



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## Evaluating the influence of ecotourism attributes of Osun Osogbo sacred grove on tourists' motivations for visiting

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World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews, 2024, 21(02), 674–682

Publication history: Received on 30 December 2023; revised on 07 February 2024; accepted on 09 February 2024

Article DOI: <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.21.2.0304>

### Abstract

This study was conducted to determine the influence of the ecotourism attributes of Osun Osogbo sacred grove on tourist motivation for visiting. Data were collected through direct observation and administration of structured questionnaire. The sample size was 250 tourists to the site. Data were analyzed and presented using descriptive statistics. According to the results of the findings, the sites historical background (43.1%), easy accessibility (37.3%), good value for cost (44.6%), famous of the site (65.5%), ability to visit a sacred place (52.2%), perfect weather (45.0%), walk around in nature (46.3%), past experiences (42.8%), ability to see the landscape (52.40%), cultural sites (41.8%), bird watching (38.6%), monkeys (41.4%) and water body (40.2%) were seen to be influencing tourists to visit the site. The results also indicate that the main push factors that were seen as motivating tourists were the need to take a break from normal daily activities (61.9%), learn about the environment (43.2%), meet new people with similar interests (37.2%), experience the atmosphere (49.00%), escape from psychological stress (44.0%), see a place with lots of attractions (52.2%), and visit a place I haven't been before (48.8%). to experience a different lifestyle (44.3%), to have fun and be entertained (44.6%), to get away from everyday responsibilities (37.3%), to strengthen relationships with family and friends (40.7%), and to get a better appreciation for nature (53.3%). Management should therefore pay attention to the improvement of these features so as to improve the destination's competitiveness in the tourism market.

**Keywords:** Cultural tourism; Ecotourism attributes; Tourists' motivation; Pull and Push Factor; Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove

