

REPOSITIONING HOSPITALITY AND TOURISM INDUSTRY FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF NIGERIA.

Introduction

Hospitality and tourism industry is one of the world's largest industries. According to research findings the industry contributes more than 9.3 percent of the global Gross Domestic Product. Every year, over a billion tourists visit destinations by air, land and sea. Hotels alone account for over half a trillion dollars worldwide in annual revenue. The industry is very broad, meaning there are plenty of opportunities and specialty fields, both visible and working behind the scenes. In fact, one in eleven jobs in the current world economy is related to tourism and hospitality. Tourism and hospitality includes attractions management, convention planning, customer service, event planning, food service, gaming, lodging, marketing, sales and travel. Hotels, airlines, restaurants, transportation companies, tourist services, convention centers, casinos, sports teams, travel agencies and activity providers are all part of a dynamic industry that continually needs skilled employees.

A research conducted by Jumia Travel in 2018, showed that the travel and tourism industry contributed 1.9% of total GDP directly (N2.298 billion), and 5.1% totally to GDP (N6.205 billion) in 2017 creating 1.2 million jobs directly and 3.3 million directly and indirectly, so that 1 out of 20 jobs came from the industry. A breakdown of the activities showed that leisure travel accounted for 51% while business travel accounted for the remaining 49%. It is evident that domestic travel has been and continues to be the biggest source of revenue for the sector, even though there was an increase in international travel. From available reports, the hospitality and tourism industry has contributed to the economic growth of Nigeria, with a contribution of a little less than 10% of the GDP in 2018. The number tourist attraction in Nigeria is huge and has the potentials to attract tourist from all over the globe. Compared with her neighbours, Nigeria has made very little strides in the area of tourism. For tourism to achieve its essence, the complimentary roles of hospitality cannot be relegated. Obviously, the industry has so much more to be tapped into; it is however evident that there is a great deal of work to be done in this regard. We have testimonials of countries such as Macau, Maldives, Seychelles, among others that their hospitality and tourism industry has helped to build and sustain their economies. We have a lot to glean from these economies that have developed the social and economic aspects of their nation through hospitality and tourism.

Challenges of Hospitality and tourism in Nigeria

The hospitality and tourism industry in Nigeria has so much to contribute to the socio-economic development of Nigeria but the industry, like many other sectors of the economy is bedeviled with a lot of challenges. If we must reposition effectively, these challenges must be identified and addressed.

Some of the challenges are:

Insecurity: despite the existence of numerous tourism sites/locations in Nigeria, the state of security in Nigeria has made it frightening for it to be attractive.

Infrastructure: The poor state of infrastructure in Nigeria is a challenge the industry has to live with, from bad roads, to inefficient power supply, which any hospitality and tourism industry in the world needs to survive. The functionality of the industry requires access road to the tourism location, functional airstrip to some of the locations, power is vital e,t,c, the Nigerian roads are death traps, the airlines don't meet up their schedules to regular routes, not to talk of covering any extras, power is not accessible.

Concentration in the urban centres only: business people are capitalists and will not mix business with pleasure. To optimize the contribution of the sector to the socio economic development will require a spread that will capture the needs of both business tourist and pleasure seeker who tour for leisure and seek maximum hospitality

Absence of strategic partnership and collaboration in the industry: the tourism and hospitality industry is a conglomeration of many player; attractions management, convention planning, customer service, event planning, food service, gaming, lodging, marketing, sales and travel. Hotels, airlines, restaurants, transportation companies, tourist services, convention centers, casinos, sports teams, travel agencies and activity providers etc. it is when these players work together as a team that the contribution of the industry can be optimized.

High Cost of operation: with the operators having to provide power and most of the infrastructural requirement of their operation, their operating cost is always on the high side. This indirectly makes their services unaffordable.

Another issue the industry faces is the tax and levies imposed by the state governments.

As much as most of the challenges are based on decisions or indecisions by the government, the hospitality and tourism industry also has challenges that are self-based, such as the low quality of personnel in this industry. According to research, about 90% of the personnel in this industry are only there as a temporary solution to the unemployment issues plaguing us as a nation.

