

The Synergy between Ecosystem and Cultural Tourism in IBINI Community

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ABSTRACT

Nature is so beautifully interrelated connected and intertwined that any attempt to separate them will be an effort in futility. This interrelationship is seen in the way cultural activities are linked to different ecosystems in the study area. There are various landmarks and monuments that are tourism assets and sites.

Religious sites and rights are located and performed in the forest ecosystem; some deities are located in the terrestrial ecosystem (water bodies). traditional festivals are linked to different seasons and times of the year depending on where such traditional activity is to take place whether on land or in the water body such as fixing expedition.

Some names of dancers/festivals and their significance and period of celebration are determined by the season of the year.

Arts and crafts is also connected two different times and season of the year in addition to being gender biased. For instance, the craft that is male-dominated is done during the raining season coma while that of the female is undertaken during the

Conclusion: The what is therefore came to the conclusion that depending on the location and culture of the people, it is absolutely difficult to separate cultural tourism from the eco system nay ecological tourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

A simple explanation of ecosystem, culture and tourism will enhance the understanding of this topic.

Ecosystem simply put is the functional unit which interacts with its biotic and abiotic environment to maintain flow of energy for sustaining life.

Maiti and Maiti (2017). The limit or boundary of an ecosystem is not well defined as it occurs in biological community. It is said to be a bigger functional unit which included several biological communities.

Culture on the other hand has been defined as a total way of life of a people (Bolter 2003: 10 (www.cssforum.com.uk).

II. LITERATURE/DISCUSSION

The following physical sites of ecosystems will help to explain further the synergy between ecosystem and cultural tourism.

The synergy in this circumstance will depend on how the people regard them in relation to tourism and what ecological tourism itself potends.

FOREST: Amongst all the features of ecotourism, forest is the most valued in the sense that if undisturbed contains more than one single feature of nature tourism attractions. Forest may contain the trees and grasses (flora) that constitutes the forest as well as birds, animals, reptiles etc. which is the fauna. It is as a result of this that forest are regarded as unique tourism sites. In some cases, they are protected as wildlife conservation programme.

In Biase Local Government Area, it was discovered that there are still "patches" of primeval forest as depicted by those identified at Biakpan, Akparavum, Akpet number 1 and Akpet Central; Etono Central, Abanwan (Black forest for religious purpose), Ibini (with particularly large expanse of elephant grasses surrounded by forest trees) Ikun, Ikot Ana, Ikot Ewo (Umon), Ehom, Etono II and Okurike to mention but these few. A conservation strategy in these forest will enhance its rapid development to full-grown forest region thereby presenting it not only as eco-tourism attractions but also for educational purposes.

It must be stated here that what remains of most forest in Biase Local Government Area have religious inclination. This is part of the synergy between ecosystem and cultural tourism. The religions and superstitious attachments to these forests by the people of Biase, where the forest exist cannot be over emphasized. Most of these

forests are considered sacrosanct. The impression held by the indigenes about the forest could be taken as a traditional way of conserving these forests (Ukam 1999). It was discovered that some of this forest be regarded as where deities resides and only a few initiates (if any is still alive) of such cult, goes there.

Others refer to them as evil forest where the wicked are buried (Ukam, 1987; Ukam, 2018; Ukam, 2021).

This researcher believes that if detailed research into the flora and fauna of these forest is carried out, it will be discovered that some of them could still be harbouring some unique animals and

reptiles as well as special species of plants. This aspect is however not within the scope of this research. However, this postulates a kind of synergy between the culture and ecosystem in making up the tourism industry.

It is important to state that apart from where Biase Local Government Area shares common boundaries with Akamkpa Local Government Area, the forest in Biase, generally has been turned to secondary forest or oil palm bush as a result of agricultural activities and buildings (expansion of settlements due to increase in population).

