

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF NIGERIA'S VISA-ON-ARRIVAL (VOA) POLICY ON INTERNATIONAL INBOUND TOURISM: A CASE STUDY OF CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT: This study determined the effectiveness of the Nigeria Visa-on-Arrival (VOA) policy on international inbound tourism development in Cross River State of Nigeria, particularly in terms of tourism accessibility, destination competitiveness, and mobility under the Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020. This study explored how the VOA process impacted international tourists' arrival and participation in key tourism destinations and events (Calabar Carnival, Obudu Mountain Resort, Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort, and Leboku New yam festival) and determined how the transition from the VOA system to the digital pre-clearance visa system, scheduled for 2025, impacts international tourists' accessibility and decisions in destinations and events. The study adopted a

quantitative survey research design in which a structured questionnaire was administered to 400 individuals sampled through a multi-stage sampling technique to major destinations in Cross River State. The data analysis method included descriptive statistics and simple linear regression analyzed using SPSS. The findings showed that VOA significantly increases the state's tourism accessibility, festival tourism activities, tourism mobilities, and business and leisure tourism activities. However, the findings also indicated that negative impacts such as safety concerns, poor destination infrastructure, and stringent implementation of digital pre-clearance affect the flexibility of tourism activities and unplanned travel decisions. Hence, the regression analysis revealed that the VOA policy has a significant positive impact on the international tourism development of Cross River State and that VOA still serves as a tool in increasing destinations' competitiveness.

Keywords: *Visa-on-Arrival, Tourism, Accessibility, Liberalization, Mobility, Development, Competitiveness, Tourism*

1. INTRODUCTION

International tourism is one of the world's largest growth industries in terms of revenue, employment, foreign exchange earnings, and inter-cultural understanding. In recent decades, many countries have embraced visa liberalization policies such as visa-on-arrival (VOA), visa-free access, and electronic visas to attract more tourists and boost their global competitive position, which in turn stimulates international travel. The ease with which tourists can gain access to a country significantly influences their travel choices, overall demand for travel, and the attraction of a country as a travel destination. For instance, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey, Rwanda, and Kenya have leveraged a simplified visa regime to increase their international tourist arrivals and strengthen their tourism industry and economy, respectively. The Rwandan VOA for African nationals boosted the growth of conference tourism and international business travel, whereas the UAE coupled the implementation of efficient and digitally enabled visa processes with sophisticated tourism marketing strategies, making Dubai one of the top global tourism destinations.

In developed countries, visa liberalization is aided by efficient immigration procedures, modern transportation systems, and technologies that facilitate travel while maintaining security. The Schengen area visa provides free movement across more than 20 European countries, thereby enhancing circulation among tourists and encouraging regional tourism,

leading to greater spending among tourists. Similarly, countries such as Singapore, Canada, and Australia have adopted modernized systems and processes that enhance tourists' convenience, thus improving their tourist competitiveness. Conversely, several developed and underdeveloped countries remain disadvantaged due to poor and complex immigration procedures, inadequate infrastructure, insecurity, and contradictory policies. In Africa, tourism has become a major tool for economic development and regional integration. Several African countries, including Kenya, Rwanda, Ghana, and the Seychelles, have introduced visa liberalization measures to encourage the arrival of international tourists. Ghana's "Year of Return," which had relatively relaxed immigration regulations, attracted millions of diaspora visitors and tourists, boosting the country's economy. However, the tourism sector in Africa is challenged by inadequate transport infrastructure, an insecure travel environment, poor destination marketing, weak institutions, and sometimes contradictory policies of different countries.

Nigeria possesses vast tourism potential due to its diverse culture, attractions (ecological, man-made, cultural and historical), and festivals. However, the growth of international tourism in the country has been impeded by insecurity, bureaucracy, and complicated visa requirements. To tackle these challenges, the Federal Government of Nigeria in 2020 introduced the Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020, thereby broadening the scope of visa categories from six to seventy-nine and enhancing the Visa-on-Arrival (VOA) for ease of access to Nigeria for international investors, tourists, professionals, the diaspora, and other legitimate visitors to reduce visa bottlenecks, boost international mobility, and harmonize Nigeria's visa processes with international best practices. Through this policy, specialized visa processes were created and strengthened to encourage various types of tourism to the country, such as business, cultural, educational, and medical tourism.

