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ASSESSMENT OF ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT ON YANKARI GAME RESERVE ALKALERI LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF BAUCHI STATE, NIGERIA FROM 2016-2021

Dung Anthony Fidelis[1], Enete, I. C.[2], Ali Saidu Ali[3], Gowon Jana Patience[4], Adjarho Safe Dennis[5], James Adams Yusuf[6]

[1]Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria, Email: dadungdung@gmail.com, Tel: 07060928651

[2]Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria, Email: ifeanyienete@yahoo.co.uk, Tel: 08037127867

[3]Allat Biz Concept Nigeria Ltd, Email: coolalli810@gmail.com, Tel: 08069035260
[4]Intelivision Technologies Limited, Lekki Lagos State Nigeria, Email: gowonjana@gmail.com, Tel: 09073165351
[5]Paul B. Construction Company Nigeria Limited, Email: safedennis360@gmail.com, Tel: 08168492558
[6]Nigeria Customs Service, Email: jamesyusuf271@gmail.com, Tel: 08135461046

Corresponding Author: Dung Anthony Fidelis; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria, Email: dadungdung@gmail.com, Tel: 07060928651

Abstract

This research aimed at evaluating the growth in ecotourism at Yankari Game Reserve. The main goals were to appraise the environmental effects of ecotourism operations, examine the trends in tourist visits between the years 2016 and 2021, and evaluate the status of facilities at the reserve. The study utilized a mixture of direct observations in the field and the distribution of standardized questionnaires to a sample size of 400 respondents determined through the Taro Yamane formula. A simple random sampling method was utilized to achieve a fair representation of stakeholders' views. Furthermore, time-series statistical analysis software, namely the quadratic model, were utilized to examine changes in tourist influx during the period in question. The results showed that despite the high ecotourism potential that Yankari Game Reserve possesses owing to its rich natural resources, there are marked oscillations in tourist visits with time. The study further revealed marked environmental effects as well as infrastructure development gaps. From these results, some recommendations were made regarding the design of relevant policies and institutional frameworks that can be utilized to upsize the reserve to the standard that is witnessed in similar parks within Nigeria and the world at large.

Keywords: Ecotourism development, Yankari, Game Reserve and Tourist patronages

1. Introduction

During the last decades, tourism became a significant economic powerhouse worldwide that revolutionizes local and national economies with the creation of employment opportunities, infrastructure building, and foreign earnings. Though globalization of tourism is growing at an unprecedented scale and at an unprecedented speed worldwide today, the benefits are not equally shared, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, where destinations with the strongest ecotourism potential are either underutilized or poorly managed. Nigeria, with its large natural scenes, distinguished biodiversity, and rich culture, has yet to fully take advantage of the economic and environmental benefits from tourism. World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2021) reveals that the sector contributes a considerable amount to the world's GDP as well as workforce creation, but Nigeria's tourism sector could not take the full benefit of these worldwide flows because the country is confronted with perennial infrastructural shortcomings in the face of inadequate institutional support.

Yankari Game Reserve is no doubt one of Nigeria's flagship ecological destinations with a valid argument for the potential and implications of ecotourism development. Yankari, with its wildlife, natural springs, and archaeological sites, has been seen as an ideal place for ecotourism with the potential to attract local and foreign tourists. Nevertheless, perennial factors such as the fewer tourists, degradation of natural resources, threat of insecurity, a low participation rate by the local population, and the weak policy guidelines have continued to hold back its success. These constraining factors highlight an important perspective into the sustainability potential of tourism development in such gazetted parks as Yankari.

Its contribution is the analysis of environmental impacts associated with tourism activities, trends in tourist arrivals from 2016 to 2021, the degree of infrastructure expansion, the role played by the local population, and the implementation status of the existing tourism policy framework. Through the identification of the gaps and opportunities that exist, the recent study contributes to the other burgeoning literature on how the conservation areas in the developing world can be managed better for sustainable ecotourism, biodiversity conservation, and socio-economic upgrading. Nigeria is richly endowed with abundant natural and material resources capable of driving economic transformation through increased revenue generation and foreign exchange earnings. Tourism, in particular, has played a vital role in the economic development of several countries across the globe, including Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States, the Emirates of Abu Dhabi, Kuwait, Dubai, the United Arab Emirates, Aruba, and South Korea (Hall & Jenkins, 2023; Sharpley, 2020; Vanegas & Croes, 2023; Herb, 2019). The sector is widely recognized for its contribution to alleviating socio-economic challenges in rural communities, particularly through job creation, infrastructure development, and poverty reduction. Tourism has also been identified as a key driver for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and promoting sustainable development (Olorunfemi & Raheem, 2018; Olajide & Nwogu, 2022).

Olapade (2012) notes that while not all destinations may appear attractive at first glance, those enriched with authentic stories, cultural heritage, robust infrastructure, and event-based attractions tend to draw significant local and international interest. These destinations create an enabling environment for investment, employment generation, and increased global visibility. However, despite its numerous tourism resources, Nigeria continues to underperform in the sector, primarily due to inadequate infrastructure, limited investment, and poor policy implementation. Many of its destinations lack the ambience, accessibility, and service standards associated with more developed tourism hubs (Ayeni,

2021). The Nigerian economy remains heavily reliant on the oil and gas sector, yet diversifying through tourism offers immense potential for economic resilience and long-term sustainability.

