

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Is the ancient city of Benin Kingdom a preferred tourist location? A qualitative-based study to achieving sustainable development Goal 11

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ABSTRACT

Studies on preferred tourist locations focus on developed countries and selected Asian cities. Many African cities like the Ancient City of Benin Kingdom (ACBK) have been grossly under-researched in global extant literature regarding preferred tourist locations and how they may improve achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Goal 11). Thus, this study examines the attributes of a tourist location. Also, it investigates perceived barriers facing the ancient city and suggests measures to improve achieving the ACBK as a tourist location and, by extension, improve achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11 in Nigeria. The study adopted qualitative research and collected primary data via face-to-face interviews and observations of tourist locations. A convenient sampling technique was used to select 30 knowledgeable participants. The researchers analysed the collected data manually. Findings reveal nature destinations (historical/archaeological), natural attractions, ecotourism/wildlife, landform areas, prompt quality services, basic amenities/infrastructure, mangrove forests, and safety/security as the attributes of a global tourist location. Findings show that the sustenance of these attributes will improve achieving Goal 11. Also, the findings identified the barriers and recommended measures to mitigate them and, by extension, promote ACBK as a preferred tourist location and improve achieving Goal 11. This study reawakens the need for all-inclusive tourism planning management and marketing in developing countries.

Keywords: Benin Kingdom; global cities; Nigeria; qualitative study; sustainable development Goal 11; tourism.

1. Introduction

The fast-tracking trend and economic benefits in the tourism industry have progressed into one of the world's largest economic industries^[1]. The industry has benefitted Asian and developed countries. In Spain, the industry is one of the top industries full of global socio-economic developments^[2]. Feng et al. ^[3] affirmed

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that globalisation of the tourism industry includes several interlocking dimensions and geographical diversity of international tourism. Several studies on preferred tourist locations focus on developed countries and selected Asian cities. Many African cities have been grossly under-researched in global extant literature regarding preferred tourist locations. Majority of the extant literature focused on cities in Asian countries, Europe, South and North America^[3-8]. Also, cruise tourism routes are fast-growing, with annual earnings of about \$154bn^[9], but they face challenges, including affordability for prospective tourists^[10]. However, Awaritefe^[11-12] affirmed that the potential for tourism location differs between countries depending on their tourism planning and development resources. Cities in African countries have not been well developed to attract global tourists, as revealed by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO)^[13]. This is of concern to stakeholders because of lax tourism developments. This may threaten the improvement and achievement of Sustainable Development Goal 11 (Goal 11). Goal 11 comprises ten targets and 14 indicators^[14-15]. The mission is to make cities and human settlements like ACBK inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable for future generations. There is a relationship between tourism development and improving achieving Goal 11.

World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) estimates that tourism growth in Africa will more than triple to 134 million international arrivals by 2030. The annual growth has been sustained at 4%–5%^[13]. This is because of the commitment and collaboration with African Member States, and other stakeholders. The sector (tourism) is a people's sector. If well managed, tourism's sustained growth brings immense opportunities for economic welfare and lasting development, including improving and achieving many SDGs, including Goal 11^[15]. Tourism has acknowledged a positive influence on mitigating poverty and inequality worldwide, including sustaining cities and communities (Goal 11). It contributes to economies, especially developing ones, if well harnessed. Thus, tourism may be a pillar of Africa's transformation and socio-economic reform to achieve the SDGs. Stronger collaboration is needed, including innovative ways to foster collaboration with other stakeholders^[13]. In African countries, there are many ailing tourism industries^[12]. In Nigeria, a case study of the ACBK, many factors may influence tourists to a destination. These factors include natural and cultural features.

In the era of sustainable urbanisation, focusing on Sustainable Development Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities), information is pertinent to identify the features of a global tourist location and their associated resources to prioritise tourism development in the ACBK and, by extension, Nigeria. Whether the features in the ACBK can improve the city's status as the best tourism destination to attract global tourists is yet to be investigated. Also, whether global tourist location can improve achieving Goal 11 is yet to be determined. Thus, based on the extant literature, there is a literature paucity concerning ACBK and attributes of tourist location in a developing country tourist city, using Benin City as a case study. Also, studies about how tourist locations like ACBK can improve achieving Goal 11 in developing countries are scarce. This study examines the attributes of a tourist location. Also, it investigates perceived barriers facing the ancient city and suggests measures to improve achieving the ACBK as a tourist location and, by extension, improve achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11. The study's goal will be accomplished through the following:

- i. To identify the attributes of a global tourist location.
- ii. To investigate barriers facing ACBK as a global tourist location.
- iii. To suggest measures to mitigate the barriers facing ACBK and, by extension, improve achieving Goal 11.

