

RELIGION AND CULTURAL TOURISM: AN ENABLER OF ECONOMIC SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Religion and cultural tourism represent a significant segment of the global tourism industry, attracting millions of travelers annually. This form of tourism involves visiting sacred sites, participating in religion festivals, and experiencing the cultural heritage linked to religious practices. Religious and cultural tourism not only contributes to the preservation of cultural heritage but also fosters cross-cultural understanding and global peace. Pilgrims to destinations such as Jerusalem, Mecca, and Varanasi exemplify the profound spiritual motivations behind such journey. Concurrently, cultural tourism allows travelers to engage with local traditions, rituals, and history, enriching their understanding of diverse culture. The economic impact of religious and cultural tourism is substantial, supporting local economies through hospitality retail, and guided tours. This paper adopts an analytical approach. However, this type of tourism also poses challenges, including the potential for cultural commoditization, environmental degradation, and the disruption of local religious practices. Sustainable tourism practices are essential to mitigate these issues, ensuring that tourism development respects the integrity and authenticity of religious and cultural sites. This abstract explores the dynamics of religious and cultural tourism, examining its benefits, challenges, and the strategies needed to promote sustainable tourism that honors both religious significance and cultural heritage. By understanding these factors, stakeholders can better manage and promote religious and cultural tourism in ways that enhance mutual respect and global cultural appreciation.

Keywords: Religion, Cultural, Tourism

Introduction

Religion and cultural tourism are phenomena that play important roles in shaping the socio-economic landscape of communities. This section provides a comprehensive overview of religion and cultural tourism and community. Cultural tourism refers to the travel that focus on immersing oneself in the cultural heritage, historical sites, attending festivals, participating in cultural activities and engaging with local communities to gain insights into

their way of life. While religion on the other hand is a set of beliefs, practices, rituals and values that guide individuals and communities in their spiritual pursuits. It often involves devotion to a higher power of deity and may include organized systems of worship, sacred texts and moral code.

Tourism serves as a catalyst for community development, fostering social cohesion, economic growth and cultural preservation. Religion and cultural tourism are integral to community development, serving as a driver of economic prosperity, cultural preservation and social cohesion. Religions tourism has contributed to stability, unity and peace. Nigeria has over 250 ethnic nationalities who gather together as one family of humanity under the programs of religious tourism. (Ele, 2017: 229). Cultural tourism is a form of tourism that focuses on experiencing the culture, heritage, arts, and lifestyle of a particular destination. It is a popular site or place that attracts visitor's interest in experiencing and learning about the cultural aspects of that particular place or site. Tourism planning also has to do with the control measures for compliance of set standard and determining in advance the type of tourism to develop in a destined area, why, how, when and where and assigning roles to individuals, group and cooperate bodes, as well as ensuring that it meets specification plan and promote cultural tourism. Tourism development must be guided by carefully planned policy, international in concept and interdisciplinary in its creation. It must be a policy not built on balance sheets and profit and loss statements alone, but on the ideals and principles of human welfare and happiness over the long pull. The planners of tourism must utilize policies which bring economic and social forces together to work for their mutual interests. Tourism strategies help the government to support the tourism sector in their own country and to reap the benefits of growth in visitor number while managing the pressures these place on businesses, communities and infrastructure. The strategy both aligns and coordinates government efforts through support of the sector in order to boost the economic contribution of tourism across the country and the same time to plan the future. Mainly, the tourism strategies are oriented to help the sector attract high-value visitors and investment, not only to tourism hot spots during peak seasons, but to a range of regions and throughout the year. Tourism today has become one of the engines of growth for Nigeria economy with a contribution of 3.20 percent of national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and providing 2.70 percent of total employment in 2013 (Nana, 2017: 194).

Processes of Tourism Planning

To plan for tourism development in an area, such area must have certain features or broad-based actives and interest that can motivate people to visit the area. However, tourism planning is a serious affair involving money and human resource. It cannot bed one haphazardly. It is important to develop strategic plans and activities.

