

Ghanaians' Perceptions of the USA and UK as Tourism Destinations: A Within-Subjects Comparison

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Abstract

Awash with studies of Africans as hosts, research has neglected Africans as tourists. In contrast, this study positions the African as tourist. Specifically, this study compared Ghanaians' perceptions of the USA and UK as tourism destinations. Middle- and upper-class Ghanaians were asked to consider each destination and what it might be like to travel there. Using valid and reliable measures, destination image, perceived risk and safety, and travel motivations were then assessed for each destination. Analysis revealed that both destinations were characterized by wealth, comfort, development, and educational/professional opportunity. Images also diverged. The UK was associated with the Royal family, sport, culture, and hospitality. The USA was associated with freedom, superpower status, racism and violence. The USA was perceived as a significantly riskier destination. Yet interest in traveling to both destinations was very high. Self-improvement, seeing the sites, novelty, fun and relaxation were important travel motivations for each destination. Implications for African tourists, and ideas for future research, are discussed.

Keywords: African tourist; destination image; perceived risk; travel motivation; international tourism

Introduction

There is an abundance of research examining Western (i.e., European, Anglosphere) perceptions of Africa as a tourist destination. In contrast, there is a scarcity of research examining African perceptions of the West as a tourist destination. One reason is that African outbound tourism is just 3% of all international arrivals (Saayman et al., 2018). Yet 3% of an estimated 1.4 billion international arrivals represents a niche market of potentially 40 million people. Certainly, understanding and serving this market presents both intellectual and economic opportunity. A separate explanation was introduced by Mkono (2011). Mkono identified an "African as tourist" gap in tourism theory over a decade ago. She argued that tourism studies have stereotyped the African as host. As such, research has importantly focused on Africans as acted upon by Western tourists (e.g. Akyeampong, 2010; Folarin & Adeniyi, 2019; Harilal & Tichaawa, 2020; Lepp, 2002; Mbaiwa, 2005) while missing the opportunity to examine Africans as empowered tourists. In the years since Mkono highlighted this research gap, little has changed. Tourism studies continues to overlook African tourists and their aspirations. In response, this study explored prospective Ghanaian tourists' perceptions of two of the West's top tourism destinations: the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK).

Expanding upon Mkono's work (2011), Cohen and Cohen (2015ab) argued that accepted understandings of tourism are based primarily upon Western views of travel. In other

words, Western cultural norms and beliefs have had the greatest influence on tourism theory. Non-western perspectives have been largely ignored. Thus, dominant theories of tourism may not adequately describe or predict the behavior of tourists from African countries. For example, Mkono (2013) documented the shortcomings of MacCannell's (1976) theory of authenticity in describing the motivations and behaviors of African tourists. MacCannell theorized tourism as a quest for a more meaningful and authentic experience outside of modernity. Examining this at Victoria Falls along the border of Zambia and Zimbabwe, Mkono (2013) compared the perspectives of African tourists with those of Western tourists. Among the differences, Western tourists searched for and demanded authenticity of experience. They wanted the "real Africa" and endeavored to test and verify the authenticity of any cultural production or artifact. African tourists, in contrast, wanted to be entertained and were not bothered to investigate the authenticity of cultural productions and artifacts. Instead, the African experience of cultural productions was influenced by perceptions of artistic creativity and beauty with no concern for authenticity.

In past efforts to understand African tourists, Crompton's (1979a) foundational work has provided a better starting point. Crompton suggested that tourism fulfills a need to break from routine, to overcome daily stressors, and restore socio-psychological equilibrium. Thus, the impetus to travel begins within the individual. Accordingly, Crompton identified seven intrinsic motivations for tourism: escape from one's familiar routine, exploration and evaluation of self, relaxation, prestige, nostalgia, enhancement of kinship, and social interaction. These have become known as push factors, because they work within an individual, pushing them towards a decision to engage in tourism behavior. Once an individual decides to engage in tourism behavior, Crompton suggests that destination specific pull factors will draw prospective tourists to one destination or another. He identified two important pull factors: novelty and education. These, of course, are related since new experiences are often educational. Crompton's theory was operationalized and tested in two studies of African tourists traveling domestically. First, Kruger and Saayman (2010) surveyed domestic tourists in South Africa. Their results demonstrated that education was a viable pull factor while escape, relaxation and nostalgia were meaningful push factors. Second, Mapingure et al. (2019) investigated domestic tourists in Zimbabwe. A desire for novelty (e.g., to learn new things, to have new experiences, to explore new places) as well as escape and relaxation were the most dominant motivational factors for the African tourists sampled. Similarly, inspired studies of prospective Nigerian tourists (i.e., not on tour when surveyed) identified escape, novelty, pleasure seeking, and self-enhancement as intrinsic motivations for domestic tourism (Awaritefe, 2004; Essien et al., 2023). In comparison, Awaritefe (2004) found that actual Nigerian tourists (i.e., engaging in domestic tourism when surveyed) most valued education and mastery over their environment. A limitation of this previous research is that the surveys forced respondents to select from a prescribed list of motivations. There was no opportunity for motivations beyond those inspired by Crompton's framework to emerge.

