

# **AN APPRAISAL OF THE STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT OF SERVICES OFFERED AT OGBA ZOOLOGICAL GARDEN, EDO STATE AS A CENTRE FOR RESPONSIBLE TRAVELS**

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## **Abstract**

*Responsible travel is gradually becoming a major source of tourism demand, due to greater awareness on the need for biodiversity conservation for the survival of man. Edo State is endowed with numerous centres for responsible travels of which the Ogba Zoological garden seems to be among the prominent ones. However, the stages of the development of services offered by the Ogba Zoological garden Benin City as a centre for responsible travels remains largely unexplored. The purpose of this study therefore was to appraise the stages of development of services offered by the Ogba Zoological garden, Benin City, as a centre for responsible travels, as perceived by the patronizing travelers (tourists). Three research questions were raised and answered in this regard. The study employed descriptive research design. The population of the study was one thousand (1000) travelers (tourists) that toured the destination between January to February 2023. Purposive sampling technique was used to select one hundred and ten travelers who visited the destination within the period of the study and used as the respondents. One hundred and ten validated and reliable questionnaires were distributed to the respondents*

*and collected on the spot. The data was analysed, using descriptive statistics to answer the research questions. The findings revealed that the stages of development of services at Ogba Zoological garden as a centre for responsible travels was not satisfactory. Hence, the researchers recommended that; the Edo government and the management of the Ogba zoological garden should expedite action to enhance the services of the Ogba Zoological garden as a centre for responsible travels.*

**Keywords:** Development, Responsible travel, Biodiversity, Travelers, Endangered species.

## **Introduction**

Responsible travels are travels to natural destinations with a view to conserving the biodiversity. Due to the increase in the awareness on the essence of conserving the biodiversity for the survival of man-kind, responsible travel is becoming a major source of tourism demand. In view of this, many stakeholders seem to be motivated to strive for ecotourism development in parts of the world. This probably contributes to tourism becoming one of the world's largest industries (World Trade and Travel Council, 2014).

In Nigeria, responsible travels, like other types of travels (tourism), seems to be receiving lip-service. According to Amalu and Ajake, (2012), this is probably due to poor attitude to its development, or over dependence on petroleum. In fact, Awoniyi and Aigbokhan, (2023), stated that most centres for responsible travels in Nigeria, are facing challenges due to lack of enough resources, poor attitude, weak implementation of policies by the government, limited capacity of the officials, resistance by the host communities, and so on. As a developing country in serious need for economic rejuvenation, income re-distribution, employment generation, peaceful co-existence and enhanced security among her numerous ethno-religious and political divides, responsible travel development is the right vehicle. According to Aluko (2021), responsible travel development is a major source of income and environmental preservation for countries where the potentials have been developed adequately.

In Edo State, there are numerous responsible travel destinations, such as the gelegele fountain, the Ikpoba Hill river side, the Okomu National park, the Ogba zoological garden, somorika / asoso rocky hills and so on. However, during the National Institute for Hospitality and Tourism (NIHOTOUR) Educational tour on travel/tourism destinations, for which one of the researchers was involved, it was found that most of the responsible travel destinations had been abandoned, while a few have become erosion reservoirs and refuse dump centres.

In order for responsible travel centres to enhance tourism and national development, an insight into the required roles and services derivable are expedient.

In this view the principles of responsible travels are highlighted to act as guides in the appraisal.

### **The Principles of Responsible Travel**

There are seven (7) principles of responsible travels (ecotourism) that have gained worldwide acceptance, as stated by Martha Horney (International Ecotourism Society (TIES)(2015). She was the co-founder and Director Emeritus of the Centre for Responsible Travels (CREST). The seven (7) principles have been accepted as the criteria for determining the stages of development of services at responsible travel centres. Aluko, (2021). The principles are;

- ✓ Responsible travel centres should be natural destinations
- ✓ Impact on the destinations should be minimal.
- ✓ Awareness of the destinations should be adequate. Thus there should be high level of awareness of the destination and its products (Arainru, 2017).
- ✓ It should be able to adequately conserve biodiversity for the benefit of man.
- ✓ The local people should be empowered through employment in the destination.
- ✓ Destination management should respect the local culture.
- ✓ It should support democratic movement and human right.

