THE CONTRIBUTION OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM TO THE ECONOMY AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA

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Abstract

Religious tourism, otherwise called "Faith Tourism", is a form of tourism, whereby people of faith travel individually or in groups for reasons related to religious or spirituality in their quest for meaning. It could be under pilgrimage, missionary, or leisure purposes. Many of today's most popular tourist destinations are related to ancient places of worship or to the site of apparent miracles. In addition, pilgrim, as part of religious tourism, is the act of moving from one place to another, often traveling through foreign lands; an ordered march of a group of people, usually with religious connotation. Religion, as a tourist, experience, becomes part of the symbolic economy. This paper adopts sociological approach in tackling this work. It also seeks to know how religious tourism has contributed towards the economic development an individual's spiritual growth, communal bonding, and a sense of identity among the diverse religious communities in the country. This article also found valid connections between sacred people, places, and events. This work recommends that Christian and other adherent of other religions should embark on religious tourism to help them fulfill their purposes by praying for salvation of their souls.

Keywords: Contribution, Tourism, Religion, Economy, Spiritual Development, Nigeria.

Introduction

Religion and tourism are related in the sense that both are as old as man himself. Religious tourism is a dynamic and culturally significant facet of Nigeria's tourism industry. The country's rich tapestry of religious diversity, including Christianity, Islam, indigenous religion, and various other belief systems, makes it a compelling destination for those seeking spiritual encounters and cultural immersion. Nigeria's unique blend of religious practices, traditions, and sacred sites offers a remarkable opportunity for pilgrims and tourists to explore the intersection of faith, history, and culture. Nigeria, often referred to as the "Giant of Africa", is home to a diverse population of over 200 million people, with various religious affiliations. The two major religions, Christianity and Islam, coexist harmoniously alongside numerous indigenous belief systems. This nation is also renowned for its teeming mega churches, historic mosques, and plethora of sacred shrines and temple, each with its own captivating stories and traditions. The nation's religious heritage is not only a spiritual beacon but also a socio-cultural treasure trove (Brown, 2013).

This multifaceted landscape of faith has given rise to religious tourism in Nigeria, attracting both domestics and international travelers. Pilgrims embark on journeys to significant religious centers, such as the Holy City of Mecca, Jerusalem, or the synagogue Church of All Nations in Lagos, to fulfill their religious obligations and deepen their faith. In parallel,

tourists interested in religious history and culture explore the ancient cities of Kano and Katsina, where Islamic traditions have been preserved for centuries, or the Niger Delta region, home to indigenous religious practices, which are vital to the nation's cultural heritage (Okoro, & Afemikhe, 2017).

 The explores the multifaceted world of religious tourism in Nigeria, shedding light on the diverse religious attractions that beckon travelers from around the world. It delves into the cultural, economics, and social dimensions of religious tourism and its profound impact on the nation's image and identity. Religious tourism as faith based tourism can be described as a unique type of tourism whereby people travel either individually or in groups to visit different places for pilgrimages, missionary work, convention and conferences in order to satisfy their spiritual yearning. Also, religious tourism is travelling for the purpose of viewing religious monuments, artifacts worships of God and to acquire more spiritual power.

Nevertheless, today, religious tourism with all its different components and types has been able to place itself in the context of global tourism because of its specific structural and functional characteristic, so that its sphere of influence has covered the entire world. According to estimates, it accounts for 26% of the total tourism flow in the world. With a brief overview of history, we can boldly admit that all the countries of the world with a brief overview of history, specially the religious countries with the help of divine verses and the lives of the prophets, to know the world and the conditions of the nations. Travelling and establishing cultural relations through tourism causes human cultural evolution to develop from material and spiritual dimensions. In conclusion, in all the rituals and books of divine religions, one of the important ways of cultural development, guidance and salvation of humans, travel and learning is through God. The great divine religions, especially Islam and Christianity, which originate from a single root, have always helped each other throughout their history through tourism and have provided favorable grounds for innovation and cultural flourishing for progress and expansion. One of the most important factors of these convergences and cultural links can be found in proper tourism policy and planning.

