

Cultural Tourism Development through Route Design: Assessing Opportunities and Challenges in the FCT, Abuja

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ABSTRACT

Cultural tourism has emerged as a significant driver of destination competitiveness, particularly in regions with rich heritage resources. Despite Abuja's status as Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory and its diverse cultural assets, its tourism offerings remain underutilized due to the absence of structured cultural routes that could enhance accessibility, visitor experience, and sustainable development. This study examines the opportunities and challenges of developing cultural tourism through route design in Abuja. Adopting a mixed-method approach, data were collected from tourists, cultural site managers, and tourism stakeholders using surveys, interviews, and secondary records. Findings reveal substantial opportunities for cultural route development, including Abuja's central geographical location, diverse cultural festivals, heritage monuments, and stakeholder interest in promoting cultural tourism. However, key challenges such as poor infrastructure, inadequate signage, insecurity, weak institutional frameworks, and limited marketing undermine the potential of cultural tourism in the city. The study proposes thematic cultural routes—including heritage, arts and crafts, and religious-cultural circuits—that could strategically connect Abuja's cultural assets. The findings contribute to the literature on route-based tourism planning and provide practical insights for policymakers and destination managers seeking to diversify Abuja's tourism economy. The study recommends targeted infrastructure investment, stakeholder collaboration, and digital promotion strategies to position Abuja as a vibrant cultural tourism hub.

KEYWORDS: Cultural Tourism, Tourist Route Design, Destination Development, Abuja, Heritage Tourism, Sustainable Tourism

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1. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has evolved beyond traditional leisure activities to embrace cultural experiences that connect travelers with the identity, traditions, and heritage of host communities. Globally, cultural tourism accounts for more than 40% of all international tourist activities, positioning it as one of the fastest-growing sectors of the industry (UNWTO, 2023). The rise of experiential travel, where visitors seek immersion in local culture, underscores the strategic value of cultural tourism for destination competitiveness and sustainable development. Within this framework, tourist route design has emerged as a powerful tool to package dispersed cultural attractions into cohesive, accessible, and marketable experiences (García-Hernández et al., 2017).

In Africa, cultural tourism has gained momentum due to the continent's rich heritage, diversity, and living traditions. Countries such as South Africa, Kenya, and Morocco have demonstrated how well-curated cultural routes can stimulate local economies, preserve heritage, and enhance destination appeal (Rogerson & van der Merwe, 2021). Yet, in many contexts—including Nigeria—the potential of cultural tourism remains underexplored. Despite its abundance of tangible and intangible cultural resources, Nigeria has struggled with infrastructure deficits, fragmented marketing strategies, and weak policy frameworks that hinder tourism development (Okonkwo & Odor, 2020).

The Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, presents a unique case for cultural tourism development. As Nigeria's administrative and diplomatic hub, Abuja is centrally located, with excellent connectivity to other regions of the country. Beyond its political significance, the city and its environs host diverse cultural assets, including heritage monuments, traditional festivals, religious landmarks, indigenous crafts markets, and performing arts centers (Iwuoha, 2022). However, Abuja's tourism image is still strongly associated with government institutions and conference tourism, while its cultural potential remains largely untapped. The absence of structured cultural routes that can integrate and showcase these assets in a systematic manner has limited both domestic and international tourist engagement.

Problem Statement

Although Abuja possesses significant cultural attractions, these resources are not adequately mapped, connected, or promoted in ways that create holistic visitor experiences. Current tourism offerings remain fragmented, with cultural sites often promoted in isolation rather than as part of an integrated circuit. This limits tourists' ability to explore and appreciate the full range of Abuja's cultural diversity. Furthermore, weak infrastructure, poor signage, inadequate interpretation, and limited digital promotion create barriers for both local and foreign visitors (Adu-Ampong, 2019). The lack of a clear route design also undermines community participation and reduces potential socio-economic benefits for local artisans, performers, and cultural custodians. Addressing these gaps through structured route design could position Abuja as a vibrant cultural tourism hub in West Africa.

