

The Pride of Africa: Tourist Centers in Nigeria

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Nigeria is indisputably the most populous country in Africa, and the largest nation in the West African sub region. The three major ethnic groups in the country are Hausa/Fulani of the north, the Yoruba of the south-west, and the Ibo of the south east. There are over 250 minority ethnic groups largely concentrated in the middle belt and the South-south region. The country operates a Federal System of government with 36 states and a Federal Capital Territory.

Nigeria is immensely rich in minerals rich with every state liberally endowed. The most exploited of its mineral resources is petroleum and natural gas. Blessed with a largely fertile soil, a wonderful tropical climate, and a population of people who are driven to succeed against all odds, the country is inherently rich. Also, given its huge population and its citizenry's insatiable penchant for the exotics, as a mark of social status, Nigeria is, no doubt, a good destination for entrepreneurs and international businesses seeking expansion into the African market. However, besides business prospecting, there are so much more reasons to visit the giant of Africa. There are various tourist destinations spread across all the states of the federation.

Lagos beaches

For most people from other parts of the world, Lagos is synonymous with Nigeria. The country's former capital, it is a mega city acclaimed to be the most populous in Africa. The most significant physical feature of Lagos State is the coastal landforms which is dominated, by lagoons, creeks, swamps, and sea shore extension, a combination of which has given the state its uniqueness, aesthetics appeal and beauty. With about 180 Kilometer coastline, Lagos has both publicly managed and privately owned beaches. Victoria Beach (Bar beach) Lekki Beach, Eko Beach, Badagry beach (along Lagos-Seme road), Eleko beach are some of the coastlines which have continued to attract tourists from different parts of the world. Other tourist attraction destinations in the state are the National museum, Oba' Palace, Iga Idunganran, Old Colonial Nigeria Secretariat, National Arts Theater, the Whispering Palms etc.

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No mention can be made of tourist destinations in Nigeria without the name of Cross Rivers State popping up. The state, located in the south-south region, is undoubtedly becoming a point of reference with respect to tourism in the country. Apart from the now popular Calabar carnival which attracts people from far and wide during the Christmas season, the state is also the location of Tinapa business and pleasure resort, Obudu mountain resort and the Abokim waterfalls.

Obudu Mountain Resort

About an hour drive from the state capital, and a with a airstrip right on the mountain, Obudu mountain resort is situated on a plateau at approximately 1576 metres above sea level on the Oshie Ridge of the Sankwala Mountains. The temperate climate offers a total contrast and welcome respite from Africa's tropical heat. Idyllic tranquillity, beautiful scenery and breathtaking views make it ideal for the lone adventurer, families on reunion, young couple or holiday group.

One of the major attractions at Obudu is the cable car which runs from the entrance of the resort at the bottom of the mountain up to the ranch resort at the summit. It is claimed to be the world's longest cable car system, providing a breathtaking view as one sees nature in its grandeur.

Although Obudu welcomes visitors all year round; the much best time to visit is October to February, when the flowers are in bloom, the sky is clear and the air is cool.

Agbokim Waterfalls

Located some 17km from Ikom and about 315km from Calabar and a very short distance away from Nigeria-cameroon border, Agbokim waterfalls is a very attractive and impressive tourist spot and a highly recommended place for tourists. The falls consist of seven streams each cascading over steep cliffs, which provide seven faced falls descending in terraces, through the tropical rainforest. The falls are surrounded by lush greenery vegetation, valleys and steep hills. It is the ideal location for a vacation, getting back into nature and regaining your creative productivity and general well being.

Yankari Game Reserve

The Yankari National Park is the premier game reserve in Nigeria. Yankari Park and Wikki Warm Springs are located around the Gagi River, approximately 1 1/2 hours by road, southeast of Bauchi, capital of Bauch State. Set up in 1956 and opened to the public in 1962, the reserve covers 2,058 sq. km. of savanna wood-land and is well-stocked with elephants, baboons, waterbucks, bushbucks, oribi, crocodile, hippopotamus, roan antelope, buffalo and various types of monkeys. Lions are occasionally spotted as well, despite their natural cam-ouflage. The best time to visit is between November and May, when tourists are likely to see more game since the dense vegetation has dried out and the animals congregate around the rivers.

The Wikki Warm Springs is one of the best features of the game reserves. The spring gushes out from under a cliff, where the water is at least 6 ft. deep, with a bathing area that extends for 600 ft. to an open area. Flood-lit at night, it is wonderful after a hot day's game-viewing to relax in the warm water.

The park is also inhabited by a variety of birds, including the huge sad-dlebill stork, golliath heron, bateleur eagle, vultures, kingfishers, bee-eaters and more. It is excellent for serious bird-watchers.

Olumo Rock

Olumo rock, one of the most popular tourist destinations in Nigeria, West Africa, sits in the ancient city center of Abeokuta – a name which means “Under the rock”. Abeokuta is just about an hours drive from the bustling metropolitan city of Lagos providing convenient access to an array of hotels, restaurants, clubs, casinos and various nightlife activities. A massive outcrop of granite rocks of primitive formation, the rock is sacred to the Egbas of Abeokuta because it was the place where they found refuge from their attackers during the war between Egba and Idahome of Togo between 1830 and 1833.

The highest point of Olumo is about 137 metres above sea levels. Situated under the Olumo rock, are caves which served as the hide out for the Egba people, the Olumo shrine, other shrines, holes, and statues of past warriors and kings.

In recent times, an elevator has been built to enable people who could not go through the rigours of climbing the rock through stairs carved into it.

Idanre Hills

The historic Idanre Hills is situated in Idanre town about 20 kilometres from Akure, capital city of Ondo State. Oke Idanre consists of high plain with spectacular valleys interspersed with inselbergs of about 3,000 ft above sea level formed in a cluster of intimidating and imposing hills housing some wonderful things which confound the senses. The hills surround the town, envelope it, and dominate life in the town. From any angle, one sees the hills and virtually every activity revolves round this collection of hills. Idanre with the seeminigy impregnable hills looks like an ancient castle.

The top of one of these hills has over six hundred steps which must be climbed before tourists can appreciate the work and beauty. This has necessitated the construction of five resting posts along the steps to the top. At the top of the hill, there is an intriguing footprint, which is widely believed to enlarge or contract to accommodate every foot.

As a natural and cultural landscape, Idanre Hills stands out well among all other places that have been listed in UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The ancient Idanre Hills has been a home for the Idanre community for almost 100 years.

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Apart from that cultural role, the town pulls the wealthy and the commoner, basically due to its perceived mystical aura and the giddy excitement lovers of nature get when they surmount the steep daunting climb to the top, to witness a spectacular view of the new town and adjoining hills in a breath-taking manner. It also has diverse and variegated eco-systems of flora and fauna. Oke Idanre contains very important bio-physical and land form features whose interaction with the physical features creates an enduring cultural landscape within the setting.

There are other amazingly beautiful tourist destinations like Erin Ijesha (Olumirin) waterfalls and the Osun-Osogbo groove, in Osun State, the Gurara water falls in Niger State, Oke mapo in Ibadan, Oyo State, Opa oranmiyan in Ile-ife, and numerous others time and space would not allow us to discuss in this edition.