



Tourists' Assessment of Sustainable Ecotourism Development: A Case Study of National Children's Park and Zoo, Abuja, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: The study of tourists' assessment of sustainable ecotourism development was carried out in National Children's Park and Zoo, Abuja, Nigeria. Purposive sampling technique was used to select one hundred and ten (110) tourists over 18 years which made up the respondents for the study. One hundred and ten (110) copies of questionnaire were administered to the respondents. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, mean and presented as tables, graphs and charts. The results revealed that the highest number of respondents (64.55%) got to know about the zoo from family and friends while the least (1.82%) from television and radio each. The majority of the respondents (36.36%) are visiting the Zoo for the first time, 28.18% are visiting for the second time while the least number of respondents (2.73%) are visiting for the sixth time. The highest number of respondents (56.36%) visited the Zoo for the purpose of Leisure/Recreation, 27.27% visited for the purpose of meetings, 10% for holiday, and 6.36% for Research/Education. The results also revealed that 67.27% of the respondents were satisfied with their visit to the Zoo, 19.09% were indifferent, and 13.64% were not satisfied. Majority of the respondents (70.91%) would visit the Zoo again and a very high proportion of the respondents (90%) would recommend the Zoo to others. It is therefore recommended that more funds should be allocated to the National Children's park and zoo to help get new facilities to attract more tourists and employ more skilled staff.

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Tourism is a major source of income and foreign exchange earner for countries with tourism potentials. Ecotourism, an aspect of environmental tourism makes minimal impact on the environment, empowers host communities, respects the culture of indigenous people and conserves biodiversity. It is one of the fastest growing aspects of tourism especially in developing countries (Magigi and Ramadhani, 2013), where the resources are present. Simply put, tourism has become the largest industry on the planet earth. While people are embarking on recreational tours, the effect of their travels have brought about

infrastructural development, physical development, employment opportunities, addition of values to local less - valued materials. The destructive nature of mass tourism and the disturbing noise of urban tourism have made people become more interested in ecotourism. Visitations to natural areas have been rated highest in terms of recreation and environmental awareness as visitors are hardly disturbed by crowds. Besides interaction with nature especially plants and animals increases knowledge of the environment, and have been proved to exert healing effects on tourists (Ana and Ajewole, 2011). People are bored of having the

same experience every time. They prefer travelling to pristine areas to learn new things, have new experiences while viewing different species of animals in their habitat including rare, endangered, endemic and abundant unique land forms; waterfalls of different heights and velocity of flow; lakes of different colours and sizes; springs of different temperatures; birds of different calls and plumage colours (Ijeomah, 2017). Put in another way they want to interact with 'the naturality' of the nature and 'the rurality of the rurals' (Ijeomah and Aiyeloja, 2010). In spite of the commendable tourism potentials in National Children's Park and Zoo, coupled with the government interest in developing the tourism sector, the level of tourist inflow in most of these potentials sites identified by the government is still not encouraging (Aniah, 2006). Besides, the lack of adequate empirical data has hindered policy makers and other stakeholders on the viability of most of the existing tourism development potentials in National Children's Park and Zoo. Studies by Ejaet *al.* (2012) on the success factors determining Nigeria as a tourist destination shows that most of the states with great tourism potentials still witness a decline of tourist influx, from 5,103 in 2008 to 2,549 in 2011, due to the fact that most of the potentials within their environment has not been provided with adequate facilities and attention. Inadequate facilities, lack of fund, poor support from government, inadequate staff, and visitors not complying with Zoological garden rules are some of the challenges faced by Zoological garden in Nigeria (Dododawa and Mbalisike, 2023).

Although many works have been done on the study of tourism in many destinations (Chon, 1990; Chukwuemeka, 2009; Muazu, 2010; Bako, 2012; Adeyemi, 2012) most of these works focused on identifying, classifying and analysing destinations attractiveness, nevertheless there exists a gap about knowing the touristic value of some natural potential in National Children's Park and Zoo, this study will therefore assess these potential in the city to determine their challenges in its development with the view of making recommendation for improvement.

Tourism brings about infrastructural development such as tarred roads, airports, hotels, power, and railways and of course revenue generation and so this study will enable policy makers to assess tourism as a tool for development in Abuja, so that challenges can be identified and recommendations may be made towards more effective tourism development. It will serve as a relevant document for individuals, government, and corporate organizations interested in developing tourism and also will contribute to knowledge, which will be useful to researchers in tourism development studies.

