

Sustainable Heritage Tourism Development and Host Community Perceptions: A Case Study of Irefin Palace in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study investigated issues relating to host community perception of Irefin Palace for sustainable heritage tourism development in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study determined residents' perception of developing Irefin palace for sustainable tourism, factors influencing tourists' patronage of the palace and residents' perception on the importance of heritage tourism. Questionnaire was used to gather data. Eighty respondents selected by purposive and simple random sampling techniques participated in the study. Findings of study include 10 perception indicators of developing Irefin Palace for heritage tourism. These include heritage tourism is alien to our culture, Irefin Palace and its design are too old for preservation, heritage tourism lead to under-utilization of the Palace and others. Findings also reveal four factors influencing tourists' patronage of Irefin palace. These are lack of awareness, poor state of the palace, absence of tourism supporting amenities at the Palace, absence of professional tour guide. Other findings are 12 indicators of perceived importance of heritage tourism. These include provide employment opportunities, provide revenue for government, be a source of pride for the community among others. Based on the findings, three recommendations were made.

Key Words: Irefin, Palace, Heritage, Development, Perception, Host, Community

Introduction

Heritage tourism falls under the purview of cultural tourism. It is a tool for economic development that achieves economic growth through attracting visitors from outside a host community, who are motivated wholly or in part by interest in the historical,

artistic, scientific or lifestyle/heritage offerings of a community, region, group or institution (Silberberg, 1995). As history shows, even the ancient Egyptians and Romans, as well as the nobility of medieval times, travelled to experience historic places of cultural importance (Towner, 1996).

While there may exist various interpretations and descriptions of 'heritage', perhaps the most commonly accepted definition among heritage scholars described it as 'the present day use of the past' (Ashworth, 2003; Graham, Ashworth & Tunbridge, 2000). This definition is purposefully broad and includes both tangible and intangible features of the cultural landscape. Some observers, including UNESCO, have extended the scope to include natural heritage as well (Boyd and Butler, 2000; Thorsell & Sigaty, 2001). Heritage is a complex and highly political phenomenon. There are few social elements and types of tourism that are more hotly contested at so many levels (Hall, 1997; Timothy & Boyd, 2003; Timothy & Prideaux, 2004). Literature has identified reasons why heritage conservation and preservation are of high priorities in western societies; fear of over-industrialization or rapid modernization; national pride and collective nostalgia; education and scientific research; economics; aesthetic and artistic value; and utilitarian value (Boyd, 2002; Hewison, 1987; Prentice *et al.*, 1998; Tiesdell *et al.*, 1996; Timothy & Boyd, 2003). The recognition of an area's historic resources can bring about neighborhood revitalization, increased and sustainable tourism, economic development through private investment, and citizenship building (Russell, 2014). For instance, in an attempt to ensure holistic appreciation of heritage tourism and its associated multiplier effects in India, a popular travel site, Lonely

(2020) suggested that tourists seeking an authentic heritage tourism experience should explore the real India by using traditional modes of transport to obtain a lifetime experience. Chapman and Duncan (2011) argued that ancient attractions (arcades) can be important elements of strategies for repositioning and rebranding heritage tourism.

According to Nur *et al.* (2015), failure to explore the touristic asset of any community for development as an integral part of strategies for ensuring overall community development will lead to the neglect of the touristic potential of such destinations. When communities' travel-related entities partner with public or private organizations, the historic, cultural, and natural resources are more effectively promoted to meet the heritage traveler's desire for an integrated and enriching experience (Bruce, 2010). Tourism is too important a resource to be left to the tourism professionals, it needs to be part of a community mobilization strategy that can reinvent the role of heritage so that it serves the needs of everyone (Bob, 2014). Heritage tourism is a personal encounter with traditions, history, and culture. Heritage tourism is based upon the concept that each community has a story to tell. This is a rapidly growing niche market that is directed towards experiencing the local customs, traditions, arts, history, sites, and culture that authentically represent a particular place. To the heritage tourist, this culture must be unique and it must be authentic.

