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DESIGNING FOR OPTIMAL USER FLOW IN A BEACH RESORT: INSIGHTS FROM IBENO, AKWA IBOM STATE

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Abstract: Resorts are built with the environment in mind and are mainly surrounded by magnificent natural features, their favorability amongst others depends on the relationship between the design and the environment it resides. For a working resort to interact with its environment it must have adhered to the principles of circulation and navigation in order to make pinpointing user location on the vast expanse of the site to be possible. A good resort takes advantage of its environment, topography, and culture. This can be seen in its design and the activities that take place within it. A lot of factors affect the resorts' ability to develop and maintain competitiveness; one of those would be the landscape of the site and adjoining facilities. Effective circulation and navigation are essential for enhancing the visitor experience at beach resort destinations. This study examines strategies for improving user movement and way finding within a beach front environment. The research combines observational analysis of existing circulation patterns, surveys and benchmarking of existing circulation practices at comparable resorts. Findings indicate that clear signage and intuitive pathway design are critical for guiding guests through the resort effectively. Through qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study explores various circulation and navigation techniques and their effective use in a beach resort.

Keywords: Effective circulation, user experience, Beach resorts, Tourism.

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) (2020), defines travels as the activity of moving between different locations often for any purpose but more so for leisure and recreation. (Hall & page, 2006). Mathieson and wall (1982) say that tourism is the temporary movement of people to destinations outside their normal places of work and residence, the activities undertaken during their stay in those destinations and the facilities created to cater to their needs. Based on this understanding researchers and practitioners in the hospitality industry are constantly seeking for ways to improve customer experiences and satisfaction with resort and hotel facilities and services. A resort is defined as a physical location where a number of tourism- related elements occur to create a cluster of activities, often in attractive locations such as coastal areas, but can be found in mountainous, rural, or city locations, (Page & Connell 2014:647).

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Resort hotels generally provide a wide range of facilities and services to different kinds of visitors and guests (jakada B., 2014). However, one of the main issues of concern when planning, designing and constructing hotel facilities is how to achieve a harmonious relationship between various functional spaces and good interconnectivity of spaces around the buildings by using the different circulation elements (deRoos, 2011). This indicates the design of circulation routes within and around hotel buildings is very important in differentiating spaces and giving form and shape to the building (Elottol & Bahauddin, 2011). It is noted that the hotel design, the location and size and amount of circulation elements are very essential in ensuring stress free movement of the large volumes of visitors within and around the building envelope. (Elottol & Bahauddin, 2011). That means that circulation plays a key role in the hotel and general resort facilities.

In architecture, circulation refers to the movement of people and goods into, through and around buildings or facilities. (Edgett & William, 2004). Hence, circulation design is a critical aspect of planning hotel buildings and associated facilities. While circulation takes place inside a building, it is also important outside,(Black G, 2005). Internal circulation include all floors of a building that linkup spaces both vertical and horizontal, that includes circulation elements such as stairs, lobbies, stairways, ramps and elevators. On the other hand external circulation comprises both pedestrian and vehicular circulation and has features such as walkways, bridges, carparks and vehicular drop offs. (Ching, F. 2004).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. THE CONCEPT OF USER EXPERIENCE AND SATISFACTION

Throughout history user satisfaction and experience has become a very important area of research in different discipline. This is probably due to the importance of such studies for marketing and sales of goods and services. The quality of services rendered could either have a positive or negative effect on the the customers/visitors. In this study the extent in which circulation is important for the users of a hotel resort and the effects it has on their experience and satisfaction will be overviewed. The role of circulation in user experience and satisfaction cannot be overlooked because user satisfaction is what makes the hospitality industry thrive. Numerous studies have shown that the hospitality industry lives off user satisfaction and various features like staff behavior, cleanliness, room qualities, timelines, safety and security have significant impacts on guests' satisfaction with hotel services. A study by (Lai, j. 2013) revealed that user satisfaction is based on safety and comfort and once these expectations were met there was increase in satisfaction levels by customers and visitors. This means that the issues of bad experiences and poor satisfaction with hotels and facilities are related to the level of safety and comfort the visitors go through.

