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The roots tourism experience of diaspora Africans: A focus on the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles

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Ghana is one of the countries visited by diaspora Africans seeking to trace their roots and reconnect with their kith and kin. However, promoting roots tourism to the African diaspora is a delicate undertaking. There is a need to understand the factors which are of importance to the roots tourism experience as this will help to package the roots tourism product appropriately to meet the expectations of tourists. This study therefore sought to examine the factors that underlie the roots tourism experience of diaspora Africans in Cape Coast and Elmina in Ghana. A cross-sectional survey of 264 diaspora Africans within the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles was conducted using convenience sampling procedures. The study identified four factors that underlie the roots tourism experience of diaspora Africans namely, host–guest relationship, authenticity, emotion and appearance of the slave castles. It is recommended that the roots tourism product is repackaged to include welcome ceremonies, visits to communities, re-enactment of the slave trade and initiation ceremonies in order to improve host–guest interactions.

Keywords: diaspora African; roots tourism; African American; slave castle; Cape Coast; Elmina

Background

Though there had been previous attempts notably by Marcus Garvey and Kwame Nkrumah to repatriate diaspora Africans back to Africa, by the mid-1970s the major concern of the “back to Africa movement” had evolved from repatriation to commercial tourism (Tillet, 2009). Many African governments seeking to use tourism as a panacea to their economic problems came to the realization that a number of diaspora Africans had assumed a superior socio-economic status compared to their brothers and sisters on the continent. Roots tourism could therefore be used as a catalyst to attract some of them to spend and invest in Ghana. This was epitomized by Jake Obestebi-Lampsey, a Minister for Tourism, in an address to the Diasporan African Forum in Accra on 27 February 2004:

It is a fact that the Diaspora nation is among the ten richest nations in the world. We your less endowed brethren in the homeland urge you to come back and put just a little of those monies and resources into the continent, and I am confident that you would be amazed at the returns.

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The fact remains that Ghana was an active participant in the Transatlantic Slave Trade (TAST), which saw some 10 million black Africans relocated to the Americas (Curtin, 1969; Perbi, 1995). Perbi (1995) indicates that Ghana alone provided about 16% of the total slave output required in the USA from 1620 to 1807. Therefore, in their quest to rediscover their roots, many diaspora Africans have been visiting places like Cape Coast and Elmina in Ghana (Bruner, 1996). Ghana is one of the countries usually chosen by African-Americans and diaspora Africans who want to visit the motherland, trace their roots and reconnect with their kith and kin. In 2003, 27,000 tourists visited Ghana from the Americas and it is estimated that approximately 10,000 of them were African-Americans (Bernhardt & Eroglu, 2004). Thus, Ghana is one of the leading heritage tourism destinations of the African-Americans (Schramm, 2004; Teye & Timothy, 2004).

Also, developments in DNA technology have enabled a number of African-Americans to trace their ancestral roots to Ghana (Fehler, 2011). Indeed, the *Daily Graphic* of 30 June 2009, culled a story from BBC about a number of African-Americans using DNA tests to trace their African roots. This included Lyndra Marshall, a 56-year-old retiree from Maryland, who traced her roots to the Ashantis of Ghana. Indeed a number of diaspora Africans, such as Louis Armstrong, Isaac Hayes and Rita Marley have traced their roots to Ghana. Significantly, the phenomenon of African-Americans in particular and diaspora Africans in general travelling to the African Homeland was inspired by Alex Harley's best-seller and television mini-series *Roots: Saga of an American Family* (Clarke, 2006; Finley, 2006; de Santana Pinho, 2008).

A defining moment in the historical links between Ghana and the African Diaspora in relation to the promotion of roots tourism was the visit by president Barack Obama, the first African-American president of the USA, to the Cape Coast Castle in July 2009, where he endorsed it as the site where the African-American experience began, and by so doing he underscored the need for African-Americans to visit the site. According to Obama,

As Americans and as African Americans obviously there's a special sense that on the one hand this place was a place of profound sadness. . . . On the other hand it is here where the journey of much of the African American experience began. (Scherer, 2009, np)

The Cape Coast and Elmina Castles occupy a central position in the experiences of roots tourists. They are the testimonies to the trials and tribulations suffered by their ancestors at the hands of slave masters on the tortuous and arduous road to America, the Caribbean and elsewhere to be enslaved. As such, the renovation and restoration of the three World Heritage monuments, Cape Coast Castle, Elmina Castle and Fort St Jago, was vociferously criticized by a section of the diaspora African community as a deliberate attempt to conceal such an unfortunate history (Bruner, 1996; Osei-Tutu, 2003). The roots tourism experience, however, transcends a guided tour of the slave castles. It includes interactions with the host communities. Though diaspora Africans travel to Ghana to be in the midst of black people (de Santana Pinho, 2008), such an expectation is sometimes met with disappointment as their hosts see them as strangers (Bruner, 1996; Polgreen, 2005).

There has been a modicum of studies which have focused on visitors' perceptions of, and experiences at the Cape Coast and Elmina castles (Bruner, 1996; Finley, 2006; MacGonagle, 2006; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; Reed, 2005; Teye & Timothy, 2004; Yankholmes & Akyeampong, 2010). Most of these studies, however, were not undertaken from a roots tourism perspective. Roots tourism is not a straightforward phenomenon but fraught with complexities (Benton & Zulu Shabazz, 2009). Roots tourists seek authentic and sacred experiences, so there are concerns that the utilization of the historical events of the

TAST in roots tourism development may evoke ethical and other questions (Austin, 2000). Also, many participants in roots tourism do not want to be labelled “tourists”, because for most of them, the journey is a pilgrimage rather than a tour; as such, referring to them as tourists seems to cheapen the experience and invoke the profane rather than the sacred (Reed, 2005). In spite of this, studies relating to roots tourism have generally explored ways in which roots visits influence the growth of the destination’s economy (Lew & Wong, 2005; Oxfeld 2004); ways of presenting history and heritage particularly for roots tourists (Austin, 2000; Maddern, 2004); and the relations between those who have left and those who stayed (Louie, 2004; Stefansson, 2004). In view of the complexity of roots tourism, an understanding of the factors of importance to roots tourists is vital for packaging the experience to meet their expectations. There is, however, no clarity in the literature on the factors of importance to diaspora Africans who travel in search of their roots in Africa. Thus, this study helps to fill the research void by examining the factors that underlie the roots tourism experience. This study helps to gain greater insights into the roots tourism experiences of diaspora Africans.

