

‘Beyond Business as Usual’: Implications of Tourist Experiences for Ecotourism Development

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Abstract

This study examines benefits and experiences of tourists to Bobiri Forest Reserve and Butterfly Sanctuary in Ghana and how management of the site can benefit from additional insights from the System's model, the 3Ps (Personnel, Physical evidence and Process management) of service marketing and Beeho and Prentice's (1997) ASEB (Activities, Settings, Experiences and Benefits) demi grid analysis. The study employed mixed-method approach involving data from the visitors' book and in-depth interviews with staff of the Sanctuary. In total 2401 visitors made comments during the period of 2009 to 2014. The data from the visitors' book were analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics in IBM SPSS version 21. The qualitative data from the interviews were subjected to thematic explication. The study revealed benefits and experiences of the tourists to the Sanctuary to include closeness to nature, adventure tour, research, education, birding and volunteerism, among others. The conclusion echoes the need for attention to the nexus of benefits and experiences of tourists and makes recommendations for marketing of the Sanctuary towards ecotourism development.

Keywords: Ecotourism, Tourist Experiences, Service Marketing, Visitors' book, Ghana

Introduction

Tourism as a global phenomenon is increasingly gaining the attention of diverse entrepreneurs, nation-states and organisations (Mowforth and Munt, 2003; Komppula, 2006; Buckley, 2009; Hall, 2010; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2010; Pirselimoglu and Demirel, 2012; Eshun, 2014; Hampton and Jeyacheya, 2014; Rogerson, 2015). To the United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNTWO), in 2015 international tourism exceeded 1.2 billion, contributed 10% of the global gross domestic product (GDP) and 6% of world's export which is about US\$1.5 trillion. Also the tourism industry is increasingly being characterised by hypercompetition (Theobald, 1998; Swarbrooke, 1999). For instance, in the 1950s countries in Europe and the Americas held 71% of the travel market, but by 2002 they held only 35% (Fennell, 2008). Many authors also argue that the rise of some destinations in Southern countries is linked to the increasing demand for their natural areas (Hvenegaard, 1994; Lawrence et al., 1997; Eagles and McCool., 2002; Akama, 2004; Stronza and Gordillo, 2008; Nunkoo and Ramkissoon, 2010; Duvic et al., 2014; The International Ecotourism Society [TIES], 2006; Tran and Walter, 2014). As a result, Hall (2010) emphasises that nature-based tourism and ecotourism are some of the clearest examples of how tourism benefits from biodiversity conservation. To the UNWTO (2005), in 2004, nature-based tourism was

growing globally three times faster than the tourism industry as a whole. Globally, some 44,000 sites have met the IUCN definition of a protected area, which together comprise 10 percent of the land surface of the world (Eagles and McCool, 2002). These protected areas fall under the six-category system of IUCN, which aims at biodiversity conservation through different management approaches (Eagles and McCool, 2002; Eshun, 2011). In sub-Saharan Africa there are about 440 protected areas covering about 2,600,000km² (Vieta, 1999).

At the core of the demand for nature-based tourism is the rise of ecotourism (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996; Stamous and Paraskevopoulos, 2003; Kiss, 2004; Eshun and Tonto, 2014). Currently, the precise global estimate of ecotourism's marketshare is beset with contestations, partly due to the inconsistencies in its definitions (Buckley, 2009). However, increasingly literature positions ecotourism as the fastest growing sector of the global tourism industry (Akama, 2004; TIES, 2006; Fennell, 2008). This phenomenon can be seen as a tool for generating income in Southern countries (Stronza and Gordillo, 2008). Trans and Walter (2014) add that, ecotourism has the potential to become a driver of sustainable tourism development and also provide opportunities for the development of the disadvantaged, marginalised and rural areas leading to poverty alleviation. Honey (2008) and Eshun (2011) also maintain that ecotourism when properly developed can stimulate economic development and social wellbeing of people and at the same time preserve the natural environment and cultural heritage. To Honey (1999), most estimates indicate that the demand for ecotourism is growing at an annual rate of 10 to 30%. Thus, since ecotourism has reached such stature it is especially necessary to examine its effectiveness as a sustainable development strategy (Swarbrooke, 1999; Kiss, 2004; Weaver and Lawton, 2007; Buckley, 2009).

Furthermore, ecotourism as an alternative form of tourism is consistently gaining research attention (Blamey and Hatch 1998; Vieta, 1999; Kiss, 2004; Narud and Vondolia, 2006; Zeppel, 2006; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009; Eshun, 2011; Bond et al., 2014; Eshun and Tagoe-Darko, 2015). Many authors position ecotourism as contributing to biodiversity conservation and providing net benefits to local communities (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996; Stamous and Paraskevopoulos, 2003). Eshun (2014:164) therefore refers to the concurrent objective of ecotourism as contributing to conservation and development as its 'dual mandate'. Proponents of ecotourism add trenchantly that ecotourism appeals greatly to tourists who are in search of authentic experiences such as education, research, escape and relaxation (Sheng and Chen, 2011). Despite the extant of literature on ecotourism, few studies have been designed to explore the components of experience for ecotourists and how such studies can inform product development and business sustainability (Jaafar and Maideen, 2012).

In Ghana, the alternative form of tourism with the consistent research output is ecotourism (Dei, 2000; Asiedu, 2002; Narud and Vondolia, 2005; Zeppel, 2006; Boakye and Owusu-Mintah, 2008; Amuquandoh et al., 2011; Yeboah, 2013; Eshun, 2014; Eshun and Tonto, 2014; Eshun and Tagoe-Darko, 2015). This is partly due to the fact that, Ghana is ranked among the top 25 % of African countries with the greatest diversity of wildlife namely: mammals (220 species), birds (721 species) and butterflies (850 species). Ghana is also home to many endangered 'IUCN –Red Data Book Species', including plants (34 species), birds (10 species), mammals (17 species) and reptiles (5 species). In addition, Ghana along with Argentina, Poland, Chile, Lithuania, South Africa, Namibia, Suriname, Belize and Seychelles remains among the 'World's 10 Best Ethical Destinations' (Tourism Review, 2010). These countries are concerned about preserving their natural surroundings, promoting safe and responsible tourism opportunities, and protecting local communities. Despite Ghana's rich tourism resources and attractions, research on tourism and specifically on ecotourism in the country, shows sparse attention to issues of tourist experiences (Amuquandoh et al., 2011). Weaver and Lawton (2007: 1186) in a review of research on

ecotourism since 1987, have challenged the academic community to proactively “pay more attention to the neglected topic areas and by encouraging, integration and continuity of research within and among all topic areas”.

Amuquandoh et al (2011) therefore used the system’s model to examine international tourists’ experience at Owabi Monkey Sanctuary in Ghana. Similarly, this study employs the system’s model to examine ecotourism at Bobiri Forest Reserve and Butterfly Sanctuary (BFRBS) in Ghana. However, this study departs from Amuquandoh et al’s (2011) work in two main areas. First, the former study focused solely on international tourists; while this study considers both international and domestic tourists in its analysis. Many authors aver that despite the increased importance of domestic tourism to local economies, it has been largely ignored by researchers and policy-makers in Southern countries (Akama, 2004; Boakye and Owusu-Mintah, 2008; Eshun, 2011; Alipour et al., 2013; Hampton and Jeyacheya, 2014; Eshun and Tagoe-Darko, 2015).

Secondly, towards achieving theory triangulation, the study contests how management of the site can benefit from additional insights from the System’s model, the 3Ps of service marketing and Beeho and Prentice’s (1997) ASEB demi grid analysis. Beeho and Prentice (1997), refined SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis into the ASEB demi grid analysis. The ASEB demi grid analysis helps qualitatively to highlight a site’s physical characteristics, the activities that visitors choose to engage in as well as their evaluation of the benefits and the experiences that they believe will result from the visit (Beeho and Prentice, 1997; Bond et al., 2014). As a result, the ASEB demi grid analysis shows essentially the strengths and weaknesses of a tourism site (Bond et al., 2014).