Cross River State is strategically positioned in the Nigerian tourism landscape, as it has some of the leading and internationally recognized tourism attractions in Nigeria which include among others: Calabar Carnival, Obudu Mountain Resort, Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort, Agbokim Waterfalls, and the Leboku New Yam Festival. Through continuous investment in tourism marketing and branding, the state has been promoting itself as "The People's Paradise." The Calabar Carnival has for some years now gained international recognition as one of the biggest street carnivals in Africa, attracting a good number of local and international tourists each year to Calabar and also boosting the state's

economy. Therefore, the NVP was expected to make it easier for international tourists to travel into the State, thereby enhancing its competitiveness and facilitating access for foreign visitors, especially those of countries where Nigeria has no mission and therefore a VOA becomes their only option. In essence, it was expected to foster spontaneous leisure travel for tourism, including the ease of traveling and participating in various festivals and business activities within the state.

Despite the positive anticipation regarding the impact of the VOA policy, international tourism in Cross River State has shown a rather fluctuating growth trend. During some festive periods, the state experienced increasing visitor arrivals, but the state's poor transport system, insecurity, high travel cost, inadequate/inconsistent flight services, and other bureaucratic hurdles have limited tourism growth. Additionally, the introduction of the 2025 policy shift from VOA to the more restrictive e-visa and pre-clearance systems has brought more confusion, delays, technical setbacks, and reduced convenience among international tourists and operators, raising concerns about the true impact of Nigeria's liberalization efforts on the sustainable growth of international tourism to Cross River State. Although various studies have been conducted on the subject of tourism and immigration reform in Nigeria, little or no empirical attention has been paid to the impact of Nigeria's VOA policy on international inbound tourism into Cross River State. These studies often focused on issues concerning national immigration policy formulation, trade facilitation, or generic tourism issues, with little or no analysis into how increased access in terms of the visa policy is impacting tourism arrival, tourism competitiveness, and the significance on festival tourism at a sub-national level, let alone research on the consequence of Nigeria's 2025 change from VOA to e-visa/pre-clearance system on the international tourist's mobility. Therefore, an in-depth analysis of the impact of Nigeria's VOA policy on international tourism to Cross River State is clearly needed.

This study is deemed important due to its contribution to the ongoing debate on tourism policies, destination accessibility, and international mobility in developing countries. Its findings will provide tourism planners, immigration authorities, policy makers, and tourism stakeholders with concrete empirical evidence of the effectiveness of visa liberalization policy in the context of attracting international tourists. Furthermore, the study will assist the Nigeria Immigration Service and the Cross River State Government in understanding how visa liberalization impacts international tourism in Nigeria and its sub-

national states and how the impact could be strengthened. Furthermore, it will add to the growing body of literature on tourism, migration policy, and tourism destination management. This paper analyzed the impact of Nigeria's Visa-on-Arrival (VOA) policy on international inbound tourism into Cross River State. Specifically, this study examined changes brought about in the visa policy due to the Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020, which was geared toward attracting international tourists through the establishment of diverse and efficient visa processing mechanisms, such as specialized visa channels for business, cultural, educational, and diaspora tourism. It also assessed the impact of current government visa policies on the arrival of international tourists to Cross River State, examined the extent to which the 2025 VOA transition to the digital pre-clearance system has influenced tourism accessibility into the state, identified the primary factors that limit the effectiveness of the visa liberalization policy in Cross River State, and proposed ways of ameliorating the limitations in the existing visa policy and thereby fostering sustained international tourist arrival into Cross River State, Nigeria.

2. EMPIRICAL REVIEW

A number of empirical studies have established that visa facilitation policy strongly affects international tourism flows. The United Nations World Trade Organization (2023) indicates that countries that provide more liberalized visa regimes are able to obtain more foreign tourists compared to states with restrictionist immigration systems. The organization argues that visa facilitation could increase tourism spending and, therefore, lead to higher destination competitiveness and regional integration into a larger tourism community. Bertoli and Moraga (2021) revealed that visa restrictions have negative implications for tourists' mobility and can increase travel uncertainties, particularly in developing countries, where the administrative procedures depend on tourism demand. Neumayer (2020) argued that restrictive visa regimes could decrease tourism flows by increasing the cost of travel and making trip decisions spontaneous. The United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Singapore, and Thailand are among the few Asian and Middle East states that have managed to attract huge amounts of global tourism investment due to the liberalization of visa policies and improved international tourism competitiveness. They successfully introduced electronic visa, visa-free visa system, and digital entry formalities to support tourism and ensure seamless international business mobility. The African region has been quite dynamic in terms of visa policy liberalization for the sake of regional

