

2020

## Pilgrimage Circuit of Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine, Osun State, Nigeria

Emeka E. Okonkwo

University of Nigeria - Nsukka, emeka.okonkwo@unn.edu.ng

Afamefuna P. Eyisi

University of Nigeria, Nsukka, afamefuna.eyisi@unn.edu.ng

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp>



Part of the [Africana Studies Commons](#), and the [Tourism and Travel Commons](#)

### Recommended Citation

Okonkwo, Emeka E. and Eyisi, Afamefuna P. (2020) "Pilgrimage Circuit of Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine, Osun State, Nigeria," *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*: Vol. 8: Iss. 4, Article 9.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/5h0v-g023>

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol8/iss4/9>

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#).

---

# Pilgrimage Circuit of Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine, Osun State, Nigeria

---

**Emeka E. Okonkwo**

Department of Archaeology and Tourism, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.  
[emeka.okonkwo@unn.edu.ng](mailto:emeka.okonkwo@unn.edu.ng)

**Afamefuna P Eyisi**

Department of Archaeology and Tourism, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.  
[afamefuna.eyisi@unn.edu.ng](mailto:afamefuna.eyisi@unn.edu.ng)

One religious tourism destination site of note in Southwestern Nigeria is the Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine, located along the banks of the Osun River in the city of Oshogbo, Osun State, Nigeria. The sacred grove and shrine was inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2005. This paper examines the routes and trails people take to get to Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine with a view to evaluating access to the destination site as well as the factors impacting on the sacred grove. The study uses ethnographic methods to elicit information from respondents and data collected were analysed descriptively. The paper argues that Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine can improve the living standard of the host community and create job opportunities if its access routes, facilities and trails are improved upon by government.

**Key Words:** pilgrimage, tourism, Osun Osogbo, sacred grove, shrine

## Introduction

Africa as a continent has been known since time immemorial, as containing a people greatly associated with worshipping traditional gods and goddesses, which is a true reflection of their religious life. Like the Greco-Roman Empire, Africa has many gods and goddesses which were deified in their sacred places (Ikoro & Ekevere, 2016). These gods and goddesses had temples where altars were engraved for prayers and sacrifices and are often referred to as shrines. Sarfraz and Mirza (2011:2 cited in Ikoro & Ekevere, 2016), opined that shrines are considered as spiritually attracted places, where admirers and adherents visit to accommodate their wishes and have them granted. Shrines and sacred groves are an integral part of African traditional religion, which is heavily represented in the daily affairs of the people. Shrines and sacred groves play socio-religious and socio-cultural roles in most traditional societies even to this day. However, the existence of shrines and sacred groves has been challenged through time and they are still passing through difficult times (Ikoro & Ekevere, 2016); this is because Africa's contact with the outside world has exposed the continent to an avalanche of socio-political and religious influences resulting in significant impacts on the indigenous modes of worship. These influencing forces include among others - Islam, slave trade, colonialism, Christianity

and Western education. To this day, the effects of these are still felt in the religious life of all the African people, including Nigeria which is well known for her rich socio-cultural identity.

It must be noted that long before the ethnic groups that constitute Nigeria had any contact with Western and other foreign religious influences, they had their distinctive religious and philosophical worldviews which dictated their choices of gods and deities, as well as their modes and places of worship. These practices constituted a crucial part of their cultural identity for which they were known. Until the present date, Nigeria is a geopolitical entity that is well known for her conservativeness in cultural practices. Each of the over 250 ethnic groups have at least one cultural practice that makes them unique. One aspect of such practices which is well pronounced is the designation of certain areas as sacred in order to minimise peoples' access either for agriculture, or cutting down trees for timber. This technique no doubt has helped in land conservation, and has equally led to the concept of national parks and game reserves in the contemporary setting, which has triggered eco-tourism in different parts of the country. Examples are the Yankari Game Reserve in Bauchi State, Okomu National Park in Edo State and Gashaka Gumti National Park in Adamawa State etc.

