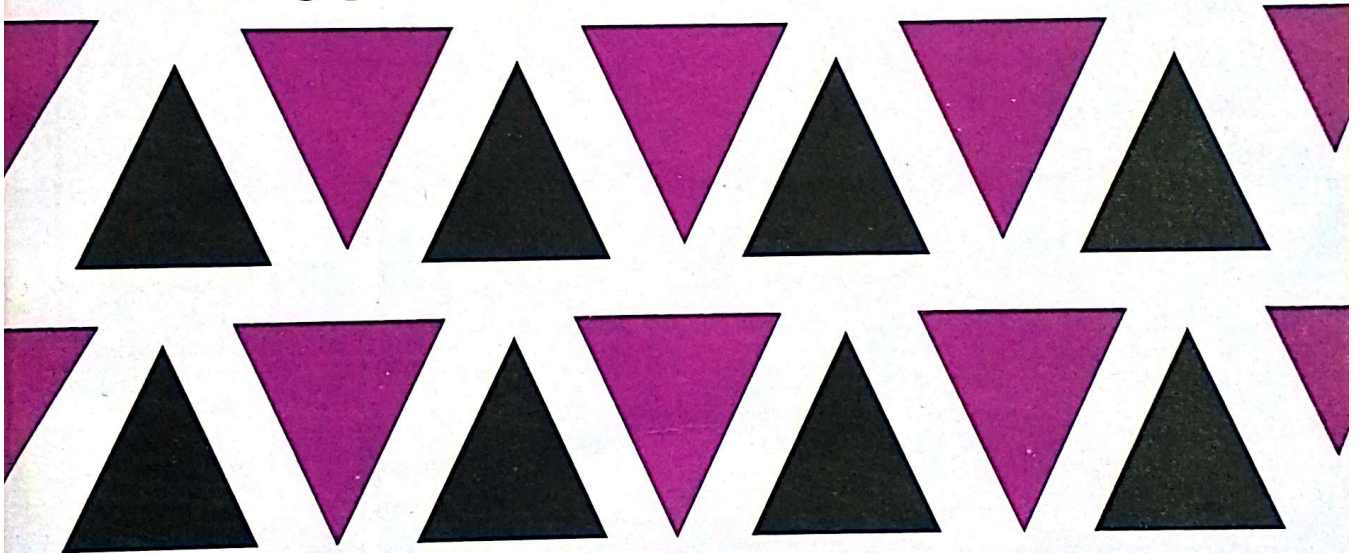


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Olympus G. Ejue



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CULTURAL TOURISM SITES IN KWARA STATE, NIGERIA: POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract

Cultural tourism is the exploration and experiencing of cultural manifestations such as indigenous cultural practices rooted in the peoples' cultural festivals, carnivals, arts centres, arts exhibitions, museums, theatre and so on. Cultural tourism serves as an alternative to the dwindling revenues from oil and gas sector in Nigeria. Despite the huge potential inherent in cultural tourism, its development has not been given adequate attention by both the private sector and the state government. The Nigeria cultural policy states that the federal government of Nigeria shall promote domestic tourism and provide facilities for its promotion. However, this is not the reality in cultural tourism development and promotion in Kwara State. The position of the cultural policy on cultural tourism promotion is not the current reality as the state government failed to set up attractions for various available cultural sites to aid the promotion of cultural tourism in Kwara State. Given this, the paper examines issues relating to the development of cultural sites and effective cultural tourism promotion in Kwara State, Nigeria. The paper

employs the descriptive method and interview instrument to interrogate reasons for low patronage of cultural sites in Kwara State. The paper reveals that low patronage of cultural sites is due to the non-availability of attractions with a beautiful ambience which can attract the local and international tourist, inadequate infrastructural facilities and lack of private sector involvement in the running of tourist sites. The paper concludes that cultural tourism relies on provision of infrastructures, effective promotion and efficient management of both human and material resources to promote cultural diplomacy and national development.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism; Tourism Promotion; Management; Cultural Policy; Challenges.