USER EXPERIENCE WITH CIRCULATION DESIGN

Natapov, Saskai, Dalton and Holscher, (2015) places that, circulation is a basic organizing component of layout and communication spaces as it associates both interior and exterior zones and reflects the thought behind spaces association in the building. Circulation is an important frame work that shapes a structure, be it the building or the landscaping outside the building.

Circulation is directly related to Navigation and cannot be discussed without the other. While circulation pertains to free movement, especially in a large enclosed space or system. Navigation is the process of ascertaining one's position through following a set route, or a premeditated path. The concept of circulation and navigation portray

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how guests advance through the site and facility, and as such the use of walkways, footpaths (covered and not) and site maps are important.

The importance of circulation and navigation are overly evident, since they help users enjoy such a large facility as a resort comfortably.

2.2. HISTORY AND DEFINITIONS OF BEACH RESORTS

Holiday resorts are typically referred to as a modern occurrence, yet historically, resort tourism dates back to the Roman Empire, when the 'patricians', the social elite, together with the affluent Romans, travelled to the seaside during the summer months. (Page & Connell, 2014). Today resorts are classified in a multitude of ways ranging from location-/ destination specific resorts to activity-/destination specific resorts

A resort is defined as 'a physical location where a number of tourism- related elements occur to create a cluster of activities, often in attractive locations such as coastal areas, but can be found in mountainous, rural, or city locations, (Page & Connell 2014:647). Brey (2011) states that 'a resort full- service lodging facility that provides access to or a range of amenities and recreation facilities to emphasize a leisure experience. The definitions stated still leave room for questions on how resorts really function, for example the type of location (mountainous areas, the seaside, rural or city areas), the type of ownership (time- share, holiday, corporative or community), the type accommodations (hotel, chalets, caravans, camping or lodges), type of experience (relaxation and rejuvenation, themed activities or family fun/ holiday activities) and the basic attractions (skiing, fishing, spa activity or beach activity). All would influence the actual meaning of a resort. However distinguishing resort properties, categories, types and characteristics is important, because it contributes to understanding the type of tourist that are attracted to a specific resort type.

2.3. PROPERTIES OF RESORTS

Resorts are known for a variety of things based on different aspects of the services they provide, but the general properties of resorts still remain the same for all resort types.

Compound of building facilities

It is a complex that is composed of structures and facilities.

Have massive structures that cannot be limited to the construction of a single building.

Others include a separate lodging facility to house guests who opt to stay for a longer period of time.

2. Located in a scenic environment.

Guests want to see and experience something out of the ordinary everyday life that could make getaway from city life.

One of the requirements of a resort is to be located in a place which is very pleasing to the eyes. The landscape or the surroundings where the facility is situated is very important for this will determine the concept of the resort.

3. Provides lodging, entertainment and a relaxing environment.

Services such as lodging and entertainment also pose as a basic need in the construction of a resort.

Most guests want their vacation fully spent and would want to maximize their experience, specifically if it is a destination resort.

4. For vacationers.

Resorts target people looking for leisure specifically vacationers who tend to stay for a little longer.

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They want their experience memorable and that stay is beyond compare.

D. CATEGORIES OF RESORTS

Resorts are categorized by

1. Proximity to primary market.
2. Setting and primary amenities
3. Mix of residential and lodging properties.

2.4. CHARACTERISTICS OF RESORTS

All-inclusiveness of resorts: resorts are all-inclusive when all the properties in a vacation destination are found and paid for all together. Accommodation, food and drinks, and some activities and entertainment are included in the price. They are usually upscale resorts in a secluded area such as the Maldives where vacationers are to a certain extent “captive” or a highly developed tourist destination such as Mexico’s Riviera Maya. Resorts like these have fixed costs, they include a minimum of three meals daily, soft drinks, most alcoholic drinks, gratuities and possibly other services in the price (Conrad, 2011).

