



## Development of Zuma Rock as Tourism Destination and the Prospect for National Economic Growth

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### Abstract

*Numerous tourist destinations in Nigeria with a variety of attractions have failed to achieve their tourism capacities due to lack of strategic development to stimulate economic growth in the host communities and the nation at large. This study therefore evaluates the potential of developing Zuma Rock as a tourism Destination and the prospects for national economic growth of Nigeria. The data for this study was generated from primary and secondary sources. Observation and interview techniques were employed in which 35 respondents comprising head district, hotel employees and community residents were interviewed. Responses articulated were analyzed using Destination Competitive Tourism Model. The finding reveals that Zuma Rock qualifies to be a Tourism destination; therefore if it is fully developed it will contribute significantly to the economic growth of Nigeria through job creation, income generation by the host community, foreign exchange earnings and revenue to government. It has been recommended that government should intensified efforts in providing social amenities, tight security surveillance to curtail the menace of kidnapping and armed robbery in the area. Private participation in the areas of investment and destination promotion should be encouraged to fully harness the potentialities of Zuma Rock as a viable tourism destination.*

**Key words:** Tourist destination, Economic growth, Eco-tourism, Zuma Rock, Tourism

### Introduction

The Nigerian hospitality report 2017 by Jumia Travel showed that Nigeria generated ninety-seven per cent of its tourism revenue from domestic travel in 2016 while foreign travel accounted for only three per cent (Ekonji, 2017). The report also showed that, the tourism industry contributed 1.7 billion naira to Nigeria's GDP, which is about 4.8 per cent of the country's GDP in 2016. This contribution was immense for the economy considering the fact that the country's GDP shrank by 2.24 per cent year-on-year in the third quarter of 2016, following a 2 per cent decline in the previous period, and compared to market expectations of a 2.5 per cent decline (Dutta, 2017). These are no doubt modest contributions to the nation's



economy in quantitative terms but a lot can still be done to revamp the economic viability of the sector generally to serve as a major foreign exchange earner for the federal government and in the process, provide job opportunities to teeming unemployed youths in the country; thereby controlling indirectly the menace of petty crimes and youth restiveness across the country; bearing in mind that every state in Nigeria is blessed with at least one potentially economically viable tourist resource.

However, numerous tourism sites in Nigeria with different attractions have not succeeded to achieve their tourism capacities as a result of inadequate destination development to propel economic growth. This is because tourism creates veritable avenues for the people living around these tourism sites to benefit from their culture and natural assets through beneficial engagement in tourism activities and the provision of goods and services without having the need to indulge in rural-urban migration in search of proverbial greener pastures (UNWTO, 2011). Smith (2007) however posits that economic benefits of tourism is largely determined by the well known economic principle of demand and supply as well as the active participation and involvement of the local community thus enabling the ‘marketability’ and attraction of the tourism destination to intending tourists. The purpose of this study is to assess the potential of developing Zuma Rock as a tourism Destination and the prospects for national economic growth of Nigeria.

## **Methodology**

Data for this study were generated from both primary and secondary sources. We employed both interview and observation method to secure the relevant information needed for this research. Thirty five (35) people were interviewed in the destination area. These includes the District Head, residents of the host community and hotel mangers and their employees.



Meanwhile, secondary data was generated from extant literature documented in published books, published and unpublished articles, journals and relevant internet materials. The data generated with regards to the subject matter was analysed using Destination Competitiveness Tourism Model.

## Theoretical Framework

In this study the Destination Competitiveness Tourism Model was adopted as a framework for analysis. This tourism model has evolved a combination of ideas, which relate to the interaction and behaviour of variety of industry which function in any given clime as well as the associated social and economic benefit it brings forth in that clime (Hassan, 2000). In this light, numerous authors and researchers have advanced some scientific insights into the applicability of this model in the area of tourism destination. For instance, Faulkner (2000) considered environmental component in his extrapolation of the Model in his study of Hot Spring Hotel in Taiwan; thus reemphasizing active participation and commitment of the local community to the development of the destination, its comparative advantage, industry structure and demand factors as the four determinants of tourism competitiveness. The assumptions of the model include:

- i. Supply of Supporting Factors or Components in any tourism destination increases demand and competitiveness of the environment
- ii. Influx of People in any given destination is a function of attractiveness and individual disposable income
- iii. Every Destination has Its own competitive advantage over one another
- iv. Tourists tend to cluster where high level of supporting facilities are allocated



- v. Demand situation supports tourism competitiveness. It also positively influences the development of added value in tourism
- vi. Complimentary aactivities in any tourism industry enhances visitors` satisfaction.