cooperation and international tourism development. Rwanda, Kenya, the Seychelles, and Ghana implemented eased visa policies to facilitate access to their countries and intra-African mobility. The African Development Bank (2022) stated that the liberalization of visa policy has a positive impact on tourist flow, the attraction of foreign investment, and the strengthening of regional economic relations in Africa.

The Nigeria Visa Policy (NVP) 2020 was designed to upgrade Nigeria's immigration system, enhance migration governance and economic competence, and achieve more flexibility for people entering and departing from the country. By expanding the number of visa categories from 6 to 79 and introducing distinct visas for tourism, business, education, medical purposes, and diaspora purposes, many opportunities were opened. The introduction of the Visa on Arrival (VOA) within the 2020 NVP was seen as a vital tool to improve the accessibility of Nigeria for international visitors from countries where Nigeria has no embassy or consular office. According to the Nigeria Immigration Service (2021), the initiative aimed to support the development of tourism, attract investments, and enhance accessibility into Nigeria. However, many scholars have cited institutional rigidity, inconsistent policy implementation, poor digital infrastructure, corruption, and perceptions of insecurity in the international community as critical setbacks that hinder its success. Adebayo and Ojo (2022) reported that even though the policy was considered innovative and forward-thinking, its capacity to attract foreign tourists was limited by the lack of administrative procedures and poor awareness. Furthermore, Okafor and Eze (2023) pointed out security concerns, airport delays, and inconsistent policy application in Nigeria as impediments to the country's visa facilitation initiatives. These are crucial for developing countries such as Cross River State, which is reliant on the influx of foreign tourists during festivals and special tourism events that happen seasonally.

Festival tourism is one of the main components of tourism development in the Cross River State. Calabar Carnival has long been known as one of Africa's largest street festivals, drawing in a crowd of domestic and international tourists each year. This event contributes significantly to hospitality revenues, transport services, tourism-based activities (including culture, entertainment, and retail outlets), and ultimately the local economy and international image of Cross River State (James et al., 2025). According to reports from the Cross River State Tourism Bureau (2025), this particular festival attracted 17.4 billion dollars in economic benefits in 2025 from spending related to tourism, sponsors,

accommodation, transportation, and other services. Besides the Calabar Carnival, tourism sites in Cross River state include Obudu Mountain Resort, Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort, and Leboku New Yam Festival to provide more variety in tourism offerings in the state. Obudu Mountain Resort is also a popular eco-tourist destination in Nigeria, thanks to its unique mountain climate, recreation services, and scenic landscapes. Despite these attractions, there are several barriers to sustainable tourism development in Cross River State that can be divided into two categories: financial, infrastructure and policy-related challenges and international insecurity perceptions on the side of travelers (Eja et al., 2021, James, et al., 2025).

Digital visa application systems are becoming increasingly prevalent in global migration governance and international mobility. They strengthen borders, reduce bureaucracy, and provide digital travel authorization. As a result of the COVID-19 outbreak, many countries are now implementing and upgrading the existing digital migration system to ease the movement and control of people and enhance security in border control processes. According to the IATA (2024), the global travel recovery is largely dependent on digital traveler systems. The 2025 Nigerian move away from the traditional VOA system toward the digital pre-clearance visa system is a product of this new global reality. Tourism stakeholders expressed concern that the introduction of the pre-approval system would affect spontaneous decision-making to travel on a short-term basis, especially when business and event tourism are considered. Adekunle and Ibrahim (2025) believe that excessive procedures and slow approval speeds will deter foreign visitors, even though the digital visa application system will indeed improve national security surveillance capabilities. The study further argues that a tourist destination reliant on event-based tourism will likely experience a decline in spontaneous tourism visitors.

