

## Community Perception on the Tourism Potentials and Constraints of Ayikunugba Waterfall, Oke-Ila, Nigeria

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<https://doi.org/10.36263/nijest.2024.01.08>

### ABSTRACT

*The beneficial roles of tourism in economic development are being harnessed by many countries. Nigeria's tourism sector is still performing below expectations due to the underdevelopment of many of its natural endowments. This study assessed the perception of members of Oke-Ila community on the tourism potentials and constraints of Ayikunugba waterfall. Eighty (80) village and household heads, randomly selected from Oke-Ila community, were interviewed using a structured questionnaire. The respondents' majority were male, aged 41-70 years, married with at least a secondary school education. Camping, swimming, and picnicking were identified as tourism activities that can be done in and around the waterfall. Hosting seminars and conferences, learning about the origin of Oke-Ila dwellers, and antique preservation were identified as objects with educational potential. Job creation, infrastructural development, foreign investments, and improvement in living standards were acknowledged as economic benefits derivable from Ayikunugba's tourism use. The beautiful scenery, remoteness, and undisturbed air condition of the waterfall and its vicinity were affirmed as notable environmental features. Furthermore, local cuisine and Ayikunugba's history were socio-cultural elements identified to improve Ayikunugba's tourism use. The poor condition of linkage roads and few number of commercial motorists plying the waterfall's routes were identified as some of the major constraints to the waterfall's tourism use. Based on this finding, it can be concluded that members of Oke-Ila community are aware of some of the tourism potentials of Ayikunugba Waterfall, and the limitations.*

**Keywords:** Ayikunugba Waterfall, Challenges, Potentials, Recreation, Tourism development

### 1.0. Introduction

The developmental roles of tourism have been acknowledged globally. Countries, across many continents, have enjoyed different levels of benefits from tourism and travel-related activities (United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO], 2024). In Africa, tourism remains one of the fastest-growing sectors with assuring economic growth and reduction in poverty level (Novelli *et al.*, 2021). By the end of the Year 2023, the African tourism sector has gained a 96% recovery of pre-pandemic visitors, with Ethiopia, Tanzania, and Morocco exceeding their 2019 numbers by 30%, 20% and 11%, respectively (UNWTO, 2024). Based on the recovery rate recorded in 2023, and the expected 2% growth in global international tourist arrivals, the tourism sector in Africa is expected to witness tourist visits in numbers and values beyond those recorded in 2019 (UNWTO, 2023; 2024).

Despite its potential, the tourism sector is yet to be fully explored in many African countries, Nigeria inclusive. Nigeria is a country with immense natural endowments, capable of turning around the country's fortune as one of the foremost tourist destinations in Africa. However, tourism development in the country has suffered relegation due to the discovery of crude oil, the mainstay of Nigeria's economy (Oladele *et al.*, 2018). Adequate development of Nigeria's tourism sector will not only complement the country's earnings from crude oil but also change the status of Nigeria's economy from being a monolithic oil-based economy to a multi-product type. The grandness of Nigeria's cultural heritage and its numerous relatively unexplored natural tourism endowments (Oladele and Digun-Aweto 2017; Oladele *et al.* 2018) make the country a worthy choice for tourism development. Among such tourist destinations are water-based tourism sites. These sites include aquatic landforms such as warm and cold springs, waterfalls, caves, and blow holes (Ajake *et al.*,

2013). Some of the water-based natural tourism sites in Nigeria are Ikogosi Warm Spring (Ekiti State), Wikki Warm Spring (Bauchi State), Kwa, Agbokim, and Ikom waterfalls (Cross River State), Assop Falls (Plateau State), Farin Ruwa waterfall (Nassarawa State), Owu falls (Kwara State), and Erin-Ijesha waterfall (Osun State). Many of these and other natural endowments exist in un- or under-developed conditions.