- a. *Identifying and promote cultural asset:* these has to do with identify the project of study and its terms of references identifying the unique cultural assets of your destination, such as their historical bites, museums, art, galleries, festival etc, traditional music and dance performance, culinary traditions, and local handicrafts. Promote these assets to attract cultural tourist who are interested in experiencing and learning about the local culture and tradition.
- b. *Determining the goals:* This has to do with the settings, objectives and goals of the project.
- c. *Develop cultural tourism products and experiences:* Create cultural tourism products and experiences that offer visitors and authentic and immersive cultural experience. This could include guided tours of cultural sites, work-shops and classes on traditional crafts and arts, cultural performances and event, and cultural festivals.
- d. *Collaborate with local communities and cultural organizations:* This has to do working hand with the cultural organizations such as state ministries of tourism, local government tourism committee and Federal ministry of culture and tourism. Collaborate with them to create authentic cultural experience that showcases the unique cultural heritage of the place.
- e. *Market and promote cultural tourism:* Develop marketing campaigns targeted at cultural tourists to promote the destination's cultural attractions and experiences, making use of different digital and traditional marketing channels to reach a wider audience of cultural travelers. For example, there is a TV program called Good Morning Nigeria, discover Nigeria and Travelogue an NTA program that promotes tourism site in Nigeria.
- f. *Provide cultural education and interpretation:* Offer educational programs and interpretation services to help visitors understand and appreciate the local culture. This could include guided tours, cultural works etc.
- g. *Preserve and protect cultural heritage:* It is important to preserve and protect cultural heritage of destination to ensure its sustainability as a cultural tourism destination. Develop conservation and preservation initiatives to safeguard cultural sites, artifacts, and traditions for future generations.
- h. *Providing visitor services and infrastructure:* Improve visitor services and infrastructure to enhance the cultural tourism experience. These could include developing transportation options, accommodation facilities, information centers, and other amenities that cater to the need of cultural tourist.

Cultural Tourism Services and Ethnics in African Culture

Cultural tourism services in African culture are focused on showcasing the diverse traditions, customs, arts, music, cuisine, and history of different ethnic groups on the continent (Boissevain, 2010:33-35). These service aims to provide visitors with an authentic and enriching experience that promotes cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. In other to ensure that cultural tourism services in African culture are conducted ethically, it is crucial to uphold principles of respect for local traditions and custom, sustainability, inclusivity education awareness and fair compensation (Boissevain 2016:33). By adhering to these ethical guild lines, tour operators can promote sustainable development, preserve cultural heritage, and foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation. Cultural tourism in Africa has to do with visiting sites and participating in the activities that shows the rich culture of Africa. These can include visiting historical sites, attending traditional ceremonies and interacting with the local communities. Example of such sites are, Yankari Park, Agungun fishing festivals, Calabar carnival, Christmas village, the place of no return at Ikot Abasi in Akwa Ibom State. Cultural tourism services in Africa cultural focus on showcasing the diverse traditions, customs, art, music and history of different ethnic groups on the continent (Nana and Udom 2023:237) critically viewed some important culture attraction tourists from within and outside Nigeria include the slave relies in Badagru's museum and monuments reflecting specific historical and cultural experiences of the Nigerian people spread across the country for example, national museum of colonial History and National War Museum in Abia State; the unique architecture of the emirate socio-political life in the northern Nigeria.

Human Relations Strategies

One effective human relation strategy in cultural tourism is to prioritize building strong relationships with local communities by activity involving them in the planning and decision-making processes. This approach can help ensure that tourism initiatives are culturally appropriate and respectful of local traditions, ultimately leading to a more sustainable and mutually beneficial tourism experience. Another strategy is to provide cultural sensitivity training for tourism professionals to enhance their understanding of different cultures and improve their ability to interact effectively with visitors from diverse background (Hall, 2006). By equipping tourism professionals with the necessary knowledge and skills, misunderstandings and cultural insensitivity can be minimized, and positive interactions with local communities can be fostered. Furthermore, promoting cross-cultural exchange through cultural education programs and community-based tourism initiatives can help facilitate meaningful interactions between tourists and local communities (Richard & Hall, 2002). By encouraging cultural exchange and mutual

learning, cultural tourism can become a platform for building understanding and appreciation of different cultures.