Expanding upon this, Cohen and Cohen (2015ab) suggested that African tourists may be motivated by self-improvement and identity development (e.g., Crompton's exploration and evaluation of self) as well as prestige. However, Mapingure et al. (2019) found that Zimbabwean domestic tourists judged prestige to be less important than all other motivations tested except social interaction. Perhaps, prestige would be more of a factor in motivating Africans' international tourism than domestic. However, this has not been studied. More recently, Saayman et al. (2018) examined Africa's outbound tourist flow and identified Europe, Asia and North America as the top destinations by continent. The authors suggested that each continent may have a unique pull, for example: colonial ties and language similarities might favor European destinations; historical ties through the trans-Atlantic slave-trade might draw

Africans to North America; and religious attractions might draw Catholics to Europe. Indeed, Alhammad (2022) presented a systematic literature review suggesting religious attractions may uniquely draw African Muslims to Asia. Finally, Cohen and Cohen noted that African tourists face different challenges than Westerners when traveling abroad. These could dampen motivations. For example, African tourists may be perceived as economic migrants rather than tourists; they do not have equal access to visas; their international movement is tightly controlled by Western nations and is more likely to be blocked. All of this could influence Africans' motivations for international tourism in ways seldom imagined by Westerners. Indeed, much more research is needed to understand and serve the African tourist.

One area of research yet to be explored with African tourists, and closely linked with motivational pull factors, is destination image. Crompton (1979b) defined destination image as prospective tourists' beliefs, ideas, and impressions of a place. These beliefs, ideas and impressions include mental pictures of a destination's physical characteristics as well as the feelings commonly associated with a destination (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). Bigné et al. (2001) described image as an individual's subjective interpretation of a destination. As such, an individual's image of a destination is an important factor in deciding which destination to visit (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Debbagh & Azouaoui, 2022; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Weru, 2021). Destination image has a logical similarity to the motivational language of Crompton (1979a) in that a favorable image pulls an individual towards choosing that destination. To date, no research that we are aware of has explored prospective African tourists' images of Western tourism destinations.

Prospective tourists' image of a destination can be classified as cognitive or affective. Cognitive images include cultural, natural and social aspects as well as infrastructure and level of development. Affective images consider the emotions evoked by a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991). While cognitive and affective images are subjective, destination managers work to cultivate, standardize and sustain destination images which their target markets would find inviting. Images which are cultivated and managed by the tourism industry are known as induced (Gunn, 1972). Tourism industry produced promotional materials (e.g., destination websites, printed advertisements, etc.) are an example of this effort. However, destination images can also evolve organically from a variety of stimuli beyond the tourism industry's control, such as tourist produced images posted to social media (Paul i Agusti, 2022). A unique study of prospective Tanzanian tourists examined their affective images of South Korea (Choi et al., 2020). Results suggested that engagement with South Korean popular culture (i.e., K-pop) was associated with favorable attitudes about South Korea as a tourism destination. It is unlikely that Africans' images of destinations beyond the continent are induced. Given the relatively small number of Africa's outbound tourists, global destinations do not spend their marketing budgets there (e.g., Hudson, 2014). As Choi et al.'s research suggests, Africans' images of global destinations are likely organic.

One source of organic image is headline news. This century began with the September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States. Since then, terrorism, war, natural disasters and pandemics have been a fixture in headline news and consequently in the mind of the tourist (Larsen et al., 2009). For this reason, perceptions of safety and risk have become important aspects of destination image (Lepp et al., 2011; Qi et al., 2009). Research has identified numerous factors which influence tourists' perceptions of safety and risk, these include terrorism, war, crime, disease, health care infrastructure, political and economic stability, level of development, and cultural differences (e.g., Brunt et al., 2000; Cossens & Gin, 1994; Lepp & Gibson, 2003, 2008; Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005; Sönmez & Graefe, 1998). In the Western mind, these risk factors are a concern across the continent of Africa (Carter, 1998). Yet African tourists' perceptions of safety and risk have been given little thought. Perhaps there are risk

factors that Africans associate with international tourism which destination managers have overlooked. For example, the industry's history of systematic and structural inequalities, bias, and racism has brought attention to the Black Travel Movement, which has long sought to create safe spaces for Black travelers (Dillette & Benjamin, 2022). While the movement predates the internet, it now uses social media to unify Black travelers regardless of national origin. Indeed, recent analyses of social media posts using hashtags such as “travelingwhileblack” have revealed that the risk of experiencing racism is a common concern among the world's Black travelers, including those from Africa (Dillette et al., 2019; Li et al, 2020; Park et al., 2022).

Mkono (2011, 2013) identified the “African as tourist” gap in tourism research. Cohen and Cohen (2015ab) further articulated the need for non-Western perspectives in tourism research. Yet, the “African as tourist” gap persists to this day. In response, this study explores how prospective Ghanaian tourists perceive the United States of America (USA) and the United Kingdom (UK) as tourist destinations. The USA and UK are among the world's top 10 tourism destinations in terms of international arrivals (UNWTO, 2019). Additionally, as Saayman et al., (2018) suggest, Ghanaians may give more thought to these destinations due to shared language (English) and history (i.e., colonial ties, slavery). Most broadly, this exploratory study asks: “what are the similarities and differences in prospective Ghanaian tourists' perceptions of the USA and UK as tourism destinations?” Specifically, this study asks the following questions:

1. In this sample of prospective Ghanaian tourists, what is the destination image of the USA? Likewise, what is the destination image of the UK?
2. Are there differences in the way this sample of prospective Ghanaian tourists perceive the USA and UK in terms of risk and safety?
3. In this sample of prospective Ghanaian tourists, what are the primary motivations for traveling to the USA? Likewise, what are the primary motivations for traveling to the UK?