Researches on tourism in zoological gardens in Nigeria exist such as Adams and Salone (2014) on Kano Zoological Garden, Adefaluet *al.* (2015) on Univeristy of Ilorin Zoo, Adekola (2015) on Federal University of Technology Akure Wildlife Park, Alarapeet *al.* (2015) on Makurdi Zoological Garden, Ayodele and Alarape (1998) on Agodi Zoo, and Dododawa and Mbalisike (2023) on Port Harcourt Zoo. However, little or no research exists as far as zoo tourism in National Children's Park and Zoo is concerned. This study therefore sought to address this research paucity. Hence the objective of this paper as to evaluate the tourists' assessment of sustainable ecotourism development: a case study of national children's park and zoo, Abuja, Nigeria.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Study Area: The National Children's Park and Zoo, an ex-situ conservation site occupies a unique landscape displaying a large section of the Aso Rock and a water flow from Jabi Lake. The National Children's Park and Zoo is located in Asokoro District close to Aso Rock Presidential Villa Abuja, Nigeria. The National Children's Park and Zoo is currently under the management of the Federal Government of Nigeria. The expansive recreation centre is home to an array of wildlife and captivating landscape. Over the years it has served as a functional recreational park with very strong educational impact.

Sampling Method: Purposive (in which visitors over 18 years were considered) sampling technique was used to select 110 respondents for the study.

Data Collection: The instrument of data collection used was the questionnaire which was equally backed by oral interview. One hundred and ten (110) copies of questionnaire were administered to the visitors.

Data Analysis: Data collected was analyzed using descriptive statistics of frequency, percentage, mean and presented as tables, graphs and charts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents: The results of socio-demographical characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. 49.09% and 50.91% of the visitors to the zoo are male and female respectively. Most of the respondents are single (73.64%). Respondents within the age group 18-28 have the majority with 63.33%, followed by 24.55% of those within 29-38, 9.09% of the 39-48 and 2.73% of the ≥ 49 group.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic status	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex	Male	54	49.09
	Female	56	50.91
Total		110	100.0
Marital status	Single	81	73.64
	Married	29	26.36
	Divorced	0	0.00
Total		110	100.0
Age (in years)	18-28	70	63.63
	29-38	27	24.55
	39-48	10	9.09
	≥49	3	2.73
Total		110	100.0
Religion	Christianity	91	82.73
	Islam	19	17.27
	Traditional	0	0
Total		110	100.0
Education	Informal education	0	0.00
	Primary education	4	3.64
	Secondary education	3	2.73
	Tertiary education	103	93.64
Total		110	100.00
Occupation	Student	19	17.27
	Business	30	27.27
	Civil servant	48	43.64
	Unemployed	13	11.82
Total		110	100.0
Household size	<4	38	34.55
	4-6	59	53.64
	7-9	10	9.09
	>9	3	2.73
Total		110	100.0
Nationality	Nigerian	104	94.55
	Others	6	5.45
Total		110	100.0

Christians have the highest representation with 82.73% while Muslims constitute 17.27%. 93.64% and 2.73% have tertiary and secondary education respectively, while 3.64% have primary education. The majority of the visitors are Civil servants representing 43.64% of the respondents, 27.27% are Business owners, 17.27% are students, while 11.82% are unemployed. 53.64% of the respondents have a household size of 4-6, 34.55% have a household size of <4, while 9.09% and 2.73% have a household size of 7-9 and >9 respectively. 94.55% of the respondents are Nigerians while 5.45% are foreigners.

friends while the least (1.82%) from television and radio each. This is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Tourists' medium of awareness of the zoo

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Television	2	1.82
Radio	2	1.82
Family and friends	71	64.55
Poster	3	2.73
Internet	22	20.0
School	6	5.45
Office	4	3.64
Total	110	100

Tourists' medium of awareness of the Zoo: The result of the Tourists' medium of awareness of the zoo revealed that the highest number of respondents (64.55%) got to know about the zoo from family and

