

Comparative Assessment of Quality of Landscape Features in a Heritage Site: A Case Study of Ado-Awaye and Idanre Hills

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Abstract

Heritage landscapes play a critical role in cultural preservation, environmental sustainability, and tourism development. However, disparities in landscape management and infrastructural provision often limit their functional and experiential value, particularly in developing countries. This study presents a comparative assessment of landscape feature quality at two prominent heritage sites in Southwestern Nigeria Ado-Awaye Suspended Lake and Idanre Hills. Using a structured five-point Likert scale, key landscape features were evaluated across four parameters: availability, adequacy, quality, and efficiency. Primary data were obtained through systematic field observations, photographic documentation, and on-site assessments. The findings reveal significant variation between the two sites. Idanre Hills consistently recorded higher performance scores across all parameters, reflecting the impact of structured management, cultural integration, and sustained infrastructural investment. In contrast, Ado-Awaye, despite its unique natural feature, exhibits deficiencies in circulation systems, visitor facilities, maintenance quality, and interpretive infrastructure. These limitations adversely affect visitor experience, safety, and heritage interpretation. The study concludes that effective heritage landscape performance depends on the synergistic interaction of physical provision, functional adequacy, maintenance quality, and operational efficiency. It recommends targeted infrastructural upgrades, community-based management strategies, and conservation-oriented planning interventions at Ado-Awaye, drawing lessons from the management framework of Idanre Hills. The findings contribute empirical evidence to heritage tourism and landscape management discourse in Nigeria and comparable developing contexts.

Keywords: Heritage landscape, landscape quality, tourism infrastructure, Idanre Hills, Ado-Awaye, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Heritage landscapes generally are vital cultural and environmental assets that links communities to their history while they also offer opportunities for tourism and sustainable development. They serve as spaces where cultural memory, ecological diversity, and social identity are preserved and experienced (Harrison, 2020; Smith, 2017). In Nigeria, over the years heritage landscapes have

become increasingly important not only for their cultural symbolism but also for their role in promoting eco-tourism and regional development (Ezeuduji, 2015).

Ado Awaye Hills and Idanre Hills are two prominent heritage sites in southwestern Nigeria, both renowned for their distinctive landscapes and cultural narratives. Ado Awaye, famous for hosting the rare Suspended Lake one of only two in the world is surrounded by caves, hills, and cultural sites that hold significant meaning for the local community (Ogunbodede & Akintunde, 2016). Idanre Hills, on the other hand, is recognized as a UNESCO tentative world heritage site due to its striking topography, ancient settlements, and rich cultural heritage that narrates the history of the Idanre people (UNESCO, 2019). Together, these sites illustrate how natural landscapes intertwine with cultural heritage to form unique tourism destinations. Even as much as they exhibit special characters and attract a lot of attention, both sites face challenges that affect the quality of their landscapes. Issues such as inadequate infrastructure, poor maintenance, and weak integration of cultural elements into spatial planning have limited their functionality and appeal (Adebayo & Ilesanmi, 2017). Assessing the quality of landscape features in these locations is therefore essential for understanding their tourism potential and for proposing sustainable management strategies.

Landscape quality assessment, according to Antrop (2017), involves evaluating not just the physical and ecological features of a site but also how well they serve cultural, recreational, and community needs. By conducting a comparative study of Ado Awaye and Idanre Hills, this research seeks to examine the availability, adequacy, quality, and efficiency of their landscape features. This comparative approach allows for identifying strengths and weaknesses in each site's landscape planning and highlights opportunities for enhancing heritage tourism in Nigeria. The significance of this study lies in its contribution to ongoing discussions about heritage site management in Africa. As Daly (2019) notes, sustainable tourism in developing contexts requires balancing environmental protection, cultural preservation, and socio-economic development. By situating Ado Awaye and Idanre Hills within this discourse, the study underscores how improved landscape management can serve as a catalyst for cultural regeneration, community participation, and sustainable economic growth.

2. Study Location

Ado-Awaye Hills is located in Oyo State, southwestern Nigeria, and is renowned for its suspended Iyake Lake, mystical footprints, and panoramic views. The terrain is rugged, with rocky outcrops surrounded by vegetation, but tourism infrastructure remains minimal.



Figure 1: Map showing location of Ado-awaye.

