
CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS INFLUENCE ON TOURISTS' CHOICE OF DESTINATION IN DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

*Iseh, G. N.,¹ Yarhere, E. O.², Ovharhe, O. J.³ and Apugo, O. E.⁴.

¹Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management
Imo State University, Owerri

²Raw Materials Research & Development Council, Asaba
Delta State

³Department of Agricultural Economics and Extension,
Delta State University, Asaba Campus, Asaba

⁴Department of Business Administration,
National Open University of Nigeria, Asaba

ABSTRACT: *The study, cultural and environmental factors influence on tourists' choice of destination in Delta State, Nigeria, was conducted in Gordon Hotel Resort, Abraka and the source of River Ethiope, Umuaja in Delta State. The study investigated factors that influenced tourist to visit the above destinations. Factors investigated were, cultural and environmental factors. The research design was a survey method using simple random sampling for data collection (n=180). Data collected were analyzed into percentage, frequencies means and Z-test was applied for the test of hypotheses. Uppermost findings revealed were that respondents' males (78%), educated elites (59%) and adults (45 years) were more involved in tourism. Tourists were more attracted to the fauna ecosystem (mean = 2.91) of the environment than other endowments in THE study area. The most prominent cultural attraction was the cultural museum/monuments (mean = 2.96). The study implied that tourism destination with natural environment encourages agricultural investment. The study concluded that environmental and cultural endowments contributed to tourists' choice of destination in Nigeria. It was recommended that more women and youth involvement in tourism so to increase income generation.*

KEYWORDS: choice, cultural, destination, environment, tourist.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is the travel stay and activity of an individual who leaves his place of normal activity for more than twenty four hours and for a distance not less than fifty miles away for pleasure, recreation, business etc. Tourism has occupied a front position in the current world phenomenon on the economic development. Tourism is now regarded as the fastest growing industry of international trade, a veritable magnet for the inflow of foreign funds into a country, one of the major sources of foreign exchange and balance of payment for many countries of the world. All these positive impacts are attributed to tourism industry. The growth of the vacation industry has provided the opportunity for some under developed countries to diversify their foreign exchange earning activities. Given the items of merchandise, tourism stands out as the widest channels through which there is flow of funds from North to South several industrially weak country and able to balance their international trade through tourism "for debt

mislead third world countries like Nigeria, tourism is a latent silver lining in the international financial horizon” (Okoroafor, 1995).

Okoli (2001) asserted that transport, stay and attractions have spatial interaction which arises out of the tourism movement from origin to destination is an inherent and retaining feature to tourism and the subject lends itself to geographical analysis. As tourism involves movement of tourist it is the transport sector that enables them (except those that trek) to travel to their destination. “Without travel and transport there could be no tourism” (Gnoth, 1997). Okoli (2001) opined that transport provides the means of travel to destination from tourism place of origin and back again. It also provide means of travelling around destination and can also be a main feature of tourism trip when the form of transport itself is an essential reason for taking the trip.

Okoli (2001) emphasized on “the invention of travel by air had rapid travel impact on tourism”. The possibility of rapid travel in comfort over long distance opened up previously remote and inaccessible destinations to those travelling for business and leisure. And thus gave shrunk the world into a global community. Today one can say I am flying to New York. Also air transport has made it possible for a person to have his breakfast in Nigeria, dinner in U.S.A. when tourists move away from their homes; they need a place that provides all facilities as more than the comfort of home. Their needs include accommodation, food, drink and entertainment. No country can expect to attract large number of tourist unless, it has an adequate stock of places providing accommodation and catering services. Therefore, the factors that can influence tourist can be either positively or negatively in his/her choice of destination. These factors are basically concerned with the environment, culture and its conclusive nature as the case may be. In this regard, if the destination is not equipped with the necessary facilities which tourist needs, it may affect the destination choice of tourist positively or negatively. The study area is endowed with the source of River Ethiope, Umuaja and Gordon Hotel Resort, Abraka 10 km apart both in Delta State are tourist choices of destinations from time immemorial. Again, the agrarian potentials and peaceful atmosphere attract tourists’ choice of destination. Prominent in the study area are two types of tourism: cultural and environmental tourism.

