



CONSTRAINTS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN PORT HARCOURT TOURISM BEACH, RIVERS STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The study examines constraints of tourism development in Port Harcourt Tourist Beach, Rivers State, Nigeria and makes appropriate recommendations for the improvement of tourism performance at the beach using personal observation, in-depth interview and structured questionnaires. Two sets of questionnaires were used for the study. The first set was administered to all the 4 staff of the Port Harcourt Tourist Beach. The second set was randomly administered to 80 tourist respondents, although only 70 were retrieved and used for the study. Data obtained was analyzed using descriptive statistics in form of percentages, frequencies, tables, and charts, while Chi-square was used to test for significance of relationships. Results revealed that constraints of tourism development in Port Harcourt Tourist beach were inadequate funding (100%), lack of adequate personnel (100%), insecurity (100%), shortage of tourist facilities (100%), dilapidated facilities (100%), lack of tourist accommodation (100%), lack of conveniences for tourists (100%), inadequate attractions (75%), lack of support from state government (100%) and poor advertisement (75%). Chi square test showed no significant association between the tourist age, gender, and satisfaction ($p>0.05$). However, there is a significant association between tourist occupation and satisfaction ($\chi^2 = 9.492$) at ($p< 0.05$). Most tourist respondents were not satisfied with the attractions available in the destination and the management of the site because the few attractions in the beach are not in good condition. Most visitors to Port Harcourt beach can hardly repeat visits. With improved funding, well trained personnel, provision of diverse tourist attractions and facilities, this destination could be a major tourist attraction for both local and foreign visitors.

Key words: Attractions, facilities, Port Harcourt Tourist Beach, tourist, tourism development

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important activity that contributes positively to human well being (Liu, 2013) and rejuvenation of human mind (Neal *et al*, 1999) thereby enhancing happiness (Sirgy, 2008; Filep, 2012)) and improves productivity (Graburn 1983). This is particularly important because the modern man is so preoccupied with so many stress induced activities that contribute to poor job performance and sometimes shorten modern man's life span. However, these unpleasant and catastrophic consequences can be eliminated or reduced by taking a detour from the regular work and go on tour. It has also been established that

individuals who engage in tourism activities experience improved work performance (De Bloom *et al*, 2010) and happiness (Nawijn, 2011). Although, many tourism destinations are located at the outskirts of cities to provide an environment different from the bustling and boisterous city life, some are also found in serene environment within the city to meet recreational needs of city residents. These are usually well patronized by city dwellers and those from nearby towns and cities especially on weekends and religious holidays particularly in Nigeria. The Port Harcourt Tourist Beach located in Port Harcourt City, is one of the least visited eco-destination in

Rivers State. Despite its strategic location in a serene environment of the city, tourist patronage is very low, which is an indication that it is not serving the purpose for its establishment. Hence, the study was carried out to identify the challenges of the beach, assess the status of tourist attractions/facilities and determine the percentage of tourists who could still be satisfied with the attraction/ facilities and the services provided by the management of the park.

METHODOLOGY

Study area

The Port Harcourt Tourist Beach is a man-made beach and was created in 1988 by Mr. Mike Amachree. The Port Harcourt tourist beach is located on 4°45'30"N and 7°02'35"E at Kolabi Creek east of the Old Township, Port Harcourt (Figure 1).