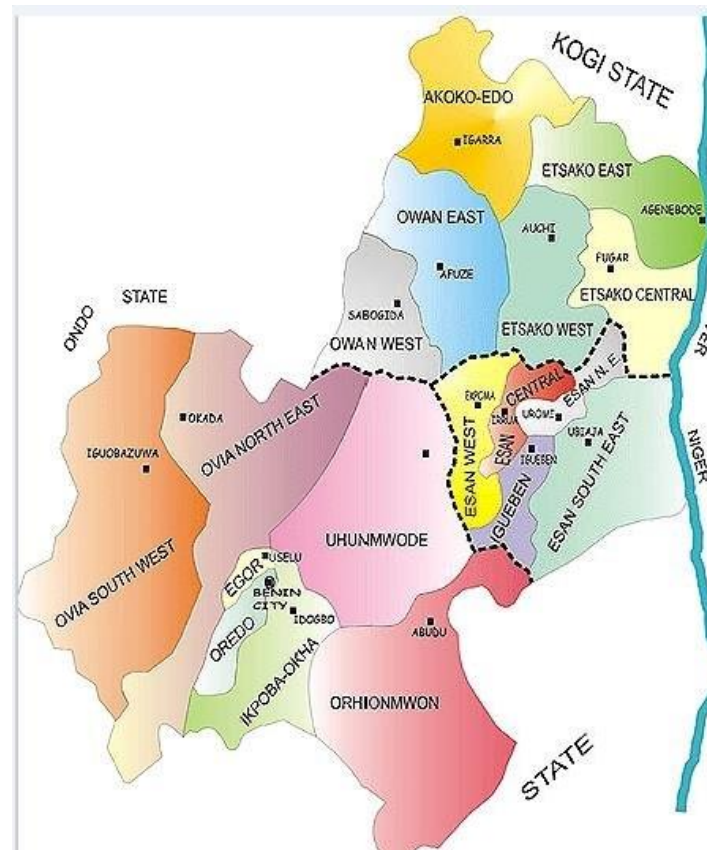
2. Literature review

2.1. Attributes of global tourist location

This sub-section focused on features of preferred tourist locations. It marshals the global city concept to enhance understanding of the tourism industry. The extant literature regarding world cities investigates how and why specific sets of cities have a strategic role in coordinating and controlling the global economy to make it a preferred location^[3]. Friedmann^[16] identified global cities as the centres from which multinational firms' progressive division of labour was organised and controlled. The attributes of a global city that attract a preferred tourist location are crucial milestones in this study. Taylor and Derudder^[17] analysed the location approaches of 175 leading global service organisations engaging 526 cities regarding the overall position and the regional configurations they form. Spalding and Parrett^[18] found that the mangrove community is a good location for tourism because wildlife could be accommodated. This includes Crocodiles/Alligators, Manatees/Dugongs, and birdlife. They affirmed that mangrove tourism is multi-billion-dollar industry and attracts millions of visitors yearly. Environmental components can influence the decision regarding holiday destinations. Uyarra et al.^[19] and Ugur and Akbiyik^[20] identified warm temperatures, clear waters, and low health risks as the most significant environmental attributes influencing holiday destination selection. Also, marine wildlife features (i.e., coral and fish diversity and abundance) and terrestrial attributes (i.e., beach features and coral bleaching) could influence the decision.

2.2. Benin Kingdom as a tourist destination

The Benin Kingdom, also known as the Edo Kingdom or the Kingdom of Benin (Bini: *Arriṣba ẹdo*), was a kingdom in southern Nigeria^[21]. The Kingdom of Benin's capital was Edo, now known as Benin City in Edo State, Nigeria. The Benin Kingdom was "*one of the oldest and most developed states in the coastal hinterland of West Africa*". It grew out of the previous Edo Kingdom of Igodomigodo around the 11th century AD, and lasted until the British Empire annexed it in 1897^[22]. The Ancient City of Benin Kingdom (ACBK) occupies seven local government areas in Edo South senatorial district of Edo State, Nigeria, as presented in **Plate 1**. The seven local governments include Egor, Ikpoba-Okha, Oredo, Orhionmwon, Ovia North-East, Ovia South-West, and Uhumwonde. The Benin Kingdom is one of the greatest rainforest kingdoms in Africa. History has it that the Benin Kingdom once extended from the Niger Delta in the south to the confluence of the Niger and Benue Rivers in the north and from the Niger River in the east to Lagos in the west. The kingdom emerged from several independent villages into a sophisticated kingdom. The kingdom is renowned for its system of earth embankments^[23] and brass crafting objects housed in world-class museums^[24]. It has been documented that other tribes in Edo State migrated from Benin City^[23]. The city is the headquarters of Oredo Local Government Area. It is known for culture, creativity, and artistry as far back as 1471, during the discovery of the Benin Court by adventurous sea captain De Sequire^[23,25]. The outcome of the discovery led to the exchange of letters between the Most Honoured Oba of Benin and the King of Portugal. The history of the ACBK from the earliest times to the present can be grouped into three phases^[23,26]. First is the foundation period. This is also known as the Ogo period (c. 900 – c. 1170). Second is the New Dynasty of Kings or Oba's (c. 1200 – 1897). Lastly, the study will discuss the arts and crafts phase and its impact on Benin society. Uzzi et al.^[23] affirmed that the Benin Kingdom is over 2025 years of existence since its inception. It is the greatest African kingdom. Ebohon^[27] reported that the Supreme God created the kingdom according to its myths of origin from 40 B.C. when the Ogo Kings began to rule. The Ogo dynasty survived for over 854 years.