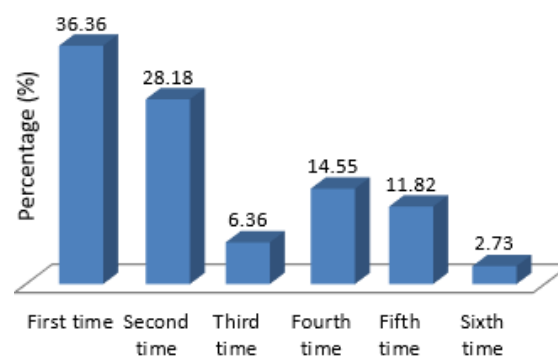


Fig 1: Number of times Visitors have visited the Zoo

Table 3: Tourists' frequency of visit to the Zoo

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Every month	5	4.55
Every 3 months	4	3.64
Every 6 months	16	14.55
Every 9 months	10	9.09
Every year	57	51.82
Every 2 years and above	18	16.36
Total	110	100

*Number of times Visitors have visited the Zoo:*The result of the number of times Visitors have visited the Zoo revealed that the majority of the respondents (36.36%) are visiting the Zoo for the first time, 28.18% are visiting for the second time while the least number of respondents (2.73%) are visiting for the sixth time. This is represented in Figure 1.

*Tourists' frequency of visit to the Zoo:*The result of Tourists' frequency of visit to the Zoo revealed that the highest number of respondents (51.82%) visit the Zoo every year, 16.36% visit every 2 years and above, 14.55% visit every 6 months, and the least number of respondents (3.64%) visit every 3 months. This is shown in Table 3.

*Tourists' length of stay in the Zoo:*The result of the Tourists' length of stay in the Zoo revealed that majority of the respondents (45.45%) stayed more than 4 hours, 25.45% stayed 3 hours while the least number of respondents (3.64%) stayed for 1 hour. This is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Tourists' length of stay in the Zoo

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1 hour	4	3.64
2 hours	7	6.36
3 hours	28	25.45
4 hours	21	19.09
More than 4 hours	50	45.45
Total	110	100

*Tourists' travelling group to the Zoo:*The result of the Tourists' travelling group to the Zoo revealed that majority of the respondents (41.82%) visit the Zoo with their friends, 38.18% visit with their family, 12.73% visit with group, and 7.27% visit with colleagues. This is shown in figure 2.

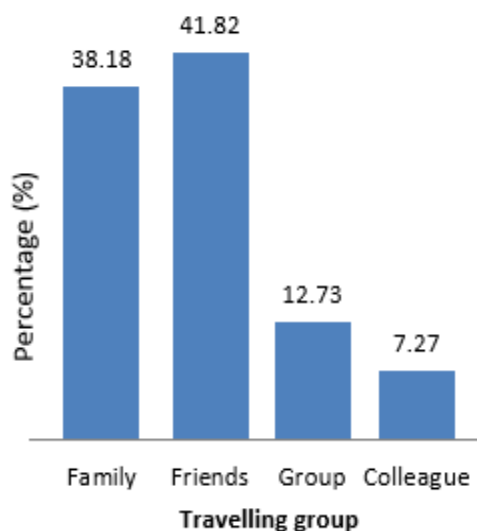


Fig 2: Tourists' travelling group to the Zoo

*Tourists' purpose of visiting the Zoo:*The result of the Tourists' purpose of visiting the Zoo revealed that the highest number of respondents (56.36%) visited the Zoo for the purpose of Leisure/Recreation, 27.27% visited for the purpose of meetings, 10% for holiday, and 6.36% for Research/Education. This is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Tourists' purpose of visiting the Zoo

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Holiday	11	10.00
Leisure/Recreation	62	56.36
Research/Education	7	6.36
Meetings	30	27.27
Total	110	100

*Presence of tour guides in the Zoo:*The result of the Presence of tour guides in the Zoo revealed that 54.55% of the respondents affirmed that tour guides were present while 45.45% affirmed that tour guides were not present. 50% of the respondents confirmed that the interpretative skill of the tour guide was good, 43.33% very good, and 6.67% fair. This is represented in Table 6.

