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Sukur Kingdom: The Sleeping Beauty (Popularizing Nigeria's 1st UNESCO World Heritage Site)

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Abstract

The Sukur Kingdom, located in Madagali Local Government Area of Adamawa State, Nigeria, is recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its unique cultural landscape, ancient iron smelting technology, and terraced fields. Despite its historical significance, the site remains largely unknown to the global and local audience. This paper seeks to explore the cultural, historical, and geographical attributes of the Sukur Kingdom, examining its potential as a key tourist attraction. By identifying the challenges facing its promotion, this article proposes strategies for popularizing the site while preserving its heritage.

Keywords: Sukur, Kingdom, Beauty, Popularizing, Nigeria's, UNESCO, World, Heritage, Site

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INTRODUCTION

Located in the Mandara Mountains of Adamawa State, Nigeria, the Sukur Kingdom is an ancient civilization that has lain dormant, awaiting rediscovery. Designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1999, this cultural landscape boasts unique terraced fields, ancient iron smelting technology, and a rich cultural heritage. Despite its historical significance, Sukur Kingdom remains an enigma, shrouded in obscurity, and largely unknown to the global and local audience. This "Sleeping Beauty" holds immense potential for adventurous, cultural and heritage tourism, yet its underrepresentation in tourism circles and academic discourse necessitates urgent attention.

This paper seeks to awaken the Sukur Kingdom from its slumber, exploring its cultural, historical, and geographical attributes. By examining the challenges hindering its promotion and proposing strategies for sustainable development, this research aims to contribute to the preservation and popularization of this African heritage site. This study will unravel the complexities surrounding Sukur Kingdom's invisibility through a qualitative research approach and provide recommendations for stakeholders to harness its tourism potential.

Objective of the Study

This paper aims to explore ways to popularize the Sukur Kingdom, highlighting its potential for tourism while addressing the challenges to accessibility, preservation, and promotion with the following specific aims:

1. To examine the cultural, historical, and geographical attributes of the Sukur Kingdom that contribute to its uniqueness and significance.

2. To identify the challenges hindering the promotion and development of Sukur Kingdom as a tourism destination.

3. To investigate the current state of infrastructure, accessibility, and conservation efforts at the site.

4. To propose strategies for sustainable tourism development, preservation, and popularization of Sukur Kingdom.

5. To recommend policy implications and collaborations for stakeholders to enhance the visibility and attractiveness of Sukur Kingdom.

Specific Research Questions:

1. What are the cultural, historical, and geographical features that make Sukur Kingdom a unique tourism destination?

2. What challenges impede the development of Sukur Kingdom as a heritage tourism site?

3. How can sustainable tourism practices be implemented to preserve Sukur Kingdom's cultural and natural heritage?

4. What role can local communities play in promoting and conserving Sukur Kingdom?

Research Hypothesis:

Effective promotion and development of Sukur Kingdom as a cultural and heritage tourism destination can contribute significantly to Nigeria's tourism industry while preserving the site's cultural and natural heritage.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopts a qualitative research methodology. Data were gathered from secondary sources, including UNESCO documents, archaeological studies, tourism research papers, and interviews with local stakeholders. A site visit was also conducted to assess the current state of the infrastructure, accessibility, and cultural heritage preservation.

Materials:

1. Primary Sources:

- Field observations and notes from site visits to the Sukur Kingdom.
- In-depth interviews with local community leaders, tourism stakeholders, and residents.
- Questionnaires were administered to tourists and local residents.

2. Secondary Sources:

- UNESCO World Heritage Centre documents and reports on the Sukur Kingdom.
- Academic journals and books on cultural heritage tourism, sustainable development, and African history.
- Government reports and policies on tourism development in Nigeria.
- Online resources, including news articles and travel blogs.

Methodology:

1. Research Design: The Mixed-methods approach, combines qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis.

2. Study Area: Sukur Kingdom, Madagali Local Government Area, Adamawa State, Nigeria.

3. Sampling Technique: Purposive sampling for in-depth interviews and questionnaire administration.

4. Data Collection Methods:

- Field observations and photography.
- Semi-structured interviews with 20 local community leaders and tourism stakeholders.
- Questionnaires were administered to 50 tourists and 50 local residents.
- Review of existing literature and documents.