Source: Authors' work.

Plate 1. Map of Edo State showing the seven local governments that constitute Benin Kingdom.

Most notable in the Benin Kingdom is bronze, and the mastery of magical art cannot be over-emphasised. The kingdom is noted for its sophisticated large earthwork system, brass art, and complex political hierarchy. The Benin Kingdom attracts many heritage sites and cultural analysis, including the Ogiamien's Palace [24]. In Benin City, the bronze casters use lost-wax technique in casting metals. This mechanism was employed long before the emergence of European influences to enhance and promote the kingdom's cultural heritage and create employment for the Binis [23]. The heritage buildings (rebuilt or refurbished) offer insights from architectural archaeology to a historical dimension of core cultural values and uses of space. Although the Benin King's palace was rebuilt, several traditional structures survived the 1897 invasion by the British soldiers [28] and are intact today [24]. The invasion led to the looting of many ACBK bronzes. The Benin Royal Palace, via the Nigerian Government has made a progressive effort for the repatriation of the stolen artefacts (looted bronzes and indigenous art) by previous colonial leaders and compensation for the atrocities [30]. Edo State Government [13] identified the Benin Moat at Sakponba Road, Egedege Nokaro (first story building in Benin – 1905), Igun Street (known for Benin Bronze casters' heritage site), the Tomb of Asoro at Sakponba Road (valiant Odionwere Omada, Head of household staff of Oba Ovonramwen), the National Museum of Benin City, Emotan Statue, Ogba Zoological Garden, and the most significant is the Oba's Palace as destinations that attract tourists in the ACBK.

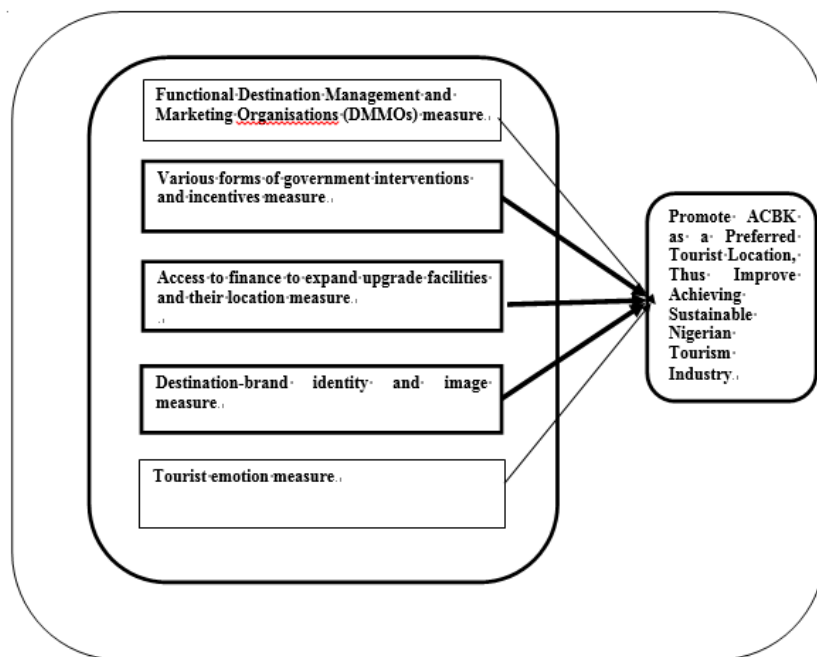
2.3. Sustainable development Goal 11

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development started in 2015 with 17 SDGs at the United Nations (UN) SDGs Summit [15]. Goal 11 (sustainable cities and communities) is one of the top SDGs, inter- and intra-linking with other SDGs. Goal 11 has a direct link with the tourism industry. This is because sustainable cities and

communities are components of the key features that attract tourists. Thus, a threat to the industry (tourism) threatens Goal 11. The research focuses on Goal 11. The goal focuses on making cities and human settlements inclusive, resilient, safe and sustainable [38]. Amongst the Goal 10 targets, and 14 indicators, Target 11.1, “by 2030, ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services and upgrade slums”, Target 11.3, “by 2030, enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanisation and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries,” and Target 11.c, “support least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilising local materials” [29]. Despite several policies to make tourism attractive to foreigners in many developing African c has been challenging [10]. These barriers may threaten to achieve Goal 11 if no ountries, including Nigeria, itt addressed, especially in prospective attractive locations like the Ancient City of Benin Kingdom.

