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Artisanal Fisheries Tourism: Potentials and Challenges in Epe Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria

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Abstract
Artisanal fisheries constitute one of the oldest and most widespread livelihood systems in the coastal and lagoon communities of Lagos State, Nigeria, yet their potential as a foundation for niche tourism development remains largely unexamined among Nigerian scholars. This study investigates the potentials of and challenges facing artisanal fisheries tourism in Epe Local Government Area, Lagos State, drawing on a cross-sectional questionnaire survey of 120 Fisherfolks and fish processors. Finding revealed that there is strong potential in the area's natural resource base, particularly the suitability of local water bodies for aqua-tourism and the diversity of fish species available, alongside marked interest in visitor activities such as seafood tasting and traditional fishing demonstrations, and broad optimism about job creation and income benefits. However, this potential was found to be constrained by gross infrastructural deficits and bureaucratic barriers to permits and licensing. The study concludes that unlocking artisanal fisheries tourism in Epe depends less on the strength of its natural endowments, which are already considerable, and more on deliberate investment in infrastructure, streamlined regulation, targeted capacity building, and environmental safeguards for Fisherfolks and fish processors. This study recommends that tourism and fisheries agencies should invest in critical infrastructure and modern equipment.

Keywords: Artisanal fisheries; coastal tourism; community-based tourism; Epe fisheries tourism; Lagos State; pescatourism

1. Introduction

Artisanal fisheries remain one of the most widespread livelihood systems in coastal and riverine Nigeria, sustaining food security, employment, and cultural continuity for communities along the country's extensive lagoon network (Ojo, Akingbola, Gbadamosi, Samuel, Olabamiji, Aboderin, & Mustapha, 2025).

Globally, tourism has emerged as a strategy for diversifying rural and coastal livelihoods, particularly through niche products that connect resource-based activities with visitor experience (Kimbu, Booyens, & Winchenbach, 2022). Fisheries tourism, or pescatourism, is one such niche, in which small-scale fishers host visitors aboard fishing vessels or involve them in shore-based fishing-related activities as a source of supplementary income (Ünal, Ertör, Ertör-Akyazi & Tunca, 2022). Research on the co-existence of small-scale fisheries and tourism in the Mediterranean has shown that such arrangements can support both the survival of artisanal fishing communities and broader coastal sustainability objectives, provided the advantages and disadvantages of co-development are properly identified and managed through participatory planning (Kyvelou & Ierapetritis, 2020). Beyond income diversification, fisheries tourism has been linked internationally to identity affirmation and community wellbeing among fishing populations undergoing economic transition, as narratives of belonging and cultural continuity have been shown to shape how communities adapt to declining traditional catches (Kimbu et al., 2022).

Nigeria possesses substantial inland and marine water resources whose tourism potential remains comparatively underdeveloped relative to other forms of tourism, despite the socio-economic gains that coastal and marine tourism have delivered elsewhere (Oladele et al., 2018). A SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats) assessment of Nigeria's aquatic tourism sector similarly found that, while the country's water resources present considerable opportunity, weak policy coordination, inadequate infrastructure, and limited private investment have constrained the sector's growth nationally (Oladele & Digun-Aweto, 2017). In the Nigerian tourism policy more broadly, community empowerment and stakeholder participation have been identified as critical, yet frequently underdeveloped, conditions for successful tourism development (Adebayo & Butcher, 2022).

Epe's fishing communities, including its active landing sites and proximity to the rapidly developing Lekki-

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Epe corridor, present a case in which the natural and cultural resource base for fisheries tourism appears strong, yet remains largely unexamined empirically. Existing scholarship on Epe's fisheries has focused principally on value chains, motorization, profitability, and poverty status among fisherfolk (Abasilim et al., 2022), leaving the tourism dimension of the sector unaddressed. This study responds to that gap by examining the potentials of and challenges facing artisanal fisheries tourism in Epe, drawing directly on the perceptions of the Fisherfolks and fish processors who would be its primary local stakeholders.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Fisheries Tourism as a Livelihood Diversification Strategy

Community-based tourism has been widely promoted as a livelihood diversification strategy for natural resource-dependent communities. In Lesotho, community-based tourism adjacent to Sehlabathebe National Park was found to offer local communities off-farm entrepreneurial opportunities, even though the benefits realised had not substantially altered the pre-existing socio-economic status of host communities, partly due to displacement onto marginal land and limited profit-sharing arrangements (Makwindi & Ndlovu, 2021). Similarly, a qualitative study of small-scale fishers in South Africa's Western and Eastern Cape found that most fishers remained confined to core fishing activities, with limited integration into the tourism value chain, constrained by inadequate finance, weak leadership structures, and unfavorable policy conditions across the fisheries and tourism sectors (Opondo et al., 2024). Elsewhere, tourism-based diversification in declining fishing communities has been shown to shape residents' sense of identity and wellbeing as much as their income, with culinary tourism in particular emerging as a pathway through which communities retain local benefit from their fishing heritage (Kimbu et al., 2022).