The remaining part of the paper is divided into four interlinked sections. The next section reviews literature on service marketing and embed it within the broader discourses on ecotourism. The third section delves into the paper’s methodological stance, with overt focus on site location, data collection and analytic tools. Section four presents the results and discussion, specifically focusing on benefits and experiences. The conclusion echoes the need for attention to the nexus of customer satisfaction and experiences and makes recommendations for marketing of the Sanctuary towards sustainable ecotourism.

Literature Review

Unravelling Ecotourism

To Honey (1999), Hector Ceballos-Lascuráin, a leading member of the World Conservation Union concerned with conserving the American Flamingo in his native Mexico in 1987, coined the term ‘ecotourism’ to reflect his endeavour of maintaining these birds for both aesthetic and economic ends. Although, Ceballos-Lascuráin is often cited as the father of ecotourism, Miller is also reputed to have coined the term ecodevelopment to address almost the same objectives under ecotourism (Honey, 1999). Also, Hetzer (1965) is reputed to have used the term to explain the intricate relationship between tourists, the environments and cultures in which they interact. Hetzer identified four key areas that have the potential to make the tourism industry responsible namely, the need for minimum environmental impact, minimum impact on and maximum respect for host cultures, maximum economic benefits to the host country’s grassroots and maximum recreational satisfaction to tourists (Fennell, 2008; Honey, 2008). Perhaps, some of the leading definitions on ecotourism were given by these authors:

- Ceballos-Lascurain (1996) defines ecotourism as involving travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of admiring, studying, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural features (both past and present) found in these areas. The person that practices ecotourism has the opportunity of immersing himself or herself in nature in a way that most people cannot enjoy in their routine, urban existences.

Thus embarking visiting ecotourism sites will imbue the visitor awareness and knowledge of the natural environment, together with its cultural aspects. Thus Ceballos-Lascurain (1996) argues that will convert visitor into somebody keenly involved in conservation issues.

- To Honey (1999), ecotourism is a distinctive market that involves travel to fragile, pristine areas (usually protected areas) that strives to be low impact and (usually) small scale. Real ecotourism must involve travel to natural destinations, minimise impact, build environmental awareness, provide direct financial assistance for biodiversity conservation, provide financial benefit and empowerment for local people, respect local cultures and lastly support human rights and democratic movements.
- Wallace and Pierce (1999) also define ecotourism as the travel to relatively undisturbed natural areas for study, enjoyment, or volunteer assistance. True ecotourism must minimise negative impacts to the environment and to local people, increase the awareness and understanding of an area's natural and cultural systems and the subsequent involvement of visitors in issues affecting those systems, contribute to the conservation and management of protected areas, maximise the early and long-term participation of local people in the decision making process that determines the kind and amount of tourism that should occur, direct economic and other benefits to local people and complement traditional practices and lastly provide opportunities for local people and nature tourism employees to utilise and visit natural areas and learn more about the bequeaths that other visitors enjoy.
- Finally, Fennell (2008) adds that ecotourism is the sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low-impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits and scale). Also, the niche-market seeks active participation from, and economic benefits to local communities and indigenous people as well as environmental education of hosts, professionals and tourists to the eco-site.

TIES (2005) defines ecotourism as “responsible travel to natural areas, which conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of the local people”. In addition, Honey (2008) argues lucidly that ecotourism can contribute to world peace by bringing people of diverse nationalities, races, ethnicities, cultures, sexes, socio-economic statuses and lifestyles to understand each other. From the two major world fora in 2002—the World Ecotourism Summit (WES) and the World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD), proponents of ecotourism prepared ‘a set of principles and how to put them into practice’ (Honey, 1999). The UNWTO declared 2002 as the International Year of Ecotourism, and ‘The Quebec Declaration’ that came from the World Ecotourism Summit stated that ecotourism should be nature-based, should embrace minimal impact management, environmental education, and contribute to biodiversity conservation and community well-being (Asiedu, 2002; Kiss, 2004; Fennell, 2008; Honey, 2008; Eshun, 2011). TIES (2007), also adds that ecotourism distinguishes itself from other alternative forms of tourism with seven consistent principles:

- Ecotourism must avoid negative impacts that can destroy the integrity or character of the natural or cultural environment;
- Ecotourism must educate the traveller on the importance of conservation;
- Ecotourism must provide direct revenues for conservation and management of protected areas;
- Ecotourism must bring economic benefits to local communities near eco-sites;

- Ecotourism must emphasise the need for the planning and sustainable growth of the tourism industry;
- Ecotourism operations must seek to retain high percentage of revenues in the host country by stressing the use of locally owned facilities and services;
- Ecotourism must increasingly rely on infrastructure developed in harmony with the environment, minimise fossil fuel use and conserve local plants among others.

These principles are fundamentally the same as those for sustainable tourism, but simply on a smaller localised human scale, whilst remaining committed to the larger ecological scale (World Commission on Environment and Development [WCED], 1987; Swarbrooke, 1999; TIES, 2006). Kiss (2004) adds ecotourism has the prospects of linking conservation, local livelihoods, preserving biodiversity, reducing rural poverty and achieving both objectives on a sustainable basis through self-financing. Certainly, a cursory observation through literature on ecotourism reveals that there has been a gradual modification in its preoccupation with biodiversity conservation (Fennell, 2008).

To Honey (1999) ecotourism encompasses an increasing commitment to the empowerment of local residents and the education of the traveller and other stakeholders in order to ensure sustainability. The educational component ties together the human and environmental considerations and is crucial in teaching and promulgating lessons on ecotourism (Honey, 2008). This involves introducing rural workers and residents to conservation biology, where human and environmental interactions become clear, and destructive land practices are seen in new dimensions. Thus, ecotourism re-echoes the viewpoint that biodiversity conservation is a product of social action, whilst still maintaining its non-human and ecological dimensions (Brechin et al., 2002).

Another important viewpoint on ecotourism comes from Fennell (2008), who argued that ecotourism is principally a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism with local orientation in control, benefits and scale. Indeed, Fennell's (2008) definition helps to reduce some of the ambiguities on ecotourism by highlighting the cornerstone of the niche-market- 'nature' (i.e. fauna and flora). Carter (2006: 23), however debates trenchantly that, "there is no single 'nature', only 'natures', it therefore follows that 'nature tourism' will be variously constructed by different societies and therefore there will be multiple 'nature tourisms'". Carter (2006), further stretches the argument that, ecotourism consumes culture directly or indirectly. Many authors also add that especially in most Southern countries, local cultures may be at the core of references to natural assets (Akama, 2004; Eshun and Tonto, 2014; Eshun and Tagoe-Darko, 2015).

On the emergence of Community-Based Ecotourism Project (CBEP) in Ghana, the 14 selected sites for the CBEP, included attractions ranging from natural areas (landscapes, lush green vegetation and waterfalls), to hikes through tropical forests, mountain climbing and encounters with monkeys, crocodiles, hippos and elephants, artisan markets and sacred cultural sites. The 14 sites were spread across three geographical zones, namely the Forest, Savanna and Volta zones (Eshun, 2011). The inclusion of Wassa Domama Sacred Rock in the CBEP showed that the project did not follow strictly Fennell's (2003) definition of ecotourism. Thus the attributes underpinning the selection of the 14 sites were in tandem with some of the arguments raised earlier that, ecotourism covers natural resources, cultural and historic sites (Honey, 2008).

