African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure **2025, Vol. 14 No. 4 pp. 914-924**
ISSN: 2223-814X

Assessing the Nature of Rural Tourism in Ghana: The Case of Binda in the Northern Region

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Abstract

Rural tourism in Ghana's Northern Region often adopts a community-based approach, with Binda serving as a notable example. Historically significant during the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Binda attracts considerable tourist interest due to its well-managed historical sites. This study aimed to assess the compliance of Binda's tourist sites with community-based tourism (CBT) principles and to identify the types of sites available. Employing purposive sampling and semi-structured interviews, data was collected, transcribed, and analyzed thematically, drawing upon the CBT theories of Giampiccoli et al. and Christaller. Findings revealed that a community site management committee, comprising of village elders and youth, is responsible for overseeing leadership, custodial roles, and tour guiding. Binda's tourist attractions include relics of cowries, artifacts of slave castration, and ruins of ransacked communities. The study concludes that Binda's tourism aligns with CBT principles, reflecting active community participation in managing and preserving their heritage. However, the Ghana Tourism Authority is urged to protect these historical relics from decay. This research underscores Binda's emergence as a significant community tourism site, contributing to the growth of CBT in Ghana and emphasizing the need for sustainable management of its historical resources.

Keywords: Northern Ghana; community; tourism; resources; benefits

How to cite this article: Halawayhi, F., Jugmohan, S. & Giampiccoli, A. (2025). Assessing the Nature of Rural Tourism in Ghana: The Case of Binda in the Northern Region. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 14(4):914-924. DOI: https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.676

Introduction

Community-based tourism (CBT) in rural areas is increasingly recognized as a sustainable approach to tourism development that empowers local communities, preserves cultural heritage, and promotes economic growth (Giampiccoli et al., 2015; Conrad et al., 2012). In the studied community, CBT complements the local livelihood structure by integrating cultural attractions as income-generating ventures that support and enhance farming activities. Individuals engage in various Cultural Tourism Enterprise (CTE) activities such as performing as local musicians, serving as traditional healers and historians, and working as tour guides while also practicing subsistence farming. Crops cultivated include yam, millet, sorghum, cassava, Bambara beans, and cowpeas. Nair & Hamza (2015) highlight CBT's potential to create business opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises, distribute economic benefits equitably, and foster collaboration between public and private sectors. Saayman & Giampiccoli (2016) emphasize that tourism promotes economic growth, which in turn contributes to poverty alleviation. Similarly, Gartner & Cukier (2012) note that CBT empowers communities to control resources such as land and water, while enhancing local managerial skills and generating broader social, economic, and environmental benefits (Giampiccoli et al., 2015). In Ghana, tourism plays a significant economic role. Ekow (2020) underscores its contributions to job creation, wealth generation, and national development. As the fourth-largest foreign exchange earner, tourism contributes 4.8% to the country's GDP. Ghana aims to become a globally competitive tourism destination by leveraging strategic partnerships, investment, marketing, and the preservation of cultural and environmental assets. The sector is overseen by multiple agencies, including the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture; the Ghana Tourism Authority; the Ghana Museums and Monuments Board; and others (Nana-Akua, 2019; Tiimub et al., 2020). These institutions are crucial in safeguarding Ghana's natural and cultural heritage. In some districts, such as Kwabre East in the Ashanti Region, tourism initiatives are owned and managed by the local assembly to ensure collective benefits. The District Assembly has established a tourism development committee to identify and promote heritage sites and preserve traditional practices (Emmanuel, 2014; Padmore & Joseph, 2014). CBT in rural Ghana operates on principles of sustainability, empowerment, and cultural preservation (Rixon, 2021; Hall, 2018). Rixon emphasizes community participation in decision-making, ensuring that tourism aligns with local needs. CBT also fosters environmental conservation and respect for local cultures, encouraging responsible tourism practices. Economically, CBT diversifies rural livelihoods beyond agriculture by creating jobs and income-generating opportunities. Residents act as guides, artisans, homestay hosts, and cultural service providers, strengthening household incomes and resilience (Sithole, 2017; Dayour, 2015; Atoeva, 2022). In South Africa, Mozambique, and Ghana, these roles contribute to poverty alleviation and rural development (Dias & Azambuja, 2022).

CBT also contributes to cultural preservation by showcasing traditional rituals, crafts, and cuisine. Tourists participate in immersive experiences that foster cross-cultural understanding and appreciation while preserving indigenous knowledge (Halawayhi, 2024; Hall, 2018; Ewoenam, 2020). Additionally, CBT supports environmental sustainability through community-led conservation initiatives that protect biodiversity, encourage eco-friendly transport, and raise environmental awareness

