Heritage Tourism Development: A Case Study of Cape Coast Castle and Bonwire Town – Ghana

Godfred Osei Boakye (✉ boakyegodfred30@gmail.com)

University of Glasgow <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5880-7427>

Research Article

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Abstract

The rate of heritage growth in a country is determined by the type of heritage tourism the country develops. The case study focuses on a specialised form of heritage that promotes rapid heritage tourism growth. It argues that diaspora tourism is the future of heritage tourism development in Ghana. Specifically, the need for Ghana to take advantage of diaspora tourism as an opportunity to develop its heritage tourism sector. Two case studies at Cape Coast Castle (CCC) and Bonwire Kente Town (BKT) are presented to disclose the opportunities and flaws of 'genealogy tourism' in Ghana, as well as why the government should embrace it. With the view to understanding the main reasons why the Ghanaian government should pursue diaspora tourism, the study has investigated its capabilities to increase awareness of the socio-cultural, historical, economic and community development that can manifest from a proper development, operation, and management of diaspora tourism. The study recommends that the government should take more advantage of its heritage assets to develop diaspora tourism in order to fuel national heritage protection, cultural conservation, local community developments and economic growth of the country.

Introduction

Ghana's historic and heritage resources include slave markets, cultural objects, historic and traditional buildings; mosques, churches, shrines, festivals, forts, and castles Ghana National Tourism Development Plan (GNTDP, 2013). The availability of these heritage materials is critical to the growth of heritage tourism in Ghana. Most of them, particularly the castles and forts were built by European merchants during the times of gold and slave trade (Visit Ghana, 2019). The histories behind castles in Ghana have created a significant connection between the 'descendants of slaves' and the country (Garrod, 2000). As well, the varied architect of these historic buildings appeals to diaspora tourists boosting their morale to visit (Mensah, 2015). Essentially, the availability of these resources enhances tourists' experiences and knowledge about their *roots* (Wei-Jue et al., 2013).

Even though there are more heritage resources in Ghana, however, there are challenges with their development, functions and management. This is because their development is somehow geared toward undefined goals. The histories and heritage that are important to political leaders are developed while others are overlooked (Ashworth, 1995). Therefore, political influence is affecting the smooth development, protection and growth of heritage assets in Ghana. Meanwhile, these assets (castles and forts) are very instrumental in the country's heritage possessions and are the main heritage assets that attract diaspora tourists to the country (Visit Ghana, 2019). Considering this, the study has explored Ghana's heritage assets, diaspora tourism and their connection with heritage tourism development. Furthermore, evidence from significant heritage destinations in the United Kingdom, notably Scotland, are referenced to demonstrate why Ghana should revive its

diaspora tourism in order to grow its heritage sector. Also, factors such as repatriation, authenticity, sustainability, and multiplier effects have been thoroughly examined in order to determine the potential consequences when attention is given to diaspora tourism in Ghana.

Literature

2.1 Diaspora Heritage Tourism in Ghana

Understanding diaspora/genealogy tourism in Ghana without a fair idea of the concept of heritage may be cumbersome. In this sense, 'heritage' could be defined as the tangible and intangible historic materials valued and possessed by a society. Thus, an intergenerational legacy of a society United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, n.d). This means that a place may be declared as a heritage destination when it offers valuable cultural, historical and antiquity displays. Tourists are attracted to heritage destinations because of unfamiliar heritage materials. They visit such places mainly for their cultural resources, heritage assets and interpretative values.

Essentially, Ghana is one of the few West African countries with genuine actual and potential diaspora heritages. This is because the government has channelled some efforts on attracting tourists who are interested in the country's history, aesthetics, culture, and ancestral attractions (Silberberg, 1995). According to the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA, 2013), the country began to play a major role in protecting its heritage when UNESCO endorsed most of its heritage sites. For instance, while museums in Europe and America show artefacts related to slave trade, Ghana displays the origin of African enslavement. Due to this, Ghana has long been a popular tourist destination for Africans living in the diaspora. Especially, the African Americans who wish to visit their ancestral home (Wei-Jue et al., 2013), trace their descent (Timothy, 2008) and re-join their origin (Mensah, 2015). Consequently, some of the histories, legacy as well as heritage assets in local communities in Ghana, are preserved for diaspora tourism as acknowledged by Agyei Mensah (2006).

