

Understanding visitors to slavery heritage sites in Ghana

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Visitor's personal connection to slavery and trip purpose influences depth of experience.
- The potential for conflict among the different visiting groups exist.
- The majority subsample seeks a shallow, World Heritage experience.

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ABSTRACT

Previous research has touched on the dissonance in visitors' experiences at sites associated with the Transatlantic Slave Trade (TAST) in Ghana, without considering the influence of their personal connection to the slavery and trip motives. Based on a survey of 550 visitors, this paper profiles visitors and then examines their knowledge and attitudes towards the site, motives for visitation and sensitivity towards other visitors. Four visitor segments were identified: connected slavery heritage visitor, connected vacationer, not connected bicultural and not connected Caucasian. Significant differences were found among the four cohorts with regard to their demographic and trip profiles as well as motives and knowledge of the site. However, as the paper describes, understanding visitor behaviour at such places depends on the intensity of experience sought or gained. The paper thus argues that care should be taken in distinguishing between the quintessential needs of root seekers from pleasure seekers.

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1. Introduction

Much of the research on slavery heritage tourism in Ghana has focused on the African Diaspora (Bruner, 1996; Kreamer, 2004; Macgonagle, 2006; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Reed, 2004; Schramm, 2008; Timothy & Teye, 2004), with many studies documenting their quest to reconnect with their roots (Hosley, 2004; Kemp, 2000; Schramm, 2004). These studies, by definition, have focused on the quintessential deep or purposeful cultural tourist. Little research though, has examined people who visit slavery heritage sites primarily for more sightseeing-oriented tourism reasons. Many of these sites encompass architectural structures. Many are also located in close proximity to sun, sand and sea resort destinations. As such, they provide an enjoyable day trip experience that complements a pleasure vacation, where learning about

slavery heritage may be less important than simple sightseeing. It is likely, therefore, that these types of tourists may seek a qualitatively different experience and value features of slave heritage sites differently from those who visit on a personal quest or pilgrimage. Their attitudes about encountering other tourists may also differ, for it is also unknown whether and how well different groups of tourists coexist if one is seeking a deeply personal experience while the other is looking for a more superficial one. This study seeks to answer these questions by examining a range of visitors to sites associated with the infamous Transatlantic Slave Trade (TAST) in Ghana.

2. Literature review

2.1. Ghana, slavery heritage tourism and a confused destination image

The awakening of interest in Ghana's heritage is borne, in part, out of her long history of contact with Europeans through the TAST, for it was one of the key supply points during the almost 400 year

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long period. Lovejoy (2000) estimates that the Gold Coast (Ghana's former name) accounted for 10.1% of the total Slave Trade between 1650 and 1900, while a recent assessment by *Transatlantic Slave Trade Database* (2013) indicates that 1.2 million captives were transported from the Gold Coast to the Americas between 1501 and 1866. At the same time, a parallel indigenous slavery system also existed. A total of nine Slave Trade routes have been identified that transferred captives to and between 63 slave markets across the length and breadth of the country (Perbi, 2004). Interior settlements along the Slave Routes such as Salaga and Bono Manso (see Fig. 1) became strategic marketplaces, while colonial traders built huge castle dungeons in such coastal communities as Cape Coast, Elmina and Osu to house captives before transshipment. Officially, the TAST was abolished by England in 1807, but unofficially, it continued into the early 20th century, especially domestically in Ghana.

Today many former Slave Trade sites carry the legacy of slavery, both in their remnant built heritage and in the social composition of

communities. In 1979, three castles (Cape Coast Castle, Elmina Castle and Christiansborg), 15 intact forts, four forts partially in ruins, four ruins with visible structures and two sites with traces of former fortifications were inscribed on the World Heritage List (see Fig. 1). They have since become the focal point for the slavery heritage tourism sector. Timothy and Teye (2004) identified three reasons why Ghana is well positioned to capitalize on its slavery heritage. First, it is unique in terms of the number of forts, castles, slave markets and other structures built by different European countries. Second, vestiges of European presence remain that buttress the intensity of trading activities in that part of Africa. Third, because it was the epicentre of the Slave Trade, many diasporan Africans can trace their ancestry to this part of West Africa. Development is concentrated in the south, while TAST-related sites found in the northern part of the country are less well developed and less popular. In addition, many southern TAST-related sites are located in close proximity to the main gateway airport and existing resort-style tourism developments (Akyeampong, 2007), explaining in part

