American Journal of Tourism and Hospitality (AJTH)

ISSN: 2993-6519 (ONLINE)

VOLUME 3 ISSUE 1 (2025)

PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

American Journal of Tourism and Hospitality (AJTH)

Volume 3 Issue 1, Year 2025
ISSN: 2993-6519 (Online)
DOI: https://doi.org/10.54536/ajth.v3i1.6032
https://journals.e-palli.com/home/index.php/ajth

Visitors' Behaviour towards Responsible Tourism and Environmental Concern of Agodi Gardens, Ibadan, Nigeria

Ajani F.[1*], Ijose O. A.[2], Adebisi O. P.[1], Eshebi G. U.[1]

Article Information

Received: August 30, 2025
Accepted: October 03, 2025
Published: November 10, 2025

Keywords

Environmental Degradation, Recreation, Responsible Tourism, Urban Green Spaces, Visitors' Behavior

ABSTRACT

This study presents findings from an assessment of visitor behavior and environmental responsibility at Agodi Gardens urban green space. Urban green spaces face significant challenges due to environmental degradation from recreational use, such as high foot traffic, off-trail walking, among others. This compromises their ecological integrity and reduces their ability to support biodiversity and provide essential ecosystem services Research integrated visitor surveys (n=274) with staff interviews (n=9) and managerial input to evaluate responsible tourism practices. The predictors of visitors' behaviour towards responsible tourism were determined. Data collected was analyzed using descriptive analyses and regression. Majority of respondents were in the age group of 25 to 34 years. Results revealed key demographics: majority aged 25-34 years (58.8% single, 52.6% female). While 90.5% recognized green space importance, only 44.5% consistently avoided littering. Regression analysis identified gender (β=2.950) and environmental awareness (β=1.181) as significant predictors of responsible behavior. The findings demonstrate a critical gap between environmental knowledge and actionable conservation practices, highlighting the need for targeted campaigns to translate awareness into sustainable visitor actions that protect ecological integrity against recreational degradation.

INTRODUCTION

Urban green spaces like parks and gardens are indispensable to sustainable cities, providing critical ecosystem services that enhance air quality, mitigate urban heat islands, and support biodiversity (Edeigba *et al.,* 2024). They also serve as vital recreational hubs, fostering physical health, mental well-being, and social cohesion among urban populations (Edeigba *et al.,* 2024). However, the rapid urbanization of cities like Ibadan, coupled with escalating visitor numbers, threatens the ecological integrity of these spaces. Human activities - ranging from littering and vegetation trampling to unsustainable resource use - are degrading urban green areas globally, undermining their capacity to deliver long-term environmental and social benefits (Liu *et al.*, 2024).

Agodi Gardens, a key green space in Ibadan, exemplifies this challenge. While studies like Operinde and Emma-Egoro (2020), have documented its developmental history and operational hurdles - including funding shortages and inadequate conservation planning - the role of visitor behavior in shaping its ecological health remains underexplored. For instance, Ojo *et al.* (2017) revealed that visitors to Agodi Gardens exhibited low environmental awareness and indifferent attitudes toward conservation, directly contributing to practices like improper waste disposal and habitat disruption. This aligns with broader findings that urban parks often struggle to balance recreational use with ecological preservation, particularly when visitor actions are misaligned with sustainability goals (Zhao *et al.,* 2023).

Urban green spaces, including parks, gardens, and nature reserves, are essential for urban sustainability and human well-being. These spaces provide essential ecosystem services, such as air purification, temperature regulation, and storm water management, while also serving as hubs for recreation, social interaction, and mental health restoration (Edeigba *et al.,* 2024). For instance, studies have shown that access to green spaces reduces stress, improves physical health, and fosters community cohesion (Edeigba *et al.,* 2024). In rapidly urbanizing regions like sub-Saharan Africa, where cities are projected to house 50% of the population by 2030 (UN-Habitat, 2020), urban green spaces are increasingly vital for mitigating the "urban heat island" effect and preserving biodiversity (Edeigba *et al.,* 2024).

