



# NACD NEWSLETTER

PUBLICATION OF THE NIGERIAN ARTS AND  
CULTURE DIRECTORY PROJECT

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[www.nacd.gov.ng](http://www.nacd.gov.ng)



\* Argungu fishing festival \* Eyo Masquerade festival \*  
\* Minna Sallah Durbar \* Osun-Osogbo festival \*





# FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK



sights that make these events unique, not only as a means of cultural expression but as part of Nigeria's contribution to global culture-tourism.

As you enjoy these scintillating sights and experience, we wish to use this medium to acknowledge the following sources, [Vanguard Online Edition](#), [Daily Trust Online](#), [Seaway Blog](#) and [Wikipedia](#), the free encyclopaedia.

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[The 19th Edition of the NACD](#) Newsletter provided a glimpse of Abuja, the Centre of Unity and the hub of tourism in Africa. In this 20th edition, we take you on tour of yet another cultural adventure. This time, we give you a preview of Nigeria's foremost cultural festivals; the Argungun International Fishing and Cultural Festival, Eyo Masquerade Festival in Lagos, the Amazing Minna Sallah Durbar, and the Osun Oshogbo Festival coming up soon.

The essence is to bring to your doorstep the inside stories, the glamour and unforgettable



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# PREVIEW OF NIGERIAN FESTIVALS



Nigeria is a country with a large expanse of land, populated by about 120 million people and over 250 ethnic groups. Each ethnic group is endowed with a unique cultural heritage, different dressing, arts and crafts, occupation and behaviour but who exist as a single nation. Through these ethnic groups comes a plethora of festivals which are unique in themselves. In the past, most festivals in Nigeria were used to pay obeisance to deities for almost every aspect of the

people's life: fertility, economic prosperity, health, clement weather, bumper harvest etcetera. All these were reasons for festivity. More recently, these festivals have become means of forging unity among the people and engendering the spirit of oneness. However, if there is any period in which these festivals have become necessary, it is the present, in light of the trend towards globalisation. Festivals are even more interesting because of the diversity,

they have become necessary for ethnic groups to showcase their cultures; if for no other reason, to preserve their cultural identity from obliteration. To do this, each ethnic group stages its festival at a particular period of the year as dictated by their taboos and other peculiar reasons. Besides the socio-political and religious dimensions of the festivals, they have become veritable instruments of cultural tourism. Nigerian

festivals are even more interesting because of the diversity, depth and the season each festival is staged. The time frame avails local and international tourists the opportunity to go on excursions round the country and capture live, the rich and entertaining festivals that take place at different times and parts of the country. Some of the festivals are:





# ARGUNGU FISHING FESTIVAL

The Argungu International Fishing Festival 2009 has since come and gone; a resounding success it was too. The NACD Project however deems it fit to provide some information on the ethos of this all-important event of the art, culture and tourism sector to our teeming readership. This in other words; is taking a look at the historical background of the festival as well as a brief of what actually took place.

Argungu Festival was not always a fishing festival. What a surprise this will be for many to hear!

The Argungu International Fishing and Cultural Festival is the culmination of a four-day cultural event in the north-western Nigerian state of Kebbi. It predates the 'conquests' of Kanta of Kebbi in the early 16th century. The festival started initially in the form of

Religious rites prior to the time of Surame Gungu of Kebbi kingdom. In other words, it began as an informal family and communal affair. Since that time, the festival has undergone several changes and modifications. Its evolution at Argungu seems to go hand in hand with the socio-economic development of the Kabawa (people of Kebbi) generally. Since the 16th century (Kanta's days), the festival as we know it today has become more





elaborate and stylish. At the same time, it has since the jihad period been getting progressively enriched with the fielding of more events for the entertainment of the attending public. Sometime between the 16th century and 1934 (particularly during Kanta's days), the festival assumed a nationalistic character, achieved through the spectacular rallying powers of Kanta himself. From 1934, it assumed a non-religious tone,

devoid of the usual Bori and Tsafi exhibitions. Dignitaries from neighbouring riverine areas featured regularly as guests even in those early days of the festival's history. The 1934 edition was the turning point of the festival, during which the fishing competition was introduced to compliment other cultural events that constitute its entertainment segment.