The stage at which the Ogba zoological garden, Benin City perform the above roles and services as a responsible travel centre, is the crux of this paper. In this research paper, responsible travel and ecotourism are similar terms and are used interchangeably. Also, travelers, visitors, tourists and customers are similar terms and are used interchangeably in this work.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The inability of the management of responsible travel destinations and other stakeholders to realize the extent at which visitors are satisfied with services offered at travel and tourism destinations, could be a salient factor hindering ecotourism development. It should be realized that the visitors are part of the society, and that their taste changes as the society itself undergoes dynamic developmental changes. Although visitors/tourists experience destinations differently, their overall appraisal are likely to be guided by their experiences gained, opportunities offered, and so on.

Today, research findings on the appraisal of the development of services offered at Ogba Zoological garden as a responsible travel centre, is inadequate. Therefore the need to determine the appraisal of the visitors on the development of services offered by Ogba Zoological garden Benin City, as a centre for responsible travel has become expedient. Using the visitors as the respondents, will be justifiable since they are the customers and receivers of such services. This will help bridge the gap in research efforts, create more opportunities for the

stakeholders to boost tourists satisfaction, enhance tourists value for their money, create more employment opportunities due to the expansion of the activities of the destination, enhance tourism development, and the overall national development of the country.

### **Research Questions**

The researchers raised the following research questions to guide the study;

- 1) What is the stage of development of services offered at Ogba Zoological garden, Benin City as a responsible travel centre?
- 2) What stage is the conservation of biodiversity at Ogba Zoological garden, Benin City, as a centre for responsible travels?
- 3) What is the stage of awareness of Ogba Zoological garden, Benin City, as a centre for responsible travels?

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to find out the stages of the development of services offered at Ogba Zoological garden Benin City, Edo State, as a centre for responsible travels, using the visitors as the respondents.

Specifically, the study aims at determining the following;

- ✓ The stage of development of services offered at the Ogba Zoological garden Benin City, as a centre for responsible travels.
- ✓ Stages of conservation of biodiversity at the Ogba Zoological garden Benin City, as a centre for responsible travels.
- ✓ The level of awareness of the Ogba Zoological garden, Benin City, Edo State, as a centre for responsible travels.

### **Significance of the Study**

The researchers expect that the result of the findings will be of assistance to responsible travels management, visitors/tourists, government, researchers, responsible travels marketers, as well as the society at large. The result of the findings will assist the responsible travels management by supplying them with the knowledge on the needs of the responsible travelers so that they can strive for better quality service delivery. Thus the responsible travelers will then have better value for their money as their satisfaction will be better guaranteed by the management. The benefits of the findings to the government include

- ✓ Increase in revenue from taxation as responsible travels business is enhanced.
- ✓ Enhancement of employment opportunities leading to peace and security needed for government businesses.
- ✓ Reduction in security votes resulting in more resources available for developmental strides.

Also the findings of the stages of development of services offered by Ogba Zoological garden as a centre for responsible travels, will be of much benefit to researchers in supplying current information. In addition, the immediate community will benefit in terms of more employment generation, enhanced peace and development, and so on.

### Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature is organized along the following subheadings;

- ❖ Conceptual framework of the study
- ❖ Location/Historical background of the destination
- ❖ Relevance of Responsible travels to National Development

### Conceptual Framework of the Study

This study is based on Tourism Development Model (TDM), developed by Nalani, (2010) and elucidated by Iwuagwu, Alex and Lynda (2015). The Tourism Development Model (TDM), explains how the society develops/transforms from traditional to modernity. The model stresses the developmental process is gradual, and that five (5) stages of tourism development model can be identified, as follows;

- 1) Stage of traditional society (poor stage)
- 2) Stage of pre-colonial take off (fair stage)
- 3) The take off stage (good stage)
- 4) Stage of drive to maturity (very good stage)
- 5) The stage of high mass consumption (excellent stage)

The Tourism Development Model (TDM) was actually developed from the modernization theory of development that emerged during the 18<sup>th</sup> century age of enlightenment Nalani, (2010), Iwuagwu, Alex and Lynda, (2015).