2. Methods

Study Area

Yankari Game Reserve, located in Bauchi State, northeastern Nigeria, stands out as one of the most prominent ecotourism destinations in West Africa (Olekeshi, 2021). The reserve is celebrated for its diverse populations of large mammals, birds, warm water springs, and sites of ethno-historical and archaeological significance. It serves as a crucial sanctuary for various antelope species, including the Roan Antelope, western Hartebeest, and waterbuck. Importantly, Yankari houses Nigeria's largest population of elephants, recognized as one of the largest surviving groups in West Africa. Established under Decree 36 of 1991, Yankari Game Reserve remains one of Nigeria's foremost tourist attractions, drawing both domestic and international ecotourists. It offers year-round opportunities for wildlife observation and immersion in the Savannah landscape, which reflects what much of North African savannah once resembled. As Nigeria's premier nature-based tourism site, Yankari plays a critical role in the promotion and development of ecotourism across the country. Spanning approximately 2,244 square kilometers, Yankari is geographically centered at latitude 9°50′N, within the southern section of Bauchi State, and situated in the Sudan Savannah ecological zone. Accessibility is primarily via a paved road from Dindima village, off the federal highway connecting Bauchi to Gombe. The main entrance to the reserve is located at Mainamaji village, near the Gongola River.

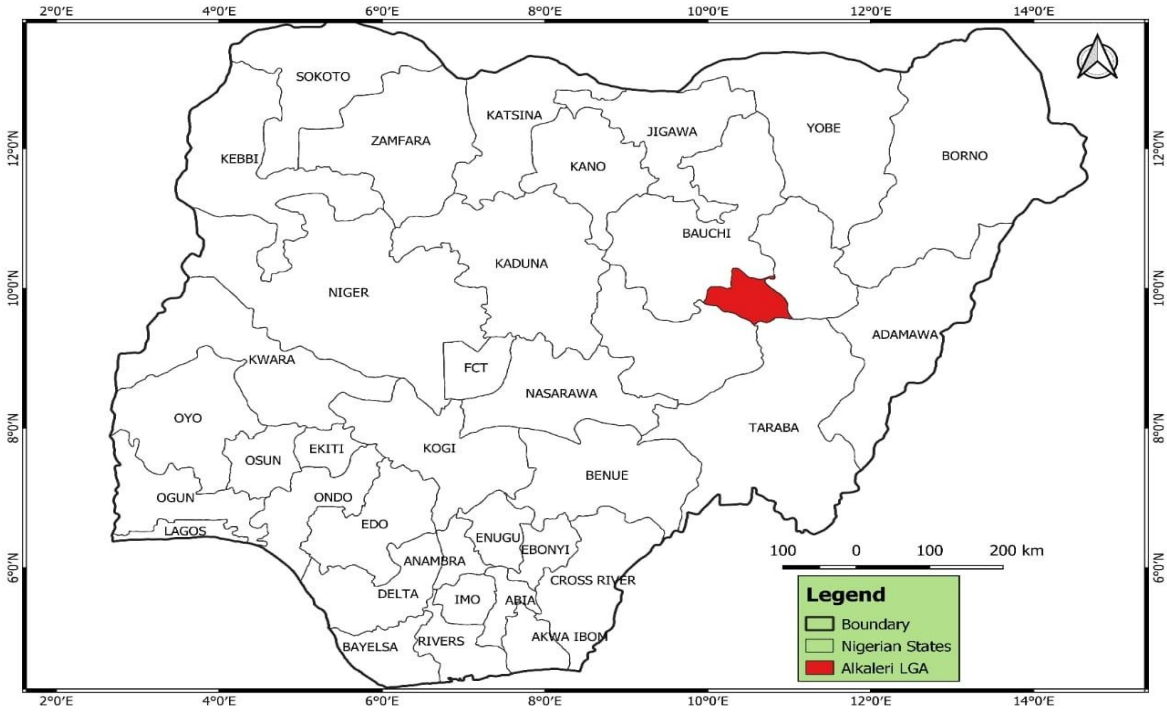


Figure 1: Map of Nigeria, Showing Bauchi State

Source: Federal Ministry of Environment

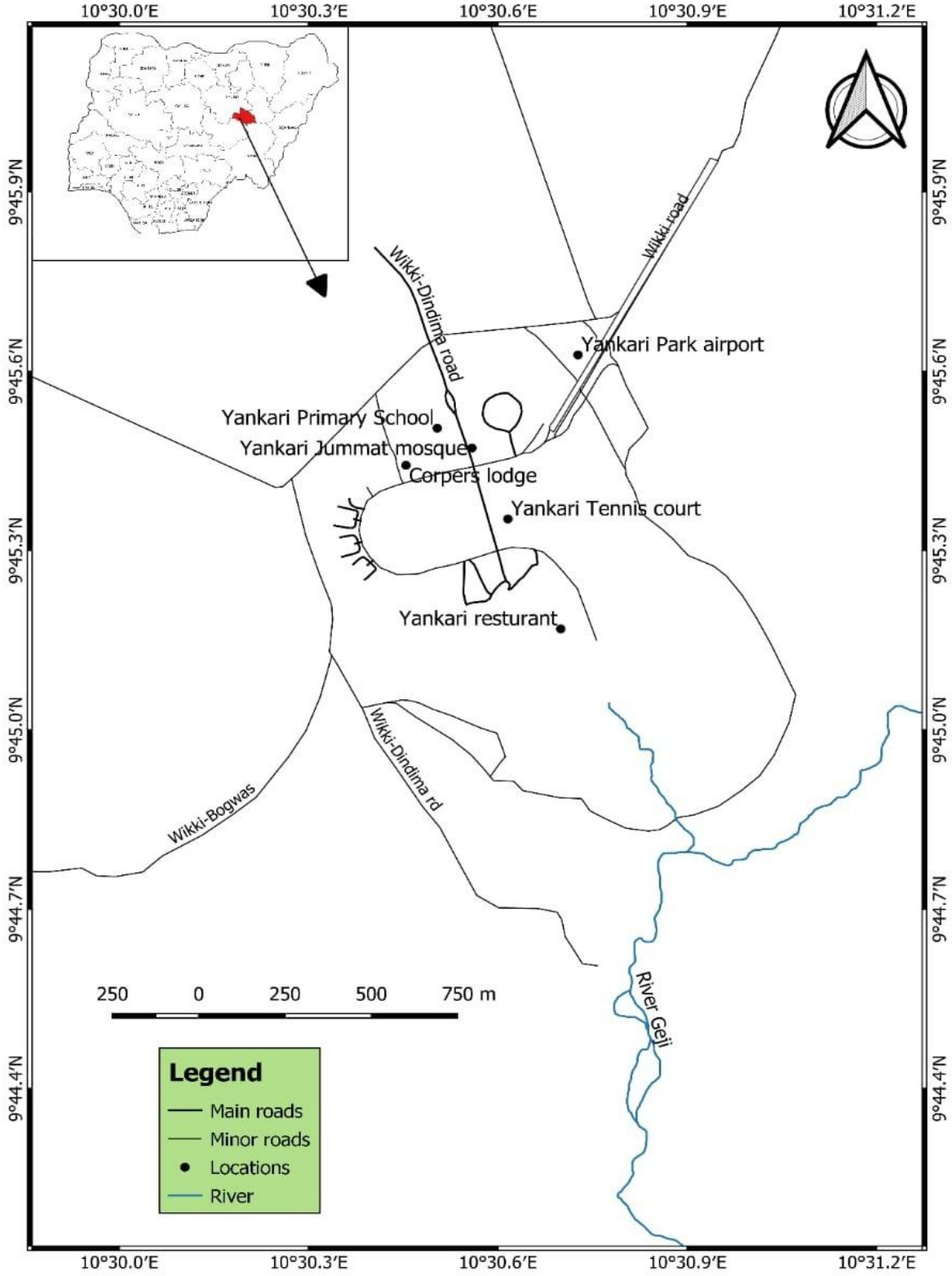


Figure 2: Map of Bauchi State, Showing Yankari Game Reserve

Source: Bauchi State Ministry of Environment

Sampling Techniques and Sample Size

The researcher applied the simple random sampling technique to ensure that every member within the population can equally form part of the sample. This technique is adopted to obtain a sample that will be a fair representation of the larger population as well as ensuring that there is an inclusion of all the subgroups that are relevant within the study.

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for this study was determined using the Taro Yamane (1967) formula, which is appropriate for finite population sampling. The formula is given as:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