That year, the festival was attended by a non-Argungu notable dignitary in the person of Sarkin Musulmi; Sultan Hassan Dan Mu'azu. In response to an earlier invitation extended by the Emir of Argungu; Muhammad Sama, the newly appointed Sultan of Sokoto paid a visit to Argungu as a special guest. The fishing competition was included as part of the events to entertain the Sultan, the host





haven considered that only such an uncommon display would be befitting a visitor of his calibre. It marked the end of the centuries-old hostility between the Sokoto Caliphate and the Kebbi kingdom. Between 1934 and 1950, the festival began to record a certain degree of consistency in terms of dates and attendance. Thousands of fishermen line up like an ancient army, carrying their traditional nets and gourds. At the sound of a gun, they pound towards the narrow river and leap into the water, having just one hour to catch the biggest fish. In 2009, more than 30,000 fishermen participated. People from all over West Africa attended the main event which is the fishing contest in the waters of River Mata Fada, using nets and calabash gourds for catching and storing. Only traditional fishing tools are allowed and many prefer to catch fish entirely by hand (a practice also popular elsewhere and known

as "Noodling" in the United States). The fisherman who makes the biggest catch wins a prize of 7500 dollars. In 2005, the winning fish weighed 75kg, and needed four men to hoist it onto the scales. With over 21 nations in attendance at this year's edition, the Argungu International Fishing Festival is now assuming the status of a globally preferred tourist destination. According to figures released by the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation, a total of 262,386 visitors witnessed this year's edition of the famed fishing festival, out of which about 400 are from abroad. The figures indicate that visitors from Niger, Mali, Chad, USA, Germany and Britain top the list of foreign tourists at the event which was held in Argungu, Kebbi State, North West of Nigeria from March 11th to 15th. True to their reputation as the most travelled tourists in the world, a total of 40 Germans attended the show followed by Americans and the British. Total

expenditure at the festival according to NTDC was N1.3 billion out of which food and drinks alone accounted for half a billion naira, transportation fetched N78 million while accommodation at Argungu, Sokoto and Birnin Kebbi brought in N146 million. The report also indicates that at least about N206 million exchanged hands for shopping particularly for souvenirs, mementoes, decorations, textile materials and crafts; while N50 million was realized from packaged tours both by air and land. Speaking to journalists in Abuja on the report, the Director-General of the Nigerian Tourism Development Corporation, Otunba Olusegun Runsewe commended the Kebbi State government for utilizing to the fullest, the public/private partnership initiative for the success of the festival. He urged other states to bring up products that can be promoted and marketed by the NTDC as part of its holistic approach to developing Nigeria's tourism industry.







# NIGERIAN ARTS AND CULTURE DIRECTORY PROJECT

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Nigeria's rich arts, culture and tourism potentials



# EYO MASQUERADE FESTIVAL OF LAGOS



Lagos residents, local and foreign visitors trooped out in their numbers to watch and enjoy one of the most prestigious, cultural masterpieces on display; the Eyo Masquerade Festival, otherwise known as Adamu-Orisha masquerades. Eyo as it is popularly known is perhaps the most popular social masquerade in Lagos. It was brought into Lagos in the year 1750 by Ejilu and Malaki the two male cousins to Olori Olugbani, wife of Oba Ado and mother of Erelu Kuti of Lagos. 'Agogoro Eyooo' (what a tall and imposing Eyo), "Mo yo fun e, mo yo funra mi" (I rejoice with you for seeing this day and I rejoice with myself), is a statement that rings out aloud all over Lagos during the festival period. Over 1000 Eyo masquerades in their white regalia with different hats of various colours from the five groups, Adamu Orisa, Laba Ekun, Oniko, Ologede and Agere partook in this year's festival organized in fond memory of Nigeria's first Minister of Information, late Chief T.O. Sobowale Benson who died last year's February. The 2009 edition of Eyo festival which was repackaged as a tourist attraction took place at the famous Tafawa Balewa Square (TBS) on Lagos Island on 25<sup>th</sup> of April, from 6am to 6pm, amidst tight security to ensure safety of lives and property.

