



The Impact of Tourism Destination Environment on Tourists' Travel Intention

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Abstract

The tourism destination environment is emphasised by the hospitality and tourism industry, practitioners, and host communities due to its advantages. This study investigated the impact of the tourism destination environment on tourist travel intention in Minna, Niger State, Nigeria, specifically focusing on selected tourist hotels. Its descriptive nature and qualitative approach characterise the study. Purposive sampling was employed, considering the availability and willingness of the survey participants. The study encompassed a pair of hotels and a total of ten interviewees. The study discovered that favourable environmental conditions in tourism have a positive impact on the desire to engage in tourism activities and take trips. Furthermore, the research revealed that the appeal of the environment and the ease of access had an impact on the travel preferences of tourists. Tourist trip intentions were also influenced by the individual's prior experiences and the opinions of influential reference groups. Safety and security concerns also impacted tourism plans. According to the survey, the tourism destination environment will continue to influence tourists' travel intentions and patronage. Therefore, stakeholders and practitioners in the hospitality and tourist industry must thoroughly analyse the comprehensive needs and expectations of passengers. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge on ecotourism and guides professionals in the hospitality and tourism industry regarding the requirements and expectations of tourists. It recognises that tourists' perceptions are subject to change as the tourism environment evolves.

Key Words: Tourism destination, Environment, Influence, Tourist, Travel intention

Introduction

Tourism has both socio-economic benefits to individuals and society, and therefore, its place potential should be critically examined to encourage and enhance tourist satisfaction experience. Thus, scholars have argued that the potential of a tourist environment will

influence tourists' visits and patronage (Sutiarso *et al.*, 2018). A tourist destination thus plays an important role in attracting tourists, which are components of amenities such as accommodation, food, entertainment, and recreation, which tourists demand often and enhance staying in such destinations.

These are regarded as basic resources that enhance tourists' experiences, including nature, culture, and society. However, scholars have further observed excessive tourist visit flow at destination attractions can negatively impact the environment and ecological settings (Frey & Briviba, 2021). For instance, scholars have reported that tourists may pay less attention to environmental issues, which, in the long run, negatively affects both the environment, the tourists and the host communities. Also, it is observed that environmental concerns and the intention of the tourists to participate in the sustainability of green tourism had a major effect on environmentally responsible tourism behaviour (Ibnou-Laaroussi *et al.*, 2020).

Environment destination thus refers to an emotional attractiveness that fascinates an individual's appreciation of nature and emotional traits that enhance recognition of the intrinsic value of the environment. In line with this assertion, it is reported that environment attachment includes feelings about the natural environment, which is a main influence on tourists' attitudes towards environmental behaviour and sustainable tourism. Hence, people who are connected to nature displayed satisfaction with the tourism environment (Whitburn *et al.*, 2019).

Environmental destinations play a vital role in tourists' decision-making processes. Hence, tourists with greater levels of environmental attachment are likely to engage in pre-tourism decisions that comprise planning, pricing, entertainment, accessibility, safety and security. For instance, the natural environment influences tourists on anything interesting and valuable, as well as those who are interested in visiting tourist destinations, sightseeing, and gaining new experience of a particular destination (Irawan *et al.*, 2022). That is,

nature tourist attractions are services that the tourism environment managers can produce that enhance tourists' satisfaction, such as natural beauty, air coolness, the tranquillity of the atmosphere, richness of biodiversity, and even new experiences. The underlying aim of this study is to investigate the tourism destination environment's influence on tourist travel intention with a focus on two key hotels in Minna, Niger State, Nigeria.

Material and Methods

This research used descriptive research with a qualitative approach. Also, the researcher adopted purposive sampling based on respondents' accessibility and willingness to participate in the interview. This type of research is used to describe an existing phenomenon by describing the problem studied in depth with data obtained through interviews and conveying the data in a narrative or with various texts (Sugiyono 2011). The reason the researcher uses this type of descriptive research with a qualitative approach is because this study aims to obtain actual and real data about the conditions and situations that exist in a tourist's environment.

