

Reinvigorating the Hotel Sector for Sustainable Tourism and Socio-Economic Development in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to analyze the existing hotels classified in Akwa Ibom State using the Automobile Association (AA) international star rating standard (British System). Descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The study employed simple random sampling method to select thirty hotels for the study. Data were obtained through direct observation and interview and also from Akwa Ibom State Hotels and Tourism Board (AKSHTB), Uyo. People involved were the managers of each hotel. The existing data on hotel classification obtained from AKSHTB were critically scrutinized. The result of the study revealed that almost all One Star hotels' structures in Akwa Ibom State are out of the AA international standard structure. It was also revealed that hotel owners and managers do not attribute importance to recreational facilities and social amenities in their establishments. This is a constraint to development in the hotels and tourism industry. It was concluded that the existing classification of hotels in Akwa lbom state is not in conformity with the AA international rating standard. International standard hotels could trigger development in Akwa Ibom State which in turn promote and enhance tourism in Akwa Ibom State; therefore the researchers recommend that hoteliers should construct hotels in conformity with the AA international rating standard. Also, recreational facilities and social amenities should be provided in hotels to attract more tourists and promote the tourism industry in the state. Moreover, standard hotels and tourism directory should be published in the state to show the types and classes of hotels, road maps, tour guides and travel agencies, banks and available port and heliport in the state.

Keyword: Reinvigoration, Hotels, Hotel Standardization, Socio-Economic, Sustainable Tourism, Development

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1. INTRODUCTION

Accommodation is an important element for tourists as well as for the tourism industry due to significant amount tourist' budget and spend on accommodation and food services. Swain and Mishra (2012) asserted that the primary aim of hotels is to offer leisure activities, business support services, meetings and conference facilities, recreation facilities and entertainment services to satisfy guests. However, Omogunloye and Ayeni (2012) and Swain and Mishra (2012) affirmed that a hotel is an establishment that provides paid lodging, meals and other services on a short term basis in a well-furnished and designed building. Therefore, a hotel is a commercial establishment that provides hospitality services over a certain period of time. It could be for leisure, business and/or recreational activities. A wide variety of lodging properties and amenities has been developed to meet the needs of specific market segment (Cook, Yale and Marqua, 2010).

In recent time, hotels are provided with lots of sophisticated facilities and modern amenities like club house, recreation centres, yoga centres, tennis courts, walking tracts, golf, duty-free shopping, travel agency, and coffee service and in some cases doctor service. Customers in the hospitality (hotel) services are typically holidaymakers, business travellers and short-break leisure seekers with the common objective of a comfortable stay. Therefore, hotel accommodation is an element that could enhance sustainable tourism development.

Due to the upgrade in the tourism industry, the way people spend their vacations has undergone a great change. People like to spend good times with families and friends while at the same time exploring various tourist places across the globe. As a result the tourism industry across the globe has seen an unprecedented growth which in turn has also resulted in tremendous growth in the hotel facilities. Omogunloye and Ayeni (2012) opined that growth in the number of lodging facilities resulted in the development of several classification schemes that could be used for reporting and comparison purposes. These classification schemes shows that lodging facilities come in many sizes and types and therefore requires varying levels of staffing and managerial expertise for successful operation (Cook et al, 2010).

Hotels are classified to know the standard of the hotels in a particular area or nation, to suit tourist's demands and also, to know the class of tourists that may visit a particular location. The hospitality (hotel) industry has become a lucrative business as a result of modern technological facilities put in place by hoteliers. This makes the destination attractive and conducive for visitation (Eja, Otu, Ndomah and Ewa, 2011). However, hotel is one of the strongest elements in tourism industry in terms of the number of people participating, the amount of income generated and employment capacity. Eja, Otu, Agbor and Inyang (2013) opined that hotel boost tourism industry. All visitors will consider first their lodging and the type of lodging at the time of trip planning before embarking on such trip; and as such, tourism cannot be complete if visitor's accommodation is neglected. However, in hotels there are variations in income. This according to Mrema, (2015) is due to some factors such as the quality (standard) of the hotel, accessibility and location. Hotels could be classified based on facilities and services and could also be graded to distinguish in terms of type and level to suit the tourist budget. Thus, hotels are classified according to size, location, and target markets, levels of service, facilities, and number of rooms, ownership and affiliation among others (FRN Gazette, 1997; Ajake, 2015).