Going down memory lane, the first performance of the Adamu-Orisha parade in Lagos Island took place on September 11th, 1852 and was staged in memory of late Chief Dosunmun Ashogbon while the last Eyo masquerade parade in the city was on August 2nd, 2003, in memory of late Oba Adeyinka Oyekan 2, the Oba of Lagos who lived between 1965 and 2003. The Eyo festival, by tradition, is staged only in memory of an illustrious deceased person, the day of staging Adamu-Orisha display is therefore significant to the great occasion and for the relatives and friends of the deceased person to be honoured. According to findings, the origins of Adamu-Orisha showed that the genesis of Eyo masquerade public performance must be rooted in legend. It may be traced to two areas in the South-west zone of the country. While the people of Iperu, Ogun State claim that Eyo masquerade originated from their town, the people of Apa coastal area of Badagry also claim that it originated from Badagry where Eyo masquerade display used to take place on market days in those early years. Eyo masquerade parade however was started on Lagos Island by traders from Badagry a long time ago. The venue of performance then was known as Oke-Ita which was later found to be the lagoon end of Glover Road, Ikoyi; Lagos. This was the site where successive kings of Lagos and their chiefs gathered to watch the Adamu-Orisha play.





Further research into the origin of Adamun-Orisha play in Lagos revealed that about the middle of 19th century, the then Colonial Governor could not tolerate the long absences of top officials of the Lagos colony administration who were fond of disappearing for days from Lagos Island to attend the Eyo masquerade parade in Ikoyi, a journey that lasted close to three days. The British Governor complained that the absence of concerned officials was serious enough to disrupt the affairs of Lagos colony. Thus, he ordered that the excursions to Ikoyi should be stopped. The Governor's directive prompted the elders, chiefs and prominent indigenes of Lagos to invite the maskers of Adamun-Orisha from

Ikoyi to relocate to Lagos Island, an invitation which the maskers accepted. Thereafter, they settled on Lagos Island and became part of the people till date. Hence, the first performance of Adamun-Orisha on Lagos Island took place on February 20th, 1854 and was staged in memory of late Oba Akitoye of Lagos. On that day on Lagos Island, the general public saw what they had never seen before and witnessed the performance with an exceedingly tumultuous turnout which has remained a characteristic of Eyo masquerade parade till today. Eyo masquerade parade lasts a whole day and is staged as the funeral obsequies of a King or Chief, or in honour and memory of a deceased eminent Lagosian, who

had contributed to the progress and development of Lagos during his or her lifetime. Eyo masquerades speak a ventriloqual tongue, suggesting that they are not human and that they represent the spirits of departed persons. Eyo symbolizes the arrival on earth of a spirit. In view of this belief, anyone meeting an Eyo is expected to greet him with the words: 'Agogoro Eyo'. The Eyo is expected to respond thus: *Mo yo fun e, mo yo funra mi*. In the programme of events, the 'senior' Eyo group, the *Adimu* (identified by a black broad-rimmed hat), goes public with a staff, one full week before the festival (always on a Saturday). This indicates that the event would take place on the following

Saturday. Each of the four other 'important' ones *Laba* (Red), *Oniko* (yellow), *Ologede* (Green), *Agere* (Purple) in this order, take their turns from Monday to Thursday. There are also revered special outings like that led by the *Olori Omoba* (leader of the Princes) currently Prince Michael Omoyele Ajose, a Prince of the royal house of Oba Ologun-Kutere of Lagos (1749-1775), who himself was a direct descendant of King Ado, the founder of Lagos dynasty (1630-1669). Prince Ajose hails from Igaa Suenu, to which the ancestral home of the current Lagos State Governor, Raji Fashola can be traced. Eyo Festival is unique to Lagos area,