It is important to know that diaspora tourists from different backgrounds have their expectations when it comes to root tourism in Ghana. Groups including Black Americans, Black British have preconceptions before any visits. African Americans see the castles in Ghana as spiritual/sacred settings of the past due to their functions and roles during the Transatlantic Slave Trade (TAST) (Leite, 2005). When they visit, they feel grief for their forefathers and are delighted for them to have endured such predicaments (Bruner, 1996) making the country more appealing for repeat visits.

Diaspora Tourism Sites In Ghana: Case Studies

The employment of diaspora tourism as a strategy to grow a country's heritage sector is confirmed in some popular destinations. From an international perspective, the Scotland Tourist Board adopted this strategy to enhance the Scottish heritage tourism industry (Visit Scotland, 2010). Evidence is seen from the past initialisations, promotions and organisation of genealogy tourism packages and events including VisitScotland and Homecoming Scotland 2009 (organized to commemorate the 250th anniversary of Robert Burns' birth). The homecoming aimed at bringing Scottish diasporas back to Scotland, not just in the territories of the UK but also from nations such as the United State of America and other parts of the world. Strategically, these initiatives were established to restore Scotland's heritage tourism (Visit Scotland, 2010). Again, the promotion and utilization of film heritage to attract diasporas (Irish Americans) to Ireland also purposefully aimed to grow the heritage tourism of the country (Rains, 2003).

From a local perspective, the tourism industry of Ghana has adopted a similar strategy, but more is to be done. Ghana does this by using slave castles as a point of reference to attract diaspora tourists (Agyei-Mensah, 2006). Subsequently, thousands of visitors from the Diaspora, notably African Americans visit Ghana's castles. For instance, in 2003 alone, 27,000 Americans visited Cape Coast Castle (Bernhardt & Eroglu, 2004).

3.1 Cape Coast Castle (CCC)

The recognition of Cape Coast Castle owes to the role it played during the Transatlantic Slave Trade (TAST) (Schramm, 2005). Aside from serving as a slave market, it also hosted millions of slaves from all over Africa, making it one of the biggest slave camps on the continent (Apter, 2017). Heritage growth and interpretation in CCC has been phenomenal both in oral and display. In the castle, unique histories on TAST are mostly interpreted to diaspora tourists to engage their emotions. Often, this rational and emotional interpretation complies with 'Tilden-1977' interpretation principles which makes it one of the best diaspora sites in Ghana. Particularly, interpretation at the castle matches tourists' expectations thereby, increasing tourists' experiences (Tilden, 1977). For example, as part of touristic activities at the castle, slaves condemned cells are shown to tourists to have a practical feel and interpretative values of the site. Sometimes tourists are also allowed to stay in these jailed cells to enhance their knowledge and experiences on the slave trade in the castle. These activities taking place at the castle has developed a strong pulling power that attracts diaspora tourists.

Additionally, heritage events in the castle have done a fantastic job of encouraging Africans in the diaspora to visit the nation and participate in historical tourism (Agyei-Mensah, 2006). The events highlight the countries culture and achievements. They aim to help Africans to reconnect in order to maintain constant attention and fully commit themselves to take proper control of their destiny considering the past tragedies (enslavement) (Oguaa-

Afahye Magazine, 1994). Consequently, the castle has attracted support from the United States Agency for International Development and International Council on Monuments and Sites (Greene, 1998).

There is a wide spectrum of attention Ghana has gained in the eyes of African Americans, Black British, other blacks and international bodies because of CCC. Due to this attention, the country specifically, CCC has been visited by not only the diasporic population but also global icons including Melena Trump, Hollywood celebrities, Steve Harvey, Beyonce among others. Also, it has received prominent personalities such as Barrack Obama (Former US President) and Kofi Annan (the former UN Secretary-General) who shared tears after receiving a heartfelt historic interpretation on the TAST (Daily Guide, 2009; Addo, 2011). Considering these attentions in the country is enough evidence to urge a shift in focus to diaspora tourism.

Despite CCC's attention and expansion as a diasporic site, there is one major flaw in its interpretation of TAST. Interpretation at the site frequently describes Africans as captives/victims and Europeans as oppressors. The over-concentration on this hides the accounts of African middlemen during the TAST (Macgonagle, 2006) thus, how Africans sold their people during the act. It is believed that a twisted interpretation is from political pressures so as to lure diaspora visitors to repeat visits. The political influence that controls CCC is of no difference to that of the 'House of Terror', a museum in Hungary that interprets the terrified acts of foreign rulers without touching the country's several years in a socialist dictatorship under its political leaders (Tamara, 2006). Issues like this are affecting the quality interpretation of CCC despite everything. Therefore, a possible strategy for dealing with this could be the restructuring of the interpretational elements of the site to help reshape heritage tourism in Ghana.