Introduction

The benefits derived from cultural tourism towards sustainable development in economic, political and socio-cultural context cannot be over-emphasized. Looking at this claim from the global perspective, one will agree that developed nations of the world invested largely in tourism to achieve sustainable development. Cultural tourism does not only contribute to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but its sustainability. The economic achievements made by countries such as the United States of America, Britain, China, India, and the United Arab Emirate (UAE) among others, are not only attributable to manufacturing, banking services, education, science and technology, but also through tourism development in their various cultural practices. The tourism industry has huge potential to generate revenue to support the dwindling revenues from oil and gas sector. The tourism industry has also been identified to possess the potential to turn around the Nigerian economy by creating employment opportunities and promoting unity among the diverse cultures in Nigeria. For these reasons, it is high time the government shifted its attention to investing in tourism as a viable industry, either through full ownership or public-private partnerships. The question asked by a participant

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at the national conference on developing strategies for viable cultural promotion and tourism developments in a reforming economy reiterates our position in this paper. The participant, according to Yerima (2007, p. 11) asks:

So when government spend all the money to repair roads, NEPA, hospitals airports, and everything turns out spick and span, and hotels are clean and lovely, and they put all armed robbers in the prison, and police treat road users with respect, and like the Minister said, "we begin to service and smile", and then finally the tourists come to Nigeria, please sir, what are they coming to see?

Interestingly, in his article entitled "Theatre as a tool for cultural tourism", Yerima reacted to this question by emphasizing that the participant has forgotten the importance of Nigerian history. He also reacted that "of course they are coming to see the cultural aspect which is embedded in our history and our consciousness" (Yerima, 2007, p.114). Looking critically at these positions, one would understand that; the unattractive nature of various cultural sites and inadequate infrastructural facilities are factors affecting effective cultural tourism promotion in Nigeria. Al Maktoum in his book entitled *My Vision: Challenges in the Race for Excellence*, (2012, p. 14) asserts that "tourism marketing must go hand in hand with the availability of quality facilities". It is worth noting that; the need to address the problem of inadequate infrastructural facilities and the unattractiveness of cultural sites is what has necessitated this paper. The paper examines the potentials and challenges of cultural tourism sites in Kwara State to further examine the position of the Nigeria cultural policy in the promotion of cultural tourism, the potential of cultural tourism and how theatre can be used to promote cultural sites in Nigeria.

Cultural Tourism in Nigeria

Man cannot live in isolation. As a result, many people have found it worthy as part of their existence to see how things are done in other parts of the world. They explore, interact and exchange knowledge, belief systems, ideas and innovations with

other people of the world. The touring experiment can also be to explore and gain experience about nature, culture, religion and other meaningful things of life. This would have resulted to the adoption of tourism mechanism as a money spinning venture for nations of the world. There is no nation as it is today that does not emphasize the essence of promoting tourism to achieve sustainable development. Chidozie and Obubo (2014, p. 25) states that "tourism is a continuous and unrelenting activity which transforms the abstract concept of culture into a profit venture that produces revenue for a people and its government". We see Nigeria in this regard as a country really endowed with cultural and historical sites which if fully developed can generate substantial revenue, create employment and reduce poverty. Onyejegbu (2014, p. 51) strengthens this position thus:

Nigeria has many endowments that it worthy of being called a tourist attraction. With the variety of tourist attractions which include rivers and oceans, different types of beaches, unique wildlife and zoos, rich national and typical forest, executive hotels and guest houses, magnificent waterfalls and good weather most of the time.

