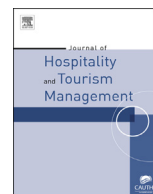




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International tourism in Ghana: A survey analysis of traveller motivations and perceptions

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ABSTRACT

International tourism plays an increasing role as an engine for economic growth in Ghana, and has enormous potential to enhance the country's balance of payments. The National Tourism Development Plan for 2013–2027 is testament to government recognition of the industry's importance. This paper examines motivations for and obstacles to international tourism in Ghana, based upon the analysis of field data from mixed-format survey questionnaires collected during 2014 in Accra, Kumasi, and Cape Coast, three of Ghana's major tourist destination cities. Tourists are attracted to Ghana's rich offerings in culture and natural environment, including the UNESCO listed Cape Coast Castle, Elmina Castle, Kwame Nkrumah Mausoleum, and Kakum and Mole National Parks. Challenges faced by tourists include the visa acquisition process and mobility within the country, especially with regard to limited public transportation options and deficient highway infrastructure. Based upon these findings, government planners should place a higher emphasis on the quality of the tourist product as articulated by the Ministry of Tourism (2012). Moreover, the national and local tourism authorities, as well as tourism service providers should make a concerted effort to help guide tourist expectations and make them more realistic, especially when it comes to tourists from wealthier countries.

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1. Introduction

This paper examines foreign perspectives on tourism in the Republic of Ghana with two goals. First, we examine visitor awareness of Ghana and motivations for travelling there. Second, we seek to identify the impediments of travelling to Ghana, and the problems that visitors encounter within the country. The purpose driving both of these goals is to identify new opportunities for tourism development in Ghana. In other words, we ask *what factors generate and constrain international tourism to Ghana, and how can this information be used to the benefit of stakeholders?*

According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2015), tourism is vitally important to Ghana, representing 6.7% of GDP in 2014 when considering tourism investment, supply chain effects, and induced income impacts. Moreover, the WTTC also reports that international tourism represents more than 5% of Ghana's total employment, and 4.6% of total exports. According to

the UNWTO (2014), international tourism receipts throughout Sub-Saharan Africa increased 7.2% in 2012. Nevertheless, in 2014 the contribution of *foreign* spending to GDP represents only 39.9% of total spending with the rest reflecting domestic sources (WTTC, 2015). Going forward, tourism in West and Central Africa is projected to grow at approximately 5% per annum through 2030, nearly twice the global average and among the best forecasts of any world region (UNWTO, 2014). Facing fierce regional competition, how will Ghana maximize its potential for growth in international tourism? This research attempts to unveil the opportunities for further growth and then puts forth some suggestions on how policy makers can maximize the industry's potential.

Ghana's Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Creative Arts is responsible for the development and promotion of tourism in the country.¹ According to its mandate, its role is to “facilitate the interface between government, implementing bodies in tourism, culture and the creative industries, as well as international and civil society partners” (MOTCCA, 2015). A recent accomplishment of the

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Ministry, with the support of its partners, is the National Tourism Development Plan of 2013–2027, a detailed document with analysis and strategies for the short, medium, and long term health of the industry (Ministry of Tourism, 2012).

What are Ghana's strengths as a tourism destination? Ghana is a stable democracy in West Africa with a population of more than 25 million, with Accra as its administrative and business hub. Ghana is connected by direct airline links with several African countries as well as North America, Europe, and Asia. Within Ghana, UNESCO has identified two groups of World Heritage Sites: Asante traditional buildings, and the forts and castles of Volta, Greater Accra, and Central and Western regions. UNESCO-listed attractions of this type have been shown to be a major force in attracting international tourists in other countries (Yang, Lin, & Han, 2010). In others' research, such as Frey and Steiner (2011), the significance of the UNESCO list is questioned, and the authors debate its value and impact.

2. Literature

Before embarking on the present research, it is necessary to examine some key contributions in the tourism literature that relate to destination attractiveness (Lew, 1987; Hu & Ritchie 1993; Lyngdoh, 2013; Owusu-Frimpong, Nwankwo, Blankson, & Tarnanidis, 2013) and travel motivation (Gray, 1971; Plog, 1973; Marris, 1986; Otoo, 2014). Generally, these can be viewed as factors that pull or push tourists to travel (Formica & Uysal, 2006, p. 419). Other scholars have published at the intersection of destination attractiveness and traveller motivation (Cho, 2008; Formica & Uysal, 2006), providing insights on the appeal of a destination relative to what Crompton (1979) labels "socio-psychological" characteristics of travellers.