TABLE 1 SOME SELECTED ECO-TOURISM ASSETS (SITES) IN BIASE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA/DIMENSIONS

S/N	NAM E OF FEA TUR E	LOCA TION(VILL AGE/ WAR D/CLA N)	H E I G H T	DE PT H	LENG TH	W ID T H	SURFAC E AREA	PHYSI CAL CARR YING CAPA CITY	SOURCE OF INFOR- MATION	POSSIB LE TOURI SM ACTIVI TIES
A	STRE AMS/ CRE EKS									
i	Ogba kIbini Strea m/cre ek	Ibini Village , Erei South Clan								
ii	Villag e to the Cross River				4km				Researcher 's survey	Picnic
iii	Otiep strea m/cre ek from Ugbe m to Ukwu opEye re	Ugbem (Umon clan), Ukwuo peyere, Akpet			6.85 km					Picnic
BI	LAK ES									
ii	Ibini Lakes (Ake- bob and others	Ibini village Erei clan					20ha	240 person per m.	You and your governmen t Ministry of Informatio	Lake Resort centre/Fi shing festivals

									n Calabar	
iii	Ebien Group of Lakes	Abanwan village, Erei Clan		8.3 m			60ha	720 p/m		-do-
iv	Bob Erei (Evein) lake	Obum village, Erei North Clan					50ha	600 person		-do-
v	Egwebe Lake	Afono village, Erei South Clan		8.6			81.25ha	955 person		-do-
Vi	Ekwo Lake	Abanwan, Erei South Clan		-			30.0ha	360 person		-do-
Vii	Bob Ikun (Group Lakes)	Ikun village, Ubagara Clan, Biakpan, Ubagara Clan		-			-	-		-do-
viii	Uruk Lake	Biakpan, Ugbara Clan		-			-	-		-do-
C	ISLANDS									-do-
I	Umon Island	Umon Village, Umon Clan					971ha	116522 m	Researcher /Biase LGA provisions edition map, by Min. of Survey, Calabar	Multiple uses
ii	Agwugune Island	Agwugune village, Eguplpa					56.20ha	674		
D	BEACHES									
I	Ibini	Ibini					57.894ha	695	Afikpo 313	Multiple

	Beach /Abrijang	(Erei Clan) Abrijang (Abayong)						p/m	SE/2C 3 and Researcher's survey	uses
li	Agwagune /Abanwan Beach	Agwagune (Egupipah), Abanwan (Erei)					85.156ha	1022 P/m		
iii	Ikun, Etono and Ugbe m	Ikun/Etono (Ubagare); Umon (Union Clan)							-do-	
E	HILLS (ELEVATIONS)									
I	Akpet, Ibiae and Environment	Akpet, Ibiae and Environment (Egupipa)	500m						-do-	Pony-trekking
li	Okurike high land	Okurike village (Egupipa)	300m						-do-	-do-
iii	Others: Egbor hills	Egbor village, Erei North	47m						-do-	Rock climbing
Iv	Urugbam, Umulo and Ipene	All in Erei Clan	42m						-do-	-do-
V	Ibini Hills	Ibini village, Erei South	39.9m						-do-	-do-
Vi	Afuno and Edu	Erei South Clan	34.6m						-do-	-do-

	Elevations		m							
Vii	Obum and Etana Elevations	Erei North Clan	49m						-do-	-do-
Viii	Biakpan Hills	Ugbagara Clan	40.6m						-do-	-do-
F	CLIFFS									
I	Obum and Etana Cliff faces	Obum and Etana villages (Erei North Clan)		49m					Researcher's field survey	Rock climbing
G	SPRINGS									
I	Idobine spring at Ijom	Ijom-Abaying Clan							-do-	Unique Natural site for sight siping
H	CAVES									
I	Agwugune Cave	Agwugune, Eguplah Clan								
II	IrepOgwua Cave	Adim-Egup Clan							-do-	-do-
I	FOREST									
I	All villages in Biase especially areas sharing common boundaries with								-do-	If conserve d and protected will be for wild life protection