A study of groves and shrines reveals the belief systems of host communities and explains the relationship between religion and nature. Shrines are sacred places where religious / ritual offerings are made, and they are the dwelling places of spiritual beings. Groves on the other hand, are very thick dense forests where those who died of infectious diseases like leprosy, swollen stomach etc were thrown. Such forests are usually avoided by the host community and in most cases are dedicated and owned by deities. Shrines and groves vary in their physical and biological appearance. They may consist of several tall trees with spreading branches plus a dense under storey, smaller trees, woody shrubs, bush and grasses, water bodies, a few stones gathered in a heap with white feathers stained with the blood of all the sacrificial victims. Sacrificial objects such as eggs, coins, beads, cowries, potsherds can often be found at such sites. According to Okpoko (2001), groves serve purposes that transcend the spiritual, thus, encompassing the educational and social, which play a role in the conservation of genetic heritage. Shrines on the other hand, being holy places of worship, generally serve as the markers of the sacred geography of a religious tradition.

Shrines and groves have contributed to the development of religious tourism in many parts of the world; they remain a fundamental part of traditional religion where admirers and adherents visit for their varied spiritual needs. Shrines and groves are usually located in an awe inspiring places that transcend the ordinary. In some cases, they are located in places that may not be reached by any form of transportation and are excluded by preying eyes. Such places (like Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine – see Figure 1), inspire admirers and adherents because they want to have spiritual experience / upliftment, and explore where their forefathers might have worshiped, as well as seeking inspiration and desire to witness significant religious festivals.

Knut Aukland (2017) investigated the development and promotion of the Char Dham Yatra (or Char Dham), a Hindu pilgrimage route in the Himalayas. Knut's findings challenged some prevalent assumptions and models in current scholarship concerning pilgrimage and tourism. In the words of Scott (2012), travel for pilgrimage purposes is an important part of Hindu doctrine and millions of adherents travel throughout India and from abroad each year for religious festivals, pilgrimage circuits, and ritual cleansings as well as to admire ancient and beautiful Hindu pilgrimage sites. Vijayanand (2012) conducted a study in Tamilnadu

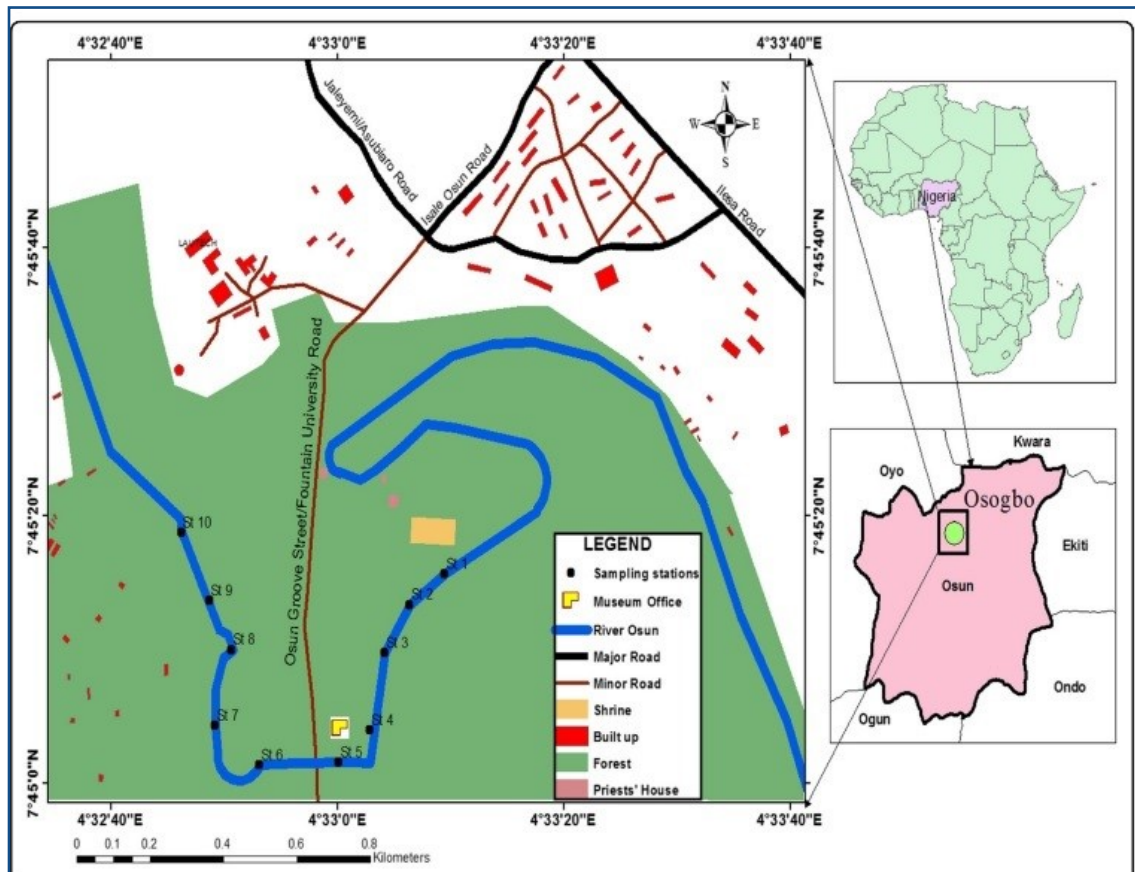
with special reference to pilgrimage circuits (Velankanni, Nagore and Thirunallar). Vijayanand's findings revealed that the pilgrims were not satisfied with existing facilities provided at pilgrimage sites such as accommodation, transportation, availability of banks and ATMs, among others. By contrast, pilgrims were satisfied with shopping facilities and their personal safety during their visit to the area.

