

**PUBLIC AWARENESS OF TOURISM BENEFITS IN CROSS RIVER STATE,
NIGERIA.**

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ABSTRACT

Using a survey research approach this study verified the extent of public awareness of tourism benefits in southern Cross River State, Nigeria. With random sampling technique, 510 subjects were drawn from a population of all inhabitants of the state's southern senatorial district. A 28-item questionnaire tagged "Awareness of Tourism Benefits Scale" (ATBS) was designed to collect data. The instrument had a test-retest reliability estimate of 0.82, this value shows that the instrument is stable in yielding data for this study. Population t-test was used to analyse obtained data which was tested at .05 level of significance. The finding revealed that public awareness of tourism benefits was very high. It is therefore recommended that relevant public and private authorities should make conscious and adequate efforts to enhance tourism related activities to encourage people to harness its benefits.

Keywords: public awareness, tourism benefits

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Background to the study

Ever since its advent, tourism has steadily gained prominence as a strategic sector through which various economies have hinged their developmental strides on. Due to the various categories of tourism (adventurous tourism, ecotourism, religious tourism, gastronomy tourism, transport tourism, cultural tourism, and hospitality tourism) (Nnamani, 2014), it impacts upon economies' growth through a "multiplier effect" mechanism (Akpan & Obang, 2012). Tourist arrivals worldwide not only rose by almost forty times between 1950 to 2011 (from 25 million to 980 million) but reached 1 billion in 2012 and they were projected to reach about 1.6 billion by 2020 (UNWTO, 2012; 2015). For sub-Sahara Africa, tourism-related arrivals were projected to generate about US\$75 billion in 2015 (Esu, Arrey, Basil & Eyo, 2011). Based on the highlight of the various categories of tourism and the brief scenario of its ever-increasing impact on economies worldwide (including Africa), it is of utmost necessity for people to be fully aware of its activities. In Nigeria, efforts have been made in line with the trend of developing the intensity of tourism activities in the country. The enactment/implementation of the National Tourism Policy coupled with encouragement of states to develop their tourist destinations is testament to the country's efforts (Eko, Ifere & Udonwa, 2013). For Cross River State, an adoption of the sobriquet "Destination Cross River – The People's Paradise" some few years back is due to the state government's focus of enhancing the proliferation of tourism activities within the state. Investments and efforts resulted in the development of globally renowned attraction sites such as the Obudu Cattle Ranch, Afi Mountains Drill Ranch, Agbokim Waterfalls, the Cross River National Park, Oban Hills, Kwa Falls, Tinapa Business Resort, and events such as Africa's biggest street party (Calabar Carnival) and Ugep's Leboku Festival. The Cross River State's tourism drive is why Oban Hills was included in the exclusive list of World Heritage sites in 2013 by the World Heritage Committee (Cross River Watch, 2013), thus implying that the level of tourism activities within the state has gained recognised international attention.

Within the Southern Cross River State, areas renowned for tourism activities are – the Calabar Residency Museum and the Marina Resort (both in Marina in Calabar South Local Government Area); Tinapa Business Resort at Adiabo, and the Mary Slessor Residence at Creek Town (both in Odukpani LGA), and; the Kwa Falls located along the Kwa River in Aningeje community, the Oban Hills located in Oban, and the Cross River National Park (Oban Division) (all located in Akamkpa LGA). For cultural events, it is mostly the annual Calabar Carnival, and sparingly, traditional displays of the area's indigenous masquerades, dances and plays including Nyoro Ekpe (Adetola, 2017).

Based on the efforts and developments of the state's tourism sector, it is expected that awareness of tourism benefits should be optimally high within the state or precisely, the Southern Cross River State. Awareness of tourism benefits in this context encompasses the knowledge, perception, concern towards and well-informed interest about the benefits under question. Awareness of tourism-related benefits is a precursor towards participation in tourism-related activities (Ajake, 2015) while participation in turn serves as a veritable driver of the intensity of the activities. It

appears that there are issues with awareness of tourism benefits among indigenes of southern Cross River State.

A steady rising annual increase in crime rate during the festive period within Calabar was reported by Ukwayi, Ojong, Basse and Emeka (2012). For Isiugo and Obioha (2015), wanton wildlife poaching and destruction of forests in the Cross River National Park is a contemporary trend. Areas around the Kwa Falls which had the luxury of a thick rainforest canopy covering have undergone a lot of deforestation thereby exposing the deep plunge at the base of the falls, and the rate of deforestation around the falls is continuing unabated (Nadube & Akahome, 2017). There has been no festive event in which the locals' rich cultural heritage (masquerades and dances) is showcased for display despite one of tourism's fundamental objectives being that of showcasing a given society's culture (Okonkwo & Odey, 2017). Lastly, communities with destination potentials rarely incorporate them in their community development projects thus most times leaving them undeveloped and untapped for tourism potentials (Eja & Iji, 2018).

