

**Connecting Visitors to People and Places: People's Perception of  
Authenticity at the National Museum, Calabar  
Calabar-Nigeria**

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**Abstract**

This study examines the impact of visitors' characteristics, motivations and sense of place attachment on perceptions of authenticity at a cultural heritage site-Nigeria National Museum and Monuments (Slave History Museum) Calabar – Nigeria. This investigation discovered that the most important motives for visiting the cultural heritage site are to 'enjoy nature' and to experience Cross River State culture as well as Nigerian slave history and culture. Also, visitors perceived a strong sense of place identity, but a weaker sense of place dependence. Research findings show that motivation to experience crossriverian cultural heritage, the place identity dimension of place attachment, educational attainment, age and past experience at the museum had significant effects on the perception of an authentic experience at the museum. Place identity emerged as the strongest predictor of perceptions of authenticity, suggests first that a strong emotional bond is an important factor in visitors perceiving a site to be authentic. As visitor motivations for learning about the crossriverian culture increased, so did perceptions of authenticity. Higher age also led to increased feelings of authenticity. As education levels and prior experience increased perceptions of authenticity decreased. This research adopted the library and survey methods of research for gathering information.

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism, Authenticity, slave History, Cultural Heritage

**Introduction**

Museum is an institution where artistic and educational materials are exhibited to the public. The materials are called a 'collection'. This collection may include scientific specimens, works of art, and exhibits

information on history or technology. Again, museums provide information for researchers, students, and other members of the community. Various members of a museum's staff prepare materials for display and care for them after they have been put on exhibition.

Although cultural and heritage tourism have received increasing attention as areas of investigation and management concern, additional research is relevant to define key constructs and establish relations among them to acquaint theory and improve practice. Specifically, inquiry is required to explore how tourists experience and construct meaning from visiting cultural heritage sites. One of the most promising avenues for investigation in this area is to document the relations between tourists' motives for visiting a site, the symbolic, emotional and functional meanings they ascribe to the site and their perceptions of the originality. This is the main point of this research, taking into consideration the Nigerian National Museum (Slave History Museum) at Calabar (Cross River State), Nigeria.

As a relatively new line of inquiry, cultural heritage tourism investigation lacks agreed upon definitions for some key constructs, therefore, it is informative to identify the main perspectives and identify the approach taken in this research. Heritage has been defined as 'not simply the past, but the modern-day use of elements from the past, according to Timothy and Bojd (36). More specifically, heritage tourism has been defined as tourism 'based on what a tribe or enclave have inherited, which can mean anything from historic buildings, to art works, to beautiful scenery' (Yale, 21). Therefore, heritage can refer to natural and cultural inheritance. In this researcher's view, heritage is somewhat more circumscribed and refers to elements of the natural and cultural landscape that have been consciously preserved by human action to represent the experience and meaning of individuals and groups in a certain place and time.

Likewise, heritage tourism is open to some interpretation. According to Apostolakis (795 – 812), and Nyaupane, et al (81 – 99), at least two perspectives have emerged that describe heritage tourism experiences. One method focuses on the supply-side, or the descriptive and definitional aspects of the experience. The second approach highlights heritage demand, representing consumptive or experience-based components. There has recently been a shift from a product-based (supply) to a consumer-based (demand) market assessment, associated

with tourists desire for unique or authentic experiences Garrod and Fayall asserts that individuals involved in the supply side of cultural heritage typically take a descriptive or curatorial method. This focus lies in defining the material components of cultural heritage sites such as attractions, objects, artwork, artefacts and relics. Additional characteristics of this concept include traditions, languages, and folklore, or the 'pull' factor. In essence, these different components are attractions that cultural heritage managers use to attract the interest of potential visitors (682-708).

The demand aspect of heritage tourism emphasizes the visitor experience. Based on this backdrop, Moscardo defined heritage tourism as an experience, which is produced by the interaction of the visitor with the resource (5). This methodology centres on visitors' cognitive perceptions, motivations and expectations pertinent to a particular site. Therefore, visitor motivation is part of the demand view of cultural heritage tourism owing to its foundation in perceptions and personal experiences. The conceptual definition of demand gives rise to 'push' factors that help provide an understanding about why travelers choose certain destinations and how they perceive or identify with specific cultural heritage tourism (Apostalakis, 812 and Nyaupane, 99).