Study Area

Minna is the capital city of Niger State with geographical coordinates of approximately between latitude 09° 025" N and 09 ° 04" N; and longitude 06 ° 015" E and 06 ° 0 35" E with an average elevation/altitude of 299 meters, with an approximate population of 355,000 people. It also has three main languages, Nupe, Hausa, and Gbani. The vegetation is predominantly Savanna, characterised by grassland and scattered trees. As an agrarian State, it produces rice, yam, and corn and is close to the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja (Aiyedun *et al.*, 2017). The Map of Nigeria is shown in Figure 1.



Source: @jeremiahaluwong (2018)

Figure 1: Niger State Map

Literature Review

The tourism environment is imperative to tourists, tourism management, and the host communities because it benefits parties concerned with the hospitality and tourism industry. Similarly, its negative effects on the tourism environment may be harmful if the stakeholders in the hospitality and tourism industry do not adequately manage them. This section examines the tourism environment's influence on tourists' travel intentions.

Tourism Destination Environment

The environment of the tourist destination is described as a place where the tourist spends time enjoying nature, attending ceremonies and historical places, or learning about the local cultural environment or any other features of the destination. The features of a tourism destination environment have been reported to influence tourists' attraction and travel intention (Seyidov & Adomaitienė, 2016). Similarly, Chen (2018) stated that what brings a tourist to a tourist destination actually goes beyond one factor, such as accessibility,

serene environment, entertainment, sightseeing, etc. Also, Ettinger *et al.* (2018) argued that the tourism destination environment and its sub-environments, such as the economic environment and socio-cultural environment, are the most important elements in the context of tourism, as these environments determine the degree of quality perceived by tourists as well as the degree of satisfaction by tourists. It is on this basis that Almeida-Santana and Moreno-Gil (2018) divided the motives of tourists to visit a tourist destination into two types: internal motives and external motives. In contrast, the internal motives indicate the desire of the tourist to visit the place, and the external motives are related to the environment of the tourist destination, which includes historical, cultural and natural attractions, which is the focus of the study.

Scholars have posited that tourism destination environments vary, but they can be classified into five: physical, economic, socio-cultural, technological, and political environment (Chen and Tsai (2007). Although tourism may look alike, the components at each destination

vary and also depend on the expectations of tourists that patronise such destinations. Notwithstanding, the five classifications are briefly examined:

The Physical Environment: The physical environment is defined as the environment that includes the natural ingredients and the artificial components that man has made (Mihalič, 2000). Examples of the natural environment components are scenic landscapes, species diversity, natural water availability, and fresh air. The artificial environment, such as buildings constructed by man and any additions made by humans, is used to improve the environment of the destination. (Aman, *et al.*, 2018). For instance, the physical environment may include scenic landforms, sea, sun and sand, flora and fauna, and good weather. For example, researchers have found that tourists are likely to behave in environmentally responsible ways when they are exposed to the natural environment and participate in nature-based on-site experiences. Thus, environmental attachment dimensions positively support revisiting intentions. Hence, environmental social beings are considered the most crucial features of environmental attachment in revisiting intentions (Isa *et al.*, 2020)

This, therefore, illustrates the connection between tourists and the natural environment, which encourages nature-based tourists' environmentally responsible behaviour by strengthening their environmental knowledge and environmental attitudes. Thus, it is logical to expect that those tourists with quality experiences in a nature-based tourism destination and strong concerns for the environment are more likely to behave in an environmentally responsible way at a destination. However, little is known about whether and how such tourist experiences are gained.

Economic Environment: The economic environment is critical to tourists' access to the

tourism destination environment; it is simply the economic environment that drives all other factors in the tourism environment. No matter the influence of tourism destinations, the availability and accessibility of money supersede all activities of tourists in a destination. It is on this assertion that it is argued that the economic environment entails inflation, exchange rates, per capita income in the host country, price level in the tourism sector, travel costs and transport costs, and living standard of the host country (Ngugi, 2014).