and it is widely believed that Eyo is the forerunner of the modern day carnival in Brazil. On Eyo Day, the main highway in the heart of the city (from the end of Carter Bridge to Tinubu Square) is closed to traffic, allowing for procession from Idumota to Iga Idunganran. Here, participants all pay homage to the Oba of Lagos. Eyo festival takes place whenever occasion and tradition demands, but is usually held as the final burial rite of a highly regarded chief. Among the Yoruba, indigenous religions have largely given way to Christianity and Islam, but the old festivals are still observed. The traditional leaders of the Yoruba are the *Obas*, who live in palaces and govern along with a council of ministers. The position of Oba is now mainly honorary, and their major roles are during the observance of festivals. Yoruba festivals honour their pantheon of gods and mark the installation of a new Oba. However, ahead of this year's event, Oba of Lagos; HRH Rilwanu Akiolu I, appealed to all participants to be peaceful in their conduct as unwholesome behaviour would not be tolerated. The state government also announced the suspension of commercial buses and commercial motorcyclists from certain designated routes in and around the venue in order to ensure free movement. Some of the major routes where movement was restricted include: Third Mainland Bridge, Carter Bridge, Eko Bridge, some parts of inner Marina, among others. Fashola, in company of the State's Commissioner for Home Affairs and Culture; Mr. Babatunde Balogun, Special Adviser on Transportation to the Governor; Mr. Kayode Opeifa, Managing Director of Lagos Metropolitan Area Transport Authority, (LAMATA); Dr. Dayo Mobereola and organizing chairman of the festival, Mr Disu Holloway, stated this at a world

press conference on the activities and measures put in place for the event, earlier held in Alausa, State House, Ikeja. Fashola who stressed that 2009 festival was designed to be a little different from past performances, strongly warned that Eyo members, (estimated to be over 1000), who did not abide by the rules of the performance would be guests of the Police Commissioner. The Eyo Festival day was a joyous day of gaiety and splendour during which Lagos Island was filled with the exuberance of young Eyo masquerades and the prayers and sobriety of older practitioners. Security at the car parks, in and around the TBS and on the Island was heightened from Friday through Saturday. For effective coordination of traffic on the masquerade parade day, Fashola arranged 310 buses of the Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) scheme to convey people from 52 different locations within the state (free of charge) to and from Tafawa Balewa Square where the festival was held. The Adamu-Orisha Festival in the views of many international spectators ranked higher in pageantry than the Rio Carnival. According to the Governor, current investment in the festival was therefore within the context of lifting the event to an international standard with an eye for its potential economic impact on the lives of the residents of Lagos State. It had been repackaged to serve as an international tourism destination and retain some of the tradition that gave it that international appeal. For the duration of the festival, members of the public were advised to desist from spreading umbrellas or putting on caps and shoes except those designed for traditional and religious leaders, to avoid provoking Eyo members. Also among measures taken by the organising committee to ensure a hitch-free festival was the presence of medical personnel on patrol at various locations while 800 Lagos State Transport Management Authority (LASTMA) officials were constantly on hand to complement safety measures.

# MINNA'S AMAZING SALLAH DURBAR

Niger State recently organised a colourful durbar display in Minna to mark the Eid-el Kabir festivity. It is a tradition in the northern part of Nigeria to mark Sallah festival with a grand durbar display. The recently celebrated Eid-el Kabir was not an exception as the people of Minna rolled out the drums and horses to celebrate the festivity in grand style. The colourful event which attracted tourists within and outside the State was staged on Monday, December 8. Niger State Governor Mu'azu Babangida Aliyu at the occasion said that the intention of the State in putting energy into tourism was a deliberate attempt to tap from the vista of financial opportunities it has to offer. Aliyu, who was recently crowned Nigeria's best tourism Governor, said the State would take durbar outside the shores of

Nigeria. "Let us take tourism outside this country. We have one of the best tourist attractions in the world. Durbar is one festivity that has been part of our history in the North. We are ready to put it on the cultural map of the world by making an appearance very soon in an international market," he said. The Niger State Commissioner for tourism; Alhaji Umaru Nasko in his opening address declared that the State government is already talking with investors towards exporting durbar to other African countries. Durbar which is predominantly an African event dating from the era of Usman Danfodio will certainly meet the entertainment needs of those living thousands of miles away from Africa. "We are talking with investors through a Public-Private Partnership effort to sponsor our durbar for