2.4. Proposed framework to promote the ACBK as a preferred tourist location

Some proposed frameworks for tourist location are employed to improve rural tourist DMMOs, but none regarding promoting ACBK as a preferred tourist location. This study modified Adeyinka-Ojo et al. [11] DMMOs framework, as illustrated in **Figure 1**. Figure offers measures to promote ACBK as a preferred tourist location. They modified the framework for destination marketing organisation’s role to develop DMMOs framework. The DMMOs framework defined the destination management roles, destination stakeholders, and destination marketing roles. Thus, the study adapts some destination marketing roles to promote ACBK as a preferred tourist location. The output would provide research directions to guide policy implementation and programmes to promote ACBK as a preferred tourist location, especially when measures are emerging from stakeholders. The output is to promote the ACBK as a preferred tourist location. Integrating the measures from the stakeholders is critical for the overall performance. The study focuses on uncovering the features of a global tourist location and suggests measures to promote the ACBK as a preferred tourist location in Nigeria. In the following section, the collected data and techniques adopted are described.



Source: Authors’ work.

Figure 1. A proposed conceptual framework to promote ACBK as a preferred tourist location.

3. Research method

A qualitative research design via face-to-face observation of selected heritage and cultural locations in the ACBK was adopted as the primary data collection. This aligns with Nadal et al. [30] and Ebekoziem [31]. They affirmed that a qualitative research design is a better method for addressing issues of this nature. To ensure a better coverage of experts, the interviewees were selected via a convenient sampling technique. Creswell and Creswell [32] opined that a convenient sampling technique is non-probability sampling. It allows units/participants to be selected for inclusion. Ebekoziem and Aigbavboa [33] and Ebekoziem et al. [34] avowed that it is the most suitable method to engage participants willing to participate in the research. The participants are knowledgeable regarding tourism and the ACBK, as presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1. Interviewees' background information.

ID	Firm	Years of Experience (Years)	Participant Rank
P1	High Chiefs in the ACBK	45	High Chiefs in the ACBK and knowledgeable regarding global tourism destination
P2		39	
P3		40	
P4		44	
P5		35	
P6	Indigenous visitors	22	Knowledgeable regarding global tourism destination
P7		21	
P8		28	
P9		30	
P10	Foreign visitors	15	Tourists with experience regarding global tourism destinations.
P11		24	
P12		30	
P13		21	
P14		22	
P15	Tourism experts in academia	23	Senior Lecturer and above in higher education institution
P16		28	
P17		21	
P18	NGOs in tourism matters	20	CEOs/Management staff
P19		17	
P20		19	
P21	Operators of tourism destinations in the ACBK	15	Management staff /Director/CEO
P22		17	
P23		20	
P24		21	
P25		16	
P26	Edo State Ministry of Arts, Culture, Tourism and Diaspora Affairs	15	Senior staff and above are involved in tourism and related matters
P27		17	
P28		19	
P29	Diaspora Affairs	22	
P30		16	

Source: Authors' work.

Table 1 reveals the participants' information. It shows that the interviewees were knowledgeable about tourism, especially concerning the ACBK. The organisations' names, interviewees' full identities, and posts were concealed for privacy in line with Ebekozién et al. [35]. The 30 interviews were conducted between September 2022 and January 2023. The essence of data collection towards the end of the year was to enable the researchers to engage the palace visitors (local and foreign) in the study. The Benin Kingdom is known for many festive activities toward the year's end and receives global visitors. The study saturation was achieved at the 26th participant. This was confirmed when there was no evidence of a 'new variable or theoretical perceptions' from the interviewees. In line with Thorne [36] and Ebekozién et al. [37], who employed contextual perceptions in analysing and interpreting the collected data. The face-to-face interviews provided answers to the research questions. The semi-structured questions were targeted at providing answers to the main objectives.

On average, each interview session lasted 65 minutes. Apart from P26 to P30, others were permitted to record data with their consent. For P26 – P30, researchers took notes during the five sessions. The notes and recorded devices were transcribed and analysed manually. The researchers employed an open coding method. This aligns with Jaafar et al. [38], who asserted that the coding comprises a verbatim data evaluation. In this instance, the qualitative technique was chosen as the unit of meaning. The researchers read the 30 transcript documents many times to ensure the interviewees' thoughts concerning the phenomenon were captured. Eighty-one codes emerged and re-arranged into 14 sub-themes. Three themes were generated from the 14 categories. To mitigate lack of firmness and bias connected with qualitative research, the study's reliability and validity were confirmed using a reliable researcher and a known technique, as illustrated in **Table 2**. Thus, validating the themes and in line with Ebekozién et al. [39], interviewees' quotes were stated to guarantee the data's reliability and validity. The study employed member checking, triangulation, and researcher reflexivity as the validity methods [32,40]. Table 2 shows that the lead author coordinated the interview to strengthen the reliability, and a specific pattern was adopted (using semi-structured face-to-face interview questions). This would mitigate challenges associated with qualitative findings. Also, engaging experts would assist in mitigating issues with a limited sample because of the vast knowledge of the participants.

Table 2. The study's quality evaluation strategies.

