



Domestic tourism development: A case study of traditional funerals at Abono in the Lake Bosomtwe basin of Ashanti Region, Ghana

Thomas Yeboah*, Charles Afram Snr, Ahmed Kulega and Alexander Baidoo
Department of Hospitality and Tourism Management
School of Applied Science and Technology
Sunyani Technical University
P. O. Box 206, Sunyani, Ghana
E-mail: tommyeboah@yahoo.com

Corresponding author*

Abstract

Funerals, despite their sombre nature, when considered under domestic tourism development in Ghana, provide the necessary ingredients for people to learn more about their country and they additionally help to inspire a sense of national identity and unity. Yet little is known about the contribution of funerals to the development of the domestic tourism industry in Ghana. The purpose of the study is to examine the extent to which Asante's traditional funerals contribute to the development of domestic tourism in the study area. The sample comprised of 120 household heads, including six key informants, drawn from the study area. Data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The study found that respondents attended funerals to show their sympathy to the bereaved families in the study area. Finally, the study recommends that every effort ought to be made by Bosomtwe District Assembly to restore the use of discarded indigenous funerary arts that are beneficial in funeral ceremonies to improve funeral attendance at Abono and thus make tourism sustainable.

Keywords: Funeral tourism, domestic tourism, Lake Bosomtwe, Akan, mourners.

Introduction

Rattray (1927) is of the view that funeral is a rite of passage dominated by the theme or idea of separation. A funeral therefore, is a ceremony for honouring, respecting, sanctifying, or remembering the life of a person who has died. Each culture and religious belief defines the notion of a funeral a little differently. In America, Arhin-Sam (2014) identifies three types of funerals practiced in South Florida. These include funerals of family members who died in Ghana or some other part of the diaspora and are buried in Ghana, relatives who die in South Florida and are buried in South Florida and the third type of funeral is that of people who died in South Florida but are buried in Ghana.

Nevertheless, there are three common types of funeral services around the world. These are traditional, graveside and direct cremation. In the graveside or direct burial funeral service, the body is buried shortly after death, usually in a simple container or casket as used by some religious groups such as Muslims. No viewing or visitation is involved, so no embalming is necessary. A memorial service may be held at the graveside or later. Direct burial usually costs less than the "traditional" full-service funeral. With direct cremation, the body of the dead person is incinerated or burnt shortly after death without embalming (Adu-Gyamfi, 2010). The cremated or incinerated remains are placed in an urn or other container. No viewing or visitation is involved. The remains can be kept in the home, buried, or placed in a crypt or niche in a cemetery, or buried or scattered in a favourite spot of the deceased or his or her direct family.



In Ghana, domestic tourism has been increasing as the economy has been steadily growing. The number of Ghanaians and residents visiting major sites rose to 5.3% in 2011, generating 763,461 visits and USD 987,000 in entrance fees (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2012). Ghana living standards survey in 2008, reveal that apart from visiting family and friends, the other purpose for travelling within Ghana is to attend funerals (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2008:58). Funerals are regarded as processes rather than events in Ghana. Depending on the bereaved family and the status of the deceased as well as the nature of the death, funeral rituals can last up to a couple of days, weeks, months and even a year or more. An average Asante's traditional funeral in Ghana requires lot of time, effort, organization and money. It is a long process, starting from the moment of death, with the last celebration after one year, incorporating several ceremonies and events (de Witte, 2001).

Funerals are strict social obligation on the living and it is not surprising to see people or group of people in mourning cloths of red and black throughout the week in Akan communities in Ghana. At the present time, little is known about funerals in the domestic tourism development in Ghana. Yet, funeral is one of the traditional weekend activities on the domestic front that sends many Ghanaians to many parts of the country on a regular basis.

Furthermore, funerals are venues for making important social contact and community integration because it is a cultural expectation for a deceased's extended network of relations, including those living in the diaspora, in Europe and America, friends and acquaintances from far and near, to attend the funeral as the final show of love and respect for the dead who, in indigenous religious discourse, is journeying to the world of the dead. Another reason is that there is an emphasis on successful funerals in Ghana and this success is determined largely by the magnificence of the funeral and the large number of mourners who attend it. The dignity of the funeral makes it necessary for all who know the dead to attend the funeral (Arhin-Sam, 2014:22).

