

Full Length Research Paper

Assessment of tourists' patronage of Obudu Mountain Resort, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Tourism in recent times has been expressed as a leisure and event-based activity. This study was carried out to examine tourists' arrivals and patronage of the Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State, Nigeria. The data for the study were collected through questionnaire survey, interviews, field inventory and participatory rural appraisal methods. The data generated were analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean, percentages, averages, graphs, charts, frequencies and maps. Analysis of variance was employed to test the hypothesis of the study. The result of the analysis revealed that there is significant variation in tourists' arrivals and patronage of the Mountain Resort ($P < 0.05$, $df = 11, 216$, $F = 3.27$). It was also observed that the local people were highly interested and involved in tourism related activities within the study area and the tourism industry had constantly improved their annual income. Based on these findings, it is recommended that more tourism events should be organized in the resort to attract more tourists' visits to the area, and that the people should be supported through the provision of trainings, economic seminars, credit facilities, and the provision of basic social amenities in the host communities to help enhance their interest and participation in tourism activities.

Key words: Tourism industry, patronage, participation, host communities.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism provides a major socio-economic opportunity for most developed countries and a means of improving the livelihoods of its residents (Ajake and Amalu, 2012a). The success and sustenance of tourism depends on the level of residents' and local peoples' involvement in tourism development processes in the area. An effective tourism

project could create positive attributes to destination areas such as, the provision of employment opportunities, foreign exchange and revenue generation, protection of natural environment, and delivery of quality visitor experience (Makame and Boon, 2008; Ajake and Amalu, 2012b).

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Tourism provides the largest labour opportunities in most developed countries and also a fast-lane vehicle in the workforce for young people and women (Hinch and Butler, 2007). Tourism, which has expanded dramatically over the last 30 years sets to continue growing as societies become more mobile and prosperous, obtaining more information on recreational services (Olurunfemi and Raheem, 2008; Takon and Amalu, 2013).

Contrarily, measuring tourism impacts is part of a wider move to improve knowledge on how the economies work, what they produce and what changes are observed over a defined time. It is no longer enough to measure physical flows (arrivals and overnight stays) and monetary data (revenue and expenditure relating to international tourism) (WTO, 2010). The most significant feature of the tourism industry is the capacity to generate large scale opportunities such as employment, infrastructural development, revenue and income in destination areas and to residents and local people (Ajake et al., 2016). Another important feature of tourism is that it contributes to national integration of the people who live in different regions of a country with diverse cultures and languages (Aniah et al., 2009).

Tourism as a vital contributor to the global economy is said to be a rapidly growing phenomenon and has become one of the world's largest industry. It plays an important role in the socio-economic and political development of major cities of the world today (Aniah et al., 2009; Okech, 2008). In most instances, it also contributes to a broader cultural understanding by creating awareness, with respect to cultural diversity and lifestyle. It is also a means of social interaction and cultural diversities (Hinch and Butler, 2007).

In Nigeria, tourism has played a major role in community and human development with its numerous accompanying socio-economic and environmental benefits. Cross River State in the southern part of Nigeria has indeed experienced a great contribution from the tourism sector, with steady increasing tourists' visits of about 10% annually from 2000 to 2016. This has positively impacted on the socio-economic status of the people of the destination area. The economic impact on the state is very laudable as tourists' visits to the existing numerous tourists' resources such as Mary Slessor's Residence in Creek town, Cercopan, Refome lake, Monoliths site in Bansara, Canopy Walkway, Agbokim Waterfalls, Cross River National Park, Tinapa Business Resort, National Museum, Marina Resort and Obudu Mountain Resort all in Cross River State have attracted unprecedented social, cultural and economic benefits to the people and government of the area (Amalu et al., 2012; Amalu and Ajake, 2012).

Obudu Mountain Resort in Cross River State is one of the leading tourists' sites in the country with its natural and unique features, such as the climate, height, cable car, winding path-way, natural swimming pool, exceptional accommodation and canopy walk-way. The resort has also experienced increased tourists' visits and patronages

in recent times, making the host people (Becheeve community who were predominantly farmers and hunters) very interested in tourism-related activities such as; acquiring jobs in the hotels, engaging in transportation, tour-guiding services, sales of food, drinks, honey, yoghurt, handcraft and other local products (Amalu et al., 2012).

