

Tourism and Socio-Economic Development in Ibeno Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the impact of tourism on the socio-economic development of Ibeno Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Despite the huge potential of tourism in the study area, its contribution to the transformation is not encouraging. A qualitative study, it adopted the Malthusian theory of economic development as the theoretical framework for analysis. Amongst others, the paper discovered that the tourism industry as it has done in other climes can generate incomes for households through engagement in various economic activities, generate of revenue for the government, create of employment for a coterie of persons as well as the capacity for rural development. However, this depends on the development of tourism. The challenges bedevilling tourism as a tool for socio-economic transformation in the study area included government negligence of the industry as a revenue and other multiplier effects spinner, as the government of Nigeria and the state of Akwa Ibom concentrate so much on the petroleum sector for revenue; lack of organisation on the part of government authorities in revenue collection in the lone tourist site available in the local government area; and a lack of adequate strategy by government agencies at the development of tourism. It has been recommended that the necessary government authorities put in necessary measures for the development and marketing of the tourism potentials of the local government area; efforts should also be directed at eco-tourism as well as creating an enabling environment for tourism to thrive unfettered.

Keywords: Tourism, socio-economic development, revenue, eco-tourism, transformation.

Introduction

Tourism unarguably is a fundamental sector of the economies of the world. This is as the sector spins multiplier effects in the states of the Southern and Northern hemispheres. The contribution of tourism is evident in the area of revenue generation, employment and trade balance between nations (Ovat, 2003). It is estimated that tourism's contribution to global Gross Domestic Product GDP in 2022 was 7.6 percent translating to \$7.7 trillion (Augustine, Bernard & Maximus, 2022). The sector is also estimated to employ directly about 77 million

people worldwide and indirectly about 234 million people, representing over 8.7 per cent of global employment.

Countries of Africa benefit from tourism's contribution to the GDP with Egypt coming first with \$47.2 billion, followed by South Africa with \$37.95 billion, Morocco with \$ 28.6 billion, Algeria with \$13.95 billion, Kenya with \$10.09 billion, Ethiopia with \$ 9.32 billion, Tunisia 6.85 billion, Cote D' Ivoire \$6.26 billion and Ghana 84.82 billion (Awode, 2022).

In Nigeria, tourism accounted for over 6.97 per cent of GDP and a monetary value estimated at \$25.36 billion in 2022 (Awode, 2022). It is germane to note that the area of tourism is dominated by the rich States of the world; States as the United States of America (USA), Spain, and France. However, realising the important role of tourism in revenue generation, employment and rural transformation (Augustine et al., 2022), African States have put into active strategic plans and policy documents for the revival and development of tourism in their States (Awode, 2022). Nigeria on her part has developed a vision 2025 action plan which is anchored by the Nigerian Tourism and Development Corporation (NTDC). The Vision 2025 action plan is a road map initiated towards opening up Nigeria as a major tourist choice destination in the continent through the promotion of domestic tourism and the development of international tourism (Awode, 2022).

The role of tourism in the development of Akwa Ibom State and Ibeno Local Government Area in the area of social and economic spheres has great potential. It is within this line of reasoning that the article explored with the central thesis that even though Ibeno Local Government Area has great potential in contributing to the socio-economic development of the state through tourism, tourism potentials in the Local Government are yet to be tapped to maximum. The paper also argues that for tourism to drive revenue, generate employment for the teeming population of the state and also serve as a tool for rural transformation, there is a need first to develop tourism to the point that it can serve as a marketing device and socio-economic transformer.

The stated thesis of the paper raised the following research questions: what is the contribution of tourism to socio-economic development in Ibeno Local Government Area and by extension Akwa Ibom State? What are the challenges to tourism in Ibeno Local Government Area? What are the likely measures to be put in place to stimulate tourism in the Local Government Area?

The rest of the article is divided into a theoretical framework, literature review, analysis and discussion of findings as well as concluding remarks.

Theoretical Framework

The paper is anchored on the Malthusian theory of economic development. The theory derives its name from Reverend Thomas Robert Malthus, and is contained in *The Principles of Political Economy published in 1917*. Reverend Thomas Malthus observed that while food supply was growing at arithmetic progression, population was growing at geometric progression. According to him, as the population was growing faster than food supply, if nothing was done to improve food supply, man was likely to be struck by famine, malnutrition and other circumstances that may not augur well for society. By implication, famine and malnutrition will face man because of the law of demand and supply which states that:

- (i) When the demand for a product is higher than the supply side, prices will go higher
- (ii) When supply is higher than the demand, prices will go down.