## Literature Review

This section of the study provides the meaning and the concept of tourism destination, State of Eco-Tourism Resources in Nigeria and also provides brief explanation on the potentiality of developing Zuma Rock as a sustainable Tourism Destination.

## Conceptualizing Tourism Destinations

Simplistically, tourism destination can be defined as the place where tourists intend to spend their time away from home. The destination may be a stand-alone event centre, a village, town, a city, a region or an island or a country (Cho, 2000). This definition is largely consistent with the perception of tourists who see destinations “as a unit, offering an integrated experience or a destination product” (Buhalis, 2000; Murphy et al., 2000). However from a panoramic standpoint, the concept of tourism destination is largely conceived as complex networks that involve a large number of co-producing actors delivering a variety of products, and services (Gunn, 1994; Pearce, 1989; Buhalis, 2000). Similarly, Hangland, Havard, Grongeth and Aarstad (2011) defined destinations as complex co-producing networks. Thus, tourist destinations are a compendium of tourism products, experiences and other intangible items promoted to the desired consumer. In a nut shell, there is a range of six components which comprise a destination at least from an industry supply perspective. These are: Available packages; Accessibility; Attractions; Amenities; Activities; Ancillary services (Anonymous, 2018).

Therefore, strategic destination development involves collaborative efforts by the government



and the organized private sector to consciously plan and ‘develop’ existing tourism resources in such a way as to enhance accessibility to it, improve its attractiveness and put in place critical amenities and facilities that would stimulate economic-related tourist activities. And “this needs to take into account the challenges of developing strategies involving a large number of firms and other actors such as, for example, local and regional authorities”(Hangland, Havard, Grongeth and Aarstad, 2011).

## **State of Eco-Tourism Resources in Nigeria**

For the purpose of clarity, eco-tourism, also known as ecological tourism refers to responsible travel to fragile, pristine, and usually protected areas. It helps educate the traveller, provide funds for conservation; directly benefits the economic development and political empowerment of local communities; and fosters respect for different cultures and for human rights (Eko, Utting and Onun, 2013). An exploration of the tourism resources in Nigeria shows that a good number of eco-tourism destinations which have enormous growth potential for Nigeria’s economy have largely remained undeveloped. Some of these include:

- i. Natural and Physical Attractions such as the Gurara Water Falls in Niger state, Matsirga waterfall in Kaduna state, Jeffy falls in Borno state and Farin Ruwa water falls, Wamba Nassarawa state.
- ii. Rock Formations such as Zuma Rock, Niger state, Riyom Rock, Plateau state and Oke Maria, Ondo state.
- iii. Hill and Highlands such as the Mambilla Plateau, Taraba state, and
- iv. Caves and Tunnels such as Marshal Caves, Yankari, Bauchi state and Kwantarkwoshi cave Zamfara state (Dantata, 2011).



## **The potential of developing Zuma Rock as a Tourism Destination**

Zuma Rock is situated in Madalla, Niger State, to the North of Abuja. It was once described as the unquestionable watchman of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT). It is unfeasible for Visitors and Tourists who come to Abuja not to see this captivating destination, as it has always been a centre of attraction for them. Although it is located at Madalla, Niger State, it has over time become a major symbol of Abuja's landscape, due to its close proximity to Abuja City (Clarke, 2017).

