



Research note

Accommodation preference among international volunteer tourists in the Kumasi Metropolis of Ghana



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ABSTRACT

Generally, most studies on volunteer tourism have placed an emphasis on motivations and experiences of participants ignoring a significant component of tourism –accommodation. This paper is an attempt to unravel accommodation preference among international volunteer tourists focusing on homestay facilities in Ghana. The data are derived from a study of 151 volunteer tourists in Kumasi, Ghana. The primary reasons for the choice of homestay accommodation included a wish to better immerse themselves in the host community and to aid social interaction but differences are found on the basis of gender, level of education and other socio-demographic variables.

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1. Introduction

The growth of volunteer tourism research has been tremendous for the past decade (Chen & Chen, 2011) as the phenomenon has attracted various studies in different geographical regions under varied themes (Benson, 2005). For some scholars, volunteer tourism as an alternative form of tourism has the ability to enhance mutual understanding (Wearing, 2001) and act as an agent of sustainable growth (McGehee & Santos, 2005). Conversely, other researchers view it with a pessimistic lens; as they believe it can perpetuate inequality, dependency and, more so, thwart developmental programs in developing countries (Guttentag, 2009). Although, the phenomenon could also be used as a two-edge sword of promoting cultural understanding and misunderstanding (Raymond & Hall, 2008). According to Wearing (2001, p. 1), volunteer tourists refer to tourists who “for various reasons volunteer in an organized way to undertake holidays that might involve aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment”. For Chen and Chen (2011, p. 426), volunteer tourism is clearly a tourism activity incorporating volunteer services that are concerned about environmental, cultural, or humanitarian issues and intends to benefit not only tourists but also locals. It is worth mentioning that despite the massive development toward defining the concept, there is still lack of consensus of key components of volunteer tourism (McGehee, 2012).

Several studies have been conducted on volunteer tourism recently. However, most featured themes under volunteer tourism studies

include volunteer tourism motivations (Henderson, 1981; Callanan & Thomas, 2005; Rehberg, 2005; Brown, 2005; Rhoden, Ineson, & Ralston, 2010; Sin, 2009; Brown 2005; Chen & Chen, 2011; Lo & Lee, 2011; Coghlan & Fennell, 2009; Gage & Thapa, 2012; Grimm & Needham, 2012), volunteer tourism experiences (Wearing, 2001; Broad, 2003; Halpenny & Caissie, 2003; Coghlan, 2005; Gray & Campbell, 2007; McIntosh & Zahra, 2007; Lepp, 2009; Tamazos & Butler, 2012; Coghlan & Fennell, 2009), volunteer tourism expectations (Chen & Chen, 2011), gap-year volunteer tourism (Lyons, Hanley, Wearing, & Neil, 2012; Simpson, 2004), volunteer tourism and conservation (Cousins, 2007; Cousins, Evans, & Saddler, 2009; Lorimer, 2008; Rattan, Eagles, & Mair, 2011) and the development of volunteer tourism models (Ayobami, Ismail, & Oluyinka, 2012) and theoretical frameworks (McGehee, 2012). Whereas the results of some of the above-mentioned empirical studies are consistent with existing literature, others are inconsistent. In an illuminating paper on volunteer tourism motivations, Chen and Chen (2011) grouped eleven themes dealing with motivations into three main broad themes of personal, interpersonal and others. According to the authors, four personal factors were measured. They include authentic experience, interest in travel, challenge/stimulation, and other interest. The authors, additionally, found four interpersonal factors –desire to help, interaction with locals/cultures, encouraged by others, and enhancing relationships. Finally, other factors include unique style of the trip, time/money, and organization goal which were described by the authors as consistent with previous studies.

While the above empirical studies demonstrate a good start, many researchers concur that volunteer tourism needs both further examinations through a variety of empirical studies (Wearing & Ponting, 2009). Most of the aforementioned themes have neglected a key specific component of tourism, accommodation. Thus, very little attention has been paid to the

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accommodation preference of volunteer tourists. Since volunteer tourists by definition are not limited to volunteering only but other touristic activities (Broad, 2003); a key component of tourism, which is accommodation cannot be left out in the volunteer tourism literature. Insights gained from this study will enhance volunteer tourists' experience and contribute to the preservation of locals' culture. Unlike previous studies on volunteer tourism, the present study seeks to examine why international volunteer tourists prefer homestay accommodation in the Kumasi Metropolis of Ghana.

