

Original Research Article

Sources and Availability of Information for Tourists: A Study of Ghana

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Abstract

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Tourism is considered as the world's largest and rapid growing industry of modern business world. It has a vital influence on economic development of a country. Ghana is a tourist destination on the map of the world. It has enormous potential to develop tourism because of its attractive natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. Tourism can add value in the local economy if the industry is handled competently. However, tourism has fall short of this expectation in Ghana due to low awareness and inadequate marketing practices. This study sets out to identify the sources and availability of information for Ghana bound tourists and the possible reasons for the choice of Ghana. The study found that tourists use travel agencies and published visitor guides to learn about Ghana before visit. It was noted that obtaining valuable information about the Ghanaian tourism sector is mixed. Ghanaian tourism marketers should consider doing more by constructing and implementing more robust marketing plan and strategy for the tourism sector.

Keywords: Ghana, Information, Tourism Sector, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is a technical and multidimensional industry which encompasses many activities like information and publication, package tours, travel agency, hotel operation and catering services etc. In Sub-Saharan African countries, tourism is a catalyst of change in household economies, leading to new opportunities for employment, new sources of cash income, and new information about technologies (Barkin, 1996; Eadington and Smith, 1992; Levy and Lerch, 1991; Liu, 2003). Ghana is one of the few countries in Sub Saharan Africa that definitely is on the tourists hunting list alongside Kenya, Senegal and South Africa; it has delicate and distinctive attractions of its own to offer. The traditional emphasis of the tourist trade has always been on the material facilities offered by a country rather than on its actual charms. This may be a reason why Ghana has been less frequently highlighted in the world's tourist maps. As Ghana has the opportunity to participate in the world's tourism industry, what are the sources that tourists use to gain information about Ghana? Is reliable information on Ghana readily

available for potential Ghana bound tourists? What factors attract tourists to Ghana?

Literature Review

The Concept of Tourism

Tourism is an activity done by an individual or a group of individuals, which leads to a motion from a place to another, from a country to another for performing a specific task. It is also conceived a visit to a place or several places with the purpose of entertaining which leads to an awareness of other civilizations and cultures, thereby increasing knowledge of countries, cultures, and histories. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) defines tourists as people who "travel to and stay in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes not related to the exercise of an activity

remunerated from within the place visited". The term tourism could be viewed from different angles like economic, managerial, marketing, social, environmental and so on (Rashidul, 1988). Tourism can be classified into several distinct categories. They would include holiday travel, visiting friends and relatives (VFR), business travel, health treatment, shopping, conference, incentive travel, official mission, education, sport and others travel (Malaysia Tourism Promotion Board 2004). According to International Association of Scientific Experts in Tourism (IASSET), "tourism is the sum of the phenomena and relationships arising from the travel and study of non-residents in so far as they do not lead to permanent resident and are not connected with any earning activity". Asiedu (2005) identified foreign tourists' attitude toward service product arrangement, channel of distribution, price of tourism product and services and promotional arrangement and showed various marketing constraints that affect the attitude of the foreign tourists. He recommends that Ghanaian tourism industry should arrange its marketing mix elements in a way that attain positive attitudes of the foreign tourists and ensure growth of the country. Tourism industry in Ghana has not got a solid footing to "taken off" despite all the efforts and measures from government and other private agencies (Bormann, 2015). Ghana is a middle profile country in Sub Saharan Africa. The country, though medium in size, has a rich collection of tourism product to offer the world. It has a unique cultural heritage with numerous historical and archaeological sites. It has the highest waterfall in the West African sub region with three world heritage sites (Koutra, 2009). Among the three world heritage sites, the most famous are the Cape Coast Castle and Elmina which served as slave dungeons during the 400 year transatlantic slave trade. The Tourism sector of Ghana is one of the least developed sectors, yet tourists arrival expanded from 113,242 in 1991 to 468,951 tourists in 2008 (Ghana Tourism Authority 2009); the growth indicates hope of further scope by maximizing use of existing resources (Koutra, 2009).