There are various types of religious tourism, including pilgrimage tourism, religious architectural tourism, food and religious medicine tourism, and religious tourism. In different religions, religious tourism has been recommended. For example, in the holy Qur'an, its goals and benefits are mentioned, which include: seeing the works of the past for learning lessons and understanding, giving thanks and knowing God, to know creation and its history, awareness of present and past traditions, which leads to a dynamic economy through commercial prosperity of travel and tourism industry and cultural and scientific exchange of ideas across different civilization.

HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RELIGIOUS SITES IN NIGERIA

Religious sites in Nigeria hold immense historical significance due to the country's rich and diverse religious heritage. Nigeria is home to a wide range of religious traditions, including indigenous religions, Islam, and Christianity. These sites serve as a reflection of the nation's historical, cultural, and religious evolution. Here are some of the historically significant religious sites in Nigeria:

Osun-Osogbo Sacred Groove: Located in Osun State, this sacred grove is dedicated to the Yoruba river goddess Osun. It is a UNESCO World Heritage site and represents the fusion ofYoruba spirituality, art, and culture. The grove is a testament to the indigenous religioustraditions of the Yoruba people.

Ouidah Shrine of Python: Located in the town of Ouidah, Nigeria, this shrine is dedicated to the veneration of pythons and is an important symbol of the indigenous religion in the region. It has historical links to the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Kano Central Mosque: This mosque, located in Kano, is one of the oldest in Nigeria, dating back to the 15th century. It reflects the historical significance of Islam in Northern Nigeria and is a center of Islamic scholarship and culture.

Old Oyo National Park: This site, located in Oyo State, is home to several ancient religious sites and represents the history of the Oyo Empire. It was once a major center of the Yoruba religion and culture.

The Synagogue, Church of All Nations: This popular Christian church, led by Prophet T.B. Joshua, attracts a global following and is known for its faith healing and prophecies. It is a significant religious site in contemporary Nigeria.

Zuma Rock: Located in Niger State. Zuma Rock is a sacred natural formation of great significance to the Gwari people. It is associated with local myths and legends and serves as a place for traditional rituals and ceremonies.

Great Mosque of Katsina: This mosque, located in Katsina State, is a historical and architectural gem, reflecting the Islamic heritage of the region. It is known for its unique mud architecture.

Wesley Methodist Church Calabar: This is also an attractive edifice built by the European in 18[th]century.It also serves as a tourist attraction to the people of Calabar.

These religious sites in Nigeria not only reflect the historical and cultural diversity of the country but also serve as a reminder of the enduring influence of traditional African religions, Islam, and Christianity on the nation's identity and heritage. They are places of worship, pilgrimage, and cultural heritage, contributing to the historical and religious tapestry of Nigeria.

ROLE OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN CULTURAL PRESERVATION
Religious tourism plays a significant role in cultural preservation by promoting the conservation of historical and cultural heritage sites. Pilgrims and tourists visit religious sites around the world, contributing to the preservation and restoration of these places.
1. **Preservation of Religious Sites:** Religious tourism helps in the maintenance and restoration of religious sites. The financial support generated from tourism contributes to the upkeep of these sites. For example, the restoration of the Western Wall in

Jerusalem was funded by donations from pilgrims and tourists visiting the site (Saar, 2010).

2. **Economic Support for Communities:** Religious tourism often brings economic benefits to local communities. This, in turn, incentivizes these communities to preserve their cultural heritage. For example, the town of Lourdes, France, has benefited economically from the pilgrims visiting the Sanctuary of Our Lady of Lourdes, which has led to investments in preserving the site (Floyd. 2009).

3. **Raising Awareness and Education:** Religious tourism provides an opportunity for cultural exchange and education. Tourists often learn about the history, art, and traditions associated with religious sites, raising awareness about the need for preservation. The Vatican Museums in Rome, for instance, not only generate revenue but also educate visitors about Christian art and history (lordanova& Yu, 2013).

4. **Cultural Revitalization**: Religious tourism can lead to the revival of cultural practices and traditions associated with a particular religion. Local communities often take pride in showcasing their traditions to tourists, preserving and passing down cultural heritage. The Kumbh Mela in India is a prime example of a religious festival that attracts tourists and promotes cultural preservation (Singh, 2017). Since European culture has been synonymous with Christianity, African culture as a recipient of that culture bears the influence of weight of Christianity and can reflect its influence on its culture (Nana, 2019:).