The study design allows for a within subjects' comparison of two of the West's top tourism destinations. As such, it is one of the first studies to explore Africans' (i.e., Ghanaians') perspectives of non-African tourism destinations.

Methods

The sample

A co-investigator in this research is an alumnus of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. Using this co-investigator's social and professional networks in Ghana, a purposeful sampling frame was created. The purpose was to create a list of college educated Ghanaians likely to self-identify as middle or upper class. Relative to the lower class, this population of Ghanaians is more mobile and more likely have previously considered international tourism. The final list included 200 alumni and students from the University of Cape Coast. These 200 Ghanaians were invited, via email, to participate in an online survey in early 2019 (before the Covid19 pandemic, before mass protests over police brutality in the USA). The survey was anonymous, voluntary, and approved by the university's institutional review board (protocol #19-163). After the initial invitation, two reminders were sent. After six weeks, the survey was closed. This method produced a sample of 138 completed surveys. Purposive samples are useful for exploratory studies targeting segments of a population who are informed and thoughtful regarding a phenomenon of interest, as was the case here (Calder et al., 1981).

Measures

Part 1 of the online survey asked about perceptions of the USA as a travel destination. The introduction to Part 1 read:

Please think about the United States of America. Also, think about what it might be like to travel to the United States of America. The questions below ask for your thoughts about travel to the United States of America. Please be honest and open with your answers.

The survey then assessed destination image using the free elicitation approach developed by Echtner and Ritchie (1993). This method has also been referred to as the “top of mind” approach (Stepchenkova & Li, 2014) and has been used previously (Lepp et al., 2011). As such, participants were asked to “Please list two things that “pop into” your head when you think of The United States of America.” Interest in traveling to the USA was then assessed with the question “Assuming time and money are not concerns, would you travel to The United States of America for a tour of the country?” The question’s wording deliberately eliminated the two most commonly cited constraints to tourism, time and money (Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008) thereby encouraging deeper reflection on the possibility of travel. This question was immediately followed with an open-ended request to “please list the two most important reasons explaining your answer above, i.e. why you would or would not travel to the United States of America.” Reasons corresponding with an interest in traveling to the USA were interpreted as motivations for travel. This method of exploring motivations has been used previously (Lepp et al., 2014). Finally, Part 1 assessed perceptions of risk and safety associated with travel to the USA using a survey developed previously (Lepp et al., 2011). The survey presented 19 statements describing various risk and safety factors identified in the tourism literature. The statements connected these risks to the USA. For example: “Terrorists are a threat to the United States of America,” or “The United States of America has good health care facilities.” Using a seven point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly disagree ... 7 = strongly agree) participants stated their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement. These 19 items comprised three unique scales. Each scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency. The first was a seven item scale assessing perceived level of development ($\alpha = .758$, $N = 138$). The second was a six item scale assessing perceived risk of violence and crime ($\alpha = .768$, $N = 138$). The third was a six item scale assessing perceptions of interpersonal (e.g., host/guest) interaction ($\alpha = .734$, $N = 138$). Scale items and means are presented in Tables 2 – 4 of the results section.

Part 2 of the online survey asked about perceptions of the UK as a travel destination. The introduction read:

Please think about the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom is short for the ‘United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland,’ a sovereign state made of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Also, please think about what it might be like to travel to the United Kingdom. The questions below ask for your thoughts about travel to the United Kingdom. Please be honest and open with your answers.

The survey items presented in Part 2 were the same as in Part 1 except the “United States of America” was replaced throughout with the “United Kingdom.” For example, the UK’s destination image was assessed by asking “Please list two things that “pop into” your head when you think of the United Kingdom.” In this way, interest in traveling to the UK, motivations for traveling to the UK, and perceptions of safety and risk were assessed. As with the USA, the scales assessing perceptions of risk and safety associated with travel to the UK demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha \geq .746$, $N = 138$). By asking the same



participants to reflect on travel to both the USA and the UK, within-subjects’ comparisons were possible.

Part 3 of the survey assessed demographics including country of citizenship, age, education level, and self-identified economic class standing. It assessed whether participants had a valid passport. Part three also assessed whether the participant had traveled beyond Africa, including whether they had traveled to the USA or UK.

Data analysis

Open ended responses used to assess destination image and motivations for travel were analyzed by categorizing similar responses into single themes. This was accomplished by co-investigators from the USA and Ghana working together to interpret the data. The data consisted of single words or simple phrases and thus were clear in meaning. This method is common in destination image studies (Lepp et al., 2011; Stepchenkova & Li, 2014). After all the data had been categorized, the frequencies of the themes were calculated, ranked, and results for USA and UK were compared. SPSS was used to analyze the quantitative data assessing perceptions of risk and safety. Risk perceptions for the USA and UK were assessed with descriptive statistics and compared. Individual items were compared using the Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for related samples. Scale means were compared using dependent sample (also known as paired sample) t-tests.