Onyejegbu's position is explicit to establish the availability of natural/man-made attractions for cultural tourism but these resources are not well developed in term of aesthetic values to create traffic of tourists at various tourism sites. A visit to cultural sites; museums, galleries of arts, council for arts and culture and craft centres in Kwara State, will no doubt reveal government attitude towards the management, marketing and promotion of cultural tourism. Some tourist sites which are funded and developed are not given adequate marketing and promotional attention. Onyejegbu (2014, p. 53) further laments on the state of museum management in Nigeria that: "Many museums in Nigeria, especially those in rural communities are of low standard and lack basic amenities and good access road. Some museums are also in shambles and have such challenges as inadequate power supply, poor finding, theft and insecurity".

The advocacy for exploring cultural tourism for revenue generation is a common discussion among policy makers, culture advocates and the academics. This advocacy and the continuous robust academic discourse on the subject-matter have established cultural tourism as "a major engine of growth and development contributing significantly to Gross Domestic Product of many nations" (Fadipe, 2014, p. 1). Awodiya (2015, p. 49) also asserts that "Nigeria stands a great chance of surviving the current economic meltdown facing the entire globe if it could focus more on cultural tourism". Fadipe identifies four major areas where the government needs to improve to promote cultural tourism in Nigeria. These include:

- Physical climate and socio-cultural attractions, such as hills, mountains, ocean fronts, waterfalls, museums, monuments, festivals, theatre, film village, event centre and amusement parks among others.
- Infrastructure: The provision of infrastructural facilities such as good roads, railways, airport, water and power supply
- Superstructure: These are facilities provided to entertain tourists.
- Accessibility: Availability and easy access to commuter transportation such as buses, shuttle services, cars, ferries and airplanes.

Nigeria Cultural Policy on the Promotion of Cultural Tourism

It is of great concern for us as culture advocates and arts administrators to examine the position of the Nigeria cultural policy document on cultural tourism and establish whether what is contained in the policy document is an illusion or a reality. The 1998 Nigeria cultural policy depicts the expectation and responsibility of the Nigeria government in the preservation, promotion, presentation and funding of the Nigerian arts and culture. "It is a document that defines the self-awareness of an individual, community or a country- that is the ability to use culture to shape experiences and allow it to have impact on

individuals or group of people” (Yerima, 2015, p. 138). The focus of the implementation of the cultural policy centres on the exploration of education, arts, tourism, mass media, religions, languages and traditional medicine. The aim is to preserve, promote and present the Nigerian culture to the outside world. In section 7 of the cultural policy, it is stated that “the state shall recognize that the mobility of people is a major factor of cultural growth and development”. Similarly, section 7.1.3, states that “the state shall promote and encourage domestic tourism by creating facilities that would encourage Nigerians to travel on holidays within the country” (*Cultural Policy for Nigeria*, 1988, pp. 12-13).

However, the problem with this document is the implementation of the policy. It is observed that the realization of the document’s objectives is more of an illusion than a reality. This is because the major factor in the implementation of the policy is funding. Section 7.1.3 emphasizes the promotion and creation of functional facilities which aid attractions and at the same time capable of encouraging Nigerians’ engagement in tourism experiences. There is insufficient funding for the tourism sector and thus, this created the absence of beautiful ambience and meaningful attractions which can encourage visit of local and international tourists. The non-implementation of the policy document in the area of funding in the practical sense has brought to the fore the fact that cultural policy for Nigeria is a mere document.

Potentials of Developing and Promoting Cultural Tourism in Kwara State

The potential of developing and promoting cultural tourism in Kwara State have surfaced in different sectors of the economy. Cultural tourism has contributed immensely to the economy of most developed nations of the world. Thus, if tourism is well developed in Kwara State, it will no doubt help in the promotion of its economic, social and cultural landscapes. Since this paper is premised on the development of cultural tourism, it becomes

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imperative to identify areas of potential for cultural tourism in Kwara State.

First and foremost, the provision of infrastructural facilities such as good road network, provision of basic amenities for the host communities where cultural sites are situated and the development of the cultural sites are prerequisites for the generation of revenue from the sector. The development of road network will improve transportation business as tourists travel from one tourist sites to another, thereby improving the economy of the host communities and contributing to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the state.