In the competitive world of the tourism sector, effective human relations strategies has become a critical factor in determining the success and sustainability of organizations. Human relations strategy in tourism delves into the key aspects of this essential discipline exploring the intersection of marketing strategies human resources strategies, and the late trends in the religion and cultural tourism communities. As the world faces unprecedented challenge and other crises, the above subheading highlights the enduring effects on individuals, businesses, communities, and destinations, occupational stress, an ongoing concern in the economic inflation in Nigeria industry, can lead to conflict among team members or between employees and their roles. By shedding light on these issues, the work seeks to offer valuable insight to undergraduate students, graduate students, professionals, practitioners and researchers involved in the field of tourism management. Amidst the technological advancements that have shaped the modern era, managers have come to recognize that their most valuable asset is their human capital. Thus, this work underscores the significance of prioritizing people and their well-being to achieve sustainable productivity and outstanding results. With globalization intensifying market competition, differentiation becomes a key driver for organizations. The work thoroughly explores how internal marketing and employee satisfaction and empowerment play pivotal roles in shaping tourism management. As work practices and human resources guideline undergo transformation in response to the economic hardship context, the work provides a thoughtful reflection on the new trends and practices emerging in Human resources and marketing strategies within the tourism community.

Some of the focal points include:

The exploration green resource cooperate event: Green resources are natural resources that are sustainable and environmentally friendly. These resources include renewable energy sources such as solar, wind, and hydropower, as well as material that can be recycled or used. Exploration of green resources involves identifying and assessing the potential of these resources for use in various industries and applications. This may involve conducting research and development to improve technologies, assessing the feasibility of implementing green resources in a large scale, and identifying potential challenges and opportunities for expanding the use of these resources. Some examples of exploration of green resource include:

- Conducting feasibility studies for large-scale solar or wind energy projects.
- Researching new technologies for converting organic waste into biofuels.

- Assessing the potential for using recycled materials in construction projects.
- Investigating the benefits of sustainable forestry practices for conserving natural resources. According to Nana, (2016: 171), he avers that “in order to promote sustainable forest management, it must be sustainable ecologically, economically and socially, achieving ecologically sustainability means that the ecological values of the forest must not be degraded and if possible, they should be improved”. This means that silvi culture and management should not reduce biodiversity, soil erosion should be controlled, soil fertility should not be lost, water quality on and off site should be maintained and that forest health and vitality should be safeguarded.

Overall, exportation of green resources is essential for promoting sustainable development and reducing the impact of human activities on the environment. By investing on green resources, we can create a more environmentally friendly and resilient economy for future generation.

- a. *Team-building trends*: Cultural tourism, team-building activities can offer a unique and engaging way for employees to explore and experience different culture and traditions. This can include activities such as cooking classes, art workshops, guided tours of historical sites, or cultural performances. By participating in these activities, employees not only have the opportunity to learn about different culture but also the work together in a new and unfamiliar environment. Additionally, team building activities in cultural tourism can help employees develop a greater appreciation for diversity and inclusion, as they interact with people from different backgrounds and perspectives. This can lead to increased creativity, innovation, and collaboration within in the workplace, as employees bring their new found knowledge and experiences back to their teams.
- b. *Employee empowerment*: Employee empowerment in religion and cultural tourism refers to giving employees in this industry the authority and autonomy to make decisions and take actions that will enhance the visitor experience and contribute to the overall success of the tourism business. Empowerment may involves trusting employees to provide an accurate and appropriate information about religion cite like Osun- Osogbo Sacred Groove, located in Osun state, Ouidah shrine of python, located in town of Ouidah, Zuma rock and the synagogue church of all nations (Nana 2023:29).

By empowering employees in religion and cultural tourism businesses can foster a sense of ownership and pride among their staff, leading to higher levels of motivation, job satisfaction, and productivity. This, in turn, can result in better service for tourists and contribute to the overall success and reputation of the

tourism business. Additionally, empowered employees are more wisely to take initiative, show creativity and offer unique insights that can enhance the authenticity and cultural richness of the visitor experience.