RELIGION: A CONTINUOUS THREAT TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA.
Religion is a multifaceted phenomenon which permeates all human activities. Religious beliefs influence many aspects of peoples' daily lives, so it is plausible to argue that religion affects some of humanity's most central endeavours, such as trade, migration, foreign investment and tourism. In tourism, religion could influence the choice of destination and even in chosen destinations restricts tourist movements and participation in certain activities. As a motivating factor for tourism one would wonder how religion stands to threaten the development of tourism in Nigeria.

Religion as a continuous threat to tourism comes from its ability to stimulate certain negative actions in people. Against this background, religion can instigate violence either within a particular faith or put one faith against another. When religious extremists are convinced that their cause is sacred and ordained by God, they are capable of savage and relentless violence. In this case, "violence becomes sacralized as a heroic act and a religious duty" (Wright, 2009). With this spiritual perception of violence and the misinterpretation of certain religious scriptures (Holy war) both in the past and present, this has aggravated religious violence. Considering the very nature of religion and its meaning one would ask, why does religion seem to need violence, and why is a divine mandate for destruction accepted with such certainty by some believers? (Juergensmeyer, 2003). This answer lies in most holy scriptures filled with records of wars, great bloody conflicts between those whom God has elected and those whom God has rejected (Markham and Abu-Rabi, 2002). Thus, allowing oneself to be indoctrinated by the scriptural passages which advocate violence in the expression of faith, fuels religious violence in any destination.

Therefore, as religion motivates tourists to travel and participate in rituals, it also instigates violence. The tourism industry provides tours and essential services to tourists which require peaceful and stable environments and nothing less. The political stabi1ity of a destination can be destroyed by religious clashes leading to social unrest, riots, and possibly wars if not checked, and they can cause significant negative impacts on tourism.

PROMOTING TOURISM IN NIGERIA AMIDST RELIGIOUS CRISIS

Promoting tourism is imperative in Nigeria so as redeem the tarnished destination image of the country. For the success of the image boost to result, the media have a gigantic role to play. Media here refers to the several mediums (Newspaper dailies, Television, Radio, Magazines, international networks etc.) through which information is disseminated. The information disseminated through these sources has great impact on the audience. This supports the assertion that the media use information to exploit the audience emotions either positively or negatively. As Howard (2002) observed, the media is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can be a frightful weapon of violence when it propagates messages of intolerance or disinformation that manipulate public sentiment. On the other, an instrument of conflict resolution, when the information it presents is reliable, respects human rights, and represents diverse views. This dual function of media message centers on how the message was communicated and its appropriateness to given situation determines the audience interpretation or the success of the communication activity. To a large extent in the present global religious uprising, media messages both on air and print are conflict oriented. Subsequently, people are more interested in conflict messages but interpretation arises from the manner of message presentation. Most times, the media portray scenes of violence more than reality, which negatively influences tourist perceptions of Nigeria.

As stated earlier most of the religious crises in Nigeria though incited by rival religions but where intensified by the media. In other words, as constructive as the media can be in disseminating objective information about tourist attractions in Nigeria it is also destructive in projecting and propagating religious violence turning tourists off the country. Against this background, it is no gainsaying that both tourism and terrorism use the media to their advantage. The Boko Haram terrorist sect in Nigeria use the media to reach their target audience employing the instrumentality of fallacious statements and falsified images so as to manipulate v1nerable Nigerians and foreign tourists. Korstanje and Clayton (2012) agreed that tourism and terrorism rely on media creation and manipulation of beliefs and perceptions. While Nigeria's tourism industry uses the media to advertise and lure tourist(s) to visit the numerous unique natural and cultural attractions in the country including tourism infrastructures and superstructures designed to satisfy tastes and classes of tourist, the Boko Haram sect and other religious extremists use the same media platform to terrify and demoralize tourists from visiting certain destinations in Nigeria because of their intended acts of violence aimed at sowing panic and fear.