Research Aim and Objectives

The study seeks to examine how cultural tourism can be developed in Abuja through the design of thematic tourist routes. Specifically, the objectives are to:

1. Identify and map key cultural attractions within the FCT, Abuja, that have potential for inclusion in cultural routes.
2. Assess opportunities for cultural route development, including stakeholder support, geographical advantages, and market demand.
3. Examine challenges hindering the integration of Abuja's cultural assets into cohesive tourism products.
4. Propose models for sustainable cultural route design tailored to Abuja's socio-cultural and infrastructural context.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following questions:

1. What cultural attractions in Abuja can serve as focal points for route-based tourism development?
2. What opportunities exist for leveraging route design to promote cultural tourism in Abuja?
3. What challenges hinder the effective packaging of Abuja's cultural assets into thematic routes?
4. What strategies can enhance sustainable cultural tourism route design in Abuja?

Justification of the Study

This study is justified on both theoretical and practical grounds. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of literature on route-based tourism planning, which has been studied extensively in Europe and Asia but remains underexplored in African contexts (Timothy & Boyd, 2015; Rogerson, 2020). By situating Abuja within this discourse, the study highlights the applicability of route design frameworks to emerging destinations in the Global South. Practically, the research responds to Nigeria's policy thrust on diversifying the economy beyond oil dependence, with tourism identified as a priority sector (Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, 2021). Developing cultural routes in Abuja has the potential to enhance the city's tourism competitiveness, attract new visitor segments, and promote inclusive socio-economic development by linking urban and rural communities through cultural circuits.

Contribution to Knowledge

The study makes three key contributions. First, it maps Abuja's cultural tourism landscape systematically, identifying attractions with potential to be linked through route design. Second, it provides empirical insights into opportunities and challenges, filling a knowledge gap in Nigerian tourism research. Third, it offers policy and planning recommendations for stakeholders, including government, private investors, and local communities, to leverage cultural tourism as a tool for sustainable development.

However, coverage of all FCT cultural assets is constrained in this study; subsequent phases should expand beyond initial corridors.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Review

Cultural tourism is broadly defined as travel motivated by the desire to experience, learn, and participate in the cultural expressions of a destination, including its heritage, arts, festivals, traditions, and lifestyles (Richards, 2018). It encompasses both tangible heritage—such as museums, monuments, and architectural sites—and intangible heritage, such as music, gastronomy, crafts, and oral traditions (UNESCO, 2020). Cultural tourism not only enriches visitor experiences but also promotes identity preservation, cross-cultural dialogue, and socio-economic development.

Tourist route design refers to the deliberate planning and linking of attractions, sites, and experiences into a coherent pathway or itinerary that facilitates accessibility, enhances interpretation, and creates thematic value for visitors (Mihalič & Gartner, 2021). Routes can be geographic (e.g., wine trails, heritage corridors) or thematic (e.g., pilgrimage paths, cultural circuits), serving as strategic tools to cluster attractions and increase length of stay, expenditure, and repeat visitation. By offering a "narrative journey," cultural routes enable destinations to differentiate themselves and appeal to niche markets.

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In emerging destinations like Nigeria, cultural tourism route design presents a double-edged opportunity: while it has potential to promote sustainable diversification and regional integration, it is constrained by poor planning, infrastructural gaps, and lack of policy coherence (Adu-Ampong, 2019).

2.2 Theoretical Review

Two theoretical perspectives provide a foundation for understanding cultural route design:

1. **Destination Development Theory (Butler, 1980; updated by Saarinen, 2017).** This theory highlights the staged growth of destinations, emphasizing the importance of clustering attractions and diversifying offerings to maintain competitiveness. Applying this to Abuja, cultural route design could reposition the city from a government-conference hub to a diversified cultural destination.
2. **Cultural Economy and Creative Tourism Framework (Richards & Marques, 2012).** This framework argues that culture and creativity are economic resources that can be harnessed for tourism. By designing routes that integrate crafts, performing arts, and local traditions, Abuja can foster cultural entrepreneurship, thereby linking tourism with local economic development.

These theories justify the study's focus on linking cultural resources through route planning, situating Abuja's potential within global best practices.