2. Methods

Since the study had volunteers as the main target population, volunteer institutions were used to get to respondents. Four volunteer organizations that use homestay as the main form of accommodation were purposively selected. They included Projects Abroad, Light for Children, School for International Training (SIT) and Students and Youth Travel Organisation (SYTO). The named NGOs had over 50 homes which were all included due to the quantitative nature of the study. Only volunteer tourists aged 18 years and above who were living in homestay accommodation within the study period of June–August constituted the target population for the study. Convenience sampling was used to obtain participants. This method was chosen due to the limited time frame within which the researcher had to conduct this study. The use of convenience sample in instances like this has been supported by Rattan et al. (2011). Questionnaires were administered personally at various homes by the researcher during the period of June to August.

Questionnaires were developed based on both literature on homestay and volunteer tourism from the works of Wang (2007), Chen and Chen, (2011) and Lo and Lee (2011) and were self-administered which took a maximum of 10 min to complete.

3. Results

Table 1 presents a cross-tabulation of tourists' profile and their originating regions. From the table, about 51.1% of volunteers from North America were males with a minority of 48.9% being female volunteers.

Table 1
Originating region by respondents' profile.

Profile	Originating regions			
	North America (%)	Europe (%)	Asia (%)	Oceania (%)
Gender				
Male	51.1	34.1	0.0	50.0
Female	48.9	65.9	100.0	50.0
Age				
<20	46.0	62.9	50.0	50.0
20–24	50.0	27.4	25.0	0.0
25–29	4.0	3.0	25.0	50.0
30+	0.0	6.7	0.0	0.0
Level of education				
Secondary	32.8	26.6	0.0	100.0
Tertiary (non-degree)	25.6	16.8	0.0	0.0
Tertiary (degree)	41.6	56.6	100.0	0.0
Marital status				
Unmarried	100.0	93.2	100.0	96.3
Married	0.0	6.8	0.0	3.7
Occupation				
Student	93.9	79.2	75.0	50.0
Teacher	0.0	19.2	0.0	0.0
Travel advisor	0.0	1.6	0.0	0.0
Banker	6.1	0.0	0.0	50.0
National service personnel	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0
Religion				
Christianity	80.9	58.3	25.0	0.0
Atheism	13.4	36.0	50.0	100.0
Buddhism	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0
Judaism	5.7	5.7	0.0	0.0

The results were different for that of Europe as more than half (65.9%) of European volunteers who stayed in homestay accommodation were females with about 34.1% being males. However, results of North America differed from the general picture as male volunteers preferred homestay to their female counterparts. Generally, majority of volunteer tourists who stayed in homestay accommodation were found in 18–24 age brackets. With the exception of respondents from Oceania (Secondary = 100%), almost the majority of volunteers from the other generating regions have obtained a higher level of education: North America (41.6%), Europe (56.6%) and Asia (100%). Generally, respondents were students which could be perhaps attributed to the so called gap years which give students ample time to travel and volunteer in deprived communities around the world (Lyons et al., 2012).

The study found that three main accommodation types were preferred by volunteer tourists. They include homestay (62.1%), guest house (22.3%) and hotel (15.6%). Moreover, significant relationship was recorded between respondents' socio-demographics and their accommodation preferences using the chi-square statistic (Table 2).

In furtherance, the study revealed that five main reasons account for volunteer tourists' preference of homestay. They include cultural immersion (25.3%), community service and development (22.2%), social interaction (20.1%), cheap price (19.2%), security and warmth of home (13.2%). In order to examine the influence of respondents' socio-demographics on their reasons for choosing homestay accommodation, the chi-square test statistic was adopted to achieve this objective. The study revealed a significant relationship between respondents' sex, age, level of education and religion and their reasons for choosing homestay (Table 3). However, a different pattern was recorded for marital status of respondents as the test statistic detected no significant relationship between respondents' reasons for homestay accommodation and their marital status (Table 3). Influence of the reasons for choosing homestay on respondents' accommodation preferences was tested using the chi-square statistic. The study revealed a significant relationship between the reasons for choosing homestay and the accommodation preference of respondents (Table 4).

4. Conclusion

Employing a quantitative approach, this study examined the reasons for choosing homestay by volunteer tourists and, moreover, explored

Table 2
Accommodation preference by respondents' profile.

Profile	Accommodation preference			χ^2 statistic df P-value
	Homestay (%)	Hotel (%)	Guest house (%)	
Gender				
Male	42.5	30.1	27.4	$\chi^2 = 18.02$
Female	56.5	14.2	29.3	df = 2 *P = 0.000
Age				
<20	60.9	18.8	20.4	$\chi^2 = 83.53$
20–24	43.2	20.6	36.2	df = 6
25–29	30.0	19.1	50.9	*P = 0.000
30+	13.3	66.0	20.7	
Level of education				
Secondary	63.6	15.2	21.2	$\chi^2 = 22.31$
Tertiary (non-degree)	31.5	27.0	41.5	df = 4
Tertiary (degree)	51.3	20.9	27.8	*P = 0.000
Marital status				
Unmarried	50.3	20.2	29.5	$\chi^2 = 6.25$
Married	60.3	26.7	13.0	df = 2 P = 0.44
Religion				
Christianity	42.9	26.7	30.4	$\chi^2 = 36.41$
Atheism	64.3	10.9	24.8	df = 6
Buddhism	33.3	20.0	46.7	*P = 0.000
Judaism	70.3	13.0	16.7	

* Significant at $P < 0.05$.