In most of the Akan communities in Ghana funeral celebrations are public, spectacular and colourful event characterized by processions, drumming, dancing and communicative events related to death such as epigraphs or inscriptions, tributes (Moses and Marelli, 2004), dirges, and obituaries (Arhin-Sam, 2014:36). The traditional colours for mourning, red and black to match with native sandals dominate and the event often involves impressive ecstatic dances and rites. Depending on one's religious belief, funerals may involve wake keeping, funeral service, interment of the body at the cemetery, final funeral rites and thanks-giving. Malek (1994) observes that the people of Ashanti region believe death is a logical consequence of existence hence a dead person merits a fitting burial and honourable funeral. Scheyvens (2007) suggests that economic empowerment in destination areas can be expressed by the tourism activities that bring lasting economic gains to the local community. It is very gratifying to note that hoteliers and other accommodation facility operators of guest houses, motels and inns located at the funeral destinations see moments of funeral celebrations as their peak periods especially in a situation where funeral celebrations are rural-based. Drinking bar operators also ensure that their stock levels are within the highest brackets. During funerals, operators of the tourism facility are put into business both at the source markets and the destination. Organizing funeral tourism well means that transport operators such as the taxi cubs, state transport company and other car rental organizations can run special services on such occasions.

The development of funeral tourism would encourage the involvement of residents in local businesses due to the existence of many employment opportunities that are supposed to be offered in the funeral destination and increasing quality of life (Aleff, et al., 2014:2). Restaurant operators and traditional caterers (chop bars) put themselves together for massive delivery to satisfy their numerous customers at such occasions. The essence of tourism is to create opportunities for the tourists to spend the night and therefore spend money and put facility operators in business at the intended destinations. It is in an anticipation of this that all tourism and hospitality facility operators at funeral destinations work



tirelessly to ensure the comfort of mourners. Since most mourners may be first time visitors to the town or village, they take time off to visit areas of interest or tourist attractions such as shrines, lakes, rivers, and even cemeteries of slaves, great chiefs and warriors.

Funeral and for that matter, funeral celebration is an activity that cut across all the industry segments, yet little have been written about its contribution to the development of the tourism industry. The purpose of the study is to examine the extent to which the various types of Asante's traditional funerals contribute to the development of domestic tourism at Abono which is home to Lake Bosomtwe, the only meteorite lake in the Ashanti region (Ghana Statistical Service (GSS, 2014:2).

Materials and methods

The study was conducted at Abono, which is found within the Bosomtwe district in the Ashanti region of Ghana. The Bosomtwe District, is located in the central part of the Ashanti Region and lies within Latitudes 6° 24' South and 6° 43' North and Longitudes 1° 15' East and 1° 46' West. The District has a land size of 422.5 sq km with a population density of 222.3 persons per sq km. The District has its capital at Kuntanase (GSS, 2010). Apart from farming, Abono also is a fishing community that has tourism potential such as Lake Bosomtwe which is relatively developed. The road linking Abono from Kumasi, which is about 30-minute drive, is in good shape. There is also the availability of electricity, lake transport, telecommunication and other facilities. Moreover, hotel accommodation, restaurant, summer huts, and open terraces are also springing up throughout the District and especially around the lake (GSS, 2014).

This study used descriptive survey design. Ali (1996) posits descriptive survey as events that are without manipulation of what is being observed. Questionnaire was the main instrument used for the study. This was however, supplemented by interview guide. The questionnaires were written in the English language but were asked in Asante Twi, the language spoken by the people in the community (Ghana Statistical Services (GSS, 2010). With the help of the instruments, the study was carried out by the researcher and his two assistants at Abono, which is located at Lake Bosomtwe basin in the Ashanti region. Abono was chosen for the study because of how funeral celebration is cherished and held in high esteem by the people in the community and also the community is noted for hosting travellers that visit the lake. The data for this study was collected from a sampled population of heads of households drawn from households at Abono. Employing a multi-stage sampling technique, 120 heads of households were selected from households at Abono. The sample size of 120 was arrived at to ensure fair representation of different categories of people living within the community. This is in line with Hair et al.,'s (1987) suggestion that a sample size of 100 is enough for statistical analysis.

In the first stage, purposive sampling technique was used to select Abono where respondents were drawn from based on accessibility to the lake as well as availability of tourism and hospitality facilities. The second phase centred on the listing of household heads in the community. As part of this exercise, field assistants were tasked to list and identify the number of households in each house and also give identification marks to each of the household heads. The third phase dealt with the proportional allocation of the sample size of 120 among the households in the community, numbering about 340. At the fourth phase, simple random sampling (without replacement) was used in selecting the individuals from the list of heads of households. Using simple random sampling, one adult household head was selected from the sampling frame to complete a questionnaire. With regards to the descriptive analyses, percentages were used to describe the individual characteristics of the respondents as well as the scores of the various scale items. Meanwhile, one Bosomtwe District Assembly (BDA) member, two hospitality facility operators and three mourners were purposively selected for the in-depth interview.



Results and discussions

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents considered in this study were age, sex, highest educational level, income, marital status, occupation and religion. Table 1, shows that 56.7% of the respondents were males while 42.5% were females. In terms of age, it was found that majority of the respondents were in the age bracket of 40-59 years representing 53.3% whilst only few of the respondents were below 39 years. More specifically, there were 29.2% of respondents who were between the ages of 30 to 39; whilst 16.7% were above 59 years.

