A REVIEW OF THE SHAO MASS WEDDING AS A POTENTIAL TRADITIONAL TOURIST ATTRACTION

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Abstract
The study showcased Awon mass wedding as a tourism potential that is yet to be fully recognized by the people of Shao and the Kwara state government. It is to be made known to the outside world to entice tourist influx from within and outside Nigeria and also expose the accruing social and economic benefit associated with it; if given necessary funding and promotion for both the host community and the state government alike. Field work, observation and oral interview were the research instruments used to gather information from the tourist, host community, tourist product provider, and the government officials present at the 2010 festival. These are the people who will benefit greatly from the festival, if fully harnessed. The Awon mass wedding is a colorful dance and folksongs traditional festival. The inhabitants of Shao, Moro local government area are hospitable people. The Awon mass wedding will help diversify the Kwara state economy, provide employment for youth, women and even less privileged skilled and unskilled in the community. Its sustainability will boost the tourism industry in the state.

Keywords: Traditional, Tourism, Potential.

Introduction
Tourism has become an important sector in the Nigeria economy for most developing countries, having overtaken export agriculture and industries as a source of foreign exchange income, employment . Orga (2010). Unfortunately out of the 80 million international tourist arrivals in 2005, sub Saharan African receives 23.1 Million and Nigeria has less than 1 million. WHO (2006) observed that despite all efforts to bring tourism to limelight through its potentials that abound in many states in Nigeria by tourist experts, tourism resources, potentials and locations are not fully understood by the government of many states in Nigeria. Tourism is defined as the activity of a person(s) travelling to and stay in a place outside his/her usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business, and other purposes that are not related to the exercise of an activity which emanated from within the place visited (Adebayo 2008). Tourism is a dynamic activity with changes rapidly daily. It includes new destinations, new technology and new market which attract varieties of tour packages. Tourism and the activities they generate may change local communities, socially and economically. It can be described as the processes, activities, and outcome arising from the relationship and interactions among tourists, tourism suppliers, host government and surrounding environment that are involved in the attracting and hosting of a visitor.(Adebayo 2008 cit Goecher and Ritchie 2003)

Nigeria is an environmentally rich country with beautiful landscape dotted with natural tourist attractions that are compared to the best in the world; this is coupled with her rich cultural and traditional heritage which date back to over two thousand years, Nigeria’s geopolitical zones offer considerable and largely as well as untapped potentials for ecological, economic, discovery or environmental tourism, as well as cultural/traditional tourism. For example in the however the rich and colorful traditional wedding in Nigeria is gradually dying out with the influx of the western white-wedding. Inspite this, there are some Nigerians, who still prefer the old tradition and perform the traditional wedding ceremony. Some of the Nigerian wedding rites which still serve as a tourist heritage. Given the significant role of tourism in the economy and the potential
benefit from it, there is need to ensure that the tourism industry remains bold there is need for environmentally and economically sustainable through traditional wedding activities. In ensuring the economical sustainability of the industry, protection of the environment and culture, traditional value and norm are foremost important. It is in the light of this that the research work is being conducted the issue of traditional wedding tourism with a case study of (Awon mass wedding in Shao, Kwara state). The Awon mass wedding ceremony has suffered a setback due to non awareness even within kwara state. The advent of western religions contributed negatively tothis cultural inheritance by portraying it as idol worshiping and force the people to abandon it so that it can die a natural death. The Kwara state government has not given it enough support/promotion because the festival is not seen as a source of revenue to the indigenes and state government alike. There are also no enough infrastructural facilities to enhance tourist influx to the location. Awon mass wedding has potentials that can be developed to meet international standard, it can empower the youth and people or community as well as attract the International and National Tourist.

