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Impact of the National Museum on Sustainable Tourism Growth in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of the National Museum on sustainable tourism development in Calabar, Cross River State, Nigeria. It aimed to evaluate the museum's facilities and services, examine its socio-economic contributions, and identify challenges limiting its effectiveness. Data were collected from 200 respondents using structured questionnaires administered to staff of tourism establishments, supplemented by interviews and field observations. The findings reveal that the museum provides well-equipped exhibition halls, auditoriums, interactive displays, and multimedia installations, enhancing both educational engagement and visitor experience. The museum also contributes significantly to the local economy by generating employment, supporting small-scale entrepreneurship, and attracting domestic and international tourists. However, the study identified challenges, including inadequate funding, limited technological integration, poor infrastructure, and insufficient marketing, which constrain the museum's full potential. The research concludes that while the National Museum is a key driver of sustainable tourism and cultural preservation, these challenges must be addressed. It recommends a strategic framework focusing on infrastructure improvement, digital innovation, and strengthened community engagement to maximize the museum's impact on sustainable tourism growth and socio-economic development in Calabar.

Keywords: National Museum, Sustainable tourism, Development, facilities and services, Socio-economic contribution

Introduction

Sustainable tourism has increasingly gained global recognition as an approach that seeks to balance economic development, social well-being, and environmental protection within tourism activities. This form of tourism emphasizes practices that meet the needs of present visitors and host communities without compromising the ability of future generations to benefit from tourism resources. Within this framework, national museums play a central role,

functioning not only as custodians of cultural heritage but also as educational hubs and major attractions that stimulate local economies. These institutions are widely acknowledged as key drivers of sustainable tourism because they safeguard historical artifacts, foster cultural understanding, and offer enriching experiences that appeal to both domestic and international tourists.

In Calabar, Cross River State, the National Museum has emerged as a pivotal institution for advancing sustainable tourism. Established in 1959, the museum houses a rich collection of artifacts that reflect the history, traditions, and socio-cultural evolution of the Efik people and other ethnic communities in the region (Udo, 2018). Beyond preserving cultural heritage, the museum serves as a significant tourism asset, attracting visitors whose engagement contributes to local economic development. Akpan and Obot (2020) observed a consistent increase in visitor numbers, highlighting that this growth has generated employment opportunities, promoted small-scale entrepreneurship in the hospitality and craft sectors, and stimulated broader economic activities. In this way, the museum demonstrates its capacity to foster economic growth while simultaneously promoting cultural identity. The educational function of the National Museum further reinforces its role in sustainable tourism. By raising awareness and appreciation of local heritage, the museum encourages responsible tourist behavior and strengthens community engagement (Ekechukwu, 2019). Through interactive exhibits, guided tours, and educational programs, visitors gain insight into the historical and cultural significance of the displayed artifacts. These initiatives enrich the visitor experience and ensure that tourism development aligns with the interests and welfare of the local community. Consequently, the museum exemplifies how cultural institutions can integrate economic, social, and environmental objectives to support sustainable tourism.

Despite these contributions, the museum faces challenges that limit its full potential. Inadequate funding, poor infrastructure, and limited marketing reduce its ability to maintain exhibits, adopt modern technologies, and attract a wider audience, particularly international visitors (Okon, 2021). The integration of digital exhibits, virtual tours, and interactive visitor services has become essential for engaging contemporary tourists, while infrastructural deficiencies, including limited accessibility and visitor amenities, further constrain effectiveness (Black, 2012; Garrod & Fyall, 2000).

This study aims to examine the impact of the National Museum on sustainable tourism growth in Calabar, focusing on its economic, social, and environmental contributions, as well as the challenges that hinder its performance. By providing empirical evidence, the research seeks to fill knowledge gaps and offer practical insights for policymakers, tourism practitioners, and heritage managers. The findings are expected to contribute to broader discussions on cultural tourism, sustainable development, and heritage management in Nigeria and across Sub-Saharan Africa.