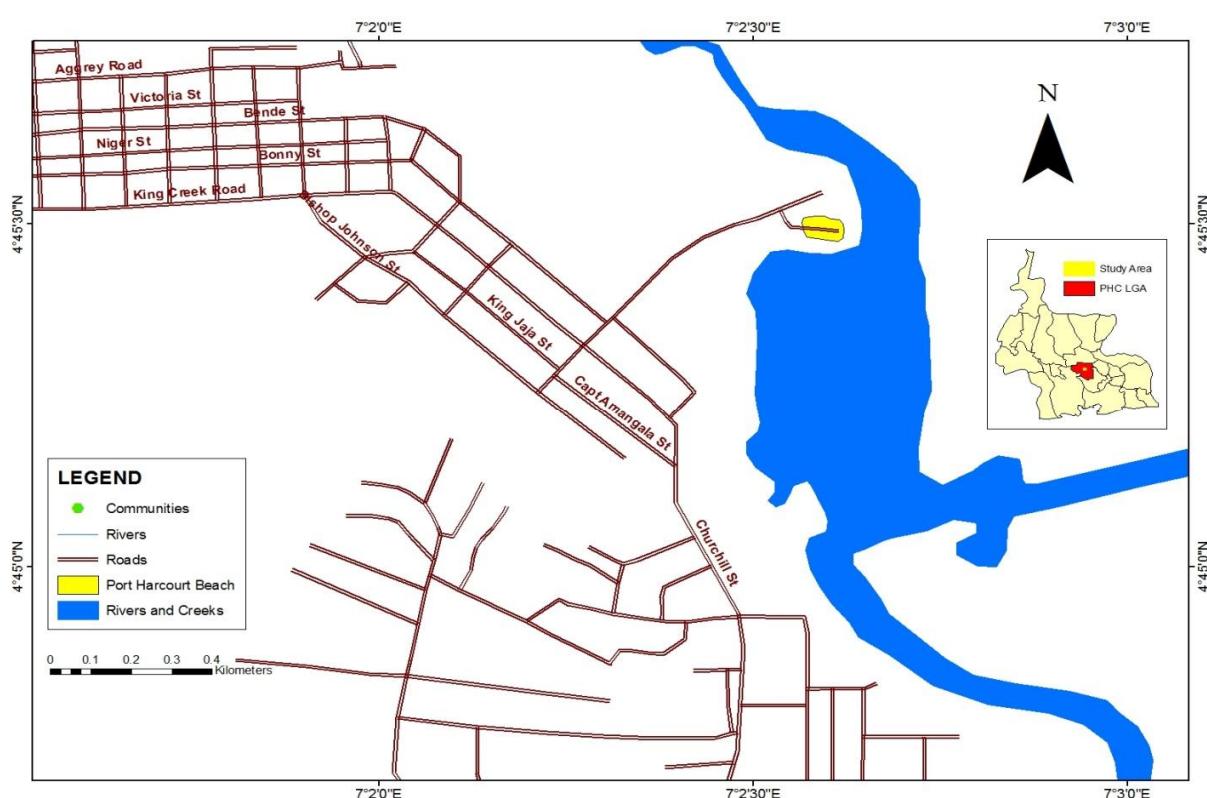


Fig.1: Map of the study area

Data collection and analysis

Data for the study were collected through the use of structured questionnaire and complemented with personal observations and in-depth interviews. Two sets of structured questionnaires were used for the study. A set of questionnaire was administered to all the four (4) staff of the Port Harcourt Tourism Beach. The second set of questionnaires was randomly administered to 80 tourists. In-depth interview was conducted with selected officials of the Rivers State Tourism Board who have worked with the board for a minimum period of 5 years, hence, are very familiar with the beach and its challenges. Tourists were also randomly interviewed. In all, a total of

84 questionnaires were administered for the study but only 74 were retrieved. Data collected from the study were summarized in the form of percentages and frequency counts while Chi square was used to test for significance of associations between respondents' age, gender and occupation with tourists' satisfaction respectively.

RESULTS

Challenges of Port Harcourt Tourist Beach are presented in Table 1 and Plates 1 and 2. The challenges as listed by all respondents include inadequate funding, inadequate personnel, insecurity, inadequate facilities, dilapidated

facilities, lack of accommodation, lack of conveniences (Table 1). Majority of the respondents (75%) also identified inadequate attractions, poor advertisement and lack of support from the state government as challenges in the beach (Table 1). Plate 1 and 2 show the dilapidated condition and poor inadequate maintenance of facilities in the beach. Rating of the condition of facilities, tourist attractions and activities by respondents are presented in Table 2. The table shows that the state of all attractions, activities and facilities in the destination were

rated poor by all the respondents. Table 3 and 4 show that majority of the respondents were dissatisfied with both attractions and facilities (91.40%) in the beach and the management (92.80%) of the destination respectively. Chi square tests of association between Age of respondents and satisfaction; and gender of respondent and satisfaction were respectively not significant ($p>0.05$). However there was a significant association ($p<0.05$) between respondents occupation and satisfaction (Table).