Sample characteristics

The final sample size was 138. Age ranged from 18 to 40 years with a mean of 22 (STD = 3.25). Males comprised 60% of the sample. All participants were citizens of Ghana and 80% owned a valid Ghanaian passport. Sixty-six percent of the sample had a bachelor’s degree, 14% a master’s degree, one percent a PhD, and the remainder (19%) had a two-year associate degree or some college. As a relatively well-educated sample, 92% described themselves as middle class, two percent described themselves as upper class, and six percent as lower class. The sample had international travel experience with 30% having traveled beyond Africa, 13% had previously traveled to the USA and 8% had previously traveled to the UK.

Results

Destination image

The survey asked respondents to “list two things that pop into your head when you think of the United States” and also “the United Kingdom.” The most frequent themes for the USA and UK are listed in Table 1.

Table 1: Destination image comparison of USA and UK

United States of America (N = 270)				United Kingdom (N = 263)			
Image	Freq	Pct	Cpct	Image	Freq	Pct	Cpct
Educational & Professional opportunity	100	37.0	37.0	Educational & Professional opportunity	60	22.8	22.8
Tourist attractions & experiences	39	14.4	51.5	Tourist attractions & experiences	41	15.6	38.4
Highly developed nation	24	8.9	60.4	Highly developed nation	29	11.0	49.4
Money	19	7.0	67.4	Royal Family	24	9.1	58.6
Good standard of living	16	5.9	73.3	Sport	23	8.7	67.3
Racism	15	5.6	78.9	Unique Culture	18	6.8	74.1
Super Power	11	4.1	83.0	Good standard of living	12	4.6	78.7
Freedom	10	3.7	86.7	Friendly	10	3.8	82.5
Violence	10	3.7	90.4	Money	10	3.8	86.3

Freq = Frequency, Pct = percent, Cpct = Cumulative percent

Because some respondents only listed one thing, this produced a list of 270 items for the USA and 263 items for the UK. These items were categorized by theme. These themes represent the destination image of the USA and UK as understood by this sample of Ghanaians. There were

similarities and differences in each country's image. Both the USA and UK shared the following images: Educational and professional opportunity, Tourist attractions and experiences, Highly developed nation, Good standard of living, and Money. The theme "educational and professional opportunity" included responses such as: educational opportunities, good universities, professional opportunities, and business opportunities. The theme "tourist attractions and experiences" included the following responses for the USA: Washington DC, New York City, Disneyland, Hollywood, beaches, museums, tourist sites, fun, excitement, and relaxation; and for the UK it included: London, British countryside, Castles, Palaces, tourist sites, fun and relaxation. The theme "highly developed nation" included responses such as: highly developed, quality healthcare facilities, political stability, orderly society, good governance, and good technology. The theme "good standard of living" included responses such as: good standard of living, comfortable living, good life, and best living conditions. This theme is different than "highly developed nation" in that it captures the imagined experience of living in a developed nation, rather than the attributes of a developed nation. The theme "money" included the following responses: money, dollars, pounds, and riches. Combined, these themes comprised 73% of the responses imagining the USA, and 58% of the responses imagining the UK.

The balance of the UK's image was comprised of four positive themes: the Royal family, Sport, Unique culture, and Friendly people. They were unique and not part of the USA's image. The "Royal family" included the following responses: Royal family, Royalty, British Monarchy, and Queen Elizabeth. "Sport" included the following responses: English Premier League, football, Manchester United, and Old Trafford Stadium. The theme "unique culture" included responses such as: unique culture, cultural traditions, teatime, English breakfast, and British accent. The theme "friendly people" included the following responses: friendly people, welcoming people, and laid-back people. In contrast, the balance of the USA's image was comprised of two nationalistic themes (i.e., Superpower and Freedom) and two negative themes (i.e., Racism and Violence). The theme "superpower" was comprised of the following responses: Superpower, most powerful country in the world, most powerful military, global power, and most influential nation. The theme "freedom" was comprised of the words "freedom" and "democracy." The theme "racism" was comprised of the following responses: racism, racism against blacks, police brutality, police killing blacks and slavery. The theme "violence" was comprised of the following responses: violence, shootings, gun violence, and crime.

Perceived safety and risk

As reported above, aspects of safety and risk did emerge from the open ended, "top-of-mind" destination image data. The survey also assessed specific aspects of safety and risk with a fixed choice questionnaire. Using a seven-item scale, the survey assessed perceived level of development. Perceiving a country as developed is an indication of perceived safety. In these results, means closer to seven indicate respondents' belief that a country is developed. Item and scale means for each country, as well as a country comparison, are presented in Table 2. As the table reveals, the Ghanaians in this sample tended to agree that both the USA (mean = 5.43, SD = .84) and the UK (mean = 5.80, SD = .73) share the attributes of developed nations. A dependent samples t-test comparing scale means indicated the difference in means is statistically significant, thus the UK was perceived as slightly more developed than the USA ($t = 5.87, p < .001$).