Globally, the concept of responsible tourism has emerged as a framework to reconcile tourism with environmental stewardship (Goodwin, 2016). However, in Nigeria, few studies have investigated how visitor behavior influences the sustainability of urban green spaces. This gap hinders the development of evidence-based strategies to promote sustainable visitor behavior. This research will ensure that this existing gap is addressed.

The specific objectives of this study are to assess visitors' behavior towards responsible tourism in terms of environmental sustainability, assess visitors' awareness of environmental concerns and identify current management practices and their effectiveness in promoting environmental sustainability.

[1] Department of Wildlife and Ecotourism Management, University of Ibadan, Nigeria
[2] Horst Schulze School of Hospitality Management, Auburn University, USA
[*] Corresponding author's e-mail: funmilolajani@gmail.com

LITERATURE REVIEW

Conceptualizing Responsible Tourism: Definitions and Evolution

The concept of responsible tourism emerged in the late 20th century as a critical response to the environmental, social, and economic harms associated with mass tourism. Early critiques focused on how tourism, driven by short-term profits, often compromised natural ecosystems and community well-being. Recent empirical work by Fletcher and Whelan (2022) reinforces these early concerns by demonstrating that tourism practices emphasizing immediate economic gains continue to erode environmental limits and undermine long-term community resilience. Their findings align with the foundational insights of the Brundtland Report, which famously defined sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). This definition laid the groundwork for reimagining tourism not merely as an economic activity but as a potential catalyst for positive, sustainable change (UNWTO, 2018).

Over time, the evolution of responsible tourism has been marked by a shift from reactive strategies aimed solely at mitigating negative impacts to proactive, holistic approaches that integrate environmental stewardship, socio-cultural sensitivity, and economic equity. This paradigm shift recognizes that sustainable tourism must incorporate diverse stakeholder perspectives, including those of local communities who bear the brunt of tourism's adverse effects. Scholars such as Weaver (2006) have argued that integrating local knowledge and fostering community participation are critical to ensuring that tourism development remains contextually appropriate and sustainable over the long term.

The term "responsible tourism" gained significant traction with the publication of the Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations (2002). This seminal document outlined a set of guiding principles, defining responsible tourism as an approach that:

i. Minimizes negative environmental, social, and cultural impacts,

ii. Generates greater economic benefits for local communities,

iii. Involves local people in decision-making processes that affect their lives, and

iv. Promotes cultural respect and conservation (Cape Town Declaration on Responsible Tourism in Destinations, 2002).

Goodwin (2016) further emphasized that the Cape Town Declaration positioned responsible tourism as a grassroot, stakeholder-driven approach—challenging the conventional top-down models of tourism development. This perspective encourages a more democratic and inclusive model, one that not only protects natural and cultural resources but also enhances the socio-economic fabric of local communities.

In summary, the evolution of responsible tourism reflects a broader global shift from an exploitative model focused on short-term economic benefits to an integrated framework that prioritizes environmental sustainability, cultural integrity, and social equity. As global challenges such as climate change and social inequity intensify, the principles of responsible tourism offer a promising pathway for reconciling economic development with the imperatives of environmental stewardship and community well-being.

The Role of Urban Green Spaces in Sustainable Tourism

Urban green spaces - parks, gardens, and nature reserves embedded within cities - are increasingly recognized as critical assets for sustainable tourism. These spaces provide ecosystem services such as air purification, carbon sequestration, and flood mitigation, while simultaneously serving as recreational and cultural hubs for residents and tourists (Edeigba *et al.,* 2024). For example, New York's Central Park attracts over 42 million visitors annually, contributing significantly to the city's tourism economy while maintaining its ecological functions (Treglia *et al.,* 2015). Similarly, Singapore's Gardens by the Bay combines cutting-edge sustainable design (e.g., solar-powered super trees, rainwater harvesting) with tourism, demonstrating how urban green spaces can balance conservation and visitor engagement (Ng *et al.,* 2022).

Urban green spaces also foster cultural sustainability by preserving local heritage and offering authentic experiences. For instance, the Kirstenbosch National Botanical Garden in Cape Town, South Africa, showcases indigenous flora and collaborates with local communities to promote cultural narratives, attracting eco-conscious tourists (Van Wilgen *et al.,* 2016).

