation, participation, focus group discussions and interviews. The research instrument is questionnaire administration with the aid of stratified random sampling technique. Findings from the study revealed that the natural and man-made potentials for recreation and tourism in Ekiti State are multi-various. In spite of this, the level of tourism development is very low, and thus the level of participation in domestic tourism is equally very low. To this end, the research recommends that all the stakeholders in the tourism industry should formulate and implement development master plan and policy for sustainable tourism in the state. On this note, the report would undoubtedly be of interest and value to researchers, tourists, evaluators, government and those planning new initiatives for the development of recreation and tourism.

Key Words: *Attraction, Influences, Participation, Recreation, Tourism*

Introduction

Tourism is the business of providing and marketing services and facilities for pleasure travelers (Nona, 1993). It is a form of recreation that requires leaving home for some other places, whether near or far (Olokesusi, 1989). It can also be defined as the phenomenon arising from temporary visits (or stays away from home) outside the normal place of residence for any reason other than furthering an occupation remunerated from within the place visited (Burkart and Medlik, 1981). From all the above definitions, a tourist could be regarded as a person who is visiting for at least one day in an area basically for the purpose of leisure or business.

Tourism involves the movement and stay of foreigners inside and outside a city or a region, provided the journey and stay of the stranger is not connected with remunerative activities. In this sense, it is the sum total of the temporary or short term movement of people from their point of origin (source) to a destination outside their place of work or residence. It equally entails all the non-economic activities in which they participate during the time they stay outside their registered domiciles.

Paul (2000) defined tourism as recreation activities requiring at least one night's stay away from home following a recreational interest. In this sense, tourism involves the movement of people from a generating region to a destination region for the purpose of adventure or relaxation. In line with the above definition, John (1995) defined tourism as the temporary short-term movement of people away from where they normally live and work. A tourist in this regard is a person who travels from place to place for non-work reasons.

The sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and stay of non-residents, in so far as they do not lead to permanent residence and are not connected with any earning activity is regarded as tourism (Leonard and Carson, 1997). It involves the process of visiting for at least one night for leisure and holiday, business and professional or other tourism purposes (John, 1995). Thus, among others, the reasons for tourism include cultural, historical, recreational, environmental and ethnic considerations.

A good number of scholars (Foster, 1994; Pearce, 1989; Young, 1973; and Smith, 1977 for example) have discussed extensively the merits of tourism. It is a great generator of economic wealth for many of the countries of the

world today. It is a net earner of foreign exchange and a major contributor to national balance of payment. Some African countries like Tanzania, Kenya, Algeria, Morocco, Gambia and Egypt are now reaping the socio-economic benefits from the development of tourism resources. This supports the view of their Robinson (1976) that tourism is a great contributor to nations' economy in socio-cultural, economic and political ways.

Beautiful natural scenarios as well as cultural artifacts for the purpose of tourism are far more available in the rural communities than in the urban areas (Ikporukpo, 1993). He noted further that the rural areas create social safety and the enabling environment for recreation and tourism. In a similar submission, David (1995) noted that the natural resources of rural areas, which attract visitors, increasingly have to be protected from overuse and misuse, and managed for specific leisure activities.

Factors affecting the participation in tourism activities include gender, educational background, purpose of visit, age, occupation, the required facilities as well as the available transportation system. Other factors are environmental, political, religious, cultural and social differences. The supply factors that pull tourists to specific destinations include the level of development of the tourism potentials, provision of infrastructural amenities, the quality of the environment, the supply of accommodation and the accessibility to tourism potentials.

Other factors affecting the level of patronage of tourist attractions are the qualities of accommodation, attractions of the destination, price levels in destination, as well as transport. The non-economic determinants which constitute the motivational and structural factors which influence the demand for tourism include urbanization, the travel trade, marketing, as well as education. Other factors are changes in population structure as well as increase in leisure time.

The key factors that impede tourism development in developing countries include poor implementation of tourism plans, absence of defined measures to encourage participation in tourism, policy formulation and implementation, and poor infrastructural development. Other factors are social, cultural and financial constraints as well as manpower development and motivation. All these factors hinder tourism development in third world countries. Another impediment identified by Aworitefe (1986) is lack of

understanding of the importance of recreation and tourism as well as bad management.

Motivation for the Study

Tourism is a concomitant to sustainable development. It is a great generator of economic wealth for developed countries like United State America Germany, Japan, France and Canada. The challenge of international tourism has been accepted by few African countries like Kenya, Tanzania, Botswana, Egypt and Algeria. These countries are now reaping the socio-economic and psychological benefits that are associated with tourism development.