ECONOMIC IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM IN NIGERIA

Religious tourism has a significant economic impact in Nigeria, as the country is home to a diverse range of religious practices, with Islam and Christianity being the two dominant faiths. These religious traditions attract both domestic and international tourists who visit religious sites, attend religious events, and engage in various religious activities.

Tourist Arrivals: Nigeria sees a substantial number of tourists coming for religious purposes, including pilgrimages, conventions, and celebrations. Notable sites like the Holy Ghost Cathedral in Enugu, the National Mosque in Abuja, and the Synagogue Church of All Nations in Lagos, among many others, attract a large number of visitors (Okoro, &Afemikhe, 2017).

Revenue Generation: Religious tourism generates substantial revenue for Nigeria. Tourists spend money on accommodation, transportation, food, and other goods and services during their visits. This revenue benefits various sectors of the economy, including hotels, restaurants, and transportation services.

Job Creation: The tourism sector, including religious tourism, provides employment opportunities for a significant number of Nigerians. Jobs are created in hospitality, transportation, tour guiding, and related industries, thereby contributing to the reduction of unemployment in the country.

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs): Many small businesses benefit from religious tourism. Local vendors, souvenir shops, and street Ibod stalls thrive due to the influx of tourists. These small and medium enterprises play a vital role in the economic ecosystem.

Government Revenue: The government benefits from religious tourism through taxes and fees imposed on the industry. This revenue can be reinvested in infrastructure, healthcare, education, and other essential public services.

Promotion of Culture and Heritage: Religious tourism often involves visits to historical and cultural sites. This helps preserve and promote Nigeria's rich cultural and historical heritage, making it more attractive for tourists.

Foreign Exchange Earnings: International religious tourists bring foreign currency into the country, contributing to Nigeria's foreign exchange reserves.

Social and Community Development: Religious tourism can lead to community development, with some tourists participating in charitable activities and contributing to local communities through donations and philanthropic efforts.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN DEVELOPING RELIGIOUS TOURISM

Developing religious tourism presents both challenges and opportunities, which can significantly impact local economies and communities. It's important to note that the specifics of these challenges and opportunities can vary widely based on the religious sites in question, the cultural context, and the region.

❖ **Challenges:**

Cultural Sensitivity: Developing religious tourism often involves catering to visitLrs from diverse cultural backgrounds. Ensuring that tourism activities and infrastructure respect the religious and cultural values of the destination is crucial. For instance, sites like Mecca and Jerusalem have strict religious and cultural requirements that must be observed (Timothy, 2009).

Overcrowding and Environmental Impact: Popular religious destinations can suffer from overcrowding, leading to environmental degradation, strain on local resources, and damage to sacred sites. For example, the temples of Angkor Wat in Cambodia have faced these challenges (UNESCO, 2007).

Economic Inequality: While religious tourism can generate revenue, the economic benefits may not always reach local communities, exacerbating income inequality. This can be seen in regions where religious tourism is concentrated, such as the Vatican City.

❖ **Opportunities:**

Economic Boost: Religious tourism has the potential to generate significant revenue for host regions through accommodations, food services, and souvenir sales. This influx of income can stimulate economic growth and create job opportunities for local communities (Ali, 2018).

Preservation and Restoration: Increased tourism can lead to the preservation and restoration of religious sites and historical landmarks. This can be observed in places like Lumbini, Nepal, the birthplace of Buddha, where international attention has prompted restoration efforts.

Interfaith and Cultural Exchange: Religious tourism can promote interfaith and cultural exchange. Visitors can gain a deeper understanding of diverse religious traditions and foster tolerance and cooperation among different religious communities.

The challenges and opportunities in developing religious tourism are multifaceted and depend on various factors. To address these challenges and maximize opportunities, it is essential for destination managers and policymakers to develop strategies that balance economic growth with cultural preservation and sustainability.

PILGRIMAGE AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Pilgrimage plays a significant role in the spiritual and cultural life of many people in Nigeria. Nigeria isa religiously diverse country with a mix of Christianity, Islam, and various indigenous African religions. Pilgrimage in Nigeria often takes place within the context of these religions and is seen as a means of deepening ones faith and spiritual development.