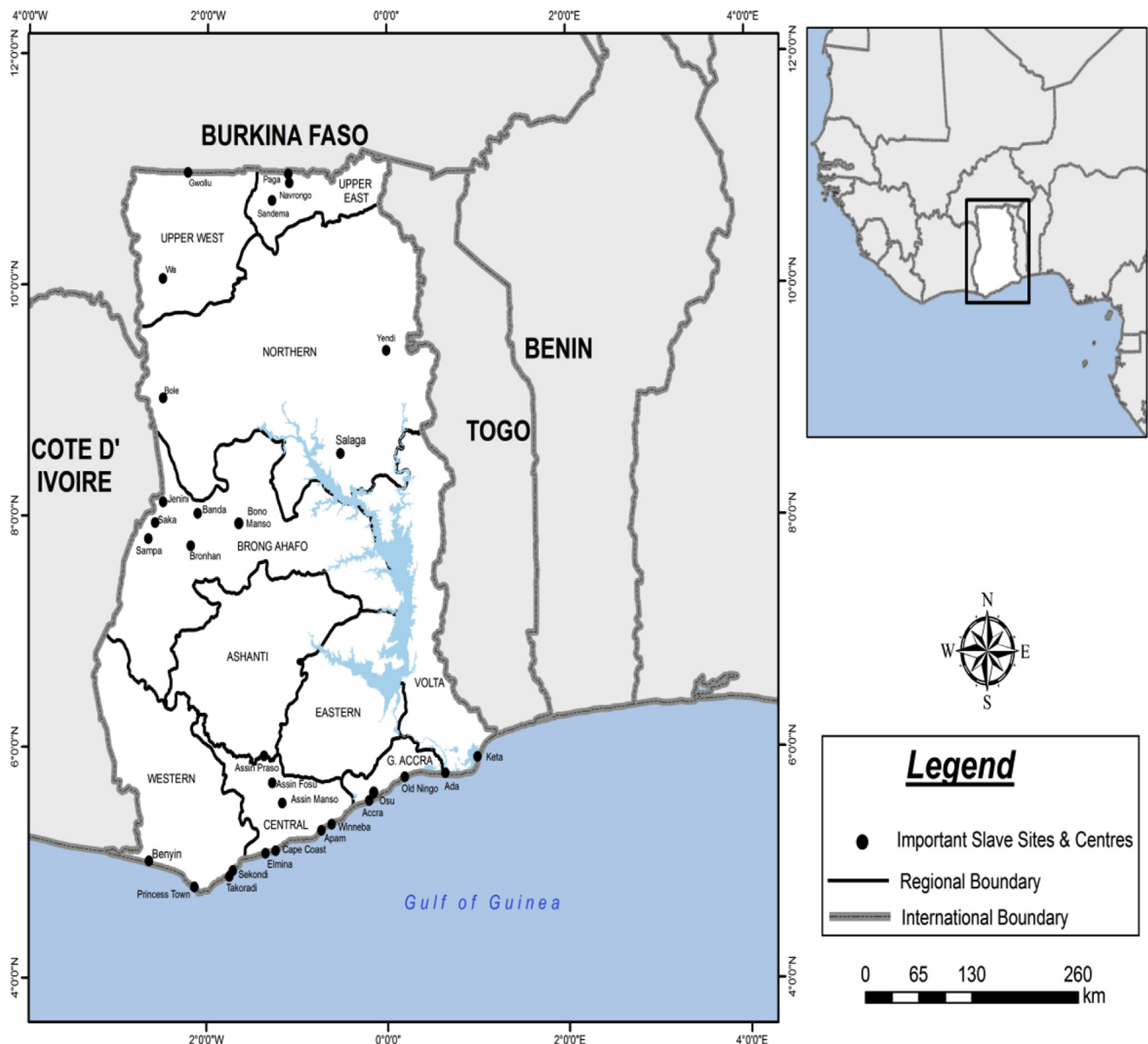


Fig. 1. Map of Ghana showing important TAST-related sites.
Source: adapted from Perbi (2004).

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