Ayikunugba waterfall is an example of an undeveloped tourism destination in Southwestern Nigeria. It is a natural aquatic landform located in an environment with vegetative serenity of the tropical rainforest. The existence of cultural jamboree and traditional rendezvous in Oke-Ila, the host community of Ayikunugba waterfall (Owolabi, 2012; Ajani *et al.*, 2020), production of local artifacts and the availability of relatively cheap agricultural food products in Oke-Ila town are additional values which will prime Ayikunugba waterfall as a suitable site for tourism development. The assessment of the perception of Ayikunugba's host community is pertinent, as it will provide information on their level of knowledge of the tourism value of the waterfall. Without some knowledge of the tourism importance of the waterfall, integration of the host community in the waterfall's developmental plan may not produce the desired outcome. Integration of members of the host community in a tourism development plan is necessary to avoid socio-cultural, environmental, and economic damage that may result from their hostile attitude towards the tourism site development (Long, 2012; Sinclair-Maragh and Gursay, 2016; Digun-Aweto and Oladele, 2018). This study assessed the perception of members of Oke-Ila community on the tourism potentials of Ayikunugba waterfall and the constraints against its use for tourism.

## 2.0 Methodology

### 2.1 Study Area

Ayikunugba waterfall is located in Oke-Ila, a rural community in Ifedayo Local Government Area of Osun State, South-western part of Nigeria. Oke-Ila is an ancient community with a portable human population whose major occupation is agriculture (Owolabi, 2012, Ajani *et al.*, 2020). Oke-Ila is located at 7°55'41.9"N, 4°57'51.9"E coordinates, and is about 45km Northeast of Osogbo, the capital of Osun State, 95km Southeast of Ilorin, the capital of Kwara State, and 160km Southwest of Ile-Ife, the historic cradle of the Yoruba race. In addition to agricultural land mass, Oke-Ila is endowed with hills and mountains, a calm and refreshing environment, as well as the greenness of rainforest vegetation.

As a waterfall, Ayikunugba has a gorge and showers of water falling from the hilltop into a pool (Figure 1). The gorge is located about 4km from the centre of Oke-Ila community. The gorge, surrounded by large and luxurious trees, has a depth of about 21 metres. The scenic beauty of the gorge is coupled with the exciting water cascade that flows from a rocky source. The water falls into a plunge pool which is about 0.31 metres deep. The ever-present calm, serene, and lush vegetative environment that surrounds Ayikunugba confers an uncommon aesthetic value on the waterfall.

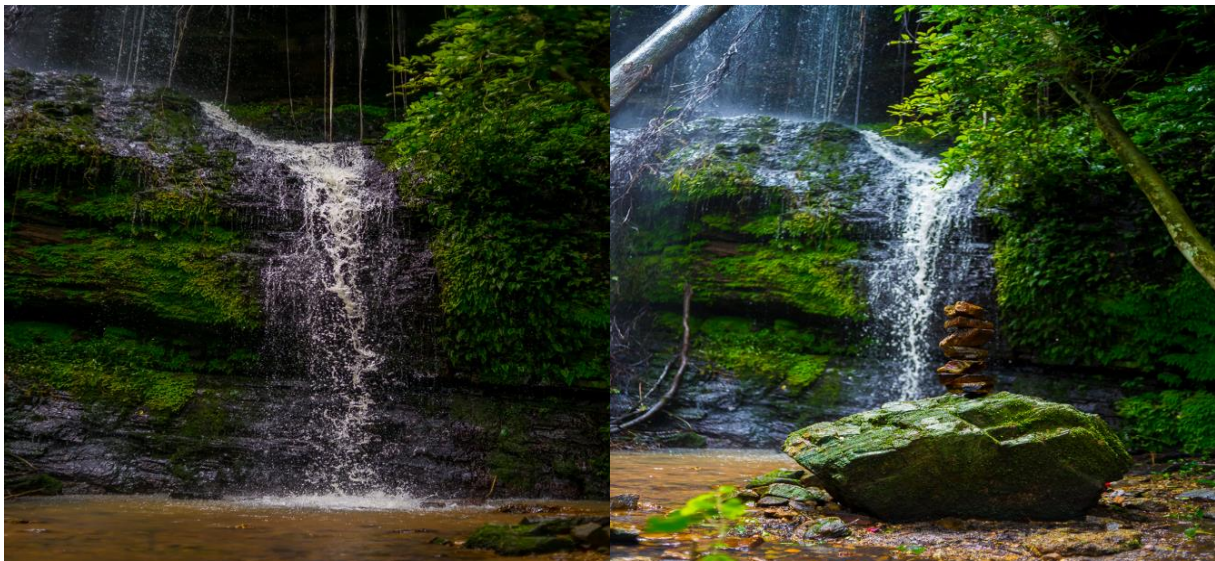


Figure 1: Ayikunugba Waterfall, Oke-Ila, Osun State, Nigeria  
Source: Wikimedia Commons (2023)

