

OLUMO ROCK TOURIST COMPLEX: MANAGEMENT LESSONS FOR PLATEAU STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Tourism plays a crucial role in economic diversification, cultural promotion, and infrastructural development, contributing significantly to national and regional economies. Effective tourism management can enhance visitor experiences, generate employment, and foster cultural preservation. Olumo Rock Tourist Complex in Ogun State, Nigeria, serves as a model for sustainable tourism development, demonstrating how strategic investments and policies can drive growth in the sector. This study examines the management strategies employed at Olumo Rock, focusing on infrastructural development, community engagement, marketing initiatives, and security measures, and explores how Plateau State can adopt these lessons to revitalize its tourism industry. Despite its vast tourism potential, Plateau State faces several challenges, including poor infrastructure, limited community involvement, inadequate marketing, and security concerns, all of which hinder tourism growth. By adopting best practices from Olumo Rock, Plateau State can enhance its tourism sector, attract more visitors, and boost economic activities. The study highlights the importance of government and private sector collaboration in promoting tourism, ensuring long-term sustainability. Recommendations emphasize a holistic approach to tourism management, including policy reforms, improved security frameworks, and digital marketing strategies to increase tourist arrivals and maximize economic and social benefits for local communities.

Keywords: *Olumo Rock, Tourism Management, Plateau State, Sustainable Tourism, Nigeria*

1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important driver of economic growth and cultural interchange, particularly in areas with major historical and environmental attractions. It helps to create jobs, earn foreign exchange, and develop infrastructure, all while promoting cultural understanding (UNWTO, 2022). Tourism gives a huge potential for countries like Nigeria, which have diverse landscapes, vibrant cultures, and rich histories, to diversify their economies and support sustainable development (Ajala, 2021). Nigeria has various notable tourism destinations, each with its own distinct attractiveness. Olumo Rock in Ogun State, for example, is a historical and cultural site that draws both domestic and foreign visitors (Ogunleye, 2020). Plateau State, often known as the “Home of Peace and Tourism” has several natural attractions, including the Shere Hills, Kurra Falls, and Riyom Rock formations, as well as cultural sites like the Jos Museum (Abubakar et al., 2019). Despite its potential, Plateau State’s tourism industry confronts numerous obstacles, notably in terms of destination management and sustainability (Eze, 2018).

Effective tourism management is critical for ensuring the longevity and appeal of tourist attractions. Olumo Rock Tourist Complex is a successful model of tourist development in Nigeria, integrating smart infrastructure investments, community involvement, good marketing, and strong security measures (Ogunleye, 2020). These elements have not only increased the site's appeal, but have also considerably benefited the local economy by offering

job possibilities and encouraging cultural preservation (UNWTO, 2022). Plateau State, on the other hand, has struggled to fully capitalize on its tourism opportunities. Inadequate infrastructure, limited community participation, a lack of effective marketing techniques, and security concerns has hampered the development of the tourism industry (Abubakar et al., 2019). These problems highlight the need for deliberate interventions and lessons from successful models such as the Olumo Rock Tourist Complex.

This study assesses the success drivers of the Olumo Rock Tourist Complex and examines how Plateau State might implement similar strategies to improve tourism management. This study intends to provide actionable recommendations for Plateau State by assessing important management practices at Olumo Rock. The purpose is to increase Plateau State's tourism attractiveness, promote sustainable development, and maximize the economic and social benefits of its diverse cultural and natural assets. The study's conclusions are especially pertinent in light of Nigeria's broader economic diversification drive. With declining oil revenues, there is a growing need to explore alternate sources of income, and tourism appears to be a potential option (Ajala, 2021). Furthermore, tourism has the ability to strengthen national unity by highlighting Nigeria's cultural richness and encouraging intercultural understanding (Eze, 2018). Plateau State can address its issues and position itself as Nigeria's leading tourist destination by learning from the successes of the Olumo Rock Tourist Complex. This study provides a road map for sustainable tourism development in Plateau State, ensuring long-term economic growth and cultural preservation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Olumo Rock Tourist Complex: An Overview

