

Geographical Distribution of Tourism Resources in Iseyin Local Government Area, Oyo State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Tourism development has been described as one of the fastest growing industries in the world. With the quest of Oyo state government for alternative sources of revenue generation, there is the need for inventory of tourism resources in the state. This paper therefore provides scenic view of geographical patterns of tourism resources in Iseyin Local Government Area, Oyo state, Nigeria. The paper mainly depended on the review of literature on tourism development and policy. The analysis showed that tourism attractions/sites are spatially distributed in the local government area with Iseyin and Ado-Awaye axis more endowed than other parts of the local government area. Most of the tourism resources are naturally made like the Suspended Lake, Ishage Rock, Agbomofunyake Depression, Iya-Alaro Lake, Elephant Tree, the Elders' Foot Prints, Ikere Gorge Dam among others. Others such as Aso-Oke Festival and Maje Kankan Shrine are man-made (socio-cultural heritage) phenomena. Despite these huge tourism resources, defective tourism development policy reflecting in inadequate funding, dearth of infrastructural facilities especially poor road network to the sites and inadequate information about the tourism sites hinder the government revenue drive accruable from tourism development. There is no doubt that with effective policy, adequate funding, infrastructural facilities and effective marketing strategy, the tourism facilities in the area can improve the socio-economic development of the people in the area and improve the revenue drive of the government.

Keywords: *Geographical, distribution, tourism resources, Iseyin, Ado-Awaye*

Introduction

Tourism is an activity that involves people otherwise known as tourists visiting places (tourist centres) outside their usual abode for leisure. However, the past decades have shown that people do not only visit places of interest for leisure only but for other purposes. Hence, terms such as medical tourism, religion tourism are among other types of tourism. Whichever perspective tourism is viewed, it is considered by World Tourism Organisation (WTO) (2014) as one of the fastest growing industries in the world. Tourism development is a source of foreign exchange earnings, employment generation, infrastructural development, income distribution through economic multiplier as well as environmental and socio cultural consequence (Geethika & Gnanapala, 2015).

According to WTO (2014), tourism generated about \$1,245 billion in 2014 alone while the World Travel & Tourism Council (2013) opined that 266 million jobs were created globally as a result of tourism. The quest for the diversification of Nigeria economy as a result of constant fluctuation in global crude oil prices (the main foreign exchange earner of the country) has shown the importance of Tourism as a better alternative to over dependent on crude oil exportation. Ezenagu (2018) observed that interest and increased investments in tourism as one of the sources of revenue generation has been on the increase post-1999 democratic dispensations.

WESTGRO (2017) reported a 12% increment in total arrivals of foreigners' into the country. Out of this, tourism –related trip added GDP of about #1.7 billion generated from 54.1% direct tourism trip. Kester (2014) said Nigerian tourism industry accounted for over 2million international arrivals which could rise to over 2 million by the year 2030 while WESTGRO (2017) forecast a GDP of 3.3 % annual increase with over #2.3 billion to be generated in the year 2027.

The diverse environmental, traditional, historical and religion features of the country serve as good tourism resources for the country and formidable memories for the tourists (Bagri & Kala, 2016). These diverse features have resulted in spatial variation in the distribution of tourism centres in the country. The implication of this is that tourism resources are spatially distributed across spaces in the country. This requires an understanding of the spatial dimensions of tourism and geography of the uneven patterns and distribution of resources as the determinant of socio-economic development (Rogerson, 2014). In other words, there is the need to appreciate how tourism resources are distributed between natural, socio- cultural, urban and rural environments of the country.

This paper attempts a study of the spatial distribution of tourism centres in Iseyin Local Government Area, Oyo State. The state government under the present administration of Governor Seyi Makinde has identified the potential of tourism as an alternative source of revenue generation drive in the state. (Feyisipo, 2020). The state government listed 167 tourist sites spatially distributed in the state. One of the areas identified to hold a potential tourist centres and development is Iseyin Local Government Area. The Local Government Area houses a number of settlements with renowned tourist centres. As a result of the Local Government Area playing host to world acclaimed tourist centres such as the Ado-Away Hanging Valley. The

year 2021 World Tourism Day (WTD) was celebrated at Ado- Awaye on September 27, 2021.

