

Sustainable Tourism Development and Heritage Site Repositioning In Nigeria: A Decadal Assessment of Obudu Cattle Ranch

Adeyemo, Timilehin John (PhD in View), John Iwuh (PhD)

Department of Theatre Arts, Redeemer's University, Ede, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria's cultural heritage sites, including Obudu Cattle Ranch, possess strong tourism potential but face challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited government support, and weak community participation. This study assessed the sustainability and tourism development of Obudu Cattle Ranch over a 10-year period using a mixed-method cross-sectional design. Quantitative data from 100 respondents and qualitative interviews with staff and stakeholders revealed that 79% of visitors had tertiary education, 66% lived in urban areas, and 44% found the site memorable. However, 66% were dissatisfied with amenities, and only 21% noticed new development. Qualitative insights identified funding gaps, poor maintenance, and weak promotion as major barriers. The study concludes that sustainable repositioning of the ranch through improved infrastructure, enhanced service quality, community engagement, and policy reforms is crucial. Recommendations include off-season tourism promotion and the enforcement of environmental sustainability to unlock the site's full potential for long-term growth.

Keywords: Cultural Heritage, Obudu Cattle Ranch, Sustainable Tourism, Visitor Experience, Nigeria Tourism Development

Word Count: 145

INTRODUCTION

Cultural heritage refers to the tangible and intangible resources passed down from one generation to another that reflect a community's values, identity, and traditions (Smith *et al.*, 2015). These include natural sites like rivers, mountains, and forests, as well as human-made elements such as languages, religious sites, clothing, artifacts, and traditional festivals (Aremu *et al.*, 2020). When properly preserved and promoted, these heritage resources can serve as powerful tools for cultural education, identity preservation, and tourism development. Nigeria, rich in cultural diversity and heritage sites, possesses significant assets capable of attracting both domestic and international tourists. The nation, however, continues to prioritize petroleum over the development of its heritage tourism sector, thereby missing vital opportunities for diversification and sustainable economic growth (Lawuyi, 2021).

Despite having more than 200 ethnic groups, each with distinct cultural traits, languages, and artifacts, Nigeria's cultural tourism potential remains largely untapped (Lawuyi, 2021). Iconic sites like the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove and Obudu Cattle Ranch exemplify this unrealized potential. The Osun-Osogbo Grove, a UNESCO World Heritage Site since 2005, reflects the deep spiritual and cultural identity of the Yoruba people and draws thousands during its annual festival (Oseghale *et al.*, 2022). Likewise, Obudu Cattle Ranch in Cross River State originally a pastoral farmland has transformed into a nature-rich tourism site with cultural and ecological significance (Olawale, 2022). However, these sites are plagued by poor infrastructure, weak policy implementation, and limited promotion, leaving them underutilized despite their promise of job creation, economic returns, and global visibility (Adesina, 2022; Nijkamp & Riganti, 2020).

Globally, tourism contributed USD 1.9 trillion in export earnings and accounted for 48% of the global GDP in 2023, employing over 650 million people (Ezenagu, 2024; Oladeji & Olatuyi, 2024). Yet, Nigeria recorded only

3.2 million tourists in 2020, far behind countries like South Africa and Morocco, despite its population size and cultural diversity (World Tourism Organization, 2023). UNESCO's designation of over 800 cultural and natural sites globally highlights the growing recognition of heritage tourism as a driver of development (World Economic Forum, 2015). Nigeria's failure to capitalize on sites like Obudu Ranch calls for empirical and data-driven research to evaluate their economic potential, identify conservation challenges, and provide strategic frameworks for sustainable heritage tourism (Omisore *et al.*, 2023; Rashed, 2024). This study aims to bridge that gap by analyzing these sites through a mixed-methods approach that combines stakeholder interviews, visitor surveys, and literature review.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it explores the untapped tourism potential of Obudu Cattle Ranch, aiming to provide statistical insights into their current usage, visitor profiles, and preferences. These insights are vital for repositioning the sites to attract both local and international tourists. By emphasizing their cultural value and economic prospects, the study promotes the preservation of Nigeria's rich heritage and encourages investment in infrastructure, marketing, and conservation. Ultimately, the findings could inform policies that support sustainable tourism, generate employment, boost local economies, and contribute to the socio-economic development of surrounding communities.

Aim and Objectives

This study aims to examine the economic significance of the Obudu Cattle Ranch. The study seeks to address the challenges impeding their conservation and sustainable development, with the ultimate goal of repositioning Nigeria's cultural heritage sites for sustainable tourism development. Other specific objectives include;

- i. to assess the current state and potential of the Obudu Cattle Ranch as cultural heritage sites for tourism development.
- ii. to identify the barriers and challenges that hinder these cultural heritage sites' conservation and sustainable growth.
- iii. to assess the historical performance records, including functioning capacities and degree of patronage, of Obudu Cattle Ranch.

