

ASSESSMENT OF ECOTOURISM DESTINATIONS IN SELECTED STATES OF SOUTH EASTERN NIGERIA

¹Okeke, A.N., ²Ijeomah, H.M. and ²Odunlami, S.S.

¹Department of Forestry and Wildlife Technology, Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria. E-mail: angela.okeke503@gmail.com; Phone: +23408060690465

²Department of Forestry and Wildlife Management, University of Port Harcourt, P.M.B.5323 Choba, Rivers State, Nigeria. E-mail: henry.ijeomah@uniport.edu.ng; Phone: +2348060344776

Abstract

Assessment of selected ecotourism destinations in south eastern Nigeria was carried out to identify the attractions and assess the social, economic, and cultural significance of these destinations. Three sets of structured questionnaires (A, B and C) were used for data collection. The first set of questionnaire 'A' was administered to 50% of the total number of households in Agulu/Nanka (51), Ogbunike (42), Nekede (48), Dikenafai (54), Oferekpe (40) and Okposi (45 communities), making a total of 280 household respondents. The second set of questionnaire 'B' was administered on 50 purposively selected tourists in each tourism site. The third set 'C' was administered on all (100%) the staff in each destination. Data collected were subjected to simple descriptive analysis. Results showed that the main attraction at Agulu/Nanka destination is erosion (88.23%) and the beach (74.50%). The attractions in other destinations were caves (95.23%) and Ogba day (88.10%) at Ogbunike; wild animal (87.05%) and monuments (77.08%) at Nekede zoo; waterfall (91.04%) and steps (87.67%) at Urashi river source; waterfall (100%) and water (85%) at Oferekpe and salt lake (97.77%) and salt (71.11%) at Okposi destinations. With exception of Agulu/Nanka and Nekede zoo households from other destinations accepted that the sites are respectively of economic significance to the communities. However, in Agulu/Nanka erosion site, white sand/building sand (37.25%), spring water (25.49%) and none timber forest products (23.53%) are sold to generate income. At Ogbunike caves, the community gets revenue (52.38%) from the tourists and formal employment (33.33%) and informal employment especially during Ogba day. The channel of economic benefit at Nekede zoo is employment (100.00%). At Oferekpe, revenue (77.50%) and employment (22.50%) while salt-selling (48.44%) and employment (15.56%) are the economic benefits at Okposi community. All the household respondents in the six study areas accepted that the destination has helped in making their communities popular. Households from Ogbunike, Dikenafai and Okposi accepted that the destinations have cultural link with the host communities. With exception of Nekede and Agulu/Nanka households from the other destinations admitted that the eco-destinations have helped in conservation of culture through cultural education as evident in Okposi Salt Lake and Ogbunike caves with the associated festivals. Also, households in the destinations accepted that further development of these sites will not destroy the culture of host community while Oferekpe and Okposi household rejected. All the tourists (100%) at Ogbunike caves, and majority at Nekede zoo (82%) and Oferekpe waterfall (86%) were satisfied unlike in others.

Keywords: Tourist attractions, ecotourism, conservation, development, culture

Introduction

There is no part of the world without attractive virtues and natural heritage (Ijeomah *et al.*, 2015). However, the level of endowment with these attractive virtues differs with region. The attractive virtues in an area may be well known yet not properly packaged to be utilized, and in many localities the attractions could be intact but unknown to potential users and therefore less valued by the host communities; in some cases, attractive virtues may have been destroyed. Ijeomah *et al.* (2016) emphasized that endowment with natural attractive features is one of the important indicators of a successful development of ecotourism, as simulation of nature - based tourism potentials can significantly make experience unnatural. There is therefore an urgent need to discover and develop attractive natural sites or eco-destination in every region (Nchor and Asuk, 2018). Identification of tourism products in each environment and the development of the sites will attract both domestic and foreign tourists who have been in serious need of recreation in eco-

destinations for vivid experience (Ezenekwe, 2010). Increase in tourist visitation will add value to local products, publicize the destination host communities, create employment opportunities, stimulate economic empowerment and rural development especially when properly planned and implemented as tourism is an invisible trade (Alarape *et al*, 2015). The world has become a global village, and tourism one of the largest markets that can sell any kind of product irrespective of where they are kept. Tourism has affected global value system. The world has become highly commoditized. Cultures are presently being marketed. Live animals, forests, rocks, waterfalls, beaches, existing shrines, caves and sacred forests now have monetary values and estimated revenues to be generated on daily basis (Ijeomah and Alao, 2007). Ecotourism has become the fastest growing segment of tourism as pristine environments and associated cultures have become scarce commodities at global level due to consistent urbanization and high rate of deforestation (Magigi and Ramadhani, 2013; Southwick, 2015). Tourists prefer travelling to pristine areas to interact with nature - view and learn new things about nature, have new experiences while viewing different species of animals in their habitat including rare, endangered, endemic and abundant species; birds of different calls and eye - catching plumage colours; unique land forms; amazing waterfalls of different heights and velocity of flow; unique lakes of different colours and sizes; wondrous springs of different temperatures; beaches of different sizes and spectacular sand colours; and fascinating ocean waves of different thrusts (Ijeomah, 2017, Ijeomah and Eniang, 2018, Ijeomah, 2022).

Many tourists are seriously searching for where to spend money and have unique experience, thus making visitation to eco-destinations a major source of revenue generation and economic empowerment. The use of ecotourism as a tool for poverty alleviation at both regional and national level has brought about protection of natural environments including national parks by many countries and host communities (Anggraini and Gunawan, 2021; Meseret, 2021; Wunder, 1999). This is because various benefits can only be generated from a destination when the tourism products there can satisfy tourists craving for vivid experience, as tourists are only willing to pay for what can satisfy their interests (Ijeomah and Ayodele, 2009). It is because of the tremendously increasing monetary value of ecotourism attractions that communities with less attractive natural potentials have started attempting to simulate natural environments, and many with pristine forests are seriously trying to protect them as ecotourism is perceived as an alternative form of the newest opportunities for income generation without destroying the environment (Butler, 2012; Manu, 2012 cited in Meseret, 2021).