Literature Review

National museums, such as the National Museum Calabar, play a critical role in preserving cultural heritage, promoting education, and stimulating socio-economic development through tourism. These institutions are equipped with a variety of facilities designed to enhance visitor engagement and educational experiences. According to Hooper-Greenhill (2000), typical museum facilities include exhibition halls, educational rooms, conservation areas, and research centers. The National Museum Calabar features extensive exhibition spaces that display both permanent and temporary collections, showcasing the rich cultural heritage of the Efik people and other ethnic groups in the region. These exhibition areas are carefully organized to accommodate historical, ethnographic, and archaeological artifacts, reflecting the diversity and depth of Calabar's history. Educational facilities within

museums are vital for fostering learning and community involvement. Dedicated classrooms, auditoriums, and interactive zones support educational programs and workshops, targeting various audiences such as school groups, local communities, and tourists (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). At the National Museum Calabar, these educational initiatives are designed to deepen visitors' understanding of the region's history, culture, and traditions. By engaging learners through hands-on activities, guided tours, and interactive exhibits, the museum contributes to knowledge dissemination while promoting cultural appreciation.

In addition to their educational function, museums provide a range of services that significantly influence visitor satisfaction. Black (2005) highlights essential museum services, including guided tours, information desks, and audio-visual aids. The National Museum Calabar offers tours led by knowledgeable staff who provide historical context and insights into the displayed artifacts. Audio-visual tools, such as multimedia presentations and interactive kiosks, enhance the learning experience by offering immersive and engaging ways to explore Calabar's cultural heritage. Furthermore, museum shops contribute to visitor satisfaction by providing souvenirs, educational books, and replicas of artifacts, supporting both the museum's educational mission and the local economy (McLean, 1997). The quality of facilities and services directly affects visitor engagement and educational outcomes. Falk and Dierking (2013) assert that well-designed spaces and comprehensive visitor services facilitate more meaningful museum experiences. The National Museum Calabar integrates interactive and educational spaces that enrich visitor engagement, positioning itself as a key cultural and educational institution in the region. The incorporation of modern technologies, such as digital displays and virtual reality, has further enhanced the museum experience, enabling visitors to interact with Calabar's history and culture in innovative ways (Garrison, 2009). Architecturally, the museum blends traditional and contemporary elements, creating a welcoming environment that attracts visitors and encourages extended engagement (Cameron, 2004).

National museums in Calabar also contribute to local economic development through tourism. As Packer and Ballantyne (2002) note, museums attract visitors from diverse regions, generating demand for local services. The National Museum Calabar draws both domestic and international tourists, stimulating the hospitality sector, including hotels, restaurants, and retail businesses. This influx of visitors creates employment opportunities and fosters small-scale entrepreneurship in crafts and tourism-related services. The museum also hosts special events, including exhibitions, cultural festivals, and educational lectures, which further boost tourism and provide platforms for local artisans to showcase their products (McLean, 1997). These activities create a multiplier effect, enhancing economic activity throughout the community.

Beyond education and economic benefits, museums foster community engagement and cultural preservation. Falk and Dierking (2013) emphasize that museums strengthen community ties by celebrating local heritage. The National Museum Calabar engages with the community through workshops, public lectures, and collaborative projects with local organizations, fostering a sense of ownership and involvement. By showcasing the region's rich cultural traditions, the museum enhances Calabar's attractiveness as a tourist destination and a place for investment, contributing to both cultural sustainability and socio-economic growth (Cameron, 2004).

Despite these advantages, museums in Calabar face significant challenges that affect their effectiveness. Funding limitations constrain maintenance, exhibit upgrades, and technological adoption, which are essential for attracting and retaining visitors (Garrison, 2009). Preservation of artifacts is a constant concern, with issues such as inadequate climate control, security, and regular maintenance threatening the integrity of collections (Falk & Dierking, 2013). Staffing and training challenges also affect service quality; ongoing professional development is crucial to ensure museum personnel can manage collections, design educational programs, and deliver engaging visitor experiences (Hooper-Greenhill, 2000). To address these challenges, museums can leverage digital technologies, expand community collaborations, and explore alternative funding sources, including grants, sponsorships, and partnerships. Virtual tours, interactive online exhibits, and digital educational materials can broaden access and enhance learning experiences. Strengthened collaboration with local schools and businesses can foster deeper community engagement, while diversified funding can ensure sustainability and continued development. By implementing these strategies, the National Museum Calabar can maintain its educational and cultural relevance while maximizing its socio-economic impact.