Roots tourism in Ghana

The slave castles as the focus of the roots tourism experience: issues and concerns

Roots tourism has been described as a kind of tourism in which immigrants and their descendants visit the communities of their ancestors for such purposes as visiting family and relatives, leisure and discovering the culture of the ancestral society, without the intention of permanent settlement or other work-related purposes (Feng & Page, 2000; Kibria, 2002). However, Leite (2005) argues that roots tourism is distinct from conventional leisure tourism in the sense that it is not motivated by a desire to escape from daily life but an underlying seriousness of purpose and emotional engagement. Roots tourism is a kind of existential tourism (Lew & Wong, 2005). Under Cohen’s (1979, p. 189) phenomenological typology of tourist experiences, he described an existential tourist as a traveller “who is fully committed to an ‘elective’ spiritual centre, i.e. one external to the mainstream of his native society and culture. Existential tourists are deeply concerned about the authenticity of their experiences”. Cohen’s (1979) existential typology of tourist experiences provides a useful framework for understanding the experiences sought by diaspora Africans who visit Cape Coast and Elmina.

In spite of the fact that Ghana abounds in landmarks, monuments and relics connected with the TAST, Cape Coast and Elmina Castles have been the main centres of attraction for roots tourists who visit the country (Finley, 2006). In the words of Ebo (1998, p. 40) ‘the diasporic roots of many American blacks are architecturally represented by slave castles in West Africa’. These slave castles occupy a special place in the heritage of diaspora Africans, serving as both a physical reminder of the long painful history of African slavery as well as reservoirs of heritage and information (Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011). Higgins (1994) also views the slave castles as a site for reunification – the place that stripped Africans of their humanity but one to which they must return to restore memories of Africa as home. In the same vein, Franklin (2003) avers that travel to and experiences gained at these slave castles link many of the diaspora to a collective past and pseudo-nationhood. These places fit Nora’s (1989) description of *lieux de memoire* or “sites of memory”, where “memory crystallizes and secretes itself”. According to Nora (1989), the past must be “preserved”, “reconstructed” and revisited via *lieux de memoire* such as the slave castles. These have also been equated to shrines where diaspora Africans go to mourn their enslaved ancestors (Kreamer, 2004). Thus, for diaspora Africans, the slave castles are sacred

grounds which ought not to be desecrated. Hyland and Intsiful (2003) recounted an incident during the Pan African Historical Theatre Festival (PANAFEST) in 1993, when members of a Jamaican dance ensemble refused to perform in the Great Court of the Cape Coast Castle on the grounds that it would desecrate the memories of their ancestors who had suffered in the dungeon below. Similarly, a number of African-Americans refused to eat their lunch, which was to be served in one of the spaces adjacent to the courtyard. Billings (1999) also reported that some African-Americans staged a sit-in protest at what they equated to a desecration of a shrine when local tourism authorities opened bars and cafes inside the castle and started to clean and whitewash the dungeons (Billings, 1999).

The renovation and restoration of the slave castles in 1993 under the Central Region Natural Resources Conservation and Historic Preservation Project (NRCHP), which was intended to maintain, protect and preserve them, attracted protests from some African-Americans (Bowden, 2009; Bruner, 1996; Finley, 2004; Kreamer, 2004; Osei-Tutu, 2003). According to Finley (2004), there have been calls from some African-Americans for the “whitewashing” of the castles to be halted and to allow them to crumble into the sea since renovation transforms the castles into “make believe” places. Their anger was also borne out of a feeling that the atrocities committed at the sites were being sanitized and washed away with coats of paint (Bowden, 2009). Some of them considered the changes as a form of *Disneyfication* and desecration of shrines, as well as acts of falsification and “white washing” designed to mask the evils of slavery (Osei-Tutu, 2003). They therefore advocated for a reversion of the sites to their original old, dark, tragic and terrifying condition since the whitewashed walls, new windows, doors and electric lighting were inappropriate and did not paint a true picture of the atrocities that were committed at the site hundreds of years ago (Kreamer, 2004). In spite of that, Mowatt and Chancellor (2011) argue that the slave castles have not been as commoditized and sanitized in interpretation and aesthetic presentation for tourists as the plantations in southern United States and the Caribbean.

There is also a debate as to whether to refer to them as dungeons or castles (Finley 2004, Reed, 2005). In Reed’s (2005) survey of Africans and people of African descent, 35% of respondents preferred that the name be changed to castle-dungeon, while 30% suggested dungeon. The term castle conceals the fact that enslaved Africans were held captive there (Finley, 2004). The fact remains that the Cape Coast and Elmina castles have been put to different uses at different points in time and had been occupied by different European countries such as the Portuguese, Dutch and English (Anquandah, 1999; van Dantzig, 1980). The sites visited by roots tourists are essentially the places of memory of an ancestral past (Leite, 2005; Nora, 1989). However, the absence of one collective memory at these sites of memory generates controversy over historical interpretations, rendering the legacy of African–European relationships a contested issue (MacGonagle, 2006). Memories of the slave trade are just one aspect of the historical development of the castles and dungeons (MacGonagle, 2006). However, MacGonagle (2006) indicates that during tours of the buildings, the history of the slave trade is put on centre stage, but there is no regular mention of the fact that Elmina Castle once served as a police training centre and the Cape Coast Castle as a school and prison. Teye and Timothy (2004) assert that though different types of contested heritage exist, the common ones are when different social groups have parallel pasts and when multiple groups share a common heritage. The latter results in different groups telling different versions of history. Different interest groups such as Dutch, British, African-American, Ghanaian tourists, museum professionals and local residents each has an interest in the castle but for different reasons (Bruner, 1996). African-American roots tourists want to reduce the memory to the castles to the TAST; however, Ghanaians are often unwilling to reduce their commemorative meaning to the

singular theme of the slave trade (Bruner, 1996; Kreamer, 2004). Dutch tourists to the Elmina Castle may be more interested in the Dutch cemetery, Ghanaian tourists from Ashanti may be interested in the “Prempeh room” (Teye & Timothy, 2004).