Expected Outcome of the Study

The expected outcome of the study is to provide valuable insights and recommendations for the sustainable development of these sites. Through the statistical analysis of visitor profiles and preferences and qualitative insights from key stakeholders, the study aims to identify strategies to enhance the attractiveness and visitor experience at the sites. The expected outcome includes recommendations for infrastructure development, marketing and promotion, conservation efforts, and community engagement, which can contribute to the long-term sustainability of these cultural heritage sites, boost tourism, and generate socio-economic benefits for local communities and Nigeria.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Development of Tourism in Nigeria

Tourism development in Nigeria began in 1959 with the formation of an Adhoc Advisory Committee, which led to the establishment of the Nigerian Tourist Association (NTA) in 1962 to promote tourism with government support (Lawrence, 2021). The association later evolved into the Nigerian Tourist Board through Decree No. 54 of 1976, and by 1989, a tourism department was created within the Ministry of Trade, with six administrative zones and state-level offices to enhance coordination (Manwa, 2022). In 1992, the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation (NTDC) was established to replace the Tourist Board and has since served as the principal body responsible for overseeing tourism development in Nigeria (NTDC Decree No. 81, 2023). Despite

the country’s vast cultural and natural resources, the tourism sector continues to face major challenges such as weak policy implementation, poor infrastructure, and underfunding. However, the NTDC can play a transformative role by promoting Nigeria’s unique attractions, improving tourism infrastructure, enforcing quality standards, building workforce capacity, and encouraging public-private partnerships. These strategies can drive sustainable tourism, enhance visitor experiences, and significantly contribute to national economic growth and cultural preservation (Manwa, 2022).

S/N	Tourist Centres in Nigeria	Location	Unique features
1	The Ibeno Beach	Ibeno, Akwa Ibom State	Known for its long stretch of sandy beach, calm waters, and beautiful sunrise and sunset views.
2	Obudu Mountain Resort	Obudu, Cross Rivers State	Famous for its scenic landscapes, cool climate, and adventurous activities like hiking, canopy walks, and the cable car ride.
3	Ngwo Pine Forest	Ngwo, Enugu State	Offers a tranquil environment with tall pine trees, cool temperatures, and opportunities for picnics and nature walks.
4	Awhum Waterfall	Awhum, Enugu State	Features a stunning waterfall cascading over rock formations, with a cave behind the falls adding to its allure.
5	Arochukwu Long juju slave route	Abia State	A historical and cultural site, known for its role in the transatlantic slave trade, with landmarks such as the Arochukwu Long Juju Oracle and the IbiniUkpabi Cave.
6	The Giant Footprint of Ukhuseoke	Owan, Edo State	An intriguing natural formation believed to be the footprint of a mythical giant, attracting visitors interested in folklore and legend.
7	Port Harcourt Tourist Beach	Rivers State	Offers a variety of recreational activities such as beach soccer, volleyball, horse riding, and jet skiing, along with beachfront restaurants and bars.
8	Gashaki-Gumpti National park	Taraba State	Known for its diverse ecosystems including savannah grasslands, montane forests, and wildlife such as chimpanzees, elephants, and rare bird species.
9	Alok Ikom Monoliths	Cross River State	Ancient stone carvings with cultural and historical significance, representing the ancestral heritage of the Ikom people.
10	Isaac Boro Garden Park	River State	A serene park dedicated to Major Isaac Boro, offering green spaces, sculptures, and recreational facilities for visitors.
11	The Tinapa free zone and resort	Cross River State	A modern shopping and leisure destination with duty-free shopping, entertainment facilities, and a film village.
12	Osun-Osogbo Grove	Osogbo, Osun State	A sacred forest with artistic sculptures and shrines dedicated to the Yoruba goddess of fertility, Osun.
13	The Emotan Statue	Edo State	Commemorates the legendary market woman, Emotan, known for her selflessness and kindness, and symbolizes the rich history and culture of the Benin Kingdom.

14	The Royal palace of Oba of Benin	Benin City, Edo State	A UNESCO World Heritage Site, showcasing traditional Benin architecture and artifacts, and serving as the residence of the Oba (king) of Benin.
15	Sukur cultural landscape	Madageli, Adamawa State	Recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, featuring terraced fields, ancient settlements, and cultural practices of the Sukur people.
16	Queen Amina's wall	Zaria, Kaduna State	Remnants of the ancient city walls built during the reign of Queen Amina of Zazzau, offering insight into the military prowess and history of the Hausa people.
17	Surame cultural landscape	Surame, Sokoto State	A UNESCO World Heritage Site, showcasing the ruins of an ancient fortified settlement and the architectural heritage of the Hausa people.
18	Oban Hills	Cross River State	Known for its biodiversity, including rare plant and animal species, and offering opportunities for eco-tourism and exploration.
19	Oke-Idanre Hills	Oke-Idanre, Ondo State	Features impressive landscapes, historical sites, and cultural artifacts, with the ancient town of Idanre nestled among the hills.
20	Ancient Kano city walls	Kana, Kano State	Remnants of historic defensive walls surrounding the ancient city of Kano, reflecting the rich history and heritage of the Hausa civilization.
21	Coconut Beach	Badagry, Lagos State	Known for its coconut palm trees, serene atmosphere, and cultural performances, offering a relaxing getaway along the Atlantic coast.
22	Ogbaukwu Cave and Waterfall	Owerre-Ezukala, Anambra State	Features a cave system and waterfall with cultural significance, used for traditional rituals and ceremonies by the local community.
23	Ogbnike Caves	Enugu State	A network of caves with geological formations, bat colonies, and cultural significance, used as a shelter and spiritual site by indigenous people.
24	Millennium Park	Maitama, Abuja	A sprawling urban park with landscaped gardens, ponds, and recreational facilities, offering a peaceful retreat in the heart of Abuja.
25	Nana living history museum	Warri, Delta State	Showcases the rich cultural heritage and history of the Niger Delta region through artifacts, traditional architecture, and cultural performances.
26	The Ancient Nok settlement	Jaba, Kaduna State	Site of the ancient Nok civilization, known for its terracotta sculptures and archaeological discoveries dating back over 2,000 years.
27	New Afrika Shrine	Ikeja, Lagos State	A cultural and entertainment venue dedicated to the legacy of Fela Kuti, featuring live music performances, art exhibitions, and Afrobeat music.
28	Abuja Arts and crafts village	Abuja	Showcases traditional Nigerian arts and crafts, including pottery, sculpture, beadwork, and textiles, providing a glimpse into the country's diverse cultural heritage.