Gilbert (2002) stresses that most eco-activities involve visits to cultural sites, especially archaeological remains and indigenous villages. For instance, Caribbean ecotourism has been most strongly developed in Dominica, Belize and Guyana, and these countries all have remnant native Carib populations that are visited as part of each region's standard ecotours

(Hall and Tucker, 2004). Consequently, Buckley (2009) stresses that ecotourism is primarily resource-based and that the protection of these natural resources (which may include archaeological/cultural resources) are vital for sustained ecotourism. Based on research on the Balkans, Duvic et al (2014:61) state that 'it is necessary to connect the culture with the natural resources in order to create complex images, so that visitors would be able to develop an awareness of the community and the local way of life'. Nevertheless, whilst the coupling of wilderness with indigenous cultures may accurately reflect some groups' ontological and epistemological viewpoints on nature, it also has the potential of positioning them as objects of a neo-imperial gaze (Akama, 2004; Hollinshead, 2004).

Ecotourists and their Characteristics

Answering the question 'who are ecotourists?', raises a lot of arguments both in theory and practice (Honey, 2008). Wight (1993) explains that the problem in answering this question is due to the overlapping of motivations of ecotourists with those of other types of tourists. The author goes on to say that ecotourists cannot be solely defined by the products in which they express interest. Eagles and Cascagnette (1995), however, define ecotourists as individuals who travel with the intent of observing, experiencing and learning about nature. Ecotourists can generally be characterised based on their interests, *inter alia* learning about and appreciating natural environments, escaping from the pressures of normal life and being involved in somewhat adventurous activities. However, it has been argued that, there is lack of information about the characteristics of ecotourists (Wight, 1993; Fennell, 2008). Many authors claim that there is spare attention to how the profile of visitors to tourism sites influence their interests and experiences (Blamey and Hatch, 1998; Uriely, 2005).

Other authors also state that the motivations for ecotourists visiting eco-sites have been narrowed down to observation and appreciation of natural features and related cultural assets (Hvenegaard, 1994; Kiss, 2004). Holden and Sparrowhawk (2002) conclude that one of the main motivations for ecotourists is a change from their circadian settings and activities. Similarly, to Eagles and McCool (1992), visiting uncrowded destinations, experiencing remote and unspoiled nature, and interacting with native people have further been found to be motivations for ecotourists. Kusler (1991) also based on socio-demographic and economic characteristics, categories ecotourists into three distinct groups:

- Harder ecotourists: travellers with strong environmental attitudes who prefer to travel in small groups. They favour long trips with few services provided. They are physically active and enjoy challenging activities. They make their own travel arrangements in order to make it a real life experience.
- Softer ecotourists: travellers who both like ecotourism and traditional holidays. They prefer to travel in large group of people; they require comforts and good quality services and are not really active. This time they tend to rely on travel agencies and tour operators (Weaver and Lawton, 2002; Fennell, 2008). Laarman and Durst (1987) argue cogently for a distinction between 'hard' and 'soft' ecotourism experiences.
- Structured ecotourists: these travellers are a mix between harder ecotourists as they prefer interacting with nature and practice physical activities but they also look like softer ecotourists as they are looking for short and multi-purpose trips with large groups, comfortable accommodation and gourmet meals.

Research on tourist experiences

Kotler et al (2006) aver that the marketplace is moving at a nanosecond pace, to depict the urgency for marketers to understand their consumers so that their products and services satisfy the needs of customers well. Currently, the global tourism industry has evolved into an arena of fierce competition, which presents a challenge for marketers to comprehend the

distinguishing characteristics of tourist experiences (Eshun, 2011). At the core of seeking for differentiation in service is the move by both academics and practitioners to understand tourist experience and how that can contribute to carving out a competitive edge by the various businesses (Jennings, 2006; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009).

To Uriely (2005) study on tourist experiences has been developed during the last 50 years and that there are four main shifts in emphasis.

First, most of the initial studies indicated that a tourist experience is a unique experience different from daily lives of the visitors. The second shift indicated pluralising the tourist experience. This shift therefore anchored the attention to different tourists and the different experiences they seek in visiting tourist sites. The third shift, placed importance on the subjectivities of tourists. Unlike seeing tourists as passive consumers of tourism, this shift recognised that tourists' present active interpretation of situations which ineluctably influence their experience (Larsen, 2007). Lastly, the fourth was called the shift of relative interpretations. Stressed further, this shift recognised that experience is a person's interpretation of situations within the milieu of the culture and times visited (Sheng and Chen, 2011). Tourist experience thus varies from one tourist to the other and as such has led academicians to focus vigorously on the concept of experience in terms of definitions, aspects, characteristics, models, methods among others (Uriely, 2005).

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the term experience as 'an event or occurrence which leaves an impression on one'. Indeed, it appears that there are a number of different classification schemes for experiences just as there are different segmentation schemes used by destination marketing organisations (DMOs). As a result, experience typologies that are outed are useful relative to their purpose rather than being absolute (Uriely, 2005; Kotler et al., 2006; Sheng and Chen, 2011). Many authors maintain trenchantly that tourist experiences are necessary considerations both in theory and practice, if repeat visit is expected and also where a destination needs to be marketed to capture the evoke set of its target market (Pine and Gilmore, 1999; Dube and Le Bel, 2003; Jennings, 2006; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009).

To Jennings (2006), several writers have attempted chronologically and temporally to define the term tourist experience. Earlier literature back in the 1970s (e.g. MacCannell, 1976) argued that tourism is an example of experience, which is unique, emotionally charged and of high personal value. Stretching this argument further, Dube and Le Bel (2003), classified visitors' pleasurable experiences into four possible categories:

- Sensory (or physical) pleasure that is chiefly borne of the pleasant sensations induced during the experience;
- Social pleasure derived from one's interactions with others (or lack thereof, as in the pleasure of solitude);
- Emotional pleasure borne of feelings, ideas, or mental images;
- Intellectual pleasure from appreciating the complexities and subtleties of things around the consumer.

Larsen (2007) thus explains that tourist experience as a term is socially constructed and is subject to multiple interpretations, from social, environmental and the activities offered. Chronologically, tourist experiences can be interpreted from their movement through space and time whereby tourists move from one destination to another during a certain time interval (Morgan and Pritchard, 1998; Ciesielski and Arrowsmith, 2005). To Pine and Gilmore (1998), there are four dimensions of experience. These dimensions can be differentiated in terms of the level of customer involvement and participation namely; entertainment, education, aesthetics and escapism.

Pearce (2008) defines tourism entertainment as a structured and managed situation designed mainly for visitor audience. Thus many authors including, Krippendorf (1987) and Honey (2008) claim that tourism offers escape aids, opportunities to appreciate nature (aesthetics) and also to be involved in educational or research activities. Indeed, the industrialisation especially in the Northern countries, has led to their citizens travelling to eco-sites towards satisfying their need of 'balancing and harmonising with nature' (Scott et al., 2009). To Ceballos-Lascuráin (1996), ecotourism as a niche-market, offers a pristine environment and this makes it ideal for tourists who want to enjoy an escapist experience. However, just as an untrammelled focus on a product can result in marketing myopia, the ecotourism market can suffer from the same phenomenon, when there is too much focus on flagship species at the expense of understanding the underlying motivations of the various visitor categories to eco-sites (Lawrence et al., 1997).

Ecotourism Marketing

Marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and organisations obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging value with others (Kotler et al., 2006). As a consequence, marketing involves building profitable, value laden exchange relationships with actual and potential customers (Kotler et al., 2006; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009). The American Marketing Association (AMA) also defines marketing 'as the activity, set of institutions and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large' (cited in Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009). To authors Levitt (1986), Kotler et al (2006) and Goeldner and Ritchie (2009) marketers are concerned with marketing 10 entities namely:

- Goods (e.g. computer, furniture);
- Services (e.g. tourism, banking);
- Experiences (e.g. Disneyworld, SeaWorld);
- Events (e.g. Olympics, PANAFEST);
- Information (e.g. SPSS, CDs);
- Ideas (e.g. Mothers Against Drunk Driving);
- Places (e.g. New York, London);
- Persons (e.g. Michael Jordan, David Beckham);
- Properties (e.g. Estates and financial property-stocks);
- Organisation (e.g. KFC, KPMG).

