



# Traditional food preferences of tourists in Ghana

Tourists in  
Ghana

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – Individuals including tourists are known to be selective as to what they consider as appropriate food. The purpose of this paper is to analyze the traditional foods consumed by international tourists during their stay in Ghana, using the Analytical Hierarchical Process Model.

**Design/methodology/approach** – The data used for the study were collected from a random sample of 675 out-bound international tourists in Ghana at the departure lounge of the Kotoka International Airport between February and March, 2010.

**Findings** – In total, 17 traditional foods were popular among Ghana's international tourists, with red red being the most favoured food whilst impotupotu was the least preferred food. It was concluded that Ghana has the potential to have a thriving local food industry that could be based on the seven topmost foods.

**Research limitations/implications** – As the first description of traditional food preferences among Ghana's international visitors, this study is intended to provide a strong point for more in-depth studies of the special qualities and attractiveness of the various traditional foods in Ghana.

**Practical implications** – The observation that international tourists on holiday in Ghana patronize a great variety of Ghanaian foods suggests that there is a substantial market of food-interested visitors that needs to be nurtured. The current awareness and interest in Ghanaian foods need to be sustained by improving on the packaging, service quality, and sanitary conditions of most eating places, as well as the efficiency of regulatory institutions including the Food and Drugs Board, the Ghana Standards Board, and the Ghana Tourists Board. Given that red red is more likely to sell or be consumed by Ghana's international visitors, food operators, including restaurants, food vendors, traditional catering points and hotels have to be sensitized to include this food item in their menus at all times.

**Social implications** – This finding also signifies that the country can reduce loss of revenue overseas if the large food imports to feed international tourists are reduced. The consumption of locally produced food items and the utilization of local ingredients in the preparation of tourist menus are known to reduce imports and leakage of tourism revenue from the local economy. The study also has a potential of assisting Ghana to project its culture through food. It has been established that traditional foods constitute essential components in the understanding of the culture of a society and also constitute an important medium for cultural expression.

**Originality/value** – This study makes a valuable contribution by highlighting tourists' tastes in Ghana. Finally, an insight into tourists' food consumption and preferences is vital to the maximization of the potential associated with tourism. Researchers such as Mitchell *et al.*, suggest that consumer behaviour research is important for stakeholders in the wine and food industry because it can help provide important insights into who the wine or food tourist is and how marketers – restaurant and café owners, bed and breakfast operators, food producers and managers – can effectively target and develop markets.

**Keywords** Ghana, Tourism, Food products, Consumer behaviour, Industry, Out-bound tourists, Preference, Traditional food

**Paper type** Research paper



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## Introduction

Much of the enjoyment in travel has been associated with dining out and sampling novel foods (Gee *et al.*, 1997). Thus, food is not only considered as a basic need, but as a major attraction to some destinations such as France and Italy (Sim, 2009). Even though food is basic and essential to life, people still have strong feelings about things that enter their mouths and the sensations these things produce. Hence, people, including tourists, are selective as to what they consider as appropriate food. One way of understanding how tourists relate to food is to study their food preferences or choices which are central to tourists' food ways.

At the destination level, an understanding of tourists' preferences and consumption of traditional foods is of paramount significance to a host country. On tourists' consumption and expenditure on food, traditional cuisines have been particularly found to be at the center of the maximization of returns available from tourism development at the destination level. The consumption of locally produced food items and the utilization of local ingredients in the preparation of tourist menus are known to reduce imports and leakage of tourism revenue from the local economy (Enteleca Research and Consultancy, 2001; Torres, 2002).

It is recognized that the kind of foods and drinks on offer for tourists can have major implications for the economic, cultural, and environmental sustainability of tourism destinations. Researchers have argued that a focus on locally sourced products can result in benefits for both the host and the guest (Boniface, 2003; Clark and Chabrel, 2007; Enteleca Research and Consultancy, 2001; Ilbery *et al.*, 2003; Torres, 2002; Woodland and Acott, 2007).

It has also been established that traditional foods constitute essential components in the understanding of the culture of a society, and, also, constitute an important medium for cultural expression (Fieldhouse, 1986). Thus, food comprises a substantial part of the appeal a destination offers. Scarpato (2002) contends that food satisfies all the conventional requirements of cultural products. Hence, tourism dining has increasingly become a major conduit for tourists to appreciate the local culture of a destination (Kivela and Crotts, 2006).