2.2 Coastal and Marine Tourism Potential in Nigeria

Water-based tourism potential in Nigeria has been the subject of periodic research attention, though rarely with a focus on artisanal fisheries specifically. A review of the Nigeria's coastal and marine tourism prospects concluded that the identification and sustainable utilisation of aquatic resources in Nigeria could support economic diversification away from oil dependency, generating revenue, employment, and resource conservation benefits, provided the sector receives adequate policy attention and infrastructural investment (Oladele et al., 2018). Oladele and Digun-Aweto 2017 SWOT analysis of aquatic tourism in Nigeria identified abundant natural water resources and a growing domestic travel culture as key strengths and opportunities, set against weaknesses including poor infrastructure, weak marketing, and threats from environmental degradation and inconsistent government policy. These national-level assessments provide useful background for understanding Epe, since they suggest that the constraints likely to be encountered locally, infrastructural, institutional, and promotional, are consistent with patterns observed across Nigeria's wider water-based tourism sector rather than unique to any one community.

2.3 Institutional, Infrastructural and Environmental Constraints

The institutional and regulatory dimension of fisheries tourism has proven decisive in several international research. In Turkey, pescatourism has remained largely unrealized despite years of advocacy, primarily due to the absence of legal recognition allowing tourists aboard small-scale fishing vessels, illustrating how governance gaps rather than resource constraints can be the binding barrier to fisheries tourism development (Ünal et al., 2022). This resonates with findings on Nigeria's own artisanal fishing sector, where innovation adoption among fisherfolk in Delta State was found to be constrained less by Fisherfolk attitudes than by environmental and family-level barriers, alongside a workforce profile marked by predominantly male, married respondents with substantial years of fishing experience (Umehai et al., 2024). Gender dynamics within artisanal fisheries have also been shown to shape who benefits from diversification: a study of billfish fisheries in Kenya found that women's participation was concentrated in secondary activities such as processing and trading rather than primary fishing or decision-making roles, reflecting broader structural and educational barriers to equitable participation (Adisa et al., 2025).

Where fisheries tourism has developed without adequate environmental safeguards, the consequences have been well documented. An ecosystem-based environmental impact assessment of tourism on two Brazilian islands found that, despite generating employment and income, tourism activity was associated with water pollution, biodiversity loss, and degraded wildlife health, underscoring the need for environmental education and management measures alongside tourism development in ecologically sensitive coastal settings (Matias et al., 2022). Taken together, this body of literature suggests that the success of fisheries tourism as a livelihood diversification strategy hinge less on the presence of natural or cultural resources, which are often abundant in communities considered and more on the strength of institutional support, financing mechanisms, training provision, and environmental safeguards accompanying its development.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

This study is broadly informed by the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework, which conceptualizes households as drawing on a portfolio of natural, physical, financial, human and social capital assets to construct viable livelihood strategies in the face of vulnerability. Within this framework, fisheries tourism represents a potential means of livelihood diversification for Epe's Fisherfolks and fish processors, converting existing natural capital (the lagoon and its fish resources) and human capital

Table 1: Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents (n = 120)

Socio-economic Characteristic	Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	48	40.0
	Female	72	60.0
Age Distribution	21–30	8	6.6
	31–40	64	52.5
	41–50	35	30.3
	51 and above	13	10.6
Category of Respondent	Fisherfolk	60	50.0
	Fish processor	60	50.0
Household Size	1–5	79	65.8
	6–10	37	30.8
	11–15	4	3.3
Education Level	None	61	50.8
	Primary	50	41.7
	Secondary	9	7.5
	Tertiary	0	0.0
Years of Experience	1–10 years	38	31.7
	11–20 years	66	55.0
	21–30 years	10	8.3
	31 and above	6	5.0

Source: Researchers Survey, 2026

(fishing knowledge and skill) into a supplementary income stream, provided that complementary physical capital (infrastructure), financial capital (credit and investment), and institutional support are in place. The recurring finding across the literature reviewed above, that fisheries tourism initiatives succeed or stall based on infrastructural and institutional conditions rather than natural resource endowment (Oladele & Digun-Aweto, 2017; Opondo et al., 2024; Ünal et al., 2022), is consistent with this framework's emphasis on the interaction between multiple capital assets, rather than any single asset, in determining livelihood outcomes.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Epe Local Government Area, Lagos State, Nigeria, a predominantly riverine area bordering the Lekki Lagoon. The area is home to long-established fishing settlements and active fish landing sites, and has historically depended on artisanal fishing and fish processing as a primary source of livelihood.