Africa-diaspora Africa relationships

Basu (2005) points to a lingering contest over the appropriate use of the term “diaspora” in academic discourses and attributes it to a semantic instability surrounding the term. He provides two schools of thought on the appropriate use of the term. First is the belief that if the term is to retain any discrete significance, its use ought to be limited to describing the dispersion and exile of the Jews from their historic homeland and that its use in other contexts must remain at this level of metaphor. The second school of thought advocates for a return to the etymological roots of the word in Greek, which is “to sow over” or scatter, and its earliest usage in relation to human dispersion. Diaspora has also been defined as a population scattered across different nation-states that commonly identifies as a nation or ethnic group with a geographical location of origin (Higginbotham, 2012). Richards (2005) used the term diaspora Africans rather restrictively to mean blacks from the slave-derived societies in the Americas. That notwithstanding, the term diaspora Africa is often used to refer to the dispersal of black people from Africa to the Americas (Clarke, 2006). For diaspora Africans, roots travel has become a genre of tourism characterized by a symbolic return to their ancestral homeland, often made visible by the idea or racial memory of Africa as a familial place of origin in the TAST (Finley, 2006).

The essence of diaspora Africans visiting the African continent is to return home and to reconnect with the land of their forebears (Austin, 2000). As such, some of them feel a sense of belongingness, preferring to be treated just like indigenes instead of tourists who can be commercially exploited. This is exemplified by some African-Americans who refuse to pay entrance fees to the Elmina Castle, since according to them, they did not pay to leave the shores of Ghana so they do not have to pay to return (Bruner, 1996).

Also, diaspora Africans who travel to Africa expect to escape from racism (Richards, 2005). According to Louis Gates, an eminent African-American scholar, African-Americans visit Elmina and other slave sites in West Africa not only to mourn their ancestors but also to be in the midst of black people (de Santana Pinho, 2008). Ironically, they often fall into the very racial trap they try to escape from in the diaspora. African-Americans are referred to as “obroni” which is a “twi” word for “whiteman” by their Ghanaian brothers and sisters (Bruner, 1996; Imara, n.d; Polgreen, 2005). According to Bruner (1996), the irony of the term “obroni” is that it labels African-Americans as both white and foreign, whereas they see themselves as black and at home. In a study on roots tourism in Brazil, de Santana Pinho (2008) also found that the concept of “light-skinned black” was an oxymoron. Many Brazilians interviewed did not perceive many African-American tourists as black. Thus, diaspora Africans find the racial prejudices that confront them in the diaspora staring them in the face when they arrive in the motherland.

These disappointments sometimes elicit rude reactions from some diaspora Africans. Richburg (1997, p. 227), in his book, *Out of America: A black man confronts Africa*, profusely thanks God for bringing his “nameless ancestor across the ocean in chains and leg irons” and for being American. He totally rejected his “Africanness” and disowned his relation to Africa:

I have been there, I have lived there and seen Africa in all its horror. I know that I am a stranger (t)here. I am an American, a black American, and I feel no connection to ... (that) strange and violent place.

Evidence available suggests that the relationship between those who left and those who stayed (Louie 2004; Stefansson 2004) has not been cordial (Mensah & Amissah, 2009; Mwakikagile, 2005; Zachary, 2001). *Lieux de memoire* provide more contradictory responses that account for the tension and dissimilarity, as well as unifying bonds of family among Africans and diaspora Africans (Richards, 2005). Holsey (2004, p. 167) argues that “both African Americans and Ghanaians participate in simultaneous yet reverse imaginative processes or transatlantic dreamings that converge within sites of painful memories of slavery’s past”. This situation could lead to what Kibria (2002) refers to as “re-diasporization” of the diaspora in the ancestral land.

It is widely acknowledged that the misunderstanding and strained relationship between Africans and diaspora Africans is due to the fact that Africans and diaspora Africans have had different historical and cultural experiences (Appiah, 1992; Austin, 2000; Barney, 2002; Bruner, 1996; Mensah & Amissah, 2009). Many African-Americans were raised in segregated societies where social interactions with white people were painful and uneasy, and thus were exposed to discrimination. But Africans come from cultures where black people were in the majority and where lives were largely controlled by indigenous moral and cognitive conceptions. As such they did not feel inferior to white people and they had little reason to resent them (Appiah, 1992, pp. 6–7). Austin (2000) also provides two reasons for the strained relationship between diaspora Africans and Africans on the continent; the long period of separation from Africa and its culture and the painful reality is that Africa has undergone an entirely different and unpleasant evolutionary growth.

Barney (2002, np) quotes Glover, a Ghanaian professor of political science at the University of South Florida as saying the perceptions that Africans and African Americans hold of one another result from:

all the negative things we’ve been taught about each other. A lot of African Americans were taught that Africa was nothing more than just a primitive, backward jungle from whence they came, [while Ghanaian] perceptions of African Americans is that they are a race of people who carry guns and are very violent.

In the words of Imara (n.d) “They [Africans] grew up in a colonized home fed with tapes promoting Tarzan and Cosby family myths. We [African Americans] grew up in a foreign land trained with Tarzan and jungle images.”

Slavery has also been a bone of contention between Africans and diaspora Africans. There is lingering hostility and confusion among the African Diaspora about the role Africans played in the slave trade (Polgreen, 2005). Most Ghanaians, on the other hand, are not particularly concerned with slavery (Richards, 2005). In fact, in most communities in Ghana, tracing slave ancestry is considered a taboo (Dei & Boakye, 2007; Richards, 2005). Slave descendants are discriminated against in marriage and in consideration for leadership positions (Dei & Boakye, 2007). The result is that many Ghanaians are not particularly enthused about events commemorating the slave trade. Hyland and Intsiful (2003) reported that the editorial of the *Daily Graphic* of 29 July 2003, which commented on the joint celebration of PANAFEST and Emancipation Day, expressed concern about ordinary Ghanaians distancing themselves from events such as the retracing of the slave route because such events were not related directly to any indigenous Ghanaian culture but rather saw such events as being for foreigners and public officials.