	Akam kpa LGA e.g Akpet and Envir on, thick forest.								
II	Others have turn to secondary forest and palm bush because of man's activities								
J	SECTIONS OF THE CROSS RIVER AT BIASE LGA								
I	Length from Ibini Beach to Union Beach	Ibini in Erei Clan to Umon in Umon Clan		69.9 km				Map of Biase and Researcher's calculation	Multiple uses
II	Average width of the Cross River at Biase	Taken at different sections		1.3 KM				-do-	-do-
K	DISTANCE BETWEEN								

	N SOM E MAJ OR BEA CHE S IN BIAS E								
I	From Ibini Beach to Abanwan Beach	All in Erei South		6.9km					
II	From Abanwan Beach to Ikun Beach	Abayong Clan		3.0 KM				-do-	
III	Abrija Beach to Abaribara	Abayong Clan			2.13KM			Map of Biase and Researcher's calculations	Picnic
IV	Abaribara Beach to Agwugune Beach	Abayong and EgupIpa			6.9km	-	-	-	''''
V	Okurike Beach to Ugbe m Beach	In EgupIpa and Umon Clans			4.4KM	-	-	-	
VI	Ugbe m Beach to Ikot Okpor a	Umon North Clan			25km	-		-	''''
VII	Agwugune Beach to Okuri	EgupIpa			2.64km	-	-	-	''''

	ke Beach									
VII I	Ikun Beach to Etono Beach	Ugbagara Clan			5.8km			-	''''	''''

CULTURAL LAND MARKS/MONUMENTS AS TOURISM ASSETS

Another area of synergy between ecosystem and culture in making up the tourism industry is in cultural landmarks/monuments.

It has been observed that historic and cultural sites are essential tourism sites. Such things amongst other things include local, Regional or National sites. Historic buildings and artifacts, archeological sites, Spas, health resort, shrines and pilgrimage sites (Boniface and Cooper, 1994). In line with the observation of Boniface and Cooper, the following similar tourism assets may be discussed here.

- A) **CUSTOMARY COURTS:**the landmarks in the study area includes old district court at Ikun in Ubagara clan. This historic court signifies the early presence of government in the area in the dispensation of justice. Others are found at Ikot Okpora and Ugbem in Umon clan.
- B) **MONUMENTS:** A heap of deposits of coweries were equally found at Agwuagwune. Cowery, it would be recalled was a medium of exchange for goods and services after the era of trade-by-barter. Tourist, after visiting the beach and cave at Agwuagwune, will perhaps find it interesting to see the coweries heaps which was once used as a medium of exchange. This also signifies the early contact of the Europeans in Biase through Agwuagwune port, though underdeveloped.
- C) **RELIGIOUS SITES:** There are various forest in the study area that have to do with the tradition or culture of the people and yet can be used as a tourism asset during or after the performance of the traditional rights of the people. Also, the traditional rights of the people amongst them are

I) ABU FOREST/LAKES

There are various religious sites in Biase Local Government Area (the study area) due to the belief system of the people that is based on African traditional religion. Various shrines abound both on

land and in water bodies. Such ecological sites are regarded as sacred and holy and as such, strangers, and in some cases non-initiates are not allowed to step in there. Rituals are only performed by the priest of such shrines. This implies that human interference with such ecosystem is quite at tolerable level. Examples of such areas include Abu forest in most villages in Biase, the "Black Forest" at Abanwan, the Uruk lake at Biakpan, some lakes at Ibini, the evil forest wherever it existed in Biase Local Government Area.

Other lakes with such superstitious attributes are those of Egwebe in Afono and Eviem in Obum/Etana and Ugbene bob at Ibini village. These lakes are associated with natural powers to cure, heal, protect, supply abundance of fish and food and the inflicting or possession of punitive and revengeful powers.