According to the Caribbean Tourism Organisation (CTO) (2002), the rating system emerged out of efforts by the Automobile and Cycling clubs in Europe, who in their tour books displayed hotels, which they recommended to their members, based on the guaranteed facilities which these hotels offered. The EU hotel union is an organization which consists of thirty-nine (39) hotels association in twenty-four (24) European countries which has a standardized classification system. In South Africa, it is the tourist grading council of South Africa that administered the system. There is also Nordiac-Baltic system based on the Danish model, while in the USA, the American Automobile Association (AAA) diamond rating system is popular. In Britain, it is basically the Automobile Association (AA) classification system of star rating while other hotels are rated by the Royal Automobile Club (RAC). The advantage of adopting international classifications system is that the travel trade and international consumers can easily recognize the codes and or ranking systems developed (CTO, 2002; Cook et al, 2010 and Omogunloye and Ayeni, 2012). Consumers expect certain accommodation standards regardless of the locations of the property.

In the AA rating system (British System), hotels are classified into; one star, two star, three star, four star and five star hotels (CTO, 2002; Omogunloye and Ayeni, 2012). In Akwa Ibom State, structural transformation and development has triggered the establishment of more hotels. The rapid increase in the hotel sector leads to the classification and rating of the hotels in the Akwa Ibom State by hotel agencies.

Based on the existing classification and rating of the hotels in the state, most hotels classified and rated in the study area are only packaged on screen and papers without reflecting the quality being packaged and as such do not meet the AA international classification and rating standard. To put to question the government monitoring, enforcing, implementing acceptable standards in the hospitality industry. The use of hotels in tourism industry in modern time connotes a useful and satisfactory meaning due to comforts, free gift of nature and confidence people derive from it. In developed countries, hotels are not limited to bed space but also have tourism facilities which attract tourists to the hotel and in turn promote and enhance tourism development. Same can be replicated in the state. This could serve as leverage in attracting more visitors and tourists to the hotels and thus promote and enhances tourism development as well as local economic development. Therefore, this work evaluates the existing classified hotels and fills the gap by classifying the sampled hotels in line with the AA international standard. However, harnessing hotels in the state would significantly enhanced marketing and promotion of the facilities and services and also serve as a means of packaging the state as a serious tourism destination. This would make Akwa Ibom State gain competitive advantage in national and international tourism market and also help tourism planners, stakeholders, investors and marketers to develop proper planning and management strategies towards sustainable tourism development in Akwa Ibom State.

2. STUDY AREA

Akwa Ibom State is located in the south-south geopolitical zone and lies between latitudes 4° 30¹ and 5° 32¹ North of the Equator and Longitudes 7° 27¹ and 8° 25¹ East of the Greenwich Meridian. The land mass is estimated at 8,412km2 with common borders with Cross River State to the East, Abia State to the North, Rivers state to the West, and Atlantic Ocean by the South. It is made up of 31 Local Government Areas with Uyo as the State capital with a population of 5,272,029 people in 2015, projected from the 2006 population census of 3,920,208 people using the acceptable growth rate of 3.4 per cent (AKSG, 2014). The major ethnic groups are Ibibio, Annang and Oron. The terrain includes the alluvial plains, beach ridge sand, rolling sandy plain, dissected upland and the Obotme isolated hills. All drainage system in the state flows into the Atlantic Ocean. The climate of Akwa Ibom State falls within the tropical rain forest zone which is hot and wet throughout the year. The rainy season begins about March/April and last till mid-November and the dry season begins in mid-November and ends in March. The vegetation includes the Mangrove, Fresh water swamp forest and the Rain forest.