Cultural Tourism: This is the form of tourism involving the exposition and travelling to enjoy the cultural heritage of other country or one’s country. Cultural tourism is designed to take care of any nation or region’s culture and tradition, precisely in the area of the people’s lifestyle, reflecting their geographical locations, history, art, architecture, religion, agriculture and related issues of life. Cultural amenities and services such as antiques in museums, relics and pre-colonial infrastructure are of high esteem. Cultural Tourism include tours in rural and sub-urban areas demonstrating traditional endowment, wealth and activities of the original native cultural heritage of various communities as in festivals, ancestral events, ceremonies, rituals, values and lifestyle conducts. Tourism is creative and dynamic in nature. Cultural tourism is an aged long type of tourism. It is valued by most policy makers in the development of other types of tourism for tourism business advancement in the future. The overview of cultural tourism lies in utilization of holidays to investigate distant cultures comparing similarities and differences from location to location (Ng, Lee and Soutar, 2007).

Association for Leisure and Tourism Education (ATLAS) established a difference between cultural visit on holiday and at leisure periods. Time spent was a critical indicator; followed by purpose of trip (Richard, 2001). Globally, government organs involved in policy making with

respect to tourist sites and host communities sees cultural tourism as a money making venture hence the protection of its heritage in the competitive industry.

Environmental tourism: This is usually described as the purest and largest form of tourism. The attraction is primarily on the environment itself, and geomorphic feature, namely mountains, waterfalls, ocean etc. The attraction may be because of weather for example visiting Obudu high land for its temperature. Environmental tourism includes Eco tourism, Wildlife/Agricultural based tourism and Recreational Tourism.

Eco tourism: This may be defined as the instructive nature of travelling practices and familiarities with environmental conservation of ecosystem and sustainability of the entities of concerned host communities in various locations. According to Okoli (2001) ecotourism as widely accepted is the visit of pristine, unhampered natural environment as tourist activity and turn hearing about the culture and beliefs of those natives and appreciating nature as its fullest. This form of tourism encompass not just boosting traffic to tourist sites but also about ensuring visitors travel responsibility, help maintain a balanced existing ecosystem and protect the wildlife they are visiting and contribute to the well-being of local communities. It also comprises of defending the ordinary and age long environment for sustainability. Tourist spot has its affirmative and unswerving influences on any ecosystem with respect to environment and its dwellers.

Wildlife/Agricultural based tourism: This type of tourism represents all the travels of tourism undertaken for adventure, recreation and relaxation. Enjoying the gift of nature, study hunting and camping in group. Wildlife tourism is a very exciting adventure as it entails having a romance with nature. In Nigeria, wildlife tourism and management and packaged through the establishment of national parks, game reserves. Agricultural based tourism includes visits to mechanized farms, modernized animal husbandry and agro-industries sites.

Recreational Tourism: This is concerned with things to do or physical involvement and activities. It can be in the form of body exercise. Recreational tourism has direct effect on the health of tourist. According to Igbojekwe (2005) recreation tourism helps to achieve a balanced live amongst the three components of the body and that is the mind, soul, and the body and the intellect. In the same vein Sonmez (1999) assert “recreation offers a wonderful opportunity for people to come together, play together, integrate and share jokes and fun as a way of crisis management. The spirit of team work is also cultivated (spirit of sportsmanship) whereby individuals learn to accept both victory and defeat.

Objective of Study

This study was undertaken to establish the extent to which:

- i. Environmental factors of the areas of study influence tourists’ choice of destination.
- ii. Cultural factors of host communities influence on tourists’ choice of destination.

Hypotheses

Based on the stated objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

H₀₁: Environmental factors of the areas of study do not have significant influence on tourists’ choice of destination.