Repositioning Hospitality and Tourism – the way out

In spite of these shortcomings, Nigeria remains a gold mine as far as the tourism potentials are concerned. One of Nigeria's greatest blessings in this regard is her ethnic multiplicity, which translates to uncommon diversity as regards cultural festivals and calendars. There is the urgent need to reposition the industry.

Merriam-Websters Dictionary defines reposition as "to change the position of". While the Cambridge Dictionary defines it as "to move something to a different place or position"

There must be a paradigm shift if the industry will make any meaningful contributions to .

The way forward therefore requires that we address the following issues:

Government needs to develop policies that would enhance the patronage of this industry such as having more lenient policies as regards visa application and grants into the country. Tourism visas should also be introduced with options of 1- week tourism visa, 2-weeks and other tourism friendly periods.

There is also the need to improve the infrastructural facilities, transportation networks should be improved upon, roads should be properly done, rail lines should be made functional, airports should be serviced with the essential amenities needed, water transportation too should be developed properly as an avenue for tourists to commute between locations in a comfortable and safe environment.

Hospitality and Tourism services rendered by government agencies should be at the forefront of socio-economic development of the nation by having these renovated and properly maintained as most of these are national treasures that if well managed can adequately boost the presence of the industry in the nation

The policy frameworks for the development of tourism in Nigeria which include the strategies to increase the inflow of foreign exchange through the promotion of international tourism, encourage even development of tourism-based enterprises and accelerate rural/urban integration should be reviewed and strengthened.

Technology has proven to be a huge blessing in this generation, with the aid of technology local businesses are getting global presence and recognition, and the tourism industry should not be left behind. The advantages availed in the tourism industry by the use of technology are numerous. Tourism and hospitality businesses should maximize the use of Google and it's many benefits, from google my business which helps business owners place their business on a global stage, it shows the time businesses are open, the days of the week, the services offered, the location and many more, it works along with google maps, that gives a geographical detail of the location of businesses, customers can come and give reviews on their experiences with businesses as well as rate the business. This example is one of the many ways technology can improve the industry, the tourism body should be able to mandate all service providers to name their business online and the services they provide as well as pictures to help clients see what they would be paying for. Social media management is another tool that can be used to improve the patronage of hospitality and tourism businesses which would increase revenue and aid socio economic development of Nigeria. Social media management involves the use of basic tools such as our Facebook, twitter, Instagram, WhatsApp. All it entails is creating an account for your business and informing the public on what you do, a good way of attracting new customers would be putting up testimonials of previous customers.

Quality of service: part of the reason some people are not willing to patronize the tourism business is the quality of service they experience when they do, or the experience of somebody else. For hotels for example, your room service should be topnotch, it does not have to cost money, having polite staff can go a long way, also housekeeping should be done properly, there are stories of people who visit hotels and guest houses and their rooms are not cleaned in 3 days. The phones in the rooms should work, the appliances should also work, it's okay if heaters are not provided in rooms because of the energy they consume, a cost effective way to save energy and money and still give your clients a good service would be to have kettles in all rooms.

Maintenance of facilities: A recurring issue with buildings in Nigeria, is the lack of maintenance, it is normal to see structures that are less than a decade old that look worn out both on the outside and inside. It might be said that for proper maintenance to take place, money would be needed, but there are cost effective practices that do not require a total overhaul to keep a building maintained and help patronage. A building being handed over to a stakeholder after construction is meant to come with a maintenance manual. How many of us are aware of this? For those who are aware, how many of us use it or follow what has been recommended?

To combat the issues of low quality of personnel in the industry, adequate training, education and compensation packages should be made available for practitioners and employees in the industry. Certification programs for certain management level jobs in the industry should be introduced if not already existing and adhered to.

The industry stakeholders and practitioners should be open to partnerships, both intra-industry and inter-industry. Intra-industry partnerships can occur between travel agencies and hotels, tourism sites and so on. Inter industry partnership can be organized between transportation services and the industry, the art & culture industry is another industry that can be partnered with. As partnerships can occur within the industry and without, better packages and benefits can be offered based on these partnerships for clients.

There is an untapped goldmine for Nigeria's economy in the hospitality and tourism industry, if only we can apply ourselves properly and not give in to the challenges plaguing us as a nation. There is the need for aggressive publicity campaign to facilitate the growth and development of hospitality and tourism.

Conclusion