Gupta and Sharma (2008) in their study tried to determine the pilgrims' expectations and their satisfaction levels by finding the extent to which the pilgrims' expectations are met. Four attributes were categorised as dissatisfying attributes, namely religiously sensitive staff, prepared itineraries for sale on the religious circuit, information about the religious destination and information about the requirements at a destination. So, a significant variation was found in terms of overall satisfaction of pilgrims. Hence, it is suggested to offer tourism services and facilities which match the visitors' / pilgrims' expectations so as to increase the number of satisfied guests as well as promote the notion of repeat visitors.

Kumar and Singh (2015) evaluated the expectation and satisfaction of Hindu pilgrims at Naina Devi Shrine situated in the north-western Indian state of Himachal Pradesh. This study provides a demographic profile of the pilgrims to the site while emphasising the necessity of improving appropriate entertainment activities, upgrading the cleanliness hygiene and sanitation situation, and reconstructing the prices charged for accommodation and souvenirs items in order to enhance the satisfaction of pilgrims. It is pertinent to note that the benefits and understanding of pilgrimage circuits in destination sites will inform about the features and facilities at the destinations as well as possible routes at tourists' disposal. This paper therefore attempts to showcase the pilgrimage circuit of Osun Osogbo, the importance of the grove and shrine, attractive components of the destination as well as factors affecting the sacred grove. It is believed that the paper would enhance tourist flow to the destination site.

Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine is located in Osogbo city in western Nigeria. Osogbo is the capital of Osun State and lies at coordinates 7°46' North and 4°34' East with an area of 47km<sup>2</sup>. Osun State is situated in the tropical rain forest zone and covers an area of approximately 14,875km<sup>2</sup>. This paper examines the tourist circuit to the sacred grove and shrine. Efforts are also made to place on record the history of the destination site, criteria for enlisting the site as a

Figure 1: Location Map of Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine



Source: Akindele *et al.* (2017)

UNESCO World Heritage Site, as well as factors mitigating against the destination. A pilgrimage circuit in this context means an established venue used for pilgrimage activity, typically involving religious performance as well as the access route(s) which pilgrimages can use to get to the religious centre.

### Osun-Osogbo Grove and Shrine: A Discourse

Primarily this study uses ethnographic methods to elicit information from local respondents, in addition to field visits and participant observation at the site. The collected data were analysed descriptively, with the key findings linked to various secondary sources and presented in the following discussion.

Many authors have written on Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine in one form or the other. Some have studied it from the tourism point of view (Enemuo & Oduntan, 2012; Olatunji & Ezenagu, 2016) or the festival perspective (Khadijat, 2011, Olaniyan, 2014), while others have considered the contributions of Susanne Wenger to the revitalization of the grove (Orjiakor & Okonkwo, 2009/2010; Bender, 2014;

Adeniran & Akinlabi, 2011). Another group analysed the safety issues and conservation of the grove (Nwankwo & Mathias 2016). All these are aimed at highlighting the central place of the grove not only to the Yoruba, but throughout Nigeria and beyond. Osun is known as the goddess of the 'water of life,' responsible for fertility. History has it that after disputes with other lesser gods, the goddess Osun was ostracised to the Osun River. For this reason, the whole of the river is perceived to be sacred. The sacred grove is even more sacred as it is where Osun actually stays.