Despite these steps by the government it is noted that most tourism resources in the state are yet to be identified, tapped and utilized for the development of the state. This paper therefore aims at providing a comprehensive directory at various tourist centres, their locations, history, unique features and their spatial distributions within the local government.

Geography of Iseyin Local Government Area

Iseyin Local Government Area is located between latitude $7^{\circ} 58'N$ and $8^{\circ} 17'N$ and between longitude $2^{\circ} 45' E$ and $3^{\circ} 37' E$ (Figures 1a & b). The Local Government Area is bounded in the North by Itesiwaju Local Government Area, in the south by Ibarapa East Local Government Area. In the west, Iseyin Local Government Area is bounded by Kajola Local Government Area and in the east by Oyo West and Afijio Local Government Areas. Iseyin, the Local Government headquarters, is about 100km to Ibadan the Oyo state capital. The town is centrally located and accessible via road network from Ibadan, Oyo. Abeokuta, Ogbomosho and other Oke-Ogun settlements. Other settlements in the local government area also include Afonja, Odoomu, Odo Ogun, Ado- Awaye, Ajabeegun, Joloko, Wasinmi, Osoogun, Akinwumi, etc. The population estimate for the year 2016 put the population of the local government at 359,100 (City Population, 2016). The land mass of the local government area is about 1,419 km².

The climate of the local government area is of the Tropical continental type characterized with relative humidity of above 60%. Annual average temperature is about 26 °C while the annual rainfall is 185 cm. The highest temperature occurs at the onset of the wet season. The local government area is drained by rivers such as Ogun, Owu, Amaka, Oowe among others. A prominent hydrological feature is the Ikere Gorge Dam (second to none in the continent of Africa). The relief is of open undulating types. Prominent relief features include the Ado-Awaye Ranges, Otigbo Hills, Egbeti Hills among other features which are tourism resources. The local government area falls within the Guinea Savanna belt with tall and luxurious grasses of variant height which include *Panicum maximum*, *Imperata cylindrica* and *Andropogon tectorum*. The trees are mainly deciduous and drought resistant examples include *Parkia biglobosa*, *Piliostigma reticulata* and *Vitellaria paradoxa*.

There is a faculty of the Ladoke Akintola University of Technology (LAUTECH), SAF polytechnic (privately owned), a technical college, the permanent orientation camp of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) as well as numerous primary and secondary school (both private and public). Major socio-economic activities include agriculture which is enhanced by fertile soils. In fact the local government and others in the Oke-Ogun area of the state are dubbed the “Food Basket” of Oyo State. The major primary industry in the area is cotton based textiles specialized in the production of industry -loom based Aso-Ofi or Aso-Oke. Iseyin town is particularly known for the production of quality Aso-Oke fabric. Hence, the name home of “Aso-Oke”. The annual Aso-Oke festival is as a result of the popularity and acceptance of the Aso-Ofi both home and in diaspora. Trading is enhanced by Agbe and Oba markets which are both daily

markets.