Olumo Rock is one of Nigeria's most prominent tourist attractions, situated in Abeokuta, Ogun State. The place holds historical, cultural, and spiritual significance for the Egba people. Olumo Rock has evolved into a diverse tourist attraction that includes historical landmarks, recreational facilities, and cultural heritage, making it an important part of Nigeria's tourism economy. Since the nineteenth century, when intertribal conflict raged, the Egba people sought safety and protection at Olumo Rock. The rock served as a bastion where people sought safety and plotted their survival (Adetayo, 2020) (Figure 1). Olumo Rock has grown into a diverse tourist destination that includes historical landmarks, recreational amenities, and cultural heritage, making it an important part of Nigeria's tourism economy. Exploring the rock's historic carvings, shrines, and tunnels provides visitors with opportunities to learn about traditional Yoruba beliefs and practices. Olumo's oral traditions highlight its status as a sacred site, with annual ceremonies honouring Yoruba deities and ancestors (Adebayo and Aluko, 2019).

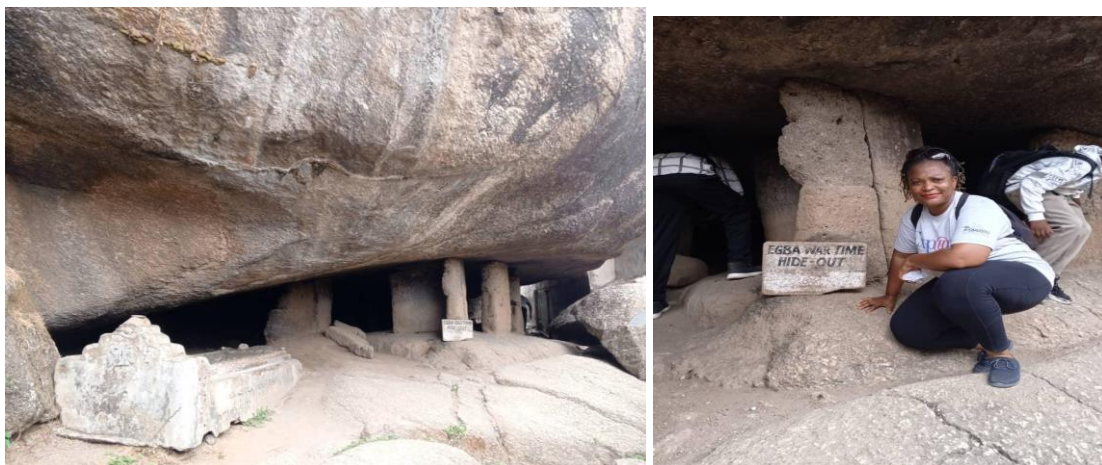


Figure 1: Olumo Rock Cave: Fortress for the Egba people

The Nigerian government as well as private organizations has collaborated to develop Olumo Rock into a tourism destination. Staircases, elevators, cafés, museums, and art galleries have all been designed to improve the visitor experience (Ogunbayo et al., 2021). These infrastructure enhancements have improved accessibility and modernized the attraction, catering to both domestic and international visitors.

Olumo Rock contributes greatly to the Ogun State economy through the generation of funds and creating job opportunities for local artists, tour guides, and vendors. The government and private organizations have worked together to create and preserve the property, assuring its attraction to both domestic and foreign visitors (Afolabi and Ayodele, 2021). These measures have considerably boosted the tourism industry in Ogun State. The flood of visitors boosts the expansion of ancillary businesses including hotels, transportation services, and souvenir shops. Studies have also highlighted Olumo Rock's importance in fostering cultural tourism and maintaining Yoruba heritage, which adds value to Nigeria's tourism industry (Eze, 2022).

Despite its achievements, Olumo Rock Complex confronts issues such as poor upkeep, inconsistent funding, and environmental damage. Furthermore, the absence of active marketing hinders its ability to attract international tourists (Ogunbayo et al., 2021). Addressing these challenges through sustainable tourism practices, marketing methods, and community engagement may increase the site's appeal and economic impact.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a qualitative research approach to investigate management practices at Olumo Rock Tourist Complex and draw conclusions applicable to Plateau State. Secondary data sources were used to collect data for the study, which included relevant publications such as textbooks, published material in bulletins, manual reports, journals, thesis, dissertations, technical reports, seminar and conference papers, and trustworthy online publications. In addition, the researchers obtained consent and approval from the complex's management. Direct observations were then conducted at Olumo Rock on March 6, 2025, to evaluate critical areas such as infrastructure development, visitor amenities, security measures, and community involvement. This strategy allowed for a firsthand assessment of how the facility is handled and maintained, as well as the overall visitor experience. On March 8, 2025, a semi-structured interview was conducted with eight key informants and two tour guides which lasted 40 to 50 minutes to acquire insights on management strategies, operational issues, and best practices. The interview included topics such as site upkeep, visitor engagement, marketing strategies, and security standards. This technique allowed for more in-depth investigation of pertinent issues while also allowing key informants and tour guides to offer their experiences and viewpoints. Data from both methodologies were evaluated thematically to identify best practices for tourism management in Plateau State. The data were then utilized to develop recommendations for increasing tourism sustainability and economic viability in the region.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Management Strategies at Olumo Rock