N = population size (529,693)

e = margin of error (0.05 or 5%)

$$n = \frac{529{,}693}{1 + 529{,}693(0.05)^2} = \frac{529{,}693}{1 + 1{,}324.23} = \frac{529{,}693}{1{,}325.23} \approx 400$$

Therefore, a sample size of 400 respondents was considered adequate for the study at a 5% level of precision. A simple random sampling technique was used to ensure that key subgroups (e.g., community members, staff, tourists) were fairly represented in the final sample. Simple random sampling was then applied within each stratum to select the individual respondents.

Method of Data Collection

In order to establish the validity and reliability of the findings of the research study, a total of 400 structured questionnaires were designed, coded, and made available by the researcher to the relevant stakeholders within the study area. Of these, 249 questionnaires were made available to the occupants within the Gwana, Fali, and Duguri host communities while the remainder were distributed amongst the tourism scholars, hoteliers, personnel within the Alkaleri Local Government Tourism Committee, tourists/foreign visitors, and staff within the Yankari Game Reserve.

Both the primary and secondary sources of the data were adopted. The primary data was collected using the structured questionnaires and supported with the direct field observations and simple measurements. The secondary data comprised the archival files and published papers that are related to ecotourism and conservation within the study area. The questionnaire contained two

main sections: the demographic attributes of the respondents were the first part, while the second part dealt with the analysis of the effects and growth of ecotourism in Yankari Game Reserve. All the items were incorporated under the form of closed-ended questions to enable the simplicity of analysis.

Out of the 400 questionnaires administered, 396 were retrieved and deemed usable after four with errors or with incomplete answers were eliminated. Respondents were obliged to provide information concerning the availability of facilities associated with ecotourism and their perceptions about the socio-cultural, economic, and environmental impacts of tourism and tourist flow within Yankari.

