
Applied Tropical Agriculture

POTENTIALS OF CULTURAL HERITAGE TOURISM AS BASIS FOR SUSTAINABLE HERITAGE SITE DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The ancient Oke Idanre (Idanre Hills) is an outstanding heritage site in Ondo State and in Nigeria and it is a testimony of a settlement that has endured many centuries. An avalanche of rich historical/archeological and anthropological resources in the site notwithstanding, the site has not been attracting upscale visitors who will stay longer and impact positively on the economies of the community rather many passersby tourists. It is therefore imperative to study the potentials of ancient Idanre Hills with a view to ascertain the genuineness and authenticity of the unique history of the people, highlight historic/archaeological features, the notable festivals associated with the culture and history of the people and how these can be developed to bring about sustainable socio-economic development to the region. The data used for the study are both qualitative and quantitative in nature, including administration of structured questionnaires to tourists, Focus Group Discussions, key informant interviews and observation techniques. Secondary data were also collected in form of record of tourist influx to the site over the years.

Keywords: Oke Idanre, Idanre Hills heritage site, cultural tourism,

Introduction

Heritage is our legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations. Our cultural heritage constitutes irreplaceable sources of life and inspiration, as well as our touchstones, points of reference, and identity. It connotes monuments, group of buildings, humanities, ways of life and sites with historical, aesthetic, archeological, scientific, ethological or anthropological value (UNESCO, 2000). Heritage sites therefore are places of outstanding values and attractions. Cultural heritage has been source of inspiration and attractions for tourists drawing many people annually and it is often reported that cultural heritage tourism is one of the fastest growing segments of the tourism industry; it is a form of tourism that has history, customs and traditions (i.e. heritage) at its core. Cultural heritage tourism is the story of the people who live in a region (Dan, 2000). The archeological relics/historical resources, the abundant fauna and flora resources composition of Oke Idanre heritage site documented by Afolayan *et al.* (2007), coupled with scintillating anthropological resources being displayed during special events, have propensity to attract high-value visitors. This heritage site has drawn the attention of UNESCO and it will be the third heritage site in Nigeria to be enlisted on UNESCO World Heritage List. This study focuses on the humanities of the "Cultural heritage tourism" of Idanre people in Ondo State, Nigeria towards sustainable cultural heritage development of the site. Villiers (1997) perceives sustainable development as raising living standard, allowing people to reach their human potential, enjoying lives of dignity, and ensuring the welfare of present and future generations.

History of Idanre

The Idanre people trace their ancestry to Ile-Ife from where according to legendary oral tradition; their forbears led by Aremitan (Olofin, the brother to Oduduwa) emigrated after the demise of Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba Kingdom in Ile-Ife. Olofin and the retinue traversed the thick forest of the West before settling at different periods. What led Olofin to leave Ife was narrated differently by different people, but the most likely cause may have been the power tussle among the leaders in Ife at the time. According to history, Olofin ruled Ife briefly after the death of Oduduwa, but the reign was full of jealousy, infightings and was acrimonious. Thus Olofin left eastward through Ujama, Epe, Urede, Ojanla, Jaleja, Utaja (his last stop), having crossed the Urore river. Since there were no houses at Utaja, the people were assumed to live in caves with Olofin as their leader. Olofin lived with Idanre people at Utaja for about five decades before he eventually died in a cave at Utaja in a place called Uwo-Akota meaning cave of wasps. Olofin's son, Aboogun, led the people to Oke-Idanre in about

10th century AD, where they settled first at a spot named Usualu and later at Ufe-Oke (now Oke Idanre). In 1928, the first batch of Idanre hilltop settlers descended and founded Ilututun now (Alade) in response to the pull of Christianity and modernity which beckoned down the hill. The remaining group joined later in 1933 by moving down to the foot of the hill to find Odode. The third settlement, Atosin had existed since about 1820 when it had been an outpost of Oke-Idanre. Today these three traditional contiguous communities co-exist based on a common symbiotic bond of culture, friendship and consanguinity.