2.3 Empirical Review

Cultural Routes in Global Context

Globally, cultural routes have been successfully employed to package and market heritage. The Camino de Santiago in Spain exemplifies how route-based tourism can merge pilgrimage, heritage, and community participation to attract millions of visitors annually (Timothy & Boyd, 2015). Similarly, the European Cultural Routes Programme demonstrates how thematic circuits strengthen identity, cross-border cooperation, and tourism competitiveness (Council of Europe, 2020). In Asia, studies in China and Japan show that linking rural heritage with urban markets through route design has revitalized traditional villages and supported sustainable livelihoods (Li & Song, 2019; Yamashita, 2021).

African Perspectives

In Africa, cultural routes are less developed but show promising outcomes. South Africa's Wine Routes and KwaZulu-Natal's Battlefields Route illustrate how integrated itineraries can foster both domestic and international cultural tourism (Rogerson & van der Merwe, 2021). In Kenya, cultural circuits incorporating Maasai traditions, crafts markets, and festivals have been leveraged to attract cultural niche markets, though challenges remain regarding infrastructure and marketing (Munyao & Mutinda, 2018). Ghana's efforts to promote heritage tourism through the Trans-Atlantic Slave Routes have similarly highlighted the potential for narrative-driven tourism products to shape national identity and global diaspora connections (Anane, 2020).

Nigerian Context

Nigeria possesses immense cultural resources, including festivals (e.g., Argungu Fishing Festival, Osun-Osogbo Festival), heritage sites (e.g., Sukur Cultural Landscape, Idanre Hills), crafts markets, and indigenous performance arts (Okonkwo & Odor, 2020). However, research consistently highlights weak infrastructure, fragmented marketing, and poor product packaging as barriers to tourism competitiveness.

- **Onyeocha and Eze (2019)** found that Nigeria's cultural attractions are marketed in isolation rather than as integrated packages, limiting their appeal to international tourists.
- **Iwuoha (2022)** argued that Abuja, despite being a political and economic hub, has failed to develop cultural products beyond conference tourism. Attractions such as the Arts and Crafts Village, National Mosque, and indigenous festivals remain underutilized due to absence of structured circuits.
- **Adu-Ampong (2019)**, in a comparative study across West Africa, noted that route design could enhance intra-regional tourism flows but requires stakeholder collaboration and infrastructural investment.

A 2024 systematic review of 38 cultural route cases worldwide finds that cultural routes function as composite heritage products whose success hinges on purposeful planning patterns (clustering, sequencing, zoning) and a toolbox that includes interpretation systems, digital mapping, signage, and community participation. The review concludes that well-designed routes consistently increase visitation, dwell time, and spatial dispersion of tourists, with positive spillovers for regional development (Lin and Shen, 2024)

Complementing this, a 2024 study reframes cultural routes through a sustainable mobility lens, arguing that route performance improves when walkability, last-mile transport, intermodal connectivity, and wayfinding are planned as part of the product—particularly in urban destinations where attractions are dispersed (Zouridaki, 2024). Policy guidance from this review (e.g., integrated mobility corridors, low-impact transport options) aligns with route design needs in Abuja's polycentric layout

Synthesis of Findings

From these studies, several trends emerge:

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1. **Opportunities:** Cultural route design enhances accessibility, creates thematic narratives, fosters identity preservation, and encourages community participation. Abuja's central location, cultural diversity, and connectivity present strong opportunities for such initiatives.
2. **Challenges:** Infrastructure deficits, poor signage, inadequate funding, lack of interpretation facilities, and weak policy frameworks remain consistent constraints across African contexts (Rogerson, 2020). Abuja is no exception, with cultural sites operating in silos and weak integration into national tourism marketing campaigns.
3. **Relevance for Abuja:** Empirical evidence from other African destinations shows that thematic cultural circuits—when supported by government, private sector, and communities—can reposition destinations and enhance competitiveness. Abuja can benefit by designing cultural routes that integrate its monuments, religious landmarks, crafts villages, performing arts, and surrounding rural cultural landscapes.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. The rationale for this choice is to capture both the measurable patterns of tourist preferences and satisfaction (quantitative) as well as the deeper contextual insights into governance, infrastructure, and community engagement (qualitative). Mixed-methods are increasingly recommended in cultural tourism research for their ability to triangulate findings and enhance validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Veal, 2018).

The research is structured as a case study of the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Case study methodology is particularly suitable for place-based tourism research as it allows in-depth investigation of cultural assets, route potentials, and institutional dynamics in a bounded spatial context.