Source: GADM website (<https://gadm.org/maps/NGA/oyo.html>) ;image processing by Author (2025)



Figure 2: Image of the Heritage feature (Ado-Awaye suspended lake).

Source:https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iyake_Suspended_lake_-_Ado_Awaye,_Iseyin,_Oyo_State,_Nigeria._06.jpg

Idanre Hills, in Ondo State, rises about 3,000 feet above sea level and features extensive cultural assets such as shrines, ancient settlements, and colonial relics. Unlike Ado-Awaye, Idanre Hills has benefited from UNESCO recognition, which has boosted conservation awareness and tourism facilities. Both locations are heritage sites of ecological and cultural significance but differ in their infrastructural and landscape development.

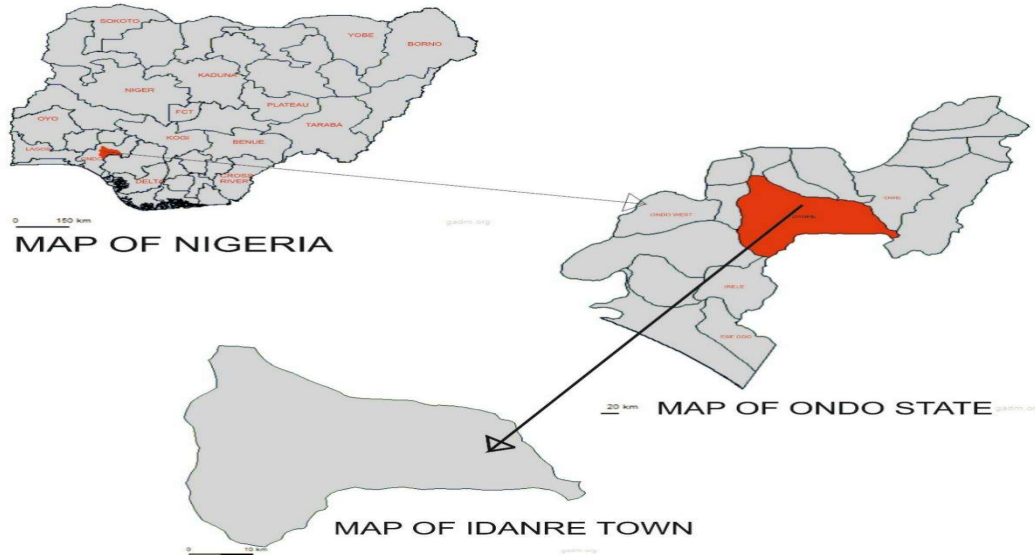


Fig 3: Adapted Map showing location of Idanre Hills

Source: GADM website (<https://gadm.org/maps/NGA/ondo/idanre.html>)



Fig 4: Image showing the Appearance of the Idanre-Hills

Source:https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idanre_Hill#/media/File:Idanre_Hills,_UNESCO_World_Heritage.jpg

3. Methodology

This study focused on two heritage locations in Southwestern Nigeria: Idanre Hills in Ondo State and Ado-Awaye suspended lake in Oyo State, utilising a qualitative research design based on a comparative case study methodology. An in-depth examination of the landscape characteristics

and heritage value of the two locations, highlighting their parallels and differences, made the case study method especially appropriate (Yin, 2018).

Data were primarily collected through field observations, guided tours, and informal interviews with local stakeholders, including site tour guides, community members, and visitors. An observation guide was developed to record and assess key landscape features such as terrain, vegetation, cultural elements, accessibility, and supporting infrastructure. These features were evaluated under four criteria: availability, adequacy, quality, and efficiency. The Likert scale method was employed to enable a structured comparison between the two sites, with scores reflecting perceptions of how well each feature was represented or managed (Ogunbodede & Akintunde, 2016).

Likewise, secondary data were sourced from academic journal articles, books, policy documents, and relevant UNESCO reports. These materials provided a scholarly foundation for situating the findings within the broader discourse on heritage tourism and landscape management in Nigeria (Ezeuduji, 2015; Daly, 2019; UNESCO, 2019).

Data analysis involved both descriptive and comparative techniques. Descriptive analysis summarized the characteristics of each site, while comparative assessment highlighted the strengths and weaknesses of the two locations across the identified criteria. This integrative approach ensured that the research findings were not only grounded in empirical observation but also contextualized within existing literature on sustainable heritage landscape management.