- c. *Job satisfaction:* Job satisfaction in religion and cultural tourism refers to the contentment and fulfillment that employees experience in their roles within this specific industry. This can be influenced by a variety of factors, such as the nature of the work, relationships with coworkers and supervisors, opportunities for growth and development, and overall job environment. Job satisfaction in religion and cultural tourism can be influenced by various factors unique to the industry. Employees in cultural tourism may also derive satisfaction from facilitating cross-cultural exchanges and promoting understanding between different cultural groups. As noted by Gursory and McCleary (2004:350-373), employees in cultural tourism value the opportunity to engage with tourists and share their cultural knowledge and heritage, leading to increased job satisfaction and motivation. Furthermore, job satisfaction in religions and cultural tourism can be enhanced by supportive work environments, opportunities for personal and professional growth, and position relationships with coworkers and supervisors. Studies have shown that these factors plays a crucial role in promoting job satisfaction and overall well-being among employees in the tourism industry (Byrne and Peterson, 2015: 28-46).

Employees may derive job satisfaction from factors such as being able to connect with and serve the needs of tourists from diverse cultural backgrounds, contributing to the preservation and promotion of religions and cultural heritage and opportunities for personal and spiritual growth. Employees in this industry may also find satisfaction in the meaningful nature of their worker they are often involved in facilitating experiences that can have profound impact on individual's understanding and appreciation of different religion beliefs and cultural tourism traditions. Ultimately, job satisfaction in religions and cultural tourism can contribute to a positive work environment, increased employee engagement, and ultimately, higher level of productivity and success within the industry.

- d. *Best practices in human resource management specific to the tourism sector:* When discussing best practices in human resource management specific to the tourism sector, it is important to consider Nzakwe Excel and Njoku (2019:192), on key best practices in human resource management for cultural tourism business is the implementation of training programs focused on cultural sensitivity and diversity. They emphasize the importance of equipping staff with the necessary knowledge and skills to interact effectively with visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds, ensuring a positive and inclusive guest experience. Furthermore, his work

highlights the significance of recruiting and retaining a diverse workforce in the hospitality industry to cater to the needs of a multicultural clientele. Human resource managers are encouraged to adopt diversity hiring initiatives and create an inclusive work environment that values and celebrates cultural diversity, as this can lead to improved customer satisfaction and loyalty. Also, this work underscores the importance of offering professional development opportunities to employees in the tourism sector, including mentorship programs, training initiatives, and leadership development. By investing in the growth and advancement of their staff, organizations can foster a motivated and skilled workforce that is better equipped to meet the unique challenge of religion and cultural tourism.

Egungun Festival and Its Economic Important

In the tradition of the people of Ogbomoso, and like other communities' life in Africa, festivals and religion entwine each other in all traditional activities (Okpoko 2007:126). Egungu festival like other festival in Ogbomoso is also marked to entertain the people. Makinde (2005:65-61) assert that traditional festivals are organized and celebrated in their 'original contexts' which is not so with the modern festival that hold sway to officially approved venue and date by organizers. Egungu festival happens to be a salient part of the taxonomy of Africa oral literature. Egungu can be said to be cultural heritage of the people around the world, most important Egungu festival is characterized by renewal of relationships and solidarity. Disputes, quarrels, misunderstanding, family and community problems are settled during festivals which bring people together. In Africa society, cultural festivals promote relationship between tourism and members of the host community. It encourages world peace people from different countries gather for recreation purpose during the festival period putting aside their country's differences and interacting with each other. It also exposes home of the hidden cultural values of the local community and serve as a motivating factor for travel as some sites directly or indirectly acts as a tourist attraction center. Cultural festival also helps to lesson various prejudice among people and leads to mutual respect among nations as well as creating the objective condition for the spiritual elevation of individuals. Apart from job opportunity, that the festival can create for the community the emergency of it can help to put the host community in the limelight of the world as a tourism destination others include the festival helps to develop and attract the attention to the economic improvement of rural people; the festival is also an ideal destination for people who wishes to restore their form after their hustle and bustle of life (come to spend their leisure time); it establishes much needed foreign exchange, generated revenue for the government through taxes and levies; developed of tourist facilities and recreation opportunities available in the host community.