### 1. Introduction

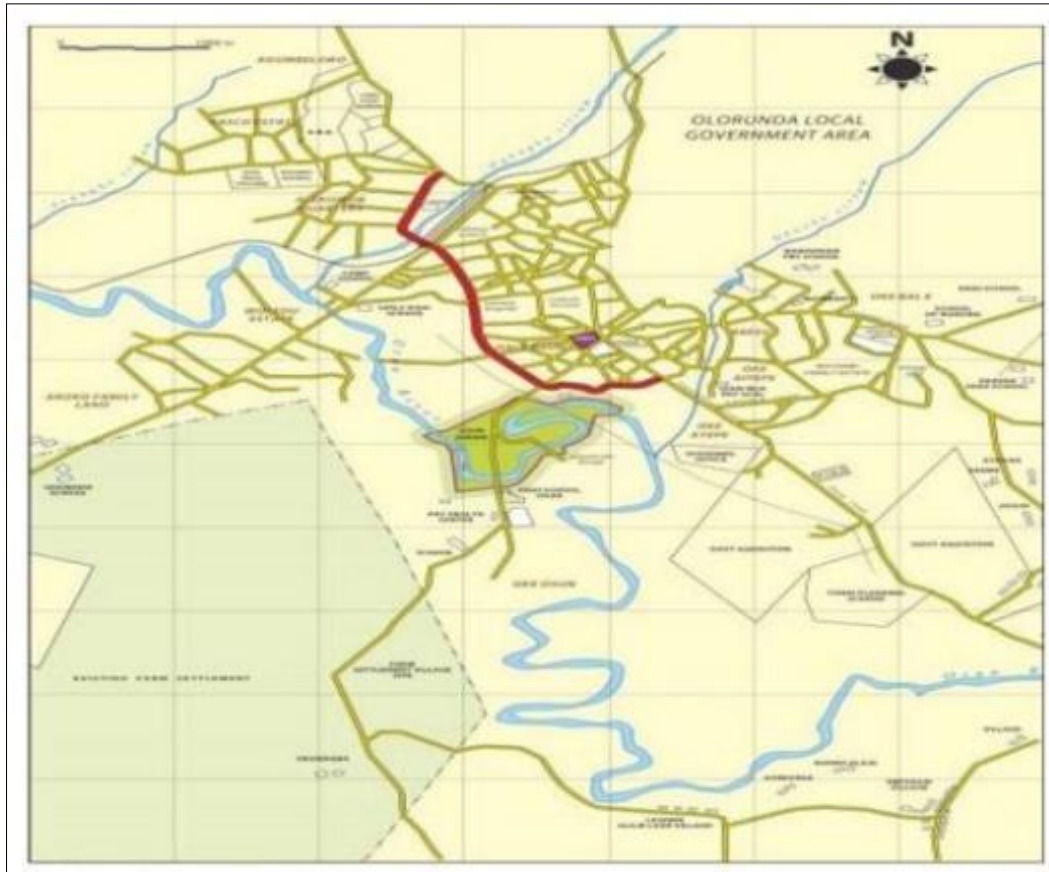
Ecotourism is considered as an environmentally responsible and sustainable form of a visit to nature-based sites (ThiKhanh and Phong, 2020). International Ecotourism Society (TIES) defined ecotourism as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the well-being of the local people, and involves interpretation and education (TIES, 2015). Sacred groves are forest patches conserved by the local people through socio-cultural and religious practices (Rajora and Solanki, 2019). This religious and socio-cultural practice has enabled sacred groves to harbour a rich biodiversity of flora and fauna and has played a significant role in the conservation of biodiversity (Singh *et al.*, 2019). Ejikeme and Okonkwo (2022) found that Sacred Groves form an attraction, both for the community and the area surrounding the community. The essence of tourists' decision in choosing a destination is of much significance in determining the best places to go that links them to the critical aspects that may influence the decision-making (Ortaleza and Mangali, 2021). Mimet *et al.*, (2022) states that destination choice has always been an important aspect in tourism literature and there are various factors influencing travel decisions. The attributes of a travel destination that may influence a tourist decision include accessibility, place, price, safety and security, culture, historical background, landscape and political stability (Jariyachamsit *et al.*, 2020). It was also mentioned that what influence decision-making