The study area

Kwara state was created on 27 May 1967, when the federal military government Yakubu Gowon broke the four regions, that then constituted the federation of Nigeria into 12 states. At its creation, the state was made up of the former Ilorin and Kabbba provinces of the then northern region and was initially named the West Central state, but later changed to Kwara, a local name for the river Niger. Kwara state has since 1976 reduced considerably in size as a result of further state creation exercises in Nigeria. On the 13th of February 1978, the Idah/Dekinah part of the state was carved out and merged with a part of the then Benue/Plateau state to form Benue state. On 27th August 1991, five local government areas, namely Oyi, Yaga, Okene, Okehi and Kogi were also excised to form part of the new kogi state, while a sixth, borgu local government area, was merged with Niger state. Presently, there are sixteen local government areas In the state, they are: Asa, Baruten, Edu, Ekiti, Ifelodun, Ilorin east, Ilorin south, Ilorin west, Irepodun, IsinKalama, Moro, Offa, Oke ero, Oyun Pategi. Kwara state, “state of harmony”, could be described as the gateway state to either the northern or southern geo-political and ecological structures of Nigeria. This gives the state a number of strategic opportunities. The state has about 4000 settlements of various sizes and structures dotted on its landscape with an average density of 48 persons per square kilometer and it could be said to be one of the most sparsely populated states in Nigeria. The state has over 1200 primary schools, 262 post primary schools, a federal university, a state university, and a private university, two polytechnic, three colleges of education, school of health-technology and school of nursing. It also has a navy school. There are rural health centres in all the local government areas of the state with the problem of medical personnel. Kwara state water board is responsible for water supply to homes and factories in the state capital, whereas, most local government headquarters have pipe borne water supply. Many bore-holes were drilled in rural areas where the problem of water shortage is most acute. There are inter and intra state road networks in Kwara state which link up the urban centers with each other and the rural areas. The state has produced mass transit system to complement the dwindling efforts of private transporters. The Nigerian Railway Corporation extends services from Lagos through the state to the northern part of the country. The Ilorin Airport is a major center for both domestic and international flights and has now been built up into a hub for transportation of cargoes. There are modern and dependable communication services which are vital for successful socio-economic development. The state owns a news paper, The Herald, radio stations, television stations, post offices and postal agencies in several towns as well as telecommunication networks. Sporting activities are managed by the state’s sports council. The importance attached to sports led to the construction of a stadium complex. The facilities available at the stadium complex are; indoor sports hall, hostels, recreational press center, as well as an Olympic size swimming pool. The state is blessed with good climatic conditions, hence, agriculture is
the main source of the economy and the principal cash crops are; cotton, cocoa, coffee, kola nut, tobacco, bean seed and palm produce. Mineral resources in the state are limestone, marble, feldspar, clay, kaolin, quartz and granite rocks. Industries in the state include; Kwara breweries, Ijagbo Global soap and detergent industry, united match company, Tate and Lyle company, Resinoplast Plastic industry, Pharmatech Nigeria limited, Kwara textile and Kwara furniture company, all in Ilorin. Others are Paper Manufacturing industry, jebba, Okin foam and Okin biscuits, Offa, Kay plastic, Ganmo and Kwara paper converters limited, Erin-de, Sugar producing company, Bacita, Kwara animal feed mall, Ilorin, and the Agricultural products company, Bacita.