One of the ways that Egungu festival has contributed in community development is through economic opportunities. Tourists who visit during the festival brings in revenue for local businesses such as vendors, artisan and hotels. This helps to boost the local economy and create employment opportunities for the community members. Also, during this period, tourists' demand for local products such as artifacts and art works, accommodations, local food and other related service is always on the increase which consequently affects the economy of the town therefore improving the income of the community. The Egungu festival has helped to preserve and promote the cultural heritage of the Ogbomoso people showcasing traditional dance, music costumes, ritual and custom. This festival helps to pass down these traditions to the future generation and it also raises awareness on the importance of preserving cultural heritage. This helps in strengthening social gathering among the community people. The Egungu festival has also established much needed foreign exchange, generate revenue for the government through taxes, and Levis; development of tourist facilities and recreational opportunities available in the host community. The festival has led to infrastructure improvements in the community. As the festival grows in popularity, there is need to facilities and amenities to accommodate the increasing numbers of tourists. These has result in the development of amenities, better roads, hospital, water and other facilities that helps the whole community as a whole.

Calabar Carnival, Its Impact on Tourism Development

Scholars acknowledge that cultural tourism serves as a unifying force. To the common man, carnival is the most popular and unifying event that is both cultural and creative in nature. Indeed, and oftentimes, cultural extravaganzas are celebrated in pageantry Interestingly, the Calabar cultural carnival celebrated in December of every year in Nigeria share similar popularity among tourists with the Rio de Janeiro carnival in Brazil. As a matter of fact, tourism is commonly regarded as a vehicle that facilitates the cultural integration of nations. In fact, the promotion of dominant culture of a people is aimed at fostering unity among nations and citizens. The cultural diversity of nations necessitates its promotion. The essence of promoting culture is that it facilitates exchange in language learning and cultural immersion. Furthermore, government all over the world considers the promotion of cultures an important tool for national integration. Globally, tourism is a major source of income to every nation. It is strongly believed that when the tourism industry is developed, it serves as a foreign exchange earner. Arising from the benefits associated with annual cultural festival, it is expedient on the stakeholders in the tourism industry to develop plans and deploy strategies that would sustain its continuity one of such strategy is the engagement of marketing principles. In short, any nation desirous of enhancing the popularity and economic development of it often embrace the promotion albeit marketing of its cultural

diversity. Tourism centers are globally visible. The attractive features of the centers enhance the image and popularity of the communities. The truth is that marketing tourism destinations serve as a vehicle for nurturing and retaining centers popularity.

In pursuant of Nigeria's quest for increase in non-oil revenue, embracing and enlarging the activities in the tourism industry would be a wise path to tread. Globally, tourism is considered a major source of foreign exchange. In fact, formulating policies that promote investment in tourism and encourage tourist's attraction is germane in the midst of declining revenue from oil. Cultural tourism and community development are intertwined aspects of the Calabar Carnival, as the festival not only celebrates the local culture but also contributes to the economic and social development of the region. Akpan and Akpan (2019:56 -67) suggested that, the Calabar Carnival has had a significant impact on the local economy by attracting tourists and boosting business activities in Calabar. The influx of visitors during the carnival season provides opportunities for local businesses, such as hotels, restaurants, and artisan markets, to thrive and generate income for the community.

Additionally, the cultural significance of the Calabar Carnival plays a very significance role in preserving and promoting the traditional customs and heritage of the region (Nkese et al., 2020:12-25) the carnival showcases the rich cultural diversity of Calabar through traditional dances, music, costumes, instilling a sense of pride and unity among the local population. This leads to increased interest in preserving and promoting their cultural heritage, fostering a sense of identity and belonging within the community. Moreover, the Calabar Carnival serves as a platform for community development projects and initiatives, as noted by Effiong and Ansa (2018). Local organizations and government agencies utilize the festival as an opportunity to raise awareness about important social issues, such as health, education, and environmental conservation. This exposure helps mobilize resources and support for community development efforts, contributing to the overall well-being of the community.

Calabar Carnival, also known as Africa's biggest street party, is a cultural event that takes place annually in Calabar, Nigeria This festival celebrates the rich cultural heritage of the people of Calabar and attracts tourists from all over the world. In recent years, the carnival has also been used as a tool for community development in the region. Cultural tourism plays a significant role in the development of the local economy in Calabar. The influx of tourists during the carnival season provides opportunities for local businesses to thrive, including hotels, restaurants, transportation services, and artisan markets. This boost in economic activity helps to create jobs and stimulate growth in the community. Additionally, the Calabar Carnival promotes cultural preservation and awareness among the local population. The festival highlights the traditional dances, music, and costumes of the region, encouraging residents to take pride in their cultural heritage. This can lead to a sense

of unity and pride within the community, as well as increased interest in preserving and promoting their traditions. Furthermore, the carnival serves as a platform for community development projects and initiatives. Local organizations and government agencies often use the event as an opportunity to showcase their work and raise awareness about important social issues, such as health, education, and environmental conservation. This exposure can help to mobilize resources and support for community development efforts in Calabar.