Table 2: Comparison* of Ghanaians’ perceptions of USA & UK in terms of level of development (e.g., perceived safety)

Individual items	N	USA		UK		Z	P
		Mean**	SD	Mean**	SD		
Highly developed nation	138	6.44	.79	6.29	.90	2.08	=.037
Politically stable nation	138	5.11	1.45	5.76	1.27	4.84	<.001
Well governed nation	138	5.22	1.52	5.88	1.05	4.53	<.001
Citizens are well educated	138	4.82	1.43	5.59	1.19	5.43	<.001
Orderly & predictable nation	138	4.71	1.51	4.99	1.26	2.10	=.036
Good health care facilities	138	6.23	1.07	6.27	.92	0.61	=.539
Stable economy	138	5.58	1.25	5.86	1.01	2.90	=.004
SCALES***	138	5.43	0.84	5.80	0.73	5.87	<.001

* Individual items compared with Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for related samples. Scale means compared using dependent sample t-tests.
 ** 7-point Likert scale assessing frequency of behavior (1 = Disagree strongly, 4 = Neutral, 7 = Strongly agree)
 *** Scales created by summing individual items and dividing by number of items (7).

The survey then assessed perceptions of violence and crime. Perceiving a country as violent and crime infected is an indication of perceived risk. In these results, means closer to seven indicate respondents’ belief that a country is prone to violence and crime. Item and scale means for each country, as well as a country comparison, are presented in Table 3. As the table reveals, the Ghanaians in this sample indicated slight agreement that violence and crime were problems in the USA (mean = 4.67, SD = 1.13). Agreement was strongest for the individual item assessing gun violence (mean = 5.76, SD = 1.52). In contrast, the Ghanaians in this sample were neutral regarding perceptions of violence and crime in the UK (mean = 4.00, SD = 1.04). A dependent samples t-test comparing scale means indicated the difference in means is statistically significant, thus the UK was perceived as less prone to violence and crime than the USA ($t = 7.40, p < .001$).

Table 3: Comparison* of Ghanaians’ perceptions of USA & UK in terms of violence and crime (e.g., perceived risk)

Individual items	N	USA		UK		Z	p
		Mean**	SD	Mean**	SD		
Pickpocketing & petty crime a problem	138	4.28	1.62	4.13	1.41	1.13	=.258
Nation is vulnerable to terrorism	138	4.65	1.80	4.30	1.64	1.89	=.059
Terrorists are a threat to nation	138	5.10	1.76	4.47	1.68	4.36	<.001
Gun violence is a danger	138	5.76	1.52	3.74	1.68	8.06	<.001
Kidnapping is a problem in nation	138	3.86	1.44	3.42	1.28	3.19	=.001
Muggings and armed robbery are a problem	138	4.33	1.65	3.86	1.39	3.40	=.001
SCALES***	138	4.67	1.13	4.00	1.04	7.40	<.001

* Individual items compared with Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for related samples. Scale means compared using dependent sample t-tests.
 ** 7-point Likert scale assessing frequency of behavior (1 = Disagree strongly, 4 = Neutral, 7 = Strongly agree)
 *** Scales created by summing individual items and dividing by number of items (6).

The survey then assessed perceptions of interpersonal interaction (e.g., host/guest interaction). Perceptions of positive, friendly interaction indicates perceived safety. In these results, means closer to seven indicate respondents’ belief that a country’s citizens are friendly, welcoming and accepting of foreigners. Item and scale means for each country, as well as a country comparison, are presented in Table 4. As the scale means reveal, the Ghanaians in this sample indicated slight agreement that both the USA (mean = 4.16, SD = .97) and the UK (mean = 4.59, SD = .97) were friendly to and accepting of foreigners. However, there was slight disagreement with two items for the USA. These items were “Africans are treated well in the USA” (mean = 3.47, SD = 1.64) and “Racism is not a problem in the USA” (mean = 2.74, SD = 1.66). For the UK, there was slight disagreement with the item “Racism is not a problem in the UK” (mean = 3.43, SD = 1.61). A dependent samples t-test comparing scale means indicates the difference in scale means is statistically significant, thus the UK was perceived as slightly more friendly, welcoming and accepting than the USA ($t = 4.30, p < .001$).



Table 4: Comparison* of Ghanaians’ perceptions of USA & UK in terms of host/guest interaction (e.g., perceived safety)

Individual items	N	USA		UK		Z	P
		Mean**	SD	Mean**	SD		
The people are friendly	138	4.58	1.40	4.92	1.45	2.04	=.043
Africans are treated well there	138	3.47	1.64	4.22	1.45	4.64	<.001
Racism is NOT a problem there	138	2.74	1.66	3.43	1.61	3.97	<.001
The police protect foreigners	138	4.18	1.53	4.71	1.32	3.41	=.001
People accept different religions	138	4.94	1.40	5.05	1.20	0.58	=.561
The people welcome foreigners	138	4.88	1.45	5.20	1.26	2.22	=.027
SCALES***	138	4.16	0.97	4.59	0.97	4.30	<.001

* Individual items compared with Wilcoxon Signed-Rank Test for related samples. Scale means compared using dependent sample t-tests.