The increasing tourism activities have also attracted the provision of basic amenities such as: schools, electricity, security, accessible roads, financial and communication facilities. Although, a reconnaissance survey of the area revealed that most of the amenities and facilities are mainly of direct benefit to the visiting tourists. Further investigation also revealed that the local people indirectly benefited from the tourism industry which is observed to have a corresponding effect on the economy of the people. The question left to be answered is that: can tourism be seen as an efficient development agent that keeps a balance between improving the standard of living of both the tourists' and the less privileged host people? It is in this regard that this study sought to examine the level and impact of tourists' patronage of Obudu Mountain resort, to understand its implication on the host people and the community (Takon et al., 2013).

Objective of the study

The main objective of the study is to assess the level of tourists' patronage of Obudu Mountain Resort, Cross River State, Nigeria with other specific objectives:

1. To examine the number of tourist visiting the resort and their origin
2. To examine the available facilities within the resort
3. To examine the purpose and preferences of tourists' visiting the resort.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism research has shown that the hospitality industry stands as one of the world's highest employment of labour (Amalu and Ajake, 2012). Ashe (2005) noted that as tourism sector continues to grow, it has serious implications on the economy of destination areas. It also contributes immensely to the achievement of sustainable development in cities, given their fragile ecological environments (Ashe, 2005). The tourism industry involves a large number of diverse leisure-related activities such as sports, recreation, holidaying, travelling and sight-seeing. Irrespective of the numerous benefits of the tourism industry such as: provision of employment opportunities, social exposure, aesthetic advancement, income, revenue and foreign exchange generation, it also has corresponding challenges accompanying its establishment such as: increase in crime, loss of cultural values, increase in theft, increasing promiscuity in

women, increasing rate of divorce and rapid environment depletion (Amalu and Ajake, 2014).

In recent times, tourism has attracted much patronage with numerous scattered tourists' sites across the world. Studies (Milan, 2008; Mugbil, 2009; Okpoko, 2006) have shown that tourism industry cannot in anywhere grow without having tourists' visit and patronage of products with factors such as free time, educational level, distance, awareness, economic status (income) and availability of unique tourism facilities and resources in place. Meyer (2007) reported that it is very understandable to acknowledge that domestic tourists can lead largely to a redistribution of national income while international tourism provides the much needed foreign exchange to destination regions. Milan (2008) observed that tourism stands out as a major driving force for economic development because of its large potential multiplier and spill-over effects on the rest of the economy (Mugbil, 2009).

To ensure the sustainability of the tourism industry, it is recommended that local people should be actively involved and there should be encouragement to embark on tourism related activities through employment in tourism outfits and through the provision of low interest loans to individuals and private business organizations that support implementation of pro-poor tourism development (Okpoko, 2006).

In theoretical context, tourism has been advocated as a development strategy to generate foreign exchange, to increase the balance of payment, increase GDP, attract development capital, increase the transfer of technology, increase employment (Meyer, 2007) and promote modern western values of life (Milan, 2008). Mugbil (2009) and Okpoko (2006) reported that the processes of tourism development could only be elucidated within the context of the development stage of a country (Amalu and Ajake, 2014).

Okech (2008) improvised the evolution of tourism development through what he called "product cycle-based evolution" of tourist destination areas. Butler proposes six stages of development: involvement, exploration, development, consolidation, stagnation and decline or rejuvenation. More recently, Amalu and Ajake (2012) used Butler's work as a template and reported that many British seaside resorts, which in the stagnating or declining stages, has rejuvenated when for example theme parks, were introduced at these resorts. It was argued that endogenous or exogenous forces also play a significant role in a process of destination development (Aniah et al., 2009).

