

Tourism in Nigeria: Erin Ijesa Water Fall

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Erin Ijesa is one of the small towns that constitute the Ijesha kingdom of Osun State in South-Western Nigeria. Located at the foot of the hills along Ilesha – Akure expressway, the town is surrounded by hills and ridges wonderfully adorned by green vegetation which provides a breathtaking view for travelers passing by the expressway. Presumably, the beautiful scenery is nature's 'bill board' beckoning to passersby to come and experience the adventure and overflowing excitement that gushes out from the heart of the lush forest .

Historically, Erin – Ijesha is said to have been founded by Akinla, one of the daughters of Oduduwa, who is the acclaimed ancestor of the Yoruba race (Yoruba is the ethnic group with the largest concentration in the south west region of the country) after seventeen days of travelling on foot from Ile-Ife. The town, incidentally, is one of the very few towns in Yoruba land under the traditional rulership of a woman (a female regent).

Besides its unique history and topographical distinctiveness, Erin Ijesha is a very quiet town, with a peaceful ambience and infectious serenity. A drive through the narrow highway leading into the town gives no indication of anything spectacular ahead. Indeed, the fact that most dwellers of the town are either farmers or hunters who have to go and attend to their businesses in the day time makes one wonder if the population of the town is made up of only the few old people leisurely looking out from the wooden frame windows of their houses as tourists drive by and the young girls selling different types of fresh fruits along the road. Why would anyone leave the hustle and bustle of the city to come to this virtually empty town in the heart of Africa? The answer lies somewhere in the deep vegetation two kilometers away from the centre of the town - The Olumirin Waterfalls popularly referred to as Erin-Ijesha waterfalls.

Erin-Ijesha (Olumirin) waterfalls was discovered about **1140 AD**. Gushing down from a hidden fountain, down the slopes of the rocky hills covered by the thick vegetation around Erin Ijesha town, the waterfalls emerges in different forms and torrents at various spots/levels on the hill, offering , in all, a breathtaking view of water cascades running through the ever green vegetation.

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Most people often describe the water falls to be made up of seven levels, but this is misconceived as there are two levels (while ascending or descending) on the hills where there is no view of the water falls due to the thickness of the vegetation and the inherent danger in trying to gain access to spots where tourists can catch a glimpse of the water as it plunges down the slopes of the hill.

Upon arrival at the vicinity of the waterfall, tourists have to climb wide short steps and cross a suspended pedestrian bridge to get to the base of the fall where one gets the first view of what in fact is the last step of the water cascades. This spot which is popularly referred to as the first level is where the adventure starts and stops for some tourists. Being able to view the waterfalls at different levels from the first spot at the base of the hill is a popular wish, but that would have taken out the fun in the whole experience, especially for daring and adventurous minds.

As wishes are not horses, one has to climb his way up the different levels of the hill to earn a date with Mother Nature and experience Erin Ijesha waterfalls in its full glory. Isn't that what good things of life demands of us?

Ascending the hill to view the waterfalls at different spots on the hill is no task for the faint-hearted; that explains the contentment of tourists who choose to leisurely hang around the first level to enjoy the view of the last drop of the water cascades and swim inside the modest pool at the foot of the fall.

A view of the water fall from the first spot is however incomparable with the grandeur and eminence epitomized by the waterfall on the second elevation. With water falling from a wide sharp steep into a big sanding pool, the waterfall on this elevation has a magical way of making even the most reserved scream in utter excitement, making those who would not dare to climb the hill wonder what the excitement is all about. Some tourists enjoy waving at their less daring friends from the cliff of the rock where water plunges into the first level out of sheer excitement and a sense of accomplishment. This usually works like magic on those who hitherto had chosen to stay on the first level, as some of them would subsequently summon courage to conquer their fears and climb the hill to be part of the excitement on the next elevation.

It is most interesting and somewhat encouraging, watching residents of the Abake (meaning the settlement at the top) community, a settlement on the peak of the hill making their way up, or descending the hill, gracefully, with heavy fire woods or farm produce well adjusted on their heads. 'Climbing the hill is not as tough as it looks', they say and true to their words, one just

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needs to start and with the help of the local guides and other tourists, those who are open to trying often make it to the top. Strangely, accidents are a rarity within the vicinity of the waterfalls.

The third elevation is a totally different experience, the waterfall is not as wide and pronounced as the second level but with the alluring beauty of nature in its royal regalia, and the feeling of tranquility, one is bound to watch the water flow over the surface of the big rock peeping out of the green vegetation with the quietness of an army tiptoeing to spring a surprise on the enemy, one cannot feel any closer to nature.

The view of the waterfalls and the surrounding vegetation keeps getting better as one goes up the hill. Like humans in the race of life, a greater percentage of tourists never make it beyond the first few levels, which is satisfying enough, but the few determined ones with greater sense of adventure, who make it to the peak of the hill, gets to have a wonderful view of the whole of Erin-Ijesha and neighboring towns and enjoy the primitive hospitality of the ever friendly settlers of Abake community. At this altitude, the fresh air, the great views, and the sense of accomplishment is rewarding and energizing enough to see tourists through the less daunting return journey to the base of the hill.

With the adventure over, tourists will be confronted with the downsides of the Erin-Ijesha waterfalls experience. The nearest hotel is at Ilesha, about twenty kilometers to Erin-Ijesha. This natural heritage site should be resort centers with standard facilities that will enable tourists have a full feel of vacationing in the deep of the African continent, and not just a shoddy one-day affair.

Erin-ijesha waterfalls is pregnant with potentials as a world class tourist attraction center, the topography makes the site a good spot for mountaineering, hiking, camping, golfing, and retreats and holidays. Sadly enough, the state (government) which earned its slogan 'the state of the living spring' from the presence of the waterfalls within its territory, has not done much to explore the tourism potentialities of the site. With the right attitude by the government and people of Osun State home and abroad, this site can witness a turn around like Obudu cattle ranch which is now known as Obudu Mountain Resort, and the old colonial, broad street prison in the heart of Lagos Island, which has now become the Freedom park, through the public/private partnership initiatives of these state governments.

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