Ecotourism in South Eastern Nigeria is a growing segment of tourism, which will credit the market within the country, provide local economic benefits and promote conservation of natural resources (Ijeomah *et al.*, 2018; Adetola, 2017). Ekechukwu, (2006) stated that some of Nigeria's ecotourism sites have suffered obvious neglect. However, the attractions in respective eco-destinations in south eastern Nigeria are unknown together with the state of development, perceived recreational value, and the cultural, social, economic and conservation significance to the host communities. Studies have shown that destinations without economic, social, cultural, spiritual, environmental and developmental significance to host communities could hardly attract conservation support of the communities because of increasing land scarcity and serious need for survival by many households (Wickramasinghe, 2014; Ciftcioglu, 2021). It is therefore imperative to evaluate the potentials and significance of the tourism sites in eastern Nigeria. This study therefore assesses the tourism

potentials together with the economic, social and cultural relevance of selected ecotourism destinations in eastern Nigeria.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was carried out in six (6) different eco-tourist sites within three states in south eastern Nigeria. These sites are: Agulu/Nanka erosion site and Ogbunike caves in Anambra state, Nekede zoological garden and Urashi river source in Imo state, Oferekpe water fall and Okposi Salt Lake in Ebonyi state. Agulu/Nanka erosion site cuts across Aniocha and Orumba North local government area of Anambra state on latitude 6.1100°N and longitude 7.0222° E. Ogbunike caves is in Oyi Local Government Area located along old Enugu-Onitsha express road and lies on latitude 6.1859° N and longitude 6.9061°E. Nekede zoological garden is in Owerri west local government area located on latitude 5.2559°N and longitude 7.0160°E, while Urashi river source of Dikenafai in Ideator south local government area lies on latitude 5.8089°N and longitude 7.0731°E. Oferekpe water fall in Ikwo local government area lies on latitude 6.4106°N and longitude 7.2147°E while Okposi Salt Lake in Ohaozara local government area is located on latitude 6.0472°N and longitude 7.7475°E (Figure 1).

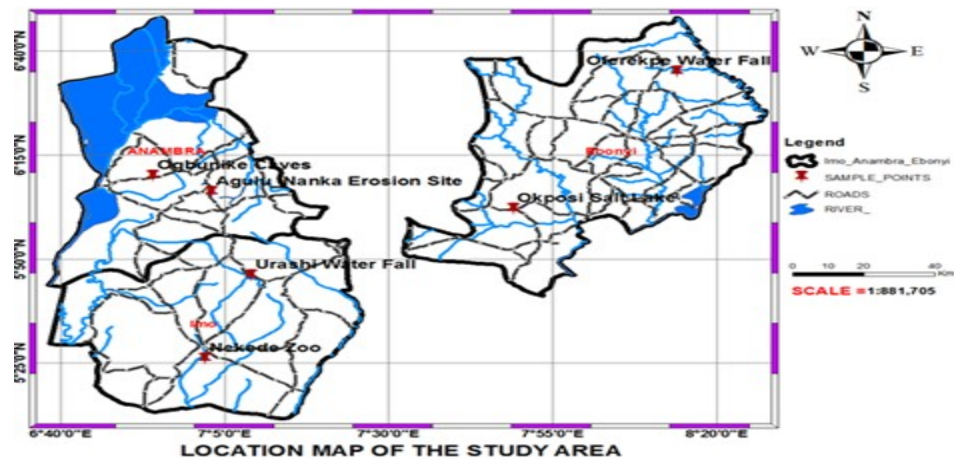


Figure 1: Map of eastern Nigeria showing location of the study area

Data Collection and Analysis

Purposive sampling technique was used to select six ecotourism destinations from south eastern Nigeria. Agulu/Nanka erosion and Ogbunike caves were selected from Anambra state, Nekede zoo and Urashi river source of Dikenafai from Imo state while Oferekpe waterfall and Okposi Salt Lake were selected from Ebonyi state. Data for the study were collected through the use of three sets of structured questionnaires administered on the household, staffs and tourists who visited selected sites. A four-point Likert scale was used for data collection. The numbers of households in each identified community was estimated (based on the average family size of 5-10) as was done by Onuchukwu and Ijeomah (2020) for southern Nigeria. The host community of each destination was identified. Fifty percent (50%) of household size in each community was sampled, 50 tourists from each destination was sampled while all (100%) the staff in each destination was considered for data collection. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics in the form of frequency of counts, mean and percentages. Means equal or greater than 2.5 ($\bar{X} \geq 2.5$) are considered substantial and therefore accepted.

Results

Tourist Attractions in the Destinations

Results on tourist attractions in the six destinations are presented in table 1, and Plates 1-5. The main attractions at Agulu/Nanka erosion site are the gullies (Plate 1) created by erosion (88.23%), coloured soil (78.43%) and beach (74.50%). The significant attractions in Ogbunike caves are caves (95.23%) (Plate 2), wild animals (71.43%) and festivals (71.43%). In the case of Nekede zoo the attractions cherished by tourists include wild animals (87.05%), monuments (77.08%) and museum (60.42%). In the case of Oferekpe waterfall the very obvious attractions are waterfall (100%) (Plate 3), water (85.00%) and forest vegetation (77.05%). Attractions at Urashi river source were identified as waterfall (91.04%), valley (87.67%) and forest vegetation (81.25%). Salt Lake (97.77%), salt (71.11%) and forest vegetation (40.00%) are the major attractions at Okposi Salt Lake. Plate 4 shows mud pot used in drawing salt water and ancient kitchen where salt water is cooked while plate 5 shows locally produced salt.