In Nigeria, little attention has been given to tourism development (Ojo, 1978; Afolabi 1992). The reason for this is not unconnected with the low economic structure as well as the rural economic base of the country. However, the nation is very rich both in ecology and culture. It has a wide variety of biodiversity. It is equally blessed with many traditional festivals and cultural attractions. On this note, Ikporukpo (1993) noted that the multiplicity of cultures in the country provides a good setting for the evolution of various cultural heritage-based tourist facilities.

Ekiti State, Nigeria has abundant tourism resources in their urban and rural places. There are several potentials for relaxation and holiday in their tourist attractions. The vistas of excellence in Ekiti State include rocky mountains, unique plants, forest reserves, parks, gardens, warm springs, lakes, buildings of historical significance, and several other man-made and natural features.

The main motivation for this study lies in the fact that in spite of the numerous tourism potentials of the state, the level of participation in tourism is very low. This is due partly to ignorance of the benefits of tourism and mainly to the poor development state of the potentials. Thus, this study aims at awakening individuals, the government, parastatals, policy makers, non-governmental organizations and tourists to the broad duty of moving towards sustainable tourism in the state.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are to:-

- i. identify the tourism potentials in Ekiti State, Nigeria
- ii. examine the level of patronage of the tourism potentials as well as the relative preferences for tourist attractions

- iii. appraise the constraints to tourism development and participation in the state
- iv. create an informed interest in the development of tourism potentials of the state
- v. make recommendations which may assist policy makers in ecotourism development.

Importance of Tourism

The advantages of tourism are numerous. It has social, economic and cultural benefits to man and the environment of attractions. It has caused major changes in the structure, value and tradition of societies. It leads to the development and promotion of some non-industrialised regions. It reduces rural-urban migration and it ensures the conservation of the abiotic elements of the environment as well as the preservation of its biodiversity (See Anne, 1991; Areola, 1976; Bob, 1996; and Chris, 2006 for greater details).

Tourism encourages regional development. John (1995) opined that it can act as a catalyst for physical development within the host region. Likewise, it brings a variety of social and cultural changes to host communities, and it promotes sustainable development. Tourism can also increase the job opportunities as well as the wealth of an area. Its development has a multiplier effect on other aspects of a country's economy (Richard, 1989).

Tourism has economic, psychological and environmental impacts. It is seen by many developing countries as offering an opportunity to earn foreign currency, create local employment, increase local income and improve domestic services (David, 1995). The main economic value of tourism relates to foreign exchange earning, contributions to government revenue, generation of employment and income, and stimulation of regional development (Leonard and Carson, 1997).

The establishment of tourist facilities and infrastructure in the rural area is a cost-effective way of meeting national development objectives (Leonard and Carson, 1997). It may renew local architectural qualities and facilitate the revival of traditional arts, crafts and culture. It is a major source of employment and income in many rural areas (David, 1995).

Tourism is a concomitant to environmental sustainability. It is one of the few industries that have a high potential for environmental engineering. Other

benefits of tourism include improvement of infrastructure, conservation of areas of outstanding natural beauty, conservation of archaeological and historic sites as well as improvement of environmental quality. It offers a good opportunity for personal contact and interchange of cultures and ideas. According to Ojo (1978), the extent to which a country can project her environment and facilities determines the prospect for tourism.

Moreover, tourism provides the avenue for escape from the hurdles and puzzles of the city, and it creates the opportunities to seek for peace and tranquility as well as the change in everyday routine at the countryside. It delivers socio-cultural, economic and environmental benefits, which are pre-requisites to sustainable development. These benefits vary in both scale and intensity from one destination to the next and depend, to a large extent on their vulnerability and accessibility to mass market (Erne and Geoffrey, 1992).

Tourism is the industry that provides travelers with tour, meal, entertainment and overnight accommodation. It promotes enlightenment, education and international goodwill (Denis, 1993). It affects social behaviour and cultural values. Likewise, it is an effective tool for positive image making as it promotes inter-communal and inter-tribal peace.

Tourist Attractions in Ekiti State, Nigeria

Nigeria is rich in both ecology and culture as magnificent bases for tourism and recreation. Ikporukpo (1993) noted that the multiplicity of cultures in the country provides a good setting for the evolution of various cultural heritage-base tourism facilities for the country. The tourism potentials in Nigeria include holiday resorts, eco-tourism assets, beaches and lakesides, countrysides, heritage/culture, adventure/safari, as well as sports. Specifically, Ekiti is a state with unlimited potentials for tourism development.