29	Kainji National Park	Niger State	Encompasses Kainji Lake, Borgu Game Reserve, and Zugurma Game Reserve, offering opportunities for wildlife viewing, fishing, and water sports.
30	Yankari National Park	Bauchi State	Known for its diverse wildlife, including elephants, lions, and baboons, as well as natural thermal springs and archaeological sites, making it a popular destination for safari and eco-tourism.

Source: Ministry of Information, Culture and Tourism, 2022

Culture, tourism and cultural tourism

Cultural tourism is a form of travel primarily or partially motivated by a desire to experience a destination’s arts, history, heritage, and way of life, making it both broad and difficult to define precisely (Cultural and Heritage Tourism Alliance, 2020). Heritage tourism, a subset of cultural tourism, focuses on sites and experiences tied to a people’s historical and cultural legacy, such as architecture, rituals, and landscapes (Chang, 2021; Yale, 2020). The two often overlap, and scholars like Eades (2020) and Wedow (2022) suggest that both involve the interaction of visitors with cultural resources for educational and leisure purposes. Cultural tourism is more than observing the past it includes engaging with living traditions, festivals, cuisine, art, and the daily expressions of a society (Edgell, 2021; Richards, 2023). It relies on the commodification of cultural assets turning traditions, artifacts, and environments into consumable experiences so tourists can appreciate and immerse themselves in them (Rodzi, Zaki, & Subli, 2022; Wedow, 2022). This process benefits host communities through economic gains, supports the conservation of heritage, and promotes cultural understanding (Zedková & Kajzar, 2024). Cultural tourism, therefore, serves as a bridge between culture and commerce, encouraging preservation while fostering development and mutual appreciation between tourists and locals (Danesi, 2025; UNESCO, 2021).

Global Relevance of Sustainable Tourism Development and Heritage Site Repositioning

A critical synthesis of recent global literature demonstrates that sustainable tourism development has evolved from a peripheral concept into a central pillar of economic diversification and cultural preservation strategies worldwide. Empirical evidence shows that the global heritage tourism market reached approximately \$605 billion in 2024 and is projected to grow steadily, underscoring its strategic importance in national development agendas. However, this expansion is accompanied by structural contradictions, as increased tourist flows intensify pressures on heritage assets, leading to environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and authenticity erosion (Castillo-Canalejo et al., 2025). Systematic reviews of over 300 scholarly works between 2018 and 2024 reveal that while tourism contributes significantly to economic growth, its impacts on heritage are ambivalent, with poorly managed destinations experiencing degradation rather than revitalization. This duality has led to the dominance of the “triple bottom line” framework balancing economic, environmental, and socio-cultural outcomes as the prevailing analytical lens in contemporary tourism studies (Sampieri, 2026). Critically, the literature converges on the argument that sustainable tourism is not inherently achieved through increased visitation but through governance efficiency, adaptive management, and the integration of local communities into tourism value chains.

Furthermore, recent empirical studies deepen this discourse by highlighting the transition from conventional sustainability to **regenerative and community-centered tourism models**, which emphasize long-term resilience over short-term economic gains. For instance, Khater (2025) demonstrates that destinations integrating community empowerment into heritage management frameworks exhibit higher sustainability outcomes and stronger cultural preservation. Similarly, global policy frameworks such as the UNESCO World Heritage and Sustainable Tourism Programme emphasize stakeholder collaboration, participatory governance, and capacity building as prerequisites for sustainable heritage management. Advanced empirical analyses using spatial and machine-learning models further reveal that visitor distribution, infrastructure quality, and landscape integration significantly influence tourism sustainability and destination competitiveness (Jia et al., 2025). Analytically, these findings expose a persistent global gap between **tourism potential and management capacity**, particularly in developing contexts, where weak institutional frameworks hinder the translation of heritage assets

into sustainable economic drivers. Consequently, the global literature justifies the relevance of this study by positioning heritage site repositioning such as that of Obudu Cattle Ranch as a critical intervention for aligning tourism growth with sustainability imperatives, especially in underutilized destinations within emerging economies.