From the supply side, the term "traditional food" is defined as:

[...] a product frequently consumed or associated with specific celebrations and/or seasons, normally transmitted from one generation to another, made accurately in a specific way according to the gastronomic heritage, with little or no processing/manipulation, distinguished and known because of its sensory properties and associated with a certain local area, region or country (Guerrero *et al.*, 2009).

On the demand side, it is described as food and drink that is produced or grown in a local area or local specialty food that has a local identity (Nummedal and Hall, 2006).

Commonly, traditional food can be differentiated from non-local products in terms of distinct product characteristics, social features, and ecological features (Sage, 2003). For the purpose of this study, the term "traditional food" will encompass the indigenous Ghanaian foods such as *fufu*, *banku*, *nkrandukuno*, and *kelewele* that are locally produced and their ingredients locally grown.

Although there is a growing interest in research into food experiences in tourism, evidences suggest that research on tourists consumption of traditional foods is at its

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infancy (Cohen and Avieli, 2004; Kim *et al.*, 2009). Cohen and Avieli (2004) assert that eating and drinking remains virtually unexplored in the sociological and anthropological study of tourism notwithstanding their obvious centrality in the tourism experience. Aside these, the existing researches on food preferences have focused on Western countries with studies on tourists' food preferences in Africa including Ghana being scarce.

Despite the central role of dining in holiday experiences, the interface between food and tourism in Ghana has received scanty research attention (Ghana Tourist Board, 2003). Existing studies including Donkor (2006) and Osei-Kofi (2002), have focused on food safety and eating behaviour of locals at the expense of international tourists. Specifically, Osei-Kofi (2002) investigated into the safety of street food in the Cape Coast Metropolis of the Central Region of Ghana whilst Donkor examined cholera outbreak, personal hygiene and metropolitan bye-laws. This constitutes a knowledge gap that needs to be filled. Consequently, this study aims at investigating into the traditional food preferences of Ghana's international tourists. The specific objectives of the study include identifying the major traditional foods patronized by international tourists in Ghana, estimating the appeal of each food against the others in the food category, and exploring variations in the consumption of traditional foods across social groupings.

The motivations for the study are threefold: first, the study addresses one of the gaps that exist in tourists' food ways in Ghana. Although Ghana has promoted international tourism for nearly three decades, there is no detailed information on the food preferences of its international visitors. This study makes a valuable contribution by highlighting on tourists' tastes in Ghana. Second, as the first description of traditional food preferences among Ghana's international visitors, this study is intended to provide a strong point for more in-depth studies of the special qualities and attractiveness of the various traditional foods in Ghana. Finally, an insight into tourists' food consumption and preferences is vital to the maximization of the potentials of tourism at the local, district, national, and regional scale. Information on food preferences could be a useful indicator for farmers and food suppliers to know the kind of food stuffs and products on high demand on the market. In terms of marketing Mitchell *et al.* (2000) suggest that consumer behaviour research is important for stakeholders in the wine and food industry because it can help provide important insights into who the wine or food tourist is and how marketers – restaurant and café owners, bed and breakfast operators, food producers and managers – can effectively target and develop markets.

### **Tourists' food preferences**

Consumer preference is one of the themes in consumer behaviour research. Consumers are known to have preference for music, cars, housing, and food and drinks. Food preference, in general, refers to the selection of one food item over the other (Rozin and Volhmecke, 1986; Chang *et al.*, 2010). Following Chang *et al.* (2010), the term "food preference" in this study is used for tourists' expressed choice between two or more traditional food items at a destination.

### **Factors that influence tourists' food preference**

Many researchers have examined generally the factors that affect food preference (Khan, 1981; Randall and Sanjur, 1981; Wright *et al.*, 2001). Among the factors that have been associated with individuals' food choice and preference include place of origin, religion, age, sex, education, standard of living, and food availability.

Traditionally, the place of origin of individuals is known to determine which foods and food qualities are acceptable in terms of sensory properties (Prescott *et al.*, 2002). For instance, Pizam and Sussmann (1995) found that Japanese, French, and Italian tourists were perceived to avoid local foods in host destinations whilst their American counterparts were perceived to have slight preference for local food. Similarly, Telfer and Wall (2000) suggest that Asian tourists visiting Indonesia may consume more local dishes whereas European tourists may demand more foreign foods. Tse and Crotts (2005) also found that national culture is one of the four factors associated with culinary choice in Hong Kong.