Table 1: List of tourists' attractions in the research destinations

Community	Tourist Attractions	Frequency	Percentage
Aglu/Nanka	Erosion	45	88.23
	Different layers of soil	40	78.43
	Water	38	74.50
	Forest vegetation	30	58.82
	Building sand	28	54.90
	Hills	24	47.06
	Beach	19	37.26
	Wild animals	15	29.41
	Festival	10	19.60
	Fish	05	09.80
	Film occasion	04	07.84
Ogbunike caves	Caves	40	95.23
	Ogba day	37	88.10
	Forest vegetation	34	80.95
	Masquerade	30	71.43
	Festivals	30	71.43
	Wild animals	28	66.66
	Trade	22	52.38
	Film occasions	18	40.48
Nekede zoo	Sacrifice to gods	14	33.33
	Marriage occasions	12	28.57
	Wild animals	42	87.05
	Monuments	37	77.08
	Museum	29	60.42
Dikenafai	Forest vegetation	22	45.83
	Waterfall	47	91.04
	Valley	40	87.67
	Steps	44	83.33
	Forest vegetation	39	81.25
	Sacrifice to gods	18	37.05
Ancient festivals	10	20.83	

Oferekpe	Waterfall	40	100.00
	Water	34	85.00
	Forest vegetation	31	77.05
	Beach	30	75.00
	Fishing	22	55.00
	Film occasion	17	42.05
	Festivals	13	32.00
	Wild animals	10	25.00
Okposi	Salt Lake	44	97.77
	Salt	32	71.11
	Forest vegetation	18	40.00
	Film occasion	14	39.11
	Sacrifice to gods	13	37.05
	Wild animals	12	27.77
	Fishing	04	08.88



Plate 1a: Agulu/Nanka erosion site Source: Field work, 2020



Plate 1b: Nanka Erosion Site Source: Field work, 2020



Plate 1c: Cutting of road by erosion Source: Field work, 2020

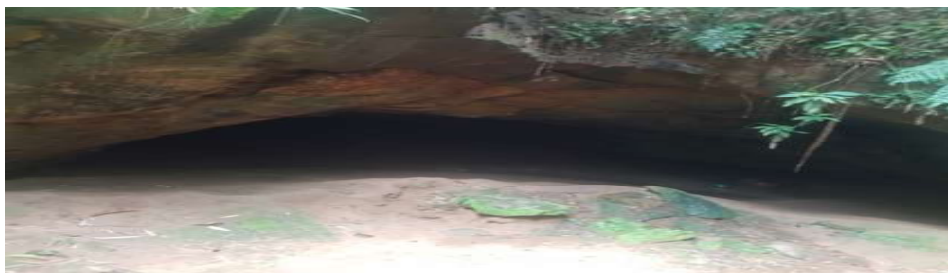


Plate 2: Ogbunike cave



Plate 3: Oferekpe waterfall flowing at the base Source: Field work, 2021



Plate 4: Mud Pot used in drawing salt water and ancient kitchen where salt water is cooked Source: Field work, 2021



Plate 5: Salt water on the fire and salt produced from Okposi Salt Lake Source: Field work, 2021

Results on social, economic and cultural significance of the sites are presented in Tables 2,3 and 4. Table 2 shows that all the household respondents in the six study areas accepted that the destination has helped in making their communities popular. Agulu/Nanka, Nekede and Dikenafai rejected that the site is not contributing towards their community development while Ogbunike, Oferekpe and Okposi accepted that the tourist sites are contributing towards the development of their communities. With exceptions of households in Agulu/Nanka (because of erosion problem) other communities accepted that the sites in their community can further be developed.

Table 3 shows the economic significance of the sites. Ogbunike, Dikenafai and Okposi accepted that the sites were respectively contributing positively to the development of their communities while Agulu/Nanka, Nekede and Oferekpe rejected. They all accepted that tourists have been visiting the sites. With exception of Agulu/Nanka and Nekede zoo households from other destinations accepted that the sites are respectively of economic significance to the communities. However, in Agulu/Nanka erosion site, white sand/building sand (37.25%), spring water (25.49%) inside the erosion gully and None timber forest products (23.53%) are sold to generate income. At Ogbunike caves, the community gets revenue (52.38%) from the tourists and formal employment (33.33%) and informal employment especially during Ogba day. The only channel of economic

benefit at Nekede zoo is employment (100.00%). At Oferekpe, revenue (77.50%) and employment (22.50%) while salt-selling (48.44%) and employment (15.56%) are the economic benefits Okposi community derive from the tourism site.

Table 4 shows the cultural significant of the sites. Ogbunike, Dikenafai and Okposi accepted that the culture of the community is connected to their destinations while Agulu/Nanka, Nekede and Oferekpe household said that there is no connection between the culture of the community and their tourist destinations. Agulu/Nanka and Nekede household rejected that the destinations respectively help in preserving the culture of the community while household respondents in Ogbunike, Dikenafai, Oferekpe and Okposi accepted that their destinations help in preserving the culture of their communities. Apart from household respondents in Agulu/Nanka communities others accepted that the tourism sites provide a place for cultural education except the household of that rejected. Also, households in the destinations accepted that further development of this site will not destroy the culture of host community while Agulu/Nanka, Oferekpe and Okposi household rejected.