Sustainable Tourism Development Model (STD Model)

Sustainable Tourism Development Model (STD Model), grounded in the broader concept of sustainable development as advanced by the World Commission on Environment and Development. This model emphasizes the integration of **economic viability, environmental protection, and socio-cultural sustainability** in tourism planning and management. The theory posits that tourism development should meet present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to benefit from cultural and natural resources (UNWTO, 2023; Sharpley, 2020). In the context of heritage tourism, the model underscores the need to balance visitor satisfaction, infrastructure development, and conservation of cultural assets while ensuring community participation and equitable benefit-sharing. Recent studies have further expanded the model to include governance, stakeholder collaboration, and innovation as key pillars for sustainable destination management (Bramwell & Lane, 2022; Font & McCabe, 2023). Thus, the STD model provides a holistic framework for analysing tourism destinations like Obudu Cattle Ranch, particularly in developing economies where sustainability challenges are multifaceted and deeply rooted in institutional and infrastructural gaps.

The relevance of the Sustainable Tourism Development Model to this study lies in its direct alignment with the core variables of **heritage site repositioning, visitor experience, infrastructure development, and sustainability practices**. The findings of this research such as poor infrastructure, low visitor satisfaction, weak government support, and limited community engagement reflect imbalances among the three sustainability pillars identified by the model. Applying this framework allows for a structured interpretation of how these deficiencies hinder the long-term viability of Obudu Cattle Ranch and provides a basis for recommending integrated solutions such as policy reform, stakeholder collaboration, and environmentally responsible tourism practices. Moreover, the model supports the study's emphasis on repositioning the Ranch as a competitive and sustainable destination by linking economic outcomes (tourism revenue and employment) with social inclusion and environmental stewardship (Ezenagu, 2024; Zedková & Kajzar, 2024). Therefore, the STD model is highly relevant as it not only explains the current challenges observed in the study but also offers a strategic pathway for achieving sustainable tourism development in Nigeria's heritage sector.

Empirical Review

Empirical studies have shown that Nigeria's cultural heritage holds vast potential for tourism development, though challenges persist. Bankole (2021) emphasized that colonial looting and weak preservation efforts have limited the showcasing of Nigerian artifacts, many of which now reside in foreign museums. He also highlighted the role of government policies, such as the 1990 National Tourism Policy, in encouraging infrastructure, rural tourism, and private-sector investment, while security issues and negative media portrayals continue to hinder progress (IMF, 2022; NACD, 2021). Similarly, Ayuk *et al.* (2023) conducted a survey in the Becheeve community around Obudu Ranch Resort and found that poor community involvement, limited funding, and infrastructure decay remain major barriers to sustainable tourism. Their study stressed the need for inclusive planning, equitable benefit-sharing, and consistent maintenance to boost tourism success at the resort (Middle-East Journal of Scientific Research, 2023). Uchechukwu (2022) also examined the economic value of the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, concluding that while the annual festival drives religious and cultural tourism, threats such as urbanization, pollution, and inadequate infrastructure risk diminishing its long-term benefits (Okon, 2023; Wahab, 2022). In contrast, the current study offers a focused, data-driven analysis of Obudu Ranch and Osun-Osogbo Grove over a ten-year period, aiming to statistically assess their tourism performance, unlike the prior studies that primarily relied on qualitative insights.

Obudu Cattle Ranch

The Obudu Cattle Ranch, also known as the Obudu Mountain Resort, was established in 1951 by a Scottish rancher named Mr. McCaughley. Originally created as a cattle ranch, it was meant to serve as a breeding and

rearing ground for cattle. However, over the years, it has evolved into a major tourist destination in Nigeria due to its stunning natural beauty and cool climate. While the original purpose of the ranch was primarily agricultural, it has since transitioned into a tourist resort offering various recreational activities such as hiking, bird watching, canopy walk, and cable car rides. The resort also provides accommodation, restaurants, and conference facilities. So, while the primary agricultural purpose might have faded into the background, the site is still being utilized, albeit in a different capacity, to attract tourists and provide recreational opportunities.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a **mixed-method cross-sectional descriptive design** to investigate the tourism potential of Obudu Cattle Ranch, combining both quantitative and qualitative approaches for comprehensive analysis. The research was conducted at Obudu Cattle Ranch in Cross River State, selected for its cultural and tourism significance. The target population included tourists, local residents, stakeholders, and government officials connected to the site. A **simple random sampling technique** was used to select 100 participants. Quantitative data were collected using a **structured, self-administered questionnaire** focused on visitor profiles, site perception, and infrastructure conditions. For the qualitative component, **semi-structured interviews and direct observations** were employed to gather deeper insights into management challenges, visitor experiences, and development strategies.