Christian Pilgrimage: Nigeria has a large Christian population, and pilgrimage is an important aspect of Christian faith. Nigerian Christians often embark on pilgrimages to holy sites both within the country and abroad. One of the most common destinations for Nigerian Christians is Jerusalem, where they visit biblical sites like the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Western Wall, and the Garden of Gethsemane. These pilgrimages offer believers the opportunity to walk in the footsteps of Jesus and deepen their understanding of the Bible. The Nigerian government supports Christian pilgrimage by subsidizing the cost for pilgrims (Euba, 2003). Pilgrim tourism which involves pilgrims to ancient holy places or religions cites, such as church, mosques, shrine etc. The annual pilgrims to some Catholics to Rome, the Mulslims to Meccas, the Christians to Jerusalem are special form of tourism (Nana, 2023: 242).

Islamic Pilgrimage: Islam is the second-largest religion in Nigeria, and many Nigerian Muslims participate in the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca, which is one of the Five Pillars of Islam. The Hajj isa mandatory religious duty for Muslims that must be carried out at least once in

their lifetime if they are physically and financially able. This pilgrimage is a profound spiritual experience for Nigerian Muslims, and it involves rituals such as the circumambulation of the Kaaba, standing on the plain of Arafat, and symbolic stoning of the Devil.

Indigenous Religions: Nigeria is also home to a variety of indigenous African religions, each with its own practices and beliefs. While indigenous religious traditions do not have the same structured pilgrimages as Christianity and Islam, there are often sacred sites and shrines that are considered spiritually significant. People from different ethnic groups in Nigeria may undertake journeys to these places to seek guidance, blessings, or healing from traditional priests and spirits (Umar, 2013).

Spiritual Growth and Development: Pilgrimage in Nigeria, as in many other parts of the world, is seen as a means of spiritual growth and development. Pilgrims hope to deepen their connection with the divine, seek forgiveness, and gain a deeper understanding of their faith. Thephysical and emotional challenges of the pilgrimage journey are often believed to purify the soul and strengthen one's faith.

Community and Cultural Significance: Pilgrimage is not just an individual spiritual journey; it also has cultural and community significance. Pilgrims often travel in groups, and tile shared experience fosters a sense of community and belonging. Additionally, the economic impact of pilgrimage is significant, as it can boost local economies, especially in areas with religious significance.

Challenges and Controversies: Nigerian pilgrimage has faced challenges, including Issues of corruption and mismanagement in the organization of pilgrimages, disputes over access to holy sites, and security concerns. These challenges have sometimes resulted in controversies and calls for reform.

Pilgrimage in Nigeria is a diverse and multifaceted phenomenon that encompasses various religious traditions. It serves as a means of deepening ones faith, strengthening spiritual development, and fostering community ties. It is an essential aspect of religious and cultural life in the country, with both positive and negative aspects that continue to shape the experience of Nigerian pilgrims.

THE INTERSECTION OF FAITH AND TOURISM IN NIGERIA

The intersection of faith and tourism in Nigeria is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that reflects the country's rich religious diversity and cultural heritage.

Religious Tourism: Nigeria is known for its significant Christian and Muslim populations. Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Muslim Hajj to Mecca are prominent examples ofreligious tourism. Nigerian Christians often embark on pilgrimages to holy sites, such asJerusalem and Bethlehem, while Nigerian Muslims participate in the annual Hajj pilgrimage.These pilgrimages are facilitated by the National Christian Pilgrims Commission and theNational Hajj Commission, respectively (National Hajj Commission of Nigeria, 2021; NationalChristian Pilgrims Commission, 2021).

Cultural Heritage and Sacred Sites: Nigeria is home to various indigenous religions, and many sacred sites are significant both culturally and spiritually. Tourists and researchers interested in the cultural heritage of Nigeria often visit places like the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, to explore the intersections of spirituality and culture (JNESCO, 2005).