Peter Drucker also adds that irrespective of the entity being marketed, "the aim of marketing is to know and understand the customer so well that the product or service sells itself". When a tourist selects a destination for their vacation in a given time, the competing destinations lose out. Therefore, there is overt onus on site managers to seek for ways of creating brand awareness to ensure that their sites are in the evoke set of customers (Kotler et al., 2006). However, branding Ghana as a tourism destination, is overly fixated on five products *inter alia*; business tourism, beaches, events, ecological and heritage or historical attractions. Consequently, the tourism industry in Ghana has been criticised for lack of creativity and lacking clearly-defined products (Eshun, 2011).

Kotler et al (2006) have cautioned that managers should be aware of the exact offerings they are putting on the market to serve as pull factors during the buyers' purchasing decisions. Also, although, Ghana is closer to Europe than North America, transportation cost is relatively expensive when travelling to Ghana than North America (Eshun, 2011). Thus building on Mill and Morrison's (1992) stance that the closeness of a destination to the tourist markets is a key determination of destination competitiveness, other issues such as transportation cost, an understanding of promotion types and their appropriateness and

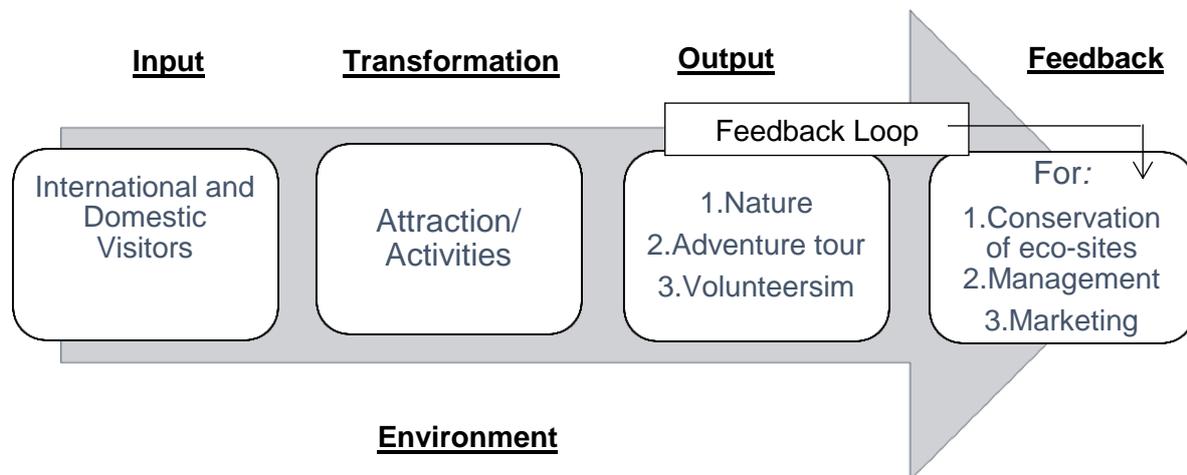
clearly defined products, *ceteris paribus* can also contribute to the effectiveness of the programmes of DMOs.

In most countries the service industries account for between 60-70% of gross domestic product (Daft et al., 2010). In the USA, about 73% of the workers are employed in the service industry (Kotler et al., 2007). To Oyewole (2001), countries are increasingly seeking to specialise in service, because compared to agriculture-based economies, service-oriented countries show higher economic performance. Interestingly, marketing's role in service is increasingly becoming indispensable (Kotler et al., 2006). Quintessential marketing highlights the four-P framework (4Ps)—Product, Place, Price and Promotion (Levitt, 1986). The four-P framework calls on marketing professionals to decide on the product and its characteristics, set the price, decide how to distribute their product, and choose methods for promoting their product. However, the success of service is anchored by three other Ps as articulated here:

- **Personnel:** the success of tourism is intertwined with the quality of skilled personnel who create lasting moments-of-truth to give a destination its unique selling proposition (Eshun, 2011). As a point in case, bilingual personnel remain an integral part of attracting international tourists. Overall, the hospitality component of the tourist product is mainly produced by the staff and customers (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009).
- **Physical evidence:** physical evidence refers to the tangible components of a destination that visitors can see and touch on their arrival. Thus physical evidence for an eco-site may include infrastructure such as parking lot, accommodation facility; building of biogas, conference centre, restaurant, lovers' bench areas and washrooms. There should also be information facilities and/or video facilities in the sites to increase access to information and comfortableness for tourists (Kotler et al, 2006).
- **Process management:** processes refer to the activities and tasks at the destination that turn input (products and services produced and offered at the destination) into actual products or desired outputs. Effective process has proven to be a potential differentiator in organisations, since it relates to how customers are treated from their first contact with the organisation through to the last. The first step is to empower frontline staff by giving them authority, responsibility and incentives they need to recognise and attend to customers' needs (Perreault and McCarthy, 2006).

In addition, there is the argument that the preoccupation with technology (also referred to as hi-tech) should be given a human face (i.e. hi-touch). Hi-touch is matted with how employees serve visitors to create moments-of-truth (Kotler et al., 2006). Currently, two websites: www.ghana.travel and www.touringghana.com, claim that they are the national websites that market Ghana's tourism. However, neither of these two websites feature among the first five sites when the key word 'Ghana' is entered in Google search. Globally tourism offerings are becoming highly competitive, which demands appropriate application of business models (Theobald, 1998; Swarbrooke, 1999; Kotler et al., 2006; Eshun, 2011). This study therefore imbeds its arguments within the business discourses unfolding in ecotourism literature by employing principally the system's model (Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Input-Transformation-Output Relationship of the System's Model



Source: Adapted from Amuquandoh et al (2011: 258).

The system's model views an organisation as a complex set of interrelated factors that must be integrated in order for the organisation to reach its goals. All parts are determinants of each other (Certo, 2003). A system is a structure which converts input into a desired output through a transformation process. System's model consists of five components namely the input, processes, output, environment and feedback (Certo, 2003; Dart et al., 2010). Generally, processes are activities which convert input (raw materials) into a desired finished product through a transformation process. The result of the process is the output, which may include the perceptions, experiences and benefits derived by visitors (Certo, 2003; Daft et al., 2010; Amuquandoh et al., 2011). Zeithaml (1988) therefore argues quite coherently that:

“For the customer, the tourist product is an experience based on his/her subjective evaluation. It has a certain price and it is the outcome of a process, where the customer exploits the services of those who offer them by taking part in the production process of the service him/herself” (Zeithaml, 1988: 14).

Feedback is knowledge of the results that influence the selection of input during the next cycle of a transformation process (Certo, 2003). The outcomes of the visit expressed by the visitors serve as a feedback to management of businesses which aids them to address concerns of visitors (Daft et al., 2010). The environment covers the larger business factors such as political stability and inflation. There are basically two types of system namely the closed and open systems. Closed system is isolated from its environment and is independent of it. Put differently, the closed system considers all input and output of system as internal. In contrast, open system is connected to and interacts with its environment. It takes input from the environment; transform them into output which are given back to the environment. Early theories of management treated organisations as closed systems. However, current literature on management sees businesses as open systems taking input from the environment and turning them into output. Similarly, this study sees tourism businesses as open systems taking input (e.g. tourists) and through transformation (e.g. nature tours) leading to experiences. Ultimately, the system's model helps to draw attention to the following considerations:

- To the dynamic aspects of an organisation and factors influencing the growth and development of all its subsystems.
- To create awareness of subsystems each with potentially conflicting goals nonetheless being integrated to achieve organisational goals and objectives.
- To reject the deterministic idea that there may be several causes to an end.

