

A gold mine yet to be tapped



Nigeria is the largest black nation in the world and is endowed with huge potentials of resources, excellent tourist locations and traditional heritage which are essential for rapid tourism and economic development. Benefits of tourism are manifold: as an industry, it is labour intensive but non-cyclical and less vulnerable than traditional sectors; with less entry barriers and no trade tariff controls, it has a catalytic effect on other sectors of the economy generating jobs. Further, tourism as a form of leisure and as a harbinger of peace enables people to live amicably. Tourism is built on natural and cultural assets and it is consumed on tourism sites; as such it can reach the poor easily in rural areas where poverty is harsher. Moreover, tourism has the potential to ameliorate poverty and inequality by accelerating pro-poor growth in Nigeria. It has the capacity if well developed, to reduce the soaring crime rate in Nigeria, as a peace building and conflict mitigating measure to promote cross cultural understanding among 50 ethnic, 250 linguistic and Niger delta militant groups. Tourism facilitates people to realise the importance of contribution and achievements of other ethnic groups that would generate in turn mutual respect, good understanding and fellow feelings. The World Travel and Tourism Council has estimated that revenue related to tourism and travel in Nigeria has exceeded 11 billion US dollars accounting for approximately 6 percent of GDP in 2008.

In the earlier decades such as 1960's and 1970's, agricultur-

al sector has contributed much to the economic development of Nigeria. After the discovery of oil, the government has not bestowed its attention on the development of primary and manufacturing sectors in view of the fact that the government received more than 80 per cent of its revenue from the sale of crude oil which is not a renewable resource. Instead of viewing the discovery of oil as a boon, many economists view it as a bane, in view of poor performance of various sectors of the economy. Therefore, in the context of country's poor agricultural and industrial progress, Nigeria needs tourism revenue essentially. However, the number of international tourists to Nigeria has remained static on account of barriers such as unfavorable visa regime, negligence, poor accommodation and catering facilities.

The image of the country is more important for the promotion of tourism. An image involves a whole act of beliefs about a place.

The image of Nigeria is important not only in tourism drive but also in international finance, foreign relations, and sports. A destination image is the expression of all objective knowledge, impressions, prejudice, imaginations, and emotional thoughts of an individual or group might have of a particular place. Consumers will form opinion on a particular product such as Nigerian tourism, based on information at their disposal. This opinion will determine whether such a destination is selected by a tourist as a destination to visit. Destination images influence a

tourist's travel decision-making, cognition, and behavior at a destination as well as satisfaction levels and recollection of the experience. Therefore, Nigeria must manage its image or rebrand it wherever necessary.

Unfortunately, there are certain negative associations with brand Nigeria such as unfavorable visa regime, inadequate supply of electricity, quality of water and poor transport facilities which affect the people and interfere with their tourism business, economic and social wealth. However, Nigeria's historical and cultural sites are in decay and the physical environment is in a strategic disadvantage. The good image is that the country enjoys a vast market potential, a large population with a friendly nature, a fine weather and the country's attraction centre's largely on cultural events, due to its ethnic groups but also includes rain forests, savannahs, waterfalls and other natural picnic spots. The African triangle slave route to Europe and America, Badagry slave house, culture and heritage are strategic elements in the Nigerian tourism product which require proper development and packaging. Absence of definite tourism policies aimed at promoting and marketing of Nigeria as a tourist destination is the bane of the tourism industry. Suitable image building techniques have to be formulated and adopted to overcome negative perceptions and attributes in order to raise the profile of the country's image to tap tourism in Nigeria that remains as a gold mine yet to be tapped.