Religious Festivals: Nigeria hosts a plethora of religious festivals that attract tourists. The annual Osun-Osogbo Festival in Osogbo, Osun State, is a prime example. It celebrates the river goddess Osun and draws visitors from around the world. Similarly, the Durbar Festival in the northern part of Nigeria showcases Islamic culture and traditions, including colorful parades and equestrian displays (Oshodi, 2019; Raimi, 2019).

Faith-Based Tourism: Faith-based tourism, often organized by religious organizations, plays a significant role in Nigeria's tourism industry. For instance, Christian organization arranges religious retreats, conventions, and conferences that attract attendees from various pats o the country and beyond (Idowu, 2017).

Economic Impact: The intersection of faith and tourism also has econon3ic implications. Pilgrimage and religious tourism contribute significantly to Nigeria's economy. These activities generate revenue for airlines, hotels, local businesses, and transportation services (Udom, 2018).

Security Concerns: Security is a major concern, especially for international pilgrims and tourists. Nigeria has faced security challenges, such as Boko Haram insurgency and religious-based violence, which have raised safety concerns for travelers (Usman, 2017).

Promotion and Development: The Nigerian government, through its various agencies, has been actively promoting religious tourism and faith-based events, recognizing their importance in cultural preservation and revenue generation (National Institute for Cultural Orientation, 2019). The intersection of faith and tourism in Nigeria is a rich and complex area ofstudy. It encompasses religious pilgrimages, cultural heritage, festivals, and the economic impact of faith-based tourism. While it offers significant opportunities for cultural preservation and economic growth, it also faces challenges related to management, security, and controversies in religious practices and site access.

SUSTAINABLE TOURISM PRACTICES AT RELIGIOUS SITES IN NIGERIA
Sustainable tourism practices at religious sites in Nigeria are essential to preserve these cultural and historical treasures while promoting responsible and eco-friendly tourism.

Community Involvement and Empowerment: Engage local communities in the management and benefits of religious sites. This approach helps ensure that the economic and social advantages of tourism are shared among local residents (Folarin, &Mbada, 2017).

Education and Interpretation: Create visitor centers and educational programs to promote understanding and respect for the cultural and religious significance of the sites (Ajayi, &Fagbola, 2018).

Visitor Management and Capacity Control: Establish visitor quotas and implement effective crowd management strategies to prevent over-tourism and its negative impacts on religious sites (Adebayo, &Fasona, 2019).

Waste Management and Environmental Protection: Develop waste management systems and promote eco-friendly practices to ensure religious sites remain clean and environmentally sustainable. (Okoli, &Adindu, 2017).

Respect for Cultural Norms and Practices: Encourage tourists to respect local customs, dress codes, and religious rituals when visiting these sites to minimize cultural clashes. (lJwazie, &Ezeudu, 2018).

Infrastructure Development: Invest in appropriate infrastructure, such as r ds and accommodations, to facilitate access and enhance the visitor experience while minimizing negative environmental impacts. (Mohammed, &Ogungbile, 2020).

Conclusion

The place of tourism in religions development in Nigeria is a multifaceted and dynamic phenomenon that has the potential to significantly impact the spiritual, cultural, and economic aspects of the nation. Nigeria, with its rich religious diversity, has been blessed with a multitude of sacred sites, pilgrimage destinations, and cultural heritage that attract both domestic and international tourists. This convergence of faith and tourism not only strengthens the religious beliefs of the people but also fosters interfaith tolerance and understanding.

Religious tourism in Nigeria has contributed to the development of infrastructure, job creation, and economic growth in various regions, thereby enhancing the overall quality of life for local communities. Additionally, it has helped to preserve and promote the country cultural and historical heritage, ensuring that future generations have access to their religious and cultural traditions.

However, challenges exist, including the need for sustainable tourism practices That protect the environment and respect the sanctity of these religious sites. Balancing economic interests with the preservation of sacred spaces is a crucial task for policymakers and local communities. Moreover, ensuring that the benefits of religious tourism are equitably distributed among all segments of society is essential for achieving inclusive development. The place of tourism in religious development in Nigeria is a testament to the country's unique and diverse religious tapestry. While it offers significant economic opportunities and cultural preservation, it also calls for responsible and sustainable management to ensure that the benefits are reaped by all, and the sanctity of these religious sites is preserved for future generations.

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