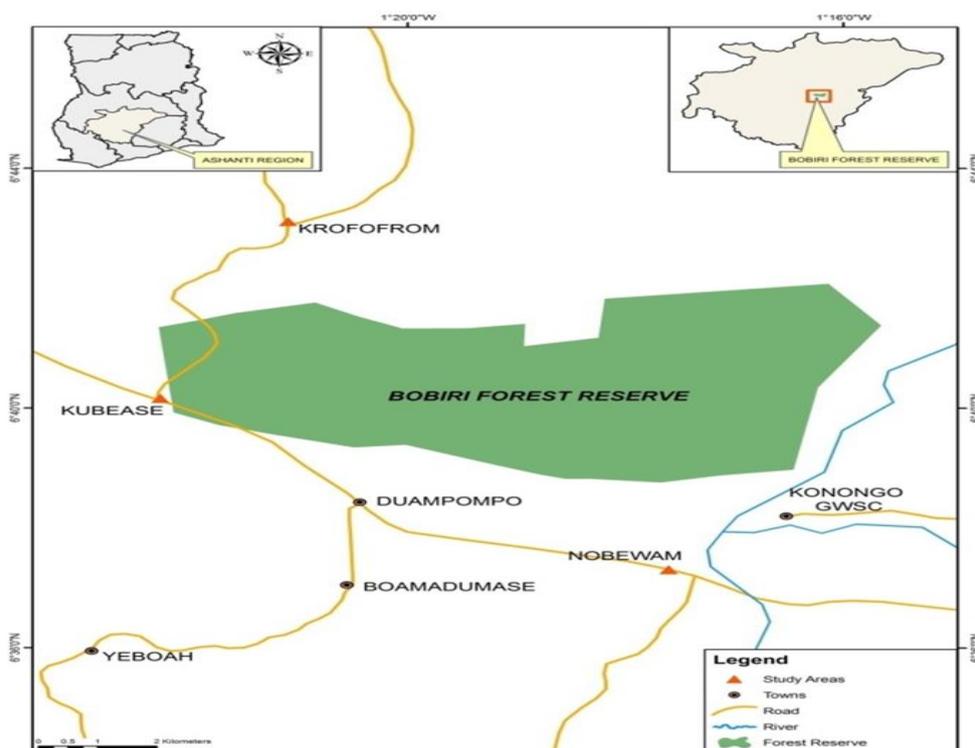
However, the system's model is criticised for having an imaginative appeal—i.e. it lacks strong scientific basics and also it does not provide specific guidance on the functions and duties of managers (Certo, 2003; Daft et al., 2010).

Research Methodology

Site Description

BFRBS lies between latitude 6°40' and 6°44' North of the Equator and longitudes 10°15' and 10°22' west of the Greenwich. The Sanctuary is 35 minutes' drive away from Kumasi-Accra highway and is enclosed by six communities viz: Krofofrom, Kubease, Ndobom, Koforidua, Nkwankwaduam and Tsetsekaasum. The Sanctuary is managed by the Forestry Research Institute of Ghana (FORIG). The Sanctuary has 80-100 plants species per acre and 200 different species of birds, and it falls within the Tropical Moist semi-deciduous Forest Zone. BFRBS has 340 butterfly species and has the biggest butterfly in West Africa called the African Giant Swallow Tail (Eshun et al., 2014). BFRBS has also three walking trails namely; the 3 Sisters' Trail, Denya trail and Onyina trail (Eshun et al., 2014).

Figure 2. Map of Bobiri Forest Reserve and Butterfly Sanctuary



Source: FORIG Office, Fumesua (2015).

The longest trail is 5.2km (Denya trail) which is approximately 150 minutes' walk and the shortest trail (Onyina trail) which is 1.1km, takes approximately 45 to 60 minutes' walk. Also, there is an arboretum of 2.0 hectares with collection of different artificially planted trees mainly for learning and research (Eshun et al., 2014). BFRBS was one of the 14 sites selected through the USAID sponsored programme for community-based ecotourism development in Ghana (USAID, 2005; Eshun, 2014; Eshun and Tagoe-Darko, 2015).

Data Collection and Tools for Analysis

This study employs a multi-method approach utilising two data sources to offer convergent validation of the findings (Eshun, 2011). The main source of data for this study was the visitors' book at BFRBS, covering the years 2009 to 2014. Visitors' book helps to trace visitors who pass through a site and offers an opportunity to assess the market of facilities, characteristics of clients, their activities and experiences, impressions as well as elements of cognitive dissonance relating to visit to a tourism site (Stamou and Paraskevopoulos, 2003). Similar to Eshun and Tonto's (2014) research on Boabeng Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS), the study employed purposive sampling to select staff at the Sanctuary to provide specific data deemed relevant for the study. Accordingly, three of the employees of the Sanctuary—namely the manager, assistant manager and cook were engaged in in-depth interviews. The approximately 30-minutes interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent. The interview schedule guided exploration of tourist numbers to the site, their concerns and experiences, settings of the Sanctuary, various activities by the visitor categories to the Sanctuary, issues of marketing and future development plans at the Sanctuary.

The data analysis process commenced with the interpretation of comments written in languages such as French, Spanish and German into English language. This was carried out with assistance from the Department of Modern Languages at the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST) and also with Google translator. In total 2,401 visitors made comments during the period of 2009 and 2014. Statements such as 'ok', 'good', 'paid to FORIG' and 'fine' seemed simplistic and banal and were omitted from the entries that led to the use of 2,101 responses. The data from the visitors' book were analysed using descriptive statistics with the aid of IBM SPSS version 21. The qualitative data from the interviews were subjected to thematic explication (Creswell, 2008; Mkono, 2012; Eshun et al., 2015). To Gupta and Levenburg (2010), thematic analysis is a useful tool for identifying patterns of meaning and experience in qualitative data. In this study, the researchers transcribed the data from the in-depth interviews. The emergent theme approach was employed by the researchers, where the transcribed data were read through several times to look for categories of themes that highlight recurrent patterns (Cloke et al. 2004). This approach enabled the researchers to 'immerse' into the data to unravel their multiple layers of meanings in relation to the study objectives. Next, the themes were then coded, which involved labelling the text to form descriptions in the transcribed database. Afterwards, the related codes were then aggregated under the dominant themes identified (Creswell, 2008; Eshun et al., 2015). Eventually, these dominant themes were then related to the study objectives for more nuanced analysis.

Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Tourism research on buying behaviour of tourists are often tied to the demographic, geographic, psychographic and behavioural variables (Kotler et al., 2006; Perreault and McCarthy, 2006; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009; Amuquandoh et al., 2011). To Housen (1997) most research on tourist experience include; gender, age and educational level. In addition, researchers are increasingly finding variables such as marital status and income useful in their studies (Housen, 1997). Sheng and Chen (2011) add that socio-demographic variables such as marital status and personal monthly income are overtly absent in visitors' books. However, variables such as marital status, nationality and personal monthly income are increasingly becoming important in contestations on tourist experiences and repeat visit. For example, Sheng and Chen (2011) show that data in surveys on museum visitors, marital status of visitors were included because parents and children are usually museum visitors during holidays, and it also reflects a person's family life cycle. Moreover, the inclusion of

marital status could probe the relationship between the family life cycle and the experience expectations of visitors. Falk and Dierking (1992) also present the argument that visitors' monthly income determines their disposable income and therefore their economic status, which invariably influence their visiting behaviour. However, most visitors' books do not request for these data from visitors and as a result may affect other calculations and inferences that could be made in a study on tourist experience (Sheng and Chen, 2011).

In this study, the following demographic characteristics were considered; sex, age, educational level, nationality and the travel profile. Table 1 shows that most of the visitors were males (62.5%). Similarly, Fennell (2008) estimated that of 62 ecotourists who visited Ecuador, with a mean age of 42 years, the female to male ratio was 48 to 52% respectively.