Table 2: Social significance of the sites as indicated by household

Parameter	SA	A	D	SD	Total No.	Total score	Mean	Remark
This destination has helped in making this community popular								
Agulu/Nanka	26(50.98)	21(41.18)	04(7.84)	0(0)	51	175	3.43	Accepted
Ogbunike	28(66.67)	14(33.33)	0(0)	0(0)	42	154	3.67	Accepted
Nekede	27(56.25)	18(37.50)	2(4.17)	1(2.8)	48	167	3.48	Accepted
Dikenafai	32(59.26)	20(37.4)	2(3.70)	0(0)	54	192	3.56	Accepted
Oferekpe	21(52.50)	19(47.50)	0(0)	0(0)	40	141	3.53	Accepted
Okposi	23(51.11)	22(48.89)	0(0)	0(0)	45	158	3.51	Accepted
This tourist site is contributing towards the development of this community								
Agulu/Nanka	3(5.88)	5(9.80)	17(33.33)	26(50.98)	51	87	1.71	Rejected
Ogbunike	19(45.24)	23(54.76)	0(0)	0(0)	42	145	3.45	Accepted
Nekede	1(2.8)	5(10.42)	22(45.80)	20(41.67)	48	83	1.73	Rejected
Dikenafai	0(0)	6(11.11)	21(38.89)	27(50)	54	87	1.61	Rejected
Oferekpe	18(45)	19(47.50)	3(7.50)	0(0)	40	135	3.38	Accepted
Okposi	20(44.44)	24(53.33)	1(2.22)	0(0)	45	154	3.42	Accepted
This site can further be developed								
Agulu/Nanka	7(13.73)	5(45.10)	23(45.10)	16(31.37)	51	105	2.06	Rejected
Ogbunike	22(52.38)	20(47.62)	0(0)	0(0)	42	148	3.52	Accepted
Nekede	25(52.08)	21(43.75)	2(4.17)	0(0)	48	167	3.47	Accepted
Dikenafai	30(55.56)	17(31.48)	6(11.11)	1(1.85)	54	184	3.41	Accepted
Oferekpe	15(37.50)	17(42.50)	5(12.50)	3(7.50)	40	124	3.1	Accepted
Okposi	10(22.22)	12(26.67)	18(40.0)	5(11.11)	45	117	2.6	Accepted

Note: SA= Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD =Strongly Disagree

Table 3: Economic significance of the sites as indicated by households

Parameter	SA	A	D	SD	Total No.	Total Score	Mean	Remark
The tourism site is economically benefitting this community								
Agulu/Nanka	1(1.96)	2(3.92)	25(49.2)	23(45.10)	51	83	1.63	Rejected
Ogbunike	19(45.24)	12(28.57)	11(26.19)	0(0)	42	134	3.19	Accepted
Nekede	0(0)	0(0)	18(37.50)	30(62.50)	48	66	1.38	Rejected
Dikenafai	24(44.44)	19(35.19)	7(12.96)	4(7.41)	54	171	3.17	Accepted
Oferekpe	17(42.50)	20(50)	2(5)	1(2.50)	40	133	3.33	Accepted
Okposi	18(40)	19(42.22)	5(11.11)	3(6.67)	45	142	3.16	Accepted
Tourists have been visiting this site								
Agulu/Nanka	10(19.61)	6(11.76)	19(37.25)	16(31.37)	51	112	2.50	Accepted
Ogunike	14(33.33)	11(26.19)	7(16.57)	10(23.81)	42	113	2.69	Accepted
Nekede	15(31.25)	25(52.8)	3(6.25)	5(10.42)	48	146	3.04	Accepted
Dikenafai	16(29.62)	18(33.33)	13(24.7)	7(12.96)	54	151	2.80	Accepted
Oferekpe	1(2.50)	3(47.50)	19(47.50)	17(42.50)	40	48	2.70	Accepted
Okposi	1(2.22)	0(0)	22(48.89)	22(48.89)	45	67	2.59	Accepted

Note: SA= Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD =Strongly Disagree; Decision rule: Accept when the value of mean is > 2.5

Table 4: Cultural Significance of the Sites as indicated by Households

Parameter	SA	A	D	SD	Total No	Total Score	Mean	Remark
The culture of the people is connected to this site								
Agulu/Nanka	3(5.88)	11(21.57)	20(39.22)	17(33.33)	51	112	2.20	Rejected
Ogbunike	19(45.23)	11(26.19)	7(16.67)	5(11.90)	42	128	3.05	Accepted
Nekede	0(0)	6(12.50)	20(41.67)	22(45.83)	48	80	1.67	Rejected
Dikenafai	18(33.33)	22(40.74)	9(16.67)	5(9.26)	54	161	2.98	Accepted
Oferekpe	3(7.50)	13(32.50)	10(25)	14(35)	40	88	2.2	Rejected
Okposi	16(35.56)	13(28.89)	9(20)	7(15.56)	45	128	2.84	Accepted
This site help in preserving the culture of host community								
Agulu/Nanka	1(1.96)	2(3.92)	25(49.2)	23(45.10)	51	83	1.63	Rejected
Ogbunike	19(45.24)	12(28.57)	11(26.19)	0(0)	42	134	3.19	Accepted
Nekede	0(0)	0(0)	18(37.50)	30(62.50)	48	66	1.38	Rejected
Dikenafai	24(44.44)	19(35.19)	7(12.96)	4(7.41)	54	171	3.17	Accepted
Oferekpe	17(42.50)	20(50)	2(5)	1(2.50)	40	133	3.33	Accepted
Okposi	18(40)	19(42.22)	5(11.11)	3(6.67)	45	142	3.16	Accepted
This attraction site provides a place for cultural education								
Agulu/Nanka	4(7.84)	7(13.73)	21(41.18)	19(37.25)	51	98	1.92	Rejected
Ogbunike	18(42.86)	15(35.71)	6(14.29)	3(7.14)	42	132	3.14	Accepted
Nekede	25(52.8)	23(47.92)	0(0)	0(0)	48	169	3.52	Accepted
Dikenafai	33(61.11)	18(33.33)	3(5.56)	0(0)	54	192	3.56	Accepted
Oferekpe	19(47.50)	10(25)	7(17.50)	4(10)	40	124	3.1	Accepted
Okposi	23(51.11)	21(46.67)	1(2.22)	0(0)	45	157	3.49	Accepted
Further development of this site will not destroy the culture of host community								
Agulu/Nanka	10(19.61)	6(11.76)	19(37.25)	16(31.37)	51	112	2.10	Rejected
Ogunike	14(33.33)	11(26.19)	7(16.57)	10(23.81)	42	113	2.69	Accepted
Nekede	15(31.25)	25(52.8)	3(6.25)	5(10.42)	48	146	3.04	Accepted
Dikenafai	16(29.62)	18(33.33)	13(24.7)	7(12.96}	54	151	2.80	Accepted
Oferekpe	1(2.50)	3(47.50)	19(47.50)	17(42.50)	40	48	1.7	Rejected
Okposi	1(2.22)	0(0)	22(48.89)	22(48.89)	45	67	1.49	Rejected