In the case of Malthus' observation, the prices will go high such that those who cannot afford will suffer from famine and malnutrition. However, Malthus' prediction has not come into play due largely to improvements in farming techniques and interdependence necessitated by cross-boundary trade within and outside of sovereign States.

How does Malthusian theory come into socio-economic development? Ovat (2003) notes that Malthus was principally concerned with raising effective demand that can assist in driving economic development. Edame (2001) had earlier averred that effective demand is the sine qua non for economic development. The generation of effective demand can come through tourism development, an increase in the volume of domestic and international trade as well as the creation of employment opportunities.

Tourism is a tool for socio-economic development. Ibeno Beach and other tourist sites in the Ibeno Local Government Area attract tourists to the Local Government which do two things: raise the population and raise demand for goods and services. Such goods and services traded in the area, for instance, seafood and other farm products, transportation, hotel and other accommodation businesses, banking services and sundry other services and productions have the capacity for creating demand for labour and generating employment; increasing revenues and incomes for the government through various taxes and income for households and other multiplier effects.

Review of Literature

Tourism

Like other concepts in academics, tourism is amenable to various definitions. For this article, two definitions became important. The first is that given by the World Trade Organisation (WTO). WTO define tourism as a social, cultural and economic phenomenon that involves the movement of people to different countries or places outside their areas of domicile usually for personal (private), business or professional purposes. The people who move from their place of habitation to another place for any of the mentioned reasons are referred to as tourists or excursionist and tourism implies the totality of what these visitors do which may involve tourism expenditure. In another dimension, the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) sees tourism as the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for a period not more than one year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity remunerated from within the place visited. (UNWTO, in Augustine et al., 2022).

From the two definitions above, the following can be decided:

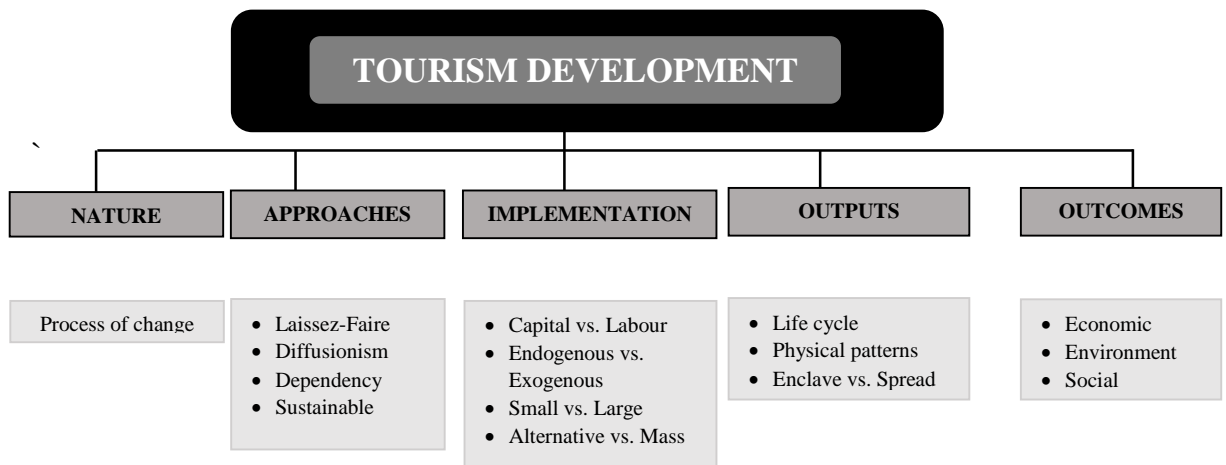
1. Tourism takes place when people move from one place to another.
2. The movement must be pleasure or leisure related, for instance, when Mr Polycarp travels from Abuja or Port Harcourt to watch a football march in Uyo. It must not be a business related, professional outing related e.g. when the Nigerian Institution of Estate Surveyors holds her annual meeting in Uyo and people from the 36 states of Nigeria attend.
3. Tourism attracts expenditure in terms of transportation, hospitality, and business e.g. visitors who have to stay in hotels, eat from restaurants, and patronize other local entrepreneurs.
4. The duration of stay must not be less than a period of one year from the first day of getting to the place of residence on a consecutive event.