Table 1 Profile of Tourists that Patronised BFRBS (N = 2101) Source: Fieldwork, 2015.

Socio-demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male	1314	62.5
Female	787	37.5
Nationality		
Ghana	550	26.2
USA/Canada	246	11.7
Germany	305	14.5
UK	238	11.3
France	122	5.8
Netherlands	331	15.8
Australia/New Zealand	30	1.4
Switzerland	65	3.1
Kenya/ Malawi/ South Africa	14	0.7
Austria	34	1.6
Asia/ Middle East	48	2.3
West Africa	25	1.2
Spain	27	1.3
Italy	19	0.9
Sweden /Finland/Belgium	43	2.0
South America	4	0.2
Occupation		
Student	545	25.9
Educationist/Researcher	418	19.9
Engineer/ It	125	5.9
Accountant/Banker/Business	74	3.5
Retired	62	3.0
Clergy	51	2.4
Artists	44	2.1
Administrator/Manager	221	10.5
Farmer/Trader/Driver	49	2.3
Health worker	153	7.3
Security	15	0.7
Volunteer	234	11.1
Tour Operators/ Guides/Travel Agents	110	5.2
Travel Profile		
1	239	11.4
2-10	1562	74.3
11-20	146	6.9
21 And Above	154	7.3

Most of the international tourists were Dutch (15.8%), Germans (14.5%), UK (11.3%) and France (5.8%), whilst USA and Canada combined registered 11.7%. Indeed, despite the rise in international travel among say the citizens from the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), still majority of ecotourists are nationals from Europe, North America, Japan and Australia (King and Stewart, 1996; Theobald, 1998; Swarbrooke, 1999; Carter, 2006; Kotler et al., 2006; Fennell, 2008). Also, the majority of visitors (74.3%) to the site were in groups of between 2 and 10, mostly accompanied by family, friends or members of institutions. Swarbrooke (1999) and Fennell (2008) add that most international ecotourists have higher education and disposable income. Majority of the visitors were students (25.9%) and the least being security personnel (0.7%). Ceballos-Lascuráin (1996), Zeppel (2006) and Honey (2008) report eco-sites and destinations attract a lot of scientists and students around the world.

Benefits of Visitors to the Sanctuary

Table 2 shows 11 common benefits that visitors to the Sanctuary derived, with closeness to nature (23.8%) appearing as the most recurrent experience alongside adventure walk or tour (15.5%), entertainment benefits (13.4%) and research or academic purposes (12.9%). The high figure registered for closeness to nature was evident during the in-depth interview, where the assistant manager at the Sanctuary emphasised that:

“The Sanctuary offers you a tranquil setting, cool air and fresh oxygen. This you will not get at Kumasi with all the car fumes and noise from streets. Walking through the trails and seeing the wonders of trees and lianas. The songs of the birds in the morning, the butterflies hovering over the shrubs and trees and the arboretum with diverse trees. This Sanctuary is an eye-opener into what we are missing by always sitting in our air-conditioned offices in the cities and towns” (Fieldwork, Interview Transcripts, 2015).

Also, the high figure registered for entertainment contrasts with Amuquandoh et al’s (2011) research on Owabi Monkey Sanctuary, where no entertainment was mentioned as part of the benefits derived by visitors. Literature on ecotourism depicts that there are variations of offerings at eco-sites that cater for harder, softer and structured ecotourists (Kusler, 1991; Fennell, 2008). For example, At BFRBS table tennis is provided for softer ecotourists such as students visiting from Ghanaian universities. Visitors are also allowed to come with sound systems for wedding and socialising programmes such as birthday parties. Football is also allowed on the courtyard of the Sanctuary. The trend in tourism offerings in general, is not disavowed from the prevailing marketing concepts. For instance, the consumer concept maintains that the purpose of a business is to create and maintain satisfied and profitable customers (Levitt, 1986). Consumer concept therefore shows overt inclination towards the 4S tourism, where customer satisfaction and profit motives take precedence over environmental concerns. However, the societal marketing concept is more in concinnity with ecotourism, where the importance of satisfying the customer, alongside the economic gain are embedded within environmental sustainability (Swarbrooke, 1999; Kotler et al., 2006; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009). Thus although the management of BFRBS allows for recreational activities, they monitor to ensure that they are in consonance with the ecological tenet of ecotourism.

Table 2. Benefits Categories for tourists

Benefits	Examples of comment by visitors	Frequency	Total (%)
Location/ Forest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beautiful forest • Wonderful forest • True garden of Eden 	255	12.14
Adventure Tour/ Walk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enjoyed the hike • Wonderful trip 	325	15.47

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nice walk in the forest 		
Birding/ Bird Watching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Great birding Beautiful nice birds Fantastic views of birds 	99	4.71
Nature/ Natural Serene/Beauty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The place is very attractive The sanctuary is very beautiful Beautiful and salubrious 	499	23.75
Research/ Academic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very wonderful and educative Informative 	272	12.95
Tree Spices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beautiful trees Massive trees 	30	1.43
Entertainment/ Amusement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It was an amazing experience It was really nice we had fun 	281	13.37
Religious Purpose	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conducive for prayer 	8	0.38
Hospitality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Very nice accommodation Friendly staff Nice breakfast 	178	8.47
Butterfly	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diverse butterflies Beautiful butterflies 	54	2.57
Dissatisfaction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Poor road network Unknowledgeable guides Ant bites Too much focus on butterfly Presence of few or no butterfly 	100	4.76
Total		2101	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2015.

Religious purposes registered the least percentage of 0.4%. This finding highlights ecotourism as a distinct niche-market from religious tourism. Indeed, ecotourism is touted as providing mainly opportunity for visitors to enjoy pristine natural setting (Bond et al., 2014). In addition, 4.8% of visitors was dissatisfied due to mainly absence of butterflies during especially the raining seasons in the year, poor road, ant bites and also some guides being unknowledgeable about the site. This stance was shown in some of the comments from the visitors' book such as 'guide was not knowledgeable enough about the tree species', 'the tour guide could not express himself well', and 'I wish the guide gave a deeper explanation to the history behind the trees and birds and 'there was no guide on my arrival'. This finding re-emphasises earlier study that the common sources of dissatisfaction identified among ecotourists to protected areas are lack of interpretation, education or good guiding (Almagor, 1985; Blamey and Hatch, 1998). This finding is also consistent with literature that lack of some basic amenities such as poor road, poor accommodation, lack of restaurant, limited telecommunication service and electricity supply can create dissatisfaction among visitors (Kotler et al., 2006; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009; Amuquandoh et al., 2011; Bond et al., 2014). Thus, this study like Amuquandoh et al (2011), refutes Stamou and Paraskevopoulos (2006) claim that visitors' books are mere congratulatory reports (i.e. good news expressed by visitors to tourist sites), rather than being records of concerns and dissatisfactions. Kotler et al (2006) state that customers may be satisfied, dissatisfied or delighted. As a consequence, the dissatisfaction and satisfaction expressed by visitors are outcomes that should inform management to address the causes of dissatisfaction to ensure repeat visit. Also, during the in-depth interview, the assistant manager of BFRBS stressed that troops of monkeys used to be easily spotted on trees in the centre of the forest but illegal logging and poaching have reduced their numbers drastically:

"The Sanctuary is not fenced, hence anyone can enter from any of its boundaries. I remember monkeys used to be very visible in the Sanctuary. There is a tree here that produces fruits in September that the monkeys like. Visitors used to go there and take pictures of them in the early mornings. For almost a year, we did not see any of

the monkeys. We heard a hunter around the Nobuom area, has been killing and selling them at the roadside one after the other” (Fieldwork, Interview Transcripts, 2015).

