

**THE IMPACT OF THE HOSPITALITY OPERATIONS ON CUSTOMER
SATISFACTION AND BUSINESS SUCCESS: A CASE OF YANKARI GAME
RESERVE**

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0. Abstract

This study looks at how hospitality operations influence customer satisfaction and success in the Yankari Game Reserve. It is secondary research, and findings indicate that while Yankari Game Reserve remains a top tourist destination in Nigeria, offering a wide range of products and services to create the best leisure experience for the customers, customers interest in visiting the reserve is declining due to security issues inside and around the reserve. Today, it is difficult for tourists to visit the reserve without being worried about kidnapping or other related issues. The resulting impact is a decline in employment as those who were directly and indirectly employed via the reserve have no customers to attend to. There is also the issue of threats to the general sustainability of wildlife as these criminals attack these animals with weapons of mass destruction. Therefore, it is recommended that the Nigerian government take urgent measures to address these issues in order to ensure the sustainability of both employment and the wildlife ecosystem.

1. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality industry continues to expand globally, and Nigeria is not left out. This is because evidence suggests that the Nigerian hospitality sector contributes about 14% of the

country's GDP. In this entry, focus is laid on Yankari Game Reserve, as the study aims to address a number of important topics related to the reserve. First, the study begins with an assessment of the nature, structure, and core operations that are available at the reserve. Secondly, the study critically examines the product design and process for the services offered by the reserve. The third part is focused on an analysis of the factors that influence customers' satisfaction with the reserve. Finally, conclusions and recommendations are made based on the findings of the study.

2. THE NATURE, STRUCTURE AND CORE OPERATIONS OF YANKARI RESORT AND SAFARI

2.1. Nature

The Yankari Resort and Safari, also known as Yankari National Park, is a large wildlife area that is situated within the south-central region of Bauchi State, in the northern part of Nigeria. It is said to cover about 2,244 square kilometres (866 sq mi) and house numerous natural springs, together with a wide variety of fauna and flora. The location of this safari, which is within the heartland of West African savanna, makes it a unique place for holidaymakers and tourists to watch wildlife within their natural habitat. The history of Yankari can be traced back to 1956, when it was originally created as a game reserve, before it became designated as the biggest national park in Nigeria by 1991 (Yankari Game Reserve, 2023a, b). For tourists coming to Nigeria, Yankari Resort and Safari remains the most popular destination; thus, it plays a critical role in the overall promotion and development of tourism and ecotourism in the country. In fact, it is one of the most popular eco-destinations in West Africa.

2.2. History

While the open country and villages that surround the Yankari National Park are populated by herders and farmers, evidence suggests that there has never been any human settlement in the area in the course of over a century. However, there is still evidence to show that there were earlier human habitations in the park, which include caves and iron smelting sites.

In 1934, the Northern Regional Committee made a recommendation to the Executive Council that a pilot game reserve be established in Bauch Emirate. Alhaji Muhammadu Ngeleruma, a former minister in the northern Nigerian Ministry of Agriculture and Natural Resources, was among those who supported this recommendation. During that period, the former minister was impressed by a visit to a Sudanese game reserve while touring the eastern parts of Africa. Thus, on returning from the visit, the minister was on the side of those encouraging a similar reserve to be established in Nigeria (Yankari Game Reserve, 2023a, b).

2.3. Structure

By 1956, the plans for the creation of a game preservation area had been approved by the Northern Nigeria Government. Yankari was identified as a region located within the southern part of what was then the Bauchi Province, and it was chosen due to the natural concentration of a large number of wild animals and its ability to be protected. In 1957, the government went further by caving out a game preservation area within this chosen region, with the area being constituted as the Bauchi Native Authority Forest Reserve (Yankari Game Reserve, 2023a, b). On December 1, 1962, Yankari Game Reserve was first opened to the public. Since its first opening, Yankari Game Reserve has been managed by both the Bauchi State Government and the Northern Eastern State Government. However, at present, the park is being managed by the Federal Government of Nigeria via the National Park Services. By decree 36 of the National

Government, the Game Reserve officially became a National Park in 1991 (Yankari Game Reserve, 2023a, b).