Awon as a deity:
Oke (1996) narrated that’ Omo Larele; (the son of Larele) was a hunter. Each time he went hunting, he, as a custom, would call at a small stream to drink water. On one of such occasions, he was met by a strange woman. Awon is believed to be a fairy woman with only one breast. Tradition claims that the woman emerged mysteriously to Omo Larele and she claimed ownership of the water from which he had been drinking. She did not show any resentment to his encroachment, but instead, she requested to be led to Oba Olanibo, the first Ohoro of Shao. It is believed that the woman spent eighteen days with the people of Shao, and left after holding a closed-door meeting with the Ohoro and his chiefs. On her way back, she was seen off by the Ohoro and his son in the company of other chiefs, through a path which was chosen by Awon. She ordered the ‘BARUBA’ hunter who was believed to be there then to cut the bush and make a path through which they walked. On reaching a spot, Awon halted, and it was at this juncture that she disclosed her name as Awon. This was when she was bidding farewell to the Ohoro and his chiefs. In her farewell address, Awon disclosed to the Ohoro and his chiefs that they would no longer see her, but she will hand over a charm to them to establish a strong settlement. When this was realized, they should rename the settlement after her as Shao-Awon. In addition, she urged the people that a day be set aside every year to mark or commemorate her presence among the people, and to ensure that all marriage able girls are given in marriage on this day, that is, all maidens of the town are to be married in a mass wedding ceremony to their suitors on the same day. The mysterious and alien woman pledged that she would always bless the people with children if her injunctions were followed faithfully. She also pledged to bless all the descendants of Shao along with the strangers amidst them if only they could come forward to put their request to her any time and most especially during the celebration of the annual mass wedding festival. Any other problems like unsuccessful life, barrenness, and other similar problems can be channeled to Awon through her priest for solution. But that can be done when the person concerned puts her absolute trust in her. Immediately after her speech, Awon fell down and vanished into the air. She was quickly followed by waves. It was at this spot that water began to gush out, and started to flow as a stream which later developed into a big river called ‘Awon’ river. The spot where the woman fell down and from where the water started to gush is called ‘AWON YALE’ this can be given two literary meanings, one-it means that ‘Awon visits home. This is when we talk of Awon as a woman. Also this spot of disappearance of the mysterious woman is very significant today among the people of Shao as it is referred to as ‘OJUBO AWON’, that is, the spot where the people gather to worship the Awon goddess. After the mysterious disappearance of the stranger woman, the Ohoro, and his chiefs went back to their abode. Later, they received two other unknown women, who described themselves as sisters to Awon. They were on a search mission for the woman who gave her name as ‘Awon’ the sisters were told how the woman had vanished mysteriously. When they could not find their sister, they too left for an unknown destination. It was later gathered that one of the sisters came to be known as ‘Asa’ (now Asa river that passes through Ilorin.) and the second sister was believed to be osun in Oshogbo. The authenticity of this tradition seemed to be partially confirmed by many similar images and figures found in both Osun and Awon shrines. After the departure of Awon and her sisters, the Ohoro, Oba Olanibo and his chiefs requested Mogaji
Gbenagbena that is, the family head of the wood carvers and the sculptors, to engrave the wooden image of the one-breasted woman and her sisters to immortalize and symbolize their presence among the people of Shao. These in turn became the symbol of the Awon goddess. The Ohoro then decreed that the annul Awon mass wedding festival should be celebrated once in a year among the citizens of Shao in remembrance of the mysterious woman and her sisters. He then also ordered a family to be the custodian of the images of Awon and her sisters, and to watch over the spot where the woman mysteriously disappeared. The family is known as ‘ILE ALAWON’ that is, Awon’s custodian, the priest, ‘BABA ALAWON’ is chosen to conduct rituals and sacrifices to Awon goddess. Once chosen, the Baba Alawon is forbidden from crossing a river. CHILD BETROTHAL - This is the first method of getting a wife in Shao. Here, the parental function in choosing a mate for their child is important. If a woman was pregnant and another man was seeking for a girl to marry either for himself or for his male child, one thing he would do was to go and meet the husband of the pregnant woman that if it happened that the woman gave birth to a baby girl, he would like to marry her for his child. Right from this time, if the husband of the pregnant woman agrees, they become in-laws to each other. The man seeking for a wife will present gifts in form of foodstuffs, fetching of firewood and monetary gifts. He would also be giving help, such as working on the farm of his father-in-law. All these activities are known as IDANA in Yoruba land. When the woman finally gives birth, and it happens to be a female child, this is an indication that they were lucky and the arrangements to marry the baby girl would be made. But if the child is a boy, the arrangements would be discontinued. Another way of getting a wife was through parental choice of husband for the baby girl. This was done if there was no suitor for the girl. The father might decide to give his closest friend to further strengthen their relationship. However times have changed, and so did this second tradition. This was due to the fact that a girl given out by her parents in marriage to another man might decide to run away from the husband imposed upon her for some obvious reasons.

Because of this, many parents have left the function of finding a marriage partner to their children, only that such male should be brought to them so they could sanction the relationship. This brings us to the third and current way of selecting marriage partner in Shao, regardless of religious belief. IFOJUSODE- this is looking or searching for marriageable partners by the boys. This is the third and most current method of getting a wife in Shao that permeates through all religions. Thus, when a man is mature enough to get a future partner, usually between the ages of 20-25 years, he begins to be very watchful and pays a considerable attention to whom to marry in the community. In some cases, his age group members help him to look for a nice and suitable partner to marry. The role of the age-group members include calling out the girl from her parents house for her suitor. On some occasions, the parents also get involved in looking for a befitting girl’.