The tourist attractions in the state include geological and natural features, places of historic and archaeological significance as well as man-made and pre-historic sites. Ekiti State has the international atmosphere that makes it conducive for tourists all over the world. The environment consists of beautiful woodland scenery. It has a gentle and soft landscape which provides many places for children and others to play.

Ekiti State is endowed with abundant natural tourist attractions. For instance, the Efon hills are the watershed of River Oni, River Oluwa, and River Owena. These are popular attractions for tourists from all over the world. The miraculous Ikogosi warm spring where warm and cold-water ooze out of hills from different sources only to meet in a pool while retaining the thermal identity is another resort with international atmosphere for recreation and tourism. Another prominent attraction in the state is the Ebomi Lake. Its scenic environment and dynamic actions are suitable for holiday and relaxation.

Other tourist attractions in the state are Esa cave at Iyin, which has the capacity for over 500 people as well as Arinta falls in Ipole Iloro which has a giant pool and three pronounced escarpments. Other natural resources that provide global opportunities for business and sight seeing are the magnificent Olosunta hills, Orole inselberg and Ayonigba River. These special natural attractions provide gigantic vistas and remarkable destinations for elites and independent travelers.

The State has a large concentration of other natural and man-made tourist attractions, which offer the local and international tourists great variety of views and vistas. Ado-Ekiti, the State capital has many art galleries, archaeological sites as well as buildings of historical significance. The countryside provides a combination of beautiful landscape, historical monuments, colourful cultural heritage and scenic environment. Also, there are many traditional gardens, musical parades, 'egungun' festivals as well as christian traditions. Overall, Ekiti State provides many quiet locations for environmentalist, naturalists as well as tourists.

The man-made tourist resources in the state capital include Ureje dam, Fajuyi park, Erinfun golf course, Adetiloye trade fair, and many buildings of historical significance at the Oba's palace. Other anthropogenic resources in the state are Ero dam and lake at Ikun, little Ose water dam and lake at Egbe, Egbigbu lake at Ayetoro, mat weaving center at Ogotun and Ipoti, as well as Isan pottery work. Prominent traditional festivals in the state include Ede-ijan, Semuregede-Ode, Odokoroso-Iyin, Ogun-Ijero, and Osayin-Isinbode.

Research Methods

This study aimed at assessing the level of participation in tourism vis-à-vis the available attractions, the factors influencing tourism participation as well

as the key trends in Ekiti State. The researcher undertook personal fieldwork of the tourist attractions in the study area so as to enable him to collect some primary and secondary data that were required for the study. The respondents include tourists, students, business men, civil servants, policy makers, as well as the indigenes of the towns where tourists' attractions are located.

The methods of data collection include a review of existing research on leisure, recreation, and tourism; personal observations and participation; interviews with residents and tourists in the attractions, as well as information collection from the Ekiti State Ministry of Culture and tourism. Seven hundred and thirty five (735) structured questionnaires were used in order to collect data from the respondents. The socio-economic variables (Section A) of the questionnaire contains the level of education, type of work, family size, marital status, age, and income. Section B of the questionnaire contains the broad areas like status of tourist attraction, importance of tourism, level of patronage, planning, constraints and recommendations among others.

Primary data were also collected with the aid of focus group discussions, observations and personal interviews so as to know the socio-economic characteristics of the respondents as well as the tourist attractions of the state, vis-à-vis their level of patronage, reasons for participation and constraints to participation. Secondary information were also derived from top level textbooks, periodicals, journals and monographs.

The tourism potentials of Ekiti State are evaluated based on the climatic suitability of the tourism potentials, accessibility, facilities, size, suitability of the location, scenic quality, historic value, level of security, as well as the level of patronage. The sampling technique employed is stratified random sampling. This technique involved the use of the pre-existing three (3) senatorial districts of the state. Two hundred and forty five (245) questionnaires were randomly administered in each senatorial district. Table and percentages were used in the data analysis.

Results and Discussion

The landscape of Ekiti is varied and interesting for recreation and tourism. There is a wide range of attractions for tourism. Participation in tourism activities is very useful to the health and productivity of the tourists (76%).

In addition, tourism is a source of capital and foreign exchange to Ekiti State (53%). Also, it is a source of employment to the people (67%).

Ekiti State has abundant tourism resources in their urban and rural places (92%). The determinants of tourism patronage include comfort, security, amenities, shelter, ambience, vistas, recreational facilities, convenience, food and beverages facilities as well as new impressions. People like to travel to beautiful places, but they also have an interest in the most awful, the hottest, the worst. Almost any place in the world can become an attraction as long as it is packaged well and sold to its niche market; the people for whom the attraction is best suited (Nona, 1993). This view explains the reason why 64% of the respondents gain exciting experience from climbing Efon hills.