Methodology

Studies on roots tourism have usually been undertaken from an interpretive perspective (see Bruner, 1996; Finley, 2006; Holsey, 2004; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011; de Santana Pinho, 2008; Tillet, 2009). Thus, Wight's (2006) contention is that there is an overabundance of qualitative enquiry-driven approaches to the study of dark tourism holds true for studies on roots tourism. This study, however, examines the roots tourism experience of diaspora Africans from a positivist perspective. It also followed a cross-sectional design involving the use of questionnaires to collect data from a cross-section of diaspora Africans visiting Cape Coast and Elmina at a specific time. Cross-sectional designs are the most common designs for social science research (Kumar, 2005). Kumar (2005) further avers that cross-sectional designs involve deciding on what to find out, identifying the study population and selecting a sample, and contacting respondents to elicit the required information.

The target population comprised of all diaspora Africans visiting the Cape Coast and Elmina castles from July to September 2014, which is considered the peak tourist season in Ghana. There is no reliable data on diaspora Africans visiting Ghana. Due to the lack of a sample frame, a convenience sampling method was used. Diaspora Africans were targeted at Cape Coast and Elmina Castles. A total of 400 respondents were targeted, but in the end 264 respondents – 145 in Cape Coast and 119 in Elmina – took part in the survey, representing a response rate of 66%. Diaspora Africans who had completed the guided tour of the castles were approached and the purpose of the study was explained to them. Those who were willing to take part in the survey were given questionnaires to complete. The obvious challenges with the convenience sampling method are the likelihood of bias (Mackey & Gass, 2005) and the non-representativeness of the sample (Babbie, 2007). Some measures were, however, put in place to minimize bias and ensure a degree of representativeness. First, the survey was carried out over two and a half month period to ensure that diaspora Africans from the main generating countries as indicated by the Ghana Tourism Authority were covered. Also, for those who were in groups, care was taken not to sample all or a majority of the people in that group. The survey was conducted concurrently at both sites but to avoid duplication, respondents were first asked if they had taken part in a similar survey before the questionnaire was administered.

A self-administered questionnaire was dispensed. This was a structured questionnaire comprising of three sections. Section A was on traveller characteristics, Section B on their perception of the roots tourism experience and Section C was on the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. A five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree was used to elicit respondents' perceptions of the roots experience in relation to the slave castles, host community and the destination as a whole. The scale for gauging the roots tourism experience comprised of a set of 28 items bordering on authenticity, contested histories, host–guest relationships and perceptions of the slave castles. Items on the scale were based on the available literature on roots tourism, including Kolar and Zabkar's (2009) 10 dimensions of authenticity of cultural heritage sites. Contested histories were measured with statements as to whether the narration by the tour guides was accurate and whether the castle served other purposes or was solely for the slave trade. Questions were relating to host–guest relationships bordered on how respondents were treated by their hosts, how they were received by their hosts and whether they felt they were like their hosts. The scale also included questions on how respondents saw the slave castles. These questions bordered on the appearance of the castles and the availability/adequacy of other supporting facilities. In addition, there was

an open-ended question, which sought respondents' comments about their personal experiences.

Prior to the actual data collection, a field pretest was conducted at the Cape Coast Castle on 28–29 June 2013. A total of 26 diaspora Africans were asked to complete a draft questionnaire after which their views were sought about their interpretations of words, phrases and all questions. Some of them expressed difficulties in comprehending and answering some of the questions. This helped improve all aspects of the instrument. The wording of some of the questions was revised, some questions were removed and some additional response sets were included. Results of the pretest were analysed and items on the roots tourism experience scale with Cronbach's Alpha values less than 0.7 were removed to ensure the reliability of the scale.

The data collection period was planned to coincide with the peak tourist season. It is also interesting to note that PANAFEST and Emancipation Day, as well as *Fetu Afahye*, a traditional festival of the people of Cape Coast which enjoys considerable patronage from diaspora Africans, were staged during the period. Because most tourists were part of an organized tour and as such had to stick to a strict itinerary, in some cases, they had little time after the tour to complete the questionnaire. Some respondents had to stop when there was a call for departure, leaving the questionnaires only partially completed. Such questionnaires could not be included in the analysis.

Data were analysed with SPSS version 17. Results were presented using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. Also, factor analysis was used to identify the underlying dimensions of the roots tourism experience by reducing the original 28 variables measuring the experience. The resulting five factors were then used in subsequent analyses. The items on the scale for determining the roots experience were grouped together in a factor analysis (principal component analysis). Before the factor analysis, the scale was subjected to reliability analysis. The overall Cronbach's alpha value was 0.95, which was well above the limit of 0.70 required for the internal consistency of the constructs (Nunnally, 1978). For the factor analysis, only variables with factor loadings of 0.40 and above were considered. Stevens (1992) suggests using a cut-off of 0.4, irrespective of sample size, for interpretative purposes.

The open-ended question was analysed manually. First, the researcher read through all the comments to determine the range of responses. Six main categories of responses emerged, namely interesting experience, educational experience, emotional experience, commendation of tour guide, unfair fees/high cost of photography and suggestions for improvement. Upon reading the comments a second time, a code was then assigned to each comment based on which of the six categories it fit best.

Results

Characteristics of respondents

Respondents were mostly female (69.7%) between the ages of 21 and 59 years (65%) as shown in Table 1. Respondents under 20 years were in the minority, representing 12.5%. They were well educated with 35.7% and 38.4% having attained undergraduate and post-graduate degrees, respectively. They were primarily composed of four main nationalities: American (76.1%), Ghanaian (6.1%), British (6.1%) and Jamaican (5.3%). Other nationalities constituting 6.4% were Canadian, Nigerian, Sierra Leonean, Serbian, Togolese, Trinidadian, Panamanian, Guyanese, Belizean, Dutch, Indian and German. That some three-quarters of the respondents (76.1%) were Americans lends further credence to the fact that most roots tourists who visit Ghana are African-Americans. African-Americans

Table 1. Socio-demographic and travel characteristics of respondents.