Global Challenges in Managing Urban Green Spaces

Urban green spaces provide ecological, social, and economical benefits, but their role in sustainable tourism is complicated by various global challenges. While they attract tourists and promote well-being, unregulated activities often lead to environmental degradation and mismanagement. Some of these challenges include;

Overcrowding and Over Tourism

High visitor numbers strain infrastructure and degrade ecosystems. Barcelona's Park Güell limited daily entries to 1,400 visitors to prevent soil erosion and vandalism, a response to over tourism pressures (Duxbury and Richards, 2019). In contrast, Mumbai's Sanjay Gandhi National Park struggles with unregulated access, leading to habitat fragmentation and wildlife disturbances (Nagendra *et al.,* 2013).

Waste Management

Improper waste disposal remains a pervasive issue. A study of Hyde Park in London found that 30% of visitors littered despite available bins, citing overcrowding and poor maintenance as contributing factors (Hitchings and

Latham, 2020). In developing nations, inadequate waste infrastructure exacerbates the problem.

Commercialization Pressures

Urban green spaces often prioritize revenue-generating activities (e.g., concerts, weddings) over conservation. Yoyogi Park in Tokyo faced backlash for hosting large-scale events that damaged grass cover and disrupted bird nesting sites (Sorensen, 2015).

Climate Change Impacts

Rising temperatures and extreme weather events threaten biodiversity in urban green spaces. A 2020 study of Berlin's Tiergarten revealed that drought stress reduced tree canopy cover by 12%, diminishing its appeal as a tourist destination (Kabisch *et al.,* 2020).

Examples of Innovative Practices and Solutions

Cities are facing the dilemma of reconciling conservation with the pressure of tourism by employing new models of green spaces that balance zoning regulations with people participation, use of technology, and the framework of policies aimed at preventing degradation of the environment while making the tourist experience more enjoyable. Examples of these innovation practices and solutions includes:

Zoning and Visitor Management

i. Curitiba, Brazil: Implemented zoning laws to separate high-traffic recreational areas from conservation zones, ensuring habitat protection (Ribeiro and Barañano, 2017).

ii. Central Park, New York City: Uses timed entry systems and seasonal closures to reduce ecological strain (Treglia *et al.,* 2015).

Community-Led Conservation

i. Karura Forest, Nairobi: Engaged local communities in tree-planting and anti-poaching patrols, reducing illegal logging by 60% (Mwangi, 2017).

ii. Seoul's Cheonggyecheon Stream: Restored an urban waterway with community input, boosting tourism while enhancing biodiversity (Kim *et al.,* 2018).

Technological Integration

i. Singapore's Smart Parks Initiative: Uses IoT sensors to monitor visitor density and air quality, adjusting resources in real time (Tan *et al.,* 2020).

Policy Frameworks

i. European Green Capital Award: Incentivizes cities like Ljubljana and Oslo to integrate green spaces into urban planning, fostering sustainable tourism (EC, 2023).

Materials and Methods

Study Area

Agodi gardens is located in Ibadan, the third largest city in Africa, and is located to the northeast of the Oyo State Secretariat, the southwest of the University Teaching Hospital and the northwest of the Premier Hotels. It was founded in 1967 as the first and primary recreational center and was under the Western Region until the creation of the Oyo State in 1976 which took over the management of the center. It is situated in a wetland and occupies an area of about 13 acres (5. 3 hectares) of land, with the geographical position of Latitude 7°24'25. 01" N and longitude 3°53'57. 35" E and an altitude of 191 meters above sea level (Olubode, 2013). The Dandaru River runs through the gardens; the area has an equatorial climate, with distinct dry season (November through March) and wet season (April through October), and high humidity. The average daily temperature of the area is between 25°C and 35°C for the entire year (Ojo *et al.,* 2017).