Cultural heritage is not just something to preserve for future generations, but is in fact an asset that can be leveraged to bring real economic benefits to the community (Bob, 2014). Rober (2014) opined that small-scale tourism is often far more beneficial to local economies than the rapid expansion of massive resort enclaves that dominate many tourism-dependent regions. Recent studies have shown that 78 percent of US tourists take part in a cultural heritage activity while traveling (partners for livable communities, 2014).

From a certain view, cultural heritage tourists might be thought of as amateur ethnographers. But while they are interested in learning about other cultures, they are first and foremost tourists. The pervasiveness of heritage resources has put heritage tourism at the forefront of the tourism industry in many parts of the world. It is one of the most significant types of tourism in terms of visitors and attractions, involving hundreds of millions of people every year. Some observers such as; MacCannell (1976) have argued that people travel in a constant search for authentic experiences and genuine places. According to Moscardo and Pearce(1986), tourists desire authentic encounters of some sort and that, at least perceived authenticity creates more satisfactory visitor experiences. Heritage tourism ensures preservation of community resources and provide a lot of economic benefits for the host community. The enormity of the

economic impact of heritage tourism cannot be overstated.

As one of the largest forms of tourism, visitors to historic places and the spending that accompanies them in the areas of lodging, food, admission fees and shopping, contribute billions of dollars every year to the global economy and employ millions of people directly and indirectly (Timothy & Boyd, 2003). With the current challenging and difficult economic situation in Nigeria led by high level of unemployment and dwindling revenue for the government, exploring the many benefits offered by heritage tourism could provide another source of revenue for government and employment opportunities for residents, however, while trying to explore any community resources, the importance of the knowledge and perception of the host community cannot be over emphasized, hence the concern of this study, which is to assess residents' perception of *Irefin* palace for sustainable tourism development in Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. According to Litheko and Potgiester (2016), what a local destination has to offer must be known to local residents in order for them to support local tourism facilities and attractions. Lee & Brahmasrene (2013) concluded that local population awareness and perception of tourism development is useful for developing measures to overcome problems due to hostility between visitors and local populations and for making plans to

gain residents' support for further tourism development.

The importance of understanding residents' perceptions of the impact of tourism is substantial when it comes to the successful development of tourism (Zhang *et al.*, 2006), as well as local support for tourism development (Nicholas *et al.*, 2009; Latkovaet *al.*, 2012; Rasoolimaneshet *al.*, 2017) and the satisfaction of host communities (Xieet *al.*, 2014; Ribeiro *et al.*, 2017). Many authors agree that tourism has effect on the economy, social-culture, and environment of host communities (Sharpely, 2014). Tourism tends to be beneficial to the communities whose government is in the stage of tourism development because it can increase their quality of life in different ways, such as improved facilities and employment opportunities (Sheng & Tsui, 2010; Moayad, *et al.*, 2019). It also enhances the economy (Liang & Bao, 2015); creates more natural and cultural attractions, and helps protect these attractions (Ko & Stewart, 2002; Vargas-Sancheset *al.*, 2008). Besides this, tourism leads to an increase in restaurants and accommodation services and creates more festivals and outdoor recreation opportunities (Liang & Bao, 2015). Regrettably, despite such benefits to the community, negative impacts can occur when tourists interact with local residents. For instance, tourism increases the cost of living and contributes to an increase in crime, the use of drugs, and traffic, leading to a big change in the culture of local residents (McCool & Martin, 1994;

Tosun 2002; Jurowski & Gursoy, 2004) as well as environmental damage (Latkovaet *al.*, 2012). Several studies have found that the influence of residents' perception toward tourism affects their satisfaction (Xieet *al.*, 2014; Ribeiro *et al.*, 2017; Vargas-Sancheset *al.*, 2008; Anderecket *al.*, 2005; Shen & Cottrell, 2008). Wang *et al.* (2014) noted that residents' satisfaction is one of the key factors leading to the success of tourism development. In Nigeria, there are a lot of heritages unique to different ethnic groups of the country. Among these are UNESCO certified (*Osun Osogbo Grove and Sukur Heritage sites*) and others such as; *Shaw AwonMass Wedding Festival, Argungun Fishing Festival, Masquerade festivals, Long Juju of Arochukwu* etc. Ibadan, the capital city of Oyo State and the largest city in Nigeria by geographical area also has some popular heritages. Among these are; *Oke Ibadan and Egungun festivals, Mapo Hall, Irefin Palace, Bowers' Memorial Tower* etc. The focus of this study is on the *Irefin* palace. This is an ancient palace built with mud and timber over 200 years ago and still stands strong on the soil of Ibadan city, southwest Nigeria (Folarin, 2015). The palace belongs to one of the royal families of Ibadan (Sulaimon, 2019). The *Irefin* clans were warriors in the days of old who settled in the Ibadan area known then as a resting settlement for travelers. The palace was the abode of a powerful chief in Ibadan enclave, who later became the traditional head of Ibadan called *Baale Irefin*, who ruled from