International exhibition. We are doing our best in adding variety to our durbar to make it unique and acceptable globally," he said. In an oblique move towards applying a post-modern touch to the usual horse and camel display, an Elizabethan carriage was introduced. The white carriage coated with beautiful splashes of gold plated material, was pulled by four brown stallions. Gently swaying from left to right was the Nigerian flag, mounted on two sides of the carriage behind which were seated two ladies dressed in the fashion of medieval days, as they waved to the admiration of the cheering crowd who had never seen a carriage physically before. One could hardly help feeling teleported outside Minna to a distant English countryside hundreds of years back in time. But just when the feeling was yet to be properly absorbed, the thumping of the hooves of horses ridden by men clad in heavily turbaned head gears and large flowing

Robes, and wielding weapons of different calibrations brought to mind, the scene of a battle field. It was a mixed grill of the old and the modern that even Northerners who are accustomed to durbar will notice the tilt. According to Mr Smith; an English tourist, the idea of taking the event abroad is a welcome one as many of his kinsmen would be obliged to watch. "I know that the durbar will make a wonderful spectacle in London if it is taken over there. It's a wonderful tourist attraction that will generate a lot of money outside Africa as many whites will come out to catch a glimpse of it," he said. He emphasized that organizing durbar in his country will not only save him the cost of transporting himself and his family to Nigeria for every Sallah celebration, but will give him the opportunity of partnering in the area of making special durbar documentaries which he confided will also generate good money.





Add

# OSUN-OSHOGBO FESTIVAL

To your 2009 Calendar

As we are getting prepared for 2009 Travel and Budget, we wish to add Osun-Oshogbo festival to your tourism itinerary for the Year. The people of Osun State are rich in cultural heritage that has a strong bearing on all the areas of their lives as it is vastly expressed in their arts, literature, music and other social activities. The state endowed with many historical and tourist sites as well as cultural festivals, but most worthy of note is the Osun Oshogbo Festival which holds in March of every year in honour of the goddess of

Fertility. One of Nigeria's most famous tourist destinations is the Osun-Oshogbo Sacred Grove found at the fringes of the city of Oshogbo in Osun State, southwest Nigeria. The grove is a spiritual site for the Yoruba.

Oshogbo is found on an altitudinal high land that measures over 500 metres above sea level and empties in the Osun River. It is the haven of the goddess of fertility. This shrine is the hub for all Yoruba culture and is the last of such Sacred Groves in the entire Yoruba land, to whom Osun is the water

spirit of love, marriage and gold. Legend has it that Oso-igbo, the goddess of Osun River, was the Queen and real founder of Oshogbo. That she recorded many achievements which helped to establish the state. The Queen possessed magical powers, which inspired her people and scared away their foes. It was also believed that she had healing powers to cure the sick and those tormented by evil spirits by means of the medicinal waters of the Osun River. Presently, the Sacred Grove is the biggest and perchance the only





surviving heritage of its kind in Yoruba land. It is host to an annual festival which thrives as Yoruba people express the bond between them, their rulers and the goddess. Sculptures and works of art in reverence of the goddess and to other Yoruba deities abound in the thicket surrounding the grove. Many shrines and sanctuaries are littered throughout the site and by the river which meanders through it. It is believed that the Osun River still has its healing powers. In the beginning, the grove was confined by the traditional rulership of its host community until it was acquired by the federal government as a national heritage site. This is a preserved area against hunting, fishing, tree felling or any other form of encroachment. Wildlife and endangered species of monkeys, birds, antelopes, snakes, which are rare in Nigeria, populate the grove.

Undoubtedly, bringing the Sacred Grove to the status of a world heritage site has brought Osun State to limelight, as Osun-Oshogbo annual cultural festival is held at the end of August, lasting a whole 12 days. The festival celebrates the mystical links between the Goddess Osun, the people of Oshogbo, and founding of the town. Traditional sacrifices are offered, beseeching the goddess to bring peace and harmony.

Dance and drama presentations form part of the commemorations. Osun-Oshogbo Sacred Grove has become the second site to be listed in Nigeria as a World Heritage Site. With the listing of this Grove as a tourist destination, it means there is something spectacular about it. Please join us as we take a trip to Osun-Oshogbo this Year!





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## SOCIAL DIARY



Mr. Hillary Oli of the NACD Project's Accounts Department and wife, Grace (3rd and 4th from right) at the dedication of their new baby recently, in company of some NACD staff and their families.





## National Gallery of Art

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