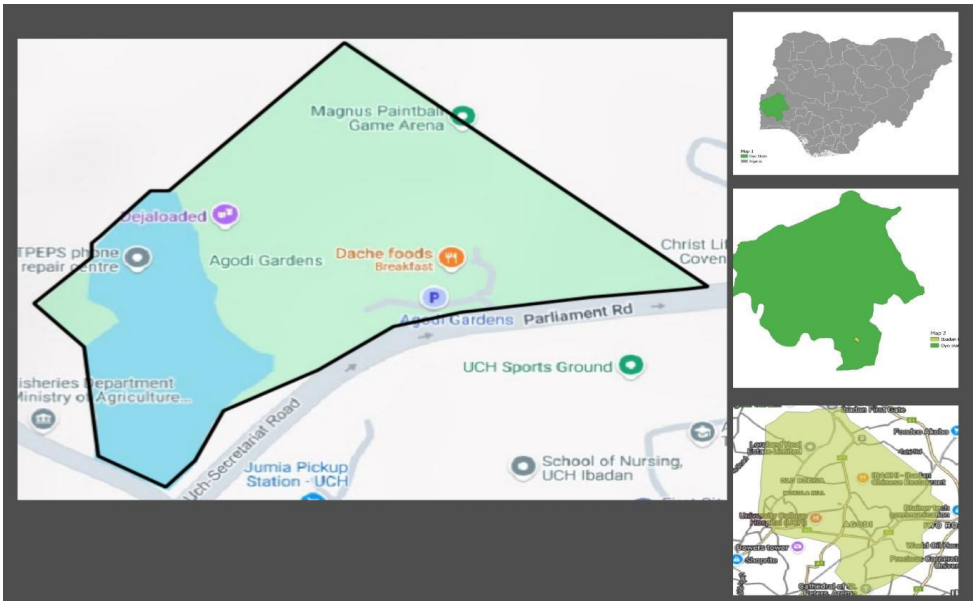

Figure 1: Layout of Agodi Gardens, Ibadan, Nigeria

This study employed a mixed-methods approach which include structured questionnaire, direct observation, and in-depth interview with the park manager and key informant among the park staff (Cleaners and Gardens). This design provided a comprehensive understanding of visitor's behavior and its environmental impacts in Agodi Gardens.

Reconnaissance Survey

A preliminary assessment of Agodi Gardens was conducted to familiarize with the surrounding and get important information needed for the study such as visitor's influx and staff population.

Sampling Procedure

Using Krejcie and Morgan sample size determination table, a sample size of 274 visitors was used for this study. An in-depth interview was carried out with the manager while structured interview was adopted to harvest information from 9 members of park staff (7 Cleaners, 2 Gardeners).

Data Collection

Descriptive statistics and inferential (regression) analysis was used to analyze the data.

Hypothesis

Ho1: Selected sociodemographic variables and visitors' awareness of environmental concerns do not significantly predict visitors' behavior towards responsible tourism