Experiences by Visitors’ Profile

Visitors’ choice of destinations and satisfaction have been found to be influenced by their socio-demographic characteristics (Moscardo, 2001; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009). For example, visitors from Austria (20.6%), Australia/New Zealand (16.7%) and Sweden/Finland/Belgium (16.3%) rather placed greater importance on learning about nature and research. Fennell (2008), adds that ecotourism tends to be patronised more by nationals from Europe and North America, because of unbridled industrialisation that has led to huge changes in their natural setting. Also, Ghanaian visitors had relatively average interest in all the experiences, unlike nationals from Southern America who showed interests only in nature.

On occupation, artistes were the most entertained group recording 27.3%. Based on sex, the female visitors were found to relate their visit more to the location of the forest (13.0%). The study highlights learning or research on nature as the fourth highest experience (12.9%). This finding re-echoes the archetypical principle of ecotourism as offering opportunity for travelers to study, admire and learn about nature as well as a form of escape from the hurly-burly of urban living (Hvenegaard, 1994; Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996; Swarbrooke, 1999; Aseidu, 2002).

Table 3 Experience by Visitors’ Profile

Individual Profile	Location/Forest (%)	Adventure tour/walk (%)	Birding/Bird watching (%)	Nature/Serene/Beautiful (%)	Research/Academics (%)	Tree Species (%)	Entertainment/Amusement (%)	Religious Purposes (%)	Hospitality (%)	Butterflies (%)	Dissatisfaction (%)	Total
Nationality												
Ghana	10.7	11.6	3.5	23.6	18.2	2.0	15.6	0.7	6.0	2.0	6.0	100
USA/Canada	11.4	13.8	9.8	23.6	13.0	0.0	11.0	0.4	8.1	6.5	2.4	100
Germany	9.8	23.0	1.6	23.3	10.8	1.3	14.4	0.7	9.2	2.0	3.9	100
UK	16.8	16.8	11.3	17.6	9.7	0.8	13.4	0.0	6.3	2.1	5.0	100
France	14.8	15.6	2.5	24.6	9.0	1.6	16.4	0.0	7.4	1.6	6.6	100
Netherlands	12.4	15.4	3.0	26.6	9.1	2.1	10.0	0.0	14.5	2.5	4.5	100
Australia/New Zealand	20.0	20.0	0.0	23.3	16.7	0.0	6.7	0.0	10.0	0.0	3.3	100
Switzerland	9.2	16.9	3.1	27.7	15.4	3.1	10.8	1.5	6.2	1.5	4.6	100
Kenya/Malawi/ S. Africa	0.0	14.3	0.0	42.9	7.1	0.0	14.3	0.0	14.3	7.1	0.0	100
Austria	11.8	11.8	5.9	14.7	20.6	0.0	11.8	0.0	11.8	2.9	8.8	100
Asia/ Middle East	10.4	18.8	2.1	27.1	12.5	0.0	14.6	0.0	8.3	0.0	6.2	100

West Africa	4.0	16.0	0.0	28.0	12.0	0.0	28.0	0.0	8.0	0.0	4.0	100
Spain	40.7	7.4	3.7	14.8	11.1	3.7	14.8	0.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	100
Italy	15.8	10.5	5.3	42.1	5.3	0.0	10.5	0.0	5.3	0.0	5.3	100
Sweden/Finland / Belgium	7.0	16.3	9.3	23.3	16.3	2.3	4.3	0.0	0.0	7.0	2.3	100
South America	0.0	0.0	0.0	50.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	25.0	0.0	25.0	100
Sex												
Male	11.6	15.4	6.0	23.0	11.4	1.5	14.5	0.4	8.1	2.7	5.3	100
Female	13.0	15.5	2.5	25.0	15.5	1.3	11.4	0.4	9.1	2.4	3.8	100
Occupation												
Student	8.4	18.5	4.0	23.1	16.7	1.3	12.8	0.7	7.9	2.9	3.5	100
Educationist/ Researcher	12.0	14.4	4.3	24.4	14.4	1.0	14.4	0.0	7.4	2.6	5.3	100
Engineer/ IT	13.6	14.4	2.4	23.2	14.4	2.4	12.8	0.0	12.8	0.8	3.2	100
Accountant/Ban ker/Business	16.2	8.1	0.0	31.1	9.5	1.4	12.2	0.0	8.1	5.4	8.1	100
Retired	9.7	12.9	6.5	33.9	11.3	0.0	9.7	0.0	6.5	4.8	4.8	100
Clergy	13.7	7.8	3.9	25.5	9.8	0.0	23.5	3.9	3.9	0.0	7.8	100
Artists	6.8	15.9	0.0	18.2	18.2	0.0	27.3	0.0	11.4	0.0	2.3	100
Administrator/ Manger	14.0	20.8	4.5	19.0	7.7	3.2	12.2	0.5	9.5	2.7	5.9	100
Farmer/Trader/ Driver	12.2	10.2	0.0	32.7	14.3	0.0	16.3	0.0	2.0	2.0	10.2	100
Health worker	19.0	13.7	1.3	22.9	10.5	0.7	15.0	0.7	10.5	2.6	3.3	100
Security	13.4	13.3	6.7	40.0	6.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.7	0.0	13.3	100
Volunteer	14.5	15.4	1.7	22.2	12.8	1.7	12.8	0.0	9.8	3.0	6.0	100
Tour Operators/Tour Guides/Travel Agents	10.9	10.0	30.0	23.6	4.5	2.7	7.3	0.0	8.2	0.9	1.8	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2015.

Furthermore, in terms of importance attached to learning and research on nature, artistes registered (18.2%), students (16.7%), researchers (14.4%) and engineers (14.4%), than the other visitor categories to the Sanctuary. In addition, the percentage of tourists who described themselves as volunteers was (11.1%), which supports the notion that

volunteerism in tourism is gradually becoming a popular tourism phenomenon in Ghana (Amuquandoh et al., 2011). For example, Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African country to have hosted the USA Peace Corps volunteers (PCVs) in various developmental projects in 1961 (Eshun, 2011; Eshun and Tagoe-Darko, 2015). Specifically in tourism, perhaps the most visible evidence of volunteerism was how the PCVs were integral to the success story of the CBEP in Ghana. The CBEP positioned the PCVs in marketing and formation of tourism management committees at all the selected eco-sites in the country (USAID, 2005; Eshun, 2011).

Implications of the ASEB demi grid analysis on the Management of BFRBS

To Amuquandoh et al (2011), current recreational resource management frameworks developed in the USA and other countries put responsibilities on managers of tourism sites to understand and practice how specific settings result in experiences and benefits. Many authors add that differentiation in settings and activities at an eco-site may give the site its competitive edge over the other (McGrath, 1999; Sheng and Chen, 2011). Currently, Kakum National Park and Bunso Arboretum are the only ecotourism sites in Ghana with canopy walkways, thus there is the opportunity for establishing a canopy walkway at BFRBS to increase visitor numbers. This suggestion was made even more coherent in this avowal:

“This Sanctuary boasts of unique biodiversity, thus the construction of canopy walkway will help to increase visitor numbers to the site. The economic benefit will help to contribute to biodiversity conservation and our mandate towards local community development. Also plans are far advanced with some partners to expand the guesthouse and provide additional recreational activities. We are waiting for the board of FORIG for final approval of the project” (Fieldwork, Interview Transcripts, 2015).

Based on the in-depth- interviews, the ASEB demi grid analysis of the site was undertaken to provide visitor insights into tourism experiences at BFRBS. The principal purpose of this analysis was to illuminate the strengths and weaknesses of the Sanctuary (Table 4). Indeed, the attractions such as having the biggest butterfly species in West Africa, and birds and trails in a relatively undisturbed rainforest accord BFRBS a first mover advantage over other eco-sites in Ashanti Region such as Owabi Monkey Sanctuary and Bomfobiri Wildlife Sanctuary.