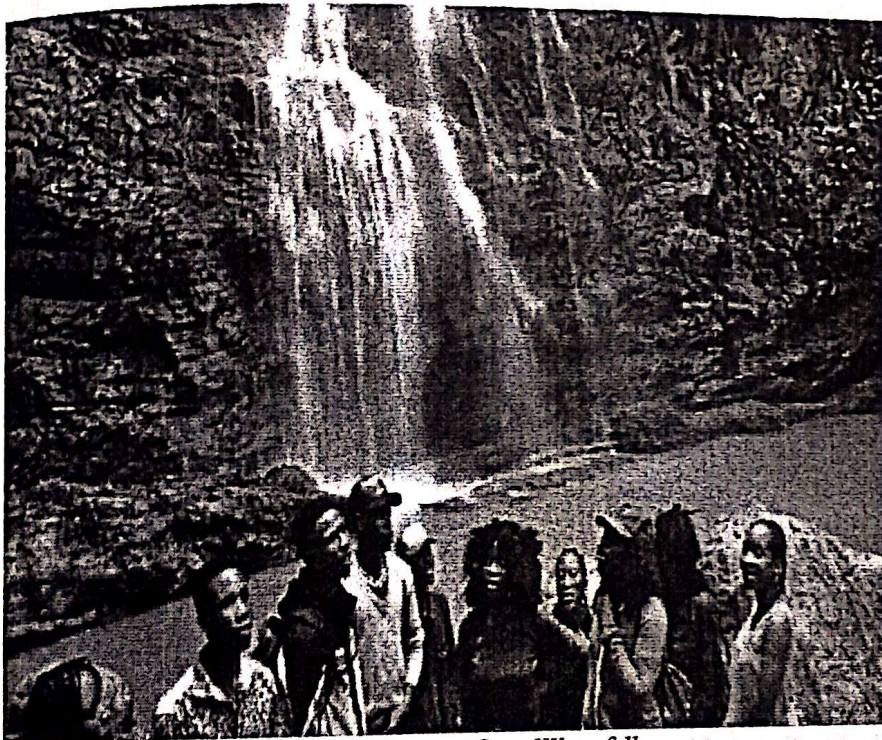


Fig 1: Students at Owa Waterfall

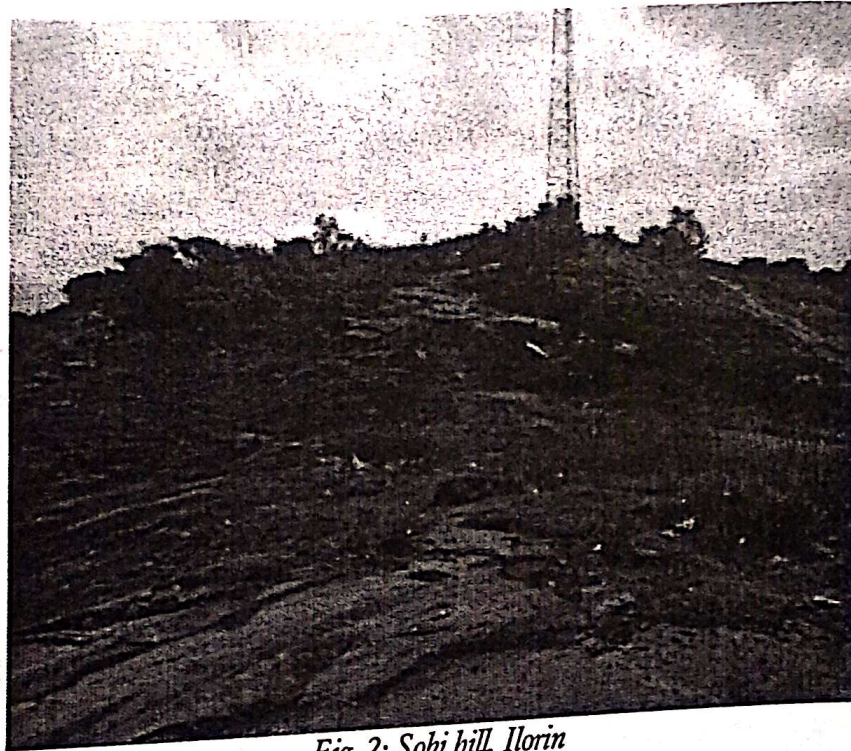


Fig. 2: Sobi hill, Ilorin

The development and promotion of tourist sites will bring simultaneous improvements in hotel businesses as tourists lodge in hotels to explore beautiful ambience surrounding the tourist sites. Other potentials of cultural tourism in Kwara State include the creation of employment opportunities such as tour guides, travel agents, events planners, booking agents, theatre operators, cultural managers for the management of cultural events such as indigenous festivals and carnivals etc. Johnson (2014, p. 20) further supports this claim saying that if cultural sites are developed and attractions are created and improved, the tendency to contribute meaningfully to the economy of Nigeria is guaranteed. In addition to the creation of employment, foreign exchange earnings and improving the GDP, cultural tourism in Kwara State has potential in the areas of social development and the promotion of cultural exchange between Nigeria and other nations. Invariably, this defines cultural tourism as a tool for cultural diplomacy.

In fact, cultural tourism development and promotion fall within the same axis with what defines the development and promotion of tangible goods. In promoting products or services,

positioning the available attractions in the cultural sites by creating brand name and creating a positive identity which prospective tourist can associate with will go a long way in developing the sites in term of patronage. Likewise, packaging of attractions in term of aesthetics provision and application will create beautiful ambience which tourist can reckon with. Affordability of price for admission into the sites should be economically considered to promote regular visit and regular use of promotional and publicity tools such as advertising, tele-marketing, direct marketing, printing of brochures, fliers, flex and banners, billboards, promoting the sites through merchandising and regular use of radio and television commercials.

Challenges