Socio-demographic variables are the next set of variables that influence individual food preferences. Evidence suggests that age does not only influence the quantity of food eaten but the type and the eating place. Eating, including individuals' food preferences, has been observed to change with age, thus from childhood through adolescence to adulthood.

Sex is a physiological state that influences food preferences. Differences in food preferences between males and females have been reported (Einstein and Hornstein, 1970; Wyant and Meiselman, 1984). A consistent finding is that women prefer fruits and vegetables more than men. However, other studies indicate that differences in eating habits including food preferences between the sexes are not marked in the Western culture except for quantity and caloric intake (Sim, 2009).

Higher education normally tends to vary eating habits because more information about food is available, foods are subject to taboos and customs, and people travel more and try other traditional foods. Educational levels have been found to be related to nutrition knowledge by a number of investigators (O'Dennell, 1994; Woolcott *et al.*, 1981).

### **Research methodology**

The study was based on a random sample of 675 out-bound international tourists in Ghana at the departure lounge of the Kotoka International Airport between February and March 2010. The data were collected through a questionnaire which consisted of three sections: traditional food consumption by international tourists in Ghana, tourists' concerns on traditional foods offered in Ghana, and tourists' socio-demographic characteristics.

The first section focused on the traditional food consumption behaviour (including kinds of foods consumed and the eating places involved) of international tourists. In an open format, respondents were asked to state four of the traditional foods consumed during their holidays in Ghana. The approach provided the respondents with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge by writing the names of foods consumed. Self-reported frequency of food consumption is the preferred method of assessing dietary in-take in epidemiological studies (Thompson and Byers, 1994; Willet and

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Sampson, 1995). The second section covered concerns expressed by tourists on local foods. A five-point Likert scale (1 – strongly agreed, 2 – agreed, 3 – neutral, 4 – disagreed, 5 – strongly disagreed) was utilized to measure the food concerns in the areas of health, sanitation, culture, and information and communication. The section dealing with socio-demographic characteristics of tourists sought data about country of origin (used as proxy for culture), age, sex, marital status, educational attainment, and religion.

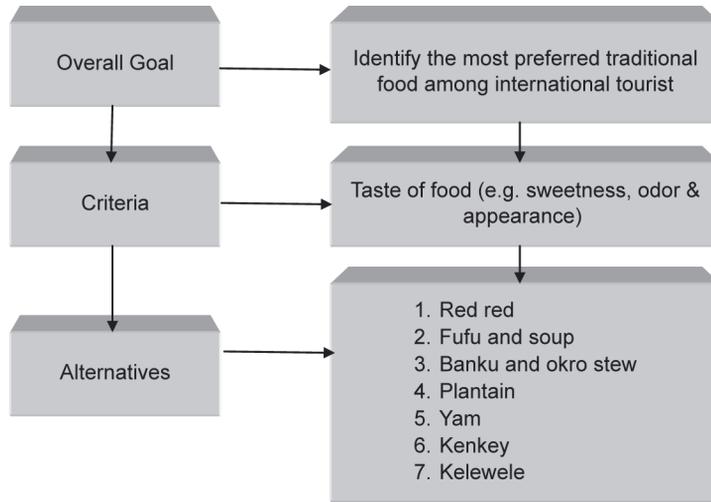
The questionnaire was pretested on a sample of 20 tourists in Cape Coast. This town was selected because it is the leading tourist destination in Ghana. The pilot survey helped the researcher to assess the viability of the instrument after which the necessary modifications were made. The questions were in English based on the assumptions that most of these tourists can read and write in English.

Departing flights of the major airlines including British Airways, KLM, Lufthansa, Emirates, Alitalia, and Virgin Airline were selected for the survey and permission was sought from the Ghana Civil Aviation Authority in that regard. These airlines were selected because of their regularity and operational links with the major tourism markets. Tourists travelling with the selected airlines were drawn systematically. This was done by selecting subjects at every third interval on their arrival at the departure lounge. Individuals who refused to participate in the survey were replaced before the next counting. The selected respondents were each given a self-administered questionnaire which they completed and returned to the researcher before boarding the aeroplane.

Two main statistical techniques namely the  $\chi^2$ -statistic and the analytical hierarchical process (AHP) model were applied on the data gathered on tourists' food preferences. The  $\chi^2$ -statistic was employed to explore whether significant relationships exist between respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and preference of traditional foods in Ghana at significant level of 0.05 while the AHP model developed by Saaty (1977) was employed to determine the relative preference for the seven topmost foods reported by Ghana's international tourists.