The grove in itself is an organically evolved cultural landscape that has stood the test of time hence, its inscription as a world heritage site. It covers about 75 hectares of rainforest vegetation typical of a West African setting, with over four hundred species of plants, with about 200 of them having medicinal values (Osaghale, Omisore & Gbadegesin, 2014). Additionally, the site is a beauty to behold as it houses over 40 shrines, 2 palaces and numerous sculptures and other works of arts like the suspension bridge, which attract visitors from far and near. The grove is very popular in Osun State and beyond and is easily accessible. It is located on the bank of Osun River in

Oshogbo Local Government Area of Osun State, South-Western Nigeria. Osun State is the heart of Yoruba customs and traditions, housing two major historic cities of Ile-Ife and Osogbo (Olukole, 2014). However, Oshogbo has become popular to scholars of cultural history, tourists and the likes because of the sacred grove.

History has it that the grove was discovered by a renowned elephant hunter Olutimehin, who convinced his friend Larooye, the Owaroki of Ipole-Omu, who was in search of abundant water, to settle because of drought in Ipole-Omu and so to establish his people in Osun Forest (UNESCO Nomination, 2004). For this reason, Larooye made a pact with Osun which included the respect and protection of the grove by himself and his people and, in turn, their prosperity and protection from their enemies. Osun on her part also promised to multiply them if they would build a shrine to worship her. Presently, the renewal of this pact annually by the Osogbo community has culminated into what is now called the Osun-Osogbo festival. During this festival, the community brings offerings to Osun and in turn revives her energies through the collection of some of the 'Water of life'. But the grove is also a place of weekly worship where devotees come to renew themselves, to offer presents or to consult Osun. Initiation of priestesses and priests, as well as of oracles and Osun devotees are also carried out (UNESCO World Heritage Scanned Document, 2004). By the middle of the 20th century, the sacred spaces within the grove began to be desecrated, shrines were looted and parts of the grove encroached upon for various purposes. However, the site was saved through the combined efforts of an Austrian Artist (Susanne Wenger popularly known as Adunni Olorisa) and some traditional Yoruba artists (Babalola, 2014). As a result of this protection effort, the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove is today probably the only remaining sacred grove in Nigeria that has kept all its traditional functions and remains so closely related to the community.

In recognition of its importance, Osun Osogbo Grove and Shrine, was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List on 15<sup>th</sup> July, 2005. The inclusion of Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine was undertaken using the following criteria:

**Criteria iii:** *Osun sacred grove is the largest and only remaining of such groves in West Africa that is used to characterize every Yoruba settlement. What is more; the grove has kept most of its characteristics alongside Yoruba*

*traditional religious activities to the extent that it has been elevated from its local status to a regional and global center for the practice of Yoruba traditional religion and medicine. In Osun-Osogbo, all Yoruba have their landmark, identity and a rich sense of history, deep oral traditions which are testimonies to a living cultural tradition and civilization.*

**Criteria vi:** *The Osun grove is directly and tangibly linked with the Osun Osogbo festival which takes place in August every year bringing all Osogbo people and their Yoruba kith and kins into spiritual and temporal contact with their deity, re-enacting the bonds that exist between the king and their people; the Osun goddess and Larooye, the founder; between gods and men; between the town and the grove; between water and life. As a large sanctuary where people come to consult and communicate with the gods and where priestesses and oracles are initiated, Osun grove is an outstanding and living witness of the Yoruba divinatory and cosmological system called IFA, widely practiced not only in many parts of West Africa, but also in Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico and other Antilles islands by descendants of African slaves.*

**Criteria v:** *The Osun grove illustrates the land-use practice in the sub region, a testimony of the traditional wisdom of man (inspired by the gods and the Ifa knowledge system) who has always maintained an appropriate equilibrium between nature and man. The Osun sacred grove and the city of Osogbo are complementary. The grove which is mostly kept wild is both a sanctuary for Osun and other lesser gods that can be consulted for protection and a natural reserve with full biodiversity that can be used for medical purposes. The grove is a microcosm of the optimal utilization of space within the ecosystem for sacred-secular purposes that parallels the use of space in town.*

(UNESCO World Heritage Scanned Document, 2004).