The available cultural sites that require the attention of the government or the involvement of private organizations for total rehabilitations or partial improvement in Kwara State include but not limited to the following:

The Owu Waterfall

Owu Waterfall is a tourist site located in Owu Isin Local Government of Kwara State, Nigeria. It is generally regarded as the highest waterfall in West Africa with its water level cascading down rocky ridges to a pool of ice-cold water below, giving a beautiful landscape and offering visitors a refreshing atmosphere. The ancient site as Owu waterfalls is known and described is a spectacular natural waterfall in West Africa. This natural phenomenon is always at its best during the rainy season, making it a wonderful recreation and vacation spot. It is believed that once a tourist is under the falls, a fine admixture of awesome feelings is achieved because of its spiritual essence. It is believed that while under the waterfall, calling the name of the water causes the water to increase in its down pour. It is a perfect location with unforgettable vacation experiences because as a tourist, one must first go on a short hiking before arriving at the said destination. The location is a fun filled and unforgettable

vacation spot where sweet and interesting experiences awaits a visiting tourist.

The waterfall is recognized as one symbolic representation of nature with its source and existence being untraceable. The location is surrounded by a natural atmosphere and hills, making it an outstanding experience for the tourist who is visiting. The waterfall is characterized with the fall of iced cold water into a swimmable pool, walkways through the rocky path for access and evergreen surroundings. Visitors enjoy this attraction either by swimming in the pool or watching others enjoy themselves. It is a good venue for having a picnic. However, this cultural site faced challenges which included bad roads and needs improved facilities around the sites. It is in great need of good access road. The site does not have green rooms in which prospective visitor can change to their swim suits, no refreshment centre where foods and soft drinks can be purchased for the enjoyment of the tourists, and there is no accommodation for prospective holiday seekers.