3.1 Use of the Likert Scale in the Study

A structured five-point Likert scale (Table 1) was employed to systematically evaluate the landscape features of Ado-Awaye and Idanre Hills. The scale provided a quantitative measure for assessing each feature across four key criteria: availability, adequacy, quality, and efficiency. This approach allowed subjective observations to be converted into comparable numerical scores, enabling a clearer interpretation of performance differences between the two sites. The study adopted the following rating definitions:

Table 1: Structured five-point Likert scale for the study

Score	Interpretation
1	Very Poor / Not Available / Highly Inadequate
2	Poor / Minimally Available / Inadequate
3	Fair / Moderately Available / Acceptable
4	Good / Available and Adequate / High Quality
5	Excellent / Fully Available / Very High Quality and Efficient

4. Result and Discussion of Findings

The comparative assessment of landscape features at Ado-Awaye and Idanre Hills reveals clear contrasts in the availability, adequacy, quality, and functional performance of their physical and cultural elements (Table 2 and Fig. 5). The Likert-scale measurements also, show that Idanre Hills consistently scores higher across most parameters, while Ado-Awaye displays significant gaps that reflect broader weaknesses in heritage site planning and management in Nigeria.

Table 2: Comparative Table of the Landscape features on the two sites

Landscape Feature	Site	Availability	Adequacy	Quality	Efficiency
Access Roads and Trails	Ado-Awaye	2	2	2	2
	Idanre Hills	4	4	4	4
Recreational Spaces	Ado-Awaye	2	2	2	2
	Idanre Hills	4	4	4	4
Vegetation and Greenery	Ado-Awaye	3	3	3	2
	Idanre Hills	4	4	4	4
Cultural/Historic Elements	Ado-Awaye	3	2	2	2
	Idanre Hills	5	4	4	4
Supporting Infrastructure	Ado-Awaye	2	2	2	2
	Idanre Hills	4	4	4	4
Tourism Facilities (Guides, etc.)	Ado-Awaye	2	2	2	2
	Idanre Hills	4	4	4	4

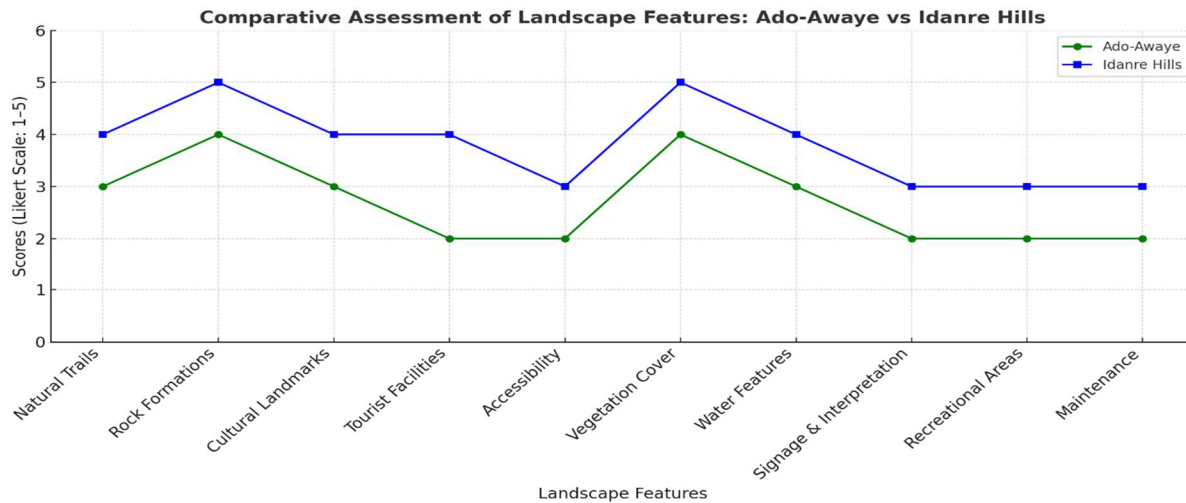


Fig 5: Comparative Assessment shown of the features shown graph: Ado-Awaye Vs Idanre Hills