The model is underpinned by three fundamental calculation stages which involve scaling the elements involved, building a comparison matrix, and calculating the eigenvalues. The structure of the AHP model minimally consists of a goal, criteria and alternatives (Figure 1). The overall goal refers to the aim to be achieved at the end of the decision making; this involves identifying the most preferred traditional food in Ghana. Criteria refer to the factors which were used for selecting the most preferred traditional food. The criterion used for this particular decision is the taste of the foods involved. This was based on the observation that tourists from Europe are noted to demand for safe and tasty food products (Cayot, 2007). Rozin and Vollmecke (1986) define "taste" to include the degree of pleasantness of the sensory effects in the mouth or of their odor and appearance.

The alternatives refer to the various traditional foods available to tourists in Ghana. With specific reference to this analysis, there were seven topmost traditional foods patronized by the tourists. These were red red (fried ripe plantain and beans), *fufu* and soup, *banku* and *okro* stew, plantain, yam, *kenkey*, and *kelewele*.



**Figure 1.**  
Hierarchical structure of the problem

Food types	Frequency	%	Rank
Red red (fried ripe plantain with black eyed beans stew)	342	55.1	1
<i>Fufu</i> and soup (pounded cassava and unripe plantain with mutton light soup, peanut soup or palm nut soup)	339	54.6	2
<i>Banku</i> and <i>okro</i> stew (corn dough and cassava dough paste with <i>okro</i> soup, fish or meat)	288	46.4	3
Plantain (boiled plantain and palava sauce)	135	21.7	4
Yam (boiled or fried yam and palava sauce)	114	18.4	5
<i>Kenkey</i> and fish or stew (corndough balls boiled in dried plantain leaves)	70	11.4	6
<i>Kelewele</i> (spicy fried ripped plantain)	69	11.1	7
<i>Waakye</i> (boiled rice and black eye beans)	66	10.6	8
TZ (pounded corn past with ayoyo leave soup)	24	3.9	9
<i>Gari</i> and stew or (fried cassava granules soaked with warm or cold water with stew or fish)	21	3.4	10
<i>Tuwo</i> (rice paste balls with peanut soup or palm nut soup)	15	2.4	11
Cassava (boiled cassava with nkontonbra stew)	13	2.0	12
<i>Koko</i> (corn dough or millet porridge)	12	1.9	13
<i>Akple</i> (cassava dough past with <i>okro</i> soup)	9	1.4	14
<i>Nkrandokono</i> (corn and cassava dough paste boiled in corn hask)	6	1.0	15
Plantain chips (fied thin slices of unripe plantain)	6	1.0	16
<i>Impotupotu</i> (mashed cocoyam stew)	5	0.6	17

**Table I.**  
Traditional food preferences of international tourists in Ghana

The AHP evaluation was performed based on tourists' judgement of the relative preference for the alternatives with respect to the taste of the foods. The preference scale was based on the self-reported frequency of the food consumed presented in Table I. Given the judgments about the relative importance and preference, a mathematical process was used to calculate priorities for the seven most patronized foods with respect to taste. This produced a seven by seven matrix which is presented

in Table II. The matrix is divided into two halves by a diagonal (values above the diagonal consist of the main rating while those below consist of the reciprocals).

Once the matrix of pairwise comparison was constructed, the next step was to calculate the priority of each of the traditional foods compared. Here the values in Table II were used to estimate the priority of each of the seven most preferred Ghanaian foods. This was achieved by building a normalized matrix. The calculation involved:

- summing up the values of each column of the pairwise comparison matrix in Table II.
- dividing the entries in each column by the total of each column to obtain the normalized matrix in Table II.
- obtaining an average of each row of the normalized matrix by adding the entries in a row and then dividing by the number of the entries in a row (Table III). The averages were taken as the estimates' of the overall priorities for the foods in terms of taste.

**Results of the study**

*The patronage of traditional foods by tourists*

In order to ascertain the traditional foods patronized by tourists during their stay in Ghana, the respondents were asked to state any four traditional foods they consumed while in Ghana. Reported frequencies of foods consumed by Ghana's international tourists are shown in Table I. Using the raw scores of the respondents, the relative preference of 17 traditional foods were derived. The overall most preferred traditional