2.4. Core operations and features

Yankari is known for having a rich wildlife resource, and this is the main attraction to the game reserve. This is also the main service or core operation being offered to the general public, as visitors can have access to different species of wildlife in their natural habitat. It represents an important refuge for over 50 different mammal species, which include the olive baboon, African bush elephant, Tantalus monkey, Patas monkey, western hartebeest, roan antelope, African buffalo, lion, bushbuck, waterbuck, and hippopotamus. It also features a large and diverse freshwater ecosystem within its freshwater springs and the Raji River. Also housed in the park are over 350 different bird species, of which 130 are resident and 50 are palearctic migrants, with the others being intra-African migrant birds that locally move within Nigeria. Some of the birds that can be seen in the park are: guinea fowl, saddle-billed stork, white-rumped vulture, cattle egret, and grey hornbill. The reserve is recognised as having one of the largest elephant populations in the entire West African continent, as it is estimated that there were over 300 elephants in Yankari as of 2005 (Yankari Game Reserve, 2023a, b). The growth of the elephant population is so pronounced that at times it has become a problem for the surrounding villages, with the animals sometimes entering local farms during the rainy season. These elephants have also stripped many of the baobab trees in the park as they seek to sustain their healthy diet.

As a result of the underground geothermal activities in the park, four hot water springs are also featured in Yankari National Park. Wikki Spring is the most famous of these springs, and the camp is named after it. The name "Wikki" comes from the local Duguri language, which means "where are you?". The Wikki Warm Spring is also the largest spring, and it spans about 13.0 metres wide and another 1.9 metres deep. Daily, 21,000,000 litres of clear water flow from the spring into the Gaji River. A constant temperature of 31.1°C is maintained by the spring throughout the year, both during the day and night, and it has been developed into a recreation centre. Aside from Wikki, other warning springs are Gwan, Dimmil, and Nawulgo. There is also a fighting spring, Tungan Naliki, which is the only cool spring within the park (Yankari Game Reserve, 2023a, b).

However, in terms of tourist facilities, the Wikki Camp is the only centre of the park, and it is located about 42 kilometres from the park's main entrance gate. The camp is built around and named after the Wikki Ware spring, and it is open for swimming 24 hours a day. The park houses 110 furnished chalets that come in different quality and sizes, ranging from the presidential suite down to the youth hostel, and all of these accommodations are being upgraded in phases (Yankari Game Reserve, 2023b). Also available in the camp are a bar, restaurant, and conference centre. Daily, at least two departures are made for the safari trip, which is usually the main reason why tourists come to Yankari Resort and Game Reserve.

3. ANALYSE THE DESIGN OF PRODUCTS AND PROCESSES

3.1. Getting to Yankari

The journey to accessing the recreation and accommodation services available at Yankari Game Reserve starts with actually getting there. It is advised by the management that the best time for tourists and visitors to come and have a full experience of Yankari is during the dry

season (which features warmer temperatures), which is typically between October and May. The reason for this is that the setting of the safari during this period would make it easier for tourists to see a wider range of different animals during their stay.

To get to Yankari, visitors going by flight will have to come from either Lagos or Abuja, as there is a direct flight from these two places to Bauchi State, where they can now enter by bus to Yankari. Once visitors arrive in Bauchi State, they can take any bus going straight to Yankari and engage in a 110km (1 hour) journey to the reserve. A significant portion of this driving time is actually within the reserve. The entrance gate is about 69km from Bauchi, in Mainamaji Village, while the distance from the entrance gate to the Wikki Camp is another 43km.

3.2. Design of products and processes

3.2.1. Accommodation

Once visitors arrive at the reserve, the first step would be to access an accommodation. Unfortunately, as of the time of this research, accommodation can only be accessed by physical presence at the reserve, and there is no option to book reservations or accommodations online or through any other process outside of being physically present at the reserve. This is also expected to cause some issues and inconveniences for visitors, as they might arrive to discover that there is no available accommodation within the reserve. However, the reserve maintains contact centres that could be reached via email or phone to discuss such issues and possibly provide solutions to the visitors before their arrival.