Aniah et al. (2009) revealed that most tourists visited tourists' sites or destination due to environmental factors such as, climatic, weather condition and scenery of the environment, while some other tourist's made their trip due to the socio-cultural attributes and events of the destination areas (Ajake et al., 2016). It is in this vein that this study investigated the impact and changes in the

socio-economic life of the people, considering tourism as a regional modernization activity with the adoption of Amalu et al. (2015) notion of assessing the stages of tourism in three phases of planning, initiation or execution and benefits sharing. This would help in understanding the economic distributional pattern of tourism wealth in Bechevee community where Obudu Mountain resort is located. In view of the above, the study examined tourists' arrivals, tourists' preferences, existing tourists' facilities, residents or local people involvement and the socio-economic changes prompted by tourism development in the area.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out across the host communities of Obudu Mountain Resort located in Obaliku Local Government Area of Cross River State, Nigeria. It lays between latitude 6°21'30.11" and 6°22'13.011"N and longitude 9°22'10.11" and 9°22'14.511"E, with an approximate area of 104 sq m², and a height of about 1576 m above sea level (Cross River State Tourism Bureau, 2010). Obudu Mountain Resort is bounded in the North by Benue state, North-East by the Republic of Cameroon, to the South-East by Boki Local Government Area in Cross River State of Nigeria. Seven villages within the Obudu plateau (Apah-ajili, Okwamu, Keji-oku, Kegol, Okpazenge, Anape and Old Ikwette) makes-up the focus of this study (Figure 1).

The study focused on its objectives as it examined the host people's involvement in tourism related activities in the area, the number of indigenes and non-indigenes employed in the resort hotels and the number of international and domestic tourists that patronized hotels in the area. Primary and secondary sources of data collection were used to obtain data for this study. The primary sources involved the use of questionnaire, interview sessions and the author's direct field observations. The secondary sources involved documented information from textbooks, journals, State Tourism Bureau and the management of Obudu Mountain Resort hotels.

The study population comprised the household heads within the area. Information was also gathered from interview sessions with women and youth groups and the process was guided by a participatory research appraisal method. Information in Table 1 presents the number of household heads adopted for this study and their various communities. A total of 200 (two hundred) household heads were employed across the adjoining host communities for the study.

Research hypothesis

Ho: The monthly patronage between international and domestic tourists in the Ranch Resort does not vary significantly from one month to another.

The quantitative statistical technique (two-way analysis of variance (ANOVA)) was adopted to test the hypothesis of the study. Two-way analysis of variance was employed to test this hypothesis because there are two factors compared namely, difference in origin (international and domestic tourists) and difference between months of visit. The formula is given as:

The between group variance:

$$[S_B^2] = BSS/(K-1)$$

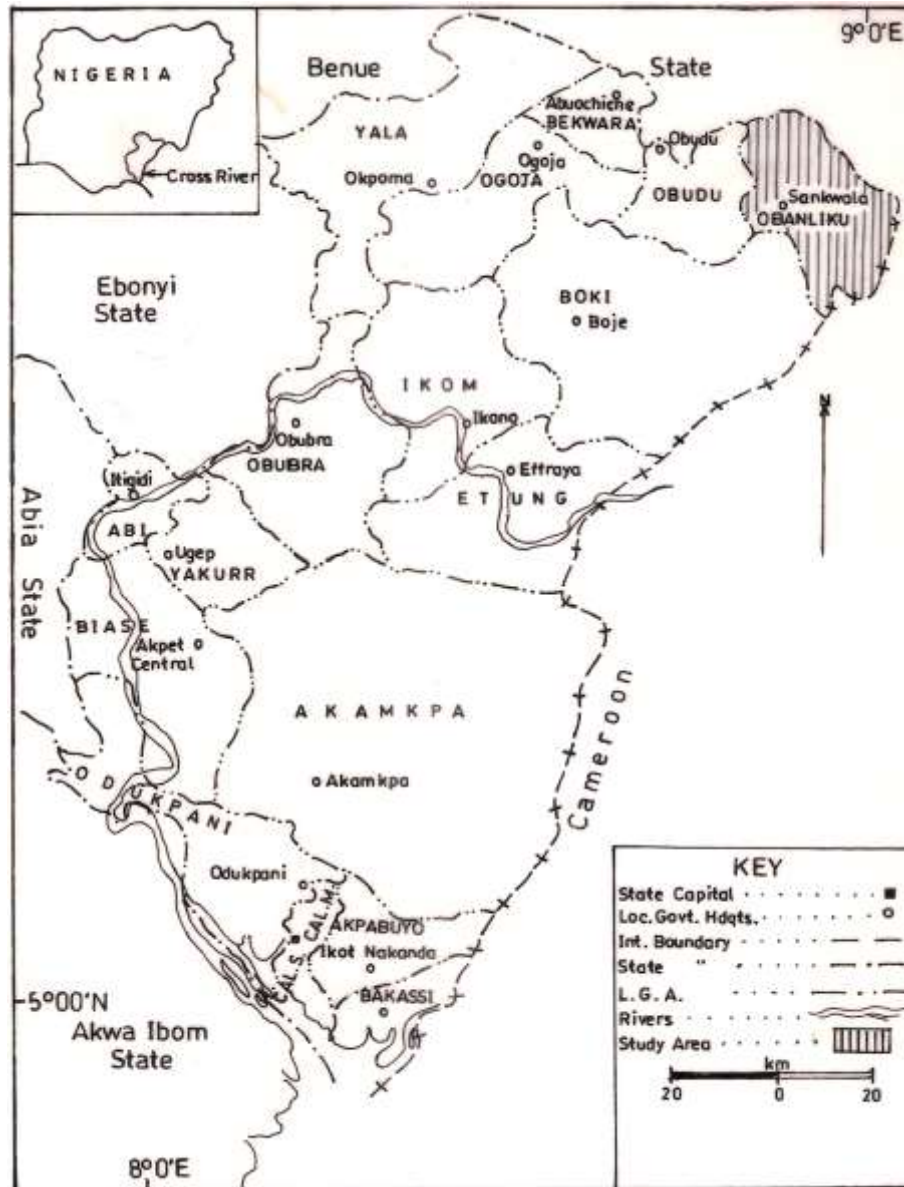


Figure 1. Map of Cross River State showing Obanliku Local Government Area. Source: Calligraphic Unit, University of Calabar (2017).

Table 1. Population and sample size.

Village	*Population (2016)	*Total households
Anape	392	46
Okpazenge	266	30
Kegol	338	35
Keji-uku	261	28
Okwamu	132	23
Apah-Ajili	195	24
Old-Ikwette	337	34
Total	1921	220

Sources: *Development in Nigeria (2016). *Fieldwork (2017).

Table 2. Monthly average income generated from facilities (2016).

Facility	Frequency	Monthly average (N)
Ranch hotel	159 rooms	526,175.00
Indigenous hotel	30 rooms	231,148.30
Swimming pool	2	143,545.42
Nature garden	1	72,475.83
Water fall	1	24,780.00
Lawn tennis court	2	22,562.00
Local bar	2	30,124.17
Resort restaurant	1	80,760.25
Local restaurant	3	56,349.17
Resort bar	2	47,965.83
Canopy walk way	1	112,572.00
Market	1	55,896.67
Games hall	1	125,716.67
Cable car	34	176,241.67
Golf car	12	15,583.33
Total		1,721,896.31

Source: Author's field Survey (2017).

Table 3. International and domestic tourist patronage of the ranch hotels (2007-2016).

Month	International tourists		Domestic tourists		Total
	Number of tourists	Percentage of tourists	Number of tourists	Percentage of tourists	
January	109	17	483	83	592
February	115	20	436	80	551
March	121	22	412	78	533
April	167	19	669	81	836
May	113	19	446	81	559
June	108	21	376	79	484
July	100	23	318	77	418
August	110	23	341	77	451
September	395	33	793	67	1188
October	163	22	550	78	713
November	162	21	583	79	745
December	268	20	1111	80	1379
Total	1931	20	6518	80	8449

Source: Records obtained from Obudu Ranch Resort Hotels (2017).

The within group variance:

$$S_W^2 = WSS / (N - K)$$

RESULTS

Patronage of the resort facilities

Table 2 shows that the highest recorded monthly average income was from accommodation, with an average of ₦526,175.00 monthly, while the least patronage was recorded by the golf-car with ₦15,583.33 as generated

monthly income. This shows that accommodation is the most important facility in terms of ensuring tourists' comfort in a tourism facility. It was also shown that the availability of these facilities was one of the reasons why most people visited and spent more time within the resort.