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

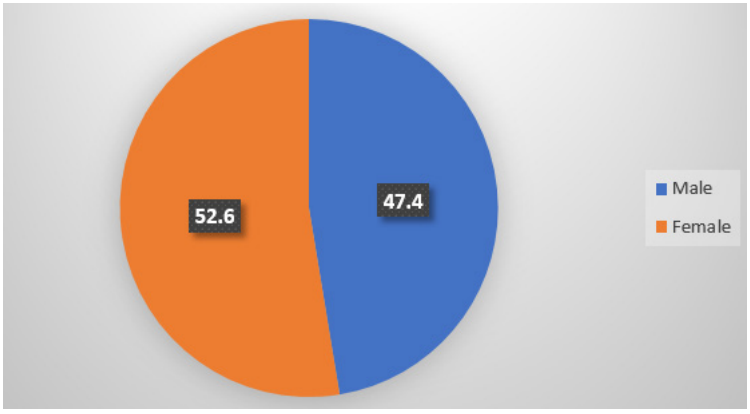

Figure 2: Gender distribution of respondents

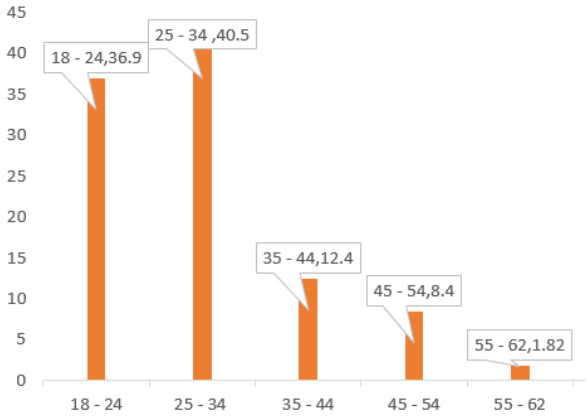

Figure 3: Age distribution of respondents

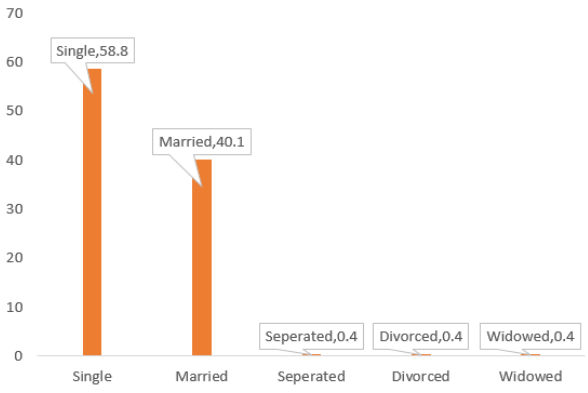

Figure 4: Marital status of respondents

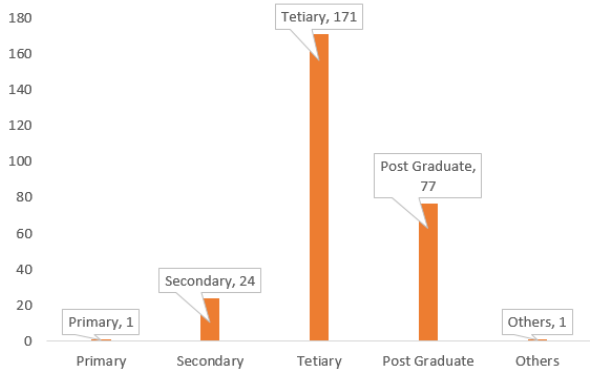

Figure 5: Level of Education of respondents

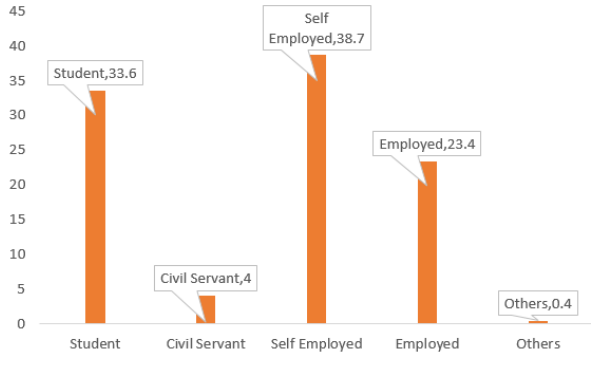

Figure 6: Occupation status of respondents

Table 1: Distribution of Visitors' behavior towards responsible tourism

S/N	Statement	SD (%)	D (%)	N (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	Weighted mean
1	I avoid littering while visiting the garden	5.8	5.1	3.6	40.9	44.5	4.13
2	I always use designated waste disposal Facili-ties	4.7	4.7	5.1	52.2	33.2	4.04
3	I consider the possible effects when making a choice of activities to carry out in the park	4.0	8.4	23.4	42.0	22.3	3.70
4	I refrain from picking plants, flowers, or dis-turbing natural habitats	4.7	15.3	13.9	42.0	24.1	3.65
5	I tease and chase the animals during my visit	25.2	38.0	12.4	7.3	17.2	3.47
6	I follow all the rules and guidelines set by the management of the green space	1.1	13.1	7.3	46.0	32.5	3.96
7	I make use of the restroom when I have to re-lieve myself	4.7	7.7	5.8	41.6	40.1	4.05
8	I make effort to reduce noise pollution during my visits	6.9	6.2	19.0	49.6	18.2	3.66
9	I properly dispose of food waste to prevent at-tracting animals	5.1	5.8	13.1	47.8	28.1	3.88
10	I report any harmful activities or environmen-tal damage to the management when observed	8.8	8.8	22.3	36.1	24.1	3.58
11	I bring reusable bags and containers to avoid single-use plastics	11.3	21.2	34.3	25.5	7.7	2.97
12	I avoid activities that consume excessive natu-ral resources in the green space	6.6	8.8	15.0	56.6	13.1	3.61
13	I encourage my companions to follow sustain-able practices during visits	0.7	8.0	18.6	43.8	28.8	3.92
14	I avoid wasting water when using facilities like public restrooms	2.6	6.9	15.3	56.2	19.0	3.82
15	I avoid feeding animals during my visits	6.2	8.8	20.8	50.7	13.5	3.57
16	I use biodegradable products if I bring any-thing that might impact the environment	8.8	16.4	12.4	50.4	12.0	3.41
17	I ensure to stay on designated pathways to pro-tect vegetation	2.6	5.1	13.5	52.9	25.9	3.95
18	I am least concerned about the possible effect of my actions in the park as long as a I derive pleasure from it	30.7	21.2	7.7	19.0	21.5	3.20
19	I choose eco-friendly sunscreen or insect re-pellents that do not harm the ecosystem	4.7	8.4	21.2	35.0	30.7	3.78
20	I do not care causing any possible damage to park facilities as long as I am able to use it	44.5	28.5	6.2	7.3	13.5	3.83

