

## Ecotourism Potentials in Bayelsa State

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### Abstract

This survey was carried out in Bayelsa State in specific areas such as Ogbia, Yenagoa, Brass, Kaiama, Akassa and Amassoma to determine the ecotourism potentials in the state. Frequency distribution and percentages were used to describe the analysis. The age group distribution respondents showed that age group 41 – 50 (23.25%) had the highest response, followed by 51 – 60 (22.0%) and 61 – 70 (20.75%), 30 – 40 (20.25%) and 71 – 80 (13.75%). The occupational distribution of respondents showed that the highest number of respondents are students (24.88%) while farmers are (22.91%) followed by traders (18.72%), driving/fishing is (17.49%) and civil servants (16.01%). On awareness of ecotourism potentials in the various communities, the highest number was at Ogbia (16) and Yenagoa (15) followed by Akassa (9), Amassoma (8), Brass (7) and Kaiama (6). Since there are ecotourism potentials in Bayelsa State the Government should provide funds at the local and state level to develop them.

### INTRODUCTION

According to Dickson (2007), the first initiative towards a formal organization of tourism in Nigeria may be traced to the period immediately after independence in 1960. At that time, private sector involvement in tourism could be said to have been relatively organized. Government was quick to recognize the importance of tourism in Nigeria. Government therefore aligned with some private agencies to form the Nigeria Tourism Association (NTA) in 1962. This is what may be regarded as the formal establishment of a statutory tourism organization in Nigeria. Dickson (2007) said that based on the increasing role and prospects of tourism in the global economy as well as the need to diversify Nigeria oil-based economy, the Federal Government formulated and launched the National Trade and Tourism policy in 1990. The main thrust of this policy was to generate revenue, create employment and promote rural enterprises and foster national integration among others. To make the tourism policy realizable, the Federal Government created the Federal Ministry of culture and Tourism in 1999. This was done to give tourism a pride of place in the nation's economy. The United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP 1992) has described nature tourism as a more diverse and specialized tourism industry involving tourists developing, such special recreational interest in natural environments, growing interest which has resulted in a new word being coined "Ecotourism" which simply means all visits for leisure and out of curiosity to natural areas and historical attraction sites of a given environment to observe or appreciate wildlife features in their habitat. It is primarily ecological and geographic in nature, such visits undertaken by groups or individuals and derives entertainment and mental relaxation through watching natural features of the environment as well as appreciating the scenery (wildlife in captivity or free-ranging) is ecotourism. The International Ecotourism Society defines Ecotourism as "responsible travel to natural areas that conserve the environment and improves the welfare of local people". (IES, 1990). According to Honey, (1985) Australian commission on National Ecotourism calls it "nature-based tourism that involves education and interpretation of the natural environment and is managed to be ecologically sustainable". Since the publication of her book titled "Ecotourism and Sustainable Development" Martha Honey's definition has become the standard. Most serious studies of ecotourism including several university programs now use this as a working definition. There are six (6) defining points: travelling to natural destinations, minimizes environmental impact, environmental awareness, provides direct financial benefits for conservation and respect of local culture. Ajayi (1979) rightly observed that wildlife represent the principal source of animal protein for the rural majority in most African countries. Besides game cropping other essential recreational activities in the national park includes; game viewing, photography, sport hunting, sport fishing, swimming, boat cruising etc. The advantage of the conserving our natural environment in the form of ecotourism parks and equivalent in the form of ecotourism parks and equivalent reserves cannot be over emphasized. Plants and animals in their numbers and varieties in landscape do not fail to attract the attention of man to the extent that certain areas are used for some sports and recreation, plants, animals, water bodies in the landscape may be used as recreational grounds for fishing, bird watching and are equally attractive and scenic places for meditation, rest and self recovery. (Ayodele *et al*, 1999). Forest provides a lot of recreational facilities and sites. They include game reserves, waterfall, seashore, lakes, rock out crops, hills, valleys, caves, parks and water spring. When developed with supporting facilities such as hotels, restaurant, indoor and outdoors, games become tourist centre receiving both local and foreign visitors (Etukudo *et al*, 1994). A well developed ecotourism parks can help to transform rural areas into centres of attraction for wildlife tourism and