Method	Assessment Strategies	The Phase of Research
Reliability	Consistent interviewer (The lead author)	Data collection
Validity	The adoption of a recognised method (semi-structured face-to-face interviews)	Data collection
		Data collection
Generalisability	Recognition of limitations due to sample size and potential interviewer bias (Focus on experts)	Data analysis
Transferability	Compare the study's implications against the current literature.	Post data analysis
	Theme approach to establish a pattern from the data	Data analysis
Credibility	Explanation building in sequential order, objective by objective	Data analysis
	Address rival explanations.	Data analysis
Dependability	Developing semi-structured interview guidelines.	Research design

Source: Modified from Ebekozién et al. [34-35, 37]

4. Findings and discussion

Despite the economic value of tourism to grow developed and developing countries' GDP, sustainable tourism is challenging, especially in developing countries' destinations, ACBK inclusive. This calls for concern and deserves more studies to address the issues. Embracing sustainable tourism in developing destinations like the ACBK may be the best option to sustain the culture and interesting destinations for the future generation in the face of rapid modernisation (majority). Findings show that the positive impact of the tourism sector in advancing knowledge and tourism policies is pronounced in developed and a few developing countries. Thus, advocating for responsible and promoting tourism as a driving force towards economic growth, inclusive development, and environmental sustainability cannot be over-emphasised (P5, P7, P13, P20, P23, & P30). The succeeding sub-sections present the study's main findings and discussion, as presented in **Table 3**, to demonstrate Objective One.

Table 3. Matrix of main findings.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Code
	Destination accessibility-related feature	Mangroves (majority)
		Terrestrial features (breach and coral bleaching) (P1, P7, P13, P23, & P29)
		Marine wildlife (i.e., coral and fish diversity) (majority)
		Low health risk's location (majority)
		Secured destination (majority)
Theme One:		
Features of global tourist location	Proximity to tourist attractions-related feature	Mangroves (majority)
		Terrestrial features (breach and coral bleaching) (P1, P7, P13, P23, & P29)
		Marine wildlife (i.e., coral and fish diversity) (majority)
		Clear waters (P4, P14, P22, & P30)
		Warm temperatures (majority)
	Economic and policy diffusions-related feature	Terrestrial features (breach and coral bleaching) (P1, P7, P13, P23, & P29)
		Low health risk's location (majority)
		Secured destination (majority)

Source: Authors work.

4.1. Theme 1: Features of global tourist locations

Identifying the features that attract tourists to locations is pertinent in promoting the tourism industry. The industry has contributed significantly to many countries' economic growth by hosting millions of visitors annually. One germane point is the features clustered into three groups, as summarised in **Table 3**. They are destination accessibility, proximity to tourist attractions, and influence of economic and policy diffusions related features. Regarding diffusion mechanisms, findings focus on the destination or tourism location management team and how their decisions influence tourist behaviour. Findings highlight the main global tourist location features, as presented in **Table 3**. **Table 3** shows that some features appear in more than one category. This includes mangroves, terrestrial features, marine wildlife, low-health risk location, and secured destination. Findings show that the sustenance of these attributes will improve achieving Goal 11 in a developing economy like Nigeria.

Regarding mangroves as a tourist location, the study shows that it is an important ecosystem and could be used to improve the tourism industry. Findings agree with Vipriyanti et al.^[41]. They found that mangrove

tourism destinations attract millions of visitors yearly. Participant P3 says, “.....*many African cities, especially Benin City, are blessed with mangroves, but developing them to attract global tourists as their destination has been challenging....*” Findings show that environmental attributes are pertinent in decision-making for tourism destinations (P6, P20, P24, & P27). This includes clear waters, low health risks, marine wildlife, and terrestrial features. Participant P20 says, “.... *There is a relationship between tourism destination and the environment. It networks with the environment. Thus, tourism location managers should invest resources to mitigate climate change’s economic and environmental impacts on environmental features because of its alteration over the years.....*” Findings agree with Ugur and Akbiyik^[20]. They opined that tourism businesses network with an open environment. Thus, one of the study’s motivations. The study argues that sustainable cities and communities can be improved if attributes that attract global tourists are sustained. This is germane for both (SDG 11 and tourism growth) in Nigeria.

Overall, findings show that the ACBK has attributes that could attract international tourists. Besides the environmental attraction and annual ceremony (Ugie Festival), the royal costumes, wood carving, and bronze casting^[42] are novels and charming identities to attract global tourists. Findings agree with Nevadomsky et al.^[24]. They reported that the historic Benin Kingdom buildings show the relationship among social structure, cultural meanings, vernacular architecture, and settlement patterns. These attributes attract global tourists. Findings show that the monarch’s palace receives local and foreign visitors during Ugie Festival (A ceremony celebrated by the king annually) (majority). Participant P3 says, “.....*the costume and colours worn by the king and his family members, chiefs, palace functionaries, and other celebrants are gorgeous with the adornment of beads and special hairstyles decorated with beads.....*” But sustaining them is not without some barriers. Thus, mitigating the barriers is inevitable.