(Dayour & Atanga, 2015; Ewoenam, 2020). Despite its benefits, Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in rural Ghana faces challenges such as poor infrastructure, limited transportation, inadequate accommodation, and sanitation (Dayour & Atanga, 2015; Ewoenam, 2020). Additionally, a lack of marketing and management skills hampers progress. However, CBT remains a powerful tool for empowering communities, preserving cultural heritage, and promoting sustainable livelihoods. By fostering sustainability, inclusivity, and cross-cultural understanding, CBT positions rural Ghana as a vibrant and responsible tourism destination. Binda in the Northern region is a CBT destination, vibrant and a known tourism attraction. Historically, Binda has held significant responsibilities within the Nanumba kingdom, particularly during the burial of Nanun kings. When the Bimbilla Naa (king) passes, Binda, together with Darayili and Ponayili, is tasked with preparing for his burial over a period of three months leading to the installation of a new king. Residents of Binda receive the deceased king's personal effects—clothes, huts, sandals, and other items—known collectively as *soori*. These items are used freely without fear of spiritual consequences, reflecting Binda's spiritual competence in handling such relics. Additionally, Binda plays a vital role in providing food for the king, ensuring that it is clean, healthy, and safe. To prevent food poisoning, the community prepares a traditional safety meal called *Binda tikpla*. Only one of the king's wives is permitted to cook his meals, adding a layer of ritual protection. Binda thus serves as a custodian of heritage and tradition within the Nanumba kingdom, maintaining sacred responsibilities and aiding the smooth transfer of power during royal transitions. The trans-Atlantic slave trade, marked by brutality (Jocylyn, 2022; Morgan & Pallascio, 2015), deeply affected Binda, which played a unique role beyond slave capture and trafficking linked to Salaga (Awedoba, 2006). The village was notorious for castrating enslaved men into eunuchs for royal courts. Some were forcibly brought, while others arrived under false pretenses, with "eggs" used as a euphemism for the procedure. This secretive practice, led by the Binda chief, earned the village the enduring title *gabloriba*, meaning "those who tire down with the robes."

This article explores the historical background and tourism potential of Binda village in Ghana's Northern Region. It is guided by the research question: *How does Binda village manage its historical and cultural touristic resources?* The study examines the community's role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and identifies key touristic assets within the village. Given the limited literature on Binda, this research makes an important contribution to literature by documenting the community's historical and cultural features that are relevant to community-based tourism (CBT). Furthermore, the study enriches the theoretical understanding of CBT by applying the frameworks of Christaller (1963) and Giampiccoli et al. (2015) to highlight the complex nature of community tourism management in Binda. It also supports the promotion of community tourism in Ghana as a key strategy for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 12, which emphasizes sustainable consumption and production. In doing so, the study underscores tourism's role in job creation, poverty reduction, and environmental conservation while empowering local communities. By focusing on cultural heritage, the study advances Ghana's tourism development agenda in ways that ensure local participation, equitable benefits, and the protection of natural resources—thus aligning with the broader SDG objectives for sustainable livelihoods and responsible tourism.

Literature review

Socio-demographic factors significantly shape residents' attitudes and participation in tourism development. Harrill (2004) highlights age and gender as key influences. Kibicho (2008) found that views on tourism differ by age, origin, education, and gender, identifying groups like "operatives," "opinion leaders," and "official leaders," each with distinct motivations. Safari et al. (2015) confirmed that middle-aged and better-educated individuals are more involved in tourism, with men participating more than women. These findings underscore the complex role of demographics in community tourism engagement. Community involvement in tourism takes various forms, such as dancers, cooks, carvers, and tour guides (Sithole, 2017; Safari et al., 2015). In northern Ghana, particularly in Binda, roles also include weavers and artisans (Tiimub et al., 2020). Understanding these demographic patterns is vital for tailoring tourism programs to effectively engage different community segments. Cultural-based tourism presents valuable opportunities for rural communities. Asli et al. (2013) identify elements like dance, storytelling, agricultural visits, and herbal tea collection, while Hamza and Khalifa (2009) and Jugmohan et al. (2016) add festivals, traditional food, attire, beadwork, and local healers. These cultural assets enhance tourism appeal. In Binda, practices such as spiritual healing, pottery, cloth weaving, traditional cuisine, historical sites, and architecture show strong tourism potential. Integrating socio-demographic factors and cultural resources is essential for inclusive, sustainable community-based tourism planning. CBT is characterized by several key principles, as outlined by Giampiccoli and Saayman (2016:8), Giampiccoli, Mtapuri, and Jugmohan (2016). These characteristics include:

- Indigenous effort: CBT initiatives are community-driven, with active participation and involvement from community members in all stages of planning, implementation, and management.
- Complementary role in community livelihoods: CBT projects should align with and enhance existing community livelihoods, rather than overshadowing or replacing them. They should complement local economic activities and contribute to sustainable livelihood strategies.
- Training and capacity building: CBT involves providing training and capacity-building opportunities for community members to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge for effective management of tourism activities. This empowers local stakeholders to actively participate in and benefit from tourism initiatives.
- CBT fosters long-term community development by preserving resources and promoting economic, social, and environmental sustainability.
- CBT promotes individual and community well-being by generating income, creating jobs, and preserving local traditions and identity. By aligning with these principles, CBT initiatives support sustainable development, strengthen

social cohesion, and ensure tourism benefits are equitably shared while respecting local cultures and protecting the environment