Gunn (1998) opined that attractions are the magnets that entice somebody to travel to a particular destination, and that satisfaction and dream are other significant experience generating components of tourism. He noted further that food, accommodation, as well as personnel are some of the key ingredients to successful tourism experience. This picture is true of all the tourist attractions in Ekiti State. They affect tourism participation vis-à-vis individual preferences. Table 1 shows the general assessment of some selected tourist attractions in the state.

The rate of development of the potentials is very low. Many of them are yet to gain national and international recognition. Similarly, the level of patronage of these resources is very low. The internally generated revenue from tourism is minimal due to the low level of development and the consequent low patronage (Field work, 2007). The major hindrances to tourism development are lack of funding (82%), low level of advertisement (80%), lack of awareness (69%), poor infrastructure (77%) and inadequate accessibility to destinations (54%). These have hindered the growth of attractions like Arinta waterfalls, Ikogosi warm spring and Isan pottery.

Another problem militating against tourism development is low level of income (77%). This conforms with the view of Leonard and Carson (1997) who jointly opined that availability of real discretionary income is a major determinant of tourism demand. Series of other problems constitute constraints to tourism participation in developing countries. Among them are time constraint (Aworitefe, 1986); bad management (Afolabi, 1992); poor accessibility to tourism potentials and inadequate mobility (Ojo, 1978); as

well as personal constraints and environmental condition (Veal, 1973). Other hindrances to tourism participation and preferences are parental restriction (55%), religious intolerance (43%), political instability (49%), lack of interest in tourism (67%), and high cost of accommodation (63%).

Major Findings

Findings from the study show that different categories of resources – warm spring, waterfall, cave, inselberg and buildings of historical significance, cultural attractions, as well as traditional dances are present in the study area. The varieties of the resources offer scenic views and vistas for recreational activities. Nevertheless, the level of patronage of the tourist attractions is very low. Likewise, inadequate security, shortage of facilities as well as ill maintenance of existing ones are the major constraints to tourism development in the state.

Findings from the study revealed that preferences for tourist attractions in Ekiti State are rural-based and natural features instead of urban-based and man-made features. The study also revealed that there is a significant relationship between tourism participation and level of awareness. To this end, the study revealed that societal changes in terms of urbanization, civilization as well as globalization are affecting the desire for tourism in Ekiti State. Above all, the available infrastructure and tourist amenities at recreational centers are determinants of domestic tourism participation.

The research found out that the level of tourism development in the state is very low. The reasons for this include high level of illiteracy, lack of up-to-date research on the tourism potentials of the state, lack of adequate funding, lack of infrastructure, mundane psychological perception of the people about tourism, as well as low standard of living. Findings from the research revealed further that inadequate mapping of tourist attractions, low level of awareness as well as negative attitude of people to travel are responsible for low level of patronage.

Recommendations

Tackling the socio-economic problems associated with the tourism industry requires the cooperation of all stakeholders like individuals, policy makers, government, and non-governmental organizations. They all need to develop a viable conception of tourism as an important segment of the economy.

Moreover, a long-term tourism development master plan as well as its implementation is required for sustainable development.

Sustainable tourism development in the state requires the review of the existing National Tourism Policy, so as to meet up with the current trends in the millennium compatible recreation and tourism. Moreover, in order to build a locally relevant and internationally competitive tourism industry in Ekiti State, more specialists should be involved in the planning and implementation of tourism development project. At this juncture, it is equally pertinent to formulate and implement additional policies that would enhance adequate development of tourism potentials in the State and Nigeria in general. Such policies should stipulate the minimum facilities at recreation centers and tourist resorts.

In addition, the Nigerian Tourism Board as well as the ministry of environment should be charged with the responsibility of providing tourists facilities for local and international tourists. In this regard, basic facilities like, electricity, potable water, good roads as well as mass transit buses should be provided in and around tourism potentials. In addition, museums, sites of historical significance, games reserves, parks, places of outstanding beauty, as well as holiday resorts should be assisted in the development of their potentials.

According to Smith (1977), a 'successful tourism strategy' to improve patronage must provide desired experience in order for people to come back for the purpose of recreation and tourism. Hence, a stable political atmosphere that is devoid of criminal activities is a basic pre-requisite to recreation and tourism. Thus, in order to derive maximum sustainable development from tourism, adequate security should be provided at tourist centers for the protection of lives and properties of tourists as well as the environment. To this end, activities that could threaten the flora and fauna populations should be avoided. In addition, hotels and restaurants in the area should maintain high standards and qualitative environmental conditions so as to meet up with international standards.