Characteristic	N = 264	
	n	Percentage
Sex		
Male	79	30.3
Female	182	69.7
Age		
Under 20	32	12.5
21–39	87	34.1
40–59	79	30.9
60+	57	22.4
Level of education		
Grade school	18	7.1
High school	34	13.3
Undergraduate	91	35.7
Postgraduate	98	38.4
Other	14	5.5
Nationality		
American	201	76.1
Ghanaian	16	6.1
British	16	6.1
Jamaican	14	5.3
Others	17	6.4
Number of visits		
First time	212	80.3
1–3 times	35	13.3
More than 3 times	17	6.4
Type of arrangement		
Organized tour	175	66.3
Self-arranged	89	33.7
Size of travel party		
Alone	13	4.9
Less than 10	129	48.9
10–19	95	36.0
20+	27	10.3
Length of stay in Ghana		
<1 week	22	8.4
1–2 weeks	178	67.9
>2 weeks	62	23.7
Purpose of visit ^a		
Visit to slave castles	148	30.8
Discover heritage and/or trace roots	106	22.0
Education	103	21.4
Learn about culture of Ghanaians	64	13.3
Participate in PANAFEST events	21	4.4
Rest and relaxation	15	3.1
Other	24	5.0

^aTotal percentage for purpose of visit is greater than 100% due to multiple responses.

thus constitute a niche market that demands special attention by tourism marketers in Ghana. This further strengthens assertions about the popularity of Ghana as a destination for African-Americans tracing their roots (Gaines, 2006; Lake, 1995; Schramm, 2004; Teye & Timothy, 2004).

Most respondents (80.3%) were visiting Cape Coast/Elmina for the first time. About two-thirds (66.3%) were organized tourists and nearly half (48.9%) were in groups of less than 10 people. The majority of respondents intended to stay in Ghana between one and two weeks (67.9%).

According to Higginbotham (2012), roots tourists generally engage with family history, visit heritage attractions, undertake ancestral heritage tours and attend special events, festivals, ceremonies and family gatherings or reunions. The purpose of visit in this study coincides with these, as the main purposes of visit were experience the slave castles (30.8%), discover heritage and/or trace roots (22%), as well as to learn about the culture of Ghanaians (13.3%). From the literature, roots tourists usually visit the slave castles, which Nora (1989) describes as the *lieux de memoire*. Since the study coincided with PANAFEST, 4.4% of the reasons for visiting were to attend this festival. Only 3.1% of the reasons for visiting were for rest and relaxation, indicating that root tourists hardly visit for truly leisure purposes. This could also be attributed to the seriousness of purpose and emotional engagement associated with the roots tourism experience (Leite, 2005).

Factors underlying the roots tourism experience

The scores for perceptions of various aspects of the roots experience were factor analysed using principal component analysis (PCA) with orthogonal Varimax rotation. The data satisfied all the requirements for using factor analysis; the Barlett Test of Sphericity produced a result of 3693.280, which was statistically significant ($p=0.000$) and thus supported the factorability of the data. Also, inspection of the correlation matrix revealed the presence of many coefficients of 0.3 and above, while the Kaiser–Meyer–Oklin value was 0.889, which is higher than the recommended value of 0.6 (Kaiser, 1974). The PCA revealed the presence of five components with eigenvalues exceeding one (1), cumulatively explaining 65.07% of the variance. However, four factors were extracted after an inspection of the scree plot.

Four factors representing 60.59% of the explained variance were extracted from the 28 variables. The four factors extracted were host–guest relationship, emotion, authenticity and appearance of slave castles. Table 2 presents the results of the factor analysis.

All variables comprising the four factors loaded quite heavily (0.4 and above). Also, the scales for measuring all four factors were reliable, with an overall Cronbach's Alpha of 0.95.

Factor 1, the host–guest relationship, relates to statements regarding the relationships between roots tourists and their hosts, how they were treated or (dis)regarded by the hosts and how they felt about it. This factor accounted for the highest percentage (22.3%) of the variance in the data indicating the importance of the host–guest relationship to the entire roots tourism experience.

Factor 2, emotion, also accounted for 13.4% of the variance in the data and had statements regarding the feelings of the roots tourists after touring the slave castles and their conceptions, notions and ideas about that experience. The factor had statements bordering on the emotions, spirituality and connections with ancestors associated with the experience.

Factor 3, authenticity, included statements concerning the genuineness or originality of the slave castles and the information provided by tour guides. It contained statements concerning the credibility of information provided by tour guides, originality of the slave castles and contradiction in history of the castles as provided by the tour guides and what the tourist already knew. Authenticity accounted for 12.7% of the variance in the roots experience.

Table 2. Varimax rotated factor analysis for indicators of the roots tourism experience.

Factors	Factor loadings	% of variance explained	Eigenvalue	Reliability Cronbach's alpha
<i>Factor 1 – host–guest relationship</i>		22.274	5.79	0.92
The people of Cape Coast/Elmina see me as one of their kind	0.838			
The people of Cape Coast/Elmina treat me as their own brother/sister	0.750			
The people of Cape Coast/Elmina are tolerant of my views and opinion	0.748			
I feel I am just like the people of Cape Coast/Elmina	0.716			
The people of Cape Coast/Elmina are always willing to help me	0.703			
I feel reconnected with my own people	0.644			
The people of Cape Coast/Elmina are hospitable	0.631			
The entrance fee to the castle is fair to non-Ghanaians	0.625			
The entrance fee to the castle is reasonable	0.590			
I feel at home in Cape Coast/Elmina	0.579			
I feel safe in Cape Coast/Elmina	0.554			
<i>Factor 2 – emotion</i>		13.373	3.48	0.85
I feel connected with my ancestors in the castle	0.822			
During the tour of the castle, I was moved emotionally	0.755			
I feel that part of my own heritage is being displayed	0.731			
Visit to the castle is an educational experience	0.688			
I have enjoyed a unique spiritual experience in the castle	0.457			
<i>Factor 3- authenticity</i>		12.662	3.29	0.79
The tour guide who provided information on the castle was credible	0.830			
I find the history behind the castle to be accurate	0.802			
The slave castles appear original to me	0.703			
The original castle has been preserved to a large extent	0.637			
There was no contradiction in the history presented by the tour guide and what I already knew	0.481			
<i>Factor 4 – appearance of slave castles</i>		12.278	3.19	0.79
The overall appearance of the castles inspire me	0.694			
The appearance of the castle is impressive	0.689			
The castle appears clean and neat	0.546			
There is adequate visitor facilities at the castle	0.453			

(Continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Factors	Factor loadings	% of variance explained	Eigenvalue	Reliability Cronbach's alpha
ROOTS TOURISM EXPERIENCE		60.587		0.95

Notes: KMO (0.889);

Barlett's test of sphericity (approx $\chi^2 = 3693.280$; $p = 0.000$);

Only loadings 0.40 and above are displayed.