3. CONCEPT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The World Tourism Organisation (WTO) (2001) defines sustainable tourism development as development that meets the needs of present tourists and host regions while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future. It is envisaged as leading to management of all resources in such a way that economic, social and aesthetic needs can be fulfilled while maintaining cultural integrity, essential ecological processes, biological diversity and life support systems (Mbaiwa, 2011; Bunakov et al, 2015).

The concept of sustainable tourism development supports strong economic and social development, in particular for people with low standard of living. At the same time it underlines the importance of protecting the natural resource base and the environment. Economic and social well-being cannot be improved with measures that destroy the environment. Therefore, all development has to take into account its impact on the opportunities for future generations. Natural resources are dynamic and can only be sustainably available to man if the fundamental characteristics of the natural resources and the environment are properly understood. Such an understanding according to Ukpong (2009) will enhance knowledge of the processes through which the resources are allocated and utilized. The major aim of sustainable development is to direct changes from development towards "a more idealised and greener future".

The term "Sustainable Development" first came to prominence in 1980 with the publication of the World Conservation Union. Subsequently the concept of sustainable development has been defined in many ways. The most widely accepted definition of sustainable development has been given by the World Commission on Environment and Development in the Brundtland Report "Our Common Future" cited in Ukpong (2009) as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own. However, this concept emphasizes the preservation of resources and respects the needs of future generations. Ukpong (2009) postulated that sustainable development contains two key concepts and the two concepts are anthropocentric (human centred).

The key concepts identified include:

- (i) Needs, especially the needs of the poor people of the world, to which overriding priority was essential; and
- (ii) Limitation created by technology and social organisation regarding the capacity of the environment to satisfy both present and future needs.

Sustainability depends in large part, on the ability of the current human population to limit its environmental impact (Withgott and Brennan, 2007). This means that tourism destination should not be allowed to exit it carrying capacity for tourism activity. Tourism is promoted as a clean and harmless economic and social activity; free of the environmental impacts attributed to other industries, such as manufacturing, mining, and intensive agriculture but, the physical impact of feet, litter, congestion, over-building and the social impact of mass visitation on cultures and indigenous communities, has led tourism development to be questioned, and tourism to be considered as a threat to the sustainability of many areas. Presently, there is a symbiotic relationship between tourism and the environment. Tourist destinations today depend upon clean physical surroundings, protected environments and the distinctive cultural patterns of local communities. Destinations that do not offer environmental quality are usually suffering a decline in quality and tourist use. Carrying capacity is the maximum use of any site without causing negative effects on the resources, reducing visitor's satisfaction, or exerting adverse impact upon the society, economy and culture of the area. Therefore, any economic activity, including tourism, should ensure a capacity for continuance.

Due to the fact that most of the tourist attraction sites are located in the rural communities, the need to concentrate development in most local places is imperatively necessary (Sam et al, 2014). Umana (2010) added that the improvement of rural lives through the provision of rural care centres and facilities such as dispensaries, clinics and hospitals is government effort to encourage rural development in order to boost tourism development. Sustainable tourism development is crucial to developing states like Akwa Ibom. If hotel industry and tourism must be sustained, Eja et al (2013) opined that a mechanism must be put in place that would ensure tourism related activities. The concept of sustainability is anchored on the three main principles of social equity, economic efficiency, and ecological sustainability (Mbaiwa, 2003). This concept proves that if tourism is to contribute to sustainable development, then it must be economically viable, ecologically sensitive and culturally appropriate. Stakeholders therefore need to embrace principles of environmental, economic and social sustainability for continued success, and boost to the tourism industry in Akwa Ibom State, Vis-à-vis Nigeria.

4. METHOD OF STUDY

The total population for the study was 310 registered hotels. However, simple random sampling method was used to select 30 hotels to represent the entire study population. Therefore, the sample size for the study was 30 hotels. In each hotel, direct observations were carried out based on the AA system major criteria (see appendix). Also, interviews were also conducted for the managers to elicit more information about the hotels. Secondary data on existing hotel classification in the state from Akwa Ibom State Hotels and Tourism Board (AKSHTB) were critically evaluated in conformity with the AA rating standard based on the data obtained from field survey.