International and domestic tourists' patronage of the ranch hotels

Information presented in Table 3 reveals that domestic tourists have more recorded visits to the resort hotel than

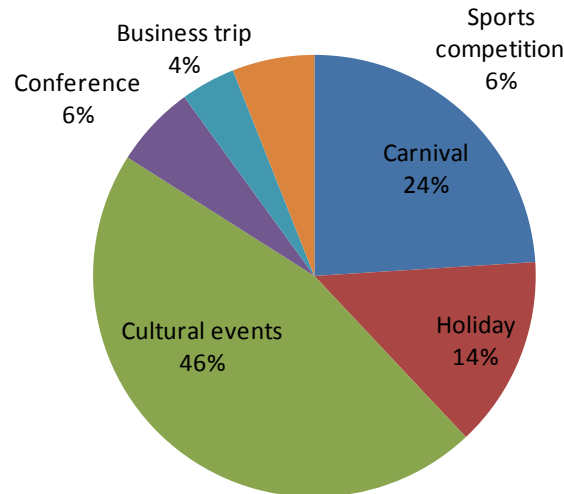


Figure 2. Purpose of tourists' visits to the Mountain Resort (2007-2016).

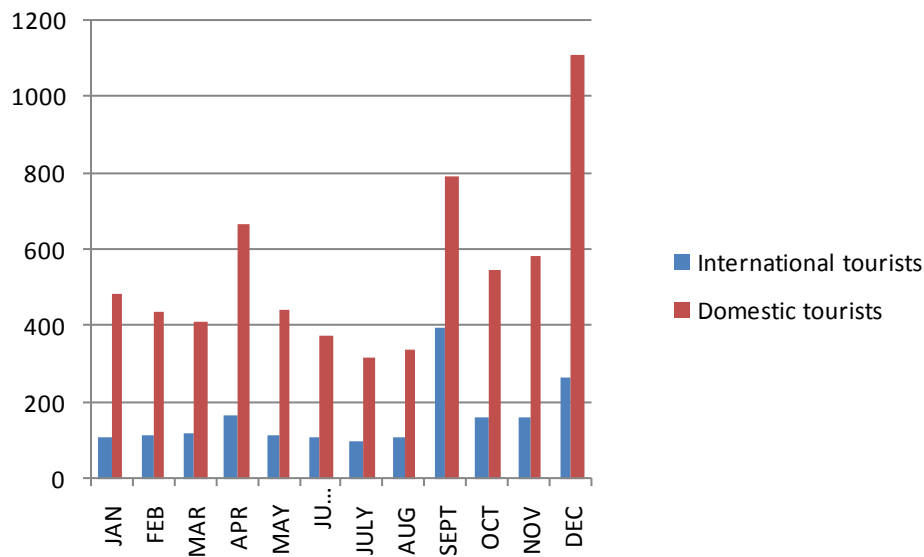


Figure 3. Patronage pattern of tourists between 2007 and 2016. Source: Author's field survey, 2017.

international tourists. The data derived shows that a total of eight thousand, four hundred and forty-nine (8449) tourists patronized the hotels between 2007 and 2016. Amongst these were six thousand, five hundred and eighteen domestic tourists representing 80% of the entire tourists' arrivals and one thousand, nine hundred and thirty-one foreign tourists representing 20% of the entire tourists' visits within this time under investigation. Further investigation presented in Figure 2 revealed that 46% of the tourists were in the region to attend cultural events like traditional marriages, chieftaincy ceremony and new yam festivals, followed by those who attended the

popular Calabar carnival (24%), holiday visitors (14%) and the least were those visiting for business trips (4%). Further investigation during the interview session shows that many more people would have visited the resort if more events were hosted within the resort area.