## Attractive Components of the Destination Site

### *The Osun River*

The Osun River is very important in the story of Osun grove. The river drains the Osun basin in a north-south pattern and passes out of the grove towards the south-west (Babalola, 2014). The water signifies a relationship between nature, spirit and human being, as it is believed that water in the Yoruba cosmology

Plate 1: Osun River



Source: Osaghale, Omisore and Gbadegesin (2014)

expresses divine action and symbolises life. It is also believed that the sacred water of Osun can make barren women pregnant, heal various diseases, ward off evil machinations of the enemy, and open the doors to prosperity and great success (Nigerian Art and Culture Directory, 2009). Moreover, the fish in Osun River were said to have been used by Osun, the goddess as a messenger of peace, blessings and favour dating back to the pact between her and the founders of Osogbo. Therefore, the annual ritual remembrance of this pact is the hallmark of the Osun-Osogbo festival. The nutrient level in the river Osun is still found to be within the acceptable limits for tropical rivers (see Plate 1). On close examination it is observed that the river consists of seventeen (17) green algae, eleven (11) diatomic and five (5) rotiferic 300 planktonic species. Twenty one (21) fish species belonging to seven (7) fish families were also recorded in Osun River within the grove. Ten (10) species of fish were found to be herbivorous, while seven (7) were omnivorous and four (4) were piscivorous (UNESCO World Heritage Scanned Document 2004).

### ***The Osun-Osogbo Festival***

Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove Festival (see Plate 2) is an annual affair which revolves round the king, Ataoja, and the Osogbo people. It is the renewal of the mystic links between goddess Osun, the people of Oshogbo and the founding of the town. The 12 day festival starts and ends in the palace of the Ataoja, beginning with (*Iwopopo*) the physical and ritual *cleaning* of the pilgrimage route from the palace in the centre of the town (Gbaemu), to the grove by the royal priestess (Iya

Osun) and the priest (Aworo), accompanying the household of the king with traditional chiefs, high chiefs and other notables with dancing and singing (UNESCO World Heritage Scanned Document, 2004). From the second to the fifth day of the festival, masquerades appeared in their numbers which are all dedicated to ancestors as well as *Sango*, the Yoruba god of thunder. The night of the 6th day is for the celebration of *Osanyin*, the deity responsible for healing through the wealth of knowledge of herbs. On this occasion, a 5000 year old sixteen-point lamp is lit using palm oil soaked in cotton wicks locally called *Olojumerindinlogun* from 7pm to 7am (Osaghale, Omisore and Gbadegesin, 2014). The Ataoja, his wives, *Ifa* priests and traditional priests would dance round the sixteen-point lamp, three times to the admiration of a cross section of the Osogbo people present at the palace grounds.

The 7th day is for honouring the *Ifa* (divination) priests who dance round Osogbo town to the admiration of the people, while the 8th day is exclusively for acrobatic performances by personified goddesses like *Oya*, one of the wives of Sango. Three days from the end of the festival, the Ataoja and his high chiefs pay compliments to his in-laws in a procession that leads from one house to the other. In a build up towards the grand finale, the tenth day witnesses the laying out of the crowns of the past and present kings for a rededication to Osun and this is called *Iborinde* in the Yoruba dialect. On this occasion, chiefs, priests and priestesses will prostrate before the crowns as a salute to the royal ancestors. The occasion is to invoke the spirit of the ancestors of the king (Ataoja) for a bestowal of blessings on the Osogbo people.

The 11th day is devoted to the final preparation for the grand finale that occurs on the 12th day. On that day the people of Oshogbo move in a procession to the sacred grove. The procession is led by the votary maid, (*Arugba*), the king, and devotees followed by high chiefs to the Osun goddess in the Osun Courtyard, at the first palace within the grove, known as Ojubo (the point of offering on the bank of the river). The votary maid (*Arugba*) who carries the ritual calabash of medicine follows the ritual route to the Osun temple. For the people of Osogbo the role of the votary maid (*Arugba*) goes beyond that of an unstable figure, she has the destiny of the whole town in her hands during the festival. She represents the life giving force of their spiritual being. She is the soul of the celebration; therefore, two bitter cola nuts are placed in her mouth so that she cannot speak out the wondrous things that

Plate 2: Osun Festival



Source: <https://www.nigerianbulletin.com>

fill her mind on visiting Osun. She must not stumble lest her fate and subsequently that of Osogbo will be exposed to the hazards of stumbling throughout the following year (UNESCO World Heritage Scanned Document, 2004; Olaniyan, 2014). When she arrives, there are usually loud ovations accompanied by beating drums and dancing.