4.1 Availability of Landscape Features

Figures 5–14 illustrate the availability of landscape features across both sites. Idanre Hills demonstrates a well-established network of structured pathways, defined viewpoints, cultural monuments, interpretive signage, and designated rest points. Notably, Figures 5a and 5b depict the carefully constructed 667 steps that provide continuous and safe access to the hilltop, ensuring seamless visitor movement throughout the landscape. In contrast, access provisions at Ado-Awaye are limited in extent and coverage. As shown in Figure 6, step construction exists only along a small portion of the ascent, leaving significant sections without defined circulation routes. Furthermore, Idanre Hills features strategically located seating nodes, cultural artefacts, and locally constructed visitor shelters at regular intervals (Figures 7a and 7b), all of which contribute to enhanced visitor comfort and engagement.

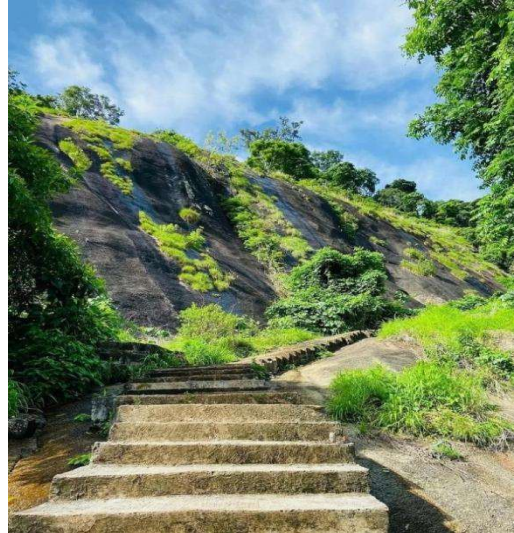
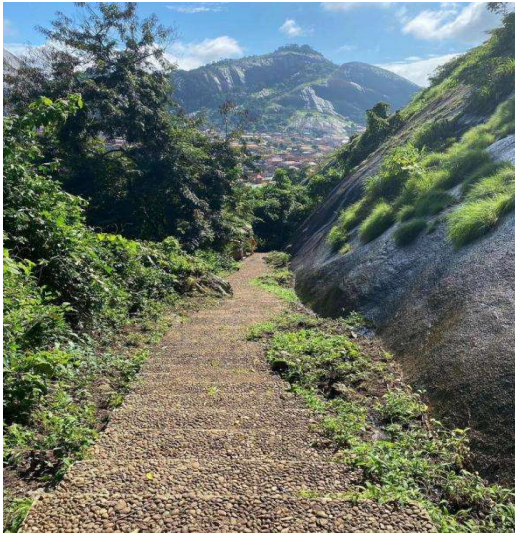


Figure 5a & 5b: Some Part of the Well-Coordinated 667 Steps that Rises Up to the Top of Idanre Hill



Figure 6: Steps Built to Access Some Part of Ado-Awaye Hill



Figure 7a & 7b: Images showing seating nodes, cultural elements and locally made shelters for tourists at Idanre Hills Site.

At Ado-Awaye, however, only two rudimentary shade structures constructed from bamboo and palm fronds were observed, with minimal or no seating beneath them (Figure 8). Cultural interpretation is also limited. While Idanre Hills integrates sculptural elements of historical significance such as column statues supporting the ancient royal palace (Figures 9a and 9b) Ado-Awaye relies largely on informal and temporary rock paintings at the base of the hill for signage (Figure 10) while Idanre Hills had proper signage explaining the ancient palace sited on the hill top (Figure 11).



Figure 8: Showing the Environment of Ado-Awaye Hill with no Definite and Proper landscape



Figure 9a & 9b: Showing statues with different historical meanings used as columns, supporting the weight of the roof of the King Palace sited on the Idanre Hill.



Figure 10: Image showing the surroundings of the entrance of Ado and beginning of Ado-Awaye hill.



Figure 11: Images Showing the Ancient Palace Sited on The Hill Top and Also Signage Speaking to it.

These findings demonstrate that heritage landscapes benefiting from long-term custodianship tend to maintain a coherent integration of natural and cultural assets. This observation aligns with Daly (2020), who argues that heritage landscapes evolve sustainably when human–environment relationships are reinforced across generations. Conversely, the limited infrastructural provision at

Ado-Awaye supports earlier findings by Ezeuduji (2015), which identified poor availability of visitor facilities as a key constraint on tourism development in Nigeria.