Food types	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7
X1 – Red red	–	1.01	1.19	2.53	3.00	4.82	4.96
X2 – <i>Fufu</i> and soup	0.99	–	1.18	2.51	2.97	4.77	4.91
X3 – <i>Banku</i> and <i>okro</i> stew	0.84	0.85	–	2.13	2.53	4.06	4.17
X4 – Plantain	0.39	0.40	0.47	–	1.18	1.90	1.96
X5 – Yam	0.33	0.34	0.40	0.84	–	1.61	1.65
X6 – <i>Kenkey</i>	0.21	0.21	0.25	0.53	0.62	–	1.03
X7 – <i>Kelewele</i>	0.20	0.20	0.24	0.51	0.61	0.97	–
Total	3.97	4.01	4.72	10.06	11.91	19.13	19.68

**Table II.**  
Full pairwise matrix based on tourist taste preference

Food type	X1	X2	X3	X4	X5	X6	X7	Average
X1 – Red red	0.252	0.252	0.252	0.252	0.252	0.252	0.252	0.252
X2 – <i>Fufu</i> and soup	0.250	0.249	0.249	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250	0.250
X3 – <i>Banku</i> and stew	0.212	0.212	0.212	0.212	0.212	0.212	0.212	0.212
X4 – Plantain	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.099	0.099
X5 – Yam	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084	0.084
X6 – <i>Kenkey</i>	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.052	0.052
X7 – <i>Kelewele</i>	0.051	0.051	0.051	0.051	0.051	0.051	0.051	0.051
Total	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00

**Table III.**  
Normalized matrix based on the comparison matrix values

foods were red red (55.1 per cent), followed closely by *fufu* and soup (54.6 per cent), *banku* and stew (46.4 per cent), boiled plantain (21.7 per cent), yam (18.4 per cent), *kenkey* (11.4 per cent), *kelewele* (11.1 per cent), *waakye* (10.6 per cent), *tuwo zafi* (3.9 per cent), *gari* (3.4 per cent), *tuwo* (2.4 per cent), cassava (2.0 per cent), *koko* (1.9 per cent), *akple* (1.9 per cent), *nkrandokono* (1.0 per cent), plantain chips (0.8 per cent), and *impotupotu* (0.6 per cent) in that order.

#### *Relative preference of Ghanaian foods*

In order to determine the relative standing of each traditional food reported by the respondents, a second stage analysis was carried out. Table II presents the result of the comparison analysis. The result shows that, in the context of the traditional foods available to tourists, red red was 4.96 times preferred to *kelewele* whilst *kelewele* was 0.20 times preferred to red red (Table II). The comparison matrix helps to assess the appeal of one traditional food against another and to predict consumer purchase innate.

The AHP model also facilitated the calculation of the overall priorities of the seven topmost foods involved in the exercise. The row averages of 0.252, 0.250, 0.212, 0.099, 0.084, 0.052, and 0.051 provide the approximation of the general preferences of the seven topmost traditional foods. The result suggests that the likelihood of an international tourist in Ghana consuming red red is 0.252 whilst those of *fufu* and *kelewele* were 0.250 and 0.051, respectively, (Table III).

#### *Traditional food preference by respondents' profile*

This section explores the influence of respondents' socio-demographic characteristics on tourists' local food preference in Ghana. It is an established fact that tourists' consumption and food preference at destinations are influenced by socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (Axelson, 1986). The socio-demographic variables used in the study were place of origin, sex, age, marital status, educational attainment, and religion.

Table IV presents the  $\chi^2$  results revealing the significance of the relationships between the frequency of tourists' consumption of traditional foods and their socio-demographic characteristics. With the exception of marital status, significant relationships were established for the other five variables examined in this analysis.

The result showed that a significant relationship existed between place of origin and preference of traditional foods in Ghana ( $p = 0.000$ ). Table IV suggests that while tourists from North America (28 per cent) were more oriented to the consumption of *banku* and stew, those from Scandinavia (35 per cent) and Europe (25 per cent) favoured red red over the others. It was evident from the result that tourists from Scandinavia shunned boiled plantain, yam, and *kelewele* whilst their counterparts from the Oceania ignored *kenkey* and yam (Table IV).