1912-1914. All thieves caught and convicted in Ibadan during his reign were beheaded. Preserved at the ancient palace are ancient diaries showing old records of events that took place at the *Irefin* Palace in the olden days. Among the numerous rooms in the palace are the clan's 'spiritual powerhouse' and the judgment room where misunderstandings within the clan and the community are resolved or punishment meted out to the iniquitous. This palace possesses great touristic value, hence, it is the concern of this study to determine host community's perception of developing it for heritage tourism.

Objectives of the Study: This study instigated issues relating to host community perception of *Irefin* palace for sustainable heritage tourism development in Ibadan, Oyo state. Specifically, the study determined:

1. residents' perception of developing *Irefin* palace for sustainable tourism.
2. factors influencing tourists' patronage of *Irefin* palace.
3. residents' perception on the importance of heritage tourism.

Research Questions

1. How do the residents perceive developing *Irefin* Palace for heritage tourism?
2. What are the factors influencing tourists' patronage of the Palace? and
3. How do the residents perceive importance of heritage tourism?

Methodology

Design for the Study: Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study.

Area of the Study: The study was carried out within the Palace and its closest proximity. The Palace is located in Ibadan North East Local Government Area of Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria. This area is semi-rural. It is an ancient settlement. The buildings around the palace are old. However, the urban center is within 2 - 5 kilometer radius. The area is a slum. Businesses around this area include; petty trade, artisans, transport, and small scale canteens.

Population for the Study: The population was made up of the people living in the area of the study. They were mostly elderly men and women, but also included middle aged women, ma, youth and children. Most of the male residents were farmers, hunters, vulcanizers, automobile mechanics, barbers, carpenters, and other forms of artisanry workers. Majority of the women were petty traders, few others were hair dressers. Members of the population involved in this study consisted of the residents of the palace and people living in the closest proximity to the palace (1 Kilometer radius) all of whom were adults. Responses from the opinion leaders in the community revealed that the total population of the community was about one hundred people.

Sample for the Study: Out of a total population of about 100 residents, samples of 80 persons were selected

for the study. While all adult residents of the palace were purposively selected, simple random sampling technique was deployed in selecting members of the host community.

Instrument for Data Collection: Questionnaire was the instrument used to gather data. It was developed based on the specific objectives of the study. Sections of the instrument on specific objectives No 1 and 2 had 5 - point Likert scale of Strongly agree (5), Agree (4), Strongly disagree (3), Disagree (2). It served as interview schedule for the illiterate respondents. It was validated by three university lecturers in Tourism studies. Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. Reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained.

Data Collection Methods: Four research assistants together with the researcher were involved in the data collection. Non - literate respondents were guided in responding to the questionnaire items while educated respondents completed the questionnaire on their own. The researcher also moved round the palace and its environs for first-hand information on the current condition of the Palace.

Key Informant Interview (KII) was conducted for nine people who represented the three different categories of key informants about the *Irefin* palace. These include; three elderly men in the community, three residents (elderly) and descendants of *Irefin* clan, and three elderly women in the community. They all gave the same

history about the palace; materials for construction (mud and timber only); age of the palace (over 200 years); number of rooms (over 200 rooms) available in the palace; and the reign of *Irefin* as the traditional head of Ibadan between 1912 - 1914.