2.1 Theory of Destination Competitiveness (DC)

This theory provides a strong argument that travel destinations are attractive and can achieve sustainable foreign tourist arrivals when their competitiveness is at a high level in all aspects of the destination offering. Such aspects include accessibility, transport infrastructure, security conditions, government policies supporting tourism development, unique tourism attractions, and the quality of services rendered to tourists. Tourism destinations can compete with other states on the international tourism market when they

are capable of ensuring a high standard of tourism services while retaining a favorable long-term social and economic impact on local communities. Accessibility is an important component in destination competitiveness, especially the entry procedures to the country, as efficient entry requirements reduce travel barriers and encourage tourism flows. Considering this specific study, the NVP 2020 and the VOA arrangement may have strengthened Nigeria's competitiveness, thereby facilitating the flow of international travelers into the state and enhancing the overall attractions, such as the Calabar carnival, Obudu mountain resort, Tinapa business and leisure resort, and Leboku New Yam festival, to be more appealing to the international audience due to decreased entry barriers.

2.2 Tourism Accessibility Concept

Tourism accessibility may be interpreted as the ease of reaching a particular tourism destination, entering the destination country, experiencing the destination's tourism offering, and departing from the destination of travel. Tourism accessibility encompasses: travel transport systems, visa formality arrangements, border process, tourism-related information available to the traveler, prices of tourism products and services, and communication availability. A destination that has easier and more convenient procedures for entering their borders will have a higher rate of tourism inflow into the country. In relation to the present study, the concept of tourism accessibility relates directly to the immigration procedures associated with the VOA as well as the planned digital pre-clearance systems, which can either pose constraints for international travel to Nigeria or make it easier for the travelers when properly facilitated. Delays, uncertainty, or very complex procedures can deter potential tourists, especially to tourism destinations such as Cross River State, which relies on a short-term arrival of foreign tourists due to seasonal attractions such as the famous Calabar Carnival and Leboku New Yam festival.

3. METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted in Cross River State due to its significance as a major tourist destination in Nigeria and its hosting of several tourist attractions and events, such as the Calabar Carnival, Obudu Mountain Resort, Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort, and the Leboku New Yam Festival. The study population consisted of stakeholders in tourism: tourists, hoteliers, travel agents, tourism officials, transport operators, business operators, and festival organizers in the state. The sample size of the study was obtained using the

Taro Yamane (1967) formula with a 95% confidence interval and a 5% margin of error, which yielded 400 respondents given the projected 2025 population estimate of 5,000,000 in 2025 (approx).

A multistage sampling technique consisting of purposive, stratified, and simple random sampling techniques was used in the sampling design. The state was divided into three senatorial districts: Cross River South, Cross River Central, and Cross River North. Purposive sampling technique was adopted in selecting tourism-active areas, such as the Calabar Municipality, Calabar South, Obudu, Obanliku, Ikom, and Yakurr Local Government Areas, because of the density of tourist attractions and tourism-related activities. The stratified sampling technique was used to stratify the respondents into respective groups such as tourist, tourism service provider (hotelier, travel agent), tourism administrator, business operator, tourism promoter, and festival organizer. To enhance the selection process, simple random sampling was used to select respondents within each stratum. Data were strictly gathered from primary sources through the distribution of a questionnaire to the respondents, which was based on a Likert-type scale. Secondary data were collected from the Nigeria Immigration Service, National Bureau of Statistics, Cross River State Tourism Bureau, United Nations World Tourism Organization, policy documents, tourism reports, and journal articles.

Data were gathered by administering questionnaires to respondents in various major tourist destinations and tourism-related enterprises in the study area. Data were coded and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistics, such as frequency table, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used to describe respondents' perceptions of tourism in Cross River State. Inferential statistics were used in hypothesis testing, using simple linear regression for the relationship between the Visa-on-Arrival Policy and international tourism development in Cross River State. A 0.05 level of significance was used.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents and the distribution of tourism stakeholders in Cross River State as presented in Table 1. Looking at the gender distribution, 55.8% of the respondents were male, while 44.2% were female, showing a