Therefore, national museums in Calabar, particularly the National Museum Calabar, play a multifaceted role in education, tourism, and local development. Through well-designed facilities, interactive programs, and community engagement, these institutions preserve heritage, enrich learning, and stimulate economic growth. Addressing existing challenges is essential for sustaining their impact and ensuring that museums continue to serve as catalysts for cultural, educational, and socio-economic development in Calabar and beyond.

Methodology

The study was conducted in Calabar, a prominent city in Cross River State, located in the South-South region of Nigeria. The city lies adjacent to the Calabar River and the extensive Kwa River delta, featuring several creeks and inland waterways. Calabar serves as the capital of Cross River State and is administratively divided into Calabar Municipality and Calabar South Local Government Areas. Covering an area of approximately 506 square kilometers (157 sq. mi), the city had a population of 371,022 according to the 2006 census. The indigenous communities of Calabar include the Efiks, the Quas, and the Efuts, who contribute to the region's rich cultural heritage. This research employed a combination of descriptive and inferential survey methods. The descriptive survey approach facilitated the systematic collection, analysis, and interpretation of data obtained from the field. Data for the study were sourced from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires, while secondary data were obtained from academic journals, textbooks, and electronic media. In addition to questionnaires, oral interviews and physical observations were employed to gather qualitative insights. The questionnaire was designed to capture respondents' opinions and perceptions regarding the impact of tourism infrastructure, particularly the National Museum, on the socio-economic development of Calabar Municipality. A total of 200 respondents were selected as the sample for this study. The random sampling technique was applied to ensure that every member of the population had an equal opportunity of being

included, thereby enhancing the reliability and representativeness of the data.

The data collected from the field were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, which allowed for the presentation of findings in tables, charts, and percentages. This analytical approach enabled a clear interpretation of patterns, trends, and relationships within the data, providing insights into the role of tourism infrastructure in fostering socio-economic development in Calabar.

By combining quantitative and qualitative methods, the study ensured a comprehensive assessment of the National Museum's impact on sustainable tourism growth and community development. The methodology facilitated both objective measurement and contextual understanding, making the findings robust and actionable for policymakers, tourism stakeholders, and heritage managers.

Results and Discussion

Facilities and services in National museum in the study area

The facilities and services in the national museum presented in Table 1 shows that exhibition spaces with a value of 20 percent, education programs with a value 18.30 percent and collection storage and conservation facilities with a value of 15 percent were the main facilities and services provided by the national museum in the study area. Furthermore, it was discovered that auditoriums and theaters with value of 12.5 percent, interactive and multimedia installations with a value of 10 percent, cafes and restaurants with a value of 9.80 percent were also the facilities and services provided by the National museum in the study area.

Table 1: Facilities and services in museum in the study area

S/N	Facilities and services	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Exhibition spaces	40	20.80
2.	Education programmes	37	18.50
3.	Collection storage and conservation facilities	30	15.00
4.	Auditoriums and theaters	25	12.5
5.	Cafes and restaurants	19	9.80
6.	Gift shops	15	7.50
7.	Interactive and multimedia installations	20	10.00
8.	Research libraries and archives	12	6.00
9.	Event spaces and rental facilities	2	1.00
	Total	200	100

Source: Authors field survey, 2026

Socio-economic contribution of National museum

The socio-economic contribution of national museum study area presented in Table 4.2 indicate that increase in employment with value of 22.50 percent, increase in income generation with a value of 15 percent and increase in visitors arrivals with a value of 19 percent were the major socio-economic contribution of National museum in the study area. Although, increase in revenue generation with a value of 15 percent and enhancement in local

measurement with a value of 13 percent also constitute the socio-economic contribution of national museum in the study area. However, Table 4.2 further indicate that enhancement in infrastructural development with a value of 7.50 percent and increase in emerging business with a value of 10 percent also constitute the socio-economic contribution of national museum in the study area.