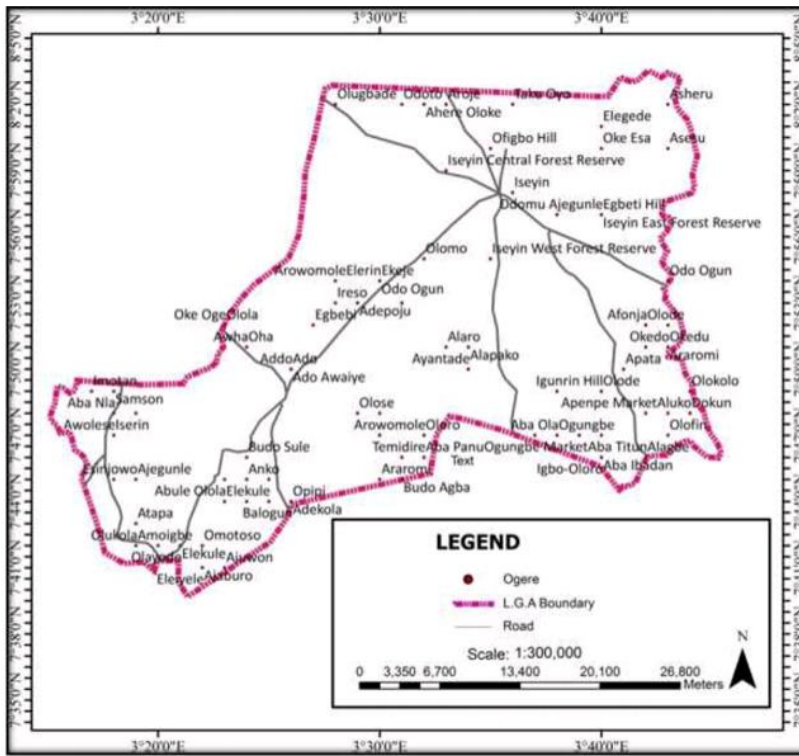


Figure 1a: Map of Iseyin Local Government Area
Source: Adeleke and Popoola, 2020

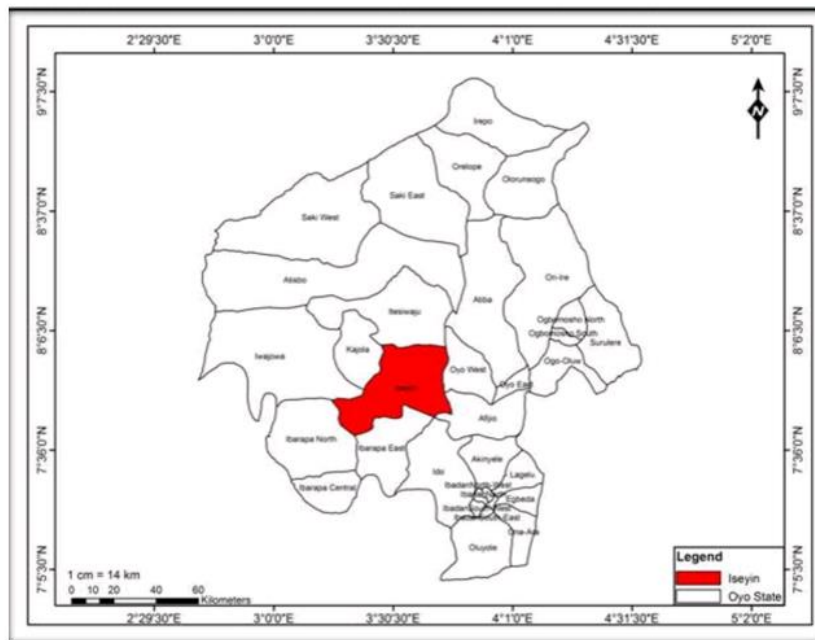


Figure 1b: Map of Iseyin Local Government Area in the context of Oyo State
Source: Adeleke and Popoola, 2020

The Geographical Distribution of Tourist Centres in the Local Government Area

There are a number of tourist attraction sites in Iseyin Local Government Area but these resources are mainly concentrated at Iseyin and Ado-Awaye axis. Though, these tourism resources are unique in features, contents and potentials they have similar challenges which hinder their contributions to the development of their host communities and the state revenue generation drive. They include the following;

The Ikere Gorge Dam

This gorge dam is located within latitude 8.20408 N and longitude 3.72318E in the North- Eastern part of Iseyin Local Government Area. The dam is the biggest gorge dam in Africa and the 4th largest in the world (Popoola & Adeleke, 2020). It is bounded in the North-West by Owu forest reserves and part of old Oyo national park. Hence, a valuable asset to tourism development. Ikere Gorge Dam has a constant water supply from rivers Wawa and Ogun. The dam was initiated in 1977 by General Olusegun Obasanjo Military Regime but actual construction was started by the civilian administration of Sheu Shagari Regime. The dam was designed to generate 3750MW of electricity. In addition, the dam was also to complement the water supply to Iju water works in Lagos, Iseyin, and some parts of Oke- Ogun region. As at 2020, the dam was supplying 82 million m³ water to Lagos at every dry season through the natural channel into Iju water works reservoir with a spill way service channel and the installed penstock. Irrigation and large scale fishery are also parts of the design of the dam. Adebayo (2017) pointed out that the main crest elevation of the dam is 185 m and 2,309m wide. It has a reservoir capacity of 565million m³ which can generate 3750MW of hydroelectricity and also to irrigate 1200 hectares of agricultural land (Federal Republic of Nigeria FRN- Ogun-Osun River Basin Development Authority, 2015).