Given the foregoing, it is common sense that tourism is a multifaceted activity that has implications and stimulates growth in various sectors of the economy. It is to this extent that Augustine et al., (2022) rightly documented the capacity of tourism for revenue generation for the government as well as the private business owners; and employment generation in various sectors. However, it is worth noting that the capacity for tourism to spine whatever level of contribution to the economy is directly related to the effort at developing tourism. This means that for tourism to contribute to the economy of any given community such a community has to consciously develop tourism.

Tourism is not a fortuitous or chance happening. Though some places or communities may be gifted assets by nature as tourism potential, such endowments have to be consciously developed to attract tourists. Natural beaches, mountains, ranches, lakes, canals etc. may be gifted by nature but infrastructure such as security, roads, railways, airports, other means of transportation, hotels, hospitals, and the hospitable and accommodating nature of the people around such facilities are essential in attracting tourists.

The development of tourism is therefore essential for it to contribute to development. Androitis (2000) has contributed immensely to the area of tourism development and its impact on the domestic and global economy. The scholar’s contribution to tourism development is captured in Figure 1 below.

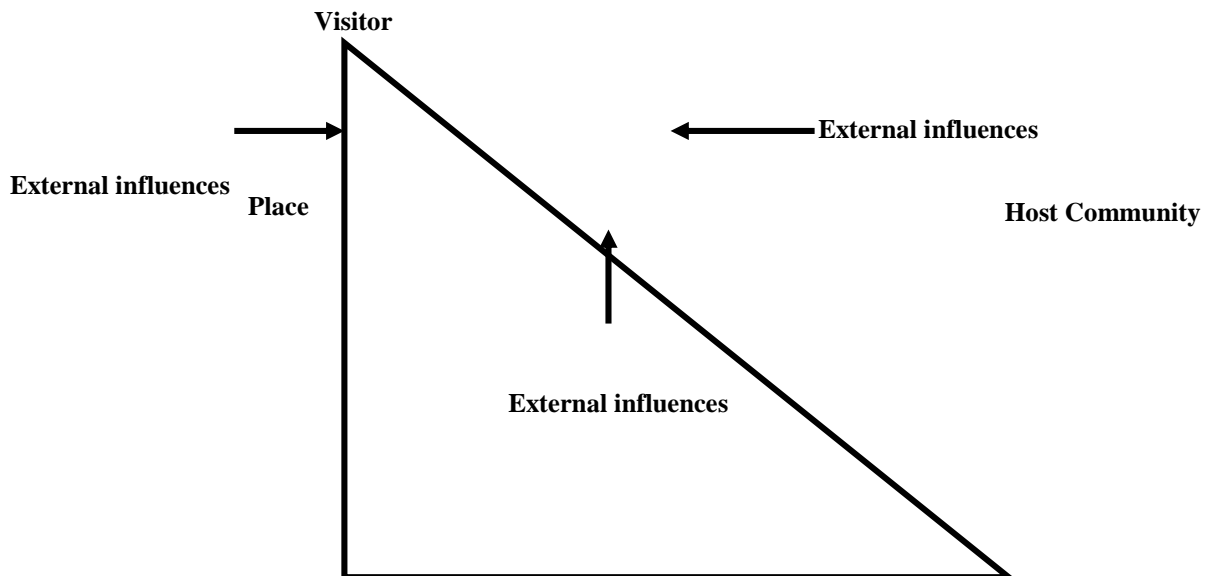
Fig. 1: Tourism Development and Components



Source: Androitis (2000) p12

For the avoidance of doubt, the following are the variables or components involved in tourism as captured in the sustainable model of tourism; place, host community and external influence. Figure 2 below shows the components of the tourism operating environment.

Fig. 2: Components of Tourism from Sustainable Tourism Model



Source: Androitis (2003, p43)

In all the approaches to the development of tourism, the article finds the sustainable development most worthwhile. Figure 2 depicts the three component: the visitor, fee place and the host community. There is a complex and dynamic relationship amongst the three components. There are things to write about the relationship:

- i. It can bring costs and benefits to the destination and the host community.
- ii. The overall objective of sustainable tourism lies in maintaining a harmonious balance between the three components.
- iii. Protecting the resource base.

Tourism in Ibeno Local Government Area

Ibena Local Government Area created on December 4, 1996 by the military administration headed by the late General Sani Abacha, is one of the thirty-one (31) Local Government Areas of Akwa Ibom State. Located in the Mangrove Forest Beer of the Niger Delta Region (South-South), it is bounded by Eastern Obolo to its West, to the North by Onna, Esit Eket and Eket Local Government Areas and to the South by the Atlantic Ocean.