fairly proportional representation of respondents in the study. In terms of age distribution, 37.2% of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 26-35 years, 28.2% fall within the age bracket of 36-45 years, 17.8% fall within the age bracket of 18-25 years while 16.8 per cent of the respondents fall within the age bracket of 46 years and above, indicating that most of the respondents were economically active adults. The occupation distribution revealed that 24.2% of the respondents were tourists or visitors, 20.8% were business operators, 18.2% were hotel operators, 15.2% were travel agents or tour operators, 12.2% were tourism officials, and 9.4% were other people, indicating that respondents from various stakeholders were covered in the study as the analysis concerns tourism in Cross River State. The statistics also revealed that 42.8% of the respondents are more aware of the tourism destination that corresponds to the Calabar carnival, 25.8% of the respondents know Obudu mountain resort, 17.2% of the respondents know Tinapa Business and leisure resort, 10.2% of the respondents know Leboku new yam festival, and 4.0% are aware of other tourism destinations in Cross River State.

Table 1: Composite Descriptive Statistics on Respondents' Demographic Characteristics and Tourism Stakeholder Distribution

Variables	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	223	55.8
	Female	177	44.2
	Total	400	100
Age Group	18–25 years	71	17.8
	26–35 years	149	37.2
	36–45 years	113	28.2
	46 years and above	67	16.8
	Total	400	100
Occupation/Category	Tourist/Visitor	97	24.2
	Hotel Operator	73	18.2
	Travel agent/tour operator	61	15.2
	Tourism Official	49	12.2
	Business Operator	83	20.8
	Others	37	9.4

	Total	400	100
Tourism Destination/Familiarity with Events	Calabar Carnival	171	42.8
	Obudu Mountain Resort	103	25.8
	Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort	69	17.2
	Leboku New Yam Festival	41	10.2
	Others	16	4.0
	Total	400	100

Source: Fieldwork of researchers, 2026

Table 2 shows respondents' views on the impact of the Visa on Arrival (VOA) policy and other related visa liberalization on international tourism development in Cross River State. As can be seen, 75.0% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the NVP 2020 improved access for international tourism in Cross River State, indicating that the NVP eased restrictions on international travel. Similarly, 75.0% of the respondents agreed that the VOA policy encourages more international tourist visits. Likewise, 75.0% of respondents agreed that the relaxation of visa application procedure had a positive effect on the attendance of festivals such as the Calabar Carnival and Leboku New Yam Festival. Thus, 75.4% of respondents agreed that business and leisure tourism activities improved due to the VOA policy, which implies that visa accessibility was beneficial to the tourism-related economy and attracted visitors to cross the river state.

In addition, 75.4% of respondents agreed that the state of security is an obstacle to the decisions of international tourists to visit. Another 75.0% agreed that deficiency in infrastructure and poor transportation system are factors that limit the full benefits of visa liberalization policies to reach the state. Thus far, visa accessibility is of benefit to tourism development, but the existing limitations remain major constraints to the country's tourism competitiveness and visitor confidence. Furthermore, 75.0% agreed that the transition from VOA to the digital pre-clearance system in 2025 led to reduced flexibility in tourism and 75.0% agreed that the digital visa system is very demanding and causes stress. Other findings from the analysis show that 75.0% agreed that the acceleration of visa application procedures will increase international tourist arrivals, 75.0% agreed that there should be

special support for festivals visas for major international tourism events, and 75.0% agreed that liberalization policies are key to promoting sustainable tourism development in Cross River State.

Table 2: Composite Descriptive Statistics on Respondents' Perception of Visa-on-Arrival Policy and International Tourism Development

Variables	SA	A	U	D	SD	Frequency	Percentage
Improvement of international tourism accessibility through the NVP 2020	171	129	41	33	26	400	100
Influence of Visa-on-Arrival Policy on International Tourist Visits	167	133	39	35	26	400	100
Influence of simplified visa procedures on festival tourism participation	173	127	43	31	26	400	100
Contribution of the VOA policy to business and leisure tourism activities	165	137	37	35	26	400	100
Effect of security concerns on decisions on international tourism	181	121	33	39	26	400	100
Influence of poor infrastructure on benefits of visa liberalization	177	123	39	35	26	400	100
Effect of the 2025 digital pre-clearance system on tourism flexibility	169	131	41	33	26	400	100
Perceived stress associated with the new DVS	175	125	37	37	26	400	100
Faster visa processing and international tourist arrivals	183	117	39	35	26	400	100
Festival visa support during major tourism events	179	121	41	33	26	400	100
Visa liberalization as a tool for sustainable tourism development	185	115	37	37	26	400	100