The questionnaire was reviewed for face and content validity by academic supervisors and pilot-tested on 10 respondents for reliability. Data were collected over one month, with participants assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Inclusion criteria were limited to individuals who had visited or worked at the ranch; others were excluded. Quantitative data were analysed using **SPSS (version 25)**, applying descriptive statistics like frequencies, tables, and charts, while qualitative responses from interviews and observations were analysed through **thematic content analysis** to identify key patterns and narratives.

RESULTS/ANALYSIS

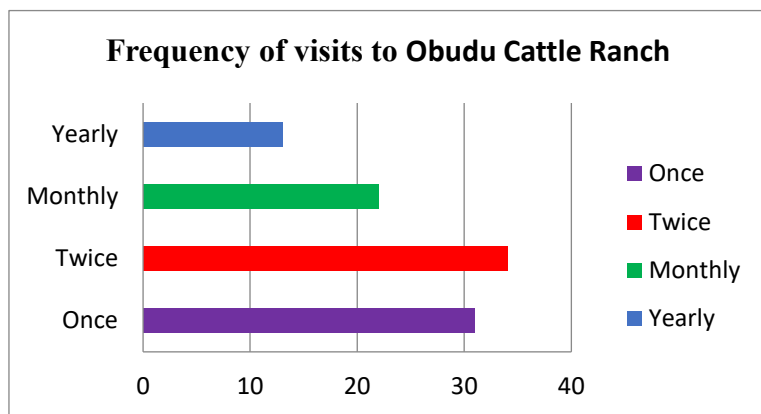
Quantitative Results

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Obudu Cattle Ranch Respondents

Table 1.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Obudu Cattle Ranch Respondents

Variable		Frequency (n=100)	Percentage (100%)
Age (year)	under 20	13	13.0
	21-30	31	31.0
	31-40	43	43.0
	41 and above	13	13.0
Educational level	secondary education	21	21.0
	tertiary education	79	79.0
Residence	Urban	66	66.0
	Rural	32	32.0
	Outside the country	2	2.0
Occupation	civil servant	35	35.0
	Farmer	13	13.0

	business owner	40	40.0
	Tourist	12	12.0
Frequency of visits to cultural heritage sites	Once	31	31.0
	Twice	34	34.0
	Monthly	22	22.0
	Yearly	13	13.0



Visitors' Experience and Feedback at Obudu Cattle Ranch

Table 1.2 Visitors' Experience and Feedback at Obudu Cattle Ranch

Variable	Strongly Agree n(%)	Agree n(%)	Indecisive n(%)	Disagree n(%)	Strongly Disagree n(%)
I have visited the Obudu Cattle Ranch more than once	35(35.0%)	44(44.0%)	21(21.0%)	-	-
The infrastructure, atmosphere, facilities, new development and first class treatment of staff motivate me to visit the cultural heritage site	-	31(31.0%)	34(34.0%)	35(35.0%)	-
The accommodation is standard in Obudu Cattle Ranch	-	30(31.0%)	34(34.0%)	36(36.0%)	-
I find all aspect of this site most appealing or memorable	44(44.0%)	-	21(21.0%)	35(35.0%)	-
I notice new development when I visit annually	-	23(23.0%)	21(21.0%)	34(34.0%)	22(22.0%)
I am satisfied with the amenities and services provided at the Obudu Cattle Ranch(e.g. accommodation, transportation, tour guides, electricity)	-	13(13.0%)	21(21.0%)	66(66.0%)	-
I feel adequately informed about the historical and cultural significance of this site during my visit	-	74(74.0%)	-	26(26.0%)	-

The guided tours and cultural activities offered at the Obudu Cattle Ranch were high quality	14(14.0%)	52(52.0%)	-	12(12.0%)	22(22.0%)
In terms of transportation options and infrastructure, the accessibility of the Obudu Cattle Ranch is good	-	21(21.0%)	35(35.0%)	44(44.0%)	-

Management Experience and Perspectives at Obudu Cattle Ranch

Table 1.3 Management Experience and Perspectives at Obudu Cattle Ranch

Variable	Strongly Agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Indecisive n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Strongly Disagree n (%)
There are current strategies or initiative being implemented to promote and preserve the Obudu Cattle Ranch	10(10.0%)	24(24.0%)	31(31.0%)	33(33.0%)	-
There are challenges or obstacles I encounter in my day-to-day management and operation of Obudu Cattle Ranch	-	65(65.0%)	22(22.0%)	13(13.0%)	-
There have been notable changes or development in the management approach or strategies employed at Obudu Cattle Ranch over the past decade	-	79(79.0%)	21(21.0%)	-	-
There are partnerships or collaborations we engage in to support the sustainability and development of Obudu Cattle Ranch	-	39(39.0%)	-	61(61.0%)	-
There are feedback mechanisms or channels that are in place for staff and management to receive input from visitors, local communities and other stakeholders	-	44(44.0%)	22(22.0%)	21(21.0%)	-
There are measures taken by government to ensure the sustainability and development of natural and cultural assets within the Obudu Cattle Ranch	13(13.0%)	24(44.0%)	22(22.0%)	41(21.0%)	-
We always balance the need for infrastructure development and visitor amenities with the imperative of environment sustainability and conservation	-	57(57.0%)	-	21(21.0%)	22(22.0%)