In the same vein, a significant relationship was established between sex and tourists' preference for Ghanaian foods ( $p = 0.001$ ). A greater percentage of males, more than females, reported eating *fufu* and soup (31 per cent) and *banku* and stew (23 per cent). In contrast, the female tourists showed more preference for boiled plantain (11 per cent), yam (9 per cent), *kenkey* (6 per cent) and *kelewele* (5.8 per cent). Red red

**Table IV.**  
Tourists' food preferences by respondents' socio-demographic characteristics

Individual profile	<i>Banku</i> (%)	Yam (%)	Plantain (%)	<i>Fufu</i> (%)	Kenkey (%)	Red red (%)	<i>Kelewele</i> (%)	( $\chi^2$ ) ( <i>p</i> -value)
<i>Country of origin</i>								
North America	27.8	3.2	9.6	24.1	3.7	25.1	6.4	0.000
Europe	14.3	13.4	11.3	25.5	6.1	25.1	4.3	
Scandinavia	28.6	0.0	0.0	28.6	7.1	35.7	0.0	
Oceania	36.4	9.1	0.0	18.2	0.0	27.3	9.1	
Asia	33.3	0.0	11.1	33.3	11.1	11.1	0.0	
<i>Sex</i>								
Male	22.9	7.0	8.3	30.6	3.2	24.2	3.8	0.000
Female	20.3	9.2	10.8	22.0	6.1	25.8	5.8	
<i>Age</i>								
<35	22.2	9.1	9.1	26.0	3.6	24.9	5.0	0.000
35-55	20.6	5.9	5.8	19.1	13.2	26.5	5.9	
>55	8.7	4.3	26.1	26.1	4.3	26.1	4.3	
<i>Marital status</i>								
Single	22.3	8.9	10.0	23.4	5.1	25.1	5.1	0.224
Married	17.9	6.9	9.8	30.4	4.9	25.5	4.9	
<i>Education</i>								
High school	21.5	10.1	10.1	25.3	1.3	26.6	5.1	0.000
University	22.0	7.7	8.4	27.3	5.6	25.5	3.5	
Post graduate	18.4	9.2	14.9	17.2	6.9	23.0	10.3	
<i>Religion</i>								
Christians	18.4	8.1	9.8	26.1	6.0	25.6	6.0	0.000
Muslims	25.0	0.0	0.0	37.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	
Atheists	22.7	9.2	11.0	23.9	3.7	26.4	3.1	
Buddhists	27.3	18.2	0.0	18.2	9.1	18.2	9.1	
Jews	25.6	0.0	0.0	28.6	0.0	28.6	14.3	

**Note:** Significant level set: 0.05

appeared to be popular among both sexes (female – 26 per cent, male – 24 per cent), but slightly favoured by the female tourists (Table IV).

In the tourism trade, a person's age is known to have effects on his or her interest, taste, and risk-taking behaviour (Hawkins *et al.*, 1989). A significant relationship was observed between age and tourists' preference for traditional foods in Ghana. Both the young (26 per cent) and the elderly (26 per cent) favoured *fufu* whilst their middle aged counterparts rather favoured red red (27 per cent). It was observed that tourists' consumption of traditional foods such as *banku*, yam, and *kelewele* decreased with age whilst that of plantain and red red increased with age (Table IV). Thus, as the age of tourists increased, their consumption of plantain also increased.

Unlike the three variables, no significant relationship was established between marital status and preference of traditional foods in Ghana ( $p > 0.05$ ). However, a greater percentage of the unmarried tourists favoured *banku* and stew whilst their married counterparts preferred *fufu* (30 per cent). With the exception of *fufu*, the

consumption of the other foods was higher among the unmarried than among the married.

Education is among the variables that are known to influence people's preference for goods and services including food. A significant relationship was established between tourists' educational attainment and their preference for Ghanaian foods ( $p = 0.000$ ). Red red was found to be the most preferred traditional food among both the high school graduates (27.0 per cent) and the post graduates (24.0 per cent), but much higher among the former. Unlike their counterparts, the university graduates were more oriented to *fufu* (27.0 per cent). Table IV shows that the consumption of red red, *fufu*, *banku*, and yam decreased with education whereas those of plantain, *kenkey* and *kelewele* increase with education.

Another important variable that is known to influence people's food behaviour and preferences is religion (Hassan and Hall, 2003). The  $\chi^2$  analysis revealed a significant relationship between religion and tourists' preferences for traditional foods in Ghana. The result shows that both the Moslem (38 per cent) and Christian (26.0 per cent) tourists were attracted more to *fufu* and soup whilst the Jews (28 per cent) and Atheists (26 per cent) were more attracted to red red. Unlike the others, the Buddhists were in favour of *banku* and stew. Overall, the demand for *banku*, *fufu*, and red red was relatively high among all the religious groups. On the other hand, boiled plantain appeared to be less attractive to most of the religious groups, particularly, among the Moslems, the Buddhists, and the Jews (Table IV).