3.2 Research Design and Sampling

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to 120 artisanal Fisherfolks and fish processors resident in Epe Local Government Area, comprising 60 Fisherfolks and 60 fish processors. The instrument captured respondents' socio-economic characteristics, their perceptions of the resource, economic, environmental, and experiential potentials of fisheries tourism, the environmental and social impacts already associated with tourism activity in the area, and the challenges confronting the sector's development.

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, to characterize respondents and to summarise their perceptions across the potential, impact, and challenge dimensions examined by the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Socio-economic Characteristics of Respondents

Table 1 shows that the sample was predominantly female (60%), reflecting the strong presence of women in fish processing activities, while male respondents, more closely associated with active fishing, comprised 40%. This gendered division mirrors broader patterns reported in artisanal fisheries research across the region, where women's participation tends to concentrate on processing and secondary value-chain roles rather than primary fishing (Adisa et al., 2025). Respondents were concentrated in the economically active 31–50 age range (82.8% combined), and the sample was evenly split between Fisherfolk and fish processors (50% each), indicating that any tourism intervention would need to address both the extractive and value-addition sides of the local fisheries economy. Educational attainment was notably low, with over 90% reporting no formal education or only primary schooling and no respondent reporting tertiary education. This profile is broadly consistent with research carried out in Delta State by Umehai et al., 2024, where artisanal fisherfolk were similarly characterised by substantial fishing experience alongside limited formal education, their findings suggests that low educational attainment may be a structural feature of artisanal fishing communities across Nigeria's coastal states rather than a characteristic unique to Epe. Years of experience were concentrated in the 11–20-year range (55%), indicating a workforce with deep practical knowledge of the fisheries but limited prior exposure to tourism-oriented skills.

Table 2: Resource and Infrastructural Potential (n = 120)

Resources and Infrastructural Potentials	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Water bodies suitable for aquatourism	114	95
Diversity of fish species that can be cultured	96	80
Availability of transportation infrastructure	66	55
Availability of trained labor for aquaculture activities	48	40

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2026

Table 3: Socio-economic Benefit Potential (n = 120)

Socio-economic Benefit Potential	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Job creation	108	90
Increased income for fishers	84	70
Revenue for local businesses	72	60
Preserving traditional knowledge	65	54

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2026

Table 4: Environmental and Conservation Potential (n = 120)

Environmental/Conservation Potential	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Learning about conservation efforts	82	68
Promoting conservation practices	60	50
Environmental impact awareness	60	50
Raising awareness of marine ecosystems	54	45

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2026

Table 5: Visitor Activity and Experience Preferences (n = 120)

Visitor Activity / Experience Preference	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Seafood tasting	118	98
Traditional fishing demonstration	108	90
Boat trips with fishers	91	76
Cultural sensitivity of activities	72	60
Cultural exchange	12	10

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2026

4.2 Potentials of Artisanal Fisheries Tourism

Respondents' assessment of fisheries tourism potential is presented across four dimensions: resource and infrastructural potential, socio-economic benefit potential, environmental/conservation potential, and visitor activity preferences.

4.2.1 Resource and Infrastructural Potential

Table 2 shows that the majority of respondents (95%) agreed that the water bodies in Epe are suitable for aqua-tourism, and 80% affirmed the diversity of fish species that could be cultured, confirming the area's strong natural resource base for a fisheries tourism product, consistent with national-level assessments identifying Nigeria's aquatic resources as a substantial but underutilized tourism asset (Oladele et al., 2018). However, only 55% and 40% of respondents respectively saw transportation infrastructure and trained aquaculture labour as adequate, indicating that while the natural endowment is strong, the supporting infrastructure and human capacity remain comparatively underdeveloped, a gap consistent with the infrastructural weaknesses identified in Nigeria's wider aquatic tourism sector (Oladele & Digun-Aweto, 2017).

4.2.2 Socio-economic Benefit Potential

Table 3 reveals that a large majority (90%) believed artisanal fisheries tourism could generate jobs, and 70% expected increased income for fishers, reflecting broad optimism about the livelihood benefits of tourism development. Revenue for local businesses (60%) and preservation of traditional knowledge (54%) were viewed as moderately likely benefits, suggesting respondents see economic gains as more assured than cultural preservation outcomes.