Factor 4, appearance of the castles, was the last factor accounting for the lowest percentage of variance in the data (12.3%). It also comprised statements related to how clean, inspirational or impressive the castles were.

The roots tourism experience

The issue of the host–guest relationship is essential in roots tourists' experiences. However, this dimension had the lowest ratings (Category mean = 4.04), as shown in Table 3. Respondents generally agreed with the statements regarding their relationships with their hosts in Cape Coast and Elmina. The hospitality of the people of Cape Coast/Elmina received the highest rating (Mean = 4.33). This is probably due to the proverbial Ghanaian hospitality. Other statements that were rated highly by respondents, including 'I feel reconnected with my own people' (Mean = 4.20) and "I feel safe in Cape Coast/Elmina" (Mean = 4.20). However, the items that received the lowest ratings were "the entrance fee to the castle is fair to non-Ghanaians" (Mean = 3.87) and "I feel I am just like the people of Cape Coast/Elmina" (Mean = 3.89) with 64.8% and 62.8%, respectively, agreeing with these statements. This implies that about one-third of respondents did not agree with these statements. Generally, statements regarding entrance fees to the castles and the feeling of being, or being considered, one of the people of Cape Coast and Elmina received relatively lower ratings.

The sentiments expressed by roots tourists after the experience of touring the slave castles were very positive. This dimension received the highest ratings (Category mean = 4.48), meaning on average the respondents agreed with statements related to emotion. Tourists generally strongly agreed with the statement that visiting the castle was an educational experience (Mean = 4.61). Other statements they agreed to were "I feel that part of my own heritage is being displayed" (Mean = 4.53) and "during the tour of the castle, I was moved emotionally" (Mean = 4.49). Thus, respondents were generally satisfied with the educational and emotional experience, as well as the opportunity to reconnect with their ancestors, confirming similar findings by Timothy and Teye (2004) at Elmina Castle.

The general perception was that the Cape Coast and Elmina castles were authentic. On average, respondents strongly agreed that the tour guide who provided information was credible (Mean = 4.68), the history behind the castle was accurate (Mean = 4.56) and that the slave castles appeared original (Mean = 4.53). Thus, the authenticity of the castles and the narration of the history behind the castles presented by the tour guides were considered to be authentic. However, 12.9% of respondents were not in agreement with the statement that the original castle had been preserved to a large extent, while 19.7% also disagreed that there was no contradiction in the history presented by the tour guide and what they already knew. Though these people may represent less than a quarter of respondents, their concerns indicated some unease about the castles' authenticity.

Table 3. Respondents' roots tourism experience.

Variable	N	% in agreement	Mean	Std. dev.
<i>Host-guest relationship (category mean = 4.04)</i>				
The people of Cape Coast/Elmina see me as one of their kind	248	65.3	3.94	1.010
The people of Cape Coast/Elmina treat me as their own brother/sister	245	71.9	4.10	0.940
The people of Cape Coast/Elmina are tolerant of my views and opinion	247	64.7	3.96	0.925
I feel I am just like the people of Cape Coast/Elmina	253	62.8	3.89	1.084
The people of Cape Coast/Elmina are always willing to help me	248	68.5	4.04	0.917
I feel reconnected with my own people	248	79.9	4.20	0.881
The people of Cape Coast/Elmina are hospitable	245	87.0	4.33	0.778
The entrance fee to the castle is fair to non-Ghanaians	247	64.8	3.87	1.139
The entrance fee to the castle is reasonable	246	69.9	3.96	1.053
I feel at home in Cape Coast/Elmina	250	66.4	3.91	1.012
I feel safe in Cape Coast/Elmina	254	82.3	4.20	0.851
<i>Emotion (category mean = 4.48)</i>				
I feel connected with my ancestors in the castle	260	89.2	4.45	0.772
During the tour of the castle, I was moved emotionally	259	90.0	4.49	0.759
I feel that part of my own heritage is being displayed	258	92.7	4.53	0.717
Visit to the castle is an educational experience	261	94.6	4.61	0.685
I have enjoyed a unique spiritual experience in the castle	259	85.0	4.32	0.912
<i>Authenticity (category mean = 4.47)</i>				
The tour guide who provided information on the castle was credible	260	95.4	4.68	0.660
I find the history behind the castle to be accurate	264	93.2	4.56	0.701
The slave castles appear original to me	264	93.2	4.53	0.780
The original castle has been preserved to a large extent	249	87.1	4.37	0.818
There was no contradiction in the history presented by the tour guide and what I already knew	258	80.3	4.22	1.017
<i>Appearance of slave castles (category mean = 4.23)</i>				
The overall appearance of the castles inspire me	258	76.4	4.13	1.060
The appearance of the castle is impressive	254	81.5	4.27	0.941
The castle appears clean and neat	259	87.3	4.36	0.857
There is adequate visitor facilities at the castle	252	77.8	4.15	0.927

Note: Percentage in agreement is composed of both respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the statements, based on a scale of 1–5 (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*).

The slave castles represent sites of remembrance for roots tourists and the focus of the roots tourism experience. The state of the castle is thus essential to the entire experience. Average responses indicate that visitors agreed that the castles were neat (Mean = 4.36), impressive (Mean = 4.27) and inspirational (Mean = 4.13). They were also satisfied with the level of facilities in the castle (Mean = 4.15). However, nearly a quarter of respondents (23.6%) were not inspired by the appearance of the castle, while 22.2% disagreed that the castles had adequate visitor facilities.