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include the condition of the place or destination quality, management and environment, transportation, safety and security, culture, likeness of the area, reason and cost of travel (Jenget *et al.*, 2019). According to Fuadilla and Mrwatiningsih (2018), tourism attributes have a significant influence on visiting decisions. Tourists have their own expectations by identifying certain features of a destination that attracts them and influence them in choosing a place including architecture, culture, food, landscape and shopping stores (Liao & Chuang, 2020). Although there are many attributes associated with a destination, safety is the major concern for tourists to make a decision on destination selection (Tan, 2020). Hayes (2021) indicated “safety, tranquility and peace are necessary conditions for prosperous tourism; most tourists will not spend their hard earned money to go to a destination where their safety and well-being may be in jeopardy”. Rice and Khanin, (2019) argue that cultural attractions have become the most important attribute, which motivates people to travel. Zeng and He (2019) identified two categories of price, namely, travel cost relating to travel to and from a destination, and ground cost relating to commodity prices within the destination. Both of the two categories of price can influence tourists’ decision making on destination selection. Muluneh *et al.*, (2022) states that both climate and weather can significantly influence tourists’ activities and behavior, just as they affect people’s routine lives as well. Word of mouth that is taken affirmatively strongly affects tourist revisit intention which contributes to understanding the attributes of a travel destination (Singh and Singh, 2019). Moreover, word of mouth influences the destination attribute that plays a crucial role in determining a tourist’s choice for an attraction, satisfaction, and price (Mohammad, 2020). Tourists enjoy pursuing entertainment during their trip even at museums and other cultural sites (Cetin and Bilgihan, 2016). Tourists, especially those in holiday mood, would like to enjoy their destinations’ natural views and beautiful scenery (Vinh, 2013). Tourists’ destination choice is often influenced by convenience (Tan, 2020). Given a choice between similar destinations, a tourist will tend to choose the more convenient one (Tang *et al.*, 2020). Thus, destinations, which are more proximate, would be more likely to be accepted over destinations offering similar products that are less proximate (Ollor and Egbuluka, 2023). It explains why accessibility can be defined as the “relative ease or difficulty with which customers can reach the destination of their choice” (Vinh, 2013). Clinch and Filimonau (2017) argue that an understanding of tourist’s motivation can offer a range of insights into why people are involved in recreational activities. But they also highlight that it is important to understand not only why people are involved in tourism activities, but also which factors can inhibit them from participating (Orakani *et al.*, 2021). Anton *et al.* (2017) emphasizes that tourists are driven by motivation while deciding which type of holiday to choose and which destination to visit. According to another study it can be defined as a set of needs that drives a person to participate in a tourist activity (Aicher *et al.*, 2015). Thus, tourist’s motivation describes the reasons which stimulate people to travel and explains their decisions and behavior while organizing and participating in the trip (Anishchenko, 2016). As the number of researches place “need” as an internal force or motivation, the following research outlined four categories of motivators: physical, cultural, personal, and status and prestige (Ma *et al.*, 2018). Understanding the association between tourists’ ecotourism attribute and motivations is essential for tourism development because such understanding helps relevant governmental departments and tourism operators to promote nature based tourism using appropriate marketing strategies and to develop ecotourism products that satisfy the demands of existing nature-based visitors. This study has thus investigated the influence of the ecotourism attributes of Osun Osogbo sacred grove on tourist motivation for visiting in order to shift the focus of the management of the site to the ecotourism attributes that attracts tourists the most so as to enhance their competitiveness in the market by paying special attention to the management of these ecotourism attributes.

### 1.1. Study Area

The study was conducted in OsunOsogbo World Heritage Site (OOWHS). The Sacred Grove is located along the bank of Osun River in Osogbo Local Government Area of Osun State in South Western Nigeria (Oladeji and Olatuyi, 2020). Its geographical coordinates are 7°45' 02" N and 4°33' 08" E. It covers an area of 75 hectares and is encircled by a buffer zone of 47 ha (IUCN, 2005). It is 285m above the sea level and primarily deciduous forest (Figure 1). The sacred grove is situated on the margin of the southern forests of Nigeria. The Osun- Osogbo sacred grove is a sacred forest that form part of Yoruba cultural tradition dedicated to Osun goddess of fertility. The sacred grove is an organically evolved cultural and landscape site associated with the Yoruba traditional religion and culture. The sacred grove is a Nigerian national monument and a UNESCO World Heritage site since 2005. The OsunOsogbo Grove has a tropical climate with the rainy season (March – November) and the dry season (November – February). It is a protected area covered by riparian forest, dry high forest and derived savannah (Akinpelu and Adebowale, 2007).



**Figure 1**Map of Osogbo Metropolis showing the location of the groove. Source: United Nations educational cultural and scientific organization (2005)

### 1.2. Data Collection

The statistical population was the tourists to Osun Osogbo sacred groove. The tourists were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan, (1970) method of sampling determination from the total annual tourists' influx to Osun Osogbo sacred groove in the year 2023. A total of two hundred and fifty (250) tourists were randomly selected from the site. The instrument of data collection was structured questionnaire which was self-administered to the tourists. Tourist and Staff members in Osun Osogbo sacred groove were also interviewed.

### 1.3. Data Analysis

The analytical and statistical tools used for this study were descriptive tools. The Descriptive tools used include frequencies and percentages.