Cultural Festivals being celebrated in Idanre Region/District

Of the seven cultural festivals celebrated in Idanre communities, four notable ones associated with the culture and history of Idanre communities are:

Orosun festival: celebrated annually in May, depending on the movement of the moon. It is perhaps the most important festival being celebrated in Idanre due to its authenticity and large number of tourists witnessing the events annually. It symbolizes the celebration of womanhood and fertility which is epitomized in Orosun, the legendary wife of Olofin who is now a deified heroine.

Ije festival: is a 7-day ancestral worship that takes place in December during which the king exhibits the Oduwa regalia inherited by Olofin his brother. The regalia include the beaded crown, Otibiti (a piece of cloth), Ada (sword), Oreghe (necklace); two cow tail hairs mounted on a piece of stick as handles for dancing called Joyhere; a cup made of brass with an inscription of a reptile, lizard on both sides; and *ughon* bangles made of brass with an inscription of an Ife monarch such that was used as FESTAC 1977 symbol.

Igwodi festival: is celebrated in March and allows the Idanre communities to learn their history, origin and where they belong. The three major quarters in Idanre i.e Idale, Irowo and Isalu organized other quarters under them and gather to tell the story and history of individual families in the each quarter.

Ogun (Ijesu) festival: is celebrated in October and marks the cultivation and successful harvest of farm produce. Its uniqueness is that it is the only time in a year when the king dances round the town.

Materials and Methods

Idanre lies between longitude 07° 00' and 7° 10' and latitude 5° 00' and 5° 13'. Idanre land is a rocky expanse of urban settlement located about 25 kilometers from Akure, the capital of Ondo state. It comprises three large towns namely Odode, Alade and Atosin, with 435 villages. It covers an area about 619 square miles (1584.6 square km). The entire landscape is enveloped in boulders of delicately-perched hills (Isenberg), caves and depressions which serve as identity symbols of its unity and cosmology. The data used for the study are qualitative and quantitative and include propensity of Idanre community to attract high class tourists, type of tourist, fiscal health and administrative vision of the heritage-based institutions in the community/state, compelling stories/facts peculiar to the community, special places that tell the story of the community; the authenticity and quality fashion in which community stories are relayed, presence of significant attractions – drama group performing historical reenactments, bikes that are led by interpretive guides in the community. Furthermore, presence of local “stars” that fit the cultural heritage mold – such as available restaurants that can serve home-cooked food, antique districts, art galleries and studio; state of health of “people infrastructure” and availability of trained personnel on tourism; funding of quality-of life items such as recreation parks, libraries, growth maintenance, beautification of streetscapes; maintenance and enhancement of cultural heritage resources and willingness of the people to invest in quality of life amenities.

These data were collected through secondary data obtained from Ondo State Ministry of Culture and Tourism (the custodian of the site) in form of record of tourist influx to the site, Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Key Informant Interview (KII), observation techniques and primary data in form of structured questionnaires were administered to the tourists over 10 months coincidental with the time of celebration of Orosun in May 2010. FGD (20-30 people) entails meeting heads of various historical/cultural societies and community-based organizations (CBOs) in the community (Fagbenro & Oladeji, 2010). The group was further streamlined into 10 people where issues earlier discussed were reemphasized so that the facts and genuineness of information earlier obtained were confirmed. KII involves discussion interview with the priests who are the custodian of various shrines in the heritage site, the chiefs of the communities and the king; which provided authentic history of the communities and further affirm information earlier generated. Observational technique involved visits to the heritage site and Idanre community to observe some of the archeological/historical features described by the key informants and the state of infrastructural facilities available.

The qualitative data obtained were analyzed using contextual analysis. Contextual in that opinion of various groups were harmonized and subjected to deductive reasoning such that sufficient inferences were be drawn. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive analysis (% distribution, bar charts) with SPSS 15.