Socio-Cultural Environment: The beliefs, norms, folkways, and cultural adaptation seem to have a great impact on tourists' influence on the tourism environment. Thus, the socio-cultural aspects within the tourist destination are of great importance because they put the tourists in a different cultural environment from their culture, which includes new customs and values (Estrada, 2018). The researcher further posits that the cultural identity of the host country is a key factor in the attraction of a tourist destination. For instance, Molina and Ochoa (2018) pointed out that the first reason for Chinese tourism to Mexico is to look for other cultures, not beaches and landscapes. Similarly, Abulibdeh and Zaidan (2017) indicated that there were differences between three groups of Chinese, Arab, and English-speaking tourists in terms of focusing on the cultural aspects of the host country. Therefore, the attractiveness of tourist destinations often depends on the attractiveness of their culture and ecological environment (Amen *et al.*, 2021). Although attractiveness may be affected by the rapid development of the tourism industry, it is on this view that these researchers observed that tourists developed place attachments. However, they tend to have a positive attitude and exhibit responsible behaviour toward the environment.

Technological Environment: Technology in whatever forms, both positively and negatively, affects the tourism destination environment. Technologies, especially modern technologies such as the internet and social media (Mobile Phones, WhatsApp, Facebook, YouTube, etc.), continue to affect the tourism industry and tourists' participation in tourism activities. Thus, ease, quick, and cheap travel are influential tools for tourists accessing the tourism environment (Bader *et al.*, 2018).

Political Environment: The political environment affects not only tourism activities but also all activities in an economy. For instance, violence, safety, good relations between the foreign and host country, Visa, and political stability (Bader *et al.*, 2024). For example, instability, political crises among parties, and Visa restrictions not only limit travelling but discourage tourists' patronage of a tourism destination. For instance, these researchers report in their findings that the most important factors behind their positive perceptions were the political stability of Jordan, the satisfactory level of safety and security, the friendliness of local people, and the attractive local culture and customs. This result is in agreement with Chen (2018), who stated that what brings a tourist to a destination is actually more than one factor, such as political stability, government policy on issues such as human rights and democracy, treatment of tourists on issues such as visa application, industry support, and entry conditions.

Akin to this assertion, the nature of the tourism environment seems to affect tourists' travel intentions. It is argued that tourists who are aware of the significance of the natural environment tend to show responsible behaviour. Such tourists choose ecotourism rather than other types of tourism due to their attachment to the natural environment (Kang & Moscardo, 2006). Therefore, it is argued that the extant literature has evidenced that environmental concern is a significant factor

driving tourists' involvement in ecotourism (Bertella, 2019). Similarly, he argued that environmental knowledge and information, which entails eco-friendly and perceived appreciation by individuals, serve as a driver for travel intention. He further reports that environmental concerns and the intention of the tourists to participate in the sustainability of green tourism had a significantly positive impact on environmentally responsible tourism behaviour. This study, therefore, addresses these questions:

1. Tourist destination environmental facilities influence tourists' travel intention.
2. Tourism destination environmental attractiveness influences tourist travel intention.
3. Tourism destination environment accessibility influences tourist travel intention.

Tourist Intention to Travel

Scholars have examined tourists' travel intentions from different perspectives depending on the perceived behaviours of the tourists (Zheng *et al.*, 2021). Travel intention is viewed as the willingness to travel to a specific tourism destination as an individual readiness that influences behavioural antecedents (Shen *et al.*, 2009). This section examined travel intention from the perspective of tourists with a focus on the tourism environment.

Travel Intention

Researchers have argued that various factors and elements form the basis of decisions about a specific tourism destination. For instance, Seyfi *et al.* (2023) classified travel intention as individual-level factors, destination-related factors, and external influences. They reported that individual-related factors include personal values, motivations, perceived benefits, and previous travel experiences. Destination-related factors encompass destination image, perceived quality, familiarity, and

attractiveness, whilst external influences entail social norms, reference groups, cultural factors and marketing communications.

Thus, it is described that 'travel intention' occurs as a result of a process that causes action and translates motivation into behaviour (Jang *et al.*, 2009). This intention is described as the possibility of those planning to travel to visit a specific destination at a specific time. It occurs as a result of tourists acting with various motivation sources, and these motivations enable tourists to visit certain destinations (Tu *et al.*, 2023). The more a person's intention to travel is, the more likely they are to travel (Lu *et al.*, 2016). It is based on this assertion that it has been reported that 'travel intention' has a significant and substantial correlation with travel behaviour (Chew & Jahari, 2014). For instance, it is opined that passengers with positive perceptions of the facility functionality, layout, accessibility, and cleanliness of airports had a higher degree of satisfaction and might be more willing to engage in more air travel in the future. Thus, facility functionality, layout, accessibility, cleanliness and perceived safety all affect travel intention (Ma *et al.*, 2022). This study hence addresses these questions:

4. Experience influences tourist travel intention.
5. Reference groups influence tourist travel intention.

Travel Intention Risk

Although a tourist destination may be the prime reason for a travel intention, the risk of such a destination may also influence the choice of a particular destination. For instance, it was reported that perceived risk was partially effective in the intention to visit the National Park in Taiwan; similarly, it is opined that the intention to visit Marmaris was affected by the risk dimensions that they had perceived during their stay (Hashim *et al.*, 2018; Lu *et al.*, 2016). For instance, it is posited that trust, crisis health care system and solidarity are identified

as important predictors of future travel behaviour (Seyfi, 2023).

It is on this basis that risk perception has been viewed as a multidimensional construct, and its dimensions might differ from one destination to another and be essentially situation-specific (Yang *et al.*, 2022). Travel intention seems to arise from various influences or factors such as destination satisfaction, demand expectations such as modern facilities, personal preferences such as a serene environment, access to airports and buses or taxes, and past tourist opinions. For instance, it is observed that whether a person engages in travel and where to visit, what is crucial and eminent depends not only on personal preferences but critical knowledge regarding and ability to prevent and control tourism risks, past travel experience, and the attitudes of the key persons in the organisations during a time of travel decision-making affects tourists travel intentions (Jiang *et al.*, 2022). For instance, the fear of COVID-19 had a significant effect on the relationship between satisfaction and travel intention (Tu *et al.*, 2023).

Thus, past tourists' opinions have played a major influence on tourism travel intention. For instance, a destination image or opinion that has been generated on a particular tourism destination, like user-generated content, plays a key and positive influence on travel motivation, which significantly corrects tourists' intention to engage in city tourism (Chi *et al.*, 2022). Also, it is observed that a large proportion of media coverage surrounding COVID-19 has negatively affected China's destination image and potential visits travel intention due to headlines such as 'Chinese virus pandemonium. Such language diminishes tourists' intention to revisit China and tarnishes the country's image (Yang *et al.*, 2022). The study, therefore, wishes to address this question:

6. Safety and security of a tourist destination environment influence tourist travel intention.

Results

Two hotels were used for the study due to accessibility and willingness to participate in

the interview. Also, a total number of 10 respondents were interviewed, five each from the two hotels, based on the questions stated in this study. Table 1 provides these details.

Table 1: Hotels and Respondents

S/N	HOTELS	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
1	Princess Zahara Suites	5
2	Niger State Development Company Suites	5

Source: 2024 Field Report

It should be noted that all conversations from Princess Zagara Hotel interviewees will be denoted as 'A', whilst conversations regarding NSDC Suites interviewees will be denoted as 'B'.

Table 2: Respondents Responses:

Question 1: Tourist destination environmental facilities influence tourists' travel intention

A	B
Respondents revealed that the destination environment facilities are not the main factors influencing their travel intentions. For example, he noted that <i>'their facilities are not yet standard to my taste, I just like the serene environment.'</i>	The interviewees revealed <i>'that tourist destination environment facilities influenced their travel intention and hotel choice.'</i>

Source: 2024 Field Report

Question 2: Tourism destination environmental attractiveness influences tourist travel intention.

A	B
The interviewees revealed that the attractiveness of the environment does not influence their travel intention. For example, <i>'the environment is not designed to attract attention, although the rooms are very standard to visitors' expectations.'</i>	The interviewees revealed that the attractiveness of the destination environment is the primary reason for their travel intention. For example, they noted that: <i>'the location of the hotel is super to him, the receptionists are friendly, the suites also located at GRA and beside the Government House which gives assurance of modern days securities challenges guarantee'. Also, they revealed that 'constant electricity supply, lodging here is a prestige to him being government owned hotel whereby rooms are bigger than privately owned hotels in the city; prices charged per room seem to me reasonable'. I am comfortable to be here. I wish to continue to patronise them by displaying this standard. 'You know, I love food, especially African dishes; the chicken</i>

always has a variety of foods; when you are here, you are sure you enjoyed your money; the design of the environment is very okay for me.'