** 7-point Likert scale assessing frequency of behavior (1 = Disagree strongly, 4 = Neutral, 7 = Strongly agree)

*** Scales created by summing individual items and dividing by number of items (6).

Finally, there was a single item for the USA and then again for the UK which assessed overall perceptions of safety and risk associated with travel to each country. The item read “How would you rate the overall degree of safety or risk associated with traveling to the USA [UK].” The item was scored on a five point scale (i.e., 1 = very safe, 2 = safe, 3 = neither risky nor safe, 4 = risky, 5 = very risky). The mean score for the USA was 3.96 (SD = 1.00) indicating an overall perception of risk. The mean score for the UK was 3.36 (SD = .79) which was closer to neutral. These means were compared with a paired sample t-test and found to be significantly different (t = 6.97, p ≤ .001). Taken together, these measures indicate that while the Ghanaians surveyed perceived both the USA and UK as highly developed (e.g., politically and economically stable, predictable and orderly, well governed, good health care facilities) there were still aspects of risk associated with each destination. This is particularly true of the USA which was perceived as more risky than the UK. Both the qualitative destination image data and the quantitative survey data suggest that the greater risk associated with the USA is somewhat influenced by perceptions of gun violence and racism.

Motivations

To assess interest in touring each country, respondents were asked “Assuming time and money are not concerns, would you travel to the USA for a tour of the country?” In the second part of the survey, respondents were asked the same question about travel to the UK. Interest in touring both destinations was very high: 132/138 (95.7%) indicated interest in travel to the USA, while 131/138 (94.9%) indicated interest in travel to the UK. Respondents were then asked to provide the “two most important reasons” explaining their interest in travel to the USA and UK. Only the responses from participants indicating an interest in travel were analyzed. Because some respondents only listed one reason, this produced a list of 248 items for the USA and 241 items for the UK. Analyzing these data revealed motivations for traveling to each destination among this sample of prospective Ghanaian tourists. The most frequently mentioned motivations for each destination are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Motivations for travel to USA and UK

United States of America (N = 248)				United Kingdom (N = 241)			
Image	Freq	Pct	Cpct	Image	Freq	Pct	Cpct
Educational & Professional opportunity	66	26.6	26.6	Educational & Professional opportunity	62	25.7	25.7
To see the tourist sites	61	24.6	51.2	To see the tourist sites	47	19.5	45.2
To experience new things	58	23.4	74.6	To experience new things	46	19.1	64.3
To have fun and relax	17	6.9	81.5	To have fun and relax	18	7.5	71.8
To learn about America	12	4.8	86.3	Sport	17	7.1	78.8
				Friendly people	12	5.0	83.8
				Royals and history	10	4.1	88.0

Freq = Frequency, Pct = percent, Cpct = Cumulative percent

The top four motivations for traveling to each destination were identical. These were: for educational and professional opportunity, to see the tourist sites, to experience new things, and to have fun and relax. The motivation labeled “education and professional opportunity” included responses such as: to further my education, for their good educational system, for their world renowned universities, to do business, to gain exposure to the corporate world, and to learn the latest industry trends. The motivation labeled “to see the tourist sites” included responses such as: to see the tourist sites, to visit the famous places, to see the interesting attractions, to view the beautiful scenery, and to see the architecture and buildings. The motivation labeled “to experience new things” included responses such as: to experience their way of life, to experience their culture, to explore new places, to try their food, to experience winter, to gain a new perspective, to be exposed to new things, for enlightenment, and for adventure. Finally, the motivation labeled “to have fun and relax” included responses such as: to have fun, for entertainment, for leisure, for pleasure, to enjoy their country, to relax, and to rest. Combined, these motivations comprised 81.5% of the responses for the USA, and 71.8% of the responses for the UK.

One additional, albeit minor, motivation was mentioned 12 times for the USA: to learn about America. No other motivational theme for the USA appeared more than five times. “To learn about America” was characterized by learning specifically about America. It included the following responses: to learn America’s history, to learn about black culture in America, to visit African American historical sites, to see if America is like in the movies, and to see if America has deprived areas. Three additional motivations were mentioned for the UK: sport, friendly people, and the Royals and history. The motivation “Sport” included the following responses: to enjoy football, to watch a premier league match, to visit the football stadiums. The motivation “Friendly people” included the following responses: friendliness, accommodating people, to meet British people because they are nice, to mingle with the people, and good hospitality. Finally, the motivational theme “Royals and history” included the following responses: to learn about the Royals and their history, because of her royal majesty the Queen, to see the British monarchy, and to learn British history. No other UK motivational theme was mentioned more than 5 times.

Discussion

This concluding section will firstly summarize the findings, secondly connect the findings to existing literature, and thirdly suggest applications as well as directions for future research. To summarize the findings, it may be helpful to revisit the overarching research question: “what are the similarities and differences in prospective Ghanaian tourists’ perspectives of the USA and UK as tourism destinations?” For destination image, both the USA and UK were seen as places for educational and professional opportunity. This was the most dominant image for each nation and was complemented by perceptions of advanced levels of national development, high standards of living and wealth. In the case of the UK, this collection of images comprised 42.2% of responses, for the USA it comprised 60%. The UK’s image was also defined by tourism attractions and experiences, the Royal family, sport, unique culture, and friendly people. Together these accounted for 44% of responses imagining the UK and suggests an attractive and well-rounded destination image in the minds of these prospective Ghanaian tourists. In contrast, the balance of the USA’s image was more nebulous. There was mention of tourist attractions and experiences (14.4% of responses), nationalistic images of “freedom” and “superpower” (7.8% of responses) as well as negative images of racism and violence (9.3% of responses). This qualitative image data was supported by the results of the quantitative survey. The survey found that respondents perceived the UK and USA as highly developed nations, although they perceived the UK as slightly more developed. They also perceived the