## 2.2 Research Techniques and Data Collection

Structured interview schedules were used to evaluate the level of awareness of the tourism potentials of Ayikunugba waterfall as well as the constraints to the tourism use of the waterfall. Among the members of Oke-Ila community, the village and household heads were selected as the respondents for the study. Twenty percent (20%) of the estimated houses in the community, which is equivalent to 80 houses, were randomly selected for the questionnaire administration. Structured questionnaires were administered to the heads of the selected households. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure the respondent's perception of the tourism potentials of Ayikunugba waterfall, as well as the constraints. Descriptive analysis, mainly frequency counts and percentage distribution, was used to describe the data obtained from the respondents' socio-economic characteristics, while the respondents' perception of the waterfall's tourism potentials and constraints were analysed and ranked using the mean item score. The scoring of the Likert scale, mean score determination, and ranking of the respondents' perception of tourism potential and constraints were done according to the method of Sözen and Güven (2019). For each of the indices evaluated under the tourism potentials, those with mean scores which ranged between 1.00 – 2.60 were rated as having negative perceptions; 2.61 – 3.40 as neutral, while those with mean scores of 3.41 – 5.00 were rated as having positive perceptions. Using the method of Tsado *et al.* (2012) of grouping constraints, constraints with a mean score from the midpoint (2.61 – 3.40) were rated as major constraints, those with a mean score of 1.81 – 2.60 were rated as minor constraints, while those with mean scores of 1.80 or less were rated as not a constraint.

## 3.0 Result and Discussion

### 3.1 Results

The socio-economic characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1. The table shows that 86.25% majority of the respondents were male, while 81.25% of the respondent population were 41-70 years of age. Also, the majority of the respondents were married (80.00%) with at least a secondary school education (65.00%), although the dominant occupations among them were farming (43.75%) and trading (28.75%).

**Table 1: Socio-economic characteristics of respondents**

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	69	86.25
Female	11	13.75
<u>Total</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>100</u>
<b>Age</b>		
≤ 30 years	2	2.50
31 – 40 years	6	7.50
41 – 50 years	24	30.00
51 – 60 years	25	31.25
61 – 70 years	16	20.00
≥ 70 years	7	8.75
<u>Total</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>100</u>
<b>Marital Status</b>		
Single	1	1.25
Married	64	80.00
Widow	13	16.25
Divorced	2	2.50
<u>Total</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>100</u>
<b>Educational Status</b>		
No Formal Education	13	16.25
Primary	15	18.75
Secondary	33	41.25
Tertiary	19	23.75
<u>Total</u>	<u>80</u>	<u>100</u>
<b>Occupation</b>		
Civil Servant	11	13.75
Trading	23	28.75
Farming	35	43.75

Artisan	11	13.75
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Religion</b>		
Islam	34	42.50
Christianity	32	40.00
Traditional	14	17.50
<b>Total</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 2 shows the perception of the respondents on the tourism potential of Ayikunugba waterfall. Among the recreational activities that can be done in and around Ayikunugba waterfall, camping received a positive perception; the respondents were neutral on the use of the waterfall’s base pool for swimming, as well as the use of the waterfall’s vicinity for picnics and rock climbing; while they opined that the waterfall is not good for boating activities. Furthermore, the respondents submitted that hosting seminars and conferences within the waterfall vicinity will be of educational importance while sharing knowledge of the origin of Oke-Ila dwellers as well as antique production and preservation have educational potential to be explored. However, learning more about the waterfall as well as the use of the waterbody for research potential received neutral and negative perceptions, respectively.

In areas of economic potential, the respondents affirmed strongly that job creation and improvement of road networks have economic potential which will positively affect the lives of the members of the Ayikunugba’s host community. The respondents identified that the waterfall has foreign investment potential, and believed that tourism development of the waterfall will lead to improvement in the living standard of the members of the host community. Also, the indices of environmental potentials receive positive perceptions among the respondents. They consented that the management of the waterfall, the hygienic condition of the waterbody and its vicinity, the beautiful scenery of the waterfall, the undisturbed air condition within the vicinity, coupled with the relative remoteness of the waterfall are essential environmental features that will enhance the tourism potential of Ayikunugba waterfall. Among the socio-economic variables, local cuisine and the history of Ayikunugba waterfall were submitted as items with some sociocultural potential. However, the use of local arts and crafts, and cultural displays were deemed improper as tourism objects for enhancing the tourism value of Ayikunugba waterfall.