All-inclusive resorts are mainly located in environments with a warmer climate, since warm climates offer more opportunities for outdoor activities and water sports, which are often included in the resort package. Warm climates also attract more tourist who are looking for a sunny escape from colder regions, especially during winter. The packages for these resorts are already prepaid for, and depending on what package is paid for, price and luxury increase. But HVS Global (2011), argues that any resort can include an all-inclusive package within their product offer, it is still essential to categorize this characteristic on the fact that businesses revolve around different customer behavior patterns and in respect of usage and consumption, which when monitored and managed properly will only improve the performance of the establishment.

TOURISM IN NIGERIA

Tourism generally is about the movement of people from one location to the other in search of leisure, it is essentially a movement for the purpose of recreation or socialization. Ibeno is one of the major local government areas in Akwa Ibom State that is rich and empowered with a sizable number of tourist destination sites, one of the best being along the Ibeno beach. The beach would provide a great opportunity for tourism development in an attempt to further complement other economic, social, and environmental available job opportunities if it was developed enough to house more people who come as tourists. Historically speaking, tourism is as old as the history of man. It became prominent during the Industrial Revolution in which a growing number of people found themselves with both the money and travel time to visit different places for religion, recreation, and of course the discovery about other lands, people and culture (Jiboku & Jiboku,2010).

The World Tourism Organization report demonstrates in a less explicit manner, that tourism plays a pivotal role in fostering sustainable development. This is evident as it contributed to approximately 11% of global employment and led to the creation of around 100,000 new jobs each year, catering to both skilled and semi-skilled young individuals within the tourism industry. If harnessed effectively, the socio-cultural activities inherent in tourism possess the potential to act as crucial elements for facilitating socio-economic transformation within host and local communities. This assertion is true since tourism involves organized traveling of a person or group of persons with socio-economic potentials to resource centers outside their usual place of residence for

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leisure, discovery, educational development and business (WTO, 2008; Camillen, 2018). Moreover, tourism is an essential requirement for achieving sustainable development. Developed nations across the globe have successfully harnessed tourism as a means of generating revenue. Several North African countries such as Algeria and Egypt, as well as East African countries like Botswana, Tanzania and Kenya, have embraced the opportunity presented by international tourism and are now reaping the socio-economic benefits of tourism development. In the case of Nigeria, however, tourism resources have remained underutilized, primarily due to the country's low economic structure and governance challenges. Nevertheless, Nigeria boasts abundant ecological and cultural resources, including a diverse range of biodiversity and a wealth of cultural and traditional festivals.

ROLES OF CIRCULATION IN A RESORT DEVELOPMENT

Circulation plays a crucial role in the development of a resort, ensuring efficient movement of people and goods throughout the property. Here are some key roles of circulation in a resort development:

1. **Guest Experience:** Well-designed circulation systems contribute to a positive guest experience by providing smooth and seamless movement within the resort. Efficient circulation minimizes congestion, reduces travel distances, and enhances convenience for guests as they navigate the various amenities, facilities, and attractions.
2. **Accessibility:** Circulation design ensures that all areas of the resort are accessible to guests with different mobility needs. It includes providing barrier-free pathways, ramps, elevators, and other accessible features to comply with accessibility standards and regulations. This promotes inclusivity and allows all guests to enjoy the resort's offerings.
3. **Operational Efficiency:** Effective circulation planning improves operational efficiency by facilitating the movement of staff, supplies, and equipment. Well-designed service circulation routes, such as back-of-house corridors or service elevators, enable efficient delivery of goods, waste management, and maintenance activities without disrupting guest areas.
4. **Safety and Security:** Circulation design plays a crucial role in ensuring the safety and security of guests and staff. It includes features such as well-lit pathways, clear sight-lines, emergency exits, and appropriate signage for emergency evacuation routes. Circulation systems should be designed to minimize potential hazards and allow for efficient emergency response.
5. **Traffic Management:** Resorts often experience peak periods with high guest traffic, such as during check-in and check-out times or meal hours. Effective circulation planning considers traffic management strategies to minimize congestion and bottlenecks. This may involve separate entrances and exits, queuing systems, or traffic flow management measures in high-traffic areas.
6. **Way-finding and Signage:** Circulation design incorporates way-finding elements and clear signage to guide guests and help them navigate the resort. Well-placed signs, maps, and directional markers assist guests in finding their way to accommodations, dining venues, recreational facilities, and other amenities. This enhances the guest experience and reduces confusion.
7. **Aesthetics and Atmosphere:** Circulation areas, such as lobbies, corridors, and walkways, contribute to the overall ambiance and aesthetics of the resort. Thoughtful design elements, such as attractive lighting, landscaping,

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and architectural features, create a pleasant and inviting atmosphere, enhancing the guest experience during their movement within the resort.