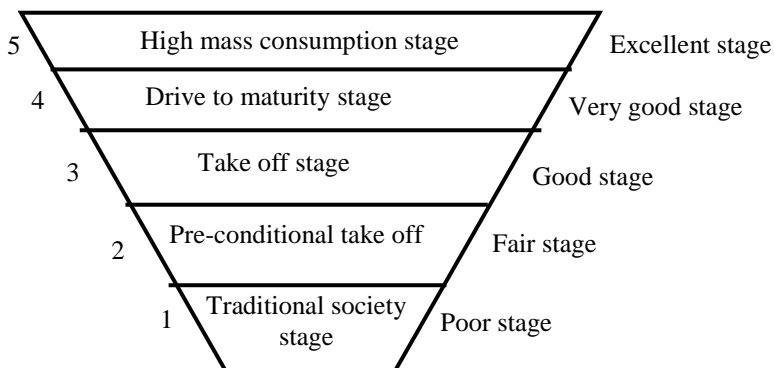


Fig I: (Responsible) Tourism Development Model (RTDM)  
Adapted from Nalani, 2010

The model shown in fig 1, requires the researchers to investigate the stages of development of services offered at Ogba Zoological garden as a Responsible travels centre, through the perception of the visitors, who are the customers and the receivers of such services.

### **Brief Description of the RTDM**

- 1) **The Traditional Society Stage:** This is the earliest stage of the development of the responsible travels destination. It is the stage during which the destination hardly attracts visitors/travelles, due to socio-cultural restrictions based on superstitious beliefs such as the syndrome, and so on. It is a poor stage of development of responsible travels.
- 2) **Pre-Conditional Take off Stage:** This is the stage when the socio-cultural barriers to visitations of the destinations are being gradually eliminated. This stage is also characterized by the emergence of destination managers and investors to transform the destination to modernity. The stage is referred to as fair stage of development.
- 3) **The Take off Stage:** This is the stage of awareness creation on the location, services and benefits derivable from the destination. It is a good stage of development.
- 4) **Drive to Maturity Stage:** At this stage of development, the travelers/visitors/tourists' needs are ascertained and sincere efforts being made to satisfy their dynamic needs by the destination management. This is a very good stage of development of services by the destination.
- 5) **The State of Mass Consumption:** At this stage, the destination is seen to be self sustaining and effectively responding to the dynamic needs of the visitors/customers, applying modernity and technology to enhance quality service delivery.

In view of the above, the researchers intend to discover the stages of development of services offered at Ogba Zoological garden, Benin City, Edo State as a centre for responsible travels.

### **The Study Area: (Ogba Zoological Garden, Benin City)**

The Ogba Zoo is an Edo State government owned Zoological garden and nature park located in Benin City. It was established in 1971 in a forest reserve in Ogba district, four kilometres from the city centre, in Oredo Local Government Area. The area covers about 750 acres of land. It promotes tourism, leisure, recreation, education and scientific research. It is located opposite the NNPC complex along the Airport Road.

The Zoological garden and nature park is a home to local and wild species of animals such as the majestic lion, hyena, chimpanzee, baboon, crocodiles, monkeys, ostriches, large python, porcupine, peafowl, aquatic birds, and so on. The

plant species in the garden include the Benin stain wood (*Afromosia Laxifora*), Mixed Mahogany (*Khaya Grandis*, *Khaya Puchii*, *Ogeagum* (*Daniell caudata*), and so on. The Rotary Club of Benin is credited with the planting of the seedlings of different species of trees including Iroko, tea, obeche, acacia, walnut, black and white afara and so on in the Ogba Zoological gardens and its highways.