Interpretation of Quantitative Data

The socio-demographic profile of respondents visiting the Obudu Cattle Ranch (Table 1.1) reveals a predominantly youthful and educated demographic, with 43% aged 31–40 years and 31% within 21–30 years. A significant 79% had tertiary education, suggesting that the site attracts a more formally educated class, likely due to its unique tourism and cultural appeal. Most visitors resided in urban areas (66%), while 35% were civil servants and 40% business owners, indicating economic stability and mobility. Notably, 34% visited twice and 31% had visited once, reflecting moderate interest. This demographic pattern is consistent with findings by Omoare and Dairo (2021), who argue that the educational background and urban affiliation of cultural tourists influence their engagement and expectations from heritage sites. Furthermore, Ezenagu (2022) notes that higher educational attainment is linked to increased cultural awareness and motivation to explore heritage destinations.

Visitors' feedback (Table 1.2) shows that while 79% had visited more than once (35% strongly agreed and 44% agreed), satisfaction levels regarding facilities and infrastructure were mixed. For instance, 66% disagreed that the site's amenities and services met expectations, and 44% felt accessibility was poor. Only 13% expressed satisfaction with basic services. Additionally, 35% disagreed that the atmosphere and treatment motivated them, and 36% disagreed with the standard of accommodation. However, a strong 74% agreed they felt informed about the site's cultural significance, and 66% positively rated the guided tours. This dichotomy suggests a well-curated cultural experience but poor logistical support, echoing Adora and Anuka (2020), who found that while Nigerian heritage sites often possess strong cultural content, they suffer from inadequate management and infrastructure. Management perspectives (Table 1.3) further confirm this, as 65% reported daily operational challenges, and 61% disagreed that there were effective partnerships for sustainability. Although 79% acknowledged recent management changes, only 34% affirmed existing government support. This aligns with Iwara *et al.* (2023), who emphasized the need for collaborative policy and investment to address operational bottlenecks in Nigeria's heritage tourism sector.

Qualitative Result

10-Year Demographic Trends of Visitors to the Obudu Cattle Ranch

Based on the data collected from one of the officers in the site, Mr. Joseph Isoh Edet, the demographic trends among visitors to the Obudu Cattle Ranch over the past decade can be summarized as follows:

1. Regional Distribution:

- **Southern Region Dominance:** Visitors from the Southern region of Nigeria constitute the largest proportion, accounting for approximately 85% of the total visitors. This region consistently contributes the highest number of visitors to the Ranch.

- **Presence of Visitors from Other Regions:** While visitors from the West, East, and North are also observed, their numbers are comparatively smaller. Visitors from specific areas within the Northern region, such as Abuja and other parts, are noted contributors to the demographic mix.

2. Seasonal Variation:

- **Fluctuations in Foreign Visitor Numbers:** Foreign visitors contribute significantly to the Ranch's visitor demographic, with their numbers fluctuating throughout the year. There is a notable peak in foreign visitor numbers during the month of December, suggesting a seasonal trend likely associated with holiday travel and tourism.

3. Visitor Characteristics:

- **Working Class Majority:** The majority of visitors to the Obudu Cattle Ranch are described as working-class individuals. This indicates a diverse range of visitors, including both leisure travelers and those visiting for business or professional purposes.

- **Family-Oriented Visits:** Some visitors bring their children along when visiting the Ranch, highlighting the family-oriented nature of the destination and its appeal to a wide demographic range.

In summary, the demographic trends at the Obudu Cattle Ranch over the past decade reflect a diverse mix of visitors, with a strong representation from the Southern region of Nigeria and significant contributions from foreign visitors, particularly during peak seasons. These trends underscore the Ranch's broad appeal and its role as a popular destination for both domestic and international travelers, including families and working-class individuals.

Visitor Origins at Obudu Cattle Ranch: Domestic Regions vs. International Patronage

Based on the data collected from one of the officers in the site, Mr. Joseph Isoh Edet, the analysis of visitor origins at the Obudu Cattle Ranch can be summarized as follows:

1. Domestic Visitor Origins:

Southern Region Dominance: The Southern region of Nigeria contributes the largest proportion of domestic visitors to the Obudu Cattle Ranch, accounting for approximately 85% of the total. This indicates a strong preference among domestic tourists from the Southern region for visiting the Ranch.

Limited Northern Region Representation: Visitors from the Northern region, including those from Abuja and other parts, constitute a smaller proportion, accounting for around 10% of the total. This suggests a relatively lower level of interest or accessibility among visitors from the Northern region compared to their Southern counterparts.

2. International Patronage:

Varied Foreign Visitor Numbers: Foreign visitors contribute significantly to the visitor demographic at the Ranch, with their numbers varying throughout the year. There is a notable increase in foreign visitor numbers, particularly during the month of December, indicating a seasonal trend likely associated with holiday travel and tourism.