Method of data analysis:

Data for the study were principally interpreted using quantitative methods. Closed-ended questionnaire responses were aggregated to show the distribution or extent of the responses. These responses were sorted into comprehensive frequency counts and percentages and then displayed using various chart types for easy comprehension. Specific chart types that were adopted include bar and pie charts to illustrate demographic characteristics and other variables that are relevant because they are suitable for the display of proportionate data such that an easy comparison is achieved across categories.

The systematic presentation of the data facilitated its interpretation in a simple manner such that patterns and trends could be identified over time periods or across groups. Tables were also utilized to summarize results for reference convenience as well as analysis purposes. Choice of graphical resources such as bar and pie charts was intentional by virtue of depicting major findings as well as percentage distribution such that the analysis of the dataset could be enhanced and results related to the research problem clearly communicated.

3. Results

Data presentation

The data presented below are the demographic composition of the respondents; age, gender, marital status, educational level, and occupation. However, this data resolved objectives two three and four respectively. The respondents age bracket of 18-25 had the lowest number in the survey, representing 12.6%, followed by 35-45 age bracket, representing 27.5%. Also, 25-35 age brackets had 27.8% representing 110 respondents, while age from 45 and above had the highest number of respondents with 32.1% representing 127 people.

Table 1: Occupation of Respondents

Occupation	Respondents	Percentage
Student	97	24.4
Farming	100	25.4
Tourism consultants	63	15.9

Business men	136	34.3
Total	396	100

From table 1: Respondents' occupations are quite varied, with 136 businessmen making up the largest group at 34.3%, followed by 100 engaged in farming (25.4%) and 97 students (24.4%). 63 tourism consultants accounted for 15.9% of the sample. This mix reflects a broad cross-section of local economic activity, though the relatively low number of tourism professionals raises questions about the depth of direct involvement in the tourism industry among participants.

Table 2: Socio-cultural benefits of Ecotourism in Yankari Game Reserve

Benefits	Respondents	Percentage
Promotes peace and Unity	96	24.3
Brings the world closer	110	27.7
Meeting of new friends and exploring tourist sites	190	47.9
Total	396	100

From table 2, tourism is perceived to offer several key benefits, with meeting new people being the most frequently cited benefit from 190 respondents at 47.9%. 110 respondents selected bringing the world closer at (27.7%) and 96 respondents opted for promoting peace and unity at (24.3%) were also notable outcomes. However, one category "exploring tourist sites" had no data entry, indicating either oversight or lack of emphasis on physical tourism attractions. Overall, the social benefits of tourism appear to be more valued than economic or cultural ones.

Table 3: The Revenue Generation of Ecotourism in Yankari Game Reserve

Revenue Generation	Respondents	Percentage
Balance of Payments	80	20.2
Employment Opportunities	160	40.4

Revenue generation	100	25.2
Gross Domestic Products	56	14.2
Total	396	100

From table 3, when asked about the economic effects of tourism, employment opportunities emerged as the most significant benefit, with 160 representing 40.4% of respondents citing it. Revenue generation was also recognized by 100 respondents at 25.2%, while balance of payments improvements accounted for 80 respondents 20.2%, and GDP contributions were the least mentioned from 80 respondents at 14.2%. These results highlight tourism's potential as a job creator but also suggest that its macroeconomic impacts may not be fully realized or acknowledged by the respondents.

Table 4.: Positive Environmental Effects of Ecotourism in Yankari Game Reserve.

Environmental Effects	Respondents	Percentage
As habitats for Wildlife	200	50.5
Reduces erosion	40	10.1
Free from polutions	50	12.6
Tourism sustainability	100	25.2
Total	396	100

From table 4, 200 respondents represents 50.51% reviewed as habitats for wildlife, 40 respondents represents 10.1% reviewed reduces erosion, 50 respondents represents 12.63% reviewed free from pollutions while 100 respondents represents 25.25% reviewed tourism sustainability. 200 respondents represents 50.51% has the highest number of respondents. It shows how positive the environment is to wildlife resources.

Table 5: Negative Socio-cultural Effects of Ecotourism Development

Socio-Cultural Effects	Respondents	Percentage
Distortion of local customs	75	18.9
Loss of native language	196	49.5
Hostility from the Host	75	18.9

Over-crowding	50	12.6
Total	396	100

From table 5, 75 respondents represents 18.9l% reviewed distortion of local customs, 196 respondents represents 49.5% reviewed loss of native language, 75 respondents represents 18.9% reviewed hostility from the host communities, which has the lowest number of respondents while 196 respondents represents 49.5% has the highest number of respondents and this might be due to the high rates of tourist influx into the communities for so long.

Table 6**: Negatives Economic Effects of Ecotourism Development on Yankari Game Reserve**

Economic Effects	RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE%
Loss of traditional industry	96	24.2%
Diversion of funds into personal Projects	200	50.5%
Inflation	100	25.3%
Total	396	100%

From table 6, 96 respondents represents 24.2% reviewed loss of traditional industry, 200 respondents represents 50.5% reviews diversion of funds into personal projects while 100 respondents represents 25.3% reviews inflation. However, 200 respondents represents 50.5% has the highest number of respondents.