**The mass wedding ceremony:**

Oke op. cit. explain further that ‘After an agreement has been reached between the girl and the boy, the stage is now set for parental involvement. The boy will inform his parents at home and the choosing of a matchmaker or intermediary will follow. This intermediary is called ALARINA in Yoruba. The ALARINA critically probes into the family history of both families to look for any reasons that can prevent the marriage such as diseases, bad characters and similar obstacles. At last, if there is nothing bad in both families, the arrangement for introduction between the two families can be made. The work of the ALARINA or intermediary is usually done by a woman. After the undergoing courtship, arrangement is made for the introduction during which the parents of the bride receive official delegation from the would-be groom’s family, formally seeking the hands of their daughter in marriage. The main event featured at this occasion is presentation of kola nut and money to the parents of the bride. This is called IKOBI. Here, the role of kola nut is indispensible. The kola nut and money received from the boy’s parents would then be shared accordingly among the family members of the girl. This is done in order to make aware all members of the family that the girl is
about to be married. This act in Shao is known as IMANA, or IMO-ANA, that, knows the in-law. After this stage, what follows is the subsequent visit of the fiancé to the bride. This is backed up by gifts and frequent manual labour on the father-in-laws farm. After that, dowry would be paid to the girl’s family gradually and instalmentally. This is known as OWO-ORI IYAWO. In addition to this, a certain amount of money would be paid to the bride either directly or indirectly. In most cases, the fiancé pays the money indirectly by putting the money under the mat he sits on during one of his frequent visits. Such money is called OWO ABE ENI, (money under mat). After he leaves, the money would be discovered. It could be any amount, but usually the current money in circulation. Due to the dubious character of people these days, the husband gives the money directly to the bride. Nowadays, due to economic and societal changes, the money for dowry and other necessary obligations have increased, apart from other things to be demanded by the family of the bride before the consummation of the marriage can take place. In Shao, these payments are not static. The amount of dowry is not uniform, it varies from one family to the other, depending on how rich the husband is. Some families do not take any dowry at all. As a matter of fact, in Shao, dowry payment is not compulsory. What is paid to get a girl is strictly restricted by the customs, beyond which parents are not allowed to go. Two years, or a year to the time of marriage, the parents of the husband sends delegates to the parents of the bride to request for the hand of the bride in marriage. This is done at this time because, at request, it has become part of the tradition for the family of the bride to postpone such a wedding to the following year, instead of the actual year that the request was made. After the introduction, engagement and payment of the dowries, the would-be husband will give the bride some money to buy things like clothes, shoes, cosmetics, umbrella, hand bag, jewelries and other material she might need for the ceremony. Apart from that, general preparation starts in the month of August with the symbolic cutting of trees by the Baba Alawon. The felled trees are then cut to pieces as firewood to be used during the ceremony. After that the Baba Alawon makes it known to all and sundry that the bridegrooms should also do the same. The bride grooms then, accompanied by their friends and relatives, get the work done. Next to this is the offering to Awon goddess an offering of white hen and white maize, called EGBO in Yoruba. The fixing of the date for the mass wedding is not done by a sole authority, it involves many participants, principally the Awon priest, the Iboo, the Ajankii, and other traditional/religious leaders in Shao. They all will assemble at the Alawon’s compound, where the Awon shrine is situated. Now when Awon has accepted the day that has been appointed, the women in the Alawon’s compound will sing and dance round the town, jingling a bell, AGOGO AWON, this is to herald to the whole community that the d-day has been fixed. Food is normally prepared for those who come to witness this fixing. After that, the parents of the would-be couples will start vigorous preparation and provide foodstuffs, and buy dresses for their sons and daughters. The bride’s parents buy her items such as mats, plates, iron pots, utensils and plates of different kinds and sizes. This preparation does not end there, the parents will send invitation messages to all their relatives far and near, informing them of the wedding details. In the absence of any problems, the invited guests make it a point of duty to attend the ceremony, bearing in mind that it will one day be their turn. By 4.00pm of the wedding eve, the women in the bridgroom’s ancestral household would be seen carrying two bundles of firewood, two big baskets of yams and a big cock to the house of the bride. These items are used to cook for the bride before her final departure from her parents. INABI, (sharing of kola nut to all and sundry) is done from 7.00pm onward. The brides, accompanied by their friends, move round the community to share out kola nut and other confectionary to all groups and classes of people in the town. After that, it is time for the age long cherished, but energy sapping race round the town. All the brides, accompanied by friends, run round the town in a joyous parade, singing different songs. They run until they are tired and the numerous participants continue to reduce in number until the last person finds her way home. This period is usually when the moon is at its fullest ray. Early in the morning of the wedding eve, all the women from the bridgroom’s family
In the olden days, the brides father’s compound, was not beat the hair. When all that has been completed, the brides get ready for their various bridegrooms’ houses by dressing up in their newly bought traditional clothes called ASO OFI, which they do not wear in their own fathers house, but at a close relative’s. Once dressed up in that relative’s house, they are never to enter that house again until after 21 days. Immediately after getting dressed, each bride gets ready for the onward journey to the market place together with friends and women from her father’s compound, singing and dancing. Before the journey to the market, the bride will recite the traditional ballad once again, visiting the houses of members to recite it. All those she visits will then pray for her, wishing her blessings of male and female children. After that, the march to the market square begins. The brides this time are not in a hurry. They march slowly on their way and occasionally halt to sing praises of the names of their relatives. This slow march is known as KIKASE IYAWO. That is, ‘’counting of the bride’s steps’’ at last, the brides all arrive at the market square, each holding an umbrella. In her right hand and covering her face as tradition demands. Then the brides start reciting the EKA again. As they do this, they are cheered by their friends and relatives amidst drumming and dancing and they proceed to the Oba’s palace to pay him homage and to confirm their farewell to spinsterhood. They kneel before him, and the Ohoro in turn showers blessings on them all. Thereafter, the brides leave for their various bridegrooms’ houses. As a bride approaches the bridegroom’s house, the