Zuma Rock was first located in a thick forest by the people of Zuba and the Koro in the 15th century when they settled around the Rock. The Zuba people named the rock, "Zumwa", which means "the place of catching Guinea-Fowls". Thus, the name "Zuma" was derived from this name. On getting to the forest, they settled within a mile radius around it and constructed a couple of settlements. On discovering that the rock had strong spirits, they worshipped it, offered constant sacrifices, and organized festivals in honour of the rock. Thus, within its environment, this rock was regarded as the strongest idol, both for its size and strong spirits. Over time, it has been used for defensive purposes by the natives of Gwari against invading neighbouring tribes (Clarke, 2017).

Zuma Rock is a very popular landmark in Nigeria. It is 3.1 kilometres in circumference and stands tall at a height of about 725 meters above the surrounding area, which is more than the height of Aso Rock and Olumo Rock combined (Clarke, 2017). At the time FCT was carved out, it was well known that the physical boundary of FCT dissected the Rock, with the larger part falling into Niger State and the smaller part falling into FCT. Therefore, geographically it is in-between Niger State and FCT, Abuja. Generally referred to as the *Gateway to Abuja*, it



stands ostensibly at the Northern end of Abuja, on the Abuja-Kaduna expressway (Clarke, 2017).

Visiting Zuma Rock between April and October, which marks the rainy season in central Nigeria where the rock is situated, would afford one the opportunity of seeing the much talked Zuma Rock Fire, as the apex of the Rock catches fire under heavy rainfall. Over time, this has remained one of the wonders to behold. Logistics-wise, the Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport, Abuja is the closest airport to the Zuma Rock. Taxis are available to drive tourists from the Nnamdi Azikiwe Airport to Zuma Rock. The journey takes about 45 minutes (Clarke, 2017), and approximately 1 hour 15 minutes via taxi from Minna, the Niger state capital.

At Zuma rock, tourists could join a group of rock climbers to go hiking and mountain climbing. Climbing the rock takes about 5 hours and it gives you the opportunity of having an aerial view of Abuja City as well as its environs. For first time climbers, it is advisable to climb the Rock through the Eastside; tourists will also be thrilled to view the face of the Zuma Rock from the south-western wing. The Rock is open and accessible to anyone interested in exploring the rock, albeit tourists would be required to pay a token in the event that they want to climb to the top of the rock (Clarke, 2017). Zuma Rock represents a beautiful and unique natural work of rock formation which offers a good environment for picnicking and relaxation.

## **Discussion of the Findings**

In order to assess the viability of developing Zuma Rock as a Tourism Destination we use Destination competitiveness Tourism Model. The data obtained through interview and observation techniques was analysed via the model to arrive at our findings and conclusion. Below is the discussion of the findings;



## **Supply of Supporting Factors or Components at Zuma Rock Area**

Accessibility to a particular location and availability of accommodation facilities are necessary in qualifying that location to be a tourism destination. The Nnamdi Azikiwe International Airport is the closest to the Zuma Rock. Taxis are also available to drive tourists to the destination area from the airport. With regards to accommodation for tourists, a five star hotel, Zuma Rock Resort International Limited is being constructed near the rock but has not been completed. However, some of the hotel accommodations located within 15 kilometre radius of the Zuma Rock include Pope John Paul Catholic Guest House, Orient hotel, Transcorp Hilton, Abuja, Crown Princess Hotels, Rockview Hotel Classic, Summerset Continental Hotel, Nugget Hotels, Barcelona Hotels, Abuja, and Reiz Continental Hotel, with standard rooms costing between seven thousand naira and ninety-two thousand naira per night. Behind the rock is the Zuma Rock Nigerian Village, which was constructed to as an accommodation for tourists visiting the rock, unfortunately it has inadequate facilities and lacks security.

## **Influx of People at Zuma Rock Area**

Due to its popularity, it is often called the ‘unquestionable watchman’ of the Federal Capital Territory (F.C.T) and as a centre of attraction to every visitor and tourists in Abuja, it is also a must see destination for both domestic and international tourists. From the interview conducted, it has been deduced that every blessed day on average, more than 100 people visited Zuma Rock with the exception of passersby who just take a look at the rock while going in or out of Abuja via suleja road.