H₀₂: Cultural factors of host communities do not have significant influence on tourists' choice of destination.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study was conducted in two sites of tourist attraction Gordons Hotel Resorts, Abraka, and Source of River Ethiope, Umuaja, regularly or periodically with respect to weekends, public holidays, parties, weddings and various ceremonies. A simple random sampling design was used to draw samples from the given population in accordance with Mill and Morrison (1998) and Anyanwu (2000) who drew a tenth of sample size from different tourist centers. This gave a sample size of 180 which was 65% of the population. A well semi-structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire was made up of three sections: Socio-economic characteristics, environmental potentials and cultural features of the study area. Data collected were placed in frequency distribution pattern, and percentages. The Z-test statistical technique was used to test the hypotheses.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Profile

Socio-economic characteristics of respondents (Table 1) revealed that males (78%) were more patriotic in tourism business. This is in relation to the travelling nature of men for business, relaxation, site viewing and leisure trips. Crompton and McKay (1997) in a survey discovered that men were more in transit and tourism activities than women. Respondents (59%) had academic qualification of above National Diplomat. The greater exposure to tertiary institution is an advantage to tourism involvement. Ukabuilu (2007) sees contribution to tourism development to have meaningfully come from educated elites. Respondents (32%) are 45 years of mean age. This implies that more adults are involved in the tourism business. Uysal and Hagan. (1993) reported that adults in Japan were more committed to tourism and other sectors of the society.

Table 1: Display of Respondents' Profile

Sex of Respondents	Percentage	Mean/Mode
Female	40 (21.11%)	Female
Male	140 (77.77%)	
Academic Qualifications		
ND Certificate and above	107 (59.44%)	➤ ND Certificate
WASC/ O'level certificate	73 (40.56%)	
Age Bracket		
Above 40 years	56 (31.25%)	45 years
31 – 40 years	35 (19.44%)	
20 – 30 years	44 (24.30%)	
Less than 20 years	45 (25%)	

Source: Field responses

Environmental Potentials

Table 2.0 reveals the importance of environmental factors with overall mean of 2.71. It was observed that none of the factors was rated below the expected mean of 2.5. About 60% agreed that environmental factors are should be considered when choosing a tourist destination. The beauty of the area attracted tourists. Tourist were more attracted to the fauna ecosystem (mean = 2.91), the various river creatures and fishes that occasionally come out during the coolness of the River Ethiope.

The findings in this study show that on the average, the tourists expressed high levels of agreement towards items of the destination environment including the flora, fauna, climate and weather, and beautiful landscape and scenery. These may be well-thought-out as one of the most essential rudiments persuading the tourists to choose the sites. Crouch *et al* (2002) highlighted that the service infrastructure and destination environment are important categories in building the tourist destination experience. The findings were confirmation to those of Fodness (1994) and Gnoth (1997) that environmental development are key factors in tourist choice.

Table 2.0: Responses to Environmental Potentials

Items	SD	D	A	SA	Mean
	%	%	%	%	
Fauna (Special animals in the area).	9.72	22.22	36.11	31.94	2.90
Beautiful landscape/Scenery	9.03	29.16	31.94	29.86	2.83
Flora (Special plants and trees in the area)	14.6	29.2	30.56	25.70	2.68
Romance with nature (Natural environment)	16.67	28.78	29.2	26.4	2.65
Environmental uniqueness	13.89	23.61	33.33	29.16	2.50
Overall mean. Scores	12.78	26.60	32.23	28.61	2.71

Source: Field responses

Key: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree

Any factor with a mean below 2.50 (expected mean) has no significant effect on tourist choice of a destination.

Cultural Features of the host Community

Table 3.0 clearly shows the relevance of cultural features of the host community as an attraction with overall mean of 2.84 which is significantly higher than the cut off mean of 2.5. The figures actually indicated that culture in an attraction in itself; about 63% expressed this view. None of the factors scored a mean lower than 2.5. Tourists were greatly attracted to cultural museum/monuments (mean = 2.96). They value these antiques and relics at precolonial era in the study area. From the findings in this study, we conclude that cultural features of the host communities played significant role in attracting tourists to the sites under study. In many fora, Nigeria's cultural heritage has been adjudged to be the main thrust of the tourism industry. Idowu, and Bello (2010) findings support this view. The implication of this is that the culture of the host communities is attractive to tourists, therefore, attention should be paid to culture during planning and development. Okoroafor (1995) and Okoli (2001) argued that for tourists location to be attractive, the elements of culture must be upheld and preserved.