According to Chhabra et al (702-719), and Taylor (26), cultural heritage tourism points to visitors' urges and expectations for genuine representations of reality. Authenticity is increasingly being promoted as a central component of a meaningful and satisfying heritage tourism experience. Authenticity or the perception of a great experience is critical in successful heritage tourism (Le and Wall, 353 – 366). With authenticity enhancing the quality of heritage tourism and becoming a major travel motive, the cultural heritage market has increasingly focused on this concept as a marketing strategy (Clapp, 29 and Cohen 356). It is therefore necessary to understand which factors are not essential in contributing to a visitor's sense of authenticity and the relationship between authenticity and other components of tourist experiences.

In a nutshell, this research paper investigates the impact of visitors' characteristics, motivations, past experience and sense of place attachment on their perceptions of an authentic experience at a cultural heritage, site in Nigeria National Museum (Slave History Museum) Calabar. The purpose is to understand better the role of these

variables in predicting an authentic experience. The inquiry begins with a review of the related literature on kinds and communicative values of museums, authenticity and place attachment, followed by an historical background of Nigeria Slave History Museum, Calabar- Nigeria and finally the implications of the findings are buttressed in the concluding section of the paper.

### **Kinds and Values of Museums**

#### **i. Kinds of Museums**

There are main kinds of museums:

- (1) **Art museums** – Preserve and exhibit paintings, sculpture, and other works of art. The collections of some art museum include works from many periods. Many art museums also have special exhibits. The exhibits are usually displayed for several weeks where applicable;
- (2) **History museums:** Illustrate the life and events of the past. The collections of such museums include documents, furniture, tools, and other materials. Many cities and states have historical societies that operate history museums. Most of these museums have exhibits on local history (The World Book, 778).
- (3) **Science and Technology museums:** have exhibits on the natural sciences and technology. Some natural science museums are called *Museums of natural history*. They exhibit displays of animals, fossils, plants, rocks, and other objects and organisms found in nature. Many of the exhibits in technology museums are sponsored by corporations and industries. These exhibits explain the operation of various types of machines and industrial methods (Cohen, 38).  
Other types of museums

#### **ii. Communicative Values of Museums**

Museums perform three main functions. These institutions

- (1) Acquire new materials
- (2) Exhibit and care for materials and
- (3) Provide various special services (Clapp 48)

**Acquisition of materials** – every new object that a museum adds to its collection is called an *acquisitions*. Many acquisition are gifts items

from people who collect such items paintings, precious stones, or sculptures. Sometimes a museum buys, a particular item that is needed to fill a gap in an exhibit. Museum employees may find new materials on archaeological expeditions or field trips. Museums also borrow material or entire exhibits from other museums. Acquisitions are received by the museum *registrar*, a staff member who records the description of each object. Every acquisition is photographed and given a number. Museum officials determine the value of each object and insure it for that amount.

### **Exhibition and care of Materials**

Various members of the museum staff prepare the materials for exhibition. The museum *curator* may conduct research to learn more about objects. Museum conservators clean, preserve, or restore objects before they are exhibited.

The *curator* decides how materials are displayed. That is, a new object may be added to an existing exhibit or become part of a special exhibit. It may be hung on a wall or placed in a case. *Designers* build cases and furniture for the displays. Again, they set up lights and electric wiring. *Preparators* create display background and prepare materials for exhibiting. Every exhibit receives a label that gives visitors some information about it. Descriptions of all objects appear in the museum's catalog as well (Nyaupane, 296).

Again, museums protect their exhibits from loss or damage. The doors and windows of many museums have alarms in addition to *locks*. Museums keep exhibit cases locked, and some cases may be connected to alarms. Some materials are displayed behind thick velvet ropes or on high platforms. Guards patrol the museum constantly. Museums may use special light bulbs and devices that control humidity and temperature to protect objects from environmental damage (Chhabra et al, 103).