Table 2: Categorization of Visitors' behavior towards responsible tourism

Behavior category	Frequency	Percentage
Indifferent	29	10.6
Positive	245	89.4

Table 3: Functionality of specialised facilities

S/N	Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	The importance of green spaces for environmental sustainability.	248	90.5
2	Reducing waste is a key part of environmental sustainability.	233	85.0
3	The concept of carbon footprint.	119	43.4
4	Climate change is a major challenge to environmental sustainabil-ity.	252	92.0
5	Walking on vegetation damages them.	198	72.3
6	Recycling is an important practice for environmental sustainabil-ity.	235	85.8
7	Protecting natural habitats is essential for environmental sustain-ability.	230	83.9
8	Conserving water contributes to environmental sustainability.	203	74.1
9	Green spaces help to reduce urban heat through tree cover and vegetation.	202	73.7
10	Improper disposal of waste can lead to water contamination if it ends up in water bodies.	225	82.1
11	Pollution from human activities affects the environment.	253	92.3
12	Overuse of natural resources can lead to their depletion and affect environmental sustainability.	215	78.5
13	Excessive use of plastic is harmful to the environment.	211	77.0
14	Sustainable tourism practices help protect the environment.	192	70.1
15	Green spaces help mitigate climate change.	211	77.0
16	Overuse of park resources (e.g., water, electricity) by visitors con-tributes to environmental degradation.	181	66.1
17	Overcrowding causes soil compaction.	188	68.6
18	Waste materials like plastics leach harmful substances into the soil.	202	73.7
19	Deforestation negatively impacts the environment.	210	76.6
20	The greenhouse gas effect.	218	79.6

Table 4: Categorization of Visitors' awareness of environmental concerns

Awareness category	Frequency	Percentage
High	252	92
Low	22	8

Table 5: Distribution of Visitors' Awareness of Environmental Concerns

Variable	Coefficient	Standard error	T-value	P-value	Decision
(Intercept)	50.840	3.939	12.907	0.000	
Gender	2.950	1.185	2.490	0.013	S
Age	0.061	0.095	0.646	0.519	NS
Married	1.845	1.696	1.088	0.278	NS
Tertiary Education	1.166	2.026	0.575	0.566	NS
Employed	-0.359	1.553	-0.231	0.818	NS
Within Ibadan	0.296	1.381	0.215	0.830	NS
Awareness Score	1.181	0.151	7.826	0.000	S

Decision criteria: Reject null hypothesis if $p \leq 0.05$, accept null hypothesis if $p > 0.05$
(Multiple R-squared: 0.2491; Adjusted R-squared:0.2293; F-statistic:12.6; p-value: 0.000).

Table 5: Discussion with key Informants

Theme 1	Basic Management Practices	Both the park manager and staff reported that the park's management approach is minimalistic, relying on the provision of waste bins, daily cleaning routines, and lim-ited regulatory sign posting.
Theme 2	Prevalence of Littering	Despite these measures, littering emerged as the most prevalent issue. The park manager noted that visitors consistently litter the facilities following daily usage, while staff corroborated this as the primary challenge they face.
Theme 3	Absence of Designated Recrea-tional Zones	The interviews revealed that there is no designated or restricted area for picnics within the park; visitors are free to use any part of the park. This lack of spatial man-agement may contribute to disorganized visitor behavior and increased litter accumulation.
Theme 4	Perceived Minimal Environ-mental Impact	Despite the recurring problem of littering, both the park manager and staff indicated that no significant environ-mental degradation - such as habitat loss or vegetation decline- has been observed.