Despite the huge potential of this dam as a tourist destination, successive governments have neglected the dam. For instance, road network connecting the dam to Iseyin townships was in the state of disrepair while most of the facilities to ensure that the dam perform at the optimum production were neglected and not functioning (Oyedemi, 2016).

Aso-Ofi/Aso-Oke Festival Market

Iseyin township is a hub for the production of Aso-Oke clothing materials which are a popular fashion item for the people in the South- west of Nigeria and beyond. The hand woven cloth known as Aso-Ofi is a Yoruba traditional attire. It is also called Aso-Oke which means Aso-Ilu- Oke (cloth from the up country). In fact, Aso-Ofi is synonymous to Iseyin town and the craft has since become a generational occupation. At any Nigerian ceremony such as chieftaincy titling, wedding or burial ceremony, the possibility of having Aso-Ofi on display is on the high side. The cloth has evolved overtime from being traditional attire into a contemporary world. Its use has expanded to include interior décor, fashion, shoes, bags, chairs, suit, head rest among

other uses. Oyo state government recognizes the importance of Aso-Ofi as an important aspect of the traditional culture of the town, state, the entire Yoruba nation as well as the nation. Hence, the establishment of Aso-Ofi International Tourism Market during Senator Ajimobi Regime. Though, the present regime of Governor Seyi Makinde maintains this development, the construction of the permanent site of the market is yet to take off. Notwithstanding, in the past few years the annual Aso-Ofi Festival has been one of the object of tourism in the state. The festival offers opportunity for the inhabitants of the local government to showcase different types of traditional fabric (Aso-Ofi). Apart from this, it serves as a platform through which indigenes and non-indigenes at home and diaspora come together and foster mutual co-existence. The festival ensures development of socio-economic development of the people and the state.

Iyake Suspended Lake

This is one of the only two hanging or suspended lakes in the world and the only one in Africa. The other is the hanging lake in Colorado in the United States of America. The Lake is one of the seven wonders in Nigeria. The lake is about 40 meter square in the rainy season and about 25m square in the dry season (Popoola & Adeleke, 2020). Its water is greenish but colourless inside any white bowl. A small palm tree, a baobab tree all stand at an angle to the lake. The lake is believed to be bottomless and has claimed the lives of people who attempted to measure its depth. Apart from the fact that it is a natural object, it is also cultural and of religious status because the inhabitants of the town believe it is the abode of the god of fertility of the town. Hence, both indigenes and visitors take the water for its healing therapy but it's forbidden to bath in the lake. The inhabitants believe that whoever swims in the lake would drown and the person's body will never be seen again (Omotosho, 2020). They believe that there is another world beneath the lake and whoever gets to this mysterious world will never come back to the earth (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Iyake Suspended Lake



Oke-Ishage (Ishage Rock)

This is also a national, cultural and religious phenomenon (Omotosho, 2020). It is a large elongated rock boulder which sits on one of its edge in an upright position. The wonder of the rock was that it has not fallen off the steep mountain side on which it rests. This has remained a mystery to the indigenes and the tourists visiting the mountain. The people believe that the god of rain resides in it and hence it's termed "bringer of rain". In the time of rain scarcity all that needs to be done is for the priest to wrap the waist of the rock with white cloth and the rain will fall for 3-4 days. Apart from this it is believed that one of the most powerful gods on the mountain resides in the rock and grants the wishes of people who pray at its foot (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Oke-Ishage (Ishage Rock)



Agbomofunyake

This is a little hole filled with water and about two to three meters to the edge of Iyake suspended lake. It is believed that whoever put his/her leg into the hole get dragged or sucked through the rock into the bottom of the suspended lake. (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Agbomofunyake



Iya-Alaro Lake

This is perceived as religious objects. The lake was named after an old woman called “Iya Alaro” because she was involved in cloth dyeing and used to worship the lake at specific time of the year. The lake is characterized by a dark colour and gloom depth, its surface and surrounding was bedecked with a lush of overgrowth and the surface of the pond is always covered by shed leaves. It is a taboo to touch or use the water of the lake for anything.