II) OLUMBA OLUMBA OBU (OOO)

OlumbaOlumbaObu is a religious set with headquarters at Biakpan. The leader, from whom the religion derives its name is a man from Biakpan, a village in Biase Local Government Area. The little town of Biakpan has become a pilgrimage home for adherents of religion. Herein lies another connection between an ecological niche and cultural tourism, considering the fact that religion is part of a people's culture and the town a type of ecosystem. The pilgrimage to this town is an aspect of tourism known as religious tourism. It was also said that, just like some practices of the Old Testament scriptures (religion) it is believed that a stream in this town (Biakpan) has the power to cure diseases and remove misfortunes, bringing blessings to the users. This water has been attracting even foreigners who proffer this faith to visit Biakpan. This on its own is a tourism practice but from the religious point of view.

DEITIES IN BIASE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

There is virtually village in Biase that does not have one small juju or the other.

Amongst the prominent ones are Abu, Ugbene-bob, Ogbak, Egwebe, Obin, Aburama,

Egup, Mfam, Ugbesu, Evien and Igwo to mention these few.

In the case of traditional religions, some deities are said to live in water (an ecosystem). Some of these waters are regarded as being too holy. In view of this, there are some specific containers that are used for fetching water from them. In some cases, some certain products/items are not allowed to enter into them to avoid contamination. As a result of this belief, only native calabash (gourds) are used in fetching water from them. Another authorized container that can be used to fetch water from them are the clay water pots.

Certain materials and products such as oil palm, cassava, faeces, metal rings (gold, silver or bronze), earrings, necklace and neck chains, ankle chains and many others that are regarded as dirty and foreign to the locality are not allowed into

them. This tourism is a way of keeping the environment clean and attractive.

It is also prohibited to kill crocodiles and other reptiles in them. The reptiles from here are equally not eating based on totemic practices. This is to avoid offending the goddess and to eschew its violent wrath on the defaulter.

Members of this lineage (Obon Egwebe) are also prohibited to eat reptiles. This could be regarded as traditional conservation practices. Examples of lakes where these deities reside include Egwebe (the crocodiles lake at Afono, Ogbak stream at Ibini, Ugbene-bob at Ibini, Ipa lakes wherever they existed, Ebien at Abanwan and Eviem at Obum.

Other deities found in this area include: Ugbesu - Etana and Aburama at Akpet Central and environ. The deities and their characteristics are shown on the table below.

TABLE 2 DEITIES AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

DIETIES	PLACE FOUND	TYPE OF GOD AND CHARACTERISTICS
Abu	Erei Clan, Abayong Clan, Agwagune and Okurike	Mainly for men and yong male initiates. Has supernatural powers for healing, security and destruction.
Ugbene-bob	Ibini-Erei	Water goddess with protective and healing power.
Ogbak-Ibini	-do-	Water goddess for supply of fishes, security, healing power, fertility
IpaEdock	All villages in Erei	Goddess of fertility of land and supply of yams and other crops.
Egwebe	Afono_Erei	Water goddess for fishing, healing, war, control and revenge.
Obin	Abanwan	For village security and protection.
Aburama	Akpet/Ehom	For security, revenge, healing and protection.
Egup	Erei Clan and Agwagune and Ourike	Mainly woman initiates. For fertility, maturity of women and for demonstration of beauty.
Mfam	Most villages in Erei	Meant to deter those engaged in witchcraft and swearing of oath.
Ugbe-esu	Etana	For security, oath and protection.
Evien	Obum	Water goddess for security, protection, supply of fishes (harvest).

Source: Researcher's Field Survey

As a traditional society as shown in table 2 above, Biase Local Government Area have many more natural deities that are too numerous to mention in this study.

Majority of the people owe their allegiance and trust to these gods for their protection, security, and existence. Nevertheless, there are many more Christians in the area whose faith and hope is hung on the Almighty God in heaven and they have been redeemed by God from this fetish traditional beliefs. The only interesting

thing that connects these goddesses and tourism is in the numerous festivities in the area from one goddess to another which makes the area livelier. The costumes are equally attractive to on-lookers.