4.2 Adequacy of Facilities

In terms of adequacy, Idanre Hills again outperforms Ado-Awaye. Facilities such as stepped routes, seating nodes, shrines, cultural artefacts, and protective walls are sufficiently distributed to support visitor movement and mitigate physical fatigue (Figures 5, 7, 9, and 12). The placement of seating nodes at regular intervals along the ascent (Figures 7a and 7b) provides tourists with opportunities for rest while simultaneously enhancing scenic appreciation. Ado-Awaye's facilities, by contrast, are inadequate relative to the site's steep and demanding terrain. The ascent to the suspended lake lacks coordinated steps, shaded rest platforms, and wayfinding aids (Figure 13), thereby compromising visitor safety and comfort. This inadequacy corroborates Oladeji's (2019) assertion that insufficient infrastructural support significantly reduces tourist satisfaction and retention at natural attractions in Southwest Nigeria.



Figure 12: Inscription on the Rock welcoming tourist to the resting place of "Owa"



Figure 13: Image Showing Tourists Ascending Ado-Awaye Hill.

4.3 Quality and Maintenance

The highest quality and maintenance scores were recorded at Idanre Hills, where landscape elements including steps, vegetation, cultural structures, and viewing balconies exhibit superior finishing and regular upkeep. The preservation of historical features, such as the ancient palace reinforced with sculptural columns (Figures 9a and 9b), is complemented by functional

enhancements that support contemporary tourism use. This finding aligns with Adebayo (2020), who emphasized that effective maintenance is critical to sustaining ecological stability, visual coherence, and visitor perception in heritage landscapes. Conversely, Ado-Awaye displays visible signs of physical deterioration, including eroded pathways, faded and informal signage (Figure 8), and poorly maintained vegetation. The absence of well-structured landscape interventions undermines both environmental stability and the site's cultural ambience, thereby diminishing its overall appeal to visitors.

4.4 Efficiency of Landscape Features

Efficiency reflects the degree to which landscape elements function cohesively to support visitor experience. Idanre Hills demonstrates high efficiency, as its circulation routes, cultural stops, viewpoints, and rest nodes create a logical and intuitive flow throughout the site. This spatial coherence enhances environmental protection while strengthening the site's interpretive narrative, consistent with Daly et al. (2020).

Ado-Awaye, however, exhibits limited operational efficiency. Trails are poorly defined, resting areas are scarce and unevenly distributed, safety provisions are minimal, and cultural interpretation is weakly integrated. These inefficiencies disrupt visitor movement and reduce experiential quality, reinforcing UNESCO's (2021) position that structured systems are essential for effective heritage landscape management. Signage further illustrates this contrast. At Idanre Hills, directional and interpretive signage is clearly visible and informative (Figures 11 and 12), whereas comparable installations are largely absent at Ado-Awaye, restricting visitor understanding and engagement.

4.5 Summary of the Findings

Collectively, the findings demonstrate that heritage landscapes perform optimally when availability, adequacy, quality, and efficiency operate in synergy. Idanre Hills exemplifies this balance through its historically embedded spatial order, cultural continuity, and sustained infrastructural investment. Although Ado-Awaye possesses a unique natural feature—the suspended lake—it lacks the coordinated landscape planning and management required to realize its full heritage and tourism potential.

These results are consistent with broader empirical studies, which identify infrastructural inadequacy, poor maintenance, and weak institutional frameworks as persistent barriers to heritage tourism development in Nigeria (Ezeuduji et al., 2015; Adewumi et al., 2018; Adebayo, 2020; UNESCO, 2021).

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Although both Ado-Awaye and Idanre Hills constitute significant heritage landscapes, this study reveals stark differences in their management trajectories. Ado-Awaye remains constrained by inadequate infrastructure and limited maintenance, while Idanre Hills benefits from international recognition, organized conservation frameworks, and well-developed tourism facilities. It is therefore recommended that stakeholders prioritize infrastructural upgrading, community participation, and comprehensive landscape conservation strategies at Ado-Awaye, drawing lessons from the management model of Idanre Hills. Strengthening these heritage landscapes will not only safeguard cultural and natural assets but also promote sustainable tourism and local economic development in Nigeria.

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