Table 6: Presence of tour guides in the Zoo

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Presence of Tour Guide		
Yes	60	54.55
No	50	45.45
Total	110	100
Interpretative skill of the Tour Guide		
Very good	26	43.33
Good	30	50.00
Fair	4	6.67
Total	60	100

*Tourists' rating of the zoo's tourism facilities:*The result of the Tourists' rating of the zoo's tourism facilities revealed that the majority of the respondents (48.18%) rated the zoo's tourism facilities as fair, 31.82% rated them as poor, 12.73% rated them as good, and 3.64% rated them as very good and very poor each. This is shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Tourists' rating of the zoo's tourism facilities

Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Very good	4	3.64
Good	14	12.73
Fair	53	48.18
Poor	35	31.82
Very poor	4	3.64
Total	110	100.0

*Most impressive resource of the Zoo:*The result of the most impressive resource of the Zoo revealed that landscape was the most impressive resource of the Zoo as reported by the majority of the respondents (64.55%), this was followed by fauna resources (20.91%), children's playground (9.09%), and the

least was flora resources (5.45%). This is shown in Figure 3.

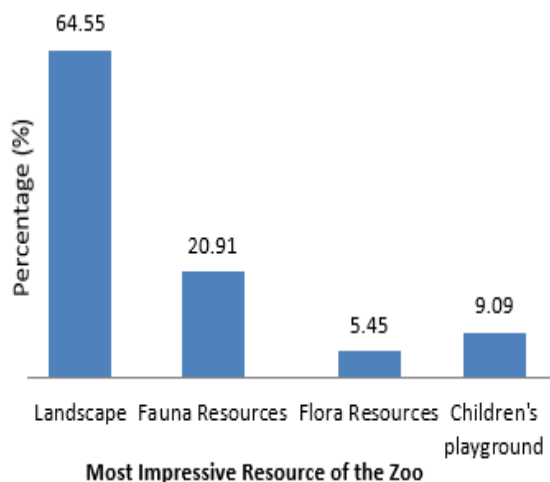


Fig 3: Most impressive resource of the Zoo

*Tourists' level of satisfaction:*The result of tourists' level of satisfaction revealed that 67.27% of the respondents affirmed that they were satisfied, 13.64% said they were not satisfied, and 19.09% were indifferent. This is represented in figure 4.

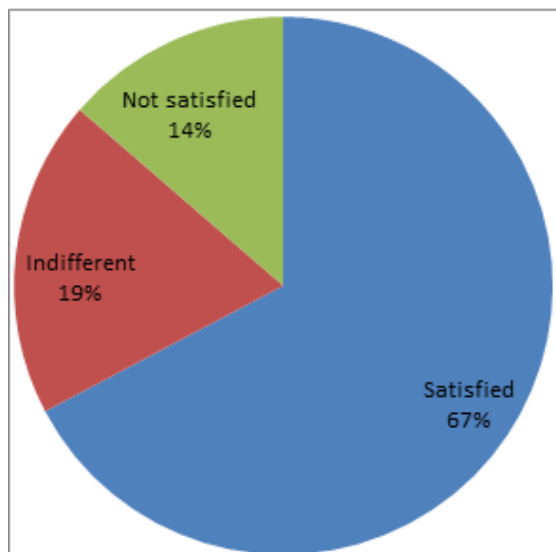


Fig 4: Tourists' level of satisfaction

*Benefits of the Zoo to Tourists:*The results of the benefits of the Zoo to tourists revealed that 82.73% of the respondents affirmed that they benefited from the zoo while 17.27% said otherwise. Majority of the respondents (29.67%) stated that they benefitted from the Zoo through animal viewing while the least (3.30%) benefitted by coming closer to nature. This is shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Benefits of the Zoo to Tourists

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	91	82.73
No	19	17.27
Total	110	100.00
How did you benefit from the Zoo?		
Animal Viewing	27	29.67
Affordable recreation for the family	4	4.40
Spending time with friends and family	7	7.69
Socializing	13	14.29
Education on wildlife and conservation	14	15.38
Children saw new animals	6	6.59
Peaceful and quiet place to relax	11	12.09
Closer to nature	3	3.30
A break from hustling	6	6.59
Total	91	100.00

*Tourists' intentions about the Zoo:*The result of the tourists' intentions about the Zoo revealed that 70.91% of the respondents would like to revisit the Zoo, 16.36% would not like to revisit the Zoo, and 12.73% were not sure. A very high proportion of the respondents (90%) claimed that they would recommend the Zoo to others, 7.27% were not sure, and 2.73% claimed they would not recommend the Zoo to others. This is shown in Table 9.