UK as significantly more positive in terms of likely intercultural interactions and significantly less prone to violence and crime. Overall, the Ghanaians in this sample perceived the UK as a significantly less risky tourism destination than the USA. That said, there was no significant difference in this sample's interest in traveling to each destination. Indeed, 132/138 indicated interest in traveling to the USA and 131/138 indicated interest in traveling to the UK. The most frequently mentioned motivation was “educational and professional opportunity” comprising 26.6% of responses for the USA and 25.7% of responses for the UK. This demonstrates the connection between destination image and motivational pull factors as this was also a dominant image for each destination (Debbagh & Azouaoui, 2022). Clearly, the prospective tourists in this sample were motivated by more than self-improvement. For the USA, 59.7% of responses indicated an interest in seeing the tourist sites, experiencing new things, having fun and relaxing, and learning about the USA by visiting historical sites. Likewise, for the UK, 62.3% of responses indicated an interest in seeing the tourist sites including those associated with the British monarchy and history, experiencing new things, participating in sport tourism, having fun, and relaxing.

This study extends the literature in multiple ways. First, it provides an “African as tourist” (Mkono, 2011) perspective on two of the world's top international tourism destinations. It demonstrates (unsurprisingly) that these prospective Ghanaian tourists have contemplated international tourism, can provide thoughtful perspectives on international tourism, and aspire to be international tourists. Their perspective supports Cohen and Cohen's (2015a) hypothesis that an important motivation for international tourism among Africans is self-improvement. In this study, opportunities for educational and professional self-improvement were the most frequently mentioned motivation. There was primary interest in visiting formal education and business settings (e.g., universities, technology hubs, industry) coupled with a secondary interest in informal educational settings such as historic sites and museums. Crompton's (1979a) foundational work on tourism motivations explains the interests of this sample well. Crompton's exploration and evaluation of self, education and novelty encompasses the “self-improvement” motivation seen here. Additionally, there is evidence that this sample was motivated by a need for relaxation, enjoyment, and social interaction. This supports the universality of Crompton's work. Most of these motivations have been identified in studies of Africa's domestic tourists (Awaritefe, 2004; Essien et al., 2023; Kruger & Saayman, 2010; Mappingure et al., 2019) suggesting common ground with their more often studied Western counterparts.

Uniquely, this study also provided a Ghanaian perspective on USA and UK destination images. Previous research suggests that destinations across the UK (Northern Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England) are associated with “Englishness” in the mind of the tourist (Grenier, 2006; Sardi & Ratz, 2008). For example, US college students provided top-of-mind images associated with Wales as a tourist destination (Harris et al., 2012ab). The most frequent responses included England, Great Britain, British culture, and many references to the British monarchy. Liu (2010) found that Taiwanese tourists to the UK wanted to experience “authentic Britishness” and were pulled by images of Britain-specific culture, customs, architecture, and literary sites. Using a top-of-mind approach, Sardi and Ratz (2008) surveyed Hungarians about England's destination image and found frequent mentions of Stonehenge, River Thames, the seaside, Football, London, Big Ben, Buckingham Palace, pubs, and tea. Kenyon and Bodet (2018) examined the destination image of London, the capital city of England and the UK. Central to London's image were famous landmarks (e.g., Big Ben tower, Buckingham Palace), the British Monarchy, sport, theater and global banking. Images of London are also associated with England and the larger UK. It is not surprising then that this sample of Ghanaians, when asked to list top-of-mind images associated with the UK frequently mentioned London, Queen



Elizabeth and the British Monarchy, famous sites like Buckingham Palace, football and the English Premier League, the British countryside, British culture and customs, English breakfast, and the British accent. Compared to images of the UK generated by (prospective) tourists from other parts of the world, Ghanaians' images of the UK identified in this study were very similar.

This sample of Ghanaians' image of the USA overlapped somewhat with previous research. For example, Li and Stepchenkova (2012) used a top-of-mind approach to assess outbound Chinese tourists' image of the USA. The ten most frequent responses included economically developed, freedom and democracy, statue of liberty, open and transparent, the beach, beautiful and scenic, technologically advanced, friendly people, and the white house. Stepchenkova and Shichkova (2017) assessed Russians' destination image of the USA. Frequent images included famous cities and states (New York, Miami, California), Urban landscape (megacity, statue of liberty, cars, fast food), nature and recreation (Grand Canyon, beaches), entertainment and pop culture (Hollywood, Disneyland), wealth and a strong economy. Bignon et al. (1998) assessed French images of the USA and found ideas of adventure, entertainment, outdoor recreation, nature, and culture as central themes. Many of these themes appeared in the responses gathered for this study (e.g., wealth, strong economy, freedom, democracy, beaches, New York, Hollywood, Disneyland). However, the Ghanaians surveyed here also identified racism and violence as minor aspects of the USA image. Given the global reach of the Black Travel Movement using multiple social media platforms, the risks (e.g., experiencing racism) and rewards (e.g., experiencing growth and development) of traveling while Black are easily searchable with the use of hashtags such as #travelingwhileblack and #blackandabroad (Dillette et al., 2019; Park et al., 2022). Even Ghanaians who have never traveled internationally may learn of such risks and rewards through social media. This study found racism as part of the USA image but not the UK image. In support of this finding, a study by Li et al. (2020) analyzed a massive global data set of online tourism reviews, looking for evidence of tourists' experience of racism. While 115 countries were represented, the USA had by far the greatest incidence of self-reported racism as recorded in online tourism reviews. Previous research has also associated gun violence and crime with specific destinations within the US, such as the state of Florida (Tasci & Sonmez, 2019) and the city of New Orleans (Dimanche & Leptic, 1996). However, the Ghanaians in this study generalized these attributes to the nation. As such, the USA was perceived to be a significantly riskier tourism destination than the UK. Examining African's perceptions of risk associated with travel to the USA is an area for future research, particularly after the police killing of George Floyd in May 2020 resulting nationwide protests which captured the world's attention.