2.1. Destination attractiveness

Lew (1987) offers a seminal framework for conceptualizing three perspectives on tourist attractions, summarizing the early tourism literature. The perspectives include the ideographic listing, the organizational perspective, and the tourist cognition of attractions. The most frequent form of typology in tourism research is the ideographic perspective, which focuses upon the concrete uniqueness of a site. The organizational perspective focuses less on the attraction itself in favour of its spatial and temporal nature. The third major approach examines tourist perceptions and experiences in an attraction, and is therefore the most relevant in the present research.

Hu and Ritchie (1993) adopt a comparative approach to explore destination attractiveness in major tourist destinations. They gather data through 400 telephone interviews with respondents in Hawaii, Australia, Greece, France, and China. Distinguishing between recreational and educational vacation experiences, the authors confirm the importance of the trip's primary purpose in research that seeks to understand traveller satisfaction. For example, travellers on educational trips are more likely to accept unpleasant experiences than those on recreational trips. In addition, the authors report that travellers who have already been to a given destination once tend to hold a more favorable impression about that place upon their return.

Crouch (1994) examines empirical findings related to tourism demand. In his well-organized and thorough review article, he builds a typology of demand determinants including price (relative prices, exchange rates, and cost of transportation), marketing, trends and fashion, and other factors such as lag and lead effects and competition. His paper concludes with an extensive table of "conclusions drawn" from each of the articles. The author cautions

readers that the wide variety of results highlighted in his narrative can be attributed to some inconsistency across methods and the context-specific nature of determinants.

Beeho and Prentice (1997) consider the importance of word of mouth in establishing the attractiveness of a destination for subsequent travellers. Drawing evidence from the case of the New Lenark World Heritage Site in Scotland, the authors also highlight the significant role of past visit satisfaction as a driver for return visits.

Papatheodorou (2000) uses econometric modelling to develop a "characteristics framework" for understanding tourists' destination preferences. In this theoretical paper, the main considerations include transport costs and tourism prices, both of which make intuitive sense in the case of most travellers. Papatheodorou points out that his framework could be expanded to accommodate additional considerations including consumer preferences, the availability of information about a destination, agglomeration, and emergence of new destinations. However, the author stops short of using empirical data to demonstrate his framework.

Formica and Uysal (2006) root their analysis of destination attractiveness in the tourism-system approach. Using both primary and secondary data, the authors conduct a multi-faceted examination of county-equivalents (counties and independent cities) in Virginia that provides an objective comparison of supply and demand attractiveness measures. Their thorough analysis of detailed results yields both a model to be replicated elsewhere and concrete suggestions for policy. Namely, the authors highlight the complex nature of destination attractiveness issues and urge state tourism authorities to focus upon the unique characteristics of the eight identified regions rather than marketing the entire Commonwealth of Virginia as a homogeneous entity.

Lyngdoh (2013) examines tourism attractiveness at the intersection of tourism supply and demand in Meghalaya in north-eastern India. Considering the stable business environment and abundant entrepreneurial opportunities in the region, he argues that the local supply of tourism exceeds the local demand. The author speculates that deficiencies in tourism infrastructure are limiting the inflow of tourists, and argues that erratic fluctuations in demand are adversely impacting Meghalaya's tourism industry. While Lyngdoh offers interesting insights on the region's challenges maintaining tourism demand, unfortunately he stops short of offering insights toward workable solutions.

While much has been written about motivations, other scholars have focused upon impediments to travel. Dolnicar (2005) and Alejziak (2013) address general causes of non-participation in travel, while Otoo (2014) focuses on constraints to the popularity of volunteer tourism, the latter being particularly relevant here because of its importance in the context of Ghana.

Dolnicar (2005) catalogues five major risk factors that can impede tourism, including political risk, natural disasters, sickness, planning risk (unreliable service providers), and property loss. Alejziak's more focused (2013) study is based upon survey data from Polish residents. More than half of the Polish respondents in Alejziak's study report that they are prevented from travelling exclusively by a lack of financial resources, and no additional inhibitors are mentioned by a majority of respondents. The survey results reveal that most other respondents cite a combination of money and time constraints, as well as household obligations and the desire for "staycations" (spending holidays at home).

With regard to inhibitors of volunteer tourism ("voluntourism"), Otoo (2014) sets forth his own taxonomy of issues that impede effective and/or enjoyable visits to Ghana. Respondents include 336 volunteers (68.4% of them women), mainly from Europe and the United States. The main categories of constraints are organizational (NGO character, pre-travel preparation, advertising, and visa-

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