All accommodation services within the reserve are provided by the Wikki Resort Hotel, which is at the centre of the reserve and is known for simply classifying and revealing a strong blend of both conventional and modern architectural buildings with carefully selected materials that are rich in textures and colours that complement the cultural

and natural environment of the reserve. One unique thing about the accommodations is that they are highly affordable. The rooms start at \$5 for a student hostel and go up to \$516 for a corporate villa. However, notwithstanding the choice, all the rooms are equipped with air conditioning systems and room service (Yankari Game Reserve, 2023e).

3.2.2. Safari game viewing



The main attraction for visitors is the safari game viewing, where they can see different kinds of wild animals in their natural habitat. As pointed out earlier, the reserve is an important refuge for over 50 different mammal species, which include the olive baboon, African bush elephant, Tantalus monkey, Patas monkey, western hartebeest, roan antelope, African buffalo, lion, bushbuck, waterbuck, and hippopotamus. It also

features a large and diverse freshwater ecosystem within its freshwater springs and the Raji River. Also housed in the park are over 350 different bird species, of which 130 are resident and 50 are palearctic migrants, with the others being intra-African migrant birds that locally move within Nigeria. Some of the birds that can be seen in the park are: guinea fowl, saddle-billed stork, white-rumped vulture, cattle egret, and grey hornbill. The reserve is recognised as having one of the largest elephant populations in the entire West African continent, as it is estimated that there were over 300 elephants in Yankari as of 2005 (Yankari Game Reserve, 2023a, b). Therefore, visitors will have access to different varieties of wild animals and should expect to have a memorable holiday, although it is suggested that they visit during the dry season (between October and May) in order to increase their chances of seeing these wild animals.

3.2.3. Swim at the Wikki Warm Spring



There are four warm springs in Yankari, and the Wikki Warm Spring is the largest. It is a natural spa that comes with a constant temperature of 31.1 oC throughout the year, both during the day and night, and it is crystal clear, 13 metres wide and 2 metres deep, making it perfect for swimming. Access to this warm spring costs about \$5 per person. It is accessible 24/7, and the fact that the temperature is constant makes it convenient for visitors to have a swim

whenever they desire. There are also special discounts for lodgers, depending on the number of days they book.

3.2.4. Marshall Caves



The Marshall Caves are located 7 kilometres east of the Wikki Camp in Yankari, and they represent a set of 59 interconnected dwellings that are believed to have been the sources of shelter for ancient people during the slave trade. They were discovered by P. J. Marshall in 1980. The caves were dug out of sandstone escarpments. They also have some rock paintings and engravings in both zig-zag and straight lines, serving as signs for the dwellers to

know their present location and next route.

3.2.5. Museum



Another service offered by the reserve is the museum, which is one of the main attractions at Yankari Game Reserve. The museum is home to numerous parts of wildlife like tusks, skins, bones, horns, and full mounts of certain wildlife species that can be seen at the park, hunting gear, and taxidermy arts that have been retrieved from poachers. The museum became operational in 1985 and has since continued to feature more artefacts from

visitors.

3.2.6. Dukkey Wells



Since the Marshall caves are believed to have been used during the course of the slave trade, there must be somewhere these slaves are kept or at least slept. This is where the Dukkey Wells come into play. They were the resting places for slave traders that were travelling from Duguri to Pali during the period of slave trade. Thus, it is also a historical attraction that shows how the settlers managed their water supply. This

well features a channel of 139 wells that are linked underneath each other by shafts.

3.2.7. Shau-Shau Iron Smelting Site



Also located in Yankari with about 60 standing shaft furnaces, the Shau Shau iron smelting works is one of the world's most extensive concentrations of early iron smelting sites, and it is also known for having the highest historical industrial complex of its time within the sub-region of West Africa. It is also a strong attraction for visitors who are mainly interested in the history that comes with the place.