### Discussion

The 17 traditional foods found on the tourists' food preference list reveal the emerging popularity of Ghanaian foods among international tourists. The study reveals that international tourists on holidays in Ghana patronize a great variety of Ghanaian foods. Tourists were not only able to identify the local foods they consumed, but were also able to write the names of the foods thereby demonstrating knowledge about them.

The high consumption of traditional foods by tourists in Ghana was expected. Evidence suggests that today's tourists are in favour of consuming "local" foods over familiar foods during their holidays because there is a conviction that if you want to be a "good traveller", as opposed to an "irresponsible tourist" (Rojek, 1993), you must engage in these regional specialities. Previous research has shown that "local" foods are popular because they are associated with a host of values such as being better for the environment, conserving "traditional" rural landscapes, and supporting the local economy. There is, therefore, a "feel-good" factor associated with consuming them (Allen and Hinrichs, 2007; Boniface, 2003; Enteleca Research and Consultancy, 2001).

The result of the AHP model revealed that the likelihood of a visitor in Ghana eating *red red* (0.252) is higher than any other local food. Tourists' high preference for *red red* may be related to the human innate taste biases. Ripe plantain has sweet taste that attracts both humans and animals, particularly birds to it. Rozin and Vollmecke (1986) indicate that humans, as biological creatures, have innate preferences and liking for sweet tastes (present at birth and measurable either by enhanced acceptance of sweetened water through the portrayal a positive facial expression). Although similar

findings had been established in adults, the liked level of sweetness has been found to vary greatly among individuals.

Even though *fufu* emerged as the second most preferred local food, it was flagged as an environmentally unfriendly food that should not be vigorously promoted for tourists' consumption. Traditionally, the pounding of *fufu* involves the use of mortar and pestle which are curved from tree stems. Cutting of trees for the production of the *fufu*-related implements contributes in part to the depletion of Ghana's forest cover. This suggests that the high demand for *fufu* by tourists could impart negatively on the environment.

The observed significant relationship between place of origin and tourists' food preference support the popular notion that place of origin shapes the food ways of people. The study revealed that whilst tourists from North America were oriented to the consumption of *banku* and *okro* stew, their counterparts from Scandinavia favoured red red. Duesenberry (1949) observed that all of the activities in which people engage are culturally determined, and that all purchases of goods, including food, are made either to provide physical comfort or to implement the activities that make up the life of a group of people.

The significant relationships established between place of origin, age, sex, education, and religion on the one hand and tourists' food preference on the other hand reflect the complex interrelations and interactions among individuals, place of origin, and society on the food ways of tourists. This finding supports the notion of many investigators that many factors combine to influence people's eating behaviour (Axelson, 1986; Rozin and Vollmecke, 1986).

## Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate into the traditional food preferences of Ghana's international visitors. The data used for the analysis were collected from a random sample of 675 out-bound international tourists in Ghana at the departure lounge of the Kotoka International Airport between February and March 2010. Based on the main findings, seven main conclusions were drawn. First, it is evident from the results that Ghana has a potential of having a thriving local food industry that could be based on the seven topmost reported consumed foods. These traditional foods appeared to be on high demand in all the eating places considered in the study, and, also, among visitors from most of the countries including the UK, the USA, Germany, and The Netherlands. Urry (1990) and Wang (1999) have argued that tourists look for "typical" signs of places that accord with their own perceptions, and it seems the top Ghanaian foods could serve that purpose. Thus, the study revealed that traditional foods could become one of the significant factors that can attract tourists to Ghana.

Red red which emerged as the most popular local food among Ghana's international tourists could provide a medium through which visitors can connect with the people of Ghana. Researchers including Kneafsey *et al.* (2004) and Clark and Chabrel (2007) indicate that "local" food can help to "reconnect" consumers with the people and places that produce them. They argue that unlike other popular souvenirs such as a decorative key-ring or craft items, foods and drinks engage all the senses and have stronger connections with a place because humans have personal and sensory

memories of consuming them in that setting. This ability of food to recall emotions could be capitalized on by districts, nations, and regions to use traditional foods to reconnect, to attract, or to cause tourists to repeat visits.

Tourists' food preference could serve as valuable input for farmers and food retailers in destinations, districts, nations and regions where tourism plays a significant role in the national development. Thus, tourists' food preference could be a good pointer to the kind of food products on demand at the market. With specific reference to Ghana, the result suggested that there was potential market for plantain. The extra demand generated by international visitors by consuming local foods could motivate the existing farmers to expand their farms, and, also to attract new individuals (particularly the unemployed youth) to enter into the production of such products. It further implied that the government needs to support the improvements in productivity and production systems of these products. Often, the support required by such small scale farmers includes the improvement of infrastructure in rural areas, the provision of loans, and the provision of extension services.