Minority Representation: Despite their significant presence in terms of numbers during peak seasons, foreign visitors constitute a minority proportion, estimated at around 5% of the total visitor count. This suggests that while foreign visitors contribute to the Ranch's visitor base, the majority of visitors are domestic tourists.

3. Overall Visitor Composition:

Southern Region Preference: The dominance of visitors from the Southern region, coupled with significant contributions from foreign visitors, underscores the Ranch's appeal to a diverse range of visitors. However, it also highlights a regional preference among domestic tourists, with the Southern region being the primary source of visitors.

Seasonal Variation: The fluctuation in visitor numbers, both domestic and international, indicates a seasonal pattern influenced by factors such as holidays and tourism trends. This underscores the importance of understanding and catering to seasonal fluctuations in visitor demographics and preferences.

10-Year Revenue Generation of the Obudu Cattle Ranch

Based on the data collected from one of the officers in the site, Mr. Joseph Isoh Edet, the analysis of the annual revenue generated by the Obudu Cattle Ranch over the past decade can be summarized as follows:

1. Baseline Revenue Calculation (2013):

- In 2013, the Ranch generated a total revenue of N33,256,246 from 1,449 visitors, with each visitor paying an average of N22,951.

2. Revenue Estimation for Subsequent Years (2014-2023):

- For each year from 2014 to 2023, the number of visitors and the average revenue per visitor (N22,951) from 2013 are used to estimate the total revenue.
- The revenue for each year is calculated by multiplying the number of visitors by the average revenue per visitor. The estimated revenue for each year is as follows:

➤ 2014: N23,157,559
➤ 2015: N28,229,730
➤ 2016: N25,567,414
➤ 2017: N24,098,550
➤ 2018: N30,777,291
➤ 2019: N25,751,022
➤ 2020: N27,590,877
➤ 2021: N29,715,109
➤ 2022: N28,918,522
➤ 2023: N24,187,278

3. Overall Revenue Trends:

- The revenue generated by the Obudu Cattle Ranch shows fluctuations over the decade, with some years experiencing higher revenue than others.
- There is a general upward trend in revenue from 2014 to 2021, indicating potential growth and increased popularity of the Ranch as a tourist destination during this period.
- However, there is a slight decrease in revenue in 2022 and 2023 compared to the previous years, suggesting potential challenges or factors impacting visitor numbers and spending during those years.

4. Annual Revenue Summary:

The annual revenue estimates provide insights into the financial performance of the Obudu Cattle Ranch over the past decade, highlighting periods of growth and potential areas for improvement or further investment.

5. Occupational distribution of people involved in tourism activities at the Ranch hotel

Employment Cadre	Non-indigenes	Indigenes	Total
Food and Beverages	13	39	59
Receptionists	8	2	10
Security	61	41	102
Tour guide	4	-	4
Labourers	9	1	10

Waiters	6	2	8
Chef	0	2	2
Laundry	5	7	12
Housekeepers	12	16	28
Gardeners	6	2	8
Accountants	3	9	12
Managers	4	16	20
Total	131	137	268

Source: Amalu, (2024).

Amalu, delineates the occupational composition of individuals engaged in tourism activities at the Ranch hotel, totaling 268 workers. Notably, security constitutes the largest cadre with 102 employees, comprising 61 non-indigenous and 41 indigenous workers, underscoring its paramount importance in ensuring safety. In food and beverages, indigenous workers dominate with 39 compared to 13 non-indigenous employees among the 59 total. However, receptionists exhibit a significant discrepancy with 8 non-indigenous and 2 indigenous workers, potentially reflecting biases or hiring preferences. Conversely, managerial roles demonstrate balance, with 16 non-indigenous and 16 indigenous individuals (24). This data underscores workforce diversity and suggests areas for further examination in recruitment practices and inclusivity efforts.

Developmental Plan and Current Challenges of Obudu Cattle Ranch

Obudu Cattle Ranch, a prominent heritage tourism site in Cross River State, faces numerous developmental challenges that affect its growth and sustainability. Key among these is **seasonality**, with visitor numbers fluctuating based on weather conditions and holiday schedules, leading to inconsistent revenue generation. During low seasons, reduced income limits operational capacity and delays development projects. Additionally, **infrastructure maintenance** remains a critical concern; while some upgrades have been made, much of the Ranch’s facilities require continuous repair to preserve visitor satisfaction and safety. Despite being a major attraction, Obudu competes with both domestic and international destinations, necessitating **stronger marketing strategies**, digital outreach, and strategic partnerships to boost visibility. Environmental sustainability is also a growing concern, with tourism activities impacting natural habitats and landscapes, thus demanding eco-friendly policies like proper waste management and habitat conservation.

Moreover, the Ranch suffers from **low occupancy rates** during certain periods, highlighting gaps in pricing strategies and guest engagement. **Limited development** has taken place over the past five years, with most efforts focused on basic maintenance rather than innovative improvements. **Service delivery** is another area requiring attention, as quality accommodation, staff professionalism, and overall guest experience directly influence return visits and recommendations. Investments in **staff training**, better infrastructure, and expanded recreational offerings are essential for enhancing competitiveness. To achieve long-term viability, Obudu Cattle Ranch must adopt **sustainable tourism practices**, diversify revenue through events and local partnerships, and strategically address operational gaps to fully harness its potential as a cultural and economic asset.