At this juncture, the Ataoja is then called into the temple where he sits on the stone throne to offer prayers to the Osun goddess with a calabash of sacrifice prepared by the Priestess, the priest and the devotees. After this, the Priestess and Priest pray fervently for the Ataoja, the Osogbo community, other citizens, and participants. The sacrifice is then carried to the river for offering. At this point every one present begins to pray earnestly to the Osun goddess for individual and collective needs. The votary maid meanwhile retires into the inner part of the temple and stays there until the end of the festival. Thereafter, the king who leads the pilgrimage along the public route to the Ojubo shrine addresses the audience and prays that the Osun goddess will keep them all safe, so they can come the same time next year, and then everyone disperses (UNESCO World Heritage Scanned Document, 2004). The Osun Osogbo festival officially ends when the votary maid successfully returns to the Osun shrine in the palace.

### Pilgrimage Routes to the Sacred Grove and Shrine

Presently, there are two major roads and several footpaths that lead to sacred locations in the study area: mythological palaces, the primordial market (*Oja-Ohun toto*), the river side altars, the New Sacred Art works and the suspension bridge built in 1935 to

initially facilitate movement of men and materials during World War II ((UNESCO World Heritage Scanned Document, 2004; Osaghale, Omisore & Gbadegesin, 2014). A tarred road from the Ataoja's palace in town (Ode-Osogbo) about 1.5 kilometres from the grove forms part of the pilgrimage route to the grove; linking with a farm settlement and a village at the Southern end of the grove (see plate 3). The second (untarred) pilgrimage route branches off the major road, passes through a metal gate and stretches into the Osun Courtyard where the temple, the Osun Shrine and the river side altar are located. This latter route branches to a suspension bridge which also provides a link with the farm settlement on the Southern end. Several footpaths lead to various shrines numbering over forty (40); and to the sacred and interpretative architectural works in the grove. Among them is the ritual route which is a narrow footpath parallel to the main public pilgrimage path. The votary maid uses this ritual path during the grand finale of the Osun-Osogbo Festival on her way to the Osun Shrine situated within the first palace in the Osun Courtyard (UNESCO World Heritage Scanned Document, 2004), (see Plate 3).

Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine lies some 88 kilometres by road Northeast of Ibadan, 100 kilometres by road South of Ilorin and 115 kilometres Northwest of Akure. It is about 48km from Ife, 32km from Ilesa, 48km from Ikire, 46km from Iwo and 46km from Ila-Orangun. Tourists visiting the site from neighbouring towns like Ikirun, Ilesa, Ede, Egbedore and Iragbiji can locate the sacred grove and shrines easily as the destination site is accessible by road from any part of the state and beyond because of its central nature (see Figure 2).

In a bid to increase flows of inbound and outbound tourists, the state government is currently implementing a project to build an international airport in Ido Osun, Ede North / Egbedore local government areas. The airport upon completion, will serve as a human and cargo transportation facility. This project will further aid importation of facilities required in the destination site to give it a facelift and thus, meet international standard. Beside the ongoing international airport project, there are domestic and international airports as well as airstrips within the neighbouring states of Oyo, Ondo and Kwara. Notable among them are:

Bacita airport (an airstrip serving Bacita town and beyond) which is 5 kilometers Southwest of Kwara State.

**Plate 3: Tarred and Untarred Roads Leading to the Osun Oshogbo Grove**



Source: World Heritage Scanned Nomination 2004

Ibadan airport (a domestic airport serving Ibadan town and beyond) in Oyo State.

Akure airport (a domestic airport serving Akure town) in Ondo State; and

Ilorin airport (an international airport serving Ilorin and beyond) in Kwara State.

The state is also located along the railway line from Lagos State to Kano State and tourists have the option of using railway services to get to the destination site. Interestingly, Osun State has over 200 major towns and several villages, which have been allocated various phases of road improvement projects that would connect major cities / towns within the state. These road projects are to complement other road infrastructure development programmes, and thus, give quicker access to Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrines as well as open-up rural transportation and accessibility. These laudable road projects would further increase tourist flow to the area as well as facilitate movement of goods and services, which will impact greatly on the socioeconomic status of the state.