Table 7: The Negatives Environmental Effects of Ecotourism on Yankari Game Reserve

The Negatives Environmental Effects	Respondents	Percentage
Noise, water and air pollutions	100	25.3

underdevelopment of facilities	96	24.3
Destruction of Wildlife Habitats(mass tourism)	90	22.7
Degradation and loss of historic Sites	110	27.7
Total	396	100

From Table 7, 100 respondents represents 25.3% reviews noise ,air and water pollutions; respondents, 96 represents 24.3% reviews underdevelopment of facilities in the areas,, 90 respondents represents 22.7% reviews destruction of wildlife habitats while 110 respondents represents 27.7% reviews degradation and loss of historic sites, which also has the highest number of respondents and this could be due to the construction of government lodge into the park and pipe, leading to the Wikki warm springs for generation of water into the lodge.

Table 8: Measures to be taken to stop communities from destruction of ecosystem

Measures Taken	Respondents	Percentage
Provision of CCTV Camera	146	36.8
Hunters and farmers be Employed	100	25.3
Provision of Drones	150	37.8
Total	396	100

Table 8: Shows that, 146 respondents represents 36.8% reviewed provision of CCTV cameras, 100 respondents represents 25.3% reviews hunters and farmers be employed while 150 respondents represents 37.8% reviews provision of Drones. However, 150 respondents represents 37.8% has the highest number of respondents, there is need to have drones in and around the park for easy views of criminal activities.

Table 9: Seasonal Indices for Influx of Tourist

Season	**Index**
January	117.304
February	79.4042

March	103.394
April	108.357
May	87.1747
June	111.477
July	96.3717
August	101.234
September	62.082
October	76.4346
November	79.0862
December	177.681

Table 9, shows the seasonal indices for each month, scaled so that an average month equals 100. The indices range from a low of 62.082 in the month of September to a high of 177.681 in December. This indicates that there is a seasonal swing from 62.082% of average to 177.681% of average throughout the course of one complete cycle. Table 2: This table showcases the seasonal indices calculated for each month as part of the seasonal decomposition analysis. These indices illuminate the relative levels of tourist influx for individual months in comparison to the average month.

Figure 4: Plot showing the Trend Cycle of Tourists Influx

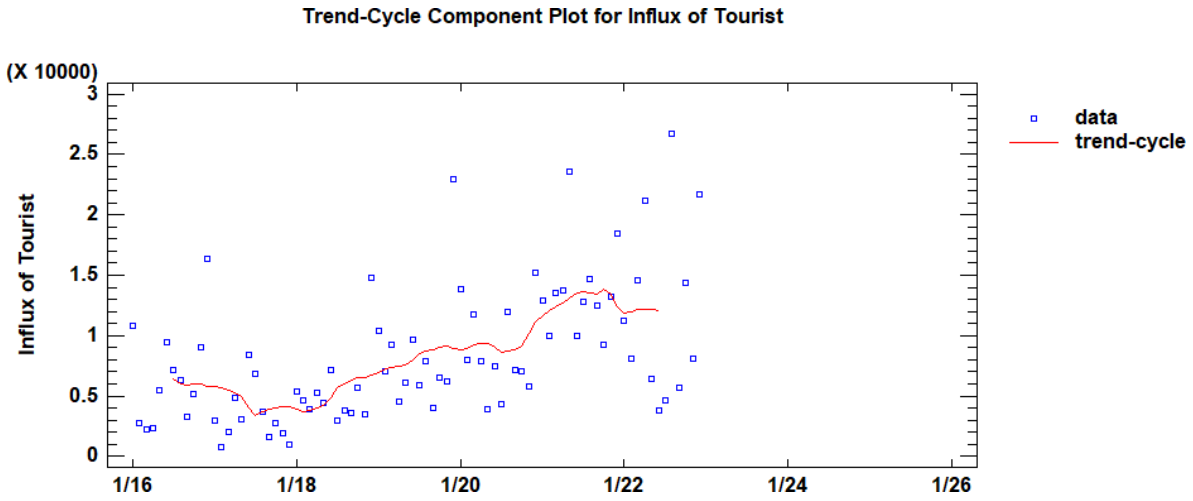


Figure 4: In this visual representation, we observe the trend cycle component derived from the seasonal decomposition of tourist influx data. The graph illustrates the extended-term pattern within the data once the seasonal and irregular components have been eliminated. Notably, there is a slight decreasing trend over time.

Figure 5: The plot displays the seasonal indices for each month throughout the year, excluding the influence of the trend and irregular components. It indicates that the tourist influx typically reaches its highest point in December and experiences a low point in September annually.