CUSTOMS, CULTURE AND TRADITION

The researchers discovered that there are various cultural practices and tradition of the people just as there are many ethnic groups within the Local Government Area.

These traditions and culture cover a wide range of issues such as traditional dances, festivals, arts and craft.

TRADITIONAL DANCES

As shown in table 3 below, it was found out that almost every community or village in the study area has her own cultural displays. These cultural displays can be used to entertain tourists at any tourism sites or destination in the Local Government Area. It is also expedient to state here that there are some traditional dances that are very unique and they cut across all the ethnic groups in the Local Government Area. Such traditional dances are those of Ebia-abu (which is dance for male folks to demonstrate the agility, coming of age, show of wealth, authority and pride). There is also the Obam and "Egbana" war dances for men and "Egup" dance for women. Other dances which are peculiar to one community or the other are those of enyi maiden dance among Erei and Abayong clans, yemi for women in the same clans; Abang dance from Biakpan n Ubagara, Ekpe dance is known amongst the people of Ibini and Afono in Erei clan as a few other villages in Abayong and Umon clans. Omene (Gunene) and Mboro (Mbolo) which is for boys and girls are common to most villages in Biase.

Others are Ogele for boys and girls and Ekpakala who dance for young men. These and more are colourful dances that are of tourism significance and can earn income for the participants. It may well be necessary to state here that some beautiful cultural displays and dances are becoming extinct and it is only tourism that can bring them into focus again.

FESTIVALS: The study area is blessed with very many festivals that have of tourism value. Prominent amongst them are the new yam festivals in September of every year. This festival signals the arrival of new yam and the commencement of the harvesting for eating of other crops such as melon, cocoyam, round beans etc. Wrestling tournament for boys and young energetic men within and between villages is yet another valued festival for tourism. The demonstration of strength amongst young men and boys through this

festival can be quite entertaining for visitors. The wrestling tournaments comes up mainly in July, however, by arrangement it could be organised anytime for entertainment.

Ibini lake (Ake-bob) fishing festival which comes up every year in April at Ibini village in Erei South Ward (Erei Clan) is a worthy tourism potential. The synergy between the lake as an ecosystem and cultural tourism is that this lake is quite close to the beach at Ibini stretching to Abanwan on the western bank of the Cross River at Biase. Abriyang and Abaribara on the eastern bank to Agwuagwune. This region forms a fine tourism centre because of the beach and the lake.

Similar beaches are found at Ugbem and Etono. Ibini lake fishing festival can be compared to the Arugungu fishing festival in Niger state in Nigeria which has attained international recognition.

The lake fishing will offer a respite to break the monotony of the beach tourism attraction for tourist who might be at the beach.

Aekpe festival, a chronological age-group naming ceremony at Ibun village and other Erei villages and Abaribara (Abayong) village is another source of entertainment at this period (April). The connection between ecosystem and cultural tourism is that this festival is organised and celebrated to coincide with dry season fishing activities that goes on these lakes.

Other festivals that can entertain tourist at the beach during this period (April) includes but not limited to "Enyi" and "Aekpe", "Ughum" in Erei and Abayong clans. Ebia-abu which is the symbol of identity for Biase people would also entertain tourist in any tourism destination. There are also many other religious festivals in the local government area that are too numerous to mention. Each of the festivals is so colourfully is celebrated that it becomes a moment of refreshment to the local people. It is a moment of joy, friendship and re-union with their kit and kins from other communities who attend these festivals. It is equally a moment of giving out of gifts to relations and loved ones. For instance, during "Aekpe" and Age-grade naming festivals and such other festivals like "tikolo", gifts are given out to relations and loved ones.