**Figure 2: Osun Osogbo Neighbouring Towns / Routes**



Source: <https://www.africanworldheritagesites.org/assets/images/osun-map.jpg>

### Factors Affecting the Sacred Grove

Osun grove is located south of Osogbo town. However, the town has expanded tremendously in recent times and the population that lives between the grove and the palace zone is quite large. This does not look good for the sustenance of the grove and its features, if the authenticity is to last. Added to this, the recent construction of a two way road in the area has made necessary the displacement of some houses. This has also increased pressure on the grove. It is commendable that construction of houses in the areas close to the fence of the grove has been successfully checked by the Museum and Traditional authorities. However, constant monitoring is needed and adequate surveillance mechanisms should be put in place for constant check. Other challenges that could affect the grove are discussed below.



### ***Environmental Pressures***

The grove is rarely affected by air pollution as winds mainly blow from East to West preventing polluted air reaching the forest. However, there are more risks on the river side, as many parts of Osogbo town lack good drainage system. Also, the river is getting clogged by the remains of plastic materials, especially plastic bags which take long time to break down. They tend to accumulate within the roots of trees located on the banks of the river. The river also flows through numerous smaller towns and cities where population pressures result in an overflow of refuse into drains and the Osun River. In the long run this situation could become alarming and as a matter of urgency the state government should act before it becomes too late.

### ***Natural Disasters and Risk Preparedness***

The main natural disaster likely to affect the site is the outbreak of fire. The practice of bush burning is still very much used in the region and there are also accidental fires that sometimes become uncontrollable. The forest is however, a rather humid environment that is not easily affected. The climate is also humid with rains during a long period of the year. However, in case of long periods of dryness there is the risk of fire outbreak in the grove, even though the main sacred zone of the forest is on one side and the river on the other forms a natural protection. The high-risk zone is therefore the western side. Thus, the management of the site need to provide a protective shield against fire occurrence throughout the grove.

### ***Visitor/Tourism Pressures***

Although the number of visitors and tourists to the site is not yet an issue regarding the carrying capacity of the grove, it is always advisable to be proactive in handling issues. However, the main threat in terms of visitor number is the annual Osun-Oshogbo Festival. This festival attracts about 40,000 people and presently, the organisers have looked into it, especially during the grand finale. It is proposed that the pilgrims be channelled in a more systematic manner. Additionally, new routes could be created so as to reduce the traffic.

### ***Religious Activities***

Another threat to the grove is the various religious and spiritual movements who use the river banks outside the grove, but sometimes very close to the buffer zone, for their invocation and purification sessions, some of which run counter to traditional religious practices.

These most particularly affect the sacred place on the river which is outside the main grove but still is related to it. The management of the site should urgently look into this and caution the offenders in any way possible. They should also set a boundary with forbidden areas in order to ward off intruders.

## **Conclusion**

This paper explored various route options available to tourists in accessing Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine. To make the study more intelligible, other attractive components were examined in order to broaden both its contents and context. A historical presentation of the sacred grove / shrine was done, alongside the criteria used in inscribing the destination site into the UNESCO World Heritage List as well as the factors affecting the sacred grove.

Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine is unique in the sense that a tourist who enters the site will become motivated to visit all the attractions (grove, river, shrine and arts works etc) available on the circuit. It should be noted that one of the objectives of having a tourist circuit is to increase the total number of visits to all the attractions and to offer tourists the opportunity of exploring them and thus, satisfying their intents and offering value for money spent at the destination site. The current routes to the sacred grove and shrine are structured considering the length, duration and connectivity. The proposed road projects connecting the destination site with other towns within the state are expected to open more opportunities for job creation, rural development, revenue generation, and increase inflow of tourists to the destination site. To maximise the benefits of the destination site, the identified factors affecting the grove should be addressed. There should also be consistent government and stakeholder commitment, in terms of action on the ground, to transform the needs and will into solid action.

Given the premise above, it is the responsibility of both the public and private sectors to ensure that all hands are on deck so as to develop tourist routes to Osun Osogbo Sacred Grove and Shrine; thus, contributing significantly to Osun State's economy in particular, and improvement in the living standard of the host community and society in general.