Entrance fee into the responsible travel centre, which is just 4 kilometer from the city centre is ₦500 for individuals up to 2 years of age. A visitor at the park enjoys a lot of recreational facilities apart from the plants and animals in their natural habitats. These include extensive landscape grounds, picnic areas, playground, river beach and so on.

### **Relevance of Responsible Travels to National Development**

Responsible travels is a type of travels/tourism referred to as ecotourism. It refers to travels to natural destination, which conserve the environment, sustain the wellbeing of the people, boost employment, create financial opportunities for the local people, recreates the participants, and so on (International Ecotourism Society (TIES) (2015). In view of the above, the relevance of responsible travels/ecotourism to National development has never been in doubt. They include;

**Provision of Employment Opportunities:** According to the World Trade and Travel Council (WTTC) 2014, tourism industries employ about 10% of the global workforce, directly or indirectly. In responsible travel sector, employment opportunities are generated in the following areas; forest rangers, tour guides, travel agents, destination managers, lecturing, and so on. In addition, there are myriads of indirect employment opportunities that can be generated from this sector, such as security guides, front officers, secretaries, accountants and so on.

**Responsible Travels/Ecotourism Enhances Economic and Social Development:** As the destinations employ many hands directly and indirectly, salaries and wages are paid to the workers. This generates spiral effects on their dependants, thereby stimulating the economy. Also mutual interactions between the travelers and the host communities, enhance better understandings, socio-economic development, peaceful co-existence and so on (Odo, 2019).

**It helps to Sustain the Natural Biodiversity, Needed for the Survival of Man:** According to Aluko (2021), ecotourism, also called responsible travels ensures the continued existence of man, through the sustainance of bio-diversity, without which man would go into extinction through excessive temperature rise due to depletion of ozone layer, mere-absence of natural oxygen, food, and so on.

**Responsible Travels, help to Maintain Good Health:** According to Agbonlahor & Agbonlabor (2017), travels offer good source of relaxation, leisure and recreation essential to reduce high blood pressure.

**It also helps to preserve endangered species:** This is because responsible travels enhances the preservation of fauna and flora in their natural habitat for them to continue to flourish (Aluko, 2021).

The destinations offer good avenue for leisure, recreation, tourism and relaxation essential for more work activities and human socialization (Arainru, 2021).

It enhances foreign exchange earnings for the country when well developed. This is because well developed destinations can attract in bound tourists/visitors, who come with their currencies and pay for such services as recreation, accommodation, transportation, food and beverage services, tour guides, and so on.

It promotes creativity and innovations essential for technological and academic advancement. This ecotourism offers the tourists the opportunity to interact with nature and other individuals freely.

## **Methodology**

The study took place at Ogba Zoological garden, Oko, Oredo Local Government Area of Edo State. The research design was descriptive, and the population of the study comprised all the visitors that visited the Ogba Zoological garden within January to February 2023, estimated at one thousand (1000).

Purposive sampling technique was employed in selecting one hundred and ten (110) tourist respondents that visited the destination within the study period, and used for the study. A 20 item validated and reliable questionnaire was used for the study to elicit responses from the respondents. The instrument was adapted from Nalani, (2010) Tourism Development Model (TDM). It consisted of 5 levels modified likert scale items based on; poor stage of development (PSD), fair stage of development (FSD), good stage of development (GSD), very good stage of development VSD), and the Excellent Stage of Development (ESD). A mean score of below 1.4 was categorized as poor stage of development, while mean scores of between 1.5 and 2.4, were categorized as fair stage of development. Also mean score of 2.5 and 3.4, were categorized as good stage of development, while a mean score of 3.5 and 4.4 were categorized as very good stage of development. Mean score of 4.5 and above, were categorised as excellent stage of development.