Results and Discussion

The ancestors of Idanre people first settled at Utaja and later moved to a cave called *Uwo Akota* located on the west side of Utaja, at the foot of Ahaha hill on the eastern part of Oke Idanre. After half a century, the people moved out of the cave to settle on the hills – Ufe oke (now Oke Idanre). The high hills have plains with spectacular valleys interspersed with inselberg of about 3000 feet (950 ms) above sea level and a diverse ecosystem of flora and fauna splendours (Afolayan et al, 2007). The hills are accessible through historical trails of about 465 steps. It was ascertained that living in a cave and on top of hills was peculiar to Idanre people of Ondo State in Nigeria. On the hill top, certain features such as the ancient palace of Owa (the king), relics of the first court constructed in 1906, the first colonial building built in 1896, Wasp cave, Bat’s cave monumental tomb of Chief Saaruku, shrines and “one size fits all depression “

The FGD and KII confirmed the level of hospitality of the people of Idanre. They demonstrated unequivocal readiness to attract upscale visitors to their community. They reinforced this by their disposition to tourists visit during some of their notable cultural festivals. At present, the community has not maximally exploited the economic benefits derivable from the cultural heritage site. For a sustainable tourism to be achieved in this region, the community leaders and professionals in the state must rise up to maximize its benefits and minimize its cost (Gertz, 1997). According to the Permanent Secretary, Ondo State Ministry of Culture and Tourism, money generated as toll fees from the tourist visit represent part of the Internally Generated Revenue (IGR) in the state. Part of the money is being used to pay the salary of the workers in the Ministry and for the maintenance of the site. Table 1 shows the record of tourist influx to the site in 2007-2010.

Table 1. Record of tourist influx to Idanre Hills (2007-Feb. 2010)

Month	2007	2008	2009	2010	Adult	Children	Adult	Children
Jan	13	10	54	42	120	141	84	169
Feb.	13	64	175	238	92	116	129	259
March	24	103	73	238	12	223		
April	nil	Nil	36	459	157	345		
May	nil	Nil	53	410	20	200		
June	nil	30	96	978	73	673		
July	nil	80	64	293	male=55 male=143	female=65 female=328		
August	nil	55	43	102	male=71 male=219	female=68 female=180		
September	7	Nil	85	93	male=60 male=115	female=42 female=153		
October	nil	40	190	431	male=154 male=16	female=38 female=63		
November	67	Nil	74	360	male=80 male=130	female=25 female=50		
December	130	127	316	471	male=180 male=130	female=260 female=150		

Source: Ondo State Ministry of Culture and Tourism

Note: Between 2007 and 2010, the toll fee for the tourists was ₦50- ₦100/head for children and ₦100 - ₦150/head for adults. During Orosun festival and other cultural festivals, toll fees are not collected from the tourists. Thus there is no official record of tourist influx at any of these occasions but is estimated at 3000-5000 tourists visiting annually.

A tourist dollar is a new dollar injected into the local economy with greater economic benefits that can come from employment as porters, cooks, and guides in hotels and in transportation, as well as tour operators/guides and travel agencies. Tourism is a labour intensive industry and creates many job opportunities, especially

for young people and part-time workers. The most direct economic benefits are the improvement in employment and income. Absences of certain features which are essential for the development cultural heritage tourism have robbed the community from some of these economic benefits. At present, no significant art gallery well constructed museum, bookshop and jewelry shop that can attract upscale tourists. Interactions with some of the stakeholders indicate that there are institutions that are ready to venture into the provision of some of these facilities, the community must therefore be willing to collaborate with the public and private sectors in order to maximize the quality of the historical inventory, attract upscale, educated and choosy tourists. Inadequate security to guard the museum where some of the antiquities and other movable tangible heritage resources like original Oduduwa crown together with the regalia can be displayed was reported as impediment to the establishment of historic/cultural museum in this society. The last time the crown was displayed was 1943, although tourists have the opportunity to see it briefly for few seconds during Ije or Iden Festival that normally comes up every December.

Analyses of questionnaires administered to the tourist provide information on the social characteristics of the tourists are presented in Tables 2-4.