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Analysis of Hotel Establishment in the Study Area from 2009-2015

The table below shows the analysis of hotel establishments in Akwa Ibom State from 2009-2015. It indicates that large number of hotels were established in 2010 (91) and 2013 (73) representing 29.4 per cent and 23.5 per cent respectively. 2011 recorded the minimum number in hotel establishment (9) representing 2.9 per cent. 2009, 2012, 2014 and 2015 recorded 12.9 per cent, 8.39 per cent, 7.10 per cent and 6.13 per cent respectively in hotel establishment. This shows great development in the hotel sector and in tourism industry which may trigger socioeconomic development.

Table 1: Analysis of Hotel Establishment in the Study Area from 2009-2015

Year of Establishment	No. of Hotels		Total
	Old	New	
2009	32	40	72
2010	72	91	163
2011	163	9	172
2012	172	26	198
2013	198	73	271
2014	271	22	293
2015	293	19	310

Source: AKSHTB, 2016

Table 1 revealed an increase in hotel establishment per year. The establishment of hotels increases as investors realizes the benefits accrued from the hotel business and at the same time the importance especially in promoting Akwa Ibom State heritage and the tourism industry. This is due to the serene tourism environment such as security, visitor friendly, peaceful, availability and accessibility of transport system (air, land and sea), banks, electricity and telecommunication among others.

5.2 Hotel Classification in the Study Area

Growth in the number of lodging facilities resulted in the development of several classification schemes that could be used for reporting and comparison purposes. The hotels in the study were classified and rated in Stars ranging from listed (not rated hotels) to five star hotels. This classification and rating did not meet the international standard of the hotels using the AA rating system (British System). This system focused on consumer's perspective on accommodation properties. The original rating by AKSHTB (2016) shows that about 67.4 per cent (209) of hotels in Akwa Ibom State were classified as listed hotels (hotels below minimum star rating standard) and 25.2 per cent (78) of hotels in Akwa Ibom State were one star.

Thirteen (13) hotels representing 4.2 per cent were two stars, Three (3) hotels representing 0.97 per cent were three stars, Six (6) hotels representing 1.9 per cent were four stars while One (1) hotel representing 0.32 per cent was five star hotel.

Table 2: Existing Hotels Classification

Hotel Rating	Frequency	Percentages (%)	
Listed Hotels	209	67.4	
One Star Hotels	78	25.2	
Two Star Hotels	13	4.2	
Three Star Hotels	3	1.0	
Four Star Hotels	6	2.0	
Five Star Hotels	1	0.3	
Total 310		100.0	

Source: AKSHTB, 2016

5.3 Evaluation of Existing Hotel Classification in the Study Area.

By virtue of fact, classification system are based on quantitative factors, the number of star gives the consumer an idea of what type of facilities are available in the hotel and not a mere packaging commodity. Based on this classification, thirty (30) hotels were sampled and classified based on the AA rating standard (British system). The result shows that some of the hotels earlier classified did not meet the necessary rating requirement of the international standard using the AA classification system (see Appendix).

As such the sampled hotels were re-classified and rated as follows:

Table 3: Evaluated Hotel Classification in Line with the AA International Rating Standard