The Essie Museum

This is an old museum in Esie not far from Oro town in Kwara State that housed the stone image. Esie is an ancient Yoruba town located in Irepodun Local Government area of Kwara State, Nigeria. It is generally known to be the home to about 800 soapstone figures. Esie museum was officially opened in 1945, and is also regarded as one of the oldest museums in Africa with some mysterious-looking statues whose origin remains unknown till date. The sculptures in Esie museum are made from steatite stone in its organic compounds. It is also known as soapstone and is composed of various designs, shapes and sizes meant to depict different arrays of social roles. The sculptures in Esie museum are calved majorly to feature men and women, seated or kneeling down with agricultural or musical instruments being held in hand. The crafted works vary from statuettes in height, size and weight, making them artistic works capturing human activities in ancient times.

Stone sculptures in Esie museum are very ancient and are generally estimated as carvings done sometime between the 12th and 15th centuries. Regardless of some of the mysterious looking statues at the museum, it is believed that, some of the crafted pieces of art are associated with ancient Yoruba myth. One widespread description captures these carvings as people of a community who were cursed by the gods and turned into stone, while others see them as ancient sculptures in their artistic splendors. Some of objects depict people with high social status because of the details capturing rich attires, heavy beads, designed headgears, musical instruments and so on. The quality of their artistic displays suggests that habitants of the said geographical produced works identifying them as a highly developed African Society of the past. Esie museum today has both old and new galleries which contain objects ranging close to 2000 pieces. This geographical location has been the centre of religious activities like the Esie monument festival which happens yearly. The museum needs improvement in the areas of improving and maintaining the existing facilities and also requires frequent and wide publicity

Dada Pottery Making

Dada Pottery making is located at the Dada area of Ilorin, the Kwara State, Nigeria. The space utilised for the pottery and its making occupies about an acre of land. This is the largest concentration of potters in Kwara State. This geographic location is also believed to be the source of pottery making in Ilorin. The Industry is also believed to be as old as Ilorin itself and it is being managed by women who have inherited the business of pot making from their ancestors. The women in this area engage predominantly in pot making, with varieties in collection of pottery products ranges from cooking utensils, water storage vessels and other well-decorated pottery items are aesthetically produced. The women work full time throughout the year to create quality products for the general populace.

The Dada pot making area is located at Okelele, Ilorin East Local Government of Kwara State. The space utilized is on the left side of Sobi Specialist Hospital Road, Alagbado, Ilorin coming from Muritala Mohammed Road to Sobi Hills and the Nigerian Army Barracks. This geographical location for Pottery making derived its name from the community itself as Dada in Ilorin. The potters who are over a hundred women organized themselves in a group and then, chose a leader for themselves. The surroundings at Dada location of Ilorin passes for a locally developing rural settlement which is not captivating as one may expect or hope for. However, appealing display of works done awaits a tourist taking time to see the craftsmanship of the women, and storage sections of Dada pottery.

The location retains an industrial view with huge heaps of clay in different types, sizes and colours. These are used to compose different shapes of pots after which, smoldering on fire begets the fine and finished products. The women made it clear that the business of making pottery have truly helped them in taking care of their daily needs and send their children to schools. Dada pottery in Ilorin has rendered a pathway to studies of the art of pottery. What is done at Dada pottery is a good insight into the astuteness of skills, the technical know-how of these people's set of skills, their economic activities and trade connections over time, regardless of the women's uneducated approach to today's technological development and advancement in this age of globalization. This site can be developed into a modern pottery-making and training centre.

Sobi Hill

Sobi hill is a good vantage point located in the Ilorin East Local Government, along Akerebiata, Sobi road, before Sobi barracks. It is indeed the highest natural land form capturing a good glance of the entire city of Ilorin. It is also recognized as one of the most visited natural locations which people, their friends and tourists generally love to visit when in the city of Ilorin. The entrance to this natural entity is not really magnificent or

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developed into compound prior to climbing of the hill. However, the superlative view of Ilorin from its topmost spot is without doubt, one of the most beautifying views of the said geographical location. Green vegetation and remarkable landscape makes Sobi hill convenient to visitors coming to destination in Ilorin. Climbing the hill is absolutely free. Getting to the top of the hill requires a gentle climb, guided by a white line that shows the easiest way to the top. The hill which is about 400m above sea level is mostly visited by people who see the top as another access point to spiritual worship. It is required that tourist take off their shoes before climbing the hill. Interestingly, this request is for religious purposes and to make the climb easier but, it is never insisted upon. The aesthetic representation at the hill top is open to different views of Ilorin. Spots are set aside to also accommodate people's spiritual enterprises.