8. **Future Expansion and Flexibility:** Circulation planning should consider future expansion and flexibility. Anticipating potential growth or changes in resort operations allows for the design of circulation systems that can accommodate increased capacity or adapt to evolving needs. This minimizes the need for major modifications or disruptions in the future.

By considering these roles of circulation in resort development, planners and designers can create efficient, safe, and guest-friendly circulation systems that contribute to a seamless and enjoyable experience for guests while supporting the operational needs of the resort.

3. METHODOLOGY

This is focused on the research methods implemented to achieve the aim of the study. The concept of research methodology encompasses the practical aspects of conducting a research study. It focuses on the systematic design employed by a researcher to ensure the production of valid and reliable results that effectively address the research aims, objectives, and questions at hand. In essence, research methodology outlines the approach and techniques utilized throughout the research process to ensure the integrity and quality of the study's findings.

Frankel (2000) described this section in the research as 'the ethnographic/fieldwork approaches that rely on the use of interviews and survey, audiovisual records and the study of documents'.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

As stated in the introduction section of this paper, the goal of the study is to investigate the impact of guests' satisfaction with circulation and the overall experience they have with the facility. Interviews and focus group discussions as a part of qualitative data collection tools was conducted with vacationers and survey of guests/customers in a hotel setting. Questions were related to the factors used in the identification of the type of lighting circulation elements to use and how comfortable it would be for the guests' experience were asked. For this study, another source of data collection involved conducting fieldwork and visiting the Rivers State University Central library to access documented data related to beach resort developments and review past thesis works on the topic. These activities allowed for the gathering of firsthand information from existing sources and explore the available literature. Additionally, case studies were employed as another method of gathering primary data for this study. This involved in-depth analysis and examination of specific cases or examples relevant to the research topic, providing valuable insights and data specific to the study's objectives.

QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH METHOD

The objective of quantitative research is to develop and employ mathematical models, theories, and hypotheses pertaining to any subject. The process of measurement is central to quantitative research because it provides the connection between empirical observation and numerical expression of quantitative relationships.

Quantitative methods entailed the use of instruments to capture measurements of the elements of circulation and how to properly position walkways in a resort. This includes how to position the resort buildings and spaces within the site away from each other, it also includes the correct sizing of pedestrian walkways and vehicular lanes. Qualitative and quantitative results were combined to paint a comprehensive picture of how circulation designs affect user experience and satisfaction in resorts.

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This approach kept the study consistent and integrated, offering both theoretical and practical perspectives on the topic of resort practices.

CASE STUDIES

Gerring (2004) arrived at a definition of a case study as 'an intensive study of a single unit with an aim to generalize across a larger set of units'. A case study is a research method that entails conducting a detailed and comprehensive investigation into a specific individual, group, organization, event, or phenomenon. It involves an in-depth analysis of a singular instance to gain a profound understanding of its context, complexities, and underlying factors. The researcher examines the case from multiple perspectives, gathering and analyzing various forms of data to provide a rich and holistic portrayal of the subject under study. By focusing on a single case, researchers can delve into the intricacies and nuances of the particular situation, allowing for a thorough exploration and interpretation of the phenomenon being examined.