The study further examined the monthly pattern of tourists' patronage of the resort. Information in Figure 3 shows that there was disparity in tourists' visits to the resort. It was observed that tourists' visits and patronages within the months of January and April; October and December were higher than other months (Figure 3). Further investigation during the interview session

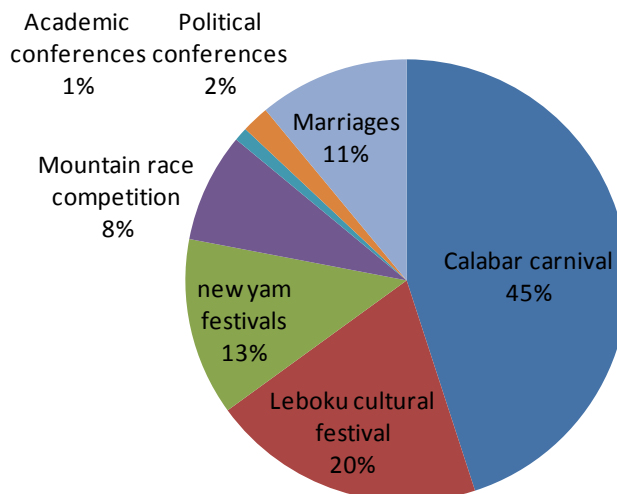


Figure 4. Major tourism events that attracts tourists to the region (2016).

Table 4. Annual income from tourism related activities in the study area.

Income level	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total	X
₦ 50,000 - ₦ 100,000	22	14	4	5	2	0	47	8
₦ 101,000 - ₦ 150,000	25	20	5	10	18	12	120	20
₦ 151,000 - ₦ 200,000	27	28	30	27	25	32	169	28
₦ 201,000 - ₦ 250,000	43	46	50	46	37	23	245	41
₦251,000 and above	103	112	131	132	138	154	770	128
Total	220	220	220	220	220	220	1320	220

Source: Author's field survey, 2017.

revealed that tourists visit to the area was not evenly spread across the months and the respondents suggested reasons for this. Some attributed it to the seasonal difference as most tourists preferred to visit the resort during dry season. Another reason given for the disparity in tourists' visits through the year was that of events as most of the focus persons and groups interviewed pointed at the availability of events. It was observed as presented in Figure 4 that major events attracted tourists to the region. It was further observed that the major events that attracted visitors to the state were the Calabar carnival festival which attracted 45% of the entire visits, Leboku cultural festival with 20% of the recorded visits, new yam festivals with 13% of the entire tourists, marriages with 11% of the tourists and mountain race competition with 8% of the tourists. The least event was academic and political conferences with 3% of the arrivals of tourists to the area.

The study examined the economic impact of tourism on the people of the host community. Information presented in Table 4 shows that there was a steady increase in the amount of money the people derived (income) from

tourism related activities. It was observed that an average of 128 local people derived an annual income more than N251,000.00 from the tourism related activities they were involved in. The least category were those who had between N50,000 and N100,000.00 as proceed from tourism related activities in the area. This also showed how tourism had impacted on the economy of the people and the community as a whole. The percentile difference of the average income level over the years (2011 to 2016) is further presented in Figure 5.

The study also examined the various tourism related activities the people were involved in.

Information in Figure 6 revealed that the people were mostly involved in tourism related activities such as sales of handcraft/arts work, sales of youghort, sales of natural honey, sales of food and drinks, jobs in hotels, transportation and tour guiding. Figure 6 further revealed that 30% of the people were involved in transportation, closely followed by those involved in the sales of food and drinks (21%), the people involved in the making and sales of hand craft/arts work (20%). The least number of involvement were those involved in tour-guiding which is

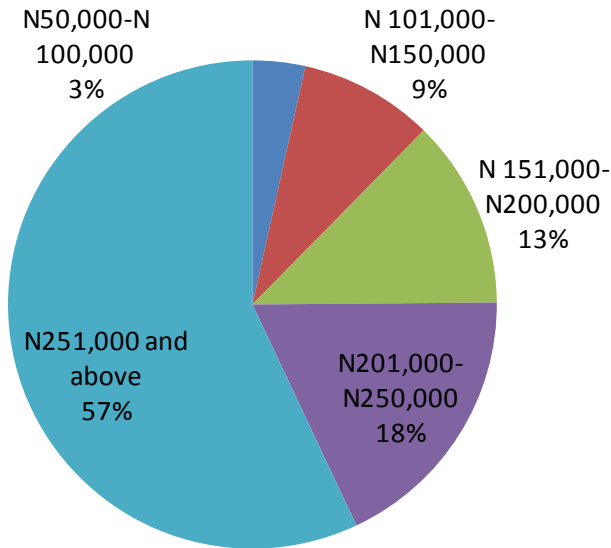


Figure 5. Percentile difference in average income from tourism activities in the area (2011-2016).