Table 1 Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Individual characteristics	Frequency	Percent
Sex		
Male	68	56.7
Female	51	42.5
Age		
20 - 39 years	35	29.2
40 - 59 years	64	53.3
>59 years	20	16.7
Level of education		
Basic	24	20.0
Secondary	41	34.2
Tertiary	34	28.3
no formal education	19	15.8
Occupation		
Related to tourism	35	29.2
Not related to tourism	85	70.8
Marital status		
Never married	40	33.3
Married	64	53.3
Ever married	16	13.3
Income		
< C100	20	16.7
C100 - C199	33	27.5
C200 - C299	32	26.7
C300 - C399	14	11.7
C400 - C499	10	8.3
>C499	11	9.2
Total	120	100.0

Note: \$1.00 = C3.9

Table 1 also shows that 34.2% of the respondents had secondary education whilst the remaining 28.3% had tertiary education, 20% had basic education and the remaining 15.8% had no formal education. With regard to marriage, about 53.0% of the respondents were married whilst 33.3% were never married with, 10.0% ever married. That is, about ten percent of the respondents were either divorced or widowed. With respect to occupation, 29.2% of the respondents had jobs which were related to tourism. These included operators of the hotels, restaurants, chop bars as well as those working as tour guides at the Lake Bosomtwe. In the interim, about 71.0% of respondents had jobs which were not related to tourism. These jobs included trading, fishing, farming, teaching, nursing and artisans.

Table 1 indicates that 16.7% of respondents were taking less than C100.0 as their average monthly income, 27.5% received between C100 - C199, 26.7% had average monthly income between C200-C299, 11.7% had C300 - C399 and a small set of respondents representing 8.3% had an income of C400 - C499 while the remaining 9.2% made an average monthly income of above C499.



Different categories of traditional funerals

The type of funerals celebrated by a deceased family is usually dictated by cultural, religious, economic, political and social factors. When respondents were asked to indicate the type of funeral that people attend most in the community, about 54% of respondents were of the view that most mourners in the community attend royal funerals. Royal funeral is a tag name given to the celebration of a funeral of a wealthy person mostly from a royal family in the community as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Types of traditional funerals at Abono

Traditional funerals	Frequency	Percentage
Royal	83	53.9
Sodoɔ	27	17.5
Atɔfo	10	6.5
Ordinary	34	22.0
Total	154	100

The celebration of royal funerals in the community mostly last for about three days before the final funeral rites. In attendance were chiefs from the surrounding communities who grace this occasion because the person had royal lineage. Respondents were of the view that royal funeral is the type of funeral that has the potential to be developed into a tourism activity since it creates employment for the local people. The extent to which the employment is generated is a function of the degree of linkages between funeral celebrations (attendance at funerals) and the other sectors of the local economy such as lodges and hotels as well as transport and retail businesses that cater for mourners that attend royal funerals in the community.

Table 2 shows that 17.5% of respondents attend *Sodoɔ* funerals in the community. *Sodoɔ* is the type of traditional funeral celebration in the Akan community that is organized when the dead person is the first person to die in the nuclear family. The celebration of *Sodoɔ* funerals lasts for few hours within the day. *Atɔfo* funeral is another type of traditional funeral celebrated by the local people when a person dies in an accident, lake or dies a “shameful” death such as through suicides or dreaded diseases, such as leprosy and in modern times HIV/AIDS. They mostly skip morgue as it is seen to be a tragedy. About seven percent of the respondents were of the view that they attended *Atɔfo* funerals in the community. These two types of traditional funerals celebrated in the study area may not contribute significantly to the development of funeral tourism since they were not patronised so much by respondents and also last for short period of time within the day.

Table 2 indicates that about 22.0% of respondents were of the view that they attended funerals of ordinary people in the community. Ordinary funeral is celebrated when a community member dies a normal or natural death. The celebration mostly last for about two days. This type of funeral also enables mourners especially, non-residents, spend the night and more importantly, money in the local economy thus helping to develop funeral tourism at Abono.

Reasons for funeral attendance by respondents at Abono

Funerals give a greater awareness of Ghana, its economy and its diverse socio-cultural structure. More importantly, funerals help redistribute income within the country, especially from urban to rural areas. In the opinion of the respondents, among some of the reasons for funeral attendances at Abono were as shown in Table 3.