Aside from these featured services, visitors can also enjoy different sporting events being hosted at the reserve, be served varied (national, continental, and intercontinental) dishes at the restaurants, or engage in different meetings at the conference halls. Overall, Yankari features a combination of recreation, safari, accommodation, food, and other related services for visitors coming to the reserve.

3.3. Laws and regulations

While holidaying in Yankari, it is also imperative to recognise and observe the laws and regulations that guide visits within the reserve. One main highlight of these laws and regulations is the importance of maintaining the integrity of the game reserve and giving it the necessary respect in the light of these laws and regulations is the importance of maintaining the integrity of the game reserve and giving it the necessary respect. For instance, there are certain prohibitions like: do not speed over 80 km/h on the main road and 40 km/h on tracks close to the reserve; there are also restrictions on playing loud music from car stereos or making excessive vocal noise anywhere; and there are many other rules and regulations that can be accessed via the reserve's website (Yankari Game Reserve, 2023d).

4. THE IMPACT OF THE HOSPITALITY OPERATIONS ON CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND BUSINESS SUCCESS

When it comes to assessing the impact of hospitality operations at Yankari Resort and Safari on customer satisfaction and success, scholars do experience difficulties due to a lack of research in that area. Even the existing studies span over two decades, and accessing recent findings to be able to develop a more compelling analysis seems difficult (at least based on the experience from this present study). However, references can still be made to the few studies conducted within this discussion, and that will be the case here.

One of such studies was undertaken by Ishiyaku et al. (2020), and it focused on the effect of service quality, service price, and infrastructural provisions on customer satisfaction and patronage in Yankari Game Reserve. Findings from the study suggest that visitors gain the highest level of satisfaction from the hospitality services provided by Yankari Game Reserve through water facilities, natural environmental landscaping, access roads, electricity, health, and safety. The evidence from their study suggests that the reserve has an effective and efficient water supply system that is beyond the expectations of customers (considering that the reserve is isolated from major cities and infrastructure in the state). This is also coupled with drainage systems, sewage systems, and other water-related systems that make a stay at the reserve both memorable and enjoyable. However, considering the number of natural springs in the reserve,

it is expected that water shouldn't be an issue if it is properly managed. The second source of satisfaction is from the natural environment's landscaping. In order to be able to access the animals in their natural habitat (which is one of the main reasons tourists visit Yankari Game Reserve), it is expected that the entire reserve should be properly landscaped to ensure such ease of assessment. The customers are happy with the entire landscaping, based on the study by Ishiyaku et al. (2020), as it makes it easier to access the animals in their natural habitat and also return to their accommodations. Similar positive influences are seen in the cases of access roads, electricity, and health and safety measures. Basically, since the reserve is located outside the major city areas, one would naturally expect to face numerous difficulties in accessing needed facilities, but these facilities were put into consideration while developing the resort, and indications from customers' perceptions show that they are happy with the services offered at Yankari and, as such, satisfied overall. These findings are in line with extant empirical works (such as Anwar & Abdullah, 2021; Abdullah & Othman, 2019; Gardi et al., 2020; Prabhu et al., 2020), which all point to the view that the quality of service provided has a significant positive influence on customers' overall satisfaction, where the higher the perception of quality, the higher the impact on customers' satisfaction.

Another major highlight from the work of Ishiyaku et al. (2020) is the affordability of the services provided at the reserve. As stated earlier, the entry fee and accommodation can start as low as US\$5 per head, and there are also discounts depending on the number of days the person is staying in the reserve. However, there are also premium services for customers who are willing to break the bank and have a more stylish holiday. Therefore, it is evidenced that the management makes provisions for all categories of customers. This is in line with the findings from Ishiyaku et al. (2020), where it is pointed out that customers are satisfied with the overall price of the services offered at the reserve.

Therefore, it is clear that both the quality of services offered and the price of these services are strong motivations for customers, and they are also strong sources of satisfaction. However, while the management continues to enact numerous measures aimed at keeping the customers satisfied and loyal, the reserve still continues to face declining patronage (especially in recent times) due to increased insecurity issues.