Source: 2024 Field Report

Question 3: Tourism destination environment accessibility influences tourist travel intention

A

The respondents revealed that 'yes, accessibility to the assignment environment influences my intention to travel and the choice of place I stay'. Also, neatness is paramount to all tourist environments since customers wish to get value for their money.

B

The interviewees revealed that 'actually, the accessibility to the environment of the meeting influences my choice of intention to travel, although accessibility to the staff or attendants is considered most paramount, especially for political meetings.'

Source: 2024 Field Report

Question 4: Experience influences tourist travel intention.

A

The interviewees are of the view that past visit experiences sometimes influence travel intention, but not necessarily all the time. For example, now, I decide to stay here even though I know other places that serve the same purpose.

B

The respondents revealed that we should be honest with you, saying that '*meeting customers' expectations is one of the motives for my travel intention. We are at home here.*' Experience hence plays an influence on me.

Source: 2024 Field Report

Question 5: Reference groups influence tourist travel intention

A

The interviewees revealed that a reference group is where to stay and be able to interact with colleagues, especially whenever there is a group assignment. *They noted that 'the office most often influences our travel intentions and choices of place to stay for the assignment. Some of us will wish to stay elsewhere, but office choice influences travel intention and choices of place to carry out assigned assignments.*

B

The interviewees responded that you cannot take away previous experiences, especially negative responses, especially from reference group opinions, like generated content views; they play a role in making some decisions on travel intentions. 'My experience continues to influence me here and even in the near future. For example, I enjoys uninterrupted electricity supply, which in some places, is just for some hours, free internet services, free room services, the environment is neat, and access to top-ups, which in some places is not available. I think the management is always training

their staff to maintain a high standard each time I come here. Experience is key. They noted that reference group opinions will continue to influence and dominate the hospitality and tourism industry, especially with the advent of information communication technologies like social media platforms.

Source: 2024 Field Report

Question 6: The safety and security of a tourist destination's environment influence tourist travel intention.

A	B
The interviewees varied in their opinions with regard to the safety and security of the tourist's destination environment. For example, <i>not really and not important. You see, anything can happen if God destiny it. I did not consider safety and security before my travel. You know, sir, sometimes people sleep in the most secure tourist environment, and yet they die. Sir, you want to tell me, are people who are in the bush, like herders, not secured and saved? I think one should be concerned with the purpose for which you travel rather than safety and security all the time. Also, I think there is no safe place, but your perception will determine your mind's judgement.</i>	<i>The interviewees prioritise visitor safety. 'You witness what is occurring across the globe, turmoil and conflicts. We, politicians, want safe tourism destinations, and your followers are always watching you to gain something from you, sir. I'm not sure about others, but I won't travel anywhere without a safety and property guarantee. Sir, you must be careful regarding your trip plans in Nigeria and abroad. Africa is experiencing political difficulties. Can you imagine Nigerians protesting terrible governance? I arrange my trips slowly, especially now when things are hard in the country. This suite is near the government house, ensuring safety. I always prioritise my safety and possessions when away from home.</i>

Source: 2024 Field Report

Discussion on Findings

The findings of the study are discussed below: The study findings on the question of destination environmental facilities' influence on tourists' travel intention varied. Few interviewees are of the view that environmental facilities are the major reasons for their intention to travel to a particular tourist destination. However, the majority of the interviewees agreed that environmental facilities served as the main reasons for their travel intention, especially with the modern information communication technologies

which have aided tourists in seeking information about their travel plans in short-possible time. This is in line with the findings of Irawan *et al.* (2022), who found that the natural environment influences tourists on anything interesting and valuable, as well as people with a desire to visit, sightsee, and gain new experiences in a particular destination. Similarly, it is reported that the features of the tourism destination environment influence tourists' attraction and travel intention (Seyidov & Adomaitiene, 2016). Thus, it can

be concluded that destination environment facilities influence tourists' travel intentions. Also, in response to the question on environmental attractiveness as an influence on tourists' travel intention, the study found that the attractiveness of a tourist destination is one of the main influences on tourists' travel intention. However, few of the interviewees varied with regard to the position held by the majority of these interviewees. Notwithstanding, the majority of interviewees' positions held are in line with the findings of the study conducted by Ettinger *et al.* (2018), who found that the tourism destination environment and its sub-environment elements determine the degree of quality perceived by tourists as well as the degree of satisfaction by tourists. Similarly, Amen *et al.* (2021) argued that the attractiveness of tourist destinations often depends on the attractiveness of their culture and ecological environment. It can be inferred that destination attractiveness is one of the main reasons for tourists' travel intention since this provides opportunities to determine activities to be carried out in such a tourist destination.