Figure 5: Iya-Alaro Lake



The Elephant Tree

This is a fascinating tree made up of a tangled trunk or root of a fallen tree which resemble the head and trunk of an elephant from which it derived its name “the Elephant Tree” the “eyes” of the elephant are also represented on the tree formation (Figure 6).

Figure 6: The Elephant Tree



Ese kan Aye, Ese kan Orun

This naturally occurring rocky object literarily means ‘a step between heaven and earth’. It is a wide and deep chasm on the mountain which separate a part of the mountain from the other section. The chasm was very steepy and slippery. It is a sloppy and very steep area of the hill with a deep gully ditch. It separates a part of the mountain from other sections. The place gives the panoramic view of Ado-Awaye town and memorable scenery of the hills and other physical and cultural features (Figure 7)

Figure 7: Ese kan Aye, Ese kan Orun



Maje Kankan Shrine

This is a small fissure that exist at a corner of Esekan Aye Ese Kan Orun valley. Any newly crowned king must visit this shrine to pay obeisance to the ancestors of the town (Figure 8)

Figure 8: Maje Kankan Shrine



Iya Oniru Lake

It is located on the part of the mountain which hosts the peak. The lake, though, is

shallow but believed that the water never dry through out the year.

Ese Awon Agba

This simply translates to “the Footprint of the Elders”. It is a cluster of large footprints found all over the mountain. It is believed that the gods once walked over the mountain to protect the inhabitants during the time they were living on the mountains.

Others physical phenomena for potential tourism development in the local government area include Iseyin Central Forest Reserve, Iseyin East Forest Reserve, Iseyin West Forest Reserve, Otigbo hills and Egbeti hills

Challenges to Tourism Development in the Area

Like most of the tourist attraction sites in Nigeria, tourist development in Iseyin local government area is hindered by a number of challenges

Foremost among the challenges is the problems of inadequate infrastructural facilities. For instance, Omotosho, (2020) observed that the access road leading to the Ado-Awaye mountains which houses the tourist centres was in the state of disrepair and neglect so also are the concrete steps leading to the mountain top. Popoola and Adeleke (2020) made similar observation about the road that connect Ikere Dam to Iseyin township. These vital facilities are in poor state and therefore reduce the number of visitors to the site.

Similarly, infrastructural facilities such as office complex, recreational facilities and socialisation facilities which can complement the power of attraction of the sites were in poor state or absolutely absent (Olaniyi & Bada, 2020).

Generally speaking Nigeria as a nation is weak when it comes to policy implementation. Hence, most of the policy statements on tourism in Oyo state are yet to be fully implemented. This has, therefore, lead to insufficient funds to implement policy on the provision of adequate and world class infrastructural facilities,

Furthermore, there are difficulties in updating existing graphical tourist guides and maps in the state. Lack of digital information for tourism facilities and destinations, lack of comprehensive information based on the internet and inadequate analysis of the state’s tourism potential have led to dearth of sufficient information about tourism resources and potential of the local government area, the state and the country at large.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The study shows that Iseyin Local Government Area is blessed with natural and man-made tourism resources and therefore has high potential for socio-economic development of not only the inhabitants of the local government area but the state and the nation at large. In this era of dwindling national income as a result of fluctuation in crude oil prices at the international market, there is no doubt that a well spelt out policy statements and implementation on tourism development will improve revenue generation for sustainable development of the local government, the state as well as the nation. Tourism development has potential of generating employment opportunity for the people, generating revenue for the government and improving socio-economic statuses of the people. All that needs to be done is to tackle the challenges facing

tourism development in the local government. This is achievable through the following steps and others;

Allocation of sufficient fund for the implementation of policy on the provision of facilities such as standard road network, electricity, office complex, recreation facilities such as hotels, gardens etc at each tourism attraction centre.

There is the need for massive campaign on the tourism potential of the local government and the state; this could be done through the provision of adequate information about the tourism resources in the local government area on the internet as well as through sources such as radio programmes, television programmes, newspapers, community participation among other means of information dissemination.

The need to accommodate all stakeholders in tourism development policy of the area is very paramount. This should involve government at the local level, state and the nation at large, the host communities, non-governmental organizations, international organizations, private investors, researchers etc. These stakeholders involvement in the development of a blue print on tourism could upgrade the tourism resources in the area to a world class category.

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