**Special services:** Many museums have an *education department* that gives lectures and classes on the museum's collection. Most museums provide gallery talks, guided tours, and other programmes for children and adults. Other activities provided by museums including art festivals, concerts, and hobby workshops. Many museums publish bulletins and pamphlets that describe contemporary and future exhibits. They also furnish scholars and research materials, the use of special laboratories

and libraries. Some museums serve as a place where local artists can exhibit their work (Taylor, 73).

### **Background Discourse on slave history in Calabar-Cross River State, Nigeria**

The period of slave trade was a dark era in the history of the world. Calabar played a very significant role as a major point of departure of nearly 30% of the slaves taken away to Europe and America. Most of the slaves were from the hunter land of the present day Nigeria and Cameroon. The first slave cargoes departed from the West African Coast in the 15th century when members of the Portuguese aristocracy started a small scale occasional impact of labour for their estates, mines and plantations. The discovery of the American continent, West Indies and the introduction of large plantation cultivation there in the 17th century led to a steady increasing demand for African slave labour.

The West African trade rapidly expanded in response to the increasing demand, and by the 18th century it developed into a massive traffic of slaves dominated by English companies. A triangular trade pattern was established in which slaves procured on the West Coast of Africa were transported across the Atlantic ocean to the American as sold there. Raw materials from the plantation were loaded on the ships on their way to Europe and replaced again with manufactured goods for the African Council trade. This transaction was immensely profitable although the competition was fierce. The European entrepreneurs were able to accumulate the capital needed in launching the industrial revolution in their countries, while the American Coastal settlements playing the role of the middle men, grew into rich city States, their rulers controlling a wide spread network or trade routes and markets. Unfortunately, the African continent lost more than it gained from the trade. It was thrown off its natural course of development into centuries of brutalization and insecurity, increasing social polarization and violent upheavals. Its economic fortune became an appendage of the economy of the western world. The abominable economic system based on the slave trade was discarded only on the emergence of a new technological age which made slave labour unprofitable.

Calabar is located on latitude 5th 50 of the Greenwich Meridian. It is about 50 nautical miles from the *estuary* of the Cross River. It was established on the cliff, overlooking the majestic Calabar River. The three ethnic groups in Calabar are Efik, Quas and Efik, the Ndidem for

the Quas and the Muri for the Efuts. Calabar was a known part on the early European travelers and traders. There was exchange of materials in trade from this period until the early 18th century when trading became very fierce between the European traders. This led to the establishment of ports that could be used to carry goods. Calabar was one of such ports that was opened and developed to handle the cargoes of the trading firms. The fierce rivalry also led to the development of massive armaments of the navies of European powers that later backed the transatlantic slave trade.

Calabar played a prominent role in the era of slave trading beginning from 1503 when the Portuguese colonized the islands of Formandopo and Saotome. European goods were exchanged for local raw materials, spices, forest tropics food and slaves within the precinct of Calabar and that led to the port becoming so-big that many ships came to berth at the port regularly. Calabar has enjoyed the singular honour of being the only port on the West African Coast with in unbroken contact with Europe from early 15th century to date.

The city became the sea of the Niger Coast protectorate – the oil river protectorate and the Southern protectorates of Nigeria in January 1914, after the amalgamation Calabar remained an important port for the export of the palm produce till the Nigerian civil war. During the civil war, Calabar became the seat of government of the South Eastern State. In 1987, it became the capital city of the newly created Cross River State of Nigeria. Today, Calabar is the tourism window to Nigeria cultural diversity.

The Slave History Museum is a unique destination for lovers of history. The artistic impressions in human forms with sound effects bring to life the past, making visitors experience the era of the slave trade in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The museum located beside the Calabar River (a point of no return) of the Marina as the major transit point of slaves bought from the hunter land and moved in canoes through the Calabar River (estuary) to the high sea to be arranged in ships, gave rise to the development of the Slave History Museum.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade and its enslavement and transportation, occurred primarily of African people to the colonies of the new world that occurred in and around the Atlantic Ocean from 1440 to about 1833. The discovery of the American continent by Christopher

Columbus in 1492 marked the beginning of the continental tragedy of transatlantic slave trade. American's rich deposit of gold and silver propelled European settlers to mine for gold using native Indians whose constitution was so feeble and their treatment so cruel that the race, rapidly diminish in a short space of fifteen years from one million to sixty thousand. To save the Indians from extinction, cardinal system of importing slaves from Africa that introduced a market in which no amount of African slaves could safety. One of the most important regions where these slaves were obtained was the Blight of Biafra which comprises of the present Cross River, Abia, Akwa Ibom, Anambra, Bayelsa, Ebonyi, Enugu, Imo and Rivers State.