Management strategies used to operate any tourism business vary (Irimdu and Donaldson, 2023). Olumo Rock Tourist Complex's management practices serve as a model for effective tourism development in Nigeria. These methods cover a wide range of practices aimed at improving tourist experiences, increasing economic returns, and assuring sustainability. Olumo Rock has developed itself as a premier tourist destination by focusing on infrastructure development, community participation, marketing innovation, and security measures. This section delves deeply into these strategies, while offering suggestions for replication in comparable circumstances.

4.1.1 Infrastructure Development

Infrastructure development is a critical component for effective tourism management, playing an important role in improving visitor experiences and ensuring the viability of tourist destinations (Mwesiumo et al., 2022). According to interviews with respondents, strategic infrastructure investments have been critical in developing the Olumo Rock Tourist Complex into Nigeria's number one tourist attraction. The researchers observed modern amenities, such as paved roads, stairways, and elevators (Figure 2). Ogunleye (2020) argues that these amenities have increased accessibility for tourists, especially those with reduced mobility. In addition, these enhancements have not only improved tourist safety and comfort, but have also expanded the site's capacity to handle more visitors (Ogunleye, 2020).



Figure 2: Selected Facilities at Olumo Rock Complex
Photo Credit: Researchers Field work

Another crucial part of Olumo Rock infrastructure development, according to respondents, is the availability of visitor amenities such as restrooms, parking lots, souvenir stores, and restaurants. These amenities serve travelers' various needs, ensuring convenience and encouraging longer stays (Ajala, 2021). Furthermore, the implementation of a well-maintained security system, which includes surveillance cameras and on-site individuals, has greatly increased guest confidence in their safety (UNWTO, 2022). Furthermore, the incorporation of cultural aspects into the infrastructure, such as the preservation of historical artefacts and the creation of a museum within the complex, has increased the site's cultural attractiveness. This approach not only encourages cultural preservation but also provides tourists with educational opportunities (Eze, 2018).

Adebayo and Iweka (2014) argue that the success of Olumo Rock's infrastructure development demonstrates the value of government-private sector collaboration. Significant expenditures in facility maintenance and upgrades have been made through public-private partnerships, assuring the site's competitiveness in Nigeria's tourism industry (Abubakar et al., 2019). The infrastructure construction at Olumo Rock exemplifies how strategic planning and investment may improve the functionality, appeal, and sustainability of tourist attractions (Eja et al., 2018). These lessons provide useful insights for similar places in Nigeria, notably Plateau State that could benefit from implementing such best practices.

4.1.2 Community Involvement

Community involvement is a crucial aspect of sustainable tourism development, and Olumo Rock exemplifies how local people may actively participate in and profit from tourism projects. Respondents were unified in their assessment of Olumo Rock Complex management's involvement in the community. Local residents' involvement in the management and operation of the Olumo Rock Tourist Complex has not only increased the

site's authenticity, but has also developed a sense of community ownership and pride (Ogunleye, 2020). This collaboration ensures that the site's unique value is conserved while also benefiting the local economy.

Employing local tour guides and craftspeople is an important part of community involvement at Olumo Rock (Adeyemi, 2019). These individuals give guided tours, discuss historical stories, and sell locally manufactured products and souvenirs, all of which add value to the visitor experience while also earning revenue for the community (Ajala, 2021). Furthermore, traditional cultural events and festivals produced by the community attract tourists and commemorate the region's rich legacy, reinforcing the bond between the place and its inhabitants (Eze, 2018). Garrod and Fyall (2017) posit that community engagement includes decision-making processes. Local stakeholders are frequently consulted on site development and management issues, ensuring that their needs and viewpoints are met (Abubakar et al., 2019). This inclusive approach has served to reduce friction and develop a positive relationship between the community and the site administrators. Furthermore, respondents believe that Olumo Rock's success as a tourist destination is due in part to the active participation of the community at large. By incorporating community engagement into tourism management, Olumo Rock serves as a model for promoting sustainable tourism that benefits both visitors and inhabitants.