## References

- Adeniran, A. & Akinlabi, F. (2011) Perceptions on Cultural Significance and Heritage Conservation: A case study of Susanne Wenger's Building, Osun Oshogbo, Nigeria. *African Journal of History and Culture*, Vol. 3 (5), pp. 73-88
- Akindede, E.O.; Olutona, G.O.; Oyeku, O.G. and Adeniyi, A.V. (2017) Assessment of Two Persistent Bioaccumulative Toxicants in the UNESCO Protected River of Osun-Osogbo, Nigeria. *Ecological Processes*. P.3. DOI 10.1186/s13717-017-0097-1
- Aukland, K. (2017) Pilgrimage expansion through tourism in contemporary India: the development and promotion of a Hindu pilgrimage circuit. *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, Volume 32, 2017 - Issue 2.
- Babalola, F. (2014) Potential and Challenges of Indigenous Knowledge in Conservation of Biodiversity in Osun Oshogbo Sacred Grove, Nigeria. *International Journal of Science and Nature*. vol.5 (2), 353-358
- Bender, T. (2014) *Lessons from the Osun Shrine*, Nigeria. Architecture, Culture and Spirituality Symposium.
- Enemuo, O. & Oduntan, O. (2012) Social Impact of Tourism Development on Host Communities of Osun Oshogbo Sacred Grove. *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. Vol.2, No.6, pp.30-35
- Gupta, B. & Sharma, S. (2008) Pilgrims' Expectation and Satisfaction in the Hospitality Industry-A Case of Katra, *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism System*, Vol.1, Issue 1, 73-80.
- Ikoru, E. & Ekevere, F. (2016) Shrinking Shrines and Expanding Altars: A Critical Study of Contemporary Trends in Religious Practices in Nigeria. *Discourse Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 3 (1) pp. 1-5.
- Khadijat, L. (2011) *Magic Poetry: A Study of Arugba Invocation in Osun Oshogbo Festival*. An unpublished Bachelor of Arts project submitted to the Department of English, University of Ilorin for the award of B.A Hons in English.
- Kumar, R. B. and Singh, L. (2015) The expectations and satisfaction of Hindu pilgrims in north-west India – the case of the Naina Devi shrine. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure*. Vol. 4 (2)
- Nigerian Arts and Culture Directory (2009) Publication of the Nigerian Arts and Culture Directory Project: Preview of Nigerian Festivals (20<sup>th</sup> edition). Available at www.nacd.gov.ng.
- Nwankwo, E. & Ugwu, M. (2016) Safety Issues at Selected Shrines/Sacred Groves in Southeastern Nigeria. *International Journal of Asia Social Science*. Vol. 6 (1), pp. 80-92.
- Olaniyan, M. (2014) An Appraisal of Osun Oshogbo as a Festival Theatre. *European Scientific Journal*. Vol. 10, No. 11, pp. 326-336.
- Olatunji, T. & Ezenagu, N. (2016) An Evaluation of Selected Attractions in Osun State for Tourism Promotion. *Journal of Tourism, Hospitality and Sports*. Vol. 15, pp. 7-15.
- Olukole, T (2014) Geographical Information Systems Database of Cultural Heritage Resources of Osogbo and their Tourism Potential. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* Vol. 3 (2), 1-10.
- Orjiakor, J. & Okonkwo, E. (2009/2010) The Contributions of Susana Wenger to the Management and Conservation of Osun-Oshogbo Sacred Grove/Shrine. *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 18, pp.1-12.
- Osaghale, G., Omisore, E. & Gbadegesin, J (2014) Exploratory survey on the maintenance of Osun-Osogbo sacred grove, Nigeria. *African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure* Vol. 3 (2), 1-22.
- Scott, J.S. (2012) Representing Sacred Space: Pilgrimage and Literature. In Coomans, T., et al. (eds.) *Loci Sacri: Understanding Sacred Places. KADOC Studies on Religion, Culture and Society*, 7. Leuven University Press Leuven, 139-167.
- UNESCO World Heritage Scanned Nomination (2004) The Inscription of Osun Oshogbo Sacred Grove/Shrine as world heritage site
- Vijayanand, S. (2012) Origin and Evolution of Pilgrimage Tourism Management. *South Asian Journal of Marketing & Management Research*, Volume 2, Issue 4, 151-170.