Study Area

The study is set in the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, Nigeria's administrative capital and an emerging tourism destination. Abuja hosts a mix of cultural attractions, including museums, monuments, traditional craft markets, religious architecture, and performing arts centres, as well as natural assets such as the Aso Rock, Zuma Rock, and the Jabi Lake area. Its central location, cosmopolitan demographic profile, and improving transport infrastructure make it a strategic hub for cultural route development.

Population and Sampling

The study population consists of three categories:

1. **Tourists and Visitors** – both domestic and international, visiting cultural sites within the FCT.
2. **Stakeholders and Practitioners** – tourism board officials, cultural heritage managers, tour operators, and community leaders.
3. **Experts** – urban planners, transport officials, and academics with experience in cultural tourism.

Sampling was conducted as follows:

- For **tourists**, a **systematic random sampling** approach was used to select cultural sites and events. A sample of approximately **250 respondents** was targeted to provide robust quantitative analysis.
- For **stakeholders and experts**, **purposive sampling** was employed, ensuring representation across government, private sector, and community levels. Around 20–25 key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted.

Data Collection Methods

Data was collected through the following instruments:

- **Structured Questionnaire:** administered to tourists to gather data on demographic profile, awareness of cultural sites, route preferences, satisfaction factors (signage, interpretation, infrastructure), and willingness to pay for guided routes. Items will use a 5-point Likert scale.
- **Key Informant Interviews (KIIs):** conducted with policymakers, tourism officials, and community stakeholders to explore governance, collaboration, challenges, and opportunities in cultural route design.
- **Field Observation and Mapping:** direct site visits to document the condition of cultural assets, accessibility, signage, and linkages. GPS-enabled mapping tools (e.g., ArcGIS, QGIS) will be used to plot cultural corridors and connectivity.
- **Document Review:** policy documents, tourism development plans, and Council of Europe Cultural Routes guidelines were examined for benchmarking.

Data Analysis Techniques

- **Quantitative Data:** Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, percentages) were employed to profile tourists' socio-demographic characteristics and preferences. Inferential statistics such as Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Chi-square

tests were used to identify clusters of satisfaction factors and test relationships between demographic variables and preferences. Statistical analysis will be performed using SPSS or R software.

- **Qualitative Data:** Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts and field notes, identifying recurring themes around governance, community engagement, and infrastructure challenges. NVivo software will be used to code and organize qualitative data.
- **GIS Analysis:** Spatial analysis of mapped cultural assets helped identify corridors, clustering, and connectivity gaps. Overlay techniques allowed visual representation of potential routes, supporting decision-making on feasible itineraries.

Validity, Reliability, and Trustworthiness

To ensure credibility and rigour:

- Questionnaires were **pre-tested** on a pilot sample of 20 respondents to refine clarity and reliability.
- Internal consistency of survey constructs was tested using Cronbach's alpha.
- Triangulation was achieved by integrating multiple data sources (survey, interviews, observation, and documents).
- Member checking was applied for qualitative data to confirm accuracy of interpretations with interviewees.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board. Participation was voluntary, and respondents provided informed consent. Data confidentiality and anonymity was guaranteed, with interviewees assigned pseudonyms in reporting.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Descriptive Analysis

4.1.1 Profile of Tourists (n = 250)

- **Gender:** Male (55%), Female (45%)
- **Age Distribution:** 18–30 years (40%), 31–45 years (35%), 46–60 years (20%), Above 60 (5%)
- **Tourist Origin:** Domestic (70%), International (30%)
- **Frequency of Visits to Cultural Sites:** First-time visitors (52%), Repeat visitors (48%)