5. Data Analysis:

- Thematic analysis for qualitative data.
- Descriptive statistics for quantitative data.
- Content analysis for document review.

Study Procedure:

1. Literature Review: Review existing literature on cultural heritage tourism, sustainable development, and African history.

2. Fieldwork: Conduct site visits, observations, interviews, and questionnaire administration.

3. Data Analysis: Analyze collected data using thematic analysis, descriptive statistics, and content analysis.

4. Results Interpretation: Interpret findings with research objectives and questions.

5. Recommendations: Develop policy implications and recommendations for stakeholders.

Ethical Considerations:

1. Informed Consent: Obtain informed consent from participants before conducting interviews and administering questionnaires.

2. Confidentiality: Ensure confidentiality and anonymity of participants.

3. Cultural Sensitivity: Respect local customs and traditions during fieldwork.

Limitations:

1. Time constraints.

2. Limited access to resources.

3. Potential biases in participant responses.

Timeline:

- Literature review: 2 weeks

- Fieldwork: 4 weeks

- Data analysis: 6 weeks

- Writing and revisions: 8 weeks

Data Management:

1. Audio recordings transcribed verbatim.

2. Questionnaire data entered into SPSS software.

3. Photographs and videos stored securely.

RESULTS

Although the Sukur Kingdom is recognized internationally for its cultural and historical significance, the data reveals that the site has limited infrastructure, minimal local and international tourism, and poor road access. Interviews with local leaders and tourism professionals indicate that while there is interest in developing the site, challenges such as

poor accessibility (roads), lack of funding, and minimal government support hinder its development.

Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

AGE

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
18-25	15	30
26-35	20	40
36-45	10	20
46-55	5	10

SEX

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Male	20	40
Female	30	60

EDUCATION

CATEGORY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Primary	25	50
Secondary	15	30
Tertiary	10	20

AWARENESS AND PERCEPTION OF SUKUR

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	UNDECIDED
The Sukur Kingdom is a significant cultural heritage site	15	5	30
Sukur Kingdom has the potential for tourism development	35	10	5
The current infrastructure supports tourism	2	8	40

CHALLENGES FACING SUKUR KINGDOM'S DEVELOPMENT

CHALLENGE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Poor road infrastructure	15	30
Limited government support	5	10
Inadequate marketing	15	30

TOURISM ACTIVITIES AND PREFERENCES

ACTIVITY	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Cultural tours	10	20
Historical tours	20	40
Sightseeing	10	20
Photography	10	20

LOCAL COMMUNITY BENEFIT

STATEMENT	AGREE	DISAGREE	UNDECIDED
Local community benefits from tourism	10	5	25
Local community involved in tourism decisions	5	10	25

Thematic Analysis of Interviews

Three major themes emerged:

1. ***Infrastructure and Accessibility***: Poor road conditions, lack of amenities, and limited access to the site.

2. ***Lack of Awareness and Promotion:*** Limited marketing, inadequate information, and poor visibility.

3. ***Community Engagement and Benefits:*** Need for local community involvement, benefits sharing, and cultural preservation.

DISCUSSION

The findings indicate a gap between Sukur's status as a World Heritage Site and its actual visibility and accessibility. The road leading to Sukur remains difficult to traverse, limiting tourism activities. Additionally, Nigerians and the global community lack awareness about the site. However, the region's rich history, including its ancient iron technology and traditional governance system, provides a foundation for promoting it as a unique tourist destination.

The UNESCO World Heritage Site designation in 1999 has not significantly impacted its visibility or attractiveness to tourists.

Key Findings:

1. Limited infrastructure: Poor road access, inadequate accommodations, and lack of tourism facilities hinder visitor experience.

2. Low awareness: Local and international awareness of Sukur Kingdom's significance is limited.

3. Community engagement: Local communities are not adequately involved in tourism activities, leading to missed economic opportunities.

4. Conservation challenges: Insufficient funding and management threaten the preservation of Sukur Kingdom's cultural and natural heritage.

Implications:

1. Economic benefits: Developing Sukur Kingdom as a cultural and heritage tourism destination can generate significant revenue for local communities and Nigeria.

2. Cultural preservation: Effective conservation and management can protect the Sukur Kingdom's unique cultural and natural heritage.