CBT is driven by indigenous efforts, supports community livelihoods, emphasizes training, adopts a long-term development approach, and promotes well-being (Giampiccoli & Saayman, 2016; Sithole, 2017). However, challenges like inadequate infrastructure, limited market access, capacity gaps, and financial constraints hinder progress (Giampiccoli et al., 2016; Dayour & Atanga, 2015). Successful CBT must be economically viable, support socio-cultural activities, ensure environmental sustainability, promote local arts, and involve broad community decision-making with clear land and resource management (Asker et al., 2010). In the study area, CBT complements livelihoods by generating income alongside farming. Residents in roles like musicians, healers, historians, and tour guides supplement subsistence farming of yam, millet, sorghum, cassava, Bambara beans, and cowpeas. CBT supports small and medium enterprises, distributes economic benefits, and fosters public-private partnerships (Nair & Hamza, 2015). It drives economic growth, which reduces poverty (Saayman & Giampiccoli, 2016), and empowers communities through capacity-building, enhancing control over local resources. This fosters long-term social, economic, and environmental benefits (Giampiccoli et al., 2015). Tourism in Ghana significantly contributes to national development by creating jobs, generating income, and boosting GDP—accounting for 4.8% and ranking as the fourth-highest foreign exchange earner (Ekow, 2020). Strategic investment, marketing, and cultural preservation aim to position Ghana as a competitive global destination. Oversight comes from the Ministry of Tourism, Ghana Tourism Authority, and National Commission on Culture (Nana-Akua, 2019; Tiimub et al., 2020). In places like Kwabre East District, the local assembly manages tourism projects for community benefit, promoting sites that reflect cultural values (Emmanuel, 2014; Padmore & Joseph, 2014). The Northern Region, like most regions in Ghana (except Greater Accra, Ashanti, and Central) faces infrastructure development challenges (Emmanuel, 2019). Despite this, it boasts rich tourism potential, including cultural festivals like Damba and Bugum, and historical landmarks such as German graves in Yendi and remnants of Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade routes (Tourghana, n.d.). Tiimub Makilua Benjamin et al. (2020) highlight tourism opportunities in the Tolon District of the Northern region, including baobab trees, bird sanctuaries, misty stone formations, crocodile ponds, and a sacred grove with over 220 plant species. Effective management of these resources, especially the sacred grove, could attract tourists and contribute to socio-economic development. Suburbs like Jakarayili and Kukuo near Tamale are also emerging as cultural tourism destinations. According to Ghanaweb (2015), these areas offer traditional weaving and pottery-making experiences. In Zongo, raw cowhide is transformed into leather goods, while nearby blacksmiths produce basic tools. These artisanal activities present viable opportunities for community-based tourism (CBT) enterprises.

Mohammed and Lukman (2023:2) emphasize the role of accommodation facilities in Wa (formerly part of the Northern Region) as access points to rural tourism sites. Hotels in the area source goods locally and display tourism site images to attract visitors. They also provide employment for locals in roles such as drivers, cooks, and cleaners, highlighting the importance of enhancing tourism infrastructure to support broader development. Observations in the study area, supported by literature, reveal that indigenous community members play key roles in tourism-related activities. They serve as drummers, dancers, drivers, tour guides, chiefs, cooks, and historians. Their active participation underscores the centrality of local involvement in ensuring tourism growth and sustainability in the Northern Region.

Theoretical considerations

This section examines two theories relevant to culture-based tourism, emphasizing their implications for cultural tourism destinations, management, and ownership. The theories discussed are Christaller (1963) and Giampiccoli et al (2015). Christaller's theory of destination development explains how tourist areas evolve through continuous processes of growth and transformation. The theory highlights several key principles:

1. Tourist destinations are dynamic and undergo continuous development and change.
2. Different types of visitors are attracted to destinations at different stages of their development.
3. The nature of the tourist experience evolves over time.
4. The impacts of tourism on destinations shift across different phases.
5. The level and form of local community participation in tourism change over time.
6. New developmental cycles emerge, often leading to the rise of new destinations.

This theory aligns with the present study in three main areas: the effects of tourism on destinations, the emergence of new development cycles, and the evolving nature of community participation. In Binda, tourism has produced both opportunities and challenges. On one hand, it has generated income for residents and promoted the recognition and preservation of the community's cultural heritage. On the other hand, some visitors have disregarded local customs by photographing sacred sites and spiritual artifacts, raising community concerns. Regarding new development cycles, Binda's nature-based tourism remains underdeveloped despite its potential. This supports Christaller's argument that destinations experience cyclical phases, suggesting that Binda is entering a new phase of tourism growth. The theory's emphasis on changing community involvement is also evident in Binda. Local elders and educated youth are taking active roles in tourism initiatives, showing growing enthusiasm for investing in tourism development. This interest is gradually expanding to women and less-educated youth, indicating an inclusive trend consistent with Christaller's view of tourism as a dynamic and evolving process. Giampiccoli et al (2015) provide a framework that explains how cultural tourism enterprises function within the broader concept of CBT. The framework identifies three core dimensions—economic, sociocultural, and environmental.

- Economic Dimension: CTEs enhance local prosperity by generating income and creating employment through tourism-related activities.
- Sociocultural Dimension: They help preserve and promote local traditions, crafts, performances, and cultural expressions, thereby strengthening community identity and social cohesion.
- Environmental Dimension: The framework promotes sustainable practices that minimize environmental degradation and ensure the protection of natural resources.