Table 9: Tourists' intentions about the Zoo

Statement	Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Would you revisit the zoo?	Yes	78	70.91
	No	18	16.36
	Not sure	14	12.73
	Total	110	100.0
Recommendation of the zoo to others	Yes	99	90.00
	No	3	2.73
	Not sure	8	7.27
	Total	110	100.0

*Challenges Tourists experienced at the Zoo:*The results of the Challenges Tourists experienced at the Zoo revealed that few animals was the major challenge as reported by 41.82% of the respondents, inadequate facilities (22.73%), no enough staff (19.09%), dirty environment (9.09%), while the least challenge was poor management and under funding of the Zoo with 3.64% each. This is shown in Table 10.

Table 10: Challenges Tourists experienced at the Zoo

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Few animals	46	41.82
Inadequate facilities	25	22.73
No enough staff	21	19.09
Dirty environment	10	9.09
Poor management	4	3.64
Under funding of the zoo	4	3.64
Total	110	100

The results obtained from the study shows that the zoo-tourism destination attracts what can only be described as 'assorted' visitors; with adequate representation of people with diverse attributes; singles, couples, groups, school excursionists, family retreats, picnickers, etc. who seek the pleasures of the site and staying for less than twenty-four hours (leisure day/recreational visitors). This is consistent with the findings of Ryan and Saward (2004), Chris and Jan (2004), and Turley (2001) that visiting zoos is a popular family-oriented leisure activity, usually involving a one-day visit. Most of the tourists who visited the zoo were employed. 27.27% of them were business men and women while 43.64% were civil servants. The employed group of tourists in total was 70.91%. This shows that majority of the tourists could afford the trip to the zoo and pay the gate fee. This is in line with the findings of Chowdhury (2017) that most tourists belong to the employed group and very few tourists belong to the retired group. The tourists population is formed mostly by Nigerians (domestic zoo-tourists), predominantly from the host city (Abuja). This finding affirms the report of Mbanefo (2014), UNWTO (2013) and STEAM (2009) that tourism market is mostly constituted by local visitors. More so, the zoo has been able to sustain the interest of its visitors as majority (63.64%), are repeat visitors, thus demonstration of a high level of tourists' loyalty. This is consistent with Scannell and Gifford (2010).

The purpose of visit of the majority of respondents (70.91%) to a great extent was met and therefore would like to revisit the Zoo as well as recommend it to others. A very high percentage of the respondents stated that they benefit from the Zoo (82.73%) through giving their kids an opportunity to see new animals, gaining knowledge on wildlife behaviours, having a quiet environment to relax, having an opportunity to spend quality time with friends and family, and spending time with nature. This corroborates the findings of Omonona and Ayodele (2011) that the zoo serves as a place of relaxation and entertainment and provides opportunity for people to satisfy their natural curiosity of seeing different species of animals especially from different areas of the world. Also is consistent with the findings of Ayodele and Alarape (1998), Uloko and Iwar (2011) that people of all ages enjoy visiting zoos because of the joy of seeing different species of animals at a specific place. Majority of the respondents (64.55%) got to know about the Zoo from family and friends, and 20% from internet. This shows the importance and power of a good word of mouth as a means of creating awareness about Zoological garden since most tourists trusts the recommendation of their family and friends. This confirms the findings of De Bruyn and Lilien (2008);

East *et al.* (2008) that a good word of mouth is more credible and plays an essential role in destination choice. This is also in line with the findings of Dododawa and Mbalisike (2023) that the main source of information about Zoological garden is from family/friends, posters, and social media. The findings show that very few respondents got information about the Zoo from posters, television, and radio. This indicates that posters, television, and radio are not enough to rely on as a means of information about the Zoo. The major challenges visitors experienced at the Zoo were presence of few animals, inadequate facilities, and no enough staff. This is consistent with the findings of Dododawa and Okwa (2018) that lack of facilities, inadequate tourists education, inadequate staff, poor handling and animal welfare, and lack of popular animals are the main challenges faced by tourists in the Zoo.

Conclusion: The study concluded that majority of the tourists visited the Zoo for Leisure/Recreation while others visited for meetings. Most of the respondents admitted the presence of tour guides in the Zoo and rated the interpretative skill of the tour guides as good. The study also concluded that the most impressive resource of the Zoo was landscape, fauna resources, children's playground, and flora resources. Majority of the respondents were satisfied with their visit to the Zoo and would like to visit the Zoo again and recommend it to others.

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