would bring in the much needed revenue (Ayodele *et al*, 1972) observed that foreign earnings from tourism contribute significantly to the national income of any country but according to him the amount realized directly by national parks as gate fees, accommodation charges is small compared with what is generally realized outside the parks. Although ecotourism is a relatively new field in Africa, its growth in Kenya has been little of the spectacular. In the past five years, some community tourism projects have been launched in Kenya. There are good places for ecotourism development in Bayelsa State such as Akassa Lighthouse in Akassa, Whiteman Graveyards in Twon Brass, Boro's Monument in Kaiama Town, Slave-holding House in Twon Brass, Opume Bronze head in Ogbia, Ox-bow Lake in Swali Yenagoa. British Consulate Building in Twon Brass, Oloibiri Oil Museum in Ogbia, Odi Ogori-ba Festival, Amassoma and Seigbein Festival and so on. Ecotourism has not been given the required attention in Nigeria due to the fact that average Nigerian particularly Bayelsa State sees it insignificance and of little benefit to man and the society. This work is to bring to the knowledge of the society (Bayelsa State) the importance of ecotourism development and to encourage more studies in this area. However, as rightly expressed by Afolayan (1987) the objective of ecotourism has been neglected over the years due to death of fund and enough manpower, besides ignorance and lack of proper awareness on the part of the planners and policy makers. Forest and marine habitats are being destroyed and some of the wildlife are driven to extinction under the pressures of hunting, agriculture, and fishing. Therefore, there is need to establish ecotourism centre in Bayelsa State for attraction, recreation, research education, revenue generation and ecological purposes. The objective of this study is to examine and locate the potentials of ecotourism sites in Bayelsa State.

### Method of Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using descriptive statistics and percentage.

### RESULTS

Table 1: Distribution of Questionnaires to the Community Areas

Communities	Administered	Retrieved	% Retrieved
Ogbia	30	30	100
Yenagoa	30	25	75
Amassoma	30	20	66
Kaiama	20	18	90
Brass	10	9	90
Akassa	10	8	80
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>92</b>

Table 1, shows that the highest number of questionnaire was retrieved in Ogbia (30) and followed by Yenagoa (25) and Amassoma (20), Kaiama (18), Brass (9) and Akassa (8) this was due to language barriers.

Table 2: Awareness of Ecotourism Potentials in the Area

Variables	Ogbia %	Yenagoa %	Amassoma %	Kaiama %	Brass %	Akassa %
Yes	80	75	80	60	70	90
No	20	25	20	40	30	10

The result on table 2 reveals the awareness of ecotourism potentials in the area. In terms of percentage, it could be deduced that the level of awareness of ecotourism potentials is higher in Akassa (90%) followed by Ogbia and Amassoma (80%) and Yenagoa (75%), Brass (75%) and Kaiama (60%).

Table 3: Potential tourism sites/centres are as follows:

Names	Examples/Areas Found
Museum	The bronze head in Opume, Oligi museum, oil museum, mangrove museum etc.
Beaches	Polaku, Koluama Okpoma, Odi, Famgbe, Sagbama and Agei palm beach in Ekeremor Local Government Area.
Whiteman Graveyards	Twon Brass in Brass Local Government Area.
Akassa Slave Transit Camp	Akassa, Brass Local Government Area.
Akassa Lighthouse	Akassa, Brass Local Government Area
Slave holding house	Akassa
British Consulate Building	Twon Brass
Isaac Boro Monument	Kaiama
Ox-bow lake, Efi lake	Swali Yenagoa in Sabagriea
Oki cultural dance and Iyantoru	Okoroba, Minikinsi Local Government Area
Angalapele and Oburumadu cultural dance	Otabagi, Ogbia Local Government Area
Edumanom forest reserve	Ogbia Local Government Area
Ancient cannon	Amassoma
Akania masquerade, Idiogbo and Gonkoma cultural dance.	Kolo town, Ogbia

Table 3 and plates 1-7 indicates the potential tourism sites or centres, and they are ; Whiteman graveyard, Akass lighthouse, Ox-bow lake, Agi palm beach, British consulate building and Isaac Boro monument . gains but also harmonized people of different culture.



Plate 1: Cultural Dance (Iyantoru in Okoroba, Bayelsa State, Nigeria)



Plate 2: Oloibiri Oil Museum in Bayelsa State, Nigeria



Plate 3: Ancient Canon in Amassoma (Bayelsa State), Nigeria



Plate 4: Lighthouse in Akassa (Bayelsa State) in Nigeria



Plate 5: Slave House in Twon Brass in Bayelsa State, Nigeria



Plate 6: British Consulate Building in Twon Brass, Bayelsa State, Nigeria



Plate 7: The Ox-Bow Lake in Swali Yenegoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria



Plate 8: Adaka Boro's Monument in Kaiama, Bayelsa State.