Furthermore, while responding to the question on destination environment accessibility, the interviewees agreed that accessibility to tourist destinations is not only a key factor but also influences other decisions and activities intended to be carried out at a tourist destination. The study found that accessibility in relation to all forms of transportation, including modern information communication technologies, influences tourists' travel intentions nowadays. This is in line with the findings of the study carried out by Bader *et al.* (2024), who found that easy, quick, and cheap travel are influential tools for tourists accessing the tourism environment. It is therefore concluded that a tourism destination's accessibility not only influences tourists' travel intentions but also informs other activities to be conducted by a tourist in a tourism destination.

In addition, the interviewees responded to the question of experience's influence on travel intention. The study found a mixed reaction from the respondents. Few of these interviewees disagreed that past experiences do not influence their travel intention, especially on a tourism destination, because destinations revolve around innovations and facilities. Thus, any tourism destination that meets up with their expectation is considered paramount for patronage. The majority of the interviewees agreed that past experiences gained either through other people's opinions or personal experiences gained with a tourism destination not only influence their travel intention but also determine their preparation as well as resources to be deployed for the trips. This is in line with the findings of the study conducted by Chi *et al.* (2022), who found that past tourists' opinions played a main influence on tourism travel intention, which correlated with tourists' intention to engage in city tourism. It is thus concluded that past experiences in whatever form a tourism destination is concerned are critical and play a significant role in motivating and attracting tourists.

Moreover, the interviewees agreed with regard to the question on reference group influence on travel intention. The study findings found that the interviewees not only agreed with the influence of reference groups on travel intention but also corroborated that they served as role models, especially with crises of different dimensions across the continent of Africa and the globe. For example, Molina and Ochoa (2018) argue that the main reason for Chinese tourists to visit Mexico is to look for other cultures and not beaches and landscapes because past tourists have reported about the Mexicans' rich cultural heritages. Also, Abulibdeh and Zaidan (2017) established that Chinese, Arab, and English tourists focused on the cultural aspects of the host countries based on past reference groups' reports of the richness of the host country's cultural

heritages. It is thus concluded that reference groups influence tourists' travel intentions. The interviewees' responses in relation to safety and security influence on tourists' travel intention were found to vary among the interviewees. Few of these interviewees are of the view that safety and security are not paramount as far as their travel intention in relation to a tourist's destination is concerned. They held views that safety and security are of the individual's mind. Thus, safety and security should be relative, but the purpose of travelling should be the most paramount influence. The majority of the interviewees agreed that the security of a tourist destination's travel intention is a major and primary consideration. They argued that safety and security influence all decisions of man, especially activities of tourism destinations. The findings of the research conducted by Jiang *et al.* (2022) agreed with these interviewees' assertion, which found that whether a person engages in travel and where to visit, what is considered imminent and crucial not only depends on personal references but also critical knowledge ability to prevent and control tourism risks,

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- these and others affects tourists' travel intentions. It is thus concluded that safety and security influences tourists' travel intentions.
- ## Conclusion
- The influence of the tourism destination environment on tourist travel intention is critical and crucial, with challenges of instability and insecurity in the African continent and the world at large. Since the tourist destination is a subset of the global environment, it is imperative for tourists to critically scrutinise the tourism environment as part of pre-plan preparation to ensure the intended objectives of the tourists are met. This way, it will enhance the tourist experience. Tourism destination management should also look into tourists' expectations and demands as tools for innovation argumentation. It should be noted that tourists' expectations and demands vary; this is sometimes anchored by age and sex. Therefore, it is inevitable for destination management to critically look into tourists' travel intentions as a determinant of their tourists' total packages for the tourism and hospitality industry.
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