Table 1: Challenges of tourism in Port Harcourt Tourist Beach as identified by staff and tourist respondents

Challenges	Percentages
Inadequate funding	100
Inadequate personnel	100
Insecurity	100
Inadequate facilities	100
Dilapidated facilities	100
Lack of accommodation	100
Lack of conveniences	100
Inadequate attractions	75
Lack of support from state government	75
Poor advertisement	75

Source: Field Survey, 2015



Plate 1: Dilapidated tourist fish pond at the Port Harcourt Tourist Beach



Plate 2: Tourist palm garden overgrown by weeds in Port Harcourt tourist beach.
Source: Field survey, 2015.

Table 2: Condition of Tourist attractions/facilities at Port Harcourt Tourist Beach as rated by staff and tourist respondents

Tourist attractions/facilities	Rating	Percentage
Mini Zoo	Poor	100
Fish Pond	Poor	100
Museum	Poor	100
Horse riding	Poor	100
Boat Riding	Poor	100
Bar/ restaurants	Poor	100
Swimming	Poor	100
Picnicking	Poor	100

Source: Field Survey, 2015

Table 3: Assessment of tourist satisfaction with attractions and facilities in Port Harcourt Tourist Beach as indicated by tourist respondents

Parameter	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
If visitors are satisfied?	No	64	91.4
	Yes	6	8.6
	Total	70	100

Source: Field survey, 2015

Table 4: Assessment of tourist satisfaction with the management of the Port Harcourt Tourist beach as indicated by tourist respondents

Parameter		Frequency	Percentage (%)
If visitors are satisfied with the management of the beach	Yes	5	7.14
	No	65	92.86
	Total	70	100

Source: Field survey, 2015

Table 5: Summary of chi-square test for satisfaction among tourists in Port Harcourt tourist beach

Variables	Calculate chi square (χ^2)	P values	Significance	Inference
Age and satisfaction	0.021	0.883	p > 0.05	No significant association
Gender and satisfaction	3.091	0.378	p > 0.05	No significant association
Occupation and satisfaction	9.492	0.009	p < 0.05	Significant association

Source: Field survey, 2015

DISCUSSION

Problems of tourism development in Port Harcourt Tourist Beach

Inadequate Funding

Inadequate funding is a major challenge in Port Harcourt Tourist Beach. It has hindered the maintenance of few existing tourist facilities and provision of new attractions that can enrich tourist experience in Port Harcourt tourist beach. Due to shortage of fund basic tourist facilities such as lodging facilities, conveniences, safety and security, and tourism information services are lacking in the destination. Similarly, Karimi (2008) reported that inadequacy of fund for development, execution of projects, and

maintenance of structures has negatively influenced tourism development in Isfahan, Iran. None maintenance of the open air theatre and fish pond in the beach reduces the aesthetic beauty of the destination.

Manpower

Shortage of manpower is another serious challenge of ecotourism development in Port Harcourt Tourist Beach. Adequate and well trained personnel are very important for effective tourism service delivery. Port Harcourt Tourist Beach is under-staffed. There is low level of tourism professionals and trained staff in Port Harcourt Tourist Beach. The few available staff in

the beach rely more on experiences instead of professional training. Thus, the beach lacks adequate and competent personnel. The few staff in the beach cannot effectively manage the destination. Visitors organize themselves, arrive with their food and drinks to use any part of the beach free of charge without being asked any question. The management of the destination feel even happy that at least presence of visitors are felt in the environment, because of the low patronage always experienced. This appears to be one of the major challenges of tourism in most destinations. Syed (2013) obtained a similar result in Gorakh Hill-Dadu-Sindh resort in Pakistan. Shortage of manpower in tourism/hospitality sector is not limited to developing countries. Jope (2012) observed that developed countries such as US, France, Germany and Switzerland similarly experience manpower shortage but actually depend on migrant labour to meet their manpower shortage.