Data Analysis Techniques: Description statistics frequency counts, percentages, and mean were used to analyze the data. Mean (X) values were used for decision making in answering the research questions. Based on the 5 - point Likert scale of the instrument, mean of 2.50 was used for decision making or Research questions No 1 and 2. Any items with means of 2.50 and above were regarded as "agreed" on perceptions", while those with means less than 2.50 were regarded as "disagreed on perception". Qualitative data gathered via the Key Informant Interview were summarized, and built into the Introduction of the study.

Results

Respondents' Personal Characteristics: Majority of the respondents were married (73.7%), females (58.8%), and belonged to Yoruba ethnic group (91.6%). Majority were Muslims (70%). They had between two and four children (51.3%), up to 60 percent of the respondents attended secondary schools (61.3%). All the respondents (100%) were adults.

Respondents' Perception on Developing *Irefin* Palace for Heritage Tourism

Table 1: Mean Responses on Perceptions on Developing Irefin Place for Heritage Tourism

S/N	Perceptions on Developing of Irefin Palace for Heritage Tourism	Mean±SD
1	The benefits of developing <i>Irefin</i> Palace for heritage tourism far outweighs its demerits	4.24±0.83
2	Heritage tourism is alien to our culture	3.95±1.07
3	<i>Irefin</i> Palace should be developed for heritage tourism for inherent benefits	4.19±0.93
4	It can lead to increase in the cost of living in the immediate community	1.65±1.38
5	<i>Irefin</i> Palace and its design are too old for preservation	2.19±1.42
6	Heritage tourism lead to under - utilization of the Palace	3.24±1.42
7	The number of visiting tourists may not justify the resources committed for the preservation of the Palace	3.62±1.12
8	Displacement will distort the normal way of life of the occupants of the Palace	3.31±1.25
9	The Palace should be preserved and developed for the benefits of the future generation	3.91±1.14
10	It will deprive <i>Irefin</i> family members and residents free access to the palace	3.37±1.36

Table 1 shows eight of the 10 perception indicators have means ranging from 3.24 to 4.19 ($\bar{X} = 3.24 - 4.19$). This implies that each of the eight indicators (No 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10) is “agreed - on” perception on developing Irefin Palace for Heritag

Tourism. Items No 4 ($\bar{X} = 1.65$) and No 5 ($\bar{X} = 2.19$) are however, not agreed on. They are “disagreed - on perception”.

Factors Influencing Tourism Patronage of Irefin Palace

Table 2: Percentages Responses on Frequency of Tourist’s Visit and Factors Influencing Visit of *Irefin* Palace N = 80

	Frequency(%)
Frequency of visitation	
Rarely	63(78.8)
Occasionally	10(12.5)
Always	07(8.8)
Factors influencing tourist’s patronage of <i>Irefin</i> Palace	
Lack of awareness	65(81.3)
Poor state of the palace	62(77.5)
Absence of tourism supporting amenities at the palace	52(65.0)
Absence of professional tour guide	39(48.8)

Table 2 shows that majority of respondents (78.8%) agreed that tourists rarely visit the palace. The table also shows the factors influencing tourist's patronage of *Irefin* palace in order of importance to include; lack of awareness i. e. low publicity of the palace (81.3%), poor state of the palace (77.5%), absence of tourism supporting facilities at the palace (65%), and

absence of professional tour guide (48.8%). These findings corroborate Bankole (2013), who also listed these factors among others as factors influencing development of cultural resources for tourism in Nigeria.

Perception of the Importance of Heritage Tourism

Table 3: Mean Responses on Perceptions of the Importance of Heritage Tourism

S/N	Perceptions of the Importance of Heritage Tourism	Mean±SD
	It can:	
1.	provide employment opportunities	4.31±0.59
2.	provide revenue for government	4.25±0.88
3.	be a source of foreign exchange	4.03±1.09
4.	increase the crime rate in the community	3.19±1.33
5.	facilitate provision of infrastructures in the host communities	3.76±0.90
6.	improve the livelihood of the community members	3.90±0.94
7.	provide market for crafts, arts, artifacts and other local products	4.00±0.99
8.	promote the image of the community	4.00±0.97
9.	be a source of pride for the host community	3.99±0.96
10.	support local entertainment industry	4.14±0.82
11.	draw the attention of government, NGOs, and international organizations who are interested in heritage tourism to the needs of the community	4.15±0.99
12.	distort the culture of the host community	3.41±1.40

Table 3 shows that each of the 12 "Importance indicators" has a mean of 2.50 and above. The means responses of the 12 items (Importance indicators) range from $X = 3.19$. Thus, it follows that the respondents agree on the Importance of Heritage Tourism based on the 12 indicators in Table 3.