In addition to this, the natural landscape gently, allows trees and grassland amidst the rocky protrusions. The green vegetation and remarkable landscape at that height makes the air on the mountain very fresh, with the atmosphere feeling and smelling like morning dew on grass. Beyond servicing as a tourist center and a venue for spiritual enlightenment, Sobi hill has also influenced the siting of a radio station within its geographical space. Sobi FM (101.9 MHz) and its broadcasting are free from any form of interference because Sobi hill elevates the radio station's mast. Sobi hill as a natural endowment is utilized by the radio station whose choice of name and the need to erect its antenna on the hill is guided by an evolutionary need to educate, entertain and disseminate information from an angle which will reach the entire populace. This site can also be developed into a modern tourist site with new technologies that aid an attractive tourist site. Lift can be constructed so that tourist can have a better view of Ilorin metropolis from the top of the hill. Its location in Ilorin gives it an edge to attract patronage from within and outside the city of Ilorin.

Amusements Park

The amusements park existed in those days when adults and children always visited the site during Sallah and Christmas celebrations. It used to house animals such as Ostrich, Crocodile, Tortoise, Horse, Donkey, swings, and served as an event centre because it was located at Ibrahim Taiwo road, a commercial centre in Ilorin. This site has also been abandoned for years. Resuscitating this attraction and promoting it will add value to the beauty of Ilorin metropolis, create employment and improve the economy of the state.

Asa River

Although this site has not been developed into a tourist attraction by the state government but it can be made into a resort and a golf course can be built at the river side to attract visitors and thereby improve the economy of Kwara State.

Patigi Regatta Festival

This is one of the major cultural festivals in Kwara State which has also been abandoned for years. The last edition of the festival was celebrated in 2013. Patigi regatta attracts participants and visitors from almost all the states in Nigeria and even beyond. It took place on the river Niger at Gbaradogi in Patigi local government. It has an extended beautiful beach which is a good site for resort and can promote beach soccer to attract visitors to the town.

Kwara State Council for Arts and Culture

This is a cultural centre where frequent theatrical activities and experimental plays are expected to be taking place from time to time, but the contrary is the case. The staff are always engaged by the state government to perform at a public functions for simply entertainment purposes. It is therefore important that the centre lives up to its statutory roles of being a centre for artistic and cultural research, a place where the culture of Kwara State is promoted through performances.

Conclusion

The thrust of this paper has been exemplified through a robust description of cultural tourism potentials and its significance to the global socio-cultural and economic development. The paper has revealed that advanced countries derive maximum benefits from tourism development and promotion, thus, the need for developing countries to follow suit in achieving Millennium Development Goals (MDG) also revealed. Furthermore, it is indisputable that developing and promoting cultural tourism through provision of infrastructures and creation of attractions, will bring simultaneous improvement by developing local economy of the immediate environment where cultural sites are situated and the economy of the country at large. It is, therefore, concluded that cultural tourism relies on infrastructures, superstructures, marketing and management of both human and material resources to improve the Gross Domestic Products (GDP) of the developing nations and serves as a unique platform for local, national and international cultural integration. Therefore, for developing nations such as Nigeria to increase her revenue generation through tourism, there is the need to pay adequate attention to improve the general outlook of some cultural sites in Nigeria. And the strategy would be by providing spontaneous attractions through the utilization of various mainstream and social media platforms to create awareness and promote tourism marketing.

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