Moreover, the model encourages the integration of cultural elements such as music, dance, cuisine, storytelling, and handicrafts into tourism experiences to create authenticity and cultural immersion. Strong connections between tourism enterprises and cultural assets further enhance the authenticity of visitor experiences. Active community involvement in the planning, development, and management of tourism enterprises is therefore critical, ensuring that tourism aligns with local values and fosters a sense of ownership and cooperation. In the context of Binda, CBT serves as a model for diversifying tourism offerings, expanding market access, and improving local livelihoods (Adu-Ampong, 2018; UNWTO, 2018; Richards, 2021). The revenue generated from CTEs is distributed among various local stakeholders who manage or own these enterprises, reflecting the principles articulated by Giampiccoli et al. (2015). In Binda, CTEs are either collectively owned by the community and managed by designated individuals or owned by individual families within the village. These ownership and management structures closely align with the foundational principles of CBT, emphasizing equitable benefit sharing, community empowerment, and sustainability. Together, Christaller's (1963) and Giampiccoli et al.'s (2015) frameworks provide valuable theoretical insights for understanding Binda's tourism landscape. They underscore the importance of responsible development, cultural sensitivity, and inclusive community participation as essential pillars for sustaining community-based tourism.

Research design

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in an ethnographic approach to explore the nature, models, and touristic resources of Binda village. Ethnography, as noted by Pritha (2020) and Gioun, Diehl, and McDonald (2020), involves the researcher immersing themselves in participants' natural settings to gain deep insights into their lived experiences. Core ethnographic techniques—such as participant observation, interviews, surveys, and archival research—were employed in line with Jack (2020) and Barbara (2005). According to Berbie (2010), ethnography enables researchers to interpret how individuals construct meaning within their sociocultural contexts. Over a two-year period (October 2022–March 2024), the study employed ethnographic methods to document and interpret the experiences of Binda residents regarding tourism and community-based tourism (CBT) practices. Binda is a rural community located about 8 kilometers from Bimbilla, the municipal capital of Ghana's Northern Region, and lies between Bimbilla and Wulensi. The village blends rich historical traditions with aspects of modern life. It consists of approximately 85 housing units and a population of about 800 residents, who formed the study population. Binda is part of the Nanumba kingdom, alongside Ponayili and Darayili, which both play significant administrative and cultural roles. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select ten respondents—six elders and four youth—based on their active involvement in tourism-related activities and their deep knowledge of the community's history and heritage sites. The inclusion criteria were: Adequate knowledge of the community's history, active participation in tourism or related activities, willingness to engage with the research team. Exclusion criteria included non-nativity and limited knowledge of the community's heritage. All interactions were conducted in Dagbani, the local language, to facilitate open communication and ensure cultural sensitivity.

The study relied primarily on ethnographic data and the lived experiences of residents. Data collection spanned from October 2022 to March 2024, producing a rich body of qualitative evidence. Multiple techniques were used including semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and unstructured observations—which offered a comprehensive view of tourism practices within the community (Anol, 2012; Gray, 2014). Semi-structured interviews, guided by a flexible interview schedule, allowed participants to express their views on key themes such as tourism attractions, benefits, beliefs, history, and community aspirations. These interviews, conducted in Dagbani, helped participants articulate their perspectives naturally, enhancing authenticity and reliability (Barbara, 2005; Berbie, 2010). Focus group discussions were held at the residence of a village elder and involved both youth and elderly participants actively engaged in community affairs, particularly tourism. Unstructured observations during repeated visits to the site focused on cultural beliefs, rituals, and spiritual practices associated with tourism and CBT. This triangulated approach which combined interviews, focus groups, and observations ensured a holistic understanding of the socioeconomic and cultural dimensions of tourism in Binda. In addition, secondary sources, including prior research on tourism in Ghana, were reviewed to contextualize the findings. Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis, a method suited for identifying patterns, meanings, and relationships within qualitative data (Chris, 2023; Sundler et al., 2019). The process began with verbatim transcription of all recorded interviews to preserve participants' authentic voices. Field notes from observations were integrated into the transcripts to enhance contextual depth. The analysis proceeded through several stages: Familiarization – Repeated readings of transcripts and notes to gain a deep understanding of the data (Schilling, 2006; Gray, 2014); Coding – Systematic identification of meaningful segments, generating initial codes that reflected key concepts and recurring ideas; Theme Development – Grouping related codes into preliminary themes representing broader patterns; Refinement and Validation – Reviewing themes for coherence and alignment with the dataset while minimizing researcher bias (Gray, 2014; Chris, 2023; Sundler et al., 2019). This iterative process allowed for flexibility and interpretive depth, ensuring that the analysis remained grounded in participants' lived realities. The final themes formed the foundation for interpreting the findings and discussing CBT and tourism practices in Binda.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness, the study adhered to established qualitative research standards (Fusch et al., 2018). Verbatim transcription preserved participants' exact words, maintaining authenticity. Triangulation enhanced reliability by integrating multiple data sources, including interviews, focus groups, and observations (Bell, 2022; Chris, 2023). An iterative coding process promoted transparency, while prolonged engagement with the data reduced the risk of misinterpretation. Theme validation ensured that analytical outcomes were firmly grounded in the data. An audit trail documented all analytical steps, providing transparency and facilitating potential replication or external review (Mason, 2014; Chris, 2023). Collectively, these measures reinforced the credibility, dependability, and confirmability of the study's findings. This research followed strict ethical guidelines in line with the global principles of good scientific conduct (Chris, 2023). Key ethical considerations included informed consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and professional integrity (Fusch et al., 2018; Saldaña, 2021). Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities, and all recordings and transcripts were securely stored. Ethical clearance was obtained from the Takoradi Technical University Ethical Review Committee (TTUERC3124). Participants provided informed consent, and proper data storage and disposal protocols were followed in accordance with institutional standards (Saldaña, 2021; Mason, 2014). By upholding these ethical and methodological standards, the study ensured the integrity of its research process and the protection of all participants involved.