Table 2. Gender distribution of tourists

	Frequency	%
Male	127	63.5
Female	73	36.5
Total	200	100

Table 3. Age distribution of tourists

Age (years)	Frequency	%
15-20	61	30.5
20-30	59	29.5
30-45	52	26.0
45 and above	28	14
Total	200	100

Table 4. Length of stay of the tourist at the destination

Duration	Frequency	%
A day	176	88.0
More than a day	24	12
Total	200	100

Tables 4 reveals that to a greater extent the site has attracted passers by tourists spending a day at their destination rather than up-market tourists interested in spending more than a day. 12% of the tourists that indicated spending more than a day at Idanre are those that ended up passing the night with their relatives that are indigenes of the town. This might be due to the failure of the Idanre community to provide the necessary socio-economic facilities needed by this category of tourists. Hotels of international standard are only available in the state capital which is about 25 minutes drive from Idanre town. Lack of accommodation facilities that meet the aspiration and taste of the tourists have denied the communities the benefits of hospitalizing upscale tourists who might want to use the purpose of the visit to pass one or two nights in the town. Availability of standard hotels is equally essential to reduce the stress of traveling after visiting the challenging but adventurous and exciting heritage site. Provision of amenities such as swimming pool, internet facilities, and outdoor games will go a long way towards improving the standard of these hotels and make them attractive and suitable to meet the need of cultural heritage tourist. There are also needs for the provision of other infrastructural facilities as listed below

Potentials of cultural heritage tourism

- Restaurants and Eateries
- Conference / Events Centres
- Cafes and Garden Centres
- Hospitals and Health Clinics
- Amusement Parks and Children Playground
- Car/bus hire services
- Roads, Helipads
- Bookshops
- Country
- Arts galleries and studio craft centre
- Museums of Cultural and Natural History
- Clothes stores, Cosmetic shops
- Jewellery and souvenir shops
- Sports/Recreational facilities (lawn tennis courts, golf course/cycling/marathon)
- Trained guides

Provision of these and some other facilities generate both indirect and direct local employment and chains of other economic benefits since some of the people in this community will be directly employed as tourist guides, lawn keepers, hotel staff, porters, bus/car drivers, auto-mechanics, ticketing office staff, tour guide (literature) producers, interpreters, pageants while some will engage in the provision of ancillary services – petty trading, interpreters, construction workers, printing, entertainment, sporting kits/materials. Also there will be a lot of social development and improvement of life of the host communities, through provision of leisure facilities and amenities, in addition to fostering respect for cultural diversity. For instance there will be provision of education facilities (schools), organised and well packaged sports/recreation events and competitions like ‘ayo’, mountaineering, healthcare, road network, transportation system, market stalls/stores/shops, security organizations, banking and insurance services, cooperatives and finance institutions, internet services, telephone/communications facilities. These will also accrue revenue for the communities, state and stakeholders, through tax and fees. Directing tourism growth toward local needs, interests and limits can greatly enhance tourism value to the community and help create sustainable industry.

Creating a successful and sustainable tourism industry is like creating any successful and sustainable economic activity (Glean, 2001). Both the government and individuals have many roles to play in actualizing the aforementioned gains and benefits derivable. In fact, it is the collective responsibilities of all the stakeholders involved in the development of the tourism potentials of the heritage site. Government should encourage private partner’s participation in tourism by giving incentives such as development of infrastructural facilities and declaring tourism sectors as tax-free investment. Communities should form and register functional cooperative societies/clubs/associations. The various governments should encourage financial institutions to consider giving loan for financing the tourism industry. The community needs further sensitization (through seminars and workshops) and training (formal, non-formal, informal) to free their mind set and adopt the practice of tourism. Tourism operates at highly technical level and only those who are trained can adopt such high level technicalities. Hence, there should be effective linkage between institutions (e.g. FUTA) and the community through a well coordinated extension system; the significance being that efforts should be geared towards extending packaged tours. Empowerment of federal, state, local governments and parastatals responsible for sustainable tourism: The Federal Ministry of Commerce and Tourism, The Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC), The National Parks Board, Federal Environmental Protection Agency (FEPA), State Tourism Boards, and Local Government Tourism Committee

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