4.2. Theme 2: Barriers facing ACBK as a preferred global tourist location

Theme 2 identifies barriers facing ACBK as Nigeria’s preferred global tourist location. This calls for concern about the economic benefits of tourism to the immediate host community and, by extension, Nigeria. Findings show that SDG 11 is threatened if these barriers are not curtailed. This is because there is a relationship between Goal 11 and tourism. Tourism can boom in environmental and sustainable cities. What makes this happen in principle is improving achieving Goal 11. Understanding these barriers is germane to improving ACBK destinations as a preferred tourist location and, by extension, improving the achievement of Goal 11. Besides economic growth, cultural preservation, environmental protection, and job creation associated with tourism, it enhances tourists’ quality of life and educational value (P3, P9, P13, P17, P23, P27, & P30). The perceived barriers include governments (federal and state) attitude towards tourism, the absence of destination management and marketing organisations, the inability to access information on available destinations, insecurity (kidnapping, banditry, armed robbing, youth restiveness, community crisis, etc.), poor tourist destination image, and absence of incentive/motivation to artists emerged as the major issues. Others are:

- i. Absence of attractions destinations offers (P15 & P20).
- ii. Lack of priority in tourism destination planning (P21, P24, & P26).
- iii. Inaccessibility of loans (short and long-term) (P8, P14, P17, P22, & P27).
- iv. Poor awareness (P14, P18, & P22).
- v. Absence of exposure to national and international exhibitions (P10, P15, P26, & P30).
- vi. Lack of amenities and infrastructure (P3, P6, P17, & P26).
- vii. Lack of interest by custodians of the location to broaden access (P12, P18, & P25).

- viii. Nonstandard tourism destination (P6, P15, & P26).
- ix. Inadequate knowledge about tourists (P14 & P18).
- x. Limited access options to the destinations (P5, P12, P22, & P26).
- xi. The absence of positive emotional surprises for foreign tourists (diverse and appealing attractions) (P6, P13, P16, P20, & P24).

Participant P18 says, “..... *how many potential global tourists can access information on the net regarding the Ancient City of Benin Kingdom and its tourist features? This is where the government has not done enough. Public-partnership is the way to go.... and provide information of the competitive strength of different locations in the Kingdom....*” Government lax attitude towards Benin Crafts is enhancing the extinction of Benin’s Artists and their products (majority). Findings agree with Atairu ^[43]. They found that governments (local, state, and federal) have not done enough to encourage arts and cultural activities in Benin’s traditional culture. Poor destination marketing has negatively influenced tourist destination image (majority). Participant P24 says, “.... *ACBK has a competitive advantage (natural and cultural resources) as a tourist city but is faced with challenges. One of the critical challenges is the poor international image as a tourist destination. The government has not helped matters regarding image marketing....*” Findings agree with Matiza and Oni ^[44]. They found that most African tourist destinations lack destination-brand identity and image. Thus, it discourages international tourists from patronising the locations for their vacations. For the nonstandard tourism destination, findings agree with Zhang et al. ^[45] and Yang et al. ^[46]. Zhang et al. ^[45] discovered a continuous rise in nonstandard accommodation in the tourism industry. The inability to understand tourists’ behaviour by operators of the destinations has hindered patronise or recommendation of destinations to family/friend members who travel to the same city ^[46].

Regarding insecurity and the absence of basic facilities like electricity, pipe-borne water, internet, and road network, findings agree they are threats to ACBK preference as a desired tourist destination (majority). Participant P14 says, “..... *inadequate infrastructural development is not peculiar to the Benin Kingdom. Many developing countries’ cities tourist locations would have preferred destinations, but the inadequate infrastructure is challenging.....*” Findings agree with Ugur and Akbiyik ^[20], Yang et al. ^[46], and Ilori et al. ^[10]. Ugur and Akbiyik ^[20] asserted that managing the crisis associated with tourism destinations needs extraordinary efforts. They classified the crisis into exogenous and endogenous crises. It could be classified into geographical ranges. This includes local, regional, national, international, and global. For global crisis or insecurity cuts across more than two countries, such as the financial crisis of 2008 and the terrorist attacks of 9/11. Ilori et al. ^[10] found insecurity and the absence of basic amenities to be factors that could hinder attraction of tourist destinations. Despite the diverse range of museums, tropical rain forests, unique culture, mountains, and beautiful sandy beaches, these factors are barriers to a preferred global tourist location. Participants P7, P20, & P24 underscore that they can counter extensive locations.

4.3. Theme 3: Measures to promote ACBK as a preferred tourist location

This theme allows participants to identify measures to promote ACBK as a preferred tourist location. Many cities in developing countries, including the ACBK, have faced difficulties meeting the minimum requirements to attract international tourists. These difficulties are threats to SDG 11. The technological backwardness compounds this, noncompliance to mitigating the changing environment, and uncertainty in the tourism industry. Thus, proffering measures to promote ACBK as a preferred tourist destination is pertinent. Findings reveal that the ACBK has many destinations that can be upgraded to global tourism destinations and would attract tourists, but stakeholders need more work. Findings agree with the Edo State Government^[47]. They identified the Benin Moat at Sakponba Road, Egedege Nokaro (first story building in Benin – 1905),