Given the location of Ibena Local Government, it has great tourist potential. It is on record that Ibena, with particular reference to Ukpnekeng, is where the Qua Iboe Church missionaries landed in Nigeria, and the church was established there in 1897. Sadly, the only notable tourist attraction of the Local Government Area is Ibena Beach.

Ibena Beach

Ibena Beach is the longest natural sand beach in West Africa. It has about 30km stretch from Ibena to James Town along the Atlantic Coastline and is reputed as the best tourist attraction in Akwa Ibom State, South-South Nigeria (Wikipedia).

The main attractions of the Ibena beach include but are not limited to; a natural sand bank, facilities for water sports, beach soccer and general boating. It is a destination for fun seekers and is quite busy on weekends, especially Saturdays and Sundays.

Concept of Socio-Economic Development

The central question that this section intends to answer is: what is development? What is socio-economic development? What are the components of socio-economic development?

Development like any behavioural science concept has been interpreted variously by scholars. This article adopts the meaning of development as given by Dudley Seers. Seers conceptualizes development as a situation that is in place when there is a significant reduction in the fundamental threats to human existence: poverty, unemployment and inequality. Seers opined that there is development in the state when there is a positive response to the following question: what is happening to poverty? What is happening to unemployment? What is happening to inequality? (cited in Udoms, Atakpa & Ekanem, 2020).

The implication from Seers is that there is development which is a qualitative issue when there is a significant reduction in the level of poverty, when the level of unemployment is drastically reduced such that citizens can easily find jobs of their choice and make a meaningful living, and finally, when there is considerably reduction in inequality, the gap between the rich and poor is bracket. The consequence of such reduction is that both income and human poverty are taken care of in society. For the avoidance of such, Caroline Thomas notes that income poverty relates to situations where people may not have spendable income, for instance, some may live below the poverty line, while human poverty may refer to the inability of people in society to be part of the process of governance, may not enjoy social life as a result of poverty (See Udoms, 2016). It is in this regard that Gboyega (2003) sees development to be the improvement in the condition of human existence for all, such as the material well-being of all citizens, not the most powerful alone.

Socioeconomic development on the other hand is seen as the improvement in the social and economic future of the people. Indicators such as Gross Domestic Product, life expectancy, literacy, employment, personal dignity, freedom of association, personal safety, freedom from fear of physical harm and the extent of participation in civil society are some of the measurements of the socioeconomic development indicators (Ijere, 2014). In the same vein, Sawant (2017) avers that socio-economic development refers to an individual's resources, wealth, education level and degree of urbanization.

Tourism and Socio Economic Development

The development of tourism makes for the provision of certain amenities e.g. roads, security, accommodation e.g. hotels. Tourism in return makes returns on these investments and goes further to reap on such investments in the form of revenue generation for government, employment generation, rural development and socio-economic impacts (Augustine et al., 2023). Androitis (2000) added balance of payment stimulation rural development, as well as linkages.

(a) Revenue Generation

Government invests a lot of money in tourism development in the form of maintaining institutions relating to tourism such as the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, the National Tourism Organisation (NTO) for the purpose of promoting tourism business; the hard and soft infrastructure such as security, roads, hospitals etc. that drive tourism are provided by the government. In turn government is expected to get return on such investment. Androitis (2000) and Augustine et al (2023) list the way government gets return on tourism to include airport taxes, hotel taxes, value added tax (VAT) or goods and services, taxes on earned employment of person working in the tourism sector as well as other forms of levies.

(b) Employment Generation

There are at least four (4) basic ways that tourism spin employment. The first is that as government tries to tax the sector by providing infrastructure e.g. roads, security etc. both the locals and others are involved as local material may be used. The second is that hands are employed in hotels, transportation businesses that carry tourists to site shops etc. Another dimension is that businesses such as restaurants, supermarkets, site shops etc. spring up in and around major tourist sites providing employment for several persons. Lastly tour guides may be needed by tourists. It has already been documented in the introduction that tourism is perhaps the greatest job provider globally.

(c) Rural Development

Tourism provides opportunity for development of tourist sites so they can attract visitors, in the form of water supply, electricity, road construction, provision of hotels and other relaxations spots, accommodation of some sorts. The provision of these infrastructure go a long way to transforming tourist sites. It is unarguable that most tourist sites are located in rural communities, which may over time transform to become urban places because of the influence of such tourist sites.