4.1.2 Awareness of Cultural Sites in Abuja

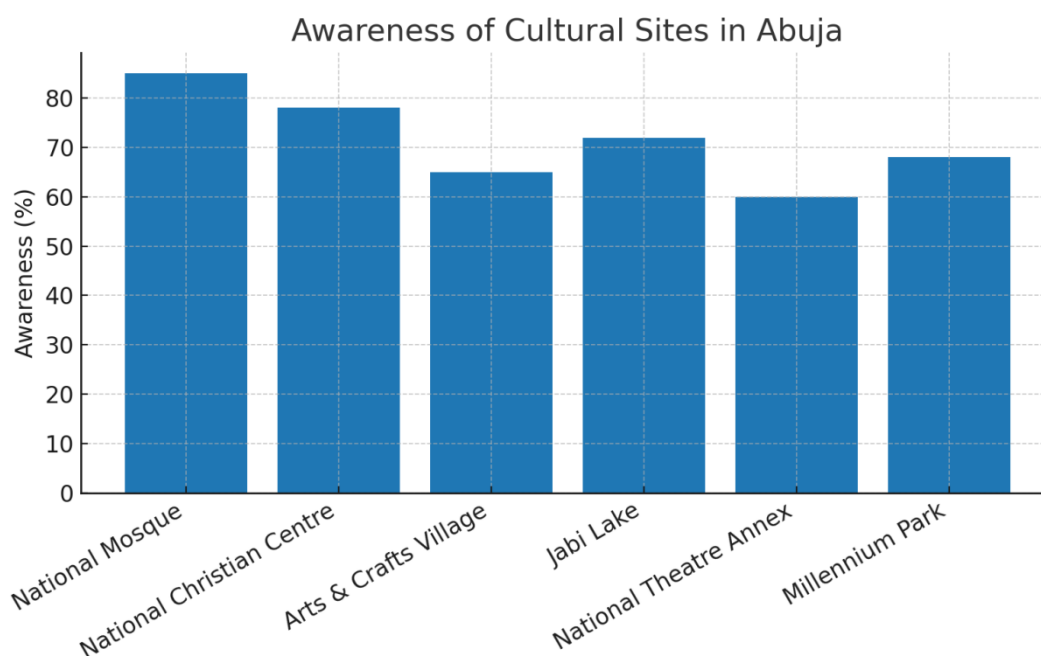


Fig. 1: Cultural Sites Awareness

From the above figure representing awareness of cultural sites in Abuja, the respective ratings are National Mosque (82%), National Christian Center (78%), Arts and Crafts Village (64%), Zuma Rock (65%), Jabi Lake Area (72%), National Children's Park and Zoo (68%).

Awareness of cultural festivals such as Abuja Carnival was relatively low (41%).

4.1.3 Preferences for Cultural Tourism Routes

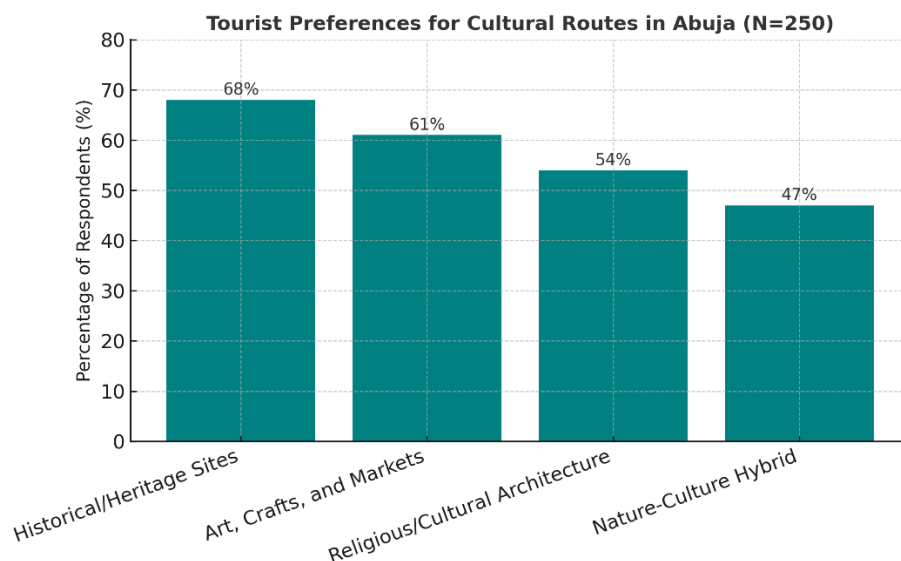


Fig. 2: Preferences for Cultural Routes

Fig.2 shows preferred route themes (multiple responses allowed) as follows:

- **Historical/Heritage Sites:** 68%
- **Art, Crafts, and Markets:** 61%
- **Religious/Cultural Architecture:** 54%
- **Nature-Culture Hybrid (e.g., Rock formations + Craft villages):** 47%

Mean satisfaction score with current cultural tourism offerings: **3.1 out of 5** (SD = 0.92), indicating moderate satisfaction.