Comments on the roots tourism experience in Cape Coast and Elmina

Respondents' narrative comments regarding their roots experiences fell into six main categories, namely interesting experience, educational experience, suggestions for

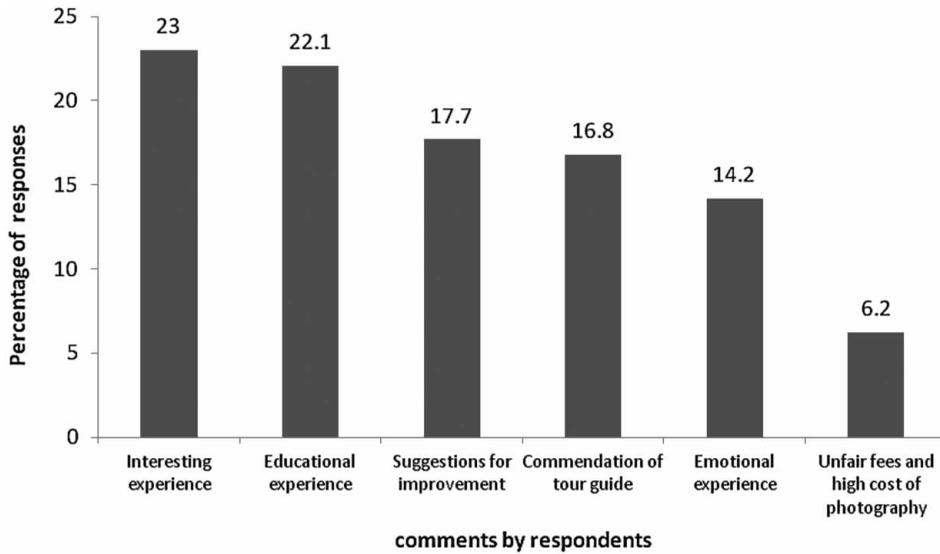


Figure 1. Comments on the slave roots experience by respondents.

improvement, commendation of tour guide, emotional experience as well as unfair pricing and high cost of photography (see Figure 1). Nearly a quarter of the comments (23%) were expressions about how interesting or amazing the tour of the slave castles was. Here the expressions were varied, but they all pointed to the fact that respondents were happy that they had taken the tour. A female nursery teacher from London wrote, “Most interesting visit to the castle, history has prevailed on me.” For some, the tour was not only interesting but it was an honour to have been able to make it. This is epitomized by an African-American male student from Texas, who wrote “Very engaging and interesting tour. It was an honour to be here for myself on behalf of my family.”

In the second category of comments, which accounted for 22.1% of the total number of comments, respondents felt the tour of the castles was an educative and enlightening experience. The opportunity to tour the castle had broadened their horizons and given them more insight into the history of the slave trade. According to a female psychiatrist from Indiana, USA, “I found the information and experience very educational and enlightening.” A female educator from Guyana also wrote “It was an education that I feel privileged to have experienced.” The tour of the castle and the information provided by the guides was considered by some to be a history lesson, as captured in the comment by an African-American man “Thank you for the amazing history lesson.”

Another category of comments was made up of suggestions about improving the roots tourism experience. This accounted for 17.7% of all comments. Suggestions were varied but could be classified under three sub-themes, namely proper preservation of the castle, improved marketing of the castles and repackaging the experience. With regards to the preservation of the castle, an African-American pastor wrote “I feel it should be preserved better. There should be flags or something that represent the different African people who were enslaved from their country.” A business owner from New York also commented that “The castle must be maintained. Many doors and windows are in bad condition.” On the subject of marketing, a comment by a male web designer from London read “Open a web page with details of the castle and history, you will get more sponsors.” Other

suggestions were pointed to increase promotion and branding. A female educational administrator from Washington wrote “We need to find ways to better promote the experience in the US.”

Suggestions about repackaging the roots tourism experience bordered on how to improve tours of the slave castles to enhance the visitor experience and the composition of groups, programmes and activities, as well as provision of adequate information. A female teacher from Jamaica suggested “white folks should not take the tour at the same time as natives of African descent”. A female African-American student wrote “I think groups should be spaced out so you do not feel rushed and are able to completely enjoy the experience.” Another female African-American student also suggested “Including more info about the state of people in the diaspora would be a nice representation of the continued impact the slave trade had on them”. A female lawyer from Tennessee also wrote “You should have a special ceremony for African Americans returning. Maybe they could get a special *sankofa* figure or something special that signifies return.”

A number of comments (16.8%) were commended for the castle tour guides. The guides played an important role in the slave route experience by recounting the history behind the slave trade and the castles, and making the stories come alive. Judging from the comments, it appeared most of the tour guides discharged their roles effectively; they were described as knowledgeable and sensitive to the feelings of their audience. A retired African-American man noted “The guide was very knowledgeable. I felt I received the true story as I was taught in US.” A female professor from Florida commented that the tour “... was very well done. The tour guide was knowledgeable and sensitive to the history and feelings of Africans in the diaspora”.

After taking a tour of the castle and having come to terms with the pains and suffering their ancestors endured, many roots tourists become emotional. This was evident in some 14.2% of the written comments. There were expressions of grief and sorrow for the pain and suffering of their ancestors, also paralleling some of the findings in Timothy and Teye’s (2004) earlier study. An African-American nurse wrote “I was emotionally touched to be in a country where my ancestors suffered to give off themselves so I am here free. The greatest experience I have ever had. To God be the glory.” Another woman from Georgia wrote “My ancestors came through this disgusting dungeon. It is so difficult to grasp how horrible my ancestors were treated. I am a living testament to the strength and faith of my ancestors. They made it.”

With the last category of responses, visitors expressed their misgivings about unfair pricing related to entrance fees paid by tourists and locals, as well as the price charged for taking photographs, which they thought was exorbitant and needless. A female student from London put it unequivocally: “Brothers and sisters from the diaspora returning home should pay the same as local Ghanaians for entry to the castle.” A male artist from Boston also wrote “There should not be a fee for photography as this is a pilgrimage for me.”