Igun Street (known for Benin Bronze casters' heritage site), the Tomb of Asoro at Sakponba Road (valiant Odionwere Omada, Head of household staff of Oba Ovonramwen), the National Museum of Benin City, Emotan Statue, Ogba Zoological Garden, and the most significant is the Oba's Palace as destinations that attract tourists in the ACBK. These locations need to be sustainable to make the city attractive to global tourists. This is a component of sustainable cities and communities (Goal 11). The destinations are unique and novel if well-developed (majority). For example, the Benin Moat, also known traditionally as 'Iya', is the largest man-made earthwork as a defensive barrier that cuts across the city (P3, P5, & P23). Participant P3 affirms that the moat is over 3,200km long. It was constructed during the reign of Oba Oguola in the 13th century. What about the Ogba Zoological Garden that was established in 1915? Participant P2 says, "... *our Ogba Zoo is the first to receive legal statute backing in Nigeria and covers over 20 hectares with different local and foreign species of wildlife....*" A quick visit to the Zoological Garden by the lead researcher confirmed the claim.

Among the perceived major measures to promote the ACBK as a preferred tourist destination include encouraging functional destination management and marketing organisations (DMMOs) in the ACBK, encouraging various forms of government interventions and incentives, accessing finance to expand upgrade facilities and their location, and stakeholders' collaboration in targeting market campaign and basic infrastructure development. Others are:

- i. Organise workshops/seminars/conferences for relevant parties (P3, P23, & P28).
- ii. Introduce the relevance of tourism and cultural crafts like pottery and bronze making in secondary school (P16, P17, & P24).
- iii. Stakeholders, especially investors, and government should introduce digitalised kiln firing to bronze casters and potters through workshops and practical seminars (P22, P26, & P29).
- iv. Destination-brand identity and image (P4, P9, P12, & P22).
- v. Collaboration via public-private partnerships to host special events like the Ugie Festival should be encouraged (P4, P8, P11, & P26).
- vi. Destination/brand personality (P7, P9, P14, & P27).
- vii. Understand tourist emotion (P7, P15, P27, & P30).

Findings agree that functional DMMOs roles include facilitating funding, convener and facilitator, catalyst, network manager, community builder, partner and team builder, advocator, and tourism product developer. Thus, the role of DMMOs in promoting the ACBK as a preferred destination cannot be over-emphasised. Findings agree with Adeyinka-Ojo et al. ^[1]. They discovered that functional DMMOs would improve service quality and tourist experience, sustainability and attraction, and tourism product and development. "... *A functional DMMOs can improve destination brand building, increase in tourist arrivals, improve tourism products development....*" said Participant P24. Findings agree with Adeyinka-Ojo et al. ^[48]. They recommended that tourism and pottery should be integrated into the secondary school curriculum. Participant P22 says, "... *more expansion, especially in tourist locations within the Benin Kingdom should be developed to global standard to attract tourists to patronise the ACBK as a preferred location....*" Findings agree with Atairu ^[43] and Uzzi et al. ^[23]. They affirmed that for the industry to move to profitability via a preferred location, there should be a global method that ensures that new locations are opened. Findings agree with Ilori et al. ^[10]. They suggested that government interventions are not inevitable. Also, collaboration with international tourism organisations or travel agencies for increased visibility and accessibility should be encouraged by Nigerian tourism stakeholders. The outcome would improve the industry's sustainability.

Tourist destinations should proactively manage identities to positively influence their images and attract international tourists to their destinations (majority). Findings agree with Matiza and Oni ^[44]. They affirmed that destination-brand identity and image are key to promoting ACBK as a preferred tourist location. The role of the public-private sector partnership cannot be over-emphasised for tourism growth, especially in developing countries such as the ACBK. There is nothing wrong with upgrading the annual Igue Festival to the status of the Argungun Fishing Festival to attract more tourists (P4, P12, P16, P19, P26, & P28). Activities that would enhance sustain the city to attract foreigners during the festival are components contributing to improving the achievement of Goal 11. Participant P4 says, “...*Igue festival is one of the top traditional and cultural festivals celebrated by all Bini’s in the kingdom and attract indigenes from far and near.....*” Besides destination personality or brand personality is key to improving tourist attraction, especially in upcoming destinations (majority), understanding tourist emotion is pertinent. Participant P20 says, “.... *the probability for a positive tourist emotion to return to the destination or recommend destination is high. Hence, positive surprise, love, and joy should be displayed to tourist during their stay in the destination. This is missing in most of the ACBK destinations.....*” The focus in many ACBK destinations is money, profit, and sales, but there is less concern regarding the tourist emotion (P1, P6, & P22). Findings agree with Yang et al. ^[46]. They found that tourists consider a variety of positive emotions, such as pleasure, comfort, love, positive surprise, etc., in the planning process of their holidays. Besides the economic value of a global tourist location to the immediate communities and the host country, the output is to improve achieving Goal 11.