4.1.3 Marketing and Promotion

Effective marketing and promotion are critical for increasing the visibility and appeal of tourism attractions (Pike and Page, 2014). At Olumo Rock Tourist Complex, tailored marketing methods have been critical in attracting a varied range of local and international visitors. The utilization of digital platforms, such as social media and government websites, has been very helpful in promoting the site's distinctive qualities and cultural heritage to a global audience (Ogunleye, 2020). Potential tourists can use these channels to learn about the site's history, attractions, and facilities, making journey planning easier and more appealing. In addition, collaborations with travel agents and tour operators have increased the site's promotional efforts. These collaborations frequently involve crafted tour packages featuring Olumo Rock as a main location, making it a popular choice for both group and solo excursions (Ajala, 2021). Furthermore, the development of annual cultural festivals and activities at the location acts as an effective promotional tool. These events not only promote local culture, but also generate media attention, increasing the site's visibility (Eze, 2018).

According to a respondent, storytelling is another important part of Olumo Rock's marketing strategy. By using the site's historical and cultural tales, marketers have successfully built a compelling brand identity that connects with travelers seeking meaningful and informative travel experiences (UNWTO, 2022). Furthermore, the marketing and promotion techniques used at Olumo Rock highlight the necessity of employing digital resources, strategic partnerships, and cultural events to attract and keep customers. These techniques provide useful lessons for other tourism sites in Nigeria, especially Plateau State, looking to strengthen their marketing efforts (Umeh and Dike, 2022).

4.1.4 Security and Safety Measures

Visitor safety is a primary focus at Olumo Rock. Security and safety measures are critical to the success of any tourism location because they influence visitor confidence and satisfaction (Bello and Nwankwo, 2021). The Olumo Rock Tourist Complex's management plan has relied heavily on the adoption of extensive safety standards and security systems. These measures include the deployment of qualified security professionals who patrol the site on a regular basis to protect the safety of visitors and employees (Ogunleye, 2020). The presence of visible security deters criminal activity and provides a safe environment for tourists.

As observed by the researchers, another crucial component is the installation of security cameras at strategic spots across the facility. These cameras provide 24-hour monitoring and allow for rapid response in the event of an emergency or suspicious activity (Ajala, 2021). Furthermore, the administration has developed clear signage and standards to ensure visitor safety, especially in places with steep climbs or rocky terrains. These procedures reduce the likelihood of accidents and improve the overall visitor experience (Eze 2018).

Respondents also emphasized emergency readiness as an important part of Olumo Rock's safety measures. The location has first aid facilities, and staff members have received basic first aid and emergency response training. This proactive strategy guarantees that any medical or safety concerns are handled swiftly (UNWTO, 2022). Furthermore, Olumo Rock's strong security and safety procedures safeguard tourists while also enhancing the site's reputation as a dependable and tourist-friendly location. These methods set the standard for other Nigerian tourism destinations, particularly those in Plateau State, to follow in order to improve visitor happiness and safety.

4.2 Management Lessons for Plateau State

Plateau State is home to a variety of natural and cultural attractions, including the Shere Hills, Kurra Falls, the Jos Wildlife Park, and the Jos Museum, all of which have enormous tourism potential. Despite these strengths, the state's tourism industry remains underdeveloped due to obstacles such as inadequate infrastructure, low community involvement, ineffective marketing techniques, and ongoing security concerns. These restrictions limit the state's capacity to attract visitors and fully realize the economic and cultural benefits of tourism. Plateau State can effectively solve these difficulties and unlock its tourist potential by implementing key lessons from Olumo Rock's management approach.