Results

The findings of the study are as follows in relation to the objectives:

Theme 1: Assessing the role of stakeholders in the tourism value chain

The stakeholders involved in the tourism resources of Binda include the entire population of 800 village residents; however, only ten individuals are actively engaged in the management of these resources. This conversation reflects the insights gathered regarding the role of the stakeholders.

> *We maintain the artifacts and perform sacrifices at the appropriate times. Some sites are deep in the bush, including graves and mountains. We walk to these sites to perform sacrifices and clear the weeds, ensuring they are preserved for future generations.* (Mba Achina, an elder)

A youth group leader who is actively engaged with meeting tourists and participates in tourism-related activities added his voice:

> *Every village member is a stakeholder in village affairs, including tourism. Because the village is for all of us, and whatever affects it affects everybody. However, only the elders are permitted to speak about our history and role in slavery. The younger generation can only guide visitors to the sites and share stories about them. Because the youth are still learning they can make mistakes in delivery of the history, and we want to prevent any misrepresentation of our history relative to slavery and inception of the kingdom.* (Aliru added, a youth)

It was observed that the youth listened attentively whenever the history was being relayed. They actually had limited knowledge and information and so tourists arrivals provided opportunity for the youth to learn too.

Theme 2: Finding out about the touristic resources of the Binda community

The village is rich in numerous touristic resources that remain undeveloped and thus fail to attract mass tourism. When asked about the touristic resources of the community, respondents shared the following:

> *There are many. We have the 'subei,' a knife used for castration during the trans-Atlantic slave trade. The room where castration was performed is still located on the outskirts of the village. Visitors will be amazed by the historical value and monuments we can show them. Here in Binda, we have lots of things for tourists, but they do not come like I saw in the Volta region last year.* (Kalim, a middle-aged resident)

Abramani added his voice to the issue of touristic resources:

> *We can boast of the Binkparigu dabari (ruins of Binkparigu), the grave of Lariwaaya, and a long mountain where the first settlers lived. Even the way we prepare our yam mounds is a touristic attraction since it is different from others. When I go to work in cocoa farms in southern Ghana, agricultural activities like farming and fishing also attracted strangers. So, our farms and the way we keep them can also be a source of attraction. But the ones that come only stay around the village for historical sites.* (Abramani, a resident)

Theme 3: Finding out if the type of tourism practiced within the community qualifies for CBT project

The results on the nature of tourism engaged in by the community indicates that the touristic resources belonged to the community and managed by members who share benefit with other stakeholders. By the nature of the activities and ownership, one could conclude that they are qualified to be classified as CBT. This conversation speaks to the core issues:

> *We don't have any group like the government or NGOs owning, supporting, or managing our resources. We are the ones taking care of everything. We benefit from the tokens visitors give us when they come.* (Mba Aduna, an elder)

Another interlocutor in answering questions on the nature of their sites in relation to CBT stated that:

> *The visitors are friendly. We sell yams to them—you saw our big yam market. That's where they buy yams, eggs, and sweet potatoes from us. They also eat prepared local dishes. When visitors come, we make money. Because they asked questions about our village, our children also learn from such interactions thereby preserving our culture and history.* (Mba Achina, an elder)

One of the residents in sharing his perspectives had this to say:

> *We manage the welfare of our sites, owning and operating them ourselves when visitors come seeking assistance. Our women benefit from sales as visitors purchase our yams and eggs from the market near the police barrier. The token of money the visitors give us, is share among the youth who took them round and elders. That is all I can say for now about the nature of our tourism.* (Suglo, a resident)

The study on the Binda community revealed several key aspects regarding stakeholder roles, touristic resources, and compliance with CBT principles. It was observed that there was no NGO or a government office as a tourism regulator or promoter. The residents operated on their own without training nor logistical and financial support.