latter must have gone out to another friend’s house as he is not expected to be met at home. It is the duty of the bridegroom’s friends to welcome the bride with the usual traditional homage paid to strangers. The housewives in the groom’s household will come to receive the bride with bowls of water to wash her legs, and then be carried up, completely swept off her feet by one of the bridegrooms friends to a new room prepared specially for her. The bride and the bride’s maid will remain inside this room for six days and six nights. The bridegroom will not be allowed to see her during this period until the sixth day when the maids might have gone away. Within these days, some traditional rituals of separation from spinsterhood to womanhood will be performed by the maids and the final ritual is the breaking of a white egg and a small pot, signifying that the couple can now meet each other for sexual intercourse, as every obstacle has been removed from their marital relationship. The marriage thus is only consummate on the sixth night of the Awon festival. This is the age-long tradition that the people have faithfully adhered to until the invasion of the foreign culture into the country, on the night of consummation, the groom is supposed to ‘’meet the bride at home’’. Again, this was in the past. Today, such traditional chastity has been thrown to the dogs and gone with the winds. On the second day of marriage, the bridegrooms take their turn in dancing around the town, accompanied by their friends and relatives, greeting and thanking their in-laws for giving their daughter in marriage. In the night, an all night party is held to round off the wedding ceremony. In the olden days, the brides used to go to Awon shrine to offer sacrifices to the
Awon goddess and to pray for a happy marital life, in the company of their friends and relatives. While going there, they sing and clap their hands this is o more in practice today due to the advent of Christianity and Islam in Shao. Brides now go to their various churches and mosque to offer thanks to God to pray for fruitful and happy marital life. The Awon dance takes place two months after the wedding festival. It is a traditional dance by every woman in the town to the Awon Goddess. On the day set aside for this dance, no woman must go out of the town to anywhere. Every woman is expected to stay at home to “bake cakes” for Awon, (DURO KO DIN AKARA- DUO DIKA). To prevent this woman from flouting this order, a masquerade, “DUO DIKA” goes to station itself along the road that leads out of the town. No matter how early a woman may think she gets up to sneak out of the town, it is certain that DUO DIKA would have outstrippe this woman from flouting this order, a masquerade, “DUO DIKA” goes to station itself along the road that leads out of the town. No matter how early a woman may think she gets up to sneak out of the town, it is certain that DUO DIKA would have outstripped her. She would meet the masquerade, perched on a stone by the road side. When a woman decides to flout the order, she will be chased back and in the process, loses her load during flight. Generally, women keep to the order. The Awon dance usually commences in the late afternoon. All the women in the town will assemble at the arena which is in front of the Baba Alawon’s house, where the shrine is located. The dance consists of some intricate steps. All the women form a ring round a massive rock, around which they move, drumming and dancing. All the drummers, be they of “Bata” drum or of “gan-gan” drum are expected to play at the event. They usually form the patterns and rhythms for the dance steps at various stages of the dancing of the dancing procession. As soon as the drummers set the rhythm, women follow with songs appropriate for the drum beat and the dance steps to be taken by tradition, the drummers know which dance step comes after which and at what stage of the dancing session. At a stage, the dance gets groovy and the women untie the swaddling clothes from their waists and start swinging it above their heads, running violently round the massive rock. A weakling among them would ultimately fall down. It is at this period of confusion that Duodika, the ubiquitous masquerade again appears. It’s assignment at this stage is to chase the women out of the dancing arena. Once it appears, all the women start to disappear, running helter-skelter in all directions to escape the masquerade’s whip. The women then make their way to their homes. It was an event that children, youths, and even elderly men looked forward to soon after the Awon wedding festival day the dancing ceremony usually ends at about 6 o’ clock in the evening. Awon mass wedding is a festival for which the people of Shao are best known. It has no doubt carved a special identity for the people of the ancient town. The practice of mass wedding, as institutionalized by Awon festival is acceptable to the people in spite of their variant religions. The festival brings along with it vast variety of traditional events, such as dancing, music, EKUN-IYAWO, and a host of others, associated with the social life of the Yoruba people. Therefore need to sustain and even standardize the festival. The need for resuscitation of the Awon festival is informed by the fact that after the loss of King Ovia Osese to Kogi state, Awon remains the only festival. Such peculiarities and uniqueness could be promoted to amplify the beauty of Kwara’s culture especially in the aspect of social life. Because of the cob-web relationship among the people of Shao, every household within the community is always involved in the festival which the people spend a whole year preparing for. The festival day is therefore, the most important social occasion in the social life of the people. The occasion presents the most colorful events of the year and it remains evergreen in the memory of every indigene until the next festival comes around. One striking feature of the festival, besides the general merry making and the free for all feasting, is the glorious galaxy of colors cast by the brides in their alluring paraphernalia and the lavishly exhibited bridal wealth paraded round the town. These bridal wealth include a bed, household utensils as well as other household materials that money could buy. It is often used as a yardstick for the assessment of the bride, by the quantity, quality and variety of her possessions which are normally displayed very conspicuously and arranged in sets for everyone to admire. A lazy and badly behaved girl is differentiated from a hardworking and well behaved one. To the people of Shao, the Awon mass wedding festival has become the central melting pot, which brings home all the sons and daughters of Shao, from far and near. The
indigenes therefore look forward to it with much eagerness, irrespective of religious beliefs or social status. It is the occasion when ordinarily slumbering community gets bubbling with activities. Some basic factors identifiable with the festival, which could make it acceptable to domestic and international tourism markets, include its acceptability by the whole community, without any controversy, whether political or religious. This is further enhanced by the fact that all features of the festival are peaceful, and tourists are free to move about unhindered. Besides its legendary past and rich cultural heritage, Shao is further favored as a tourist destination by its newly acquired status as “junction town” with the new road to the north and south passing through it to form an intersection with the road To MALETE. With adequate promotion, Awon Mass Wedding and indeed, Shao-Awon, offers immense potentials for domestic and foreign tourism.