Figure 5: Plot showing Seasonal Index of Tourists Influx

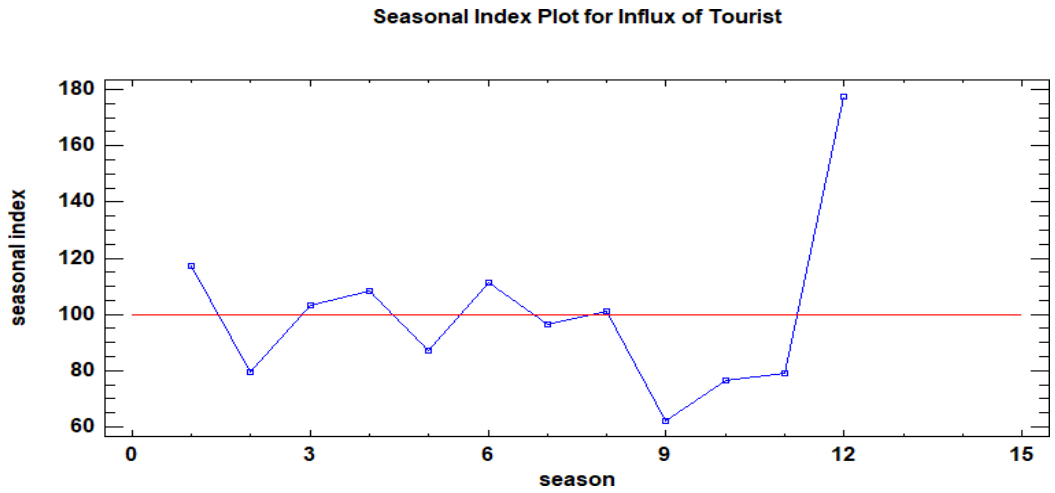


Figure 6 : Plot showing Irregular Component of Tourist Influx

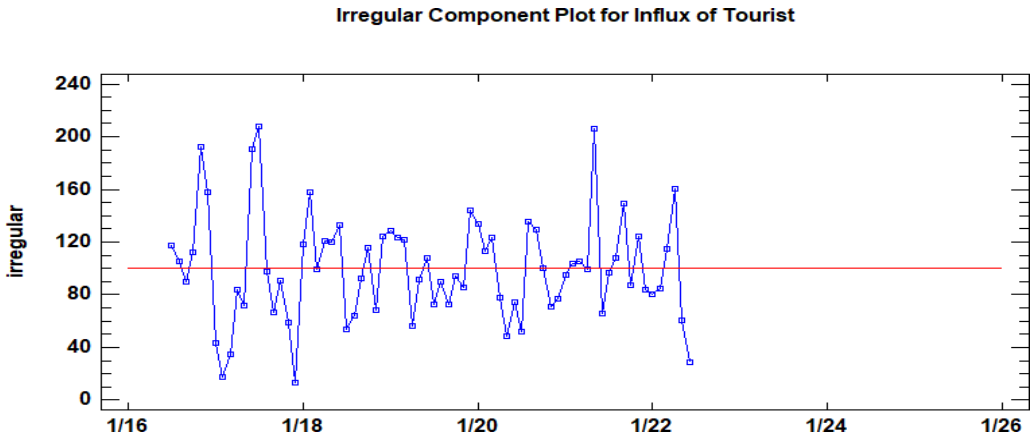


Figure 6: Demonstrating the irregular or residual aspect of the data, this plot emerges after the removal of the trend and seasonal components. It represents the unsystematic, short-term fluctuations surrounding the overall trend and seasonal patterns.

Figure 7: Plot Showing the Seasonally Adjusted Data

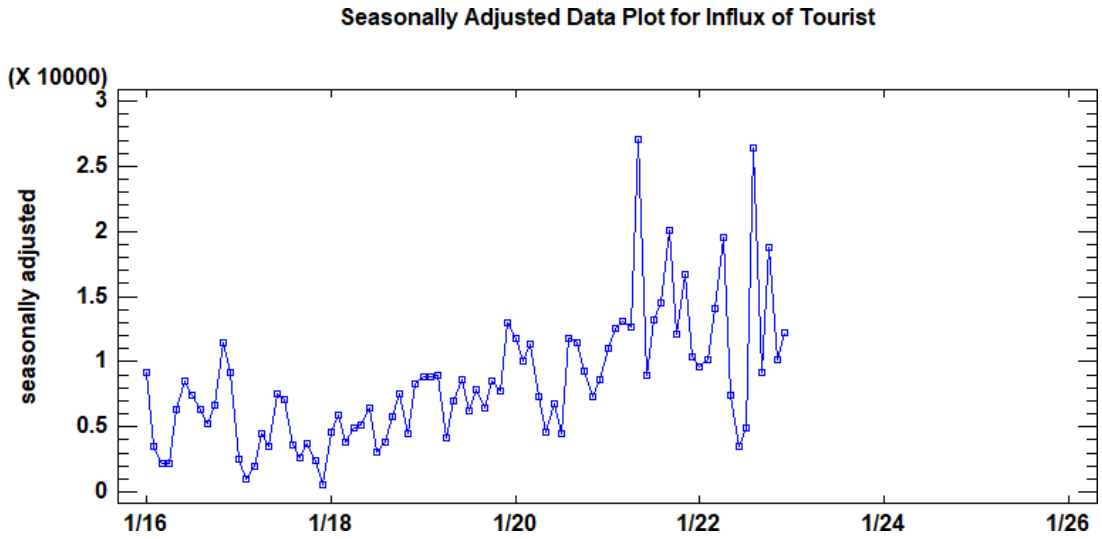


Figure 7: Presents the original data post-adjustment for seasonal effects, this plot smooths out the seasonal variations to reveal only the underlying trend and irregular components.

The Forecasting Model

The data cover 84 time periods. A quadratic trend model was selected to fit the time series data. Each value of Influx of Tourist data was fitted using this model

Table 11: Trend Model Summary

Parameter	*Estimate*	*Stnd. Error*	*T*	*P-value*
Constant	838013.0	574589.0	1.45846	0.148582
Slope	-2116.09	1377.9	-1.53573	0.128501
Quadratic	1.34325	0.825514	1.62717	0.107586

Quadratic trend $Y=838013.0-2116.09\,t+1.34325\,t^2$

The output summarizes the statistical significance of the terms in the forecasting model.