Calabar played a very important role in the transatlantic slave trade. In 1493, Diego Sama, a Portuguese navigator, visited Calabar estuary. His visit led to the coming of other Portuguese traders who turned the Niger-Delta to a main slave supplying area in the 16th century. By the late 17th century, British traders took over the Niger-Delta slave trade from the Portuguese. Such examples include John Elliot of the Ship ironically called art of Barbados, captain Brainfill landed 278 slaves in Jamaica from Calabar.

By 18th century, Calabar has *immersed* as the major slave point in the Blight of Biafra. It has been estimated that nearly 20 percent of the slaves that entered the Atlantic slave trade were exported through old Calabar. The slaves were captured through the Cross River creeks and their tributaries. They were gathered by the agents of the middle men in Duke Town, Creek Town, Itu, Umon and Upstreams to Biakpan and environs in the present Biase Local Government Area. These captured slaves comprised 56 percent Igbos, 42 percent Ibibios, slaves from Ejagham, Cameroun, Benue Valley, Igala, Nupe, Kakanda and Hausa made up the remaining 2 percent.

These figures suggest that the prosperity and viability of old Calabar ports were totally depended on transatlantic slave trade. Many of the Igbo and Ibibio slaves that were sold in Calabar were recruited by the Aros though the combination of means, among them raids kidnapping, direct purchase in slave markets, fairs and above all through manipulation of their gods, Ibiuikpabi also known as "long juju" in the European records. Slaves captured by Aros were processed through central markets at Akpabuyo, Umon, Ukwia Enyong and Itu respectively.

**The Middle Passage (Transportation)**



The Portuguese took their first cargo of an Negro slaves from Bio de-Oro to Portugal in 1482. This marked the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade which was at first between Europe and Africa and subsequent movement to the Americas as a result of the establishment of plantations in the West Indies from the 1490s. The slaves were used as household servants or domestic slaves just as in West Africa itself. When slaves arrived at the Calabar Coast (estuary), they were packed into holds of the ship. Here was the beginning of the disgusting middle passage to America. The slaves were crowded together under horrible conditions that resulted in the death of many. A captain of the slave ship was asked when giving evidence before a commission how comfortable were the slaves during the middle passage his reply was they are about as comfortable as a man might be in a coffin.

The voyage of the middle passage lasted about 50 days. Once on board, a surgeon in a slave ship described his ordeal of the conditions of the slave, saying it is not in the power of human imagination to picture a situation more dreadful and disgusting. Barbaric treatment by European traders made a large number of slaves die before getting to America. A captain was once said to have poisoned his human cargo when held up by bad weather.

### **People Perception of Authenticity at Slave History Museum, Calabar-Nigeria**

The Nigeria National Museum, specifically the slave history unit is a place where important things are preserved, a building or institution where objects of artistic, historical, or scientific essence and value are kept, studied, and put on display for the purpose of preservation, presentation and promotion of cultural heritage tourism pertinent to the activities of slave trade in Calabar – Cross River State (South-South), Nigeria, between the 15th to 18th centuries. Intangible cultural heritage is the practice, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills as well as the instruments, objects, artifacts and cultural spaces associated there with those communities, groups and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage (Kingu, 4). The intangible cultural heritage transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature, and their history. It provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity in Cross River State and Nigeria at large.

This investigation on slave history museum of Nigeria National Museum in Calabar shows that visitors (globally) visit the museum regularly, most especially during the Nigerian Calabar international carnival season (Africa's Biggest Street Party), between 1st to 31st December every year. Many visitors that visit the slave history museum are motivated by the desire to enjoy history, to experience and to learn about Cross River State, and Nigerian slave trade experience in Calabar between 15th to 18th centuries. The visitors (Indigenes and foreigners) have a moderately strong sense of place identity, but a comparably weaker sense of place dependence. That is, visitors perceive that the slave history museum provides an authentic experience, which is enhanced by preservation of archaeological resources, learning about customs and values of the crossriverian people, other meeting other Nigerians and tribes.