To ascertain the extent to which Nigeria's Visa-on-Arrival (VOA) policy impacts on international inbound tourism development in Cross River State, Nigeria, this study had a null hypothesis that Nigeria's VoA policy has a significant effect on international inbound tourism development in Cross River State, Nigeria. This preposition was tested using simple linear regression analysis. From the Model Summary table below, it can be observed that the VOP has a strong positive correlation with tourism development with the value of correlation coefficient (R) at 0.846 and the value of the coefficient of determination (R Square) being at 0.716; this therefore means that the VOP variable(s) used in the analysis accounts for about 71.6 per cent of the variation in the development of international inbound tourism. This implies that tourism has been well developed with ease of obtaining a visa/entering into Nigeria, while accessibility is good in Cross River State. The ANOVA table indicates that the regression model used in the study was highly significant with the value of F-statistic being at 1008.441, with significance at 0.000, which is below the significance level of 0.05. This indicates the high relevance of the regression model and hence the impact of the visa-on-arrival policy on tourism development. The coefficient table shows that the VoA policy had a positive regression coefficient value ($B = 0.781$) and a positive standardized beta coefficient value (0.846), implying that enhanced ease of obtaining the VoA also had a positive impact on tourism development. Descriptive statistics for Visa on Arrival (mean score of 4.18) and Tourism Development (mean score of 4.09) revealed a higher mean score for Visa on Arrival than Tourism Development; both indicating the respondents' general agreement that the Visa on Arrival policy has a strong positive influence on tourism development. Similarly, the Correlation table reveals a strong positive, statistically significant relationship between the VoA policy and tourism development, with a correlation coefficient value of 0.846 and a significance value of 0.000. Based on the results of the analysis, the study concludes that Nigeria's Visa on Arrival policy impacts the development of international inbound tourism in Cross River State, Nigeria. Therefore, H_0 , that is, there is no impact of the visa-on-arrival policy on tourism development, is rejected and H_1 is accepted.

Table 2: Summary of the models

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R-square	Std. Error in the Estimate
1	.846a	.716	.712	.391

a. Predictors:

Variables of Visa-on-Arrival Policy

Table 3: ANOVAa

Model	Sum of the Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	154.283	1	154.283	1008.441	.000b
Residual	60.917	398	.153		
Total	215.200	399			

a. Dependent Variable:

International Development of Tourism

b. Predictors:

(Constant), Visa on Arrival Policy

Table 4: Coefficientsa

Model	Unstandardized Coefficient B	Std. Error	Standardized coefficients of beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	1.117	.146		7.651	.000
Visa-on-Arrival Policy	.781	.025	.846	31.756	.000

a. Dependent Variable:

International Development of Tourism

Table 5: Descriptive statistics

Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Visa-on-Arrival Policy	4.18	.693	400
International Development of Tourism	4.09	.641	400

Table 6: Correlations

Variables	Visa-on-Arrival Policy	International Development of Tourism
Visa-on-Arrival Policy	1	.846**
International Development of Tourism	.846**	1

Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

5. DISCUSSION

The study findings showed that most of the respondents were economically active and tourism stakeholders with considerable information about tourism and tourism accessibility in Cross River State. From the majority of respondents within the age brackets of 26-35 and 36-45 years, tourists, hoteliers, business owners, and travel agents' respondents can conclude that most of the tourism and hospitality practitioners' informed responses were captured in the study. The majority of respondents also identified the Calabar Carnival as the most recognized tourism attraction in the state, thus confirming its importance as the state's foremost attraction. These findings support the claims of the DCT that destination competitiveness is achieved through strong tourism attractions, a high degree of accessibility, supporting infrastructure, and favorable policy supports. The finding is also supported by earlier studies by the Cross River State Tourism Bureau (2025), which identified the Calabar Carnival and other tourism attractions as responsible for the level of visibility, destination branding, tourism economics, among others, of Cross River State. The findings from