Note: SA= Strongly Agree, A = Agree, D = Disagree, SD =Strongly Disagree; **Decision rule:** Accept when the value of mean is > 2.5

Results on types of economic benefits derived by host communities from the destinations, cultural festivals celebrated at research destinations and other activities people participated in eco-destinations are presented in Tables 5-7. Table 5 shows that revenues generation was the main way communities’ benefit from most of the selected tourism sites. Agulu/Nanka communities benefited from sand used in building (31.34%) among other benefits. The major benefits at Ogbunike caves is employment (100%); while at Okposi Salt Lake salt selling (58.46%) is the main source of economic benefit to the community. Table 6 shows the cultural festivals celebrated in the sites. Agulu/Nanka community celebrates ‘Ofiaolu’ (60.78%) in the site, which means the celebration to know when a man is matured enough to join his age grade. Ogbunike community celebrates ‘Ogba day’ (30.95%) at the cave’s surrounding. ‘Ogba day’ day is an annual celebration in honour of the caves. ‘Odu’ festival (61.11%) used to be celebrated at Urashi river source, where people gather to do trade by bata. The ‘Mowo’ festival (75.00%) at Oferekpe was a fishing competition and ‘Aju’ (42.22%) which is a masquerade festival was celebrated at Okposi Salt Lake. Table 7 shows other

activities people participate in the destinations. One of the activities at Agulu/Nanka erosion site is hunting (33.33%). Hunting of birds (32.35%), relaxation (46.15%), fetching of water (28.79%), fishing (51.11%) and salt-making (27.38%) are the activities carried out at Ogbunike caves, Nekede zoo, Urashi river source, Oferekpe waterfall and Okposi Salt Lake respectively.

Table 5: Types of Economic Benefits Derived By Host Communities from the Destinations

Destinations	Economic Benefits	Frequency	Percentage
Agulu/Nanka	Building sand	19	37.25
	Water	13	25.49
	Cashew fruits	12	23.53
	NTFPs	07	13.73
Ogbunike caves	Revenue	22	52.38
	Employment	14	33.33
	Hawkers	06	14.29
Nekede zoo	Employment	48	100.00
Dikenafai	Revenue	44	81.48
	Bamboo selling	10	18.52
Oferekpe	Revenue	31	77.50
	Employment	09	22.50
Okposi	Salt selling	38	48.44
	Employment	07	15.56

Table 6: Cultural Festivals Celebrated At the Destinations as Indicated By Households'

Respondents

Destination	Cultural Festival	Frequency	Percentage
Agulu/Nanka erosion	Afiaolu	31	60.78
	Ijele masquerade	12	23.53
	Ebe	08	15.67
Ogbunike caves	Ogba day	13	30.95
	Onwaasato	10	23.81
	Azu	09	21.43
	Ofala	07	16.67
	Imeogbe	03	07.14
Nekede zoo	None	48	100.00
Urashi river source	Akwu	33	61.11
	Oroshi shrine	14	25.93
	Iriji (new yam festival)	07	12.96
Oferekpe waterfall	Towo	30	75.00
	Ijumu	10	25.00
Okposi Salt Lake	Aju	19	42.22
	Agwu	17	37.78
	Ifejioku	09	20.00

Table 7: Other Activities People Participated in Research Sites

Study area	Other activities	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Agulu/Nanka	Tipping sand	20	39.21
	Hunting	10	19.70
	Farming	09	17.64
	Hiding	04	07.84
	Film practicing	03	05.88
	Relaxing	03	05.81
	Long walk	02	03.92
Ogbunike caves	Festivals	10	23.81
	Long walk	07	16.67
	Hiding	04	09.52
	Dancing	04	09.52
	Relaxing	03	07.14
	Hunting	02	04.76
	Family time out	02	04.76
	Photo/film shooting	02	04.76
	Dressing masquerades	02	04.76
	Meetings	02	04.76
	Sacrifice to gods	01	02.38
Nekede zoo	Learning	21	43.75
	Picnic	11	22.92
	Family time out	07	14.58
	Relaxing	04	08.33
	Long walk	03	06.25
	Discussion	02	04.17
Dikenafai	Dressing masquerade	14	25.93
	Photo/film shooting	14	25.93
	Fetching water	10	18.52
	Festival	08	14.81
	Sacrifice to gods	04	07.41
	Hiding	02	03.70
	Relaxing	02	03.70
Oferekpe waterfall	Fishing	18	45.00
	Sacrifice to gods	07	17.05
	Family time out	04	10.00
	Photo/film shooting	04	10.00
	Hiding	03	07.05
	Festivals	02	05.00
	Relaxing	02	05.00
Okposi	Salt making (cooking)	18	40.00
	Salt selling	08	17.78
	Festivals	07	15.55
	Sacrifice to gods	05	11.11
	Picnic	04	08.89
	Photo/film shooting	03	06.67