## **Competitive Advantage of Zuma Rock as a Tourism Destination**





The location of Zuma Rock at the physical boundary between FCT and Niger State has made it to be one of the important geographical landmarks. Zuma Rock possesses unique features in height and circumference area which is more than the height of Aso Rock and Olumo Rock combined together. It has a magnificent feature of producing fire at the Apex during rainy season.

Zuma Rock on its own is a beautiful attraction that no one would like to miss viewing. Additionally, it provides a range of tourism services which include mountain climbing, hiking, adventures, picnicking and relaxation centres. Combined together, these services provide a competitive advantage for Zuma Rock as one of the attractive tourism destinations not only for the FCT but for the country as a whole.

### **Demand Situation Supporting Tourism Competitiveness at Zuma Rock**

The Rock is available and accessible to anyone interested in touring the rock- mountain climbers, researchers, students on excursion. People are interested in visiting Zuma Rock as a centre of attraction being the gate way to Abuja. Currently, as indicated by the most respondents interviewed, the demand situation of tourism services at Zuma Rock is sufficient and compelling, this means if Zuma Rock is developed to its full potentials it can positively influence the development of added value in tourism which will subsequently lead to economic growth.

### **Tourists Tend To Cluster where High Level of Supporting Facilities Are Allocated**

The fact that Zuma Rock is located in an area with high level of supporting facilities it is enough to enable tourist cluster around the area. More than 70% of the respondents interviewed believed that once Zuma Rock is developed fully as tourism destination more tourists will patronize it



and this will create rapid infrastructural development of the area, employment opportunities for the youth and economic prosperity of the host community.

## **Complimentary Activities supporting Zuma Rock as a tourism Destination**

Apart from Abuja international airport and accommodations facilities located near Zuma Rock, the presence of National Stadium, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Office, United Nations Office, Millennium Park, and Shopping Malls in the Federal Capital Territory Abuja provides opportunity of conducting series of activities and programs that generate an overwhelming gathering of people coming from different parts of the country including abroad for sports, conferences, meetings and shopping. These activities may eventually create site visitation to Zuma Rock especially when it is marketed very well.

Finally, the observation made during visitation to the destination reveals that Zuma Rock Nigerian village is however, bedevilled with a number of challenges such as inadequate security which has been aggravated by the activities of kidnappers and armed robbers operating along the Abuja-Kaduna express way, uncoordinated tour guide services, epileptic power supply, and an 'unfriendly' host community who largely view tourists as necessary evils that must be hoodwinked by the locals. These challenges have tremendous impact on the destination image hence could water down its potential as a viable tourist destination.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Developing Zuma Rock as a potential tourism destination has been examined using Destination Competitiveness Tourism Model. The finding shows that Zuma Rock is a good potential for tourism destination and the location has abundant opportunities for tourism activities due to its unique and outstanding features compared to other rocks in Nigeria. Conclusively, its



development would lead to economic growth of Nigeria through creating employment; income generation to host community, foreign exchange earnings and increase tax revenue to government. Based on the findings of this research the following recommendations are offered;

1. The supply of supporting factors in Zuma Rock requires government support and private sector commitment to increase demand and attractiveness of the environment. By provision of adequate infrastructural facilities, transportation, constant water and electricity supply, and catering services.
2. The Zuma Rock Nigeria Village which was built to accommodate tourists visiting the rock has inadequate facilities and security measures should be put in place for the safety and welfare of the tourists.
3. There should be coordinated tour guide service to be rendered to tourists, mountain climbers, adventurers, students on excursions and researchers.
4. The Federal Government should formulate a plan on developing Zuma Rock because of its unique features compared to other rocks in Nigeria to make it a sustainable tourism destination as the gate way to Abuja.
5. There should be educated and trained professionals in the tourism industry (residents) to help in creating awareness of the benefits of tourism development in the Zuma Rock host community.
6. There should be constant transportation means for example shuttle buses to move people from parking areas into the site.
7. Increased awareness about Zuma Rock through promotions and advertisements both locally and internationally to increase patronage. Studies of customer behaviours should be carried out periodically to understand the ever-changing tastes of tourists in order to develop specific promotions that will resonate with the prospective tourists.



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