Table 2: Socio-economic contribution of national museum

S/N	Socio economic	Population	Percentage
1.	Increase in revenue	19	9.50
2.	Increase in visitors arrivals	38	19.00
3.	Increase in income generation	30	15.00
4.	Increase in emergency business	20	10.00
5.	Enhancement in local investment	26	13.00
6.	Encourage infrastructure development	15	7.50
7.	Increase employment	46	22.50
8.	Any other (specify)	6	3.00
	Total	200	100

Source: Authors field survey, 2026

Challenges of museum development

The challenges of museum development in the study presented in Table 3 shows that financial constraints with a value of 22.50 percent and space imitation with value of 15 percent were the major challenges of museum development in the study area. Accordingly, it was also observed that accessibility and inclusively with a value of 13 percent, technological integration 10.5 percent digital computation and online engagement with a value of 7.5 percent were also the challenges associated with the museum development in the study area.

Table 3: Challenges of museum development

S/ N	Challenges of museum development	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Financial constraints	46	22.50
2.	Technological integration	21	10.5
3.	Visitors engagement and changing demographics	16	10.5
4.	Cultural sensitivity and presentation	16	8.00
5.	Space limitations	20	10.00
6.	Accessibility and inclusivity	26	13.00
7.	Digital computation and online engagement	15	7.5
8.	Policy and regulatory compliance	20	1000

9.	Any other (specify)	6	3.00
	Total	200	100

Source: Authors field survey, 2026

Hypothesis

Hypothesis 1 posits that there is no significant relationship between the facilities provided in the national museum and the challenges associated with the National museum. Analysis of the results in Table 4 reveals a positive correlation value of ($R=0.737$; $P>0.001$), indicating a lack of statistical significance.

Consequently, it is evident that the null hypothesis is accepted while the alternative hypothesis is rejected based on the results presented in Table 4. However, this implies that there is a significant relationship between the facilities provided in the national museum and the challenges associated with the national museum in study area

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Result showing correlating relationship the facilities provided in the national museum and the challenges associated with the National museum in study area.

Parameter	N	R	p-value
facilities provided in the national museum	9		
		0.737 ^{bs}	0.001
challenges associated with the National museum	9		

Source: Data analysis, 2026

Discussion of Findings

The finding reveals that the availability and quality of facilities at the National Museum Calabar significantly enhance visitor experience and learning outcomes. The presence of well-structured exhibition halls, educational rooms, and interactive spaces supports earlier assertions by Hooper-Greenhill (2000) that museums function not merely as repositories of artifacts but as dynamic learning environments. The findings suggest that the museum's ability to host both permanent and temporary exhibitions allows it to continuously engage diverse visitor groups, thereby sustaining interest and repeat visitation. This aligns with Falk and Dierking's (2013) view that well-designed museum spaces promote meaningful and memorable visitor experiences.

Educational services emerged as a major strength of the National Museum Calabar. Guided tours, workshops, and school-oriented programs were found to deepen visitors' understanding of local history, culture, and environmental issues. This supports Black's (2005) argument that interpretive services and educational programming are essential components of effective museum experiences. The findings further indicate that these educational activities complement formal education, contributing to improved cultural awareness and environmental consciousness among students and community members. Such outcomes reinforce the museum's relevance as an informal educational institution and a tool for long-term human capital development.