4.2.1 Investment in Infrastructure

Investment in infrastructure is a critical component of successful tourism development, as seen by the efficient operation of the Olumo Rock Tourist Complex. The infrastructure of Olumo Rock, which includes paved access roads, parking facilities, contemporary visitor centres, and well-maintained restrooms, has greatly improved the site's accessibility and visiting experience (Ogunleye, 2020). This infrastructure development has also permitted the incorporation of other services such as restaurants, souvenir shops, and cultural exhibition spaces, transforming the site into a holistic tourism hub. On the other hand, Plateau State, which is rich in natural and cultural attractions, continues to face significant challenges in realizing its tourism potential due to a lack of suitable infrastructure. Tourist destinations in the state, including Shere Hills and Kurra Falls, frequently suffer from bad access roads, inadequate lodging facilities, and insufficient visitor amenities (Eja et al., 2015). Taking lessons from Olumo Rock, targeted infrastructure investments could increase accessibility and attract more visitors. Improved road networks and transportation infrastructure, for example, would allow tourists to visit different locations around the state (Abubakar et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the establishment of new visitor centres and recreational amenities at key tourism destinations in Plateau State could improve the overall visitor experience. Such investments would increase tourist pleasure while also creating opportunities for local businesses and job growth (Ajala, 2021). Public-private partnerships (PPPs) could play an important role in financing major infrastructure projects, as demonstrated by the successful PPP models deployed at Olumo Rock. Moreover, Plateau State can considerably boost its tourism industry by emphasizing infrastructural investment. By replicating Olumo Rock's strategic approach, the state may establish a more appealing and sustainable tourism business, contributing to economic growth and cultural preservation.

4.2.2 Community Participation

Community involvement is essential for sustainable tourist development because it develops local ownership, preserves cultural heritage, and promotes economic inclusion (Sebele, 2010). The Olumo Rock Tourist Complex's success has been largely due to community involvement (Adeleke et al., 2018). Local craftsmen and vendors operate on the premises, selling crafts, souvenirs, and local delicacies that not only enhance the visiting experience but also provide a source of money for the community (Ogunleye, 2020). Furthermore, community members work as tour guides, cultural performers, and maintenance workers, instilling pride and care in the place (Ajala, 2021). Plateau State on the other hand, with its rich natural and cultural resources, has the ability to emulate these practices. However, a lack of community involvement has hampered the development of the tourism sector (Okech et al., 2012). For example, local communities near Shere Hills and Riyom Rock formations frequently lack opportunities to actively participate in tourism activities, resulting in an underutilization of their cultural and economic potential (Abubakar et al., 2019). Plateau State should use lessons from Olumo Rock to adopt policies that involve local communities in the management and operation of tourist sites.

Researchers (Manyara and Jones, 2007; Mitchell and Ashley, 2010; Bello, and Lambulira, 2023; Makandwa et al., 2023) argue that one strategy is to form cooperatives that allow community members to provide tourism-related activities such as guided tours, cultural displays, and handicraft production. Furthermore, involving communities in decision-making processes may develop a sense of ownership and guarantee that tourist projects reflect their needs and values (UNWTO, 2022). Such initiatives not only improve the sustainability of tourism operations, but they also reduce conflicts and resistance from host communities. Plateau State may learn from Olumo Rock's community participation concept in order to maximize the tourism industry's potential. By actively incorporating local communities, the state can assure equitable sharing of tourism advantages, protect its unique cultural legacy, and promote long-term growth.

4.2.3 Aggressive Marketing Strategies

Aggressive marketing efforts have helped Olumo Rock become a top tourist destination in Nigeria. The utilization of various promotional outlets, such as social media, print media, and partnerships with tour operators, has considerably increased the site's visibility to both local and foreign tourists (Ogunleye, 2020). Targeted advertisements emphasizing Olumo Rock's historical relevance and cultural richness have successfully attracted niche customers, including cultural aficionados and educational groups (Ajala, 2021). In contrast, Plateau State's tourism industry has struggled to get equivalent awareness (Aref and Gill, 2023). Despite its numerous attractions, including Shere Hills, Kurra Falls, and the Jos Wildlife Park, the state lacks coordinated and consistent marketing activities. Lessons from Olumo Rock highlight the necessity of developing a strong brand identity and utilizing digital media to reach a larger audience. Plateau State can use aggressive marketing methods such as creating a unified tourism brand and engaging in digital storytelling to emphasize the unique experiences that its attractions provide (Eze, 2018).