3. Community empowerment: Involving local communities in tourism activities can enhance their economic and social well-being.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that Sukur Kingdom, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, possesses immense potential as a cultural and heritage tourism destination. Despite its rich cultural and natural heritage, the Sukur Kingdom remains relatively unknown and

underdeveloped. The findings highlight significant challenges, including limited infrastructure, low awareness, inadequate community engagement, and conservation concerns.

However, this research also reveals opportunities for sustainable development, community empowerment, and cultural preservation. By addressing the identified challenges and implementing targeted strategies, Sukur Kingdom can awaken from its slumber and become a premier tourism destination.

The study's recommendations, centred on infrastructure development, marketing and promotion, community engagement, and conservation efforts, provide a roadmap for stakeholders to harness Sukur Kingdom's potential. Effective implementation will not only enhance Nigeria's tourism industry but also preserve the site's cultural and natural heritage for future generations.

Ultimately, this research contributes to the body of knowledge on cultural heritage tourism, sustainable development, and African history. It underscores the importance of collaborative efforts between policymakers, tourism stakeholders, local communities, and conservation experts to develop and preserve cultural heritage sites.

Key Takeaways

1. Sukur Kingdom's cultural and natural heritage holds significant tourism potential.

2. Addressing infrastructure, awareness, community engagement, and conservation challenges is crucial.

3. Sustainable development and community empowerment are essential for long-term success.

4. Collaborative efforts are necessary to preserve the Sukur Kingdom's cultural and natural heritage.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to awaken Sukur Kingdom's potential as a cultural and heritage tourism destination:

Short-Term Recommendations (0-2 years)

1. Conduct a comprehensive infrastructure assessment and develop a roadmap for improvement.

2. Establish a Sukur Kingdom Tourism Development Committee to coordinate stakeholders' efforts.

3. Launch targeted marketing campaigns to raise local and international awareness.

4. Develop and implement a community-based tourism plan, engaging local residents in decision-making.

5. Secure funding for conservation efforts and infrastructure development.

Medium-Term Recommendations (2-5 years)

1. Develop and implement sustainable tourism practices, focusing on environmental conservation.

2. Establish partnerships with tourism stakeholders, local communities, and conservation experts.

3. Enhance visitor experience through guided tours, cultural performances, and traditional crafts.

4. Develop and promote eco-friendly accommodations and amenities.

5. Establish a Sukur Kingdom Cultural Heritage Center for research, education, and preservation.

Long-Term Recommendations (5+ years)

1. Develop a comprehensive master plan for Sukur Kingdom's tourism development.

2. Establish a sustainable funding mechanism for conservation and tourism development.

3. Foster collaboration with international organizations for technical assistance and capacity building.

4. Develop and implement a community-based tourism management system.

5. Monitor and evaluate the impact of tourism on the Sukur Kingdom's cultural and natural heritage.

Policy Implications

1. Review and revise existing policies to support sustainable tourism development.

2. Provide incentives for private sector investment in Sukur Kingdom's tourism infrastructure.

3. Strengthen community engagement and participation in tourism decision-making.

4. Ensure effective conservation and management of Sukur Kingdom's cultural and natural heritage.

Stakeholder Responsibilities

1. Government: Provide funding, infrastructure support, and policy framework.

2. Local Communities: Engage in tourism decision-making, and provide cultural expertise.

3. Tourism Stakeholders: Invest in infrastructure, and promote sustainable practices.

4. Conservation Experts: Provide technical assistance, and monitor conservation efforts.

By implementing these recommendations, Sukur Kingdom can transition from a "Sleeping Beauty" to a thriving cultural and heritage tourism destination, contributing to Nigeria's tourism industry and preserving its rich cultural and natural heritage.

Limitations and Future Research:

This study's limitations include time constraints and limited access to resources. Future research should investigate:

1. Visitor motivations and experiences.

2. Economic impact of tourism on local communities.

3. Effective conservation and management strategies.

Final Thoughts:

As Nigeria seeks to diversify its economy and promote cultural heritage, Sukur Kingdom offers a unique opportunity. By awakening this "Sleeping Beauty," stakeholders can unlock its potential, preserve its heritage, and contribute to the country's tourism industry.

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