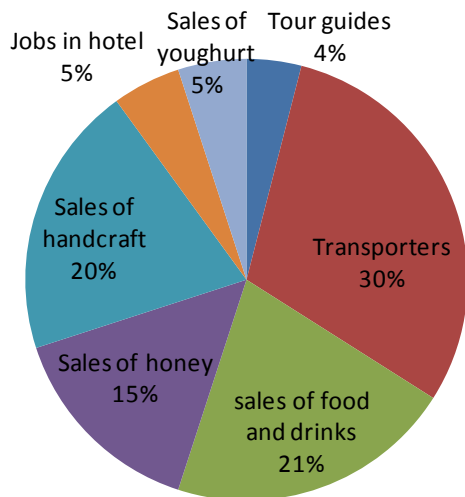


Figure 6. Local people's involvement in tourism related activities in the area (2016).

4% of the people. This shows that the volume of tourists' visits in the area really had a significant impact as the huge involvement of the people in the transport sector directly shows the need for rapid movement around the area. The high demand for consumables (food and drinks) also helped to buttress this point. It was also revealed during the study investigations that there were activities tourists who visited the resort preferred most. Information in Figure 7 revealed that 35% of visitors took pictures around the resort, 25% preferred to visit the farmhouse to buy and take fresh farm yoghurt sold there, 16% were observed to visit the natural garden where they could have a clear view of variety of birds with the

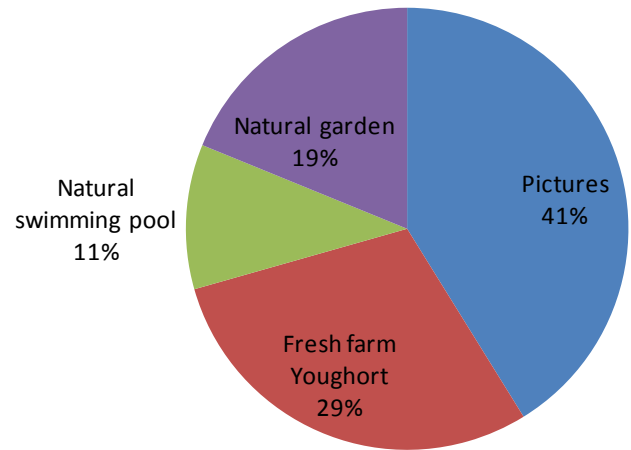


Figure 7. Preferences of tourists in Obudu Mountain resort.

aid of the canopy walk way. Meanwhile, 15% of the visitors liked taking a trip in the cable car which happens to be the longest in West Africa, while others (9%) took timeout at the natural swimming pool.

Test of hypothesis

Ho: The monthly patronage between international and domestic tourists in the ranch resort does not vary significantly from one month to another.

In examining the difference in the monthly patronage between international and domestic tourists in the ranch resort, two-way analyses of variance was employed, since the researcher sought to determine the variability of the two groups across the months. The factors that were considered in this hypothesis were: Origin of tourists, number of tourists and month of the year as presented in Table 3. The result of the two-way analysis of variance is presented in Table 5, where from the estimated marginal mean, it can be seen that origin of tourists has more significant error in domestic (M=52.57) than in the international tourism (M=15.09). The main effect of the month is significant (F(11, 216)= 12.43 and p < 0.001). From the estimated marginal means in the number of errors made by the month, the mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level. The main effect of number of tourists is also significant (F(1, 216)= 263.19, and p < 0.001). Pattern (origin and monthly) of tourists visit to the mountain resort: the month and origin of tourists interaction is significant (F(11, 216)= 3.27 and p < 0.001). It is observed that domestic tourists made more errors than international tourists in all the months. This is indicated by the large variations in their means. The post hoc comparison was carried out to clarify the preceding interpretation by helping to locate differences between the twelve experimental conditions. The result from the

post hoc comparisons indicates that the significant month of origin of tourists' interaction is due primarily to the number of tourists that had significantly, more error, that is, in the months of April, September and December and less error in the other months.