The research method utilized is a field work and personal interview and observation with the indigenes, tourist’s products providers, and some government agencies, information were collected on government participation, awareness and promotion, all associated with the untapped Goldmine. It is also to know the extent of the development of the Awon mass wedding. Personal interview was conducted to generated the information from government agencies, like ministry of Arts Youth Sports and Culture and the museum, all in Kwara state. According to Adebayo et al, (2001:3), statistical data can be collected not only by personal interview but by personal observation as well. By this method, the observer feels, smells, visualize phenomenon, it is possible to take note of and record all that happens, instead of being told. It was discovered that a lot of people, even though are aware of the importance of tourism and knowing fully well that Awon mass wedding is an untapped tourist potential, but are skeptical because of the Idol worship undertone/aspect. Most people in Ilorin which is the state capital, less than 10 kilometers away from Shao, the host town, are not aware of or never attended the festival before. Some tourist product providers like Shekina suites and MTN are some of the sponsors for 2010. This is to say that some private partnerships are beginning to participate in its promotion. The Kwara state government participation are very meager because it was only able to provide canopies and chairs at the reception. Members of the state cultural troops were there to perform and the state museum was also in attendance. The security to lives and properties was also in place, mounted by the Kwara state government. Some government officials interviewed agreed that even though it could be a major source of revenue for the state government, it has not really enjoyed much support in the areas of financial assistance, promotional campaigns, and publicity. The people within and out of the state are not informed of the Shao festival.