The Role of Tourism in Ghana

The tourism sector can play an important role as a driving force of economic development by contributing in three high priority goals of developing countries. Tourism expenditures and the export related goods and services generate income to the economy of Ghana and can simulate the investment necessary to finance growth in other economic sectors. Government may earn revenue by imposing tax on the popular products demanded by the tourists. Tourism offers job opportunity for different classes of people and thereby contributes to the alleviation of poverty in the country. Tourism generates jobs directly, through hotels, restaurants, taxis, souvenir sales; and indirectly, through the supply of goods and

services needed by tourism-related business. In addition, tourism can include the local government to make infrastructural improvements and also make an important contribution to a country's balance of payments. Although the number of tourist arrivals has shown an increasing trend over the years, Ghana has not been able to reap the full benefits in the tourism sector up to the desired level according to its potentiality. In the year of 2004-2005, approximately 271,270 tourists visited Ghana and it earned 3,967 million cedis whereas in 2005-2006, 300,000 tourists visited Ghana contributing more than 4,000 million cedis to the domestic economy (Ghana Tourism Statistics, 2009).

Sources of Information and Tourists' Motivation

In a competitive market such as tourism, consumer awareness, selection, and choice of tourism and hospitality products depend heavily on the information supplied to and used by the tourist (Fodness and Murray, 1997; McIntosh and Goeldner, 1990; Moutinho, 1987). From the guests' point of view, information is the harbinger and initial indicator of the later, actual tourist service. It follows that the quality and quantity of the information available is an actual strategic success factor (Laesser, 1998). The most important criteria of influence include such factors as potential travelers' own intuition/desires, their own experience/satisfaction or dissatisfaction, information made available by the providers, information given by friends and relatives (recommendation by word of mouth), the marketing influences of guidebooks, press articles, Television programs, Television/radio commercials, advertisements, among others (Fodness and Murray, 1999; Laesser 1998; Snepenger et al., 1990).

In tourism, most producers will often have no practical choice but to deal with certain segments, mainly because of the location and nature of their business (Middleton, 1994). Possible segments include purpose of travel, buyer needs, user characteristics, demographic, economic or geographic characteristics, psychographic characteristics, price, etc. (Middleton, 1994; Bieger 1998). Due to the continuous loss of power of socio-demographic segmentation (Schewe, 1998; Bieger, 1998), information sources structures – based on consumer behavior have frequently been used as a segmentation variable in tourism literature (Fodness and Murray, 1997, 1999; Mansfeld, 1992; Um and Crompton, 1990). Information-seeking is often coupled with a cultural (and therefore regionally different) background, which results in different patterns of behavior (Dawar, 1993). Among those vacation groups, the presence of family and friends at the destination, prior visits to the destination, the degree of novelty associated with the destination (Snepenger et al., 1990). Promotion is recognized by many as a critical element in tourism

Table 1. Sources of Information

Source	Percentage
Word-of-mouth	8
Webpage	8
Advertisement	8
Family, friends, relatives	12
Tourist Information Centre	8
Hotel/Lodge	4
Magazine/Newspaper	16
Tourist leaflet/travel guide/brochure	12
Travel Agency	16
Television	8
Others	0