3.2 Bonwire Kente Town (BKT)

Bonwire kente town is one of the popular heritage destinations in Ghana known for its genealogy tourism. The town is known to be the true origin of the popular 'kente cloth' (a handmade woven cloth) for centuries (Kriger, 2006). During the 18th and 19th centuries, the kente tradition was almost everywhere in the town (Tourism Ghana, 2016). However, early migration in the region resulted in inhabitants relocating to neighbouring countries. Now, most of these people are returning to visit their 'roots' due to a deep connection (Duval, 2004) with the BKT.

Connection is an essential component in diaspora tourism at BKT. Werner (2003) theorizes the importance of connections in the heritage tourism industry. Connection helps to create a unique identity and a bond between a country and its people no matter where they find themselves (Wu et al., 2019). Werner's notion helps to understand the endeavours of BKT. This is because BKT has been successful in receiving diaspora tourists from West Africa and other parts of the world as a result of its connection with them.

Additionally, the growth of diaspora tourism helps in a unique community identity (Ebron, 1999). With respect to BKT, the distinctiveness of the town makes it special among other similar areas (Wei-Jue et al., 2013). This happens because the town exhibits authentic Kente tradition at national gatherings and festivals to attract diaspora tourists. Therefore, to succeed in heritage tourism, authenticity is important to strengthen the tourist-destination connection (Bae, 2016).

BKT is succeeding from its connections and consideration of an essential element in the tourism industry, which is local community participation. Locals especially master weavers interpret and educate tourists about the town's tradition as well as the history behind the cloth tradition. Unsurprisingly, BKT has seen a significant increase in tourist receipts (Otoo et al., 2021) and a fair share of the national cake. Consequently, diaspora tourism has been contributing to the town in terms of local employment, local income, and sustainable heritage development.

Empirical Analysis

4.1 Sustainability and Authenticity

The sustainability and authenticity of diaspora sites in Ghana are significant to the heritage tourism development of the country. Majority of heritage sites in Ghana face authenticity issues and they affect the growth of the country's heritage tourism space (Dallen & Boyd 2006). This is because tourists are always on the lookout for genuine experiences and authentic sites to visit (MacCannell, 1976). The issue with heritage authenticity and sustainability is considered a problem with no easy solution (Cohen, 2002). Sometimes heritage sites may be a symbol of 'sustainability' when they can remain the same despite external pressures (Aronsson, 1994: 86). In relation to diaspora tourism in Ghana especially, CCC, though the history of the slave trade in the place is always highlighted to demonstrate the originality of the place (MacGonagle, 2006) but during the time the castle was used as a school and prison cells by the Ghanaian government is rarely revealed to diaspora during interpretations tourists (Mensah, 2015).

Furthermore, other authenticity issues in Ghana's diaspora tourism site are associated with conservation and maintenance. Problems related to renovation and preservation may affect the smooth operation of heritage tourism development (Macgonagle, 2006). For instance, as the management board of CCC desire to restore the castle, some diaspora tourists based on their suggestions show an ill-thought about it, seeing it as an attempt to eradicate the rich imagery of slavery and the site's authentic history (Osei-Tutu, 2004).

The castle has gone through a series of transitions and transformations (such as lightning and painting) which is believed to have affected the site. Arguably, others believe that the authenticity of CCC is still there despite the structural transformation. According to them the site still has the ancestral spirit, thus, the souls of the millions of slaves who died before and during the TAST (Szubert et al., 2021). The rational and emotional interpretation, authentic evidence of blood, human remains, slavery arsenals, shackles and the tombs and remains of C.B. Whitehead (a British soldier killed in the castle) and George MacLean (a British governor from 1830-1844) (Afrolegends, 2015) in the castle's forecourt attest to its genuineness as an authentic heritage destination (Szubert et al., 2021). This means while authenticity is related to the structure of the site, others disagree and refer to heritage authenticity as a psychological state (Wang, 2000: 56).