4.2.3 Environmental and Conservation Potential

In Table 4, over two-thirds of respondents (68%) agreed that tourism could support learning about conservation efforts, while around half saw potential for promoting conservation practices (50%), raising

Table 6: Perceived Social and Environmental Impacts (n = 120)

Item	Positive — Freq. (%)	Negative — Freq. (%)
Observed environmental changes attributed to tourism	98 (81.7)	22 (18.3)
Tourism affected traditional fishing practices	70 (58.3)	50 (41.7)
Contribution to livelihoods and wellbeing	117 (97.5)	3 (2.5)
Effect on local marine ecosystems and fish habitats	69 (57.5)	51 (42.5)
Conflict or cooperation between community and visitors	108 (90.0)	12 (10.0)

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2026

Table 7: Specific Environmental Impacts Observed (n = 120)

Specific Environmental Impact Observed	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Increased waste generation	111	92.5
Promoting responsible fishing practices	112	93.3
Pressure on fish stocks	108	90.0
Supporting sustainable seafood consumption	96	80.0
Pollution from boats and tourists	78	65.0
Raising awareness of marine conservation	35	29.2

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2026

general

environmental awareness (50%), and awareness of marine ecosystems specifically (45%). This more moderate endorsement, compared with the strong support for resource and economic potential, suggests respondents are less certain that tourism development will translate into environmental benefits without deliberate conservation-focused programming.

4.2.4 Visitor Activity and Experience Preferences

Table 5 reveals that seafood tasting emerged as the most strongly favored tourism activity (98%), followed by traditional fishing demonstrations (90%) and boat trips with fishers (76%), indicating that culinary and experiential fishing activities hold the greatest appeal as tourism products in Epe. This pattern echoes the Mediterranean pescatourism experience, where fishing-village co-development processes have shown that culinary and experiential fishing activities, rather than deeper cultural interaction, tend to hold the greatest appeal (Kyvelou & Ierapetritis, 2020). Cultural exchange was rated lowest (10%), even though 60% of respondents considered cultural sensitivity important, suggesting that while direct cultural exchange programming may have limited appeal, any tourism activity introduced must still be designed with cultural sensitivity in mind.

4.3 Environmental and Social Impacts of Artisanal Fisheries Tourism

In Table 6, respondents perceived artisanal fisheries tourism as contributing positively to community livelihoods and wellbeing (97.5%) and observed largely positive environmental change attributable to tourism (81.7%). Cooperation rather than conflict was the dominant pattern between hosts and visitors (90%). However, perceptions were more divided on whether tourism-related activity has affected local marine ecosystems and fish habitats, with 42.5% reporting a negative effect, and a majority (58.3%) reported that tourism has affected traditional fishing practices, which may reflect adaptation pressures on established fishing routines.

At the same time, respondents identified specific negative environmental pressures associated with tourism activity: increased waste generation (92.5%) and pressure on fish stocks (90%) were the most widely observed concerns, alongside pollution from boats and tourists (65%). This dual pattern, positive livelihood perception alongside acknowledged environmental strain, mirrors findings from an ecosystem-based assessment of island tourism in Brazil, where tourism activity generated employment and income even as it contributed to water pollution and biodiversity loss in the absence of adequate environmental management (Matias et al., 2022). Encouragingly, majorities also observed that tourism activity is promoting responsible fishing practices (93.3%) and supporting sustainable seafood consumption (80%), indicating that alongside environmental strain, tourism appears to be reinforcing more sustainable behavior among some operators. Awareness-raising for marine conservation was the least observed effect (29.2%), pointing to a gap between behavior change and deliberate conservation education, and reinforcing the case for building environmental safeguards into fisheries tourism planning in Epe from the outset, rather than addressing them retrospectively.

Table 8: Key Challenges Facing the Artisanal Fisheries Tourism Sector (n = 120)

Challenge Category	Leading Challenge	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Financial and Economic	Fluctuations in fish price	102	85.0
Infrastructural	Lack of modern equipment	118	98.3
Institutional and Regulatory	Bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining permits/licenses	116	96.7
Market and Competitive	Limited marketing and promotional resources	66	55.0
Human Capital	Limited access to training and skills development	90	75.0
Socio-cultural	Difficulty in maintaining community cohesion/traditional values	89	74.2
Environmental and Operational	Concerns about overfishing/environmental impact of tourism	118	98.3

Source: Researcher's Survey, 2026

4.4 Challenges Facing the Artisanal Fisheries Tourism Sector

Challenges reported by respondents were organised into seven categories, with the most prominent challenge identified within each category presented in Table 8.