During the research on existing similar facilities, a combination of primary and secondary sources was employed. Primary data collection methods included conducting interviews with relevant individuals and making direct observations of the facilities. This allowed for firsthand information and insights to be gathered. Additionally, secondary sources were utilized, which involved referencing previous thesis reports, textbooks, articles, and utilizing online resources. These secondary sources provided existing knowledge and perspectives on the topic, allowing for a broader understanding and context. By utilizing both primary and secondary sources, the research was able to benefit from a comprehensive and well-rounded approach to data collection and analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. APPLICATION OF FINDINGS IN THE DESIGN

User circulation and navigation are crucial aspects of resort design to ensure guests can easily navigate the property and access various amenities and facilities. Here are some considerations for user circulation and navigation in a resort design:

CLEAR SIGNAGE: Implement clear and visible signage throughout the resort to guide guests and provide directions to different areas, such as accommodations, dining venues, recreational facilities, and the beach. Signage should be strategically placed at key decision points and intersections to prevent confusion.

CENTRALIZED RECEPTION/AREA: Designate a centralized reception or guest services area where guests can receive information, check in, and seek assistance. This serves as a starting point for guests to orient themselves and obtain guidance on navigating the resort.

LOGICAL LAYOUT: Plan the resort layout logically and intuitively. Group similar amenities together, such as placing dining venues near each other or locating recreational facilities in a specific zone. This arrangement allows guests to easily find what they are looking for and minimizes unnecessary travel distances.

MAIN PATHWAYS: Establish main pathways or walkways that connect different areas of the resort. These pathways should be wide enough to accommodate guest traffic comfortably and be well-lit for nighttime navigation. Consider using visually appealing materials and landscaping to enhance the guest experience along these pathways.

WAY-FINDING ELEMENTS: Incorporate way-finding elements, such as distinctive landmarks, focal points, or architectural features, to help guests orient themselves within the resort. These elements can serve as visual cues

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and reference points for navigation. For example, a prominent fountain or a unique sculpture can act as a visual landmark.

ACCESSIBLE ROUTES: Ensure that pathways and routes are accessible for guests with disabilities. Design ramps, elevators, and other accessible features to comply with accessibility standards and regulations. Consider the needs of guests with mobility issues when planning inclines, stairs, and gradients.

CLEAR MAPPING AND INFORMATION: Provide guests with clear maps or resort directories that highlight key areas and amenities. Include information on operating hours, services available, and any restrictions or guidelines. Make this information easily accessible in guest rooms, common areas, and through digital platforms.

TRAFFIC FLOW MANAGEMENT: Consider the flow of guest traffic in high-traffic areas, such as lobbies, dining areas, or event venues. Designate separate entry and exit points, implement queuing systems if necessary, and incorporate crowd management strategies to ensure a smooth and organized flow of guests.

OUTDOOR NAVIGATION: If the resort has outdoor spaces or expansive grounds, provide clear pathways, signage, or directional markers to guide guests to different facilities or attractions. Consider incorporating features such as shaded rest areas, seating, or water stations along the pathways to enhance the guest experience.

GUEST ROOM NUMBERING: Establish a logical and consistent numbering system for guest rooms or accommodations. Clearly display the room numbers in a visible location to assist guests in finding their rooms easily.

5. CONCLUSION

In the beginning of this study, several topics were reviewed, such as the concept of user experience and satisfaction, tourism in Nigeria, the history of resorts and its characteristics and the impact of proper circulation in a resort hotel building and facilities. In conclusion, the establishment of a beach resort in Akwa Ibom state marks a step towards the enhancement of the tourism sector in the state and the nation as a whole. This project will foster communism and preserve the long cultural heritage of the region where it is located while providing job opportunities and monetary income to the state.

Regularly assess and gather guest feedback on circulation and navigation to identify areas for improvement. This will help fine-tune the resort design and enhance the overall guest experience

6. RECOMMENDATION

The consideration of proper circulation in the site can easily be neglected and not done properly within the design, since circulation is a major necessity when it comes to any design, ignoring or not properly highlighting it could cause a major functionality withdrawal within the design. Proper Navigation in a beach resort is very important as it is considered in order to ensure users of the resort don't lose their way while transversing the resort. The design consideration indicates that the project will improve experience of the vacationers through the effective and efficient implementation of proper circulation by creating a space that is easy to navigate through. While the prospect is promising, challenges such as funding, infrastructure and sustained community involvement must be addressed. In order to solve issues like funding, both government and private sectors will have to be involved since it will most surely be a profitable venture.

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