Figure 2 shows tourists' satisfaction after visiting the sites. In Agulu/Nanka erosion site, 80% of the tourists were not satisfied due to erosion disaster and fearful nature of the environment. All the tourists (100%) at Ogbunike caves were satisfied. Most tourists at Nekede zoo (82%) and Oferekpe

waterfall (86%) were satisfied. On the other hand, majority of the tourists were unhappy after visiting Urashi river source (78%) and, Okposi Salt Lake (86%)

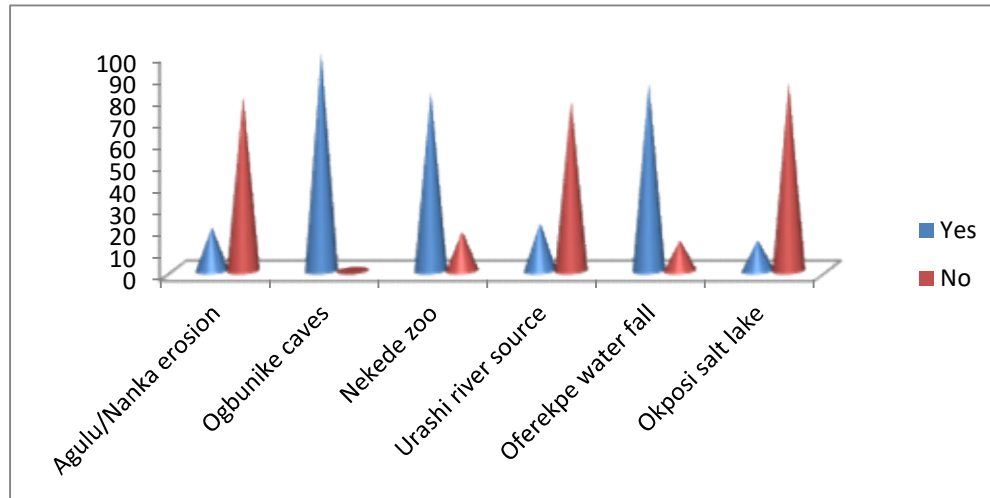


Figure 2: Tourists satisfaction in the sites as indicated by tourist respondents

Discussion

Tourists' Attractions in Selected Destinations

There are different attractions in each of the destinations. The major attraction at Nekede zoo was wild animals (87.05%). Tourists cherish viewing games at Nekede zoo. Many tourists have their first-time opportunity to see animals especially the big and endangered ones alive. The mimicking characteristics of some wild animals like baboons, parrots and monkeys fascinated many tourists. This corroborates the findings of Eltringham (1984) that game viewing is a major attraction in Africa. Many tourists cherished viewing eggs of ostrich because of the extra-large size. Tourists in groups like schools, clubs, communities, children and families were regular visitors at Nekede zoo to view wild animals. This agrees with the report of (Ijeomah *et al.*, 2005) that visitations of zoos and wildlife parks on annual basis have become part of the educational cultures of most schools in Plateau State. Apart from live wild animals, there are carved wild animals in form of monuments (77.08%) like giraffe monuments, elephant monuments, birds and rodent monuments.

These monuments look real when sighted from far. The presence of these monuments gives tourists an insight of the real animals and their ecological status. Museum (60.42%) is also of high interest to some tourists. Tourists can view the skins, bones, skeleton, egg and other trophies of wild animals at Nekede zoo. Other interesting features in Nekede zoological garden include the quietness of the environment, and the roaring of lion. Tourists of different class perceived the Nekede zoo as a good site for recreation and meditation. The caves and 'Ogba day' are the major attractions at Ogbunike caves. The caves are natural, fearful and can be entered by tourists. The ogba day is a traditional festival that is normally organized by the community in respect of the caves. Many cultural dances and masquerades perform to entertain tourists during the celebration, and food is served to all participants free of charge. Also, a lot of people around Nigeria including traditional elders from different parts of Igbo land attend Ogba day. Other attractions in Ogbunike caves include forest vegetation (80.95%), where a lot of birds are observed 'singing' and building nests on the canopy of trees around the caves in the quiet environment, thus making the site look quite natural and therefore serves as a good site for meditation and other spiritual activities by

different groups. The destination serves as venue for many occasions such as new yam festivals, new dance outing ceremony and reception for wedding events.

Waterfall (91.67%) is the major attraction at Urashi river source of Dikenafai. Going to the waterfall requires walking through an untarred, slippery and sloppy road that is purposely scarified with holes to facilitate movement before moving through 57 steps into the valley. The climbing is like an adventure to tourists. This corroborates the findings of Ijeomah *et. al.* (2007) on the attractions in Urashi ecotourism destination. The valley (83.33%) also attracts tourist because of its uniqueness. This river source forms large rivers in many places and neighbouring villages. Forest vegetation (81.25%) comprises mainly of bamboo (*Bambusa vulgaris*), which is also an economic tree that attracts members of the community inside the waterfall. The quiet environment in the destination fascinates many tourists. The main attraction at Okposi Salt Lake is the salt (97.77%). This is followed by the Salt Lake (91.11%). Many tourists visit the site to view the lake that produces salt. One of the interesting attractions to tourists at Okposi salt lake is the rules of salt-making - Only the women are allowed to fetch the salt water at a specific time of the day, and the fact that a special vessel (mud pot) is used to fetch the water (not every container). Quietness of the Salt Lake also fascinates tourists. Other tourist attractions include forest vegetation, the use of the site as background for film production. The main attraction at Oferekpe waterfall is the waterfall. Though, this community is in the interior part of Ebonyi state tourists visit there because of the unique waterfall and the bluish colour of the water. Forest vegetation (75.00%) is also of tourist interest because it is quiet and cool. Some community members are interested in fishing (55.00%), and beach (40.00%) where a lot of people visit for recreation and festivals (32.05%). The erosion site at Agulu/Nanka is uniquely enormous. When viewed from far it looks fearful and appears as if there is a force trying to draw someone closer to the erosion gully. When one gets close to the gully and talks, it echoes. The gully shows different layers of the soil with different colours especially the red earth. The quietness of the environment as a wilderness area makes the site unique for recreation, meditation and film production. This is similar to the report of Ijeomah and Alao (2007) at Farinruwa falls. Cashew trees planted in form agroforestry to check erosion contributes to the beauty of the environment.