Table 3: Reasons for funeral attendance by respondents

Reasons	Frequency	Percent
Donation	29	24.2
Social obligation	19	17.4
Attraction / entertainment	13	11.9
Sympathy	59	54.1
Total	120	100

Donations

Table 3 shows that 24.2% of the respondents indicated that they attended funerals to give their donations to the bereaved families. Households were of the view that they attended funeral to show their love they had for the deceased to the bereaved family through donations. Respondents explained that the donations could be done in the form of cash (*nsaabodeɛ*) or in kind (*aboadeɛ* and *asiedeɛ*). This is a practice where a widow or widower of a deceased as well as his or her loved ones gives items ranging from mats, pillows, pieces of cloth to handkerchiefs and rings (Asante, et al., 2013).

In an interview, a fifty-year old man at Abono said:

“Some time ago, funerals were being celebrated using sheds constructed with sticks and covered with palm fronds to provide shade for funeral ceremonies. But these days funeral celebrations have become costly at Abono due to the hiring of canopies, chairs, including sound system and life band that perform at the funeral grounds. As a sympathizer, I need to donate money to the bereaved family to help reduce the cost they would incur in this funeral”.

In another interview a thirty-year old woman said:

“Food and drinks are served to mourners in the family house, or in cases where there are huge numbers of people to be served, other places, apart from the family houses, is sought around the funeral grounds to accommodate mourners. Sometimes, a catering service enterprise is contracted to prepare and serve food and drinks to mourners, all of which are costly”.

As a result of the perceived costs incurred by funeral organizers or the bereaved family, respondents suggested that well-wishers and sympathizers of the deceased and the bereaved family need to come together to support the funeral by donating money and drinks among others to the bereaved family during funeral celebrations.

Social obligation

About seventeen percent of respondents indicated that they attend funeral in the community since it is a social obligation on the living as shown in Table 3.

In an interview, a forty-five year old mourner at Abono said:

“I always attend funerals because, if you do not attend other people’s funerals, you don’t expect that when you die people will attend your funeral”.



Respondents were of the opinion that funerals in the study area provided avenues for important social contact for mourners. It offered the opportunity for mourners to have social contact, settle conflicts, contract marriages, meet old friends, and have conversations, trade gossip and news about happenings in and around them. Funeral tourism offers various communities important development opportunities as during such occasions, some poor roads in the community were reshaped, old family buildings were either pulled down and new ones built or the old family houses were painted. Increasingly, these activities organized during funeral celebrations were expected also to contribute to sustainable development and deliver benefits to the local community.

Attraction

Since most mourners may be first time visitors to the funeral destination, they take time off to visit areas of interest or tourist attractions. Table 3 shows that 11.9% of respondents attended funerals in the community because of the attraction (Lake Bosomtwe). The respondents believe that funerals offered them the opportunity to entertain themselves and to visit Lake Bosomtwe which they had heard of it so many years ago. Some of the respondents were of the view that they attended funeral in the community to dance and or listen to, especially traditional music that were played during funeral celebrations. In the opinion of some of the mourners, funeral celebrations offered them the opportunity to relax, or at least not to get bored after working throughout the week or month.

Sympathy

In the context of social exchange theory residents' attitude towards funeral tourism development at Abono can be evaluated based on its benefits and costs (AP, 1992). The implication is that once the benefits exceed the costs, locals are likely to support funeral tourism development. As a result, it is crucial to identify the impacts of funeral tourism on host destination, especially the negative impacts in order to minimize the perceived costs and raise household support to funeral tourism development. In planning funerals in the study area, the most significant consideration of a bereaved family is how to make the funeral a successful one. Success in a funeral was determined by the large numbers of mourners that attended the funeral, how magnificent it was, the quality of the coffin, the high social standing of those who attended, and the good quality and large quantity of food and drinks served to mourners. About 54% of respondents indicated that they attended funerals in the community to mourn or sympathize with the bereaved family as shown in Table 3.

Conclusion

Funeral tourism, despite its somber nature, has a bright future in the study area based on the active role of the households in the celebration of funerals. The result above shows that it has inspired awareness from all walks of life. It promotes the culture of the people and since most of the time urban dwellers move to the rural areas to celebrate funerals, it helps to relieve mourners the burden of the bustle and hustle of city life. Funerals also act as an aspect of national integration and wealth creation through culture. In essence, it has helped to boost Abono's cultural heritage, thus acting as a viable vehicle for social mobilization and sustainable domestic tourism development.



The study has revealed that traditionally, funerals at Abono to a large extent reveal their cultural identity. Even though acculturation has brought about certain changes in the funeral celebration in the area, they have not been completely destroyed the traditional culture of the households. With this in view, some of the indigenous and culturally beneficial funerary arts should be retained while at the same time paving ways for change to suit modern conditions. It is also interesting to note that the cultural identity of the respondents is to a large extent linked to the funeral being celebrated by the households at Abono. To help the present and future generations come to terms with their true identity through funeral tourism, every effort must be made to restore the use of discarded indigenous funerary arts that are beneficial in funeral ceremonies at Abono.

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