Other strategies of improving the socio-economic status of the tourism industry in Ekiti State are better management vis-à-vis harnessing and utilization of tourism potentials. Furthermore, there should be extensive use and application of information and communication technology as well as

computerization of tourism records and operations. To this end, in order to harness and develop all tourism potentials as well as to make a turn-around overhauling of the industry, attendance of local, national and international exhibitions, symposia, seminars and conferences on recreation and tourism should be made compulsory for the management staff of Ekiti State tourism board.

In view of the wide resources base for recreation and tourism in Ekiti State, there is the necessity to establish tourism-training institutes in the state for the production of human resources development capacity for the industry. To this end, further researches on recreation leisure, and tourism should be encouraged at local, state, national and international levels. Moreover, there is the necessity to increase the publicity on the available tourist attractions. In the same vein, more commitments should be shown to the development of these potentials through funding, advertisement, promotion and marketing.

Other strategies of improving the tourism industry include political decisions in favour of tourism, improved transportation, provision of outdoor recreational facilities, as well as provision of adequate public utilities and amenities for recreation and tourism. Other key issues are financial aid for tourism infrastructure, preservation of cultural assets, monitoring of tourism labour market, as well as planning and coordination of tourism development.

In order to promote sustainable socio-economic development for the tourism industry in Ekiti State, the use of safe sanitation facilities should be encouraged in and around tourism destinations. Likewise, sound environmental practices, turn-around maintenance, rehabilitation and development of tourism potentials is required in order to successfully tap all the tourism potentials within the context of environmental management and planning. To this end, rural management strategies to promote eco-tourism should be done in conjunction with landscape planning and environmental impact design.

Above all, Nigerians should be encouraged to spend their holidays in the available tourists' centers in the country. Moreover, the private sector, individuals, governmental and non-governmental organizations should be encouraged to participate in tourism and recreational activities and its development. To this end, security of lives and properties should be

guaranteed in tourist attractions, festival sites, open spaces, hotels, parks and gardens.

Conclusion

Tourism means visiting places for pleasure rather than going there for work. It is an activity, which cuts across conventional sectors in the economy. It requires inputs of economic, social, cultural and environmental nature. It is often described as being multi-faceted (Leonard and Carson, 1997). It is one of the world's fastest growing sectors of economic activity. It is a source of foreign exchange as well as an employer of labour. The development of tourism and the provision of leisure activities provide self esteem and satisfy curiosity.

Ekiti State is blessed with a large concentration of natural and man-made tourist attractions. Tourists come from far and near sources to enjoy the views, wild flowers, and birds, areas of outstanding natural beauty, as well as the cultures and traditions. This research confirmed that the tourist attractions in Ekiti State are at the low level of development. The problems that are militating against the growth of the tourism industry are insecurity, exchange rate fluctuation, environmental pollution, and shortage of infrastructural amenities and public utilities.

The need for sustainable tourism requires the conservation of landscape, community services, and development of national parks, provision of attractive services and facilities as well as the development of roads, forestry, water supply, industry, agriculture and other sectors of the economy. On this note, both private and public participation in tourism development is advocated for the exploitation of the rich and exotic tourist attractions of the state.

Findings from this work would enhance the interest of the government, policy makers and individuals in the development of countryside tourism potentials. It is equally expected that if all the recommendations are taken, the level of patronage of tourist attractions would increase, and the revenue base of Ekiti State would also increase.

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Table 1: Assessment of Some Selected Tourist Attractions in the State. Requirements

TOURIST ATTRACTION	ACCESS	NATURAL RESOURCES	AMENITIES	CULTURAL FACILITIES
Efon hills	Unreliable	Impressive hills	None	None
Ikogosi warm spring	Good	Supernatural spring	Swimming pool	Masquerades
Ebomi lake	Fair	Attractive lake	None	Masquerades
Esa cave	Fair	Unusual cave	None	Festivals
Arinta falls	Fair	Dynamic actions	None	Festivals
Orole & Olosunta hills	Unreliable	Extra-ordinary	None	Festivals
Ayonigba river	Unreliable	Magnificent	None	Festivals
Ose water dam	Expensive	Impressive	Excellent	Festivals
Fajuyi park	Cheap and reliable	none	Excellent	Entertainment
Erinfun golf course	Comfortable	Fairly undulating plain	Sporting facilities	Entertainment
Adetiloye trade fair	Good and quick	None	Local entertainment	Entertainment
Ogotun mat weaving center	Fair	None	Excellent	Festivals
Isan pottery	Fair	Clay	Excellent	Festivals
Semuregede festival	Fair	None	Local entertainment	Festival

Source: Field work, 2007.