Table 3
Reasons for choosing homestay facilities by respondents' profile.

Profile	Reasons					χ^2 statistic df P-value
	Cultural Immersion (%)	Cheap price (%)	Community service and development (%)	Security and warmth of home (%)	Social interaction (%)	
Gender						
Male	41.3	54.5	35.5	22.2	34.0	$\chi^2 = 20.54$ df = 4 *P = 0.000
Female	58.7	45.5	64.5	77.8	66.0	
Age						
<20	40.0	56.9	51.1	39.4	57.4	$\chi^2 = 29.88$ df = 12 *P = 0.003
20–24	28.1	27.7	28.4	30.3	17.1	
25–29	14.2	12.3	3.5	9.1	10.6	
30+	17.7	3.1	17.0	21.2	14.9	
Level of education						
Secondary	25.6	22.7	29.1	35.4	55.3	$\chi^2 = 33.17$ df = 8 *P = 0.000
Tertiary (non-degree)	15.9	25.8	24.1	20.2	21.3	
Tertiary (degree)	58.5	51.5	46.8	44.4	23.4	
Marital status						
Unmarried	95.0	95.5	96.5	96.0	93.6	$\chi^2 = 0.889$ df = 4 P = 0.926
Married	5.0	4.5	3.5	4.0	6.4	
Religion						
Christianity	53.5	60.6	55.3	56.6	42.6	$\chi^2 = 21.37$ df = 12 *P = 0.045
Atheism	23.6	28.8	29.1	27.3	36.2	
Buddhism	11.7	7.6	11.3	14.1	10.6	
Judaism	11.2	3.0	4.3	2.0	10.6	

* Significant at $P < 0.05$.

the relationship between volunteer tourists' socio-demographics and the reasons for choosing homestay. All volunteer tourists preferred homestay due to its ability to provide a platform for cultural immersion. Indeed, volunteering in local communities was also but one of the many means of traveling to different destinations to “learn about local cultures” or to “go beyond superficial tour packages where you don't see how people really live” (Sin, 2009, p. 497). Moreover, Chen and Chen's (2011) study of the “Chinese Village Traditions” expedition held in an underdeveloped village in Shaanxi, 2008 revealed that living and working with locals is a characteristic of volunteer tourism trips. Hence, volunteer tourists preferred to stay with a host family during the expedition, offering them deeper cultural interaction. According to Callanan and Thomas (2005), deep volunteers are community centered and think more about the community than themselves. Hence, despite the sharp difference between volunteer tourists and hosts' cultures, the former preferred to stay with local community than opting for a standardized accommodation option that might be less challenging. As a result, volunteer tourists in this study fall into the deep volunteer tourists grouping by Callanan and Thomas (2005).

The present study has revealed the significant role of homestay in volunteer tourism which is consistent with other studies. In previous

studies, some scholars were of the view that homestay accommodation helps augment the experience of volunteer tourists (Sin, 2010), others were of the opinion that homestay enhances the sustainability of volunteer tourism causing most volunteer tourists to prefer it to other forms of tourist's accommodation. This view has been empirically confirmed by Broad (2003) in his ethnographic case study in Phuket, Thailand. Moreover, since volunteer tourists spend so much on their travel cost (Sin, 2010), a more cheaper and comfortable accommodation becomes more preferable. Consequently, given the significant role of homestay in volunteer tourism as indicated in this study, it is imperative that homestay facilities are packaged to meet the needs of volunteer tourists to enhance their experience.

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Table 4
Reasons for choosing homestay by accommodation preference.

Reasons	Accommodation preference			χ^2 statistic df P-value
	Homestay (%)	Hotel (%)	Guest house (%)	
Cultural immersion	76.3	18.4	5.3	$\chi^2 = 1.516$ df = 8 *P = 0.000
Community service	56.2	7.0	36.8	
Social interaction	50.9	16.9	32.2	
Cheap price	58.6	13.8	27.6	
Security and warmth	35.0	50.0	15.0	

* Significant at $P < 0.05$.

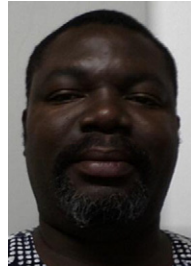
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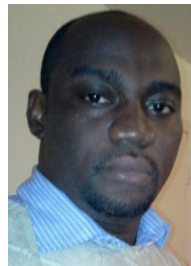
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