4.1. Insecurity issues and declining patronage of Yankari Game Reserve

Ukah and Ejaro (2019) looked at the socioeconomic impacts of boko haram activities on the host community of Yankari Game Reserve. Their study revealed that since the advent of Boko-Haram terrorist activities and other social vices (like herders and farmers crashes, kidnappings, etc.), there has been a continued decline in patronage at the Yankari Game Reserve. There are incidences where tourists were kidnapped while watching these animals in their natural habitat, and releasing them requires a huge sum of money in ransom. There are also instances where kidnapped tourists were killed even after ransoms were paid. Due to these issues, people are becoming reluctant to visit Yankari Game Reserve, which is also affecting the overall wildlife activities in the area. Although significant, the issue of insecurity has continued to rise in Nigeria, and it is not projected to decline anytime soon. This issue is also most pronounced in the north-eastern part of the country, with Bauchi State being one of the most affected areas, making the Yankari game reserve exceptionally vulnerable. The large scale of the game reserve

also comes with difficulties for security personnel to access and confront terrorists or kidnappers.

Ukah and Ejaro (2019) also revealed in their study that in terms of buying and selling, patronage was very high prior to the Boko Haram era due to the high influx of tourists, but this has significantly decreased as people no longer visit the reserve like they did before. They also pointed out that many of the youths directly and indirectly employed (as tour guides and so on) are now without a job due to the declining interest of tourists in visiting the area. The challenge of terrorism and other related activities has had a significant negative influence on patronage, and it continues to negatively alter the image of the reserve. This issue is also significant because the youths that have been stripped of their jobs would naturally have to source for another means of earning a living, and this could push them into illegal activities.

Finally, Ukah and Ejaro (2019) also looked at the impact of these changes on the wildlife population. The issue of terrorism and related activities within the reserve would naturally have a negative effect on the wildlife population. This is because these terrorists will naturally have to defend themselves against these wild animals or be forced to consume them as food. Also, considering that the terrorists wield strong weapons of mass destruction, it is also expected that their impact on the wildlife population will be highly significant. Thus, if they are allowed to continue their activities, the resulting impact could be an empty reserve where the population of wildlife would drastically reduce.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The tourism industry remains one of the fastest-growing sectors in Nigeria, contributing a significant (14%) amount of the country's GDP. The Yankari Resort and Safari, also known as Yankari Game Reserve or Yankari National Park, is one of the key players in the tourism industry. It is renowned for housing the biggest Safari Games in all of West Africa, which is why it is a main attraction for tourists. Upon entering the reserve, visitors are treated to luxurious and affordable accommodations to choose from. Overall, tourists are satisfied with the quality of services being rendered at the reserve as well as the price of these services. The prices are structured in such a way that both the rich and the poor can actually access the reserve. However, the reserve has recently started to witness a decline in patronage. The main reason behind this is increased terrorism and insecurity issues around the reserve, and records show that some visitors have been kidnapped in the past, some had to pay a huge sum for their release, and some were even killed after paying the ransom. The socio-economic impact of this decline in patronage of Yankari Game Reserve includes a decline in patronage of other products and services that were dependent on the reserve, as well as a decline in employment as visitors are no longer interested in coming into the area.

Thus, based on the findings, it is recommended that the Nigerian government work towards addressing terrorism and other related issues. For the tourists, the risk of coming to Yankari Game Reserve seems to outweigh the benefits, and if it should remain that way, then they will continue to run away from the reserve. Therefore, addressing the terrorism and kidnapping issues is the only way tourists can be encouraged to return, providing them with the assurance that they will be safe during their stay. Another reason why the government needs to step up towards addressing the security issues is because they have a direct negative influence on the sustainability of the reserve. These security issues threaten the wildlife population in numerous

ways, and it is only when the government is able to address them that they can protect the wildlife in their natural habitat and ensure the sustainability of the reserve.

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