Again, this research show that the higher visitors desire to experience Cross River State and Nigeria slave history experience, the higher their level of place identity, and the greater their age, the higher their perceptions of authenticity at the site. On the contrary, the higher visitors' education and the greater their levels of prior experience, the lower their perceptions of authenticity were. Considering the experience at the slave history museum encompasses tangibles such as the buildings, monuments, crafts, paintings, pictures as well as intangible (values and artforms), writer regard visitors at this type of site to be cultural heritage tourists as described in Nyaupane et al (99).

The above premise by Nyapane may be because visitors (strangers) are seeking a site that is pristine, primitive, natural and untouched by modernity (203), and MacCannell, concluded based upon their visit that cultural heritage tourism presented an accelerate historical and cultural representation. That is, the site provided an objectively authentic experience as pertinent to slave history museum, Calabar – Nigeria (76). On the other hand, visitor (strangers) who were highly motivated to experience Cross River State's slave history and culture may have been more likely to interact with the people, artefacts, and educational opportunities and therefore, actively construct a sense of originality, consistent with Cohen's concept of negotiated authenticity (29). Also, it is possible that some visitors, driven by a strong desire to experience authenticity, are simply inclined to report attaining an authentic experience regardless of actual experience, in a process of cognitive

rationalization, which justified the time, expense and effort of visiting such a remote cultural heritage tourism site (Slave History Museum).

### **Conclusion**

This process of cognitive rationalization is one of the several coping mechanisms that visitors may employ when on-site conditions do not meet expectations or desires. Fascinatingly, although several other desired experiences were essential to visitors at the slave history museum, Calabar – Nigeria, specifically to enjoy and learning about archaeology and history – these motives did not significantly explain visitors' perceptions of authenticity. This facilitates the idea that it is the strength of specific urge experiences, and expectation about cultural heritage tourism that influence authenticity perceptions.

This inquiry demonstrates the essence of a strong emotional bond with a place in explaining perception of authenticity. This lends *facilitator* to Relp's idea of 'insidedness', that is, having an identity tied to a place enables an individual to have a genuine or authentic experience at that place. Place identity refers to what Proshanky called a deeper connection with a place in which an individual's personal identity begins to be associated, with this location (96). Also, place identity can be more conceptual, relating to either a person or shared symbolic meaning attached to an environment such as in the way the Nigeria National Museum (Slave History Museum), Calabar symbolize Cross River State and Nigeria at large cultural heritage tourism.

In a nutshell, given prior research suggesting an impact of authenticity perceptions on overall satisfaction and the increasing importance of authenticity as a management objective, it is essential for managers National Museum, Calabar to consider how to maintain or increase visitors' perceptions of authenticity. This may be accomplished through interpretive and educational programmes, services, and exhibits that address explicitly the complex narrative of human history in the slave history museum (Calabar – Nigeria) and provides visitors, especially those who are highly educated and motivated by desire for cultural learning experiences, with opportunities to see 'backstage' and to critically evaluate the site. Apparently, this may be uncomfortable for managers and may perhaps be unwelcome by Cross River residents. Therefore, as with nearly every aspect of management at the Slavery History Museum (Calabar – Nigeria), a careful and co-operative approach would be necessary.

At last, this investigation contributes to the growing body of research demonstrating the effects of place identity and place dependence on a variety of visitor perceptions, including sensitivity to site impacts (Williams et al, 46), crowding (Kyle et al 50) support for fees (Kyle et al, 226), and environmentally responsible behaviour (Vaske and Kobrin). If cultural heritage managers wish to enhance perceptions of authenticity at the \$ slave history museum (Calabar- Nigeria), they should cultivate visitors' identification with the site by promoting meaningful, memorable, and significant experiences pertinent to Nigeria slave history dated back to the 15th and 18th centuries respectively.

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