In addition, the study revealed that most respondents agreed that the NVP 2020 and the Visa-on-Arrival (VOA) policy enhanced tourism accessibility and increased international tourists; boosted activities during festivals and promoted tourism; and encouraged business and leisure tourism within the state. The respondents also agreed that visa policies that support fast visa processing and good tourism support enhance the arrivals of international tourists and sustainable tourism development. These findings are of paramount importance to tourism accessibility because they confirm that easy access for international tourists is achieved through better visa policies and travel systems, thus enabling more international tourist arrivals and enhancing destination competitiveness. The finding is also supported by various scholars, such as UNWTO (2023), Bertoli and Moraga (2021), and Neumayer (2020), who have shown that visa liberalization policies promote international tourists' arrivals, encourage tourists' confidence, and promote competence in international destinations. The findings of the study also support the statement of the Nigeria Immigration Service (2021) that Nigeria's Visa-on-arrival policy is part of a strategy to improve access and stimulate tourism development. However, the results revealed that the respondents most strongly agreed that security issues, poor infrastructure, and the

transition from VOA to digital pre-clearance systems in 2025 reduced flexibility and affected international tourism travel decisions in Cross River State.

The opinion that the digital visa system is complicated and restrictive that despite visa liberalization policies, flexibility, efficiency, security management, and appropriate infrastructure are key determinants of a successful tourist accessibility. This further supports the argument of the Destination Competitiveness theory that only an efficient network between these factors (accessibility, infrastructure, security management, tourism support systems, and policy framework) can maintain tourism competitiveness. The finding is also supported by empirical studies conducted by Okafor and Eze (2023), Eja et al. (2021), and Adekunle and Ibrahim (2025), who found that poor infrastructure, security challenges, rigidity of the visa system, and cumbersome digital visa processes have negative impacts on the arrival of international tourists and the viability of the tourism industry. This was further supported by the outcome of hypothesis testing, where a very high and strong correlation was established between the Visa-on-arrival policy and international tourism development, confirming that accessibility is a primary factor of destination competitiveness.

6. CONCLUSION

As part of NVP 2020, Nigeria's VOA policy has played an enormous role in developing international inbound tourism in Cross River State by increasing the level of accessibility for tourists and boosting participation in tourism events, festivals, and businesses and leisure activities in the state. The findings also confirmed that easy travel policies such as VOA enhance the destination's competitiveness and attract international tourists, consequently boosting its key tourism attractions, including the Calabar Carnival, Obudu Mountain Resort, Tinapa Business and Leisure resort, and Leboku New Yam festival. However, the findings proved that security issues, poor infrastructure, inconsistent administrative support system, and the new digital pre-clearance systems from 2025 negatively affect the level of ease tourism international travel decisions in Cross River State. The hypothesis test also confirmed a strong statistically significant relationship between visa accessibility and international tourism development in Cross River State. In conclusion, visa liberalization is a fundamental aspect of improving tourism flow and competitiveness of tourism destinations. However, policy efficiency, tourism

infrastructural development, good security management, and the provision of a very efficient and friendly digital visa system are important in actualizing sustainable tourism development.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The Federal Ministry of Interior and the Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) are called upon to refine and fast track the implementation of the NVP 2020 by fast tracking tourism visa channels, with a more relaxed policy for tourism, festival visits, business visits, and the diaspora. The reduction of required documents, faster processing time for visas, and introduction of support desks for tourist visa applications at major points of entry in Nigeria should also be considered.
2. The Government of Cross River State, private tourism operators, and other relevant bodies (such as the NTDA) are expected to increase the promotion and marketing of the state's international tourism destinations. This is also to be done on an international level. Attractions such as the Calabar Carnival, Obudu Mountains Resort, Tinapa Business and Leisure Resort, and the Leboku New Yam Festival could be immensely beneficial.
3. The Nigeria Immigration Service (NIS) and digital migration authorities must make the 2025 digital pre-clearance visa system a user-friendly process, making it more accessible for foreign travelers to Nigeria. Fast processing times, improved online application procedures, multilingual customer services, and an end to unnecessary bureaucracy that deter short stays and impromptu visits should be seen.
4. Tourism infrastructure and transport links within tourist destinations should be improved. The Cross River State government should focus on road networks in key tourist spots, flight frequency and access into Calabar, accommodation facilities, reliable internet service, and adequate site maintenance.
5. All concerned security agencies should increase tourism security throughout the state, ensuring that international visitors can trust the destinations they visit. Safety around the tourism attractions, special security personnel for tourism sites, and public safety campaigns should be conducted.

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