**Table 2: Tourism potentials of Ayikunugba Waterfall**

	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	MIS	Perception	Rank
<b>Recreational potentials</b>									
1	The base pool is perfect for swimming	5 (6.25%)	11 (13.75%)	21 (26.25%)	42 (52.50%)	1 (1.25%)	3.29	Neutral	2
2	Picnics	2 (2.50%)	12 (15.00%)	30 (37.50%)	35 (43.75%)	1 (1.25%)	3.26	Neutral	3
3	Boating	5 (6.25%)	47 (58.75%)	20 (25.00%)	8 (10.00%)	0 (0.00%)	2.38	Negative	5
4	Rock-climbing	1 (1.25%)	21 (26.25%)	45 (56.25%)	13 (16.25%)	0 (0.00%)	2.88	Neutral	4
5	Camping	1 (1.25%)	6 (7.50%)	9 (11.25%)	60 (75.00%)	4 (5.00%)	3.75	Positive	1
<b>Educational potentials</b>									
6	Learn more about the waterfall	0 (0.00%)	6 (7.50%)	40 (50.00%)	33 (41.25%)	1 (1.25%)	3.36	Neutral	4
7	Knowledge of the origin of dwellers	0 (0.00%)	5 (6.25%)	32 (40.00%)	41 (51.25%)	2 (2.50%)	3.50	Positive	2
8	Host seminars and conferences	1 (1.25%)	5 (6.25%)	18 (22.50%)	56 (70.00%)	0 (0.00%)	3.61	Positive	1
9	Research potentials	5 (6.25%)	26 (32.50%)	41 (51.25%)	8 (10.00%)	0 (0.00%)	2.40	Negative	5
10	Antique preservation	0 (0.00%)	2 (2.50%)	39 (48.75%)	38 (47.50%)	1 (1.25%)	3.48	Positive	3

<b>Economic potentials</b>									
11	Job creation awareness	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	2 (2.50%)	57 (71.25%)	21 (26.25%)	4.24	Strongly Positive	1
12	Sales of local arts and crafts	12 (15.00%)	25 (31.25%)	22 (27.50%)	20 (25.00%)	1 (1.25%)	2.66	Neutral	5
13	Foreign investment potential	1 (1.25%)	5 (6.25%)	34 (42.50%)	38 (47.50%)	2 (2.50%)	3.44	Positive	4
14	Improvement of road network	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	4 (5.00%)	54 (67.50%)	22 (27.50%)	4.23	Strongly Positive	2
15	Improvement in living standard	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	8 (10.00%)	57 (71.25%)	15 (18.75%)	4.09	Positive	3
<b>Environmental potentials</b>									
16	Scenery	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	22 (27.50%)	54 (67.50%)	4 (5.00%)	3.78	Positive	3
17	Relative remoteness	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	30 (37.50%)	48 (60.00%)	2 (2.50%)	3.65	Positive	5
18	Unpolluted air	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	21 (26.25%)	57 (71.25%)	2 (2.50%)	3.76	Positive	4
19	Hygiene	0 (0.00%)	2 (2.50%)	14 (17.50%)	50 (62.50%)	14 (17.50%)	3.95	Positive	2
20	Management	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	10 (12.50%)	55 (68.75%)	15 (18.75%)	4.06	Positive	1
<b>Socio-cultural potentials</b>									
21	Cultural displays	9 (11.25%)	32 (40.00%)	34 (42.50%)	4 (5.00%)	1 (1.25%)	2.45	Negative	5
22	Local art and craft	9 (11.25%)	28 (35.00%)	38 (47.50%)	4 (5.00%)	1 (1.25%)	2.50	Negative	4
23	Negative effect	2 (2.50%)	13 (16.25%)	37 (46.25%)	27 (33.75%)	1 (1.25%)	3.15	Neutral	3
24	Local cuisine	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	17 (21.25%)	61 (76.25%)	2 (2.50%)	3.81	Positive	1
25	History of Ayikunugba	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	19 (23.75%)	59 (73.75%)	2 (2.50%)	3.79	Positive	2

Keys: SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree, MIS: Mean Item Score

The perception of the respondents on the constraints facing the use of Ayikunugba waterfall for tourism purposes is presented in Table 3. The table reveals that all the elements highlighted in the table were affirmed as a constraint, except one where the respondents submitted that the residents of the waterfall’s host community do not resist tourists visiting the waterfall. Also, cultural restrictions on the rocks were rated as a minor constraint among the respondents. Top ranking constraints were identified as the distance of the waterfall from the surface, conditions of the linkage road to the waterfall, distance from the nearest airport, and unavailability of commercial motorists plying the waterfall’s routes.