Discussion

The roles of individuals and communities in tourism participation encompass diverse responsibilities, including those of caterers, tour guides, managers and carvers (Sithole, 2017; Sithole et al., 2018). Community participation is a collaborative process, where members, often with external support, work together to identify needs, mobilize resources, and manage and evaluate tourism-related actions (Jaafar et al., 2015; Mensah, 2016). According to Ahmed and Dar (2024), the dynamics of heritage tourism differ significantly between developed and developing nations due to variations in governance, economics, stakeholder involvement, conservation efforts, historical influences, and socio-cultural factors—all key drivers of tourism in Binda. In Binda, community participation is evident in leadership, spiritual duties, historical knowledge sharing, custodial functions, and tour guiding. Mensah (2016) noted that in Mesomagor, a remote location hindered full community participation, limiting benefits mostly to environmental conservation. In contrast, Binda's strategic location along a main road facilitates broader participation and economic benefits. Though a 10-member committee manages tourism decisions, elders and youth—collectively known as *kpamba* (plural) or *kpema* (singular)—actively shape tourism development. These leaders inspire community engagement and sustain the village's identity. Preservation of historical knowledge is another critical role. Elders educate both locals and visitors about the community's role in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, sharing "yelkura" (matters of old times) with students, researchers, and tourists. Spiritual responsibilities are also key. Elders oversee sacred sites and relics like the *subei*, a slave-era artifact requiring regular sacrifices known as *maling* in Dagbanli. Other sacred sites, including graves and locations linked to the transformation of men into eunuchs, also receive ritual attention (Awedoba, 2006). Elders also act as custodians of historical artifacts and sacred sites, ensuring their protection and transmission to future generations. Additionally, tour guiding (*zingili*—"take around") is essential for maintaining spiritual protocols. Elders guide visitors with culturally appropriate actions, safeguarding sacred spaces. Youth occasionally conduct tours with elder approval to ensure no spiritual taboos are breached. Together, these roles illustrate the holistic and culturally rooted approach of Binda's community to tourism development, balancing economic participation with cultural and spiritual preservation.

The researchers sought to find out about the available touristic resources of the Binda community. It emerged from the findings that the community is endowed with several touristic resources including the Bindili drum, Lariwaaya grave, the ruins of Binkparigu and Malinkpo, castrations relics and cowries (used as money) stashed away during the Atlantic slave trade period. The Binda community derives its name from the Bindili drum (see figure 1 below). The Bindili drum is historically significant to the community, as they are pioneers in its manufacture and use within the Nanumba kingdom. This instrument is one of the key artifacts showcased to visitors, reflecting the rich cultural heritage and history of the Binda community (Halawayhi, 2024).

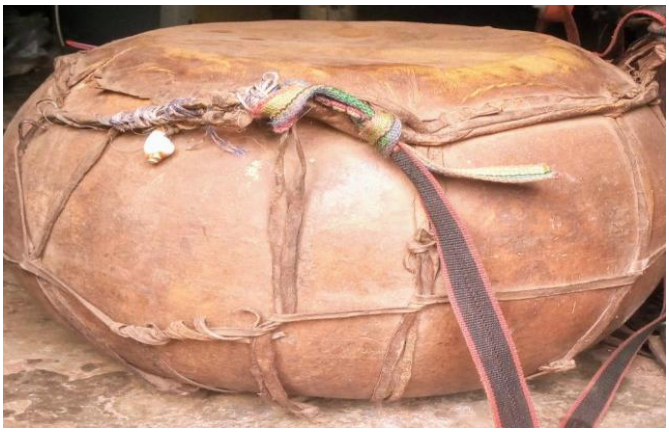

Figure 1: Bindili drum
Source: Field research 2024

In the 12th century, Binda was among the independent communities encountered by Dagbamba invaders and later integrated into the Nanun Kingdom, founded by Gmantambu, a son of Naa Gbewaa. His brothers, Shitobu and Tohgu, established the Dagbon and Mamprugu kingdoms, respectively (Awedoba, 2006; Kwame, 2018). Though united by Dagbamba ethnicity and the Dagbani language, regional variations led to distinct dialects influenced by local tribes (Awedoba, 2006; Abdulai, 2016). The people of these kingdoms are referred to as Dagbana, Nanuna, or Gmampruga based on their geographic location. The name "Nanun" originates from the Nawuri term *naanuba*, meaning "go listen and come tell us." The Nawuri, unable to speak Dagbani, appointed interpreters to relay communications from the Dagbamba, leading to the broader adoption of the name "Nanun" for the kingdom. A notable tourist attraction in Binda and neighboring villages like Darayili and Ponayili is the display of *lahkpahira* (cowries in figure 2 below), once used as currency during the trans-Atlantic slave trade (Awedoba, 2006). These cowries, stored in containers and sun-dried to maintain their whiteness, offer visitors both educational insight and historical appreciation.

Figure 2: Cowries preserved since trans-Atlantic slave trade period
Source: Field research, 2024

The Castration Relics remain a key tourist attraction in Binda. Historically, the village played a central role in castrating male slaves, turning them into eunuchs for service in royal palaces. The site where these procedures occurred, including the dilapidated walls, is preserved for visitors. Village elders safeguard the historical *subei*—the knife used in the castration process—which holds deep cultural and spiritual significance linked to Northern Ghana's slavery history. Unlike the cowries, photographing the *subei* is forbidden due to spiritual restrictions similar to those at shrines in nearby Kukuo (Halawayhi, 2024). Nearby, the adjoining communities of Benkparigu and Malinkpo (see figure 3) are also notable historical sites about three kilometers east of Binda. Locally called *Kambonvalvali*, these now-ruined villages carry a tragic history tied to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Around the 1740s (Awedoba, 2024), Benkparigu possessed a rare firearm, which was used to fire shots at Binda at night, instilling fear. During a hunting expedition, Ashanti visitors from southern Ghana were led by Binda inhabitants to these communities, leading to the capture and displacement of all residents—from children to elders. The name *Kambonvalvali* combines "Kambon" (Ashanti) and "valvali" (empty), marking the total evacuation by the Ashantis. These sites hold significant historical and touristic value, warranting further academic and tourism development attention. The baobab trees growing among the ruins evoke memories of abandoned settlements. In Dagbamba culture, baobabs are sacred, often found in chief and sub-chief homesteads as homes of divinities, reinforcing their spiritual importance (Awedoba, 2006; Halawayhi, 2024).