Applications and future research

The results of this study suggest that these Ghanaians, like other Africans (Essien et al., 2023), are interested in the benefits of tourism related to self-improvement, particularly in the realms of education and business. Universities, non-profits with a focus on cultural diversity, professional associations, and businesses with an interest in Africa could facilitate such opportunities. For example, Kent State University in the USA has partnered with a local environmental education non-profit to host African environmental educators for several months each year. The university helps process the visa work, arrange travel, and provides access to educational resources; the non-profit provides accommodation, professional training, and a small stipend; and the African contributes airfare, related travel expenses, and a unique cultural perspective. This partnership benefits the university and non-profit by enriching and diversifying their programming. Simultaneously, it benefits the African by providing opportunities for educational and professional development. Coupling such opportunities with

trips to museums, historic sites, national parks, famous cities and tourism attractions creates a well-rounded, beneficial and enjoyable experience for the tourist and host. Indeed, the host enjoys an international experience without ever leaving their country. Creative partnerships are one way of increasing such mutually beneficial opportunities. Given the potential benefits, research should explore avenues for increasing the flow of Africa's outbound tourists to the USA and UK.

Regarding future research, the small number of studies investigating the “African as tourist” (Mkono, 2011) indicate many more are needed. As Mkono (2013) demonstrated, testing foundational ideas from tourism studies with samples of purely African tourists can provide new insights. To offer one idea, a typology of tourists from Africa would be helpful to develop and then compare to accepted Western typologies such as those developed by Cohen (1972) or Yiannakis and Gibson (1992). Saayman et al. (2018) suggested that Africa's colonial history might influence destination choice. This idea can be tested. Do Francophone Africans prefer visiting France over competing, non-Francophone, destinations? Knowledge which can be immediately applied to increase Africa's outbound flow of tourists is needed. A starting point would be a critical analysis of state sanctioned, systematic exclusionary practices such as unequal visa requirements that make it difficult for Africans to travel beyond the continent. As such, an examination of Africans' perceived constraints to international travel as well as how African tourists successfully negotiate those constraints would be helpful. Furthermore, a better understanding of tourism operators specializing in African tourists as well as other networks that African tourists might use to access global destinations is needed. Other relevant topics include African tourists' perspectives of China. This is of interest given China's expanding influence across Africa. Lastly, as tourism management programs take hold at major universities across Africa, there is an opportunity for African tourism scholars to take the lead in this line of research while also promoting the idea of African tourists to the growing African middle class (Lambulira et al., 2022; Mahachi-Chatibura & Nare, 2017).

Limitations

Before concluding, it should be noted that this research has limitations. First, a nonprobability sample was used therefore readers should use caution and good judgment if generalizing these findings. Second, the survey asked prospective tourists to reflect on a hypothetical tour. Surveying Africans while on tour at an international destination or immediately after an international tour might produce different results. Third, Africa is an extremely diverse continent comprised of many different nationalities and cultures. Assuming that the perspectives of a sample of Ghanaians represents Africans in general would be a mistake. Thus, research is needed from across the continent. Hopefully the present study can serve as a building block for future work on Africans' travel beyond the continent of Africa.

Conclusion

In conclusion, millions of African tourists travel internationally each year. While this is a relatively small segment of the total international tourism market, these African tourists deserve researchers' attention. Understanding Africans as tourists, and not just as hosts, will prove enlightening and improve the entire enterprise of international tourism. Indeed, non-Western perspectives may challenge and ultimately push the discipline and profession forward (Cohen & Cohen, 2015a/b; Mkono, 2011). In the present study, prospective Ghanaian tourists clearly aspired to travel to the USA and UK. In some ways, their perceptions of these popular destinations were similar to tourists from other parts of the world. Yet in other ways, their perceptions differed. As one example, perceptions of racism influenced their image of the USA. Such perceptions might not emerge from the more often studied European market. As a second

example, the Ghanaians sampled optimistically perceived travel to the USA and UK as an opportunity for educational and professional self-improvement, as an opportunity for learning, for soothing intellectual curiosities, and for personal growth and development. Indeed, consistently delivering such intrapersonal benefits to all tourists is an important aspect of a sustainable global industry. Finally, applying research to expand opportunities for this niche market will not only benefit Africans but also increase opportunities for their non-African hosts to participate in an important and beneficial international and intercultural exchange. In short, expanding international opportunities for the African tourist has likely benefits for all.

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