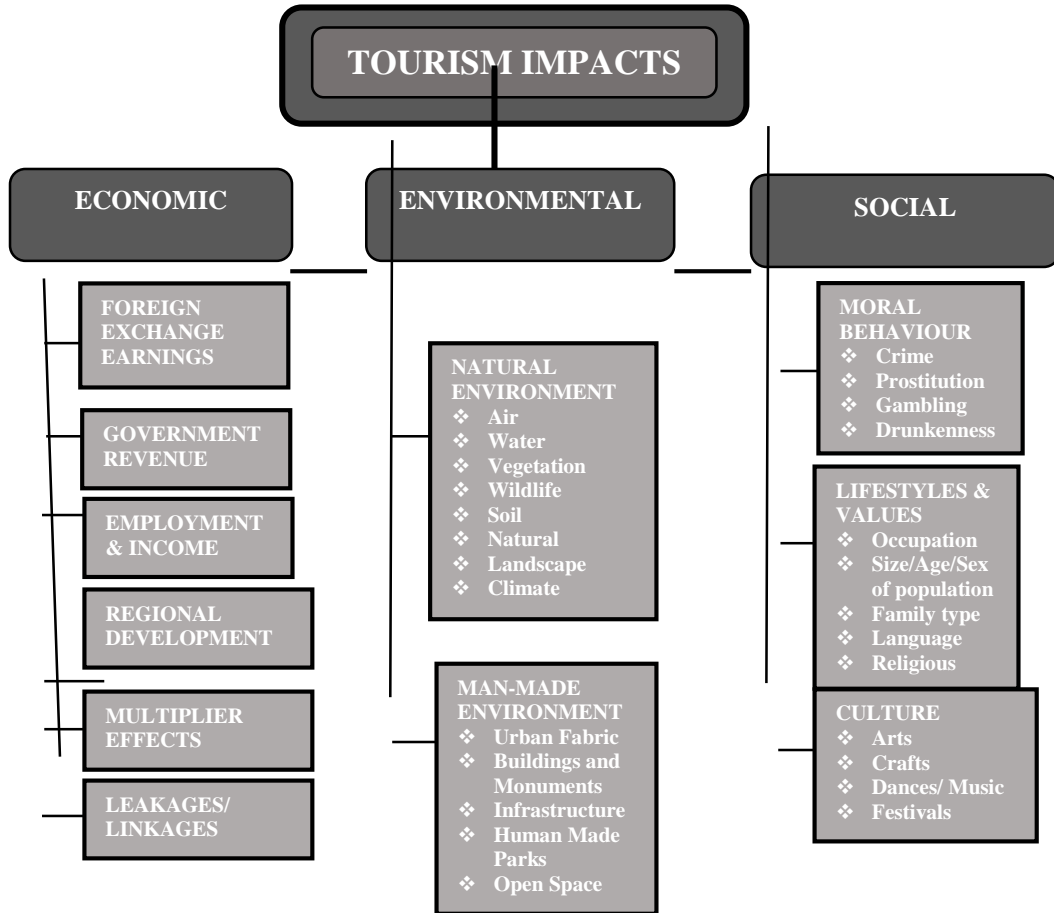
Ibenu Beach, Exxon Mobil, Tourism and Socio Economic Development in Ibenu Local Government Area

Tourism is not a sole item exercise, rather it consists of all those items that attract visitors to a certain area as well as the activities of the visitors that have impact on the environment. It is to this that the paper adds a major tourism spinning item as the presence of Mobil Producing Unlimited located in Ibenu. The presence of Mobil Producing Unlimited as a major oil producing company also attracts numerous other companies and concerns that in turn attract stakeholders from within and outside Akwa Ibom State. The presence of these businesses also attract other investments to service those concern and their clients e.g. hotels, restaurants,

entertainment ventures, transportation business, markets of various dimension including the popular rich market in Ibeno owing to the influence of the Atlantic Ocean.

Tourism therefore has a lot of influence in any host community and beyond – tangible and intangible impacts. Androitis (2000) chose to divide the impacts of tourism into three: economic, environmental and social. This is captured in figure 3.