Social Significance of Selected Destinations

Table 4 shows the social significance of the sites as indicated by households. All the household in the sites accepted that the destination has helped in making the host communities popular. This cannot be unconnected with the fact that these destinations tend to be more popular than the host communities. They have become social landmarks. The Urashi water flows to form many water bodies at many communities hence very popular. Ogbunike cave is quite popular in eastern Nigeria. Nekede zoo is the only *ex-situ* conservation facility for wild games in eastern Nigeria and therefore projects the name of the host community. Even Agulu/Nanka is well known in Nigeria because of the erosion site. All the sites are used as backgrounds for film production by many producers because of their peculiarities and popularities, which also help in making the communities more known to the public. Most respondents perceived that Agulu/Nanka erosion site is a problem to the host community and therefore not contributing towards development of the community. However, it attracts both state and federal government attention to the host community. Nekede zoo is managed by Imo state government and has not significantly contributed to the development of the host community especially in terms of provision of infrastructure. Urashi

destination is suffering neglect as tourist influx is very low, thus contributes insignificantly to development of Dikenafai community. Households at Ogbunike, Oferekpe and Okposi accepted that the sites respectively contribute towards the development of their communities. This can be attributed to the fact that the sites are active. Development of the sites will increase the benefits derived by households from the site and increase the popularity of the area. All the households accepted that the site can further be developed except Agulu/Nanka households because of the erosion problem as the site was neither a heritage nor purposely developed but a product of ecological disaster of international attention.

Economic Significance of Selected Destinations

Table 5 shows the economic significance of the sites as indicated by the household. Ogbunike, Dikenafai and Okposi accepted that the site was contributing positively to the development of their community while Agulu/Nanka, Nekede and Oferekpe rejected. They all accepted that tourists have been visiting the site. Host communities derive some economic benefits from the destinations. The benefits depend on the destination and management. In Agulu/Nanka erosion site, there are white sand inside the gullies that could be used for building and construction works which households' harness and sell to make money (notwithstanding that bye laws have been made to prevent people from harnessing sand from the environment). There is also a spring water inside the erosion gully; which households' harness and sell to generate income – the water is perceived to be very clean. Households harness the water in tankers and distribute to other people. Cashew fruits and nuts from the cashew plantations around the erosion gullies are harvested by some households to generate income. Similarly, other non timber forest products like snails, rodents, and fruits in the site are harnessed and sold by households in the community to generate income. At Ogbunike caves, the community generates revenue from tourists because the site is managed by the community. Some youths are formally employed in the destination as cave attendants and administrative workers while others benefit from the informal employments (created by tourist visitation) in form of bike transportation, hawking etc. especially during 'Ogba day' festival. The facilities in Ogbunike cave are also hired to host events and through this means the community generates revenue while market is created for many members of the community to sell their products. This agrees with the findings of Meseret (2021) that ecotourism is a means of money making without destroying the environment.

The main channel of economic benefit at Nekede zoo is employment (100.00%) of the community members. Though, Imo state government manages the site and can employ workers from any part of the country, members of the host community have better chances of being employed. Households in the host community of Urashi river source rarely derive revenue from the site. Bamboo selling is a channel of income for few residents as numerous stands of the plant surround the site. Some households harvest the species when fully grown and sell to generate income. At Oferekpe, revenue (77.50%) is generated from tourist visitation, and the employment of some youths from the community for protection of the site. The major source of economic benefit at Okposi Salt Lake destination is through selling of salts, as the production activity is managed by the host community. Besides, some community members are employed for security services in the site. This agrees with the report of Wickramasinghe (2014) that conservation becomes long lasting when economically beneficial to the society.

Cultural Significance of Selected Destinations

Table 6 shows the cultural significance of the sites as indicated by the households. Ogbunike, Dikenafai and Okposi accepted that the culture of the community is connected to their respective destinations while Agulu/Nanka, Nekede and Oferekpe household said that there is no connection between the culture of the community and their tourist destinations. Ogbunike cave serves as a venue for Ogba day which is a day that the entire community celebrates the cave for the protective role played during the war as it served as a hiding place for the people. There is no way that the people of Ogbunike will gather without making reference to the history and culture of the people. The interpretive narratives (from elders and members of the community who are quite knowledgeable about culture), apart from making the Ogba day interesting helps in educating both visitors and indigenes of the history and culture of the community. This is similar to previous findings, on the protective roles (during communal wars) played by Monitor Lizard (*Varanus niloticus*) to the Ndoni people of Rivers State (Ijeomah et al., 2019) and that of Sclateri monkey (*Cercopithecus sclateri*) in Lagwa, Imo state (Ijeomah et al., 2011) where both species, eventually became indigenously conserved. Studies have also shown that the cave inside Olumo rock, Abeokuta historically served as a protective facility to the ancient Egbas in times of war. Thus, both the rock and the cave have become preserved as a cultural heritage, hence a tourist attraction. The ancient people of Dikenafai had festivals that were performed at Orié Ukwu market; which is in front of the Urashi eco-destination. In the course of the festival participants are entertained with unique and interesting cultural music; which people dance individually while traditional wrestling was carried out as one of the major activities. Even during the *Akwu* festivals, members of the Urashi cult enter inside the destination to make sacrifice with no none member present.