Table 4. The ASEB demi grid analysis on the Sanctuary

	Activities	Settings	Experiences	Benefits
S T R E N G T H S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Opportunity for creation of a canopy walkway • Opportunity for camping • Opportunity for holding conferences • Nature walk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Largely an undisturbed forest • Presence of nature trails • Presence of an arboretum • A garden to attract butterflies • A well-kept guesthouse • Remains the only butterfly sanctuary in West Africa 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A suitable place for research and learning about nature • Presence of diverse birds and butterflies • Proximity to Kumasi Metropolis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bird watching • Adventure tour • Nature walk • Religious purpose (prayer) • Research • Education • Volunteerism

C H A L L E N G E S	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Few recreational activities • Lack of documentaries on the site • Too much focus on butterflies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tourists trampling on lawns and littering • Guesthouse needs expansion • Lack of stable electricity and telecommunication • Poor road network • Absence of map on site 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unknowle-geable and personnel • Too much focus on butterflies • Inadequate customer-oriented experience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local communities seem marginalised • Limited marketing efforts • Threat of expansion plans on the beauty of site
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Source: Fieldwork, 2015.

The results so far, illustrate the system’s model in three ways. First, the input in this study includes mainly biodiversity, guesthouse, tourists and management. Second, the tour through the Sanctuary is a transformation process for visitors, which leads to output such as relaxation, research and birding. Third, the comments and observations in the visitors’ book serve as feedback for management of the Sanctuary. The system’s model thus re-echoes Sheng and Chen’s (2011) standpoint that, no matter the tourism product being offered, the ‘experiencescape’ will be influenced by tourists, personnel and the existing attractions.

Conclusion

This study examines benefits and experiences derived by tourists to BFRBS in Ghana and how management of the site can benefit from additional insights from business perspectives. To many authors, study on tourist experiences helps in understanding tourists’ characteristics and their expectations; which has a utility in designing suitable activities, services and management frameworks (Chiou et al., 2008; Amuquandoh et al., 2011; Sheng and Chen, 2011). These foregoing assertions are coterminous with how the ASEB demi grid analysis helps to highlight the strengths and challenges of an eco-site. In final analysis, the study makes the following recommendations under the tutelage of the 3Ps of service marketing:

- **Personnel:** successful ecotourism initiatives have been intertwined with the quality of frontline employees who create lasting moments-of-truth (Chiou et al., 2008). Indeed, the level of knowledge, skills, ability and others portrayed by the employees or the personnel go a long way to affect the satisfaction levels of visitors (Kotler et al., 2006). Tourism as a service entity is characterised by inseparability, variability, intangibility and perishability (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009). Tourism is inseparable such that both the service provider, which is the personnel and the visitors have to be present for the delivery of service to occur (Komppula, 2001; Perreault and McCarthy, 2006). Put differently, contact with employees is part of the product being offered. Thus it is necessary how personnel present themselves, their customer relations and the delivery of the service. For example at BFRBS, it is based on how the tour guides are knowledgeable about the site and how they interact with the tourists to heighten their experiences. Also, the employees serve as the tangible aspect of tourism (Kotler et al., 2006). This reduces the uncertainty caused by intangibility and gives visitors, information and confidence in the product they are purchasing (Komppula, 2001). The variability of tourism means that service quality depends on who provides the services and when and where they are provided. To Kotler et al (2006) variability depends largely on the technical quality (e.g. the knowledge about faunal and floral species) and functional quality (e.g. the interactions exhibited by employees). Many authors aver that employees must master interactive marketing skills to increase customer satisfaction (Jennings, 2006;

Kotler et al., 2006; Perreault and McCarthy, 2006; Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009; Amuquandoh et al., 2011; Eshun, 2011). Ciesielski and Arrowsmith (2005) further argue that with the right training, personnel help to minimise or prevent the incidence of perishability of a service. The foregoing elucidations further buttress the fact that employees serve an important role in the tourist experiences at BFRBS, which should underscore the Sanctuary's unique selling proposition.

Additionally, in Ghana, inadequate number of employees at eco-sites is not a principal limitation issue, the overarching limitation is the quality of personnel (Eshun, 2011). At most eco-sites in Ghana, there are more than two full-time employees, this is because most of the sites are managed by the Wildlife Division, which employs at least one resident manager along with an assistant manager and security. Contrariwise, in Finland, almost a quarter of the Finnish nature-based activity operators do not have full-time personnel, because most of their eco-sites are privately-owned and not under governmental influence (Komppula, 2001). Eshun (2011) adds that customer service skills and knowledge level of tour guides at most eco-sites in Ghana are dismal. He argues that managers of the eco-sites must plan for periodic training programmes especially for their tour guides on species and their uniqueness, physical appearance, appropriate level of English language, and diverse and exciting information relevant to the various visitor categories. McGrath (1999) claims cogently that tourist experiences and satisfaction are intertwined largely with the functionality of service providers.

- **Physical Evidence:** still flagship species are positioned as the *de rigueur* pull factor at eco-sites (Eagles and McCool, 2002; Fennell, 2008; Honey, 2008). Thus at BFRBS, there is much focus on the butterfly species. However, the butterflies are in low numbers especially in the raining season, therefore a net hub has been erected to attract them to ensure easy visibility. In addition, the Sanctuary has a well-kept guesthouse with conference room. To Fennell (2008) accommodation at an eco-site helps to curb leaking. This notwithstanding, poor road network, limited telecommunication service and electricity supply, few recreational activities at the site continue to create dissatisfaction among visitors. All these need urgent attention. There was an arc at the entrance at Kubease with BFRBS embossed on it, which is broken down, this needs to be reconstructed to serve its function of advertising the site. Nunkoo and Ramkissoon (2010) re-echo that tourism's potential in African economies is constrained by several factors such as lack of capital, distance from main tourism markets, poor governance, poor marketing and lack of tourism planning and policy.
- **Process management:** effective process has proven to be a powerful differentiator, since it tangibilises service to create lasting moments-of-truth (Kotler et al., 2006). For example, provision of shuttles from BFRBS will reduce the excessive stress that visitors pass through in getting back to the Kubease community after visiting the site. Also, developing a community-tour will increase tourist experience and contribute to empowerment of the local communities. Akama (2004) further suggests that these threats can be minimised by creating opportunities for locals to participate and benefit from the ecotourism. This standpoint, have been re-echoed by many authors, who stressed that a sense of community ownership, a feeling of responsibility and practical involvement in ecotourism, invariably contribute to sustainability of ecotourism (Hvenegaard, 1994; Asiedu, 2002; Boyd and Singh, 2003; Kiss, 2004; Zeppel, 2006; Tran and Walter, 2014). Kotler et al (2006) caution that the marketplace is characterised by fierce competition, which demands that managers are proactive in finding ways of reaching and satisfying their customers towards repeat visit. BFRBS is currently featured on the Ghana tourism map and the Centre

for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) and FORIG website. However, to reach larger market there is the need for creating documentaries of the site on social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and twitter and publishing in brochures and catalogues. Chiou et al (2008) surmise that visitors' expectations for experience are usually based on the interaction between tourists and trips, including reading brochures in advance, virtual experiences on the Internet or past tourism and visiting experiences.

Recommendations

This study makes further recommendations for research on tourist experience. First, the use of visitors' books as the sole source of data for tourist experience is beset with linguistic problems, lack of depth of data, and some of the visitor groups not being particularly interested in detailing their experiences in visitors' books (Stamous and Paraskevopoulos, 2003). These limitations do not allow for exploring the underlying and more personal reasoning of respondents (Sheng and Chen, 2011). Although this study sought to overcome some of these limitations by employing interview technique, however, further works could be complemented with data from mainstream techniques such as focus group discussion and survey alongside emerging trends such as nethnography and poetics. Second, research on the same topic must involve different eco-sites to engender cross-fertilisation of understandings of visitors' characteristics and experiences by management to help in planning and developing customer-tailored and environmentally-sound services towards achieving sustainable ecotourism.

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