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## 2. Results

### 2.1. Socio-economic Characteristics of Tourists

Results on socio-economic characteristics of tourists are presented in Table 1. Findings from this study showed that the respondents consisted of both males and females but the percentage of the female (60%) is higher than that of the male (40%). This shows that there are more females visiting the site than males. Findings also revealed that the age group with the highest number of respondents is between 26-35years (29.2%), followed by 18-25 years (21.6%). This implies that majority of the tourists visiting the sites are in their youth stage of life. Furthermore, the results showed that 50.8% of the respondents were single, while 48.4% were married. The results reveal that highest percentage of tourist at Osun Osogbo groove (27.6%) had HND/ BSC, while 3.2% with PhD. Also, the results reveal that 24.5% were self-employed, 20.1% were full-time workers, 19.3% were part-time employees, 11.2% were unemployed, 8.0% were retired and 16.9% were students. The study further shows that 29.0% earned ₦20,000 and below as their monthly income. The study further revealed that majority (80.0%) of the tourists was Christians (Table 1).

**Table 1** Socio-economic Characteristics of Tourists

Variables	Osun Osogbo sacred groove	
	F	%
Gender		
Male	100	40.0
Female	150	60.0
Age		
18-25	54	21.6
26-35	73	29.2
36-45	53	21.2
46-55	53	21.2
Above 55	17	6.8
Marital Status		
Single	127	50.4
Married	123	48.4
Level of Education		
Primary School	9	3.6
Secondary School	42	16.8
Undergraduate	121	48.8
Postgraduate (MSC)	69	27.6
PHD	9	3.2
Main Occupation		
Full Time Job	50	20.1
Part Time Job	48	19.3
Self employed	61	24.5
Un employed	28	11.2
Retired	20	8.0
Student	43	16.9
Monthly Income		
₦20, 000 and below	65	29.0
₦21, 000 and ₦40,000	50	19.3
₦41,000 and ₦60,000	40	18.2
₦61,000 and ₦80,000	55	22.5
₦81,000 and ₦ above	40	11.0
Nationality		
Nigerian	250	100
Foreigner	0	0

Religion		
Christianity	200	80
Islam	50	20
Traditionalist	0	0

Keys: F = frequency, % = percentage. Source: Field survey, 2023

### 2.2. Respondents source of information about the site

Respondents source of information about the site are presented in Table 2. Results from the findings indicates that 6.4% of the respondents got their information about the site from touristic catalogues, 14.8% from travel agencies, 5.2% from brochures, 4.8% from magazines, 11.6% from internet (social media), 13.6% from television/radio and 43.6% from friends and relatives. This shows that a higher number of the respondents visited the sites with their friends and relatives.

**Table 2** Respondents source of information about the site

Information Source	Frequency	Percentage
Tourist catalogue	16	6.4
Travel agencies	37	14.8
Brochures	13	5.2
Magazines	12	4.8
Internet	29	11.6
Television/radio	34	13.6
Friends and relative	109	43.6

Field survey 2023

### 2.3. Perception of the site to the respondents

Perception of the site to the respondents is presented in Table 3. Table 3 depicts the perception that each respondent has towards OsunOsogbo sacred groove, and the table reveals that more than half of the respondents believe the site to be a cultural site (58.8%), while 13.4 percent sees the site as an ecological site.

**Table 3** Perception of the site to the respondents

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Ecological	33	13.4
Cultural	147	58.8
Relaxation	66	26.4

Field survey 2023

### 2.4. Motivational Factors That Propel the Desire to Travel

As revealed in Table 4, the results indicate that the main push factors that were seen as motivating tourists were the need to take a break from normal daily activities (61.9%), learn about the environment (43.2%), meet new people with similar interests (37.2%), experience the atmosphere (49.00%), escape from psychological stress (44.0%), see a place with lots of attractions (52.2%), and visit a place I haven't been before (48.8%). to experience a different lifestyle (44.3%), to have fun and be entertained (44.6%), to get away from everyday responsibilities (37.3%), to strengthen relationships with family and friends (40.7%), and to get a better appreciation for nature (53.3%)