Results of the Objectives

Objective 1: Assessment of the Current State and Tourism Potential of Obudu Cattle Ranch

Result: The findings reveal a paradoxical condition in which Obudu Cattle Ranch demonstrates strong latent tourism potential but suffers from underperformance in experiential delivery and infrastructural adequacy. Empirical evidence from the study shows that while 79% of visitors possess tertiary education and 66% reside in urban areas indicating a high-value, experience-sensitive tourist segment only 44% found the site memorable,

and a significant proportion expressed dissatisfaction with core amenities. This suggests a misalignment between visitor expectations and service quality, a pattern consistent with findings by Ezenagu (2022) and Omoare and Dairo (2021), who argue that educated tourists are more critical of destination quality and demand higher standards of service and interpretation. Analytically, this indicates that Obudu's tourism value currently lies more in its **intrinsic natural and cultural capital** than in its **constructed tourism experience**, thereby limiting its competitiveness. However, the high rate of repeat visitation (79%) signals enduring destination appeal, implying that with strategic repositioning particularly through infrastructure upgrades and experience design the Ranch can transition from a passive attraction to a dynamic heritage tourism hub capable of competing regionally and internationally.

Objective 2: Barriers and Challenges to Conservation and Sustainable Growth

Result: The study identifies systemic and interrelated barriers that significantly constrain the sustainable development of Obudu Cattle Ranch, particularly in the areas of governance, infrastructure, and stakeholder integration. Quantitative data indicate that 66% of respondents were dissatisfied with amenities, while 44% rated accessibility poorly, reflecting structural deficiencies that undermine both conservation and tourism growth. From the management perspective, 65% reported operational challenges and 61% denied the existence of effective partnerships, pointing to institutional fragmentation and weak collaborative frameworks. These findings align with Iwara et al. (2023), who emphasize that the absence of robust public-private partnerships in Nigeria's tourism sector limits investment inflows and innovation, and with Ayuk et al. (2023), who link poor community participation to reduced sustainability outcomes. Critically, the absence of visible development (only 21% noticed improvements) suggests stagnation rather than adaptive management, which contradicts global best practices in sustainable tourism that prioritize continuous reinvestment and stakeholder engagement (Bramwell & Lane, 2022). Thus, the challenges are not merely operational but structural, rooted in policy inefficiencies, weak institutional capacity, and the failure to integrate local communities into the tourism value chain.

Objective 3: Historical Performance, Functioning Capacity, and Degree of Patronage

Result: The decadal analysis of Obudu Cattle Ranch reveals fluctuating but generally unstable performance trends, reflecting vulnerability to both internal inefficiencies and external tourism dynamics. Revenue data indicate modest growth between 2014 and 2021, followed by a decline in 2022 and 2023, suggesting that gains were neither sustained nor institutionalized. This instability is further reinforced by demographic trends showing heavy dependence on domestic visitors from Southern Nigeria (approximately 85%), with international tourists accounting for only about 5%, thereby exposing the Ranch to regional demand shocks and limiting foreign exchange potential. Empirically, such patterns corroborate the observations of the United Nations World Tourism Organization (2023), which notes that destinations with low market diversification are more susceptible to seasonal and economic fluctuations. Additionally, the concentration of employment in low-skill roles such as security (102 staff) versus specialized tourism services (e.g., only 4 tour guides) indicates an imbalance in functional capacity, limiting the Ranch's ability to deliver high-quality interpretive and experiential services. This structural inefficiency, as argued by Adora and Anuka (2020), constrains both visitor satisfaction and revenue optimization. Therefore, while the Ranch demonstrates operational continuity over the decade, its performance reflects **stagnant capacity utilization, limited market expansion, and weak service differentiation**, all of which undermine its long-term sustainability and growth trajectory.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Obudu Cattle Ranch over a 10-year period and revealed that, despite its cultural and tourism significance, the site faces challenges such as low visitor satisfaction, poor infrastructure, and seasonal fluctuations. However, its potential for boosting sustainable tourism and local development remains strong if repositioned strategically.

RECOMMENDATION

To effectively reposition heritage sites and promote sustainable tourism development, policymakers and tourism managers should prioritize integrated destination planning that aligns infrastructure investment with conservation goals, ensuring reliable transport, energy, and digital access without degrading heritage assets. They must institutionalize public-private partnerships and community-based tourism models to enhance

funding, local participation, and equitable benefit-sharing, while also implementing data-driven management systems (e.g., visitor monitoring and feedback analytics) to guide adaptive decision-making. Furthermore, targeted destination branding and year-round tourism programming should be deployed to reduce seasonality and expand market reach, alongside strict enforcement of environmental regulations and heritage protection laws. Continuous capacity building for staff and local stakeholders, combined with transparent governance and policy consistency, will strengthen service delivery, improve visitor experience, and ensure long-term sustainability of heritage tourism destinations.

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