Discussion

The demographic data showed that majority of the respondent were females, within the age range of 25–34, single, had tertiary education, were self- employed, and stayed within Ibadan, similar to the findings of Adedoyin and Ajani (2021) which found majority of the respondents to be females, single and also had tertiary education.

The study revealed that a high percentage of the respondents report positive behavior toward responsible tourism, along with high environmental awareness, except for the concept of Carbon footprint which is relatively new to majority of them. This suggests that visitors to Agodi Gardens are generally inclined to act in environmentally responsible ways. This finding aligns with other studies conducted in similar urban park settings. For instance, research in urban green spaces has often documented high visitor awareness and pro-environmental attitudes, driven by increasing environmental education and public campaigns (Lee & Kim, 2015; Saha & Haq, 2024).

However, despite these favorable attitudes, littering remains a major issue, and basic management practices (such as provision of waste bins and routine cleaning) seem insufficient to curb the problem. This conflict points to a well-documented phenomenon in environmental studies - the attitude-behavior gap (or value-action gap).

Several studies have shown that high environmental awareness and positive attitudes do not automatically translate into environmentally responsible actions. For instance, Gifford, (2011) argue that even when individuals recognize the importance of environmental stewardship, various internal and external barriers - such as convenience, lack of proper facilities, or social norms - can inhibit the translation of these attitudes into actual behavior.

The findings of this study highlight the significant role of environmental awareness in shaping visitors' behavior towards responsible tourism. The regression analysis indicates that awareness of environmental concerns is the strongest predictor ($\beta = 1.181$, $p < 0.001$), aligning with previous studies that emphasize the positive relationship between knowledge of environmental issues and pro-environmental behavior. For instance, Razah *et al.*, (2024) found that tourists who are more informed about environmental problems tend to adopt eco-friendly practices, such as reducing waste, conserving water, and supporting sustainable tourism initiatives. Similarly, Vicente (2024) demonstrated that individuals with high environmental consciousness are more likely to engage in responsible tourism, reinforcing the argument that awareness fosters behavioral change. The study also found that gender plays a significant role in influencing responsible tourism behavior, with females ($\beta = 2.950$, $p = 0.013$) displaying higher levels of concern than males. This is consistent with the findings reported by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication in their 2019 Climate Opinion Maps (Parikshat *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, studies in the tourism sector (Budeanu et al, 2015) have shown that female tourists are more likely to choose eco-friendly accommodations and support conservation efforts, further supporting the gendered differences in responsible tourism behavior.

The regression model accounts for approximately 24.9% of the variance in responsible tourism behavior, indicating that while awareness and gender are important predictors, other factors remain unexplored. Previous research suggests that psychological variables such as personal values, social norms, and moral obligation may play a crucial role in shaping responsible tourism behavior (Stern, 2000). Additionally, contextual factors like accessibility to sustainable tourism options, financial considerations, and cultural influences could further explain variations in behavior (Wehrli *et al.,* 2017).

Recommendations

1. Enhanced Infrastructure Development like designated picnic areas, increased waste disposal facilities, improved signage, strengthening of management practices
2. Regular Monitoring and Enforcement
3. Community Engagement Programs
4. Feedback Mechanisms
5. Bridging the Attitude-Behavior Gap
6. Targeted Environmental Campaigns
7. Collaboration with Local Stakeholders

CONCLUSION

This study is consistent in the perception that visitors to Agodi Gardens exhibit high levels of responsible behavior and environmental awareness, which is in consonance with findings from other urban parks. However, the gap in management practices, particularly the issues of littering and unregulated park use, points to the need for strategic improvements in park management. Enhancing facilities and adopting a more comprehensive approach to environmental stewardship could ensure that the positive behaviors and awareness among visitors are fully supported and translated into sustainable tourism practices.

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