Figure 3. Impacts of Tourism



Source: Androitis (2003, p43)

Tourism as Tool for Socio-Economic Development in Ibeno Local Government: Challenges and Prospects

The role of tourism as a tool for generating revenue and income for both government and households has been elaborated to the effect that various economic activities in the area are promoted as there is a great influx of tourists into the Local Government Area, especially the Ibeno Beach which is the main tourist site in the area. It has been pointed out that employment and rural development are part of the consequences of tourism in the area.

A visit by the researcher to the Local Government Area reveals that the major tourist attraction - Ibeno Beach is a beehive of activities, especially, during weekends and festive periods, a large number of tourists troop into the facility during Christmas, New Year days, Easter to catch fun and relax with loved ones and community people and other residents and others making businesses.

Challenges and Prospects

A major observation about the challenges of tourism serving as a tool for socio-economic development in Ibeno Local Government is that several other sites that have tourist potential in the Local Government area like the site where the Scottish Missionaries established the Qua Iboe Church in 1887 are not given due attention. If the Federal, State and Local government authorities were to recognise the tourist potential of the facility and the capacity for socio-economic transformation, the development of such a facility would add value to Nigerian society. Nigerian religious faithful of Christian extraction visit Jerusalem every year on religious pilgrimage, making Israel earn a huge revenue. Mkpanak community where the Church was first sited in Nigeria and Africa has the potential for attracting religious faithful from all over the country and Africa if the church and government authorities recognise the huge capacity of that historic relic.

At Ibeno Beach (the only recognised and highly patronised tourist site in the Local Government Area), the level of touting by community boys who are eager to extort money from tourists is capable of siphoning revenue meant for the government. The tickets occasionally issued during festive periods at the beach are neither issued by the State nor the local Government. What that suggests is that revenue collection at the beach is not organised. Security at the beach is rather porous. The wide expanse of the facility arguably the largest sandbank beach in West Africa (Awode, 2022) is not adequately secured. Apart from the community volunteers and a few security personnel from Exxon Mobil, there is no organised security network to protect tourists at the beach given the security challenges in Nigeria at the moment, where kidnapping for ransom has become disturbing with even the government seemingly helpless.

The three challenges mentioned in the preceding paragraphs are consequent on the fact that the Nigerian government relies so much on the petroleum sector for revenue for development. The government only pays lip service to the other sectors of the economy. The issue of diversification is not given adequate attention. At this juncture it becomes pertinent to add that leadership vision commitment and its gross lack in Nigeria is perhaps the greatest challenge to the development of tourism as a tool for socioeconomic transformation and development.

Corruption in a country where governance deficit is a feature has wrecked government policies from formulation to implementation. According to Udoms and Atakpa (2021), governance deficit consists of public officials misusing power entrusted to them by the position they occupy to seek primordial and mundane private interests.

Concluding Remarks

The paper interrogated the capacity of tourism to create socio-economic development with particular reference to Ibeno Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. It argued that tourism generates income for households, revenue for the government, and creates employment for persons engaged in various activities in a bid to satisfy tourists. However, for tourism to contribute to the development of any area in terms of rural transformation, employment, and revenue generation, there must be a conscious effort at tourism development through the provision of infrastructure and an enabling environment for tourism to thrive.

However, the paper noted, that too much dependence is on the petroleum sector to the detriment of other sectors that can contribute to the development of the economy of the country by way of diversification. The tourism industry is effectively positioned to boost the economy. Given the findings of the paper, the following recommendations were made:

1. The state government and the authorities of Ibeno Local government should discover, project, market and promote the cultural, historical, and archaeological treasures in Ibeno Local government area as this will boost the capacity of the tourism industry

contributing to the overall development of the Local government area with spillover effects on the state.

2. There is a need for proper funding for tourism. It is therefore recommended that the government should provide a conducive environment that aids the private sector in the development of the tourism industry.
3. Ibeno local authorities and other stakeholders should step up efforts in ecotourism-environmental impacts of tourism with a particular focus on the protection/development of wildlife tourism, natural parks and endangered species that will attract tourists all year round.
4. Ibeno Local government should make a case for the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) to invite necessary industry agents to the Local government area, to discover potential tourism sites and to apply marketing strategies capable of generating demands e.g. seminars, film shows and others that highlight the hidden treasures in the local government.
5. Government and other stakeholders should embark on concerted development of needed manpower in the tourism industry. These may include but are not limited to training schools and institutions for the development of critical personnel in the tourism industry.
6. Akwa Ibom state should, as a matter of urgency embark on the generation of tourism information through the collection and collation of tourism statistics. This should be made available on the internet for the benefit of investors and tourists.

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