5. Study’s implication

The research findings revealed the key destinations for tourists in the ACBK. They are Benin Moat at Sakponba Road, Egedege Nokaro, Igun Street, the Tomb of Asoro at Sakponba Road (valiant Odionwere Omada, Head of household staff of Oba Ovonramwen), the National Museum of Benin City, Emotan Statue, Ogba Zoological Garden, and the most significant is the Oba’s Palace. Preferred locations are mostly short-distance or nearby and linked with cultural and natural resources. This includes wildlife/games, but the absence of water/beach areas disadvantages the ACBK. Understanding the barriers facing the ACBK as a preferred tourist destination would lead to better decisions from the stakeholders, especially destination operators and the government. Besides promoting ACBK as a preferred tourist destination, it would increase investors’ opportunities and promote eco-friendly sustainable materials such as landform sceneries and improve achieving Goal 11. The outcome would strengthen the country’s foreign currency via commercialising culture and arts and preserving and protecting local arts and culture (sustainable cities and communities). Also, the host communities will be strengthened, and social services will be provided via events and festivals that engage the residents and rejuvenate the tourist interest. Besides the proposed conceptual framework (**Figure 1**), the clustered features (**Table 3**) in developing countries, using Nigeria as a case study would form part of the theoretical implications. The clusters are destination accessibility, proximity to tourist attractions, and influence of economic and policy diffusions related features.

The results are imperative for promoting ACBK as the preferred tourist destination via recommendations, thus improving Nigeria’s tourism industry and achieving Goal 11. This research intends to stir stakeholders, especially government and destination operators, regarding promoting ACBK as the preferred tourist destination in Nigeria. The proposed measures are pertinent to the key stakeholders, including policymakers. It will promote ACBK towards becoming the preferred tourist destination in Nigeria. The measures include encouraging functional DMMOs, various government interventions and incentives, providing access to finance to expand upgrade facilities in their location, and stakeholders’ collaboration. If key stakeholders embrace these measures, the outcome will promote a healthy tourism industry and enhance the preservation and promotion of local cultural heritage and tradition in Nigeria. Besides preserving local arts and culture, job

creation, increasing foreign exchange, strengthening host communities, increase social gains and economy boost, and commercialisation and revitalisation of culture and art, it will contribute to local economies and increase sustainable tourism in the long run and improve achieving Goal 11.

6. The research limitations and possible areas for future studies

This research has limitations concerning the study design approach and area of study coverage, but the in-depth literature and accomplished saturation from knowledgeable participants improved the results' robustness. Thus, the research's findings can be generalised to other developing cities with similar attributes like the ACBK. For future studies, the research suggests a larger coverage of other destinations within Edo State, such as Ososo Hills, Somorika Hills, Edegbake/Oghodoghodo Caves, the Giant Footprint of Ukhuse Oke, and the animal footprint of Ivbidohen via a quantitative research design.

7. Conclusion and recommendations

This study identified the features of a tourist location, investigated the perceived barriers facing the ancient city, and suggested measures to improve achieving the ACBK as a tourist location and, by extension, improve achieving Sustainable Development Goal 11 in Nigeria. The study adopted face-to-face interviews to achieve the objectives. The study collected data within selected destinations using the convenient sampling technique from 30 participants. The researchers employed a thematic approach in the data analysis via a manual method. The governments (federal and state) attitude towards tourism, the absence of destination management and marketing organisations, inability to access information on available destinations, insecurity (kidnapping, banditry, armed robbing, youth restiveness, community crisis, etc.), poor tourist destination image, and absence of incentive/motivation to artists emerged as the major perceived barriers. Similarly, the study identified measures to improve achieving the ACBK as a preferred tourist location and improve achieving Goal 11 in Nigeria.

The following are suggested in line with the findings:

1. Many countries that have developed their tourism industries earn substantial foreign exchange as income to them. Thus, governments (state and federal) role should be all-inclusive to promote tourism in the ACBK and other Nigerian destinations with features of global tourist locations. This should include establishing and implementing a functional tourism information desk in all strategic locations and a comprehensive travel guide to destinations. The outcome would boost government revenues via tax on income from tourism employment and tourism businesses.

2. The need to improve awareness via social media and blogs to keep foreign and local tourists abreast cannot be overstated. Lax information has hindered Edo diasporans and foreign visitors from visiting these destinations. Thus, increasing stakeholders' awareness to improve their understanding concerning the ACBK as a preferred tourist destination is germane to promoting tourism investment/development and business opportunities for the betterment of Nigeria and other developing countries.

3. In the era of sustainability, preserving local arts and culture to stimulate the economy by improving the tourism industry should be considered. Many countries, including Malaysia, have benefited from the tourism industry. More educational training and reskilling are pertinent to harness skills to bridge local arts and cultural gaps for competitive advantage. This is pertinent in digitalisation and urbanisation, but local heritage and indigenous cultures, including arts and crafts, should be protected via tourism sustainability.

4. The ACBK, as a preferred tourist destination, requires potential investors to create an enabling environment to attract global tourists and sustainable funding for research. Basic facilities coupled with safety are key to tourists. This is one area that should be addressed in Benin Kingdom. Kidnapping and epileptic

power supply should be tackled to improve the chances of patronising the ACBK as a preferred tourist destination. More research on ACBK should be encouraged because it is the root of technological development and innovations. This is vital to promoting ACBK and integrating the destination into global recognition.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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