Across the seven categories, the leading challenge in each case was reported by a large majority of respondents. Fluctuating fish prices (85.0%) stood out as the dominant financial and economic constraint, echoing the South African finding that small-scale fishers' integration into the tourism value chain remained limited primarily by inadequate finance (Opondo et al., 2024). A lack of modern equipment (98.3%) was the most acute infrastructural constraint, consistent with the infrastructural weaknesses identified across Nigeria's broader aquatic tourism sector (Oladele & Digun-Aweto, 2017). Bureaucratic hurdles in obtaining permits and licenses (96.7%) emerged as the principal institutional and regulatory barrier, closely paralleling the Turkish pescatourism experience, where the absence of a legal framework permitting tourists aboard small-scale fishing vessels, rather than any deficit in fisher interest or natural resource, has been the binding constraint on sector development (Ünal et al., 2022). Limited marketing and promotional resources (55.0%) were the most notable market and competitive challenge, while limited access to training and skills development (75.0%) was the sole but substantial human capital constraint identified, consistent with the finding that innovation adoption among Nigerian artisanal fisherfolk is shaped significantly by access to extension and training support (Umehai et al., 2024). Difficulty maintaining community cohesion and traditional values (74.2%) was the leading socio-cultural concern, while concerns about overfishing and the environmental impact of tourism activities (98.3%) was, together with the lack of modern equipment, the single most widely shared concern in the entire survey. Taken together, these leading challenges point to infrastructural and regulatory constraints as the most pressing barriers to artisanal fisheries tourism development in Epe, ahead of financial, market, human capital, and socio-cultural concerns.

5. Discussion

Taken together, the findings revealed a sector with strong latent potential constrained by weak enabling conditions. The natural resource base for fisheries tourism in Epe is rated very highly (95% suitability of water bodies; 98% interest in seafood tasting as an activity), and respondents are broadly optimistic about job creation and income benefits. However, this potential sits alongside near-universal concern about infrastructural inadequacy (98.3% lack of modern equipment) and regulatory bureaucracy (96.7% citing permit/licensing hurdles), alongside a workforce with very limited formal education and tourism-specific training. The tension identified earlier between the highest-rated 'potential' item (exploitation of fishers, 95%) and the sector's economic promise underscores that unmanaged tourism growth carries real risk of disadvantaging the same Fisherfolks it is intended to benefit. This pattern, strong resource potential undermined by weak institutional, infrastructural, and financial conditions rather than by any deficit in natural or cultural endowment, recurs consistently across the wider literature on fisheries tourism and community-based tourism diversification (Kyvelou & Ierapetritis, 2020; Makwindi & Ndlovu, 2021; Oladele & Digun-Aweto, 2017; Opondo et al., 2024; Ünal et al., 2022), lending confidence that the constraints identified in Epe are structural rather than incidental, and that addressing them would meaningfully unlock the sector's potential.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

6.1 Conclusion

This study concludes that artisanal fisheries tourism in Epe Local Government Area holds substantial untapped potential, anchored in a strong natural resource base and broad community optimism about its economic benefits. However, this potential is presently constrained by weak infrastructural, institutional, and human capital conditions rather than by any deficit in natural or cultural resources. Consistent with the Sustainable Livelihoods Framework's emphasis on the

interaction between multiple capital assets, the findings suggest that realizing the sector's potential in Epe depends on simultaneous investment across infrastructural/physical, financial, human, and institutional capital, rather than reliance on natural capital alone. If left unmanaged, the findings further suggest that expanding tourism activity carries genuine risk of environmental strain (Matias et al., 2022) and of disadvantaging the very Fisherfolks and fish processors it is intended to benefit.

6.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Relevant tourism and fisheries agencies should invest in critical infrastructure, including functional docks, processing facilities, and modern equipment, identified as the most severe constraint facing the sector.
2. Regulatory authorities should simplify and streamline the process of obtaining permits and licenses for fisheries tourism ventures, drawing lessons from jurisdictions where the absence of clear legal recognition has stalled pescatourism development.
3. Targeted, non-formal training and skills development programmes should be provided for Fisherfolks and fish processors, given their generally low levels of formal education and limited exposure to tourism-oriented skills.
4. Microfinance and other tailored financing schemes should be developed to address the financial constraints and limited access to investment capital reported by respondents.
5. Fisheries tourism development should be accompanied by deliberate conservation and environmental management measures, given respondents' concerns about overfishing, waste generation, and pressure on fish stocks associated with tourism activity.
6. Tourism planners should safeguard Fisherfolks from potential exploitation as tourism activity expands, ensuring that economic benefits are equitably distributed to the communities generating them.

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