Figure 3: Remains of Binkparigu and Malinkpo
Source: Field research, 2024

Lastly, the grave of Lariwaya remains a significant tourist attraction, especially for visitors from Northern Ghana's ethnic groups. Historically, Naa Gmantambu invaded Nanun with his sister Lariwaya (Yeribasohya, meaning "the speakers of truth are hidden"). After marrying in Darayili and later moving to Binda following her husband's death, Binda people earned the title *Naa demba* ("king's in-laws") due to this royal connection. The site attracts mainly Dagbamba visitors and others interested in Atlantic slave trade history. Libations are often poured by visiting royals to honor their ancestor and the region's legacy. Binda residents actively innovate to keep their sites appealing, aligning with practices in Mozambique where limited institutional support is overcome by entrepreneurs using local cultural knowledge and craftsmanship to create attractive tourism products (Dias et al., 2024; Nana-Akua, 2019; Tiimub, 2020).

Giampiccoli et al. (2015) and Mensah (2016) define community tourism enterprises as small to medium-scale initiatives that practice sustainable tourism and generate economic, cultural, social, and environmental benefits for local communities. A crucial feature is that community members must actively influence decision-making. The authors argue that even privately-owned businesses may qualify as community tourism enterprises if they meet these criteria. Asli et al. (2013) and Giampiccoli et al. (2015) further note that such projects may be fully or jointly owned and operated by community members. Planning should be proactive and inclusive, ensuring participation of all social groups, especially marginalized ones (Daia et al., 2024). Additionally, CBT should support, not replace, other economic activities to encourage local economic resilience (Litheko, 2022). Tourism in Binda reflects these CBT principles. It is community-owned, managed by locals, and complements other livelihoods, such as farming (Asli et al., 2013; Adu-Ampong, 2018). It also helps preserve cultural traditions (Halawayhi, 2024). Community insights reveal that tourism provides a reliable supplemental income. Although committee members do not formally charge tourists, visitors often voluntarily offer money in appreciation for guided tours. Researchers observed such a transaction, where the money was shared among committee members—elders receiving more than youth. This informal practice occurs regularly, offering daily income that enhances household livelihoods and supports traditional authority structures. This system of spontaneous tourist contributions highlights how CBT in Binda both sustains cultural heritage and offers tangible economic value to the community. Another key feature aligning Binda's tourism with community-based tourism (CBT) principles is the fame the community enjoys due to its historical involvement in the trans-Atlantic slave trade and its role as official undertakers for the Bimbilla Na, the kings of Nanun (Halawayhi, 2024). This historical significance has attracted numerous tourists—both foreigners and locals—who visit to gain authentic information or perform sacrifices at the grave of Lariwaaya. These attractions are comparable to those in Wa, in Ghana's Upper West Region, where visitors are drawn by the community's cultural heritage and history (Mohammed & Lukman, 2023).

Binda manages its tourism sites independently, without external assistance. A ten-member committee oversees maintenance and ensures the spiritual well-being of the sites. Despite this, innovation aimed at increasing tourist numbers is limited, partly due to low literacy levels. A few educated locals are now working with researchers to better understand and document the community's history. Tourism in Binda has significantly impacted the local economy, consistent with findings in other African regions (Giampiccoli et al., 2015; Dias & Azanbuja, 2022; Sithole, 2018). The village's strategic location along a major road enables women to sell yams, eggs, and other farm produce to tourists and passersby. This economic activity exemplifies CBT in action, where tourism stimulates local production and commerce, creating a cycle of increased income and community development. Another vital CBT feature is community ownership. All tourism sites in Binda are locally owned and managed—meeting a core criterion of CBT (Asli et al., 2013; Atoeva, 2022). Community ownership ensures inclusive decision-making and reflects shared values and priorities. It empowers locals by giving them control over tourism development, ensuring equitable distribution of economic, cultural, and social benefits. This model also instills a sense of responsibility and stewardship, encouraging sustainable practices that preserve cultural and historical assets (Septian et al., 2024). In sum, Binda's tourism reflects key CBT principles: community ownership, cultural preservation, local economic impact, and independent site management. While challenges such as low innovation persist, ongoing efforts to document and share historical knowledge signal a promising path for sustainable community-led tourism.