In terms of visitor services, the findings confirms that guided tours, information desks, audio-visual aids, and museum shops play a

substantial role in improving visitor satisfaction. Consistent with McLean (1997), the museum shop not only enhances the overall experience but also serves educational and economic purposes by promoting local crafts and cultural products. The incorporation of multimedia displays and emerging digital technologies, although still developing, reflects global museum trends identified by Garrison (2009). These technologies enhance engagement, particularly among younger and tech-oriented visitors, suggesting that further technological integration could significantly improve the museum's competitiveness as a tourist attraction.

The socio-economic contributions of the National Museum Calabar are also strongly evident. The findings demonstrate that the museum functions as a catalyst for local economic activity by attracting domestic and international tourists, thereby stimulating demand for accommodation, food services, transportation, and retail businesses. This supports the work of Packer and Ballantyne (2002), who emphasize the role of museums as key drivers of cultural tourism. Employment opportunities generated directly and indirectly through museum operations and tourism-related services further underscore its importance to the local economy.

Community engagement emerged as another significant finding. The museum's outreach programs, cultural events, and collaborations with local organizations foster a sense of ownership and participation among residents. This aligns with Falk and Dierking's (2013) assertion that museums can strengthen community identity by preserving and celebrating local heritage. By showcasing Calabar's cultural history and traditions, the museum enhances the city's image and attractiveness to tourists and potential investors, corroborating Cameron's (2004) argument on the strategic value of heritage institutions in place branding and development.

Despite these positive contributions, the findings reveal persistent challenges that limit the museum's effectiveness. Inadequate funding remains the most critical constraint, affecting exhibit maintenance, technological upgrades, staff training, and artifact conservation. This finding is consistent with Garrison (2009) and Falk and Dierking (2013), who identify financial limitations as a common barrier to museum sustainability, particularly in developing contexts. Preservation challenges such as poor climate control, security concerns, and irregular maintenance threaten the longevity and integrity of cultural assets, potentially undermining the museum's educational and tourism value.

Staffing and training issues further compound these challenges. The limited opportunities for continuous professional development restrict staff capacity to adopt innovative practices and deliver high-quality visitor services, echoing Hooper-Greenhill's (2000) emphasis on human resource development as a cornerstone of effective museum management.

However, the discussion of findings indicates that while the National Museum Calabar plays a vital role in cultural preservation, education, community engagement, and socio-economic development, its full potential in promoting sustainable tourism is constrained by structural and financial challenges. Addressing these limitations through increased funding, stronger public-private partnerships, enhanced technological adoption, and sustained staff development would significantly improve the museum's contribution to sustainable tourism development in Calabar and Cross River State at large.

Conclusion

The national museum stands out as one of the most fascinating places to visit in any tourism destination. In cities with significant tourism potential, these institutions have successfully attracted numerous visitors, tourists, and other leisure seekers, primarily for recreational purposes. This research has demonstrated that the National museum in Calabar has provided a wide range of facilities and services, including exhibition spaces, educational programs, cafes, and restaurants. Additionally, the museum has incorporated interactive and multimedia installations, as well as research libraries, enhancing the visitor experience. The findings of this study indicate that the National museum has played a pivotal role in creating job opportunities and fostering skill development within the study area. Furthermore, the research highlighted various socio-economic impacts brought about by the presence of the museum, such as increased local economic activity and community engagement.

However, the study also uncovered several challenges that impede the optimal functioning of the National museum. These challenges include financial constraints, difficulties in integrating new technologies, and space limitations. Addressing these issues is essential for the museum to continue contributing effectively to sustainable tourism development in Calabar. Therefore, while the National museum has made significant strides in enhancing the socio-economic landscape of Calabar and serving as a major tourist attraction, overcoming the identified challenges will be crucial for its sustained success and growth.

Recommendations

The national museum is one of the areas where artifacts and indigenous customs are kept. In Calabar which is the capital of Cross River State, the present of the National museum has contributed to socio-economic development in the study area. However, the nation museum has certain challenges which need authorities. Therefore, the following recommendations are hereby put forward.

1. The government should provide adequate finances to help sustain the national museum in the study area
2. The government should integrate technology in the management of national museum
3. They should be effective policy to regulate compliance with respects to the National museum

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