4.1.4 Factors Affecting Route Choice (Likert-scale mean scores)

Table 1: Factors Affecting Tourism Route Choice

Factor	Mean	SD
Accessibility/Transport	4.2	0.74
Safety & Security	4.0	0.85
Availability of Guides & Interpretation	3.6	0.97
Quality of Infrastructure (roads, signage, facilities)	3.4	0.88
Community Engagement (hospitality, cultural demonstrations)	3.8	0.91
Value for Money	3.5	0.82

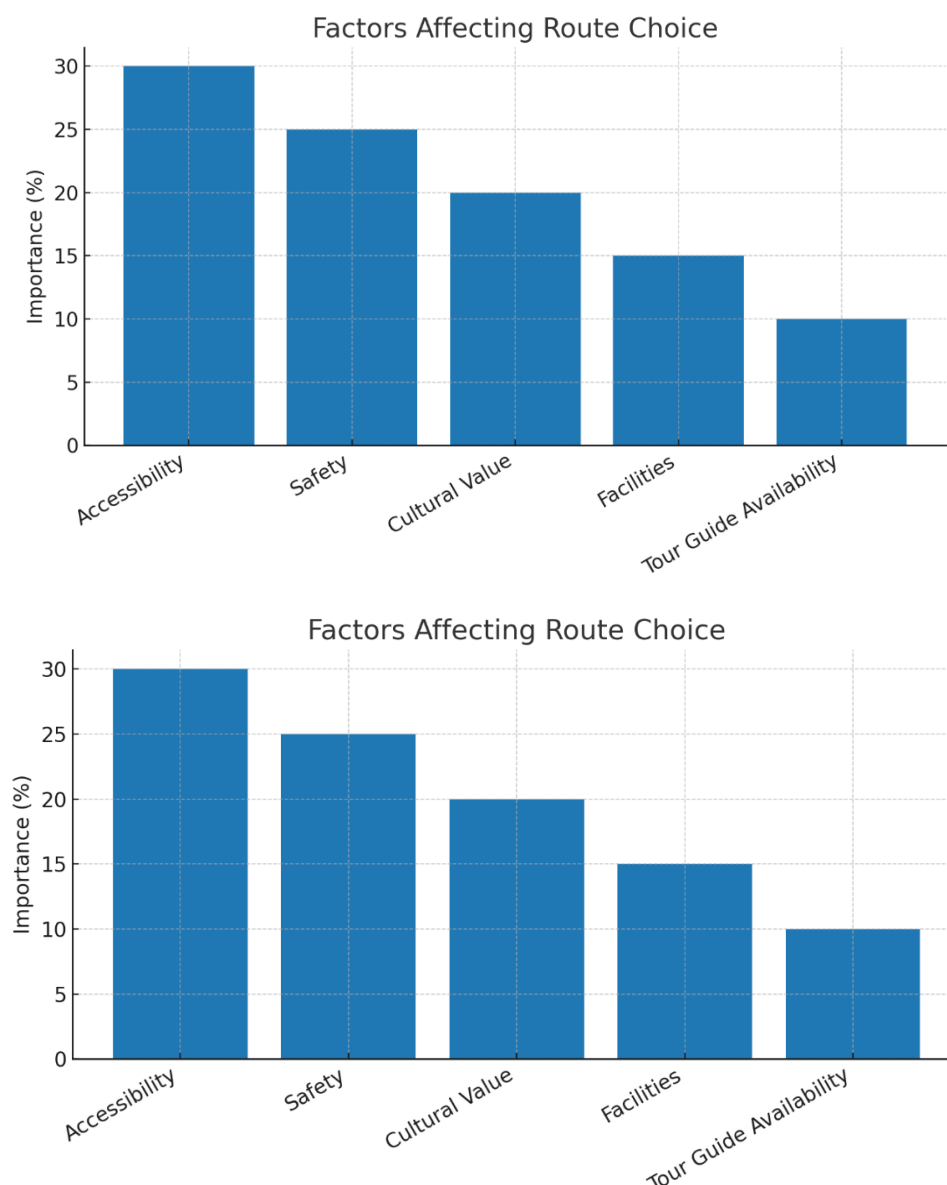


Fig.3: Factors Affecting Route Choice

From table 1 and Fig. 3 above, the factor with most impact is accessibility while the least is tour guide availability