Furthermore, collaborations with travel agencies, influencers, and content providers can increase the state's tourist visibility. Promotional activities aimed at certain groups, such as adventure seekers or eco-tourists, can help the Plateau State establish itself as a competitive destination (UNWTO, 2022). Hosting annual festivals and events can also act as a stimulus for increasing tourist numbers, as demonstrated at Olumo Rock. Plateau State can alter its tourism scene by implementing the aggressive marketing methods used at Olumo Rock. A focus on inventive and targeted advertising will not only attract more visitors, but will also help the state's tourism industry grow sustainably.

4.2.4 Security Enhancement

Security and safety are key components of effective tourism management because they directly affect travelers' trust and willingness to visit destinations (Pizam, and Mansfeld, 1996; Cavlek, 2002; Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009; Iirmdu and Donaldson, 2024). Robust security measures have been implemented at the Olumo Rock Tourist Complex to safeguard the safety of tourists and employees. These steps include deploying skilled security personnel, installing surveillance systems, and forming a well-coordinated emergency response team (Ogunleye, 2020). Such proactive measures have not only improved the overall visitor experience, but have also boosted the site's reputation as a safe and family-friendly destination (Ajala, 2021). Plateau State's tourism potential, on the other hand, has been hampered by repeated security issues, such as communal clashes and criminal activity near tourist destinations. These difficulties dissuade visitors and damage the state's reputation as a safe destination (Eze, 2018). Plateau State may learn from Olumo Rock management and prioritize security enhancements at its tourist destinations to generate a sense of safety among potential tourists. The formation of site-specific security units, along with sophisticated surveillance equipment like CCTV cameras and alarm systems, is one of the key measures. Collaborations with local law enforcement agencies and vigilante organizations can help to boost security operations (Abubakar et al., 2019). Additionally, doing regular risk assessments and providing safety training to employees can assist to limit potential dangers.

Public awareness campaigns concentrating on security enhancements can also be effective in regaining trust and enticing visitors (Rittichainuwat and Chakraborty, 2009). Plateau State can improve visitor safety by implementing these measures, increasing visitation and enhancing the local economy. Improving security is critical to long-term tourism development. Plateau State may apply Olumo Rock's complete security architecture to handle its difficulties and present itself as a safe and appealing destination.

5. CONCLUSION

The Olumo Rock Tourist Complex demonstrates how effective management may turn a local attraction into a world-renowned destination. Its success demonstrates the necessity of including community participation, infrastructural investment, innovative marketing, and strong security measures into tourism growth. Plateau State, with its rich cultural and natural resources, has the ability to reproduce and modify these techniques to its specific situation. The state may increase its tourism appeal by building strong collaborations between the public and private sectors, ensuring local community participation in decision-making processes, and harnessing digital platforms for marketing.

Furthermore, promoting sustainable practices will ensure that tourism development is compatible with environmental preservation and cultural heritage conservation. Tailored methods that meet Plateau State's unique difficulties, such as security issues and poor infrastructure, are critical for long-term success. The lessons learned at Olumo Rock give a comprehensive foundation for Plateau State to reestablish itself as a top tourist destination in Nigeria. Plateau State should use deliberate efforts and an emphasis on sustainability to transform its tourist sector into a driver for economic growth, cultural preservation, and social inclusion, benefiting both locals and visitors while securing its position in the competitive tourism environment.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

To fully realize the potential of its tourism industry, Plateau State should promote creative ways that are consistent with worldwide best practices. To achieve inclusivity and efficacy, the state government must first strengthen the Plateau State Tourism Corporation through engagement with members from the local community, commercial sector, and academic institutions. Second, the Plateau State should actively seek international cooperation with existing tourist groups to exchange information and gain access to financial opportunities. This can be accomplished by joining global tourist networks, attending international trade fairs, and presenting conferences highlighting the state's assets using a tourism compendium. Third, using digital technologies to build an engaging online presence is essential. Creating user-friendly websites and mobile applications that include virtual tours, booking systems, and multilingual support will increase worldwide reach and accessibility. Furthermore, the state should promote eco-tourism by encouraging behaviours that protect its natural landscapes and wildlife. This entails performing environmental impact assessments and executing waste management plans at all tourist attractions. Finally, continued investment in education and training for tourism professionals is critical. Plateau State can increase service delivery and tourist satisfaction by developing a trained staff, which will encourage repeat visits and long-term growth in the tourism sector.

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