S/n	Hotels	Original Rating	Evaluated Rating	Comment	Remark
1.	Le'Meridian Ibom Hotel & Golf Resort	5 star	5 star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
2.	Uranus Hotel & Suites	2 Star	2 star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
3.	Rema Hotel	1 Star	Listed	No detached room	Not qualified
4.	Peaceful Hotel	Listed	Listed	Inadequate requirement	Qualified
5.	Entry point Hotel	2 Star	2 star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
6.	Utimalik Suites	2 Star	2 star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
7.	De-Castle Luxury Home	4 Star	4 star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
8.	Mellany Suites	1 Star	Listed	No detached room	Not Qualified
9.	Sam Law Hotel	1 Star	Listed	No detached room. Inadequate requirement.	Not Qualified
10.	Fishers Hotel	Listed	Listed	Inadequate requirement	Qualified
11.	Emmjm Hotel & Suites	4 Star	4 star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
12.	Amity Hotel	1 Star	Listed	No detached room	Not Qualified
13.	Villa View Hotel	1 Star	Listed	No detached room	Not Qualified
14.	Daaty Hotel Ltd.	2 star	2 Star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
15.	Monty Suites	3 Star	3 star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
16.	Pinnacle Premium Suites	Listed	Listed	Inadequate requirement	Qualified
17.	Clesta Luxury Hotel	1 Star	Listed	No detached room	Not Qualified
18.	Kingdom Resort	1 Star	1 Star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
19.	Grandville Hotel	2 star	2 Star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
20.	Crystal Palace Hotel	2 Star	2 star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
21.	Eden hotel Ltd	4 star	4 Star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
22.	Royalty Hotel & Recreation	3 Star	3 Star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
23.	Sadof Guest House	Listed	Listed	Inadequate requirement	Qualified
24.	Ventola accommodation	1 Star	Listed	No detached room	Not Qualified
25.	Sinadee hotel	1 Star	Listed	No detached room	Not Qualified
26.	Sonak Hotel & Tourism Ltd	2 Star	2 Star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
27.	Villa Marina Hotel	4 star	4 Star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
28.	Darrels Hotels Ltd	2 Star	2 Star	Adequate requirement	Qualified
29.	Usel International Hotel	1 star	Listed	No detached room	Not Qualified
30.	Florem Hotel	1 Star	Listed	No detached room	Not Qualified

Source: Researcher's Field Survey, 2016

From table 3, it shows that only one hotel met the international rating standard requirement for a one star. Most of the hotels earlier classified as one star had basic requirement but the rooms are not detached which is one of the major requirement apart from number of rooms. Some of the hotel lack adequate facilities and services are poor. Although, Akwa Ibom State has good and quality hotels that could suite visitor's demand, the field study shows that recreational facilities and social amenities are not put into consideration when building hotels in most cases. To achieve hotels benefits for sustainable tourism development, it requires classification and rating of the hotels.

The major criteria in the classification and rating of hotels in Akwa Ibom State were embedded in the number of rooms, location and facilities among others. However, the existing hotels classified were evaluated in conformity with the AA rating standard. It was discovered that most hotels in the study area did not meet the British international rating standard (AA rating system). The classification system promotes and enhances tourism development in the area as hospitality services are raised to its apex with quality services and standard facilities to suit all categories of tourists and visitors.

In consideration of the field survey, we found out that Akwa Ibom State image is highly projected globally through hotels and tourism industry. This is as a result of the beautification of big and standard hotels such as four (4) and five (5) star hotels and its surroundings with traditional art and crafts work. These handiworks apart from being an attraction to visitors and tourists in the hotels also serve as souvenir and as well help to promote the rich culture of Akwa Ibom State globally. Though other small standard (1, 2, and 3 star) hotels also make such beautification, but not all of them see it as important. This shows that the evaluation of existing classified hotels in conformity with the AA international rating standard would make it possible or guaranteed any visitor or tourist who need comfort or want to stay away from home to make available the choice of his or her comfort pending on the available fund or income. Moreover, tourists' income determines the chance and choice of hotel and the duration to spend on any trip.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The extent of development in the hospitality industry vis-a-vis hotel revealed that much attention has been given to tourism industry in recent time. Though, hotel investors still need guide and orientation on quality and standard of hotels especially before setting up their establishments that would not serve only bed space and rooms but could equally help in promoting and enhancing tourism development. However, the evaluation of the existing classified hotels would promote and project hotels and tourism industry in the state to a greater height and enhances tourism development as it gives visitors and tourists a view of internationally standard classes of hotels available in the state. This would make the state a serious tourism destination in the global market and as such will gain competitive advantage as a sustainable tourism destination in Nigeria and beyond. Therefore, standard classification of hotels could serve as leverage to tourism development in Akwa lbom State.