Table 4: Age Distribution of Respondents

AGE GROUP	Ogbia	Yenagoa	Amassoma	Kaiama	Brass	Akassa	Total %
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
30 - 40	12.65	9.58	39.25	14.49	20.68	30.77	20.25
41 - 50	18.98	30.14	17.86	21.74	27.59	23.08	23.25
51 - 60	25.32	24.66	21.43	28.98	17.24	12.31	22.0
61 - 70	22.78	21.92	12.5	23.19	24.14	18.46	20.75
71 - 80	20.25	13.69	8.93	11.59	10.34	15.38	13.75

Table 4 shows the age class 41 – 50 (23.25%) out of the total respondents. Followed by those with age group of 51 – 60 (22.0%), while age group of 61 – 70 (20.75%) and age group of 71 – 80 (13.75%)

Table 5: Occupational Distribution of Respondents

Occupation	Ogbia	Yenagoa	Amassoma	Kaiama	Brass	Akassa	Total %
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Farming	28.98	25	16.66	25	20.83	20.0	22.91
Student	26.08	20.31	20	27.78	28.17	25.71	24.87
Civil servant	10.14	7.81	26.67	13.89	15.49	22.86	16.01
Trading	20.28	28.13	15	22.22	12.68	14.29	18.72
Driving/fishing	14.49	18.75	21.67	11.11	22.54	17.14	17.49

The results of table 5 below reveals that the highest number of respondents are students (24.87%) while farmers are (22.91%) followed by traders (18.72%), drives and fishermen (17.49%) and civil servants (16.01%).

## Discussion

### Age Distribution of People Living in the Study Area

During the period of this study, the result showed that youths between age groups of 41 – 50 years are aware of tourism (23.25%) and age groups of 51 – 60 years less aware of tourism (22.0%). Awareness of ecotourism by the youth groups was mainly due to their educational background which enable them to know the importance of developing ecotourism centre in their communities. Perhaps, most of the youths may have visited a national park of ecotourism centre on excursion from their various institutions of learning. The study revealed that majority of the people living in the study areas are students (24.87%) followed by farmers (22.91%). Creating awareness for a particular resource is very vital for it to gain popularity and support of individuals, organizations and the government alike, (Lameed, 1999). It became apparent that awareness of ecotourism was higher as 95% of the respondents were confirmed to have the knowledge of ecotourism. Higher percentages in awareness of ecotourism is mainly due to economic and social impacts being felt by the people. Also, civil servants, teachers and students are literate and educated who read daily newspapers and listen to radio and television broadcast through which they are aware of ecotourism in their area. The dream of the state is to make Bayelsa State a cultural melting point and a holiday resort for people, to visit at will. That is why the state cultural and tourism policy is designed to promote, preserve and protect the rich heritage of Bayelsa cultural festivals (tourism). Agei Palm Beach and Ox-bow Lake can serve as ecotourism , while the cultural festival, the Oloibiri Oil Museum, the White man Graveyard, the Ancient Canon, the Light-house, Slave House, British Consulate Building, the Adaka Boro Monument and Opume Bronze head can serve as tourists attraction sites. Bayelsa State has a long list of colourful festivals which run through the year. There are over twenty-five of such festivals, some of these festivals are celebrated annually while others are celebrated every seven years. These festivals could be successfully marketed both within the country and internally. An investment to showcase the holistic unique dance and festivals of the state could draw tourist from all works of life. The celebration of festivals does not only bring economic gains but also harmonized people of different culture.

### Museum

There are various historical sites of tourist interest in Bayelsa State and appropriate steps are in the pipe line to develop them for cultural exhibitions, excursions and recreation activities. The bronze heads discovered in the forest in Opume, the Oligi museum, Mangrove museum etc. these are places where artefacts dating back to hundreds of years have been found and preserved. The Oloibiri Oil Well Museum which has been proposed by the Federal Government to commemorate the first striking of oil in commercial quantity in Nigeria in 1956 is equally significant remembering that the economic growth of Nigeria rest on this black gold called oil. When the museums are finally put in proper shape and standards, they will serve as a centre of excellence in petroleum history entertainment and learning.



### **Beaches**

The nascent beaches in Bayelsa State are worthy of a visit. The development of these beaches will turn them into a busy recreational centre and holiday resorts that will offer tourists a serene atmosphere for sight-seeing activities such as social events, e.g. parties, swimming, boat trips, boat regatta. Fishing takes place in the beaches, particularly during festival periods like Christmas, New Year and Independence Day Celebration, such beaches are found in Polaku, Koluama, Okpoma, Odi, Famgbe, Sagbama as well as the Agi Palm Beach in Ekeremor Local Government Area. They are all fine, sandy and beautiful beaches found in Bayelsa State which is already major tourist sites.