Looking to the future, the Binda community has expressed strong interest in forming partnerships (*lagim tum*—working together) with government bodies and external organizations to enhance tourism development and site management. This interest focuses on two main areas: collaboration to develop the sites and introduce formal receipting mechanisms, and training in tourism-related skills. Community members are keen to formalize tourist activities by implementing structured financial systems, reflecting their recognition of tourism's economic potential. Elders highlighted how commercializing tourism can generate revenue (*buni*), create jobs for youth, and strengthen Binda's reputation as a historical destination (Dayour & Atanga, 2015; Emmanuel, 2019). Partnerships have proven effective in rural areas, particularly in preserving natural resources and improving access to infrastructure and services (Septian et al., 2024). Public-private collaborations, as noted by Litheko (2022), can bridge investment gaps, enhance tourism infrastructure, and promote regional development. Inspired by successful CBT models elsewhere (Ewoenam, 2020), Binda seeks similar growth through home-stay facilities, improved visitor services, and better site management. Training is another major priority. Like other northern communities (Tiimub et al., 2020; Mensah, 2016), Binda is eager to receive training in tour guiding, financial management, and tourist safety. This reflects their proactive approach to building a sustainable tourism model that benefits the entire community. Binda's readiness to collaborate and its vision for structured tourism growth highlight a strong foundation for future community-based tourism (CBT) development, combining local knowledge with external support for shared progress (*lebgimsim*).

Limitations of the study

While this study provides meaningful insights into community-based tourism (CBT) in Binda, several limitations should be recognized. First of all, the study is limited by geographical scope. The study focuses solely on the Binda community in Ghana's Northern Region. This narrow geographical focus may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other areas with different socio-cultural, economic, or political conditions. To deal with this problem it is proposed that future research should adopt a comparative or multi-site approach, involving other communities within the Northern Region or across Ghana. This would allow for a broader understanding of how CBT functions under varying local conditions and enhance the transferability of the findings. Secondly, reliance on qualitative data as the only research tool. The research primarily employs qualitative methods—focus group discussions, interviews, and observations. While these approaches yield deep, contextual insights, they are inherently subjective and may introduce potential biases, such as participants providing socially desirable responses or researchers interpreting data through personal lenses. This challenge can be resolved by ensuring that subsequent studies could adopt a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. The inclusion of surveys or statistical analyses would provide measurable indicators (e.g., visitor frequency, tourism revenue, or household income levels), strengthening the validity and generalizability of the results. Thirdly, the absence of quantitative measurement. The lack of quantitative data limits the ability to statistically assess phenomena such as visitation rates or income generated from tourism. This constraint prevents a fuller understanding of the economic magnitude of CBT in Binda. This challenge cab ne dealt with by ensuring that future researchers collect quantitative metrics alongside qualitative insights. For example, data on tourist numbers, revenue distribution, or employment rates could be systematically recorded to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of CBT's economic impact. Furthermore, dependence on self-reported experiences. The study relies on participants' self-reported experiences, which can be difficult to verify—particularly regarding spiritual beliefs, income, and benefit-sharing. This dependence on anecdotal accounts may affect the accuracy and reliability of some findings. The solution of this lies in strengthened data validity, future research should also integrate triangulation strategies, such as cross-checking participant statements with documentary evidence, observational records, or local administrative data. This would help confirm or contextualize self-reported claims. In addition, there is limitation in the exploration of SDG Linkages. Although the study touches on the relevance of CBT to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), it does not extensively examine how specific goals such as poverty reduction, gender equality, or environmental sustainability are being achieved through tourism in Binda. To address this challenge, future research should adopt a multi-scalar and SDG-focused analytical framework, assessing how CBT contributes to various SDG targets at both community and regional levels. This would provide a clearer understanding of tourism's broader developmental role.

Conclusions and policy implications

This study has illuminated the touristic resources and management practices in Binda, positioning the community as a strong example of communal or community-based tourism (CBT) in Ghana. The findings reveal that Binda possesses a well-structured, locally driven tourism management system consistent with CBT principles. Strengthening this framework through supportive policies and targeted investments can foster sustainable tourism development—one that safeguards the community's cultural and historical heritage while ensuring that economic benefits are fairly distributed among residents. Such inclusive growth enhances local livelihoods and contributes to long-term community well-being. The study's theoretical grounding in Christaller's (1963) theory of destination development and Giampiccoli et al.'s (2015) framework on CBT development and management has provided valuable insights into how tourism evolves and functions in Binda. These frameworks helped clarify the dynamic, participatory, and cyclical nature of CBT within the community context. From a policy standpoint, the research reinforces participants' calls for greater governmental and NGO involvement in supporting community-based tourism initiatives. Effective tourism policy should emphasize collaborative partnerships among government institutions, NGOs, and local communities to ensure that development efforts respect traditional governance and cultural systems. Establishing feedback and monitoring mechanisms would help align tourism strategies with both community priorities and broader industry trends.

To strengthen local capacity, institutions such as the Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture, the Ghana Tourism Authority (GTA), and the Ghana Tourist Board should implement comprehensive training programs in areas such as tour guiding, customer service, storytelling, and destination marketing. Additionally, providing education in digital marketing and technology use can help local entrepreneurs expand their reach and increase tourism revenues. Investment in essential infrastructure including roads, sanitation facilities, and communication networks is also critical for enhancing visitor experiences and improving residents' quality of life. Finally, sustained support for the preservation and promotion of cultural and historical sites will strengthen Binda's appeal as a unique cultural destination, ensuring that tourism development remains both sustainable and community-centered.

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