**Economic importance of tourism on Kwara state and the nation at large**

The economy has been experiencing fluctuation and downward trend in its foreign exchange hence, its deteriorating nose-diving balance of payment, as ascertained by the interim head of government and chairman, transition council of Nigeria, Ernest Shonekan, in the punch issue of Friday, 14th may, 1993, said that the country’s revenue from oil has fallen drastically from $26.bn (N571.7bn) to $6.6bn (N131.9bn) annually. Nigeria as one of the developing states laid emphasis on manufacturing industrialization sector, where it is not faring better while trying to boost their balance of trade by exporting some manufactured products alongside of the agricultural and crude oil. Most manufacturing industries are either folding up or relocating to other countries due to the epileptic nature of the Power Holding Company of Nigeria. Here comes the need for an alternative source of income, that is, Tourism. SWEDISH Agency for Economic and Regional growth reported that the Total Tourism Revenue used by over 6% to 251.7bn Kronor ($32.87bn) in N2000 and over 12,000 now full time jobs by foreign visitor consumption in Sweden, rose by nearly 13% to 93.6bn Kronor in 2009. Uganda Tours and Gorilla Tracking Safari news revealed that tourism earning shoot up to $400m and that the numbers of tourist has shoot up from $530 in 2004 to 1,000,000 in 2009. This indicates that the Uganda’s Tourism
industry has emerged in a vibrant source or foreign exchange. Kenya tea output rises up 730pm, as observed by George Obulutsa Nairobi. Goecher and Ritchie (2003) cit Adebayo (2008) Tourism earning rose by 114% due to increase arrival jumping to %445.3m. Tourist arrival rose by 17% to 403, 487 in 2009. Tourism is the 3rd largest source of foreign exchange between June-May. Aba Ahmed et al (2010) reported that Nigeria is endowed with rich natural landmark and blessed with rich cultural heritage but is yet to be fully exploited. The government came to its full realization in the 1990s when concerted effort is made to package tourist attractions in the nation. Nigeria is blessed with beautiful, friendly and rich natural environment, climate resources as well as colorful and rich festival which offer the best option in the quest for diversification. The Nigeria Tourism Industry can take the place of oil as the major pillar and catalyst or the nation’s economy, Tourism has the potential to aid the economic growth of the nation, provision of employment for both skilled and unskilled, the highly educated less educated and even illiterates. More jobs can be created for women, youths and ethnic minority group. The World Travel and Tourism Council (2003:10) has been measuring the economic impacts of travel and tourism for the world regions, and the organization for economic cooperation and development, (OECD) countries since 1991. In 1992, they released their first estimates, indicating that travel and tourism is one of the world largest industries and a generator of quality job. In 2001, the global travel and tourism industry was expected to generate 3.5 trillion U.S Dollars of economic activity and 207 million jobs by 2011. Travel and tourism is projected to grow to 7.0 trillion Dollars of economic activity and 260 million jobs by 2011. The direct travel and tourism industry accounted for 4.2 percent of worldwide gross domestic product in 2001. The broader travel and tourism economy, including industry demand is expected to contribute 10.7 GDP in 2001 and 11.0 percent in 2011. Travel and tourism is a catalyst for construction and for manufacturing. For 2001, capital investment is estimated at 656.7 billion U.S Dollars or 9.0 percent of investment. By 2011, this is estimated to reach 1.434 bn US Dollars or 9.3 percent of the total. The economic figure cited shows that tourism has grown to be an activity of worldwide importance and significant. For a number of countries, tourism is the largest commodity in international trade. In many others, it ranks among the top three industries. Tourism has grown rapidly to become a major social and economical force in the world. There are other areas of benefit occurring to the traveler, such as the contribution, educational benefit, understanding of other people and culture and the physical and mental well being of the travelers. Tourism is a composite of activities, services and industries that deliver a travel experience, transportation, accommodation, eating and drinking, establishments, shops, entertainment facilities, and other hospitality services available for individual or groups that are travelling away from home. It encompasses all providers of visitor-related services. Tourism is the sum total of tourist expenditure within the borders of a nation or a political sub-division or a transportation-centred economy area of contiguous state or nation. He brings in the hard currencies from his own region. This is represented by the injection of money into an economy (export). This injection increases the income of the destination (host country). The money spent by the tourist in the area becomes income for the recipients. Business people see tourism as an opportunity to make a profit by supplying the goods and services that the tourist market demands. A typical example is the hotel that provides food, drinks, accommodation etc. for the tourist, taxi cab or car hire services provider, petty traders by the road side or supermarket etc. money spent by the tourist on any of these services or goods are used to pay wages and salaries which are in turn used by the staff to pay for food, clothing, rent, school fees etc. The process or respending continue until the amount being spent becomes smaller for each round or spending: The Government view tourism as a wealth factor in the economy of their jurisdictions. Their perspective is related to the incomes their citizens can earn from this business. At each round of spending by the tourist the particular recipients’ incomes increases and when these increases are summed up for all the respending process, the income of the host nation will increase by more than the original tourist
expenditure. The state government also considers the foreign exchange receipts from international tourism as well as the tax receipts collected from tourist expenditure either directly or indirectly. The Host Community: Local people see tourism as a cultural employment factor. It is the effect of the interaction between large numbers or international visitor and residents. The effect may be both harmful and beneficial. It is observed that apart from the economic benefit of tourism are its cultural and it is educative. The Manila declaration of the World Tourism Organization (W.T.O.) 1980 emphasizes intangible benefits such as the improved quality of the life and of the sociological and psychological value. By bringing different people together, tourism can help to promote better understanding and goodwill around the world.