**Table 3: Perceived constraints to the exploration of Ayikunugba waterfall**

	Statements	SD	D	N	A	SA	MIS	Con-straints	Rank
1	Cultural restrictions on rock	12 (15.00%)	31 (38.75%)	35 (43.75%)	0 (0.00)	2 (2.50%)	2.36	Minor	6
2	Distance from surface	1 (1.25%)	7 (8.75%)	7 (8.75%)	31 (38.75%)	34 (42.50%)	4.13	Major	1
3	Restrictions on hunting	1 (1.25%)	7 (8.75%)	52 (65.00%)	19 (23.75%)	1 (1.25%)	3.15	Major	5
4	Residents resist tourist visits	27 (33.75%)	48 (60.00%)	4 (5.00%)	1 (1.25%)	0 (0.00%)	1.74	Not a constraint	7
5	Condition of roads	0 (0.00%)	0 (0.00%)	6 (7.50%)	70 (87.50%)	4 (5.00%)	3.98	Major	2

6	Unavailability of commercial motorists	6 (7.50%)	15 (18.75%)	16 (20.00%)	39 (48.75%)	4 (5.00%)	3.25	Major	4
7	Distance from airport	1 (1.25%)	6 (7.50%)	38 (47.50%)	34 (42.50%)	1 (1.25%)	3.35	Major	3

Keys: SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, N: Neutral, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree, MIS: Mean Item Score

### 3.2 Discussion

The observed dominant age, marital status, and sex distribution are expected because village and household heads are positions meant for adult and mature male individuals in Yoruba communities. The relatively high population of respondents with a minimum of secondary school education could be attributed to the availability of public primary and secondary schools in Oke-Ila community, while the two commonest occupations, farming, and trading, are typical of Nigerian rural community, as reported by Nchuchuwe and Adejuwon (2012).

The position perception of the respondents on the use of the waterfall's vicinity for camping programmes may have been informed by the calm and refreshing natural features of the waterfall vicinity. The economic benefits that may accrue from holding such events (Oladele *et al.*, 2018; Ogili *et al.*, 2023) may have also contributed to this popular opinion. The relatively small surface area of the plunge pool, the shallow depth as well as the effect of falling water may have led to the respondents' neutral opinion on the use of the waterfall's base pool for swimming. These variables may have also accounted for the negative perception that boating cannot be done on the water body. With greater awareness and sensitization, the neutral position of the respondents on the use of the waterfall and its vicinity for swimming and picnics, respectively, can be improved. Similarly, the lack of awareness and safety equipment necessary for rock climbing may be responsible for the neutral position observed among the respondents on the use of the waterfall's hilly surroundings for rock climbing.

The benefit of preserving the community's history and culture could be responsible for the respondents' submission which supported the need for exploring the educational potentials of the waterfall. Besides the educational importance, the economic benefits accruable from hosting seminars and conferences within Ayikunugba's vicinity (Digun-Aweto and Oladele, 2018) may have contributed to the respondents' support for the use of the waterfall's vicinity for these educational programmes. The need to preserve the cultural heritage of the host community may have accounted for the positive perception of the respondents on sharing knowledge of the origin of Oke-Ila dwellers as well as antique preservation. Also, the need to preserve the cultural heritage of the community could be one of the reasons why the respondents' majority were neutral on the use of the waterfall for research purposes. The fear that research studies may demystify the community's cultural heritage and beliefs may have also contributed to this position.

The respondents' awareness of several economic benefits of tourism may have contributed to their positive disposition to the various areas of economic potential. Job creation, inflow of foreign investments, infrastructural development, and improvement in living standards are some of the economic benefits that can be enjoyed from the development and tourism usage of Ayikunugba waterfall. This corroborates the submissions of Ajani *et al.* (2016), Digun-Aweto and Oladele (2018) and Alarape *et al.* (2023). The role of tourism in job creation for the locals has been documented in many studies such as Johnson and Snepenger (2006), Ndanusa *et al.* (2014), and Oladele and Digun-Aweto (2017), among others. The position of the respondents on the importance of a good road network as a recipe for optimal tourism use of Ayikunugba waterfall supports the findings of Ashley *et al.* (2000) and Oladele *et al.* (2018) that infrastructures such as roads, airports, power, potable water, shopping malls among others serve as attractants to tourist as well as provide comfort during the visit.