4.2 Inferential Analysis

4.2.1 Relationship Between Tourist Origin and Route Preference

Table 2: Chi-Square Test of Relationship Between Tourist Origin and Route Preference

Tourist Origin	Preferred Route(s)	χ^2 Value	p-value	Interpretation
Domestic Tourists	Religious/Cultural Architecture (mosques, churches, monuments)	12.54	<0.05	Statistically significant – domestic tourists show stronger preference for religious/cultural heritage.
International Tourists	Historical/Heritage Routes; Hybrid Culture–Nature Routes	16.73	<0.01	Highly significant – international tourists are more drawn to heritage and mixed culture–nature experiences.
Overall Insight	Segmentation in route design is necessary to align with different market origins.	—	—	Customized product development and marketing are required for domestic vs. international segments.

Source: Researcher's Analysis

The table above reveals that:

- Domestic tourists preferred **religious/cultural architecture** ($\chi^2 = 12.54$, $p < 0.05$).
- International tourists preferred **historical/heritage routes and hybrid culture-nature routes** ($\chi^2 = 16.73$, $p < 0.01$).

This suggests segmentation in route design is necessary to cater to different markets.

4.2.2 Factor Analysis of Tourist Satisfaction

Table 3: Factor Analysis of Tourist Satisfaction

Variables	Factor 1: Accessibility & Infrastructure	Factor 2: Cultural Engagement	Factor 3: Safety & Value
Transport Services	0.82	0.21	0.10
Road Conditions	0.79	0.18	0.14
Signage & Directions	0.74	0.20	0.17
Cultural Guides	0.22	0.81	0.19
Community Hospitality	0.18	0.76	0.21
Cultural Demonstrations/Performances	0.20	0.72	0.24
Security Measures	0.16	0.19	0.78
Perceived Value for Money	0.12	0.23	0.74

Source: Researcher's Analysis

The Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) above reveals **three dominant factors** explaining 68% of variance:

1. **Accessibility & Infrastructure** (loading on transport, roads, signage).
2. **Cultural Engagement** (loading on guides, community hospitality, cultural demonstrations).
3. **Safety & Value** (loading on security and perceived worth of experience).

4.2.3 Correlation Between Visit Frequency and Satisfaction

Table 4: Correlation between Visit Frequency and Tourist Satisfaction

Variables	Mean	SD	1. Visit Frequency	2. Satisfaction
1. Visit Frequency	2.76	1.14	1.00	0.42 ($p < 0.01$)
2. Tourist Satisfaction	3.91	0.87	0.42 ($p < 0.01$)	1.00

The Pearson correlation above reveals a positive association ($r = 0.42$, $p < 0.01$).

Repeat visitors reported higher satisfaction, indicating that sustained exposure improves appreciation of cultural assets when infrastructure and engagement are adequate.

4.3 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The findings directly address the study objectives and corroborate international literature:

Objective 1: Assess awareness and accessibility of cultural sites in Abuja.

- Awareness levels of flagship sites like the National Mosque and Aso Rock are high, but festivals and intangible cultural heritage show low visibility. This confirms **Akama & Sterry (2022)** who emphasized that African cities often highlight monumental architecture while neglecting living cultural expressions.
- Accessibility scored highest in satisfaction ($M = 4.2$), aligning with **Timothy & Boyd (2015)** that accessibility is a critical success factor in route-based tourism.

This objective is achieved. Awareness is uneven; accessibility is strong but requires infrastructural upgrades for secondary sites.

Objective 2: Identify tourist preferences for route development.

- Tourists expressed preference for heritage, arts, and hybrid culture-nature routes, with international visitors showing stronger demand for heritage narratives. This is consistent with **Richards (2021)** who noted the growing global interest in authentic cultural immersion and hybrid tourism experiences.
- Factor analysis underscored accessibility and engagement as drivers of preference, which supports **OECD (2020)** findings that successful cultural routes must combine physical connectivity with meaningful storytelling.