The results provide a baseline data for future longitudinal and comparative analyses of international tourists' traditional food preferences. Evidence suggests that human taste and preferences for food is not static but changes with time and age (Drewnowski and Hann, 1999; O'Dennell, 1994) According to symbolic interactionists, objects including food have no fixed status, and they can undergo changes in their meaning. Hence, the need to monitor changes in tourists' food preferences over time.

In addition, the understanding of what tourists consume and the ability to develop appropriate food tourism strategies have been noted to broaden destinations appeal and consequently encourage more "first time visitors" to return (Langton, 1996). Moreso, researchers such as Thomson (1988) and Drewnowski and Hann (1999) argue that much of consumer marketing rests on the premise that self-reported food preferences can predict the frequency of actual food consumption.

The study also yields scientific data that can form the basis of Ghana's food tourism decision making and the marketing of traditional foods in the major tourism markets. Quan and Wang (2004) maintain that an in-depth understanding of tourists' different food preferences and dining behaviours is required to enable destination marketers, hospitality businesses, and tour operators face the challenge of how to appropriately portray and present their local cuisines as an attraction.

Finally, the research supports the growing body of literature which conclude that socio-demographic characteristics including sex, age, educational attainment, place of origin, and religion are important factors influencing food ways of tourists. It is evident from the study that with the exception of marital status, significant relationships existed between the rest of the socio-demographic variables and tourists' traditional food preferences.

### **Implication for practice and research**

The observation that international tourists on holidays in Ghana patronize a great variety of Ghanaian foods suggests that there is a substantial market of food-interested visitors that need to be nurtured. The current awareness and interest in Ghanaian foods need to be sustained by improving on the packaging, service quality, and

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sanitary conditions of most eating places as well as the efficiency of regulatory institutions including the Food and Drugs Board, the Ghana Standards Board, and the Ghana Tourists Board. This finding also signifies that the country can to reduce loss of revenue overseas if the because of large food imports to feed international tourists is reduced. The consumption of locally produced food items and the utilization of local ingredients in the preparation of tourist menus are known to reduce imports and leakage of tourism revenue from the local economy (Enteleca Research and Consultancy, 2001; Torres, 2002).

The relative preference analysis of Ghanaian foods, which helped to assess the appeal of one traditional food against another indicated that red red was 4.96 times preferred over the other traditional foods considered in the study. This implies that red red is more likely to sell or be consumed by Ghana's international visitors, hence food operators, including restaurants, food vendors, traditional catering points and hotels have to be sensitized to include this food item in their menus at all times. It is also an indication that red red has to be made the core food for maximizing the returns available from the traditional food industry.

The significant relationships established between place of origin, age, sex, education attainment, and religion on one hand and tourists' preference for traditional foods denote that socio-demographic characteristics of the international visitors can be used to segment Ghana's international food market. Segmentation involves breaking large markets into manageable ones (Gartner, 1996). The reason for segmentation is simply to reduce large populations into smaller ones that can be targeted for specific marketing programmes. It evident from the study that geographic markets could be formed based on the traditional food preference of the visitors. As observed from the study, tourists from America were more oriented to the consumption of *banku* and stew whilst their counterparts from Scandinavia and Europe favoured red red over the others.

In the same vein, the  $\chi^2$  results suggest that respondents profile such as age, sex, education attainment, and religion could serve as important variables for segmenting Ghana's international food market. At the global scale, the finding reinforces the popular notion that socio-demographic characteristics are useful variables for segmenting the global tourism market including the food-interested visitors.

Since marketing research is an ongoing process which involves the reassessment of choice strategies and the detection of changes over time, it would be in line with marketing practice that similar studies are conducted regularly to help determine the changes in international tourists' food tastes of traditional foods available in Ghana. This would help to institute corrective mechanisms to address gaps in the traditional food industry, and, also, to deal with the increasing food needs of tourists.

Another future research that is recommended for consideration is consumer analysis. Commonly, once current users of products, including traditional foods, are identified, further analysis is needed to be conducted with current and potential users to determine how product attributes are perceived (Gartner, 1996). Often, how consumers perceive the tourism product(s) offered ultimately determines long-term potential for growth and development.

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