

Chapter 5

Ecotourists' Perceived Risk/Benefit and Its Ability to Influence the Tourist Willingness to Visit

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ABSTRACT

Ecotourism has emerged as a tool that can help reduce environmental degradation and boost the economic and social activities of residents at various ecotourism destinations. These benefits can materialize when ecotourism destinations receive tourists throughout the year to ensure the sustainability of activities. Ecotourists choose destinations to visit based on their perceived benefits and risks which include a series of activities that the tourists experience on the journey and at the destination. A positive perception is a benefit and a negative one is a risk which intend influences the intention of the tourists to visit, revisit, and recommend the destination to potential tourists. Several authors have looked at the perceived risks and benefits and their influence on visits, however, insight into developing countries like Ghana remains under-researched. This chapter explores the literature and uses primary data collection from Ghana to explain the phenomenon.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental preservation has become a challenge for the global community, and several discourses have taken place to ensure environmental quality. Ecotourism

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presents itself as one of the strategies that can help preserve the quality of the environment (Yang et al., 2023; Zhou et al., 2022). Ecotourism emphasizes the visit to natural areas to enjoy and protect the environment, enhance the trickling down of economic benefits, and ensure the social and cultural stability of destination areas (Abbasi et al., 2021; Carvache-Franco et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023). The International Ecotourism Society, for instance, sees ecotourism as a responsible journey to pristine areas to preserve the environment, ensure that the well-being of the local people is sustained, and entail education and interpretation (Eshun, 2021; TIES, 2015). Ecotourism provides economic opportunities for residents in destination areas to engage in different economic activities to enhance their livelihood options and provides political, financial, and sociocultural incentives for conservation (Carvache-Franco et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023). It also has the potential to enhance social connectivity and cohesion to foster the development of destinations (Abbasi et al., 2021; Eshun & Asiedu, 2021). Hence, ecotourism destinations also apply the tenets of sustainable development. Ecotourism, therefore, serves as