The age-old salt making technology of Okposi is carried out in Okposi Salt Lake environment. This is an exemplified gender - based cultural role performed in the area, which has been preserved for many years. Only females of certain age are allowed to be involved in the salt production activities carried out in the Salt Lake. The reasons for allowing only females, and of certain age have some cultural implications. This is similar to the gender based cultural activities observed in the type of crops cultivated in most parts of eastern Nigeria – Men always cultivate yam while females cultivate cocoyam. The salt production is culture – based, and the continuous existence showcases the local technology of the host community similar to the Nok culture or the weaving culture of the Akwete people. When tourists visit, the unique process of salt making is interpreted with the facilities for the production displayed. With the visitation they become aware of the existence of the salt production culture of the Okposi people. Respondents at Agulu/Nanka opined that there is no connection between the site and culture due to the fact that erosion site developed with time. Nekede zoo is a government facility, also without any cultural link with the destination host community. Both Agulu/Nanka erosion site and Nekede zoo serve as venues for environmental education instead of cultural education. Households in Okposi perceived that further development of Okposi Salt Lake would destroy their preserved culture because the salt production technology is entirely a local age-old technology that is culture-based. Development of the site may bring about modernization of the facilities; which may lead to discarding of the age-old equipment being used, hence an erosion of their cultural heritage.

Cultural Festivals in the Selected Destinations

Table 7 shows some cultural festivals that are celebrated in the research destinations. At Agulu/Nanka erosion site, the community celebrates ‘ofiaolu’ (60.78%) which signify the remembrance of market exchange done in the hidden part of the site. Households also dress ‘ijele masquerade’ (23.53%) in this site to prevent women and children from knowing the source. ‘Ebe’ (which signify the period when a boy reaches adulthood) is equally celebrated in the site. At Ogbunike caves, ‘Ogba’ day is celebrated every 31st December in remembrance of the caves and its assistance to the community. ‘Onwaasato’ is another cultural celebration done in order to allow all masquerades in Ogbunike community to come out and perform. Other cultural celebration at Ogbunike caves includes ‘Azu’, ‘Ofala’ and ‘Imeogbe’. Ofala festival is done occasionally at this site in honour of the traditional ruler while ‘Imeogbe’ is the cultural celebration in honour of respective villages. There was no cultural celebration at Nekede zoological garden as it is not a culture-based facility, and owned by Imo state government.

There was ‘Odu’ celebration at Urashi river source, in remembrance of the ancient trade that went on in the site. This ancient trade was stopped by the civil war. The *Odu* is no longer celebrated. At Oferekpe waterfall, the community celebrated ‘Towo’; which signifies the existence of the waterfall. Some took birth in the waterfall according to the tradition to mark their adulthood. Household respondents also celebrated ‘Ijumu’, which brings all the community masquerade in the waterfall to know themselves. At Okposi Salt Lake, ‘Aju’ is celebrated. Aju signifies that only women that are culturally permitted to fetch salt water. In this cultural festival, initiation of women (who are up to the stipulated age) into the group that fetches salt water and produce salt takes place. ‘Agwu’ is also celebrated in honour of the spirit of Salt Lake. Households believed that it was a favourable spirit that visited Okposi in form of the Salt Lake. ‘Ifеjioku’ is celebrated in honour of the god and goddess of the new yam. This festival is celebrated with a lot of activities like dancing, competition, singing and meetings. Similarly, Onuchukwu and Ijeomah (2020) reported of many cultural festivals that have various significance in Andoni and Opobo local government areas of Rivers state.

Tourist Satisfaction

Figure 2 shows tourists’ satisfaction in the destinations. In Agulu/Nanka erosion site, majority (80%) of the tourists were not satisfied due to erosion disaster and fearful nature. All the tourists (100%) were satisfied after visiting Ogbunike caves because it is a natural heritage that is still intact, and active with a lot of activities. Similarly, tourists are fascinated by the ancient cave inside Olumo rock and Mado tourist village at Abeokuta and Plateau state respectively. The satisfaction of most tourists (82%) at Nekede zoo can be attributed to the fact that many species of wild animals were seen. This agrees with Eltringham (1984) that game viewing is the major attraction in Africa. Edeh *et al.* (2020) obtained a similar result where many tourists were satisfied after visiting the university of Ibadan zoo. On the other hand, majority (78%) of the tourists were not satisfied at Urashi river source because the site is neglected. Similarly, the Pai river wildlife park of Plateau state suffers neglect and hardly patronized as tourists are not satisfied in the eco-destination. Majority (86%) of tourists were satisfied after visiting Oferekpe water fall because of the flow of the waterfall and its attractive blue colour while few were not satisfied due to poor management by the host community. This agrees with the report of Ijeomah *et al.* (2015) that the blue colour of Oguta lake brings some level of satisfaction to tourists. Many tourists (86%) indicated that they

were not satisfied after visiting Okposi Salt Lake because of crude method of salt production at this modern time while few tourists (14%) were satisfied because of conservation of culture.

Conclusion

There are various attractions from different ecotourism destinations in south eastern Nigeria, including activities at the gender-based age-old salt production facilities at Okposi Salt Lake, waterfalls, historic festivals and diverse species of wildlife, ancient caves and fearful gullies. Many of these attractions being part of the natural and cultural heritage show that some of these endowments of the area are still intact. These sites have been sources of social, economic, recreational and cultural benefits to households in many of the host communities and therefore protected. Many are also of conservation significance and serve as places for both conservation and cultural education for tourists. Households from Ogbunike, Nekede, Dikenafai and Oferekpe will like their destinations to be further developed while Okposi and Agulu/Nanka will not due to the fear of cultural destruction and consequences of erosion menace respectively. These sites can further be developed in a sustainable manner (in collaboration with host communities) to attract more local and international tourists while energizing the economy of the host communities. Provision of adequate infrastructure, access roads, further development of the sites (with prevailing culture and biodiversity preserved) and proper publicity will make the destinations more popular and beneficial to the inhabitants of south eastern Nigeria and Nigeria as a whole.

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