Meanwhile the Calabar Carnival plays a vital role in promoting cultural tourism and community development in Calabar. By celebrating the region's cultural heritage and bringing together residents and tourists in a spirit of festivity, the carnival helps to boost the local economy, preserve traditional Customs, and support community initiatives for a better future. Looking further, tourism has emerged as one of the world's major socio-economic sector and has an expanding rate of 45 percent annually during the latter half of the 20th century and has since become the world fastest growing industry accounting to 7% of global captive investment. It is in this regard that the Cross River State government is investing a lot of money into the development of tourism development is part of government strategic plan to emerge as one of the foremost tourist destinations in Africa in the nearest future. The rising profile of tourism in Cross River State has led to its recognition as a potential fast-growing industry by the present administration as it is seen as a virgin source of revenue and indeed a vibrant sector for repository income foreign exchange and the private sector. Tourism has become a worldwide industry which is recognized as one of the top three constituents of world trade ranking third after petroleum and the vehicle industries. Tourists who are individuals regarded as holiday makers or travelers for pleasure or fun seekers and lovers of frolics are not the major reasons for their travels despite the fact that tourism is focused on recreation and relaxation Some tourists are also religious pilgrims, business visitors, individuals in search of health and even students undergoing various researches in wild life, and geography and culture of other countries. There are also accidental adventure tourists, business people, journalists, development workers, etc. In response to the movement call, the state is beginning to witness an increase in private sector involvement in the tourism industry. Many people within and outside the state are today investing in the hospitality industry, transport sector, communication sector, provision of recreational facilities, banking sector among others. These investments have significant implications for the socio-economic development of the state and country. The Cross River State Government has mapped out some strategies to conceptualize and implement an integrated tourism master plan that will give unique tourism favor. This master plan if implemented will lead to the state becoming a trade and distribution hub in West Africa, provide unique tourist opportunities in Nigeria and increase transportation infrastructural facilities. But despite the enormous natural resources and the efforts Cross River State, Government has

put into tourism sector; the state is yet to fully develop her tourism potentials to its maximum benefit.

Recommendations

To maximize the benefits and address the challenges of religious and cultural tourism for sustainable economic development, the following recommendations can be implemented.

- *Sustainable tourism practices:* Implement measures to control tourist number and reduce environmental impact, such as limiting access to fragile sites and promoting eco-friendly transportation options.
- *Community involvement:* Engage local communities in planning and decision-making processes to ensure that tourism benefits are equitably distributed and that cultural traditions are preserved.
- *Education and training:* Provide training programs for local residents in hospitality, guiding, and conservation to enhance their skills and ensure high-quality tourist experience.
- *Marketing and promotion:* Develop targeted marketing strategies to attract diverse tourist segments while highlighting the importance of sustainable and respectful tourism practices.
- *Infrastructure Development:* Invest in sustainable infrastructure that supports tourism while preserving the integrity of religious and cultural sites, such as eco-friendly accommodations and renewable energy sources.
- *Policy and Regulation:* Establish policies and regulations that protect cultural and natural heritage sites from over exploitation, including enforcing limits on tourist numbers and activities.
- *Research and Monitoring:* Conduct ongoing research and monitoring to assess the impacts of tourism on religious and cultural sites and to inform adaptive management strategies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, religions and cultural tourism serve as powerful catalysts for economic sustainable development. By attracting visitors to experience religious sites and cultural heritage, this form of tourism generates significant revenue, creates employment, and fosters infrastructure development. Moreover, it encourages the preservation of cultural traditions and promotes environmental sustainability when managed responsibly. However,

challenges such as over tourism and maintain authenticity must be address through careful planning and community involvement. Overall, when effectively harnessed, religious and cultural tourism can drive economic growth while preserving the cultural and natural heritage for future generations.

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