Terms with P-values less than 0.05 are statistically significantly different from zero at the 95.0%

confidence level. In this case, the P-value for the quadratic term is greater than or equal to 0.05, so it is not statistically significant.

Figure 8: Plot showing the Time Sequence

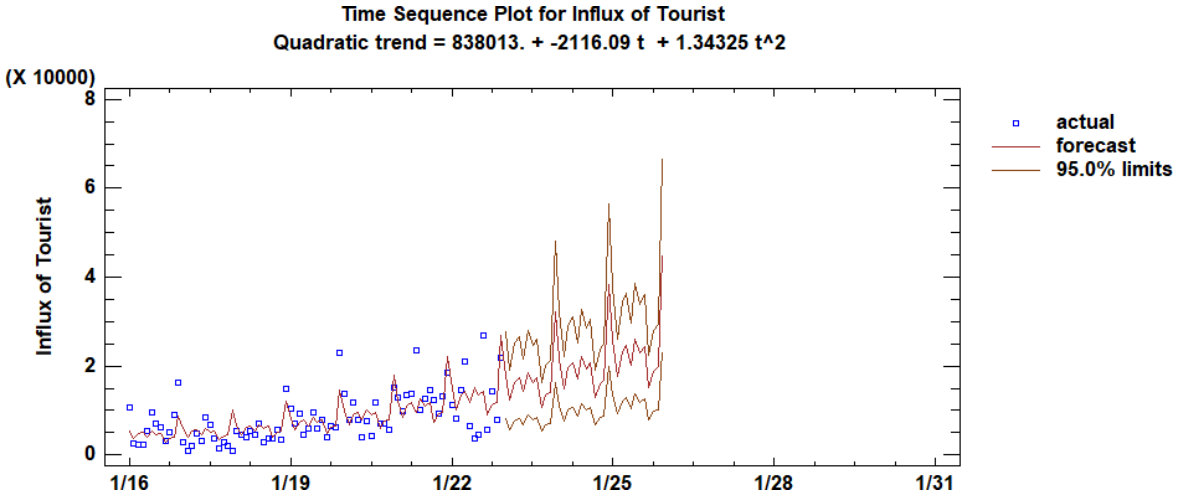


Figure 8. This time series plot visualizes the raw tourist influx data over time, providing a straightforward representation of the data's chronological evolution.

Figure 9: **Plot Showing the Forecast**

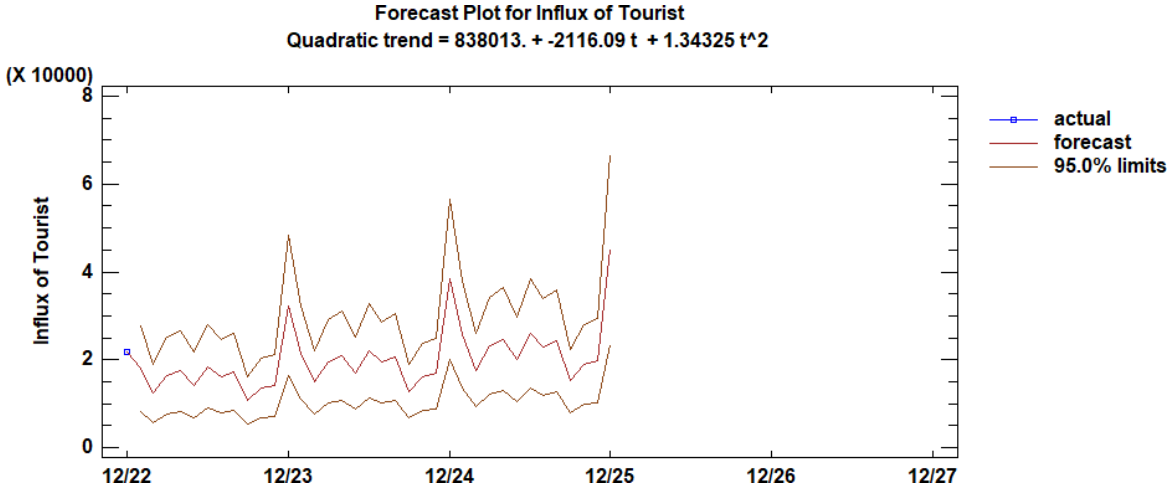


Figure 9: Showcasing a 36-month forecast alongside 95% prediction limits, this plot predicts future values based on the quadratic trend model applied to the data. The prediction limits signify the uncertainty inherent in these forecasts.