Table 3.0: Responses to Cultural Features of the host Community

Items	SD	D	A	SA	Mean
	%	%	%	%	
Cultural Museum/monuments	9.72	19.44	36.11	34.72	2.96
Mode of dressing of the local people	9.72	18.75	39.0	32.64	2.94
Local festivals	18.65	22.9	29.87	29.2	2.85
Cultural dance of the host community	9.72	33.33	29.24	27.78	2.79
Cultural cuisine of host community	19.44	25	29.2	27	2.63
Overall mean scores	13.45	23.07	33.5	30.27	2.84

Source: Field responses

Key: SD = Strongly Disagree; D = Disagree; A = Agree; SA = Strongly Agree

Any factor with a mean below 2.50 (expected mean) has no significant effect on tourist choice of a destination.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis one was stated thus: 'Environmental features of the areas of study do not have significant influence on tourists' choice of the destinations'. To test this hypothesis we used the data (overall mean of 2.71 which gave a standard. deviation = 1.02). The Z calculated ($Z = 2.36$) was greater than the Z tabulated ($Z_{tab} = 1.65$ at 0.05) indicating that the sample (observed) mean is significantly higher than the expected mean of 2.5; hence the hypothesis was rejected. We therefore, conclude that environmental features played significant role in attracting tourists to the sites under study. The attraction of tourist to any recommended destination is linked to aesthetic environmental gratification. This report was also upheld by [Igbojekwe (2005); Kassean and Gassita (2013)] who reported environmental beautification is fundamental in tourist choice of destination.

Hypothesis two was stated thus: 'The extent to which cultural features of host communities influence tourists' choice of a destination is not significant'. To test this hypothesis the data from Table 3 were used (overall mean of 2.84 and std. dev. = 1.04). The Z calculated ($Z = 3.92$) was greater than the Z tabulated ($Z_{tab} = 1.65$ at 0.05) indicating that the sample (observed) mean is significantly higher than the expected mean of 2.5; hence, the hypothesis was rejected. We therefore, conclude that cultural features of the host communities played significant role in attracting tourists to the sites under study. The importance of culture is paramount in choice of tourism center and environmental development as supported by Richards (2001); Okpoko, Okonkwo and Diminyi (2011).

Implication of the cultural and environmental in tourism

The study revealed the cultural and environmental status quo involving tourism as choice of destination in the Delta State, Nigeria. Currently, there is a move in the country to diversify from a mono-economy source of income as regards oil exploration to tourism and agriculture among others. The study availed the rich cultural and environmental endowments of the state. This implies that tourist investors see advantageous avalanche to invest in agriculture so as to harness the agro-potentials in the study area. Theoretically, the tourist becomes an intended stakeholder in agriculture in the available crop and animal production enterprises found during the tour. Consequently, tourist linkage to agricultural extension services for more information sources about the intended agro-business brings the tourist to a practical agricultural business

entrepreneur phase. Thus, the agro-business idea was influenced as a result of tourist destination and lodging phenomenon.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study was able to reveal the indicators contributing to the profiles of tourists, cultural and environmental embodiments of tourist center in the study area. It was recorded that more males, educated elites and adults were involved in tourism and patronized the Gordon Hotel Resort, Abraka and the source of River Ethiope, Umuaja in Delta State. Tourists were more attracted to the fauna ecosystem of the environment than other endowments in the study area. The most prominent cultural attraction was the cultural museum/monuments. Again, the study implied that businesses inclined to environment like agriculture can be initiated as a result of exposure to tourism. Based on the findings, in order to advance the tourist enterprise in the study area, the following is expedient:

- i. More women and youth involvement in tourism so to increase income generation
- ii. Environmental uniqueness development to brace up with international standards
- iii. Patronizing of cultural cuisine, which will add value and sense of belonging to host community members.

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