Discussion And Implication

5.1 Impacts - Multiplier Effects - Diaspora Tourism

Comparably, the significance of developing heritage tourism in Ghana via diaspora tourism outweighs the negative side, therefore, diaspora tourism is encouraged. The increase in tourists' numbers in sensitive historic destinations as a result of diaspora tourism in Ghana could cause physical changes which can have a severe negative consequence (Borges et al., 2011) on the originality of these sites. When that happens, it could be possible that those sites will be tagged among the list of UNESCO world heritage sites in danger as specified by 'Article 11, Clause 4' of UNESCO convention (UNESCO, 1972).

Also, there is an over-concentration of some heritage sites in Ghana like the Cape Coast Castle. The government and responsible local authorities have failed to develop other potential diaspora tourism sites (other forts and castles) to complement the few popular ones. These prospective sites are being left to rot because the government may be still waiting for international organisations such as UNESCO and USAID to come to its aid as it happened decades ago. Thus, limiting the socio-economic growth of those host communities (Twumasi-Ampofo, 2020). The development and transfiguring of these forts and castles which also played a significant role in TAST into diaspora tourist sites can be a major source of revenue to the host communities.

These ruining sites are among the current chances that the government can use to create successful heritage tourism. The government can do this through branding. Current promotional efforts such as 'branding,' which involve the use of media, souvenirs and publications have proved to be working in other noticeable heritage sites in Scotland such as Castle Douglas Food Town (MacLeod, 2009). This means that branding promotes a good relationship between heritage locations and diaspora tourism. On this note, Ghana's heritage sector should take advantage of it to develop genealogical heritage tourism in the country. Unlike other forms of heritage tourism, it is easier to access the international market when the government brands its diaspora tourism.

Despite the above criticisms, the essay cannot overlook the enormous positive impacts that diaspora tourism has on local communities in Ghana. Although the effects of diaspora tourism are not readily apparent but do occur. The model of 'multiplier effects' recognises that visitors spending is an engine for a country's economic well-being and local growth as corroborated in Domański & Gwosdz (2010). Also, what stands out in this is that through diaspora tourism some local communities in Ghana have been metamorphosed from small villages into wider towns.

Social, economic, culture/heritage conservation, environmental protection and local community growth are some of the benefits (Salazar, 2010) that have been obtained by the country especially from sites like CCC. For example, recently, the Ghanaian government in collaboration with CCC introduced the "Year of Return-2019" heritage tourism project to commemorate the 400 years of the country's enslavement (GTA, 2019). The project aimed to display Ghana's outstanding historic assets and black history. During the project, over a million tourists visited the country and among them, many were African Americans in the diaspora British Broadcast Corporation news (BBC, 2020). This was so because of the history behind African Americans to have been moved from Ghana to America during the TAST. The project contributed massively to the economy of local communities through cultural exhibitions, sales of crafts and other local indirect services. Again, it has polished the country's exceptional identity to the black world (GTA, 2019).

Considering this, if existing and potential diaspora tourism sites in Ghana are given attention, diaspora tourists expenditure will expand and contribute to the growth and development of Ghana's heritage destinations especially the disadvantaged rural communities. This is because diaspora tourists are more likely to contribute to the local economy, by opting to live in local communities and accommodations, as well as patronizing local products and services in order to feel part of the community (their root) (Newland & Carylanna, 2010). Additionally, they may also invest to enhance the local

economy to reduce poverty and economic difficulties for sustainable growth. Thereby, applying the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs 1, 2, 8, 11) in Ghana. Considering this, it is important to know that critics who place too much emphasis on diaspora heritage tourism flaws in Ghana fail to see the other side of it. Especially, its contributions to Ghana's economic growth, as well as to the development of the heritage tourism sector of the country.

Conclusion

The study used case studies at Cape Coast Castle and Bonwire Kente Town as evidence to identify the strength of diaspora tourism in Ghana. The study discovered that diaspora tourism is a vehicle that can better promote, market, and develop heritage tourism in the country. Therefore, Ghana has a better opportunity of revamping its diaspora tourism to shape its tourism sector. Moreover, the study also discussed the need for the government to develop potential heritage assets because aside from facilitating rapid heritage tourism growth in the country, there is a vast chance that diaspora tourists will spend and invest to support the local communities and businesses. Considering this, the study recommends that the government should do more to transform most of its heritage assets (especially, the ruining slave forts/castles) into diasporic sites to ensure sustainable heritage tourism development in the country. Thus, taking more advantage of the diaspora resources to progress heritage tourism to fuel the country's heritage protection, socio-cultural progress, cultural conservation, local community developments and economic growth.

Declarations

Competing interests: The authors declare no competing interests.

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