**Table 4** Motivational Factors That Propel the Desire to Travel

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	UD
	F%	F%	F%	F%	F%
Needed a break	161 (61.9)	72(29.0)	9(3.6)	3(1.2)	3(1.2)
To learn about the environment	101(41.1)	108 (43.9)	30(12.2)	4(1.6)	3(1.2)
Meet new people of similar interest	93(37.3)	95(38.2)	54(21.7)	4(1.6)	3(1.2)
To feel the atmosphere	122(49.0)	100(40.2)	18(7.2)	6(2.4)	3(1.2)
Get away from psychological stress	107(43.0)	92(36.9)	38(15.3)	9(3.6)	3(1.2)
To learn about history and culture	128(51.4)	87(34.9)	22(8.8)	9(3.6)	3(1.2)
See a destination with many attractions	130(52.2)	96(38.6)	17(16.8)	3(1.2)	3(1.2)
Visit a place I haven't visited before.	121(48.8)	84(33.9)	25(10.1)	15(6.0)	3(1.2)
To have fun and be entertained	91(36.5)	111(44.6)	35(14.1)	9(3.6)	3(1.2)
To escape from daily responsibilities	92(37.4)	80(32.5)	62(25.2)	12(4.9)	3(1.2)
Experience new lifestyle	85(34.6)	109(44.3)	43(17.5)	9(3.7)	4(1.2)
Strengthening relationship with my family	100(40.7)	100(40)	35(14.2)	8(3.3)	4(1.2)
To get a better appreciation of nature	130(53.3)	71(29.2)	33(13.6)	6(2.5)	3(1.2)

Keys: F = frequency, % = percentage. Source: Field survey, 2023.SD: Strongly disagree, D: Disagree, U: Undecided, A: Agree SA: Strongly agree

## 2.5. Attribute of the site that influenced tourists' motives

**Table 5** Attribute of the site that influenced tourists' motives

Variables	SA	A	D	SD	UD
	F%	F%	F%	F%	F%
It is a famous attraction	163 (65.5)	62(24.9)	15(6.0)	9(3.6)	9(3.6)
To visit a sacred place	130 (52.2)	94(37.8)	13(5.2)	9(3.6)	3(1.2)
Perfect weather	112(45.0)	97(39.0)	25(10.0)	12(4.8)	3(1.2)
Walk around in nature	114(46.3)	108(43.9)	14(5.7)	3(1.2)	7(2.8)
Good value for cost	111(44.6)	95(38.2)	27(10.8)	12(4.8)	4(1.6)
Historical background of the site	107(43.0)	100(40.2)	30(12.0)	9(3.6)	3(1.2)
Past experiences	82(32.9)	107(42.8)	45(18.1)	15(6.0)	1(1.2)
See the landscape	129(52.4)	75(30.5)	33(13.4)	6(2.4)	3(1.2)
Cultural/heritage sites	99(39.8)	104(41.8)	39(15.7)	7(2.8)	1(1.2)
Bird watching	89(36.2)	95(38.6)	54(22.0)	7(2.8)	3(1.2)
Easy accessibility	107(43.0)	100(40.2)	30(12.0)	10(4.2)	3(1.4)
Monkeys	79(40.7)	103(41.4)	48(19.3)	18(7.2)	3(1.4)
Water body	80(32.1)	100(40.2)	40(16.3)	12(2.4)	3(1.4)

Keys: F = frequency, % = percentage. Source: Field survey, 2023.SD: Strongly disagree, D: Disagree, U: Undecided, A: Agree SA: Strongly agree

Attribute of the site that influenced tourists' motives are presented in Table 5. According to the results of the findings in the table 5, the sites historical background (43.1%), easy accessibility (37.3%), good value for cost (44.6%), famous of the site (65.5%), ability to visit a sacred place (52.2%), perfect weather (45.0%), walk around in nature (46.3%), past

experiences (42.8%), ability to see the landscape (52.40%), cultural sites (41.8%), bird watching (38.6%), monkeys (41.4%) and water body (40.2%) were seen to be influencing tourists to visit the site.