TABLE 3 SOME NAMES OF DANCES/FESTIVALS, THEIR SIGNIFICANCE AND PERIOD OF CELEBRATION

S/N	NAMES OF FESTIVALS	VILLAGE/CLAN	SIGNIFICANCE	SEASON OF CELEBRATION
1	Abu and Ebiabu	Agwuagune and all villages in Erei and Abayong Clans	A demonstration of maturity, Secrecy, power	Dry seasons November to April. 3 to 7 years intervals

			and authority. (Exclusively for male initiates).	
2	Egup	As above	For beauty, pride and pageantry as well as secrecy in women. Mainly for females (All comers)	Dry seasons alternating the years of Abu
3	Enyi	Erei and Abayong clans	To demonstrate flexibility and feminity in girls as well as maturity and beauty	Rainy seasons July - August yearly and other time on request
4	Ekpe	Most villages in Biase	Exclusively for male initiates to show authority, governance, prestige and wealth.	Rainy seasons August - September. Any other on request
5	Wrestling	Most villages in Biase	Demonstration of strength in boys and young men (All comers affairs).	Rainy season July/August
6	New Yam Festival	All villages in Biase	Celebration of the arrival of new yams and appeasing the goddess of fertility	From August - September (Rainy season)
7	Ake-bob (Ibini Lake) fishing festival	Ibini village	Celebration of fishing occupation. A period of inviting all and sundry for free fishing at Ibini. For everybody including visitors	April, yearly (Dry season)
8	Onene (Gunene) dance	All villages in Biase	For entertainment by young boys and girls at most festivals and ceremonies	As need arises (any time)
9	Religious festivals for Ogbak, Mfam, Egwebe, Ipah, Ebiafia, Egbom-Edip, Uffiom, Ebon-Ugbo, Aburama etc.	Ibini, Afono, Abanwan in Erei clans as well as other villages and clans in Biase LGA	Celebrating for the gods (deities) to appease them and show appreciation for their abundance supply of food/fishes; care and protection against disease	Rainy season between July and September

			and enemies attack etc	
10	Ekpakala, Eghot, Obam	Adim, Agwuagune, Abayong clans, Erei clans	War dances to show prowess; to appease the god of war and to make preparation for war.	Any convenient time as the need arises
11	Igben; Ughum (fattening room)	Most villages in Biase particularly in Abayong and Erei clans	A period of preparing matured girls for marriage. Many may not be accompanied by the 3 months fattening room period	July/August (Rainy season yearly)
12	Aekpe and Age-group naming ceremony	All villages in Erei and Abaribara in Abayong clans	Chronological Age-grade naming ceremonies and the identification of children's age groups for the new entrants (children) by their parents. Every male and female is a member.	Dry season (April yearly)

Source: Researcher's Field Survey

Most of such gifts are even demonstrated during the new yam festivals when the widows, orphans, less privileged relations of well-to-do people and any other sympathizer I remembered. Yams and fishes are given out to them. Special delicacies (e.g. melon balls soup with sufficient meat and fishes) also the exchange hands. This is done in the spirit of celebration of new yams. It really shows a time of harvest in the eyes of most people in Biase even though the actual harvesting of crops from the farms comes up in November each year.

ARTS AND CRAFTS:Biase Local Government Area has indigenous technology for local craft. For instance, Most of the fishing equipments such as traps, nets ("egbele" and "eghat" for men). "Ubun" (women fishing nets); the fishing fences, canoes and paddles are produced and credited to Ibini and most other riverine villages in the local government area. Hunting is also carried out by the people of Biase with locally made traps of various complexities as well as locally made spears, arrows and guns. These people are equally talented in the making of their local instruments such as flutes, drums, gongs etc.

Long and short baskets as well as wood carving (especially for idols) are evident. Some of the carvings can go for souvenirs if well developed. Here again lies another synergy where the materials from the terrestrial ecosystem is used to develop cultural artifacts for the tourism industry. It is sad to note that some of these artistry works are gradually disappearing as people no longer take interest in doing them because of lack of ready markets. Black smiting, is equally evident at IjomAbayong and some other villages. This is equally being played down upon because of lack of patronage.

To encourage people to go into these ventures again can only be possible if there is a ready market and tourism industry in Biase Local Government Area would be ready market where foreign and local currency could be earned by local people.

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