Conclusion

The importance of tourism for economic development in any nation cannot be over-emphasized Archer (2004:162). Nau (2002) believes that “unity is the heartbeat that pumps life into any economy. We need to develop strategy that will preserve these assets through partnership with the private sector.” Awon mass wedding, Shao ranks with the Lagos carnival in Lagos state that has enjoyed government sponsorship and private participation and may be staged or celebrated in likewise manner. There is need for private sector participation in the areas like Bureau De Change, sales of souvenirs, provision of entertainment and recreational facilities, building of hotels, operation of duty free shop and retail travel services transportation of various types. If Awon mass wedding is properly packaged into a brochure and sent abroad, it could serve as a major source of revenue for both the host community, Kwara state, and Nigeria. The brochure must be made available in the embassy, public areas or places like the bank, eateries, Airports within and outside the country; documentaries ran on both visual and audio media houses, print media and billboards. Necessary information made available on the internet. It can help to alleviate poverty in Shao, provide jobs for young school leavers, thereby reducing the rural-urban migration in search for a decent and well paid job. Also it will create wealth for the community members, state and the nation at large. The government should assist in promotional campaigns in and out of the state, as well as make available funds to refurbish or build super and infrastructural facilities like good road networks, cheap and affordable transportation, medical services, pipe bone water and regular electricity supply, etc. the host community must be well informed on the importance of tourism to the community and the potential embedded in the mass wedding. A regular date should be chosen for the celebration. Adebite (2010) states that the holistic nature of African traditional festivals which are primarily of a high religious coloration in reality go beyond this to incorporate the other significant elements. This is to say that all traditional festivals has traditional religious undertone therefore, the beliefs and taboos associated with the ceremony should be eliminated.

References


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