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### **3. Discussion**

#### **3.1. Socio-economic Characteristics of Tourists**

Findings from this study showed that more females than males visit the tourists' site. This is inconsistent with the findings of Adetola and Adedire (2018), who reported that majority of visitors to ecotourism destinations were females. Findings also revealed that the age group with the highest number of respondents is between 26-35 years. This implies that majority of the tourists visiting the sites are in their youth stage of life. This suggests that majority of the tourists were youths, this is in agreement with the findings of Knezevic *et al.*, (2016) which reported that 56% of the tourists to ecotourism destinations were within the age group of 25-39 year olds. Furthermore, majority of the tourists are single. This is in agreement with the findings of Meng and Uysal (2008) who reported that visitors who are not married seek adventure activities in a destination more than married visitors. The study showed that highest percentages of the tourists have tertiary education. This is consistent with the findings of Arowosafe and Emmanuel (2014), who reported that 76.8% of the tourists to the mole national park were highly, educated attaining to tertiary level of education. Also, the results reveal that highest percentages of the tourists were self employed. This study however negates the findings of Karanikola *et al.* (2014) in ecotourism sites of Thessaloniki, Greece which reported that majority of the visitors were employed. The studies showed that majority of tourists earned between ₦20,000 and below on monthly as monthly income. This is consistent with the findings of Adetola *et al.*, (2016) which reported that 63.6% of the visitors to ecotourism destinations earned less than ₦20,000 as their monthly income. The study also revealed that majority of the tourists to the site was Christians. This is tandem with the findings of Orimaye *et al.* (2018) which reported that 84.7% of the visitors to the ecotourism destinations were Christians.

#### **3.2. Respondents source of information about the site**

Results from the findings indicate that the highest percentage tourists got their information about the site from friends and families. This is supported by Salim and Mwaipopo (2016) that visitors are willing recommend it to friends and families if they were satisfied with it.

#### **3.3. Motivational Factors That Propel the Desire to Travel**

The results indicate that the main push factors that were seen as motivating tourists were the need to take a break from normal daily activities. This is supported by Ramkissoon and Uysal (2010) that modern and sophisticated tourist looking for more natural heritage offerings. O'Neill *et al.* (2010) also opined that visitors are driven by a desire to escape routine and are attracted by the wide open green spaces offered by nature-based sites. The desire of visitors for game viewing also corroborates suggestion by Ballantyne *et al.* (2011) that the sensory and emotional nature of the wildlife experience and desire to 'reconnect with nature' drives wildlife tourism.

#### **3.4. Attribute of the site that influenced tourists' motives**

These features at this site form the core attractions of the site which has elevated the status of the heritage site to being listed on UNESCO's tentative list of World Heritage sites and this has created a good image for the host Nigeria. This is consistent with the findings of Ortaleza and Mangali (2021), who reported that majority of visitors to ecotourism destination visited due to the attribute of the site.

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### **4. Conclusion**

This study investigated the influence of the ecotourism attributes of Osun Osogbo sacred grove on tourist motivation for visiting and concludes that despite the vast ecological attributes the site possesses, Osun Osogbo sacred grove is still seen as a cultural destination, only few sees the site in the light of its natural or ecological attributes. But regardless of this the sites' ecological attributes still have great influence in attracting tourists to the site while most of the tourist were satisfied by their visit to the site by suggesting that they will revisit the site and recommend to friends and families and also most of the tourist shows great concerns and attitude towards the environment. Management should therefore pay attention to the improvement of these features so as to improve the destination's competitiveness in the tourism market. Management of the site should also develop the site features to taste so as to attract visitors to them thereby reducing concentration at these preferred site features.

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## Compliance with ethical standards

### *Acknowledgments*

The authors recognize and appreciate the cooperation of the entire management of Osun Osogbo sacred grove for their efforts in making this research possible.

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

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