The research instrument was validated by experts from the Department of Human Kinetics and Sports Science, University of Benin, Benin City, and the Department of Measurement and Evaluation, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin City. Test re-test reliability method was used to determine the instrument reliability. The draft instrument was administered to twenty (20) tourists in the destination. After two weeks interval, the same instrument was administered to another twenty tourists/visitors in the destination. The above visitors being used for reliability test were not part of the participants for the study. The two separate



responses were subjected to Cronobach's Alpha reliability test to determine their reliability for use. This yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.86, which was considered reliable enough for the study. The valid reliable instruments were administered to one hundred and ten tourist respondents and retrieved on the spot. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation.

### Presentation of Result and Discussion of Findings

**Table 1:** Respondents appraisal of the stage of development of Services offered at Ogba Zoological Garden, Benin City as a Responsible travel centre.

Male Respondents (N = 50)			Female Respondents (N = 60)			
	Mean	SD	Inference	Mean	SD	Inference
Developments	2.0	0.92	FSD	1.8	0.90	FSD

Source: field study 2023. SD = Standard Deviation

Table 1 on appraisal of the stages of development of services offered at Ogba Zoological Garden Benin City as a responsible travel centre, shows that the respondents are of the opinion that the stages of development of services offered at the destination as a responsible travels centre is fair (FSD). This is because the mean score of both the male and female respondents on the variable is 2.0 and 1.8 respectively. This falls within the fair region of between 1.5 and 2.4 mean scores. This finding is in line with the previous findings of Ajake & Amalu (2012) that most of our natural tourism resources are yet to be adequately developed.

**Table II:** Respondents appraisal on the stage of development of conservation of biodiversity at the Okomu National Park, Benin City.

Male Respondents (N = 50)			Female Respondents (N = 60)			
	Mean	SD	Inference	Mean	SD	Inference
Developments	2.3	0.63	FSD (fair)	2.4	0.60	FSD (Fair)

Source: field study, 2023. SD = Standard Deviation

Table II on appraisal of the stages of development of bio-diversity at the Ogba Zoological garden Benin City, as a responsible travel centre shows that that respondents are of the opinion that the stages of development of the variable is fair (FSD). This is because the mean score of the male and female respondents are 2.3 and 2.4 respectively, which fall within the range of fair stage of development (FSD), being between 1.5 and 2.4. Perhaps, the female visitors rated the centre slightly better than the males in this regard. It appears that some of the original flora and fauna species has 'disappeared' with time and the location of the Ogba Zoological garden near the city centre did not have much impact on the development of its biodiversity.

**Table III:** Respondents on the stage of development of awareness of Ogba Zoological garden as a responsible travel centre

Male Respondents (N = 50)				Female Respondents (N = 60)		
	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	St. deviation	Inference	Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )	St. deviation	Inference
Developments	2.5	0.63	GSD	2.6	0.61	GSD

Source: Field Study, 2023.

Table III on respondents appraisal of the stages of development of awareness of Ogba Zoological garden, Benin City as a responsible travel centre, shows that both the male and female respondents are of the view that the stages of development of awareness creation are good. This is indicated by the mean scores of the male and female respondents being 2.5 and 2.6 respectively. Both scores fall within the range of 2.5 and 3.4, which are for good stage of development (GSD) this may be intanden with fact that Ogba Zoological garden is the only responsible travel centre in Edo State located within the city centre. However, the level of awareness of the Ogba Zoological garden is not reflected in the stage of development of services rendered.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Responsible travel is a major source of tourism demand due to greater awareness on the need to conserve biodiversity for the survival of man. Although the Ogba Zoological garden Benin City, Edo State is a well known centre for responsible travel, there is need for improvement on the stage of development of services provided. This will help to ensure the survival of mankind by preserving the ozone layer.

In view of the above, the following are recommended;

- ✓ Government should enhance budgeting in tourism sector, so as to promote quality services delivery.
- ✓ More responsible travel centres should be upgraded so as to enhance competition, which translates into better quality service delivery.
- ✓ Better security should be provided to enhance patronage.
- ✓ The local communities should be involved in the management of destinations so as to enhance peace and reduce poverty.
- ✓ Greater emphasis should be placed on training of tourism manpower to promote professionalism and sustainable quality service delivery.

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