As such, the researchers recommend that hoteliers should promote tourism industry through provision of recreational facilities and social amenities in their establishments. Also, the AA hotel rating criteria are made available to any investor to enable him when establishing a hotel should endeavour to establish a standard hotel to suit tourist demand and in turn enhanced sustainable tourism development in the state. In addition, the researchers recommend that hotel surroundings should be beautified with meaningful sculptures such as past local heroes and heroines, flowers and good sceneries. The researchers recommend that tourism awareness should be flag-off in the state for the people to be aware of the accruing benefits from hotel and tourism industry. This may enhance the locals understanding of hotel and tourism business especially in the production of local goods and artefacts which serves as souvenir to tourists in the hotel and tourism industry.

Furthermore, the researchers recommend that standard hotels and tourism directory be published in the state to show the types and classes of hotels, road maps, tour guides and travel agencies, banks and available port and heliport in the state among others. This could ease visitors search, spur up their interest on tourism and also give them chance to make choice of travel based on the knowledge of availability and accessibility of hotels and tourism products. Also, the standardized hotels and tourism directory will promote Akwa Ibom State globally in the international tourism market. Lastly, Events should be organized in the state to attract visitors and tourist that would make use of the hotels and as well enhance tourism development in Akwa Ibom State.

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APPENDIX

Appendix I: Summary of Major Requirement for AA System Classification

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Hotel star rating	Major criteria for AA classification system		
	Parking space of at least ten cars		
	Minimum of ten detached rooms		
	Laundry and dry cleaning services provided		
	Minimum of two qualified first-aid employee		
	Restaurant/dining room with comfortable arrangement		
One Char	Litter box/basket available		
One Star	100% of room with shower/WC		
	Daily room cleaning		
	 100% room with colour TV and remote control 		
	Soap and body wash		
	Reception service		
	Publicly available telephone for guest		
	Table and chair in room		
	In addition to One Star hotel		
	Packing space of at least 20 cars		
	Minimum of twenty rooms		
	Small supermarket/store		
Two Star	Telephone in rooms		
**	Reading light next to bed		
	Shower gel, towel, linen shelves,		
	Breakfast buffet		
	 Sanitary product such toothbrush, toothpaste, shaving kit 		
	In addition to two star hotel		
	Minimum of thirty (30) rooms		
	All locks shall operate on master key system		
	Air condition in all rooms		
	Parking service of at least 30 cars		
	Laundry services under the responsibility of hotel management		
Throa Ctor	Telephone for internal and external calls in bedroom		
Three Star	Postal/telegraph service in the premises		
	Conference hall		
	Taxi service		
	Foreign exchange counter within hotel premises		
	Swimming pool, gym hall		
	Chemist shop		
	A lift if there is more than two floors including ground floor		
	Page boy, shoe shine, shoe cleaning service		
	Reception opened 14hrs and accessed 24hr on calls		
	Heating facilities in bathroom, hair dryer and cleansing tissue		
	Dressing mirror		

Four Star	 In addition to three star Mini bar/ 24 hours beverage High standard architectural features, construction and finishing of the building Minimum of 50 bedrooms At least one lifts for every 50 rooms or major part thereof, in addition to one service lift or more. At least 20% of the bedroom shall be single and 4% suites One suit per 20 bedroom minimum of 4 qualified first-aid staff 24hr lounge service Parking space of at least 50 cars Temperature control device in each room Concierge and porter service available 24hrs Facilities for acceptance of cables, telegrams, postal letter and supply of postal
	 Facilities for acceptance of cables, telegrams, postal letter and supply of postal stamp Conference and banquet halls Sitting areas separate from bar, lounge or game areas Well-equipped and stocked bar with counter of high quality Dance floor and an orchestra in the dining At least 2 restaurant with a dining well equipped with high standard Breakfast buffet or breakfast menu card via room service Upholster chair/cough with side table in room Buildings shall centrally air-condition and all rooms including dining banquet hall, lobby etc. shall be sound proof. 2 ash tray, vacuum flask, 2 hygienically clean glasses. A radio, TV, bar counter, kitchenette and refrigerator
Five star	 Multi-lingual staff In addition to four star Minimum of 100 bedrooms At least 20% of the bedrooms shall be singles and 5% suites At least one lifts for every 100 rooms or major part thereof, in addition to one service lift or more. 24hr reception service