Discussion and conclusion

Results of this study indicate that issues of host–guest relationships, emotions and the authenticity and appearance of the slave castles are the underlying factors that define the roots tourism experience of diaspora Africans in Cape Coast and Elmina, Ghana. These are the issues of most importance to diaspora Africans who embark on a journey to rediscover their roots or reconnect with their ancestral land. With the exception of the host–guest relationship, the other three factors relate to the experience at the slave castles. Similarly, almost all

the comments of participants referred to their experiences during the tour of the slave castles. Thus, these buildings are the focus of the roots experience and thus the pivot around which all activities of roots tourists revolve. This lends further credence to the centrality of the slave castles as physical reminders of African slavery and as reservoirs of heritage and information (Bruner, 1996; Mowatt & Chancellor, 2011).

The issue of host–guest relationships is an important factor in the roots experience because the tourist considers the host as his/her own kith and kin and the journey as a return trip home. It is, therefore, not surprising that this factor was the highest contributor to the variance in the data. However, it was also the factor that received the lowest ratings in terms of respondents' perceptions of their relationships with hosts. Roots tourists want to be treated like indigenes, but the literature chronicles a litany of issues and incidents that indicate their dissatisfaction with how their hosts related to them (Bruner, 1996). There are also issues of misunderstandings between diasporic tourists and their Ghanaian hosts (Mensah & Amisshah, 2009) and racism (Bruner, 1996; de Santana Pinho, 2008). About one-third of study participants did not feel they were just like their hosts. They perceived that their hosts did not consider them as one of their kind and did not tolerate their views.

One reason why promoting diasporic roots tourism is a complex issue (Austin, 2000; Benton & Zulu Shabazz, 2009; MacGonagle, 2006) is that roots tourists want to be treated by their hosts as locals, one of their own. They do not want to be foreigners in what they perceive to be their homeland. At worst they should be treated as pilgrims. Evidence from this study shows that the relationship between diaspora Africans and their hosts needs improvement. The roots experience ought to be a total package, rather than just a tour of the slave castles. The missing ingredient is interaction with local residents and immersion in their local cultures. Most roots tourists (66.3%) are organized tour participants who are bound to a group and have to adhere to strict itineraries that do not foster host–guest interaction. This could be addressed by repackaging the roots product to include welcome ceremonies, visits to communities, re-enactments of the slave trade and initiation ceremonies. As one African-American woman suggested, a special ceremony could be organized for returning African-Americans during which they could be given something to symbolize their return. However, fostering a healthy relationship between roots tourists and their hosts will work best in a situation where they understand each other. This calls for education on all fronts to correct prejudices and for them to understand one another's worldview.

Significantly, the price paid by tourists compared to that of residents was considered unfair and unreasonable. Statements to this effect received some of the lowest mean ratings. These concerns were also conveyed in some of the comments, indicating that entrance fees for tourists compared those for locals, as well as the price charged for taking photographs, were exorbitant and needless. This concern has been expressed in previous studies (e.g. Bruner, 1996). To diaspora Africans, the sacred nature of the visit, which is essentially a pilgrimage, coupled with the fact that they want to feel like part of their hosts, distinguishes them from mainstream tourists and should therefore not be subjected to commercial exploitation.

In reality, ensuring an equitable pricing regime for both hosts and guests presents a tall order for management and the government of Ghana. This is because the government's rationale for tourism promotion, including roots tourism, is the generation of jobs and revenue. Since diaspora Africans are seen to be better-endowed financially than most Ghanaians, they are expected to pay higher entrance fees. This also fits the government's policy of encouraging domestic tourism by generating local participation. Yet some of the concerns of roots tourists are founded because excessive commercialization might compromise the spirituality of their experiences. From the results of this study, it is evident that roots

tourists are not a homogeneous group of people but have varied characteristics. Further research is needed to examine the sensitivity of different market segments to prices, so that appropriate pricing strategies can be used.

The question of authenticity of heritage attractions is another important factor in the diasporic roots tourism experience, because most roots tourists seek the truth about the slave trade and their lineage. This study indicates that respondents generally agreed that the slave castles and the history narrated by the tour guides were authentic. Indeed, the authenticity of the slave castles has been questioned in the past (Bruner, 1996; Finley, 2004; Osei-Tutu, 2003). However, the authenticity of the locations in this study should not be surprising because the visible whitewashed walls of the castle after the renovations in 1993 have faded. For instance, Bruner's (1996) research was conducted three years into the renovation of the castle. The modernization/refurbishment of the sites was therefore apparent then even for the most casual observer. This explains why authenticity was an issue in the 1990s. The situation is not the same today. The combined effects of the scorching sun and proximity to the sea have restored the castles' rustic appearance. On the contrary, though, some respondents in this study did call for the proper preservation or restoration of the castles.

In common with other research, this study confirms that emotional reactions are an important component of the roots tourism experience. Leite's (2005) assertion that the distinction between roots tourists and conventional leisure tourists is their motivation – an underlying seriousness of purpose and emotional engagement – could not have been more truthful. The emotional reaction to the diasporic roots experience was one of the most important elements extracted through the factor analysis, accounting for the second highest contribution (13.37%) to the data variance. The emotional experiences of respondents were also conveyed through their comments. These comments were expressions of grief and sorrow for the pain and suffering of their ancestors. Thus, the roots experience is also an emotional journey. To quote Retha Hill, an African-American, "A trip to Ghana is not just a vacation; it is a balm for a broken soul."

Finally, this study has underscored the importance of the tour guide to the roots tourism experience. Judging from some of the comments, it appears the credibility of the guides, their provision of full information about the history of the castles and the slave trade and their sensitivity to the feelings of the tourists were of paramount importance. Significantly, almost all comments concerning the tour guides were positive. Thus, the roots experience is greatly influenced by the tour guide. Roots destinations and attractions should concentrate on training and certifying tour guides to equip them with the requisite skills and qualifications to carry out their duties effectively.

Notes on contributor

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