The beautiful scenery of the waterfall, the greenness of the surrounding rainforest vegetation, and the relative remoteness of the natural environment, which are observed features of Ayikunugba waterfall, may have informed the position of the respondents that the waterfall and its vicinity have desirable environmental characteristics which will enhance its tourism use. Proper management of Ayikunugba waterfall and its vicinity may have contributed immensely to the popular opinion of the respondents' majority that the waterfall has many environmental features which positioned it as a worthy tourism destination. The socio-economic benefits obtainable from the display of local food and food products, as well as the history of Ayikunugba waterfall could be responsible for the respondents' agreement to the use of the local cuisine and the waterfall's

history to aid Ayikunugba's tourism values. Exhibition of local language, dressing, food, and traditional festivities will not only reflect the beauty of the rich culture of the tourism site and the host community but also add value to the tourist experience (Oladele *et al.*, 2018). However, the prospects of using cultural displays as well as local arts and crafts for tourism did not receive positive acceptance. This may be attributed to the communal belief that tourists can only see cultural displays during the "Oro" festival which comes up once a year. Similarly, the respondents' fear of the negative effects of cultural dilution and cultural commoditization (Moisey, 2002; Reisinger, 2009) may have accounted for the negative position of the respondents on the use of local arts and crafts as elements of tourism. Cultural aberration may occur in an attempt to satisfy tourists' demand especially when the economic rewards look irresistible.

The number of constraints identified by the respondents gave credence to the fact that Ayikunugba waterfall is undeveloped. The lack of well-laid steps amidst the need to move down a sloppy terrain to get to the waterfall may have informed the position of the respondents' majority who rated the distance of the waterfall from the land surface as a major constraint. The opinion of the respondents on the poor condition of the waterfall's linkage roads, distance from the airport, and unavailable commercial motorists plying the waterfall's routes as major constraints further corroborates the status of the waterfall as undeveloped. The few numbers of commercial motorists plying the waterfall routes could be attributed to the bad condition of the linkage roads. According to the findings of Kiper (2011) which reported that the capacity of a site to attract tourists depends on accessibility, among other factors, there is a need to fix these problems as a headway to developing Ayikunugba waterfall for tourism purposes.

#### 4.0. Conclusions

Members of Ayikunugba's host community submitted that the waterfall's vicinity is adequate for camping programmes. Although the pool was deemed inadequate for boating activities, the respondents were neutral on the usage of the waterfall's base pool for swimming. The use of the waterfall's vicinity for hosting of seminars and conferences, as well as the use of historical knowledge of Ayikunugba waterfall and the Oke-Ila community, were acknowledged as having educational potential capable of adding value to tourists' visits. Job creation, foreign investment, improved standard of living, and infrastructural development were affirmed as some of the socio-economic benefits derivable from the tourism development of Ayikunugba waterfall. Members of Oke-Ila community agreed that the scenery of the Ayikunugba waterfall, the relative remoteness as well as the refreshing natural atmosphere of the waterfall vicinity are important environmental features that will boost the tourist experience. Among the cultural elements, local cuisine and history of Ayikunugba waterfall were described as items of potential value, although the respondents' majority disagreed with the use of local arts, crafts, and cultural displays as objects of tourism. Distance of the waterfall from the land surface, bad conditions of the linkage roads to the waterfall, and poor availability of commercial motorists plying Ayikunugba routes were identified as some of the major constraints to tourism use of Ayikunugba waterfall. Hence, it can be concluded that members of Oke-Ila community are aware of some of the tourism potentials of Ayikunugba waterfall, as well as the limitations to its use for tourism. Addressing the identified constraints will not only make the waterfall accessible but also allow for adequate development and utilization of this natural endowment for tourism purposes.

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**Cite this article as:**

Alarape A. A., Oladele A. H. and Odekunle O. T. 2024. Community Perception on the Tourism Potentials and Constraints of Ayikunugba Waterfall, Oke-Ila, Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Environmental Sciences and Technology*, 8(1), pp. 13-21. <https://doi.org/10.36263/nijest.2024.01.08>