### **Whiteman Graveyards**

These graveyards are found in Twon Brass Akassa in Brass Local Government Area. They are graves of Europeans who died in the Akassa raid of (1895). The incident occurs as a result of the local palm oil trade which was coming gradually under the control of the Royal Niger Company at the expense of the indigenous traders. It is worth mentioning that the attack was led by King William Kokom, the graveyard tells a vivid story of the raid and its bloody aftermath. These graveyards are symbolic for a number of reasons most especially as they demonstrate the long resolve of the Niger Delta people to control their resources and determine their own destiny.

### **Ancient Cannon**

It's an old type of large heavy gun, usually on wheels, that fires solid metal or stone balls. It is formerly used in warfare that is, fighting against enemy or usually fired when a hero died. The cannon is usually loaded with gunpowder or other explosive based propellant. The cannon was found in Amassoma and it is a good relics for tourist attraction.

### **Akassa Lighthouse**

This lighthouse is estimated to be about 60 metres tall standing by the sea-side in Akassa. It was speculated to be the tallest lighthouse in West Africa; it was originally built in 1910. The reason why this lighthouse was erected was to enable the pilot to control the ships coming into the hinterlands. However, history tells that the lighting process was facilitated by solar energy. In fact, mere climbing the lighthouse would be an adventure to tourists. That is why the Bayelsa State Government should consider it necessary to develop the lighthouse for the pleasure and splendour of tourist.

### **Slave Holding Housing in Akassa**

The slave trade left many scars on the Niger Delta particularly in Bayelsa State. The grim-looking holding house below is where slaves were chained as they awaited shipment to the Americas. It was built of iron and brick; it is a considerable historic interest, particularly as symbol of our heritage. A visit to this destination will reflect memories of the plight slaves suffered while in transit. Therefore, there is need to develop it for tourist attraction.

### **British Consulate Building**

A British consulate was established at Twon Brass. The consulate was used in administering the area during the era of legitimate trade. This consulate building was still in use till the end of the colonial period in 1960. Below is the relic of the building for tourists centre.

### **Ox-bow Lake**

This is unique creature of nature where the water takes the shape of U with isolated island. This ox-bow is located in the state capital, Yenagoa and it has turned to be an attraction for tourists, because of the interest which the Bayelsa State Government has consciously generated concerning the site. Most tourism related activities are being celebrated there by both government and private tourism practitioners such occasions include: Christmas carnivals, etc. The lake reveals the aquatic nature of the Bayelsa people.

### **Isaac Boro Monument**

The historical attractions of Bayelsa State will not be complete without considering the hero and freedom fighter of the Izoos nation, Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro whose name is synonymous with the Niger Delta struggle. He sacrificed himself for the struggle to emancipate the Izoos from economic and political bondage. According to Tamuno (2005) in defiance of the Federal might, Boro took up arms against the Federal Government with a rag-tag army of just 159 youths on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, 1966 when he declared the Niger Delta People's Republic. Today, a monument in Boro's name has been built in Kaiama, his home town in Bayelsa State for remembrance. Bayelsa State, Nigeria His aggressive approach may be considered as a pointer for the liberation of the Izoos. He

was instrumental for the creation of the Rivers State; the Government of Bayelsa State should develop for tourist attraction.

### **Opume Bronze Head**

These are a collection of ancient relics whose origin and basic historical delta confine to defy explanation. Tradition has it that the bronze head was made up of long head of tortoise and a sword; they are preserved in Opume forest in Ogbia Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Apart from the uncertainty surrounding the sculptures, it is an attraction which is becoming tourists concern.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Conclusion**

It is quite possible for ecotourism to become a significant factor in Nigeria particularly Bayelsa State, if handled with seriousness and well managed, and could become next to crude oil as a foreign exchange earner for the state. Wildlife resources and tourist potentials are highly abundant in the studied areas but they are not well managed and mainly due to poor funding by the government. It can be rightly concluded that ecotourism creates employment opportunities for local communities, stimulating economies and social welfare and creating recreational facilities and services. Local communities around the tourism potentials require knowledge and lot of information about the importance and the benefit embedded therein, this will enhance their interest on ecotourism development. If in future, tourism is to achieve social and economic objectives then it must take ecological, environmental and social consideration into account. From interview and observation, one can conclude that the local people surrounding the ecotourism potentials states do not have good knowledge and the benefit of ecotourism; rather they preserve the forest as hunting ground and the wild animals as food.

### **Recommendations**

To enhance good and effective ecotourism and community development especially in Bayelsa State such as Ogbia, Yenagoa, Brass, Kaiama, Akassa, Amassoma and the country in general the following sets of recommendations are made: The government, private individuals and stakeholders should invest in ecotourism in Bayelsa State. The general public and most importantly the local communities surrounding these ecotourism potentials need to be aware of the importance of ecotourism and national wildlife heritage as resources for the present and future generation such public education should be initiated by extension services, radio television programmes, seminars, workshops and symposium.

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