Safety and security challenge

The study reveals that most tourists to Port Harcourt Tourist Beach have so much concern over security and safety issues. This is partly due to the location of the beach. The beach is located within the Niger Delta Region of Nigeria associated with militancy and kidnapping. Hence, many people outside the region usually have fears about travelling to this region. Safety and security issues play significant roles in tourist's choice of destinations. Lack of insecurity normally influences choice of destinations by tourists. Arana and Leon (2008) obtained a similar result that tourists show clear preferences for peaceful destinations. Tourists will generally show preference for safe destinations where they can freely enjoy their holiday without any threat to their lives. Safety of tourist's life and property are particularly critical to tourists because they not only affect the activities tourists can engage in but also their length of stay which also directly affect their spending. Moreover, tourists often spend more money when they stay longer and pay more repeat visit to a destination considered to be safe thereby meeting one of the core objectives of good management. An unsafe destination will

only attract few tourists regardless of its standard or status and will hardly encourage many repeat visits. Similarly, Dabour (2003) and Kaufmann (2008) implicated insecurity as one of the barriers of tourism development in some countries including Bahrain, Kazakhstan, Senegal, Morocco, Maldives, Egypt, Ethiopia and Mali. The fear of being kidnapped, raped, robbed and even killed has been the major concern of many potential tourists to the region (Nwagba, 2014). In the case of Kenya Tom (2000) reported that the fear of insecurity caused several potential tourists to cancel their bookings in favour of competing safe destinations.

Lack of government/institutional support

Lack of government support is another factor noted to have militated against tourism development at the Port Harcourt Tourist Beach (Table 1). The initial management work-plan for the Port Harcourt Tourist Beach was in collaboration with the Rivers state government. The tactical withdrawal of support by the state government played a role in the malfunctioning of the destination. Government support at different levels is very important for tourism to thrive particularly as it concerns the provision of infrastructures such as roads, power supply and security. The success of ecotourism development in Brazil (in 1998) was attributed to the synergy between government at different levels and management of destinations (Raul, 2003). The study also reveals that the Rivers State Ministry of Culture and Tourism which has the supervisory role over tourism industry in the state has no serious commitment to the beach. This agrees with Christie (2013) that tourism institutions are often weak when there is no real government commitment to monitor them. A sturdy government commitment and support could have helped in promoting the beach and the Rivers State as a vibrant tourism hub. Lack of support from the state government retarded the performance of the Port Harcourt Tourist Beach. Raul (2003) also reported that lack of government as well as institutional support was among the factors responsible for poor tourism performance in Brazil between 1987 and 1991.

Lack of accommodation facility

Lack of accommodation facility at the Port Harcourt Tourist Beach is also one of the major drawbacks of the beach as indicated by majority of the tourist and staff respondents (Table 1). Majority of the tourist respondents to the beach indicated their desire to spend at least a night at the beach. Similarly others who are day tourists expressed strong desire to enjoy the comfort of a living room while at the beach. Accommodation facilities at beaches/resorts enhance tourists experience because visitors can engage in other activities that will enrich their stay. Besides, it reduces the stress of transportation of tourists to and from the resort for their entire period of visitation which could have negative implications on tourists' safety and experiences. This perhaps was also responsible for low patronage of tourists who are not resident in Port Harcourt. Moreover, availability of accommodation facility at tourist destination encourages tourists to stay longer and engage in more activities which will also make them spend more money thereby improving the revenue accruing to the destination. Availability of accommodation influences tourists choice of destination as Harshwanti (1994) reported that some tourists in Uttarkashi and Chanoli districts in Garhwal Himalayas, declined additional adventure due to lack of accommodation facility.