Tourism activities have the capacity to benefit a large sector of everyone including the grassroots population. It is worth noting that public awareness of the benefits is necessary for a new environmental behaviour. This is so because of the seeming contemporary awareness among people that tourism activities mostly involve exploiting the environment in a wanton manner thus breeding more of its negative aspects which then far outweigh its positive aspects (Asmamaw & Verma, 2013). Public awareness helps to disseminate and promote knowledge about tourism and ultimately improve people's understanding of tourism activities and where there are possible dangers and problems including its socio-psychological adverse impact. Public awareness of how tourism activities can be engaged in a sustainable manner is a necessary strategy for tourism development sustainability (Bukola & Olaitan, 2018). Public awareness of tourism benefits such as income generation, solving the problem of balance of payment deficit, master employer of labour and guaranteed foreign exchange earnings could also serve as a driver for tourism development sustainability (Umoh, 2006). This study is therefore designed to determine the extent of public awareness of tourism benefits such as economic development, income generation, employment creation, foreign exchange earnings and reserve and multiplier effect in southern Cross River State, Nigeria.

Statement of hypothesis:

Public awareness of tourism benefits is not significantly high.

METHODOLOGY

A survey design was used for the study. The study was conducted in Southern Cross River State. The population of the study comprised all the residents of southern Cross River State. The accessible population of the area is 1,189,801 (NPC, 2020). The random sampling technique was employed to select a sample of 510 respondents for the research. A data collection instrument tagged "Awareness of Tourism Benefits Scale" (ATBS) was used for data collection. The instrument, with a response rubric of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree for the

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section B had sections A and B with the first one being concerned with the demographics while the second one had 5 subsections which measured awareness of tourism benefits in line with economic development, income generation, employment creation, foreign exchange earnings and reserve and multiplier effect. It was validated by 3 research experts in the Departments of Environmental Education and Test/Measurement in the University of Calabar. Test-retest reliability estimate method was used to verify the instrument's stability which was found out to be .82. Respondents were accessed personally in the sampled communities with the aid of research assistants and the period of administering the questionnaire copies was one month. Return rate of 98.04% was achieved. Population t-test was used for data analysis. The assessed areas of awareness of tourism activities were in terms of economic development, income generation, employment creation, foreign exchange earnings and reserve/multiplier effect.

RESULTS

Hypothesis:

This hypothesis states that public awareness of tourism benefits is not significantly high. To test this hypothesis, population t-test was employed to analyze obtained data. The result is presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1

Population t-test analysis of public awareness of tourism benefits in Cross River State (N = 500).

Tourism activities	X ₀	X _e	SD	t	Sig of t
Economic development	16.09	12.50	2.43	20.86*	000
Income generation	16.09	12.50	2.77	18.356*	000
Employment creation	18.61	15.00	3.14	16.246*	000
Foreign exchange earnings	14.96	12.50	2.76	12.576*	000
Reserve and multiplier effect	18.02	15.00	3.58	11.936*	000

* Significant at the 0.05 level of significance.

The information in Table 1 shows that the public awareness of tourism benefits of Cross River State is significantly high in the areas of economic development ($t = 20.86$; $p = .000$); income generation ($t = 18.356$; $p = .000$); employment creation ($t = 16.246$; $p = .000$); foreign exchange earnings ($t = 12.576$; $p = .000$) and reserve and multiplier effect ($t = 11.936$; $p = .000$). Hence the null hypothesis that public awareness of tourism benefits is not significantly high was rejected at 0.05 level of significance.

DISCUSSION

The result shows that public awareness of tourism activities is significantly high in the areas of economic development, income generation, employment creation, foreign exchange earnings and reserve and multiplier effect. The study's finding did not come as a surprise because being an area where tourism activities are prevalent, it was expected that the people would have an appreciable level of awareness concerning tourism benefits. This finding is in line with Adeniji and Ekanem (2013) and Ijeomah *et al.*, (2014) revealed that awareness of ecotourism potentials was significantly associated with willingness to participate in ecotourism-related activities. Iyam *et al.*, (2014) found out that awareness of a festival's activities was associated with active participation in developing the hospitality industry for tourism growth. Ijeomah *et al.*, (2015) indicated that awareness of tourism activities within national parks was associated with the parks' tourism development. Orga's (2015) finding indicated that a steady increase in tourists to a festival over a given period of time was due to the extent of public awareness disseminated concerning the festival.

Still in consonance with the study's finding, Agri *et al.*, (2016) revealed that awareness was positively associated with capability of exploiting gainful tourism activities for more "tourism multiplier income". Kanu and Anthony (2017) revealed that awareness of a festival's activities served as a driver of understanding of how to harness it for cultural tourism development. Nwanna (2017) reported that awareness of festival events is associated with increased participation in tourism activities. Okonkwo and Odey (2017) observed that awareness of tourism events was associated with participation in tourism-related activities. Olaniyi *et al.*, (2018) reported that adequate awareness of ecotourism potentials could lead to its enhanced development. Emeafor and Nwaopara (2019) found out that awareness of how to harness festivals' tourism potentials significantly determined locals' participation in such related activities. Lastly, Essien and Anthony (2019) observed that awareness of gainful carnival-related activities was a significant correlate of youths' economic empowerment.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study it is concluded that members of the public are aware of tourism activities of Cross River State. Also, the public are aware tourism activities in the areas of economic development, income generation, employment creation, foreign exchange earnings and reserve and multiplier effect and this is very encouraging.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Relevant public and private authorities should make conscious and adequate efforts to enhance tourism related activities to encourage people to harness its benefits.
2. The government and private agencies should design action plans to ensure sustainable development of tourism.

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