Source: Fieldwork 2014

marketing. Among the array of promotional methods available, the travel brochure is one of the most important and widely utilized (Holloway and Plant 1988). One of the most influential factors in the purchase of a tourist product (destination) is information about tourist goods and services. Moreover, tourists differ in the information sources they use before making a decision (Moutinho, 1987). Institutions, travel agencies and tourist businesses make great efforts and spend a lot of money to make tourist information circulate. Despite the high investment made on communication and promotion, there is a general lack of knowledge as to which information source tourists use to make their choice (Kim et al. 2005; Weilbacher, 2003). Sources of information about a destination have a great influence on the process of tourist decision-making, and the behavior of tourists determines how the search for information is done and how information will be used (Andereck and Caldwell, 1993; Capella and Greco, 1987; Snepenger, Meged, Snelling and Worrall, 1990; Snepenger and Snepenger 1993). Formal sources of information, like brochures, and informal sources, for example relatives and friends, have an influence on image formation in a tourist destination (Beerli and Martin, 2004). Tourists tend to prefer impersonal information sources: brochures, Internet, guides, etc. (Molina and Esteban, 2006). Nevertheless, personal experience probably appears to be the most important information source. Tourists use external information sources as a first step when planning their holiday travel (Goossens, 1994). So, it is essential for entrepreneurs and tourism promoters to know exactly what kind of information should be included in tourist brochures and guides. At the same time, it is also important to analyze the effect of information on tourist behavior and image. This study is an attempt to identify the sources of information for tourists and the reasons why the tourists select a particular country, for this study, Ghana which were studied earlier workers with a rather little scope.

METHODOLOGY

Secondary and primary forms of data were used. Secondary data took the form of analysis of published material on tourism. A semi-structured questionnaire survey has been conducted on 300 conveniently sampled respondents across the country made up of 100 foreign tourists, 100 domestic tourists and 100 residents around leading attraction sites in Ghana to obtain primary information. Besides Key informant interviews were held with authorized personnel of scenic places and renowned show rooms. In addition, officials of organizations related to the tourism industry were also interviewed for this study including hotels, motels, pubs, clubs and the Headquarters of the Ghana Tourism Authority. Data was analysed descriptively and thematically. Though a non-probability survey, representatives from all demographic categories in general populations including age, occupation, and income have adequately been catered for as far as humanly possible to avoid bias.

FINDINGS

The Sources of Information

One of the reasons for conducting this study was to know the sources tourists usually explore to gain information about tourism of Ghana. Majority of tourists (16%) obtained travel information on Ghana Travel Agencies and the Press as shown in Table 1.

The least used source is the hotels/lodges. This suggests that Ghanaian hotels have little necessary information about the tourist sites. Unlike the developed countries, Ghana provides less information through hotel and brochures which are the most efficient way to attract and the repurchase of the tourist site.

Table 2. Attractions for Tourists

Reason for selecting Ghana	Percentage
Sites	28
Wildlife	24
Hospitality	17
Recreation/tour	17
Business purpose	14

Source: Fieldwork, 2014

Availability of Sufficient Information

Among survey respondents, 40% were of the view that there is sufficient information available for Ghana bound tourists. However a good number of respondents (33.3%) do not think information was readily available. This suggests there are still issues with the availability of information about tourism in Ghana

Tourists' Motivation to Visit Ghana

Tourists visit Ghana for various reasons including visiting historical sites, recreation, tour or coming for business purpose. Majority of tourists (28%) gravitate towards Ghana for sites including the highest waterfall in West Africa. Most of the tourists (24%) showed a general interest in nature and wildlife as shown in Table 2.

Interviews with stakeholders intimated that natural and heritage sites constitute a major pull for Ghana bound tourists, but noted their clients (tourists) frequently complain about the costly nature of Ghana as a tourist destination compared to other developing countries in south east Asia and Sub Saharan Africa. This according to their clients is the main reasons for their unwillingness to re-visit Ghana even though there is easy access to/from their countries due to the central location of Ghana in Africa and attractive sites.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

There are a number of tourist attractions and potentials in Ghana but information on this sector is insufficient to adequately develop the industry. For overall sustainable development of Ghana's tourism sector, potential tourists must be made more aware of the interesting and historical places, scenic beauties, adventurism, health resorts, rich, and ramified culture the country has to offer. The Ghana Tourism Authority should modify its marketing strategy with an aim to building up a better image of Ghana. Committed efforts are required from the citizenry and the authorities to provide sufficient information regarding tourism sites for full development and utilization of the tourism potentials of Ghana.

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