Tourist respondents also complained about lack of conveniences at the beach. The implications of this are that tourists select what they eat and drink while at the beach. This affects their experiences and also reduces their rate of spending. Food and drinks normally add to tourists 'experiences and also constitute one the major ways of generating revenue from tourists destinations. However, since there was no provision for conveniences and tourists will naturally generate waste, environmental pollution is therefore inevitable especially in the flowing water and the sandy portion of the beach - this can destroy and degrade the beauty of the beach whereas the quality of ecotourism experience is directly related to the level of environmental quality. Similarly Tosun(2001) reported the pollution of

seawater due to discharge of solid waste by tourists in Kusadas, Turkey.

Poor status of tourist attractions

Tourists in the Port Harcourt Tourist Beach were disappointed at the state of the few attractions including the mini zoo, museum, fish pond and others (Table 2). The few cages and animal house in the dilapidated zoo are in a state of desolation and were rated poor by many tourist and staff respondents (Table 3). The fun and excitement which animals could have provided were missingSimilarly, the fish pond and Palm Garden which were created to provide some unique experiences to tourists in the beach have been overgrown by weeds (Plate 1 and Plate 2).The current state of these attractions actually denies tourists the opportunity of engaging in varied activities. The dilapidated state of the attractions and facilities at the beach is as an eye-saw to tourists and reduces the aesthetic quality of the beach. An attraction such as Port Harcourt Tourist Beach Museum (Plate 3) which houses some few artifacts is not popular amongst tourists because the specimens are in bad condition and cannot be properly displayed. This further increases the level of dissatisfaction by tourists to the beach (Table 3). It is the availability and good status of diverse tourist attractions/facilities at destinations that enhance tourist's experiences (Crouch and Ritch, 2000).

The study revealed that majority of the tourist respondents (91.40%) expressed dissatisfaction with their visit to the beach (Table 3) and this could have serious consequences on repeat visit to the beach especially where there are competing beaches with excellent attractions and facilities. More so, most tourist respondents (92.9%) were not pleased with how the Port Harcourt Tourist Beach is managed (Table 4). Chi square tests of association showed that there were no significant relationship between age, gender and tourist satisfaction at $p>0.05$ (Table 5), However, there was a significant relationship between occupation and tourist satisfaction at $p<0.05$ (Table 5). This implies that majority of the tourist who are not satisfied (91.4%) are working and might have been able to afford visit to other destinations with better quality attractions and facilities, thus, higher satisfaction. Tourist satisfaction has an

important role to play in tourist destination's development. Poor state of basic tourist infrastructure and inadequate facilities affect tourist's experiences and result in low level of satisfaction by tourists (Table 3) which also impact negatively on tourist's expenses at the beach. Satisfaction of tourists increase the success and profitability of destinations as they are more likely to discuss their experiences with friends and relations, spend more time and money on activities, and subsequently pay repeat visit. This agrees with the findings of Handszuh (1995) that the quality and standard of attractions, services, infrastructure, security, cleanliness and serene environment can create pleasant experiences in tourists thereby motivating them to visit again.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The challenges of Port Harcourt Tourist Beach are numerous. The poor state of attractions, activities and facilities which tourists have continuously criticized has discouraged the management of the

beach from creating awareness about the resources in the destination. For an optimal tourism performance and improved service delivery that can sustainably attract both local and foreign visitors, there is need for more investment in infrastructures, facilities, maintenance of the destination and publicity of resources in the beach. The government of Rivers state should help promote the state as a vibrant and safe tourism region. The management of the beach should employ tourism management experts to manage the destination. Conveniences should be provided in the destination to prevent visitors from defecating in the beach environment. Provision of more and varied attractions, maintenance of good sanitary condition in the beach, security of the beach, adequate advertisement with good management will restore the confidence of tourist to visit the destination *en masse*. Provision of children play ground will also add to the fun of visitors with children.

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