With respect to the interaction between the month and origin of tourists, since $F(11,216) = 3.27$ and $P < 0.001$ is less than the 0.05 level set for this study, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis was accepted. Similarly, in testing the significance of the population column means where there is no variation in the number of tourist across the months, $F(11,216) = 12.42$ and $P < 0.001$, which is lower than the 0.05 level, indicates a significant difference.

Decision

Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative accepted, meaning, the monthly patronage between international and domestic tourist in the mountain resort varies significantly from one month to another.

DISCUSSION

In a bid to investigate the opportunities tourism offers to the development of Becheeve community (hosts of Obudu Mountain Resort), this study therefore examined the level of tourists' patronage of Obudu Mountain Resort. It was observed that to ensure sustainable development in the area, it was expedient that any government official or government agency that wishes to invest in the area must have a priority to improve the living conditions of the people. In assessing the impact of tourism on the living standards of the people, it was observed that although basic social amenities such as, tarred roads, electricity, potable water, security, medical facilities, communication facilities, schools, transportation services and financial facilities (ATM) were provided, these facilities are mainly located around the government owned tourism business centre (TBS) and therefore, it could be said that the facilities are basically put in place to ensure the satisfaction and comfort of tourists visiting the area. Apart from Keji-oku which is located at the heart of the (TBC), other adjoining villages do not feel the presence or relevance of such facilities.

In terms of income, it was observed that tourism in the area had impact on the household income. The study reveals that there was a steady increase in participation in tourism related activities and this transformed to an adverse increase in house-hold income in the area. Aniah et al. (2009) and Okpoko (2006) identified one major impact of tourism which is, increase in the income level among the host people; this increment is also shown in the level of employment of indigenes in the various

tourism servicing industries in the area with a recorded 51% of employed indigenes in the hotels over 49% of non-indigenes.

This is a confirmation of the study of Enang et al. (2016) and Ajake et al (2016), showing that the tourism industry attracts a lot of economic benefits to destination areas and host communities such as, providing employment opportunities, diversifying the economy, presenting other option for economic development, and having positive impact on the advancement of the aesthetic status of the tourists' destination. Other major findings were that domestic or local tourists' visited the resort more than their foreign or international counterparts based on the factors of distance, time, and season.

The study also showed that the volume of tourists and tourism activities in the area was significantly influenced by the number of events hosted within the resort as more visitors and patronages were observed during time of major events.

Conclusion

The study clearly emphasized the impact of seasonality in tourism as the visits and patronage of tourists in the Mountain resort varied across months and time. The study also emphasized that tourism is an event-based activity as the more the uniqueness of activities or events in a destination, the greater the number of people expected to visit and spend money and time within the area. This study is in conformity with the studies of Key and Pillai (2006), Jenny (2001), and Enang et al. (2016), showing that domestic tourists recorded more visits to tourist destinations based on factors such as: distance, climate, language, information, culture and security; and tourists preferred to visit destinations based on the availability of unique events, and tourism is a seasonal activity which is easily influenced or affected by seasonal factors.

Based on the aforementioned findings, the study hereby recommends that for the tourism industry and Mountain Resort to observe more patronage, more cultural and traditional events should be hosted and organized within the resort to help attract more visitors and provide the local people and the tourism support services more opportunity to improve their economic status. It is also recommended that trainings and economic seminars should be organized for the local people to equip them with the skills and knowledge on how to maximize their potentials.

Finally, soft-loans should be given to the people to make them improve their services as the government is compelled to invest more in placing advertisements on print, visual, social, and electronic media to expose the potentiality and uniqueness of the resort to the world, to promote and enhance the volume of visitors patronage of the Mountain Resort.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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