4. Discussion

The socio-cultural function of ecotourism in Yankari Game Reserve can be traced through how it contributes to the diffusion of peace, unity, and intercultural tolerance by bringing persons from diverse walks of life closer to each other. Visitors to the reserve cited the construction of friendships and a sense of world interlinkages as a sign of the intangible tourism effects discussed by Teye, Sirakaya, and Sönmez (2002). These types of intercultural exchanges constitute destinations' soft power and cultural diplomacy reinforcement (Richards, 2018). Economically, Yankari Game Reserve is an important contributor to the non-oil economy of Nigeria by providing employment opportunities, foreign exchange earnings, and a boost to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the form of tourism revenues. The local livelihoods are supported by the reserve and the balance of payments is improved through the expenditure by international tourists, a broader outcome related to UNWTO (2019), which highlights tourism as integral to sustainable economic growth. There are nevertheless challenges. Respondents identified inflationary influences on the ecotourism growth in Yankari as a constraint, alongside diversion of tourism funds and a slow phasing out of traditional industries as a result of the changing economic focus issues similar to the findings in the works by Mbaiwa (2011) and Akpan (2020).

Infrastructural shortcomings remain an issue from the tourists' perspective. Grievances about insufficient facilities, destruction of the environment (more specifically water pollution), insecurity, and the general sullying of the landscape within the parks were a frequent reference. These impact experience and satisfaction rates negatively for visitors, as similar research by Eagles, McCool, and Haynes (2002) identified the need for quality infrastructure within protected areas. Tourists' comments about the development of ecotourism were in the spectrum from "under-developed" to "developing,' with a perceived shortfall in meeting international ecotourism standards. Respondents' suggested solutions are the availability of modern facilities, attracting foreign investments, and government subsidies. These are in concert with Scheyvens' (1999) proposal that sustainable ecotourism needs to enjoy ample institutional investment and cooperation between stakeholders. Public participation and the partnerships between the government and the private sector are crucial to the project's success in the long term. A time-series analysis of tourist arrivals into Yankari Game Reserve reveals a typical seasonal pattern with a maximum in December and a minimum in September. Seasonal indices confirmed December as the leading month (177.681) and September as the low month (62.082), just as the seasonal tourist pattern seen in tropical ecotourism destinations (Wang & Pizam, 2011). The intrinsic trend after the elimination of the effects of the seasons reveals a persistent but gradual tourist decline, dropping from 6,377.08 in mid-2017 to 12,433.7 at the end of the study period.

Furthermore, the remaining short-term anomalies after the deseasonalizing and detrending operations suggest that exogenous shocks such as political unrest, health pandemics, or economic crises continue to influence tourist behavior. Gössling et al. (2020) support this contention but argue that environmental variations and global crises can significantly distort tourism flows. Forecasts with a calibrated quadratic model indicate a persistent decline in the number of tourists, from 17,990 in the month of January 2023 to 15,142 in September 2025. The prediction intervals

at the 95% confidence level indicate increasing uncertainty over time and the variability within tourism trends. The greater uncertainty reflects broader questions regarding the resiliency of tourism systems under the forces of climate change, security risk, and insufficient investment (Becken & Hay, 2012). To stem this decline and make Yankari a competitive ecotourism site, there is a necessity to adopt strategic interventions. These include upgrading infrastructure, enhanced security systems, tourism products diversification, and climate-smart tourism policies. Technology integration in the form of the application of drones and CCTV monitoring, coupled with education and employment for the local communities, will stop encroachment and improve conservation a view supported by Honey (2008) and Weaver (2011). Yankari achieving its full ecotourism potential ultimately hinges upon a holistic approach based upon sustainability, openness, and inclusive growth.

5. Conclusion

The study discovers that Nigeria, just like other emerging economies, possesses enormous untapped tourism potential. With rich heritage and diverse ecological attractions, the country can benefit enormously from tourism opportunities around the globe. But if tourism is to be a viable alternative for economic diversification, intentional reform and investment are required. Nigeria's tourism industry is today characterized by structural deficiencies that are pervaded by insecurity, weak policy implementation, and inadequate infrastructure. Sustainable tourism around the world is a resilient and transformational phenomenon that can prevail amidst the terrorism, pandemics, and economic headwinds. International tourist arrivals touched 900 million in the year 2007 and the UN projected a rise to a billion by the year 2010. Developing states have capitalized on the momentum—Kenyan communities, for instance, have managed to utilize the ecotourism opportunities to stimulate their community developments and lift foreign revenues. But the expansion in India has been marred with weak regulatory policies and exclusion of the local communities. Nigeria will only achieve the same result if it fills the governance gap and involves the local communities in tourism planning. Through the omission to have inclusive and strategic developments, the country will continue losing the economic, social, and environmental benefits that tourism can yield. Unlocking Nigeria's tourism opportunities will require immediate and coordinated interventions between the government and the private sectors.

6. Recommendations

1. Enhance Infrastructure Security: Nigerian tourism will only be a success when security is guaranteed. The government should place emphasis on security infrastructure to safeguard tourists, personnel, and the ecotourism attractions such as Yankari Game Reserve against security threats including banditry and encroachment.

2. Invest in Infrastructure: One area that needs government expenditure is the upgrading of the necessary infrastructure such as roads, electricity connections, water supply, and internet connections. These upgrades are necessary to attract and sustain tourism activity around the

country.

3. Encourage Private and Foreign Investment: The government can grant tax exemptions and streamlined procedures to facilitate local and foreign investment in tourism development and particularly underdeveloped ecotourism sites.

4. Promote International Publicity and Tour Operations: Yankari Game Reserve and other sites should be promoted globally through massive international mass mediums and social networks. And in addition to that, the establishment of licensed tour companies will help organize, manage, and promote tourism professionally.

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