Discussion

Heritage records and expresses the long processes of historic

development, forming the essence of diverse national, regional, indigenous and local identities and is an integral part of modern life. It is a dynamic reference point and positive instrument for growth and change. The particular heritage and collective memory of each locality or community is irreplaceable and an important foundation for development, both now and into the future. At a time of increasing globalization, the

protection, conservation, interpretation and presentation of the heritage and cultural diversity of any particular place or region is an important challenge for people everywhere (ICOMOS, 1999). This study established that majority of the respondents positively perceived the development of *Irefin* Palace for tourism. They agreed that the inherent merits far outweigh its demerits. This finding is in consonance with the submission of Moayadet. al. (2019) whose research showed that the perceived economic impact of heritage tourism is the most important aspect for the host community, and that the perceived negative impacts do not significantly influence their satisfaction. Thus, harnessing the heritage for tourism will be warmly received by the host community. This study also revealed that, the occupants of the palace and the host community are worried that the development of the palace for tourism will alter the normal way of life of the occupants. The finding collaborates the submission of Luis (2019) whose study showed that; the inhabitants of far distance areas have a more positive opinion on tourism development in historic areas than those who live in the historic center. This reinforces the best approach of ensuring total support for tourism via all stakeholders' participation. The study further identified; lack of awareness of the palace, poor state of the palace, absence of tourism supporting facilities, and absence of professional tour guide as factors militating against

patronage of the palace. This result is in line with the submission of Bankole (2013), who also listed these factors among others as factors influencing development of cultural resources for tourism in Nigeria. It also upholds the finding of Sulaimon (2019) who concluded from his study that modern attractions are far more popular than ancient attractions.

Conclusion

This study established that, though recognized and listed as a tourist centre by Oyo State Tourism Board, *Irefin* Palace has not received any attention for preservation and sustainability from any source. Though the main palace still stands strong, the total environment is no longer in good shape and some parts have started dilapidating. The palace receives tourists once in a while and the factors influencing patronage include; lack of awareness, poor state of the palace, absence of tourism supporting facilities, and absence of professional tour guides. The host community is very much aware of both the positive and negative likely effects of heritage tourism development in the destination. Though majority of the respondents had a good perception of heritage tourism, they still have some reservations on the development of *Irefin* Palace for heritage tourism. The magnitude, features, and historical importance of *Irefin* Palace is too attractive to be neglected as a tourist attraction. This site is long overdue for proper action to be taken to preserve it and ensure its sustainability. It is not

an over statement that the history of Ibadan, the largest city in Nigeria is incomplete without mentioning the Palace, hence, the need for stakeholders such as; members of *Irefin* clan, Ibadan Progressive Development Union, Olubadan in Council, Nigeria Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC), and Oyo State Tourism Board to take necessary actions to preserve and position the palace for sustainable heritage tourism.

Recommendations

In line with the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made;

1. Since the host community is ready to support the tourism development effort at the palace, effort should be made without further delay to position the palace for sustainable tourism development by improving the state of the palace, providing tourism supporting facilities, and creating awareness about the destination. This can be done by the state government, private investor or through public - private partnership. Local and international Non - Governmental Organizations who are interested in heritage conservation can also be contacted for support.
2. While developing the palace for tourism, all stakeholders must properly be involved to ensure total support for the project. Members of *Irefin* clan and the host community should be well orientated on the pros and cons of tourism. Employment opportunities should be given to the

host communities for any position that that may have qualified human resources for.

3. Awareness of the palace should be increased through bill board and social media. A festival can be instituted by the collaborative effort of *Irefin* clan, Olubadan in Council (traditional chiefs), and State Tourism Board to further promote the palace.

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