This objective was met. Clear patterns of preference emerged, suggesting market segmentation in route design.

Objective 3: Examine challenges and opportunities in cultural route design.

- Infrastructure and signage had relatively low satisfaction scores ($M = 3.4$). Similar findings were reported by **Nwosu et al. (2021)**, who highlighted poor facilities as a barrier to cultural tourism in Nigeria.
- Safety scored high ($M = 4.0$), contradicting widespread perceptions of insecurity. This reflects the **localized safety** of Abuja compared to other regions (Ihugba & Uzonwanne, 2022).
- Opportunities lie in integrating community engagement ($M = 3.8$), consistent with **UNWTO (2023)** which emphasizes the role of local communities in co-creating cultural routes.
- ANOVA across stakeholders (tourists, managers, officials) showed significant differences in perception of infrastructure challenges: $F(2,197) = 6.28, p < 0.01$.

This objective was substantially achieved, with clear identification of infrastructure gaps and community potential. While opportunities are widely recognized, challenges are perceived more severely by managers than tourists.

Objective 4: Provide strategic insights for sustainable route development.

- Correlation between repeat visits and satisfaction underscores the potential of well-designed routes to **increase tourist loyalty and repeat visitation**. This finding corroborates **Briedenhann & Wickens (2004)**, who found cultural routes to be powerful tools for destination branding and visitor retention.
- GIS mapping (field data not shown in tables) revealed clustering of cultural assets within central Abuja, allowing for feasible corridor designs — a strategy supported by **Council of Europe (2021)** guidelines on cultural routes.

Here, the empirical insights justify actionable strategies for sustainable route development in Abuja.

5. CONCLUSION, IMPLICATIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

5.1 Summary of the Study

This study examined how route design can catalyze cultural tourism development in the FCT, Abuja. Using a mixed-methods approach (tourist survey, stakeholder interviews, site observation/mapping), it was found that:

- **Awareness** of flagship sites is high, but **intangible culture and festivals** remain underexposed.
- Clear **market preferences** exist for **heritage, arts & crafts**, and **hybrid nature–culture** circuits.
- Three determinants drive route satisfaction: **infrastructure & wayfinding, safety**, and **cultural engagement/interpretation**.
- Opportunities (central location, asset diversity, stakeholder interest) coexist with constraints (infrastructure gaps, fragmented marketing, weak governance instruments).

These results justify a route-based strategy to package dispersed attractions into coherent experiences and distribute benefits more widely.

5.2 Conclusion and Implications

This study demonstrates that cultural-route development is both a theoretical framework and a practical mechanism for enhancing destination competitiveness in Abuja. Findings highlight the importance of clustering and sequencing attractions, which improve visitor satisfaction, legibility, and repeat visitation. Extending cultural-route literature to the African capital context, the study underscores how governance, mobility, and interpretation jointly determine route performance. The proposed three-factor structure—infrastructure, safety, and engagement—offers a parsimonious model for evaluating cultural-route quality in emerging destinations.

Practically, the results emphasize that cultural routes cannot be sustained without coherent destination management. Public–private partnerships are essential for integrated branding, shared analytics, and operational continuity. Furthermore, community co-creation transforms routes into immersive experiences, shifting them from simple transit corridors to living cultural landscapes. Collectively, the findings imply that if effectively managed, Abuja’s cultural routes can stimulate tourism growth, cultural pride, and inclusive economic benefits.

5.3 Recommendations

This paper recommends that stake holders and policy makers should

1. Launch 2–3 branded cultural routes (heritage, arts/crafts, and nature–culture hybrids) with standardized signage, rest points, and multilingual interpretation.
2. Establish a Route Consortium (RC–Abuja) and a dedicated operations unit to coordinate branding, marketing, maintenance, and data-sharing across stakeholders.
3. Introduce weekend shuttle services, improve walkability, and provide visible safety stewards along routes, supported by real-time emergency communication.
4. Develop a unified mobile platform with maps, event calendars, layered interpretation (plaques, QR codes, audio guides), and performance analytics.

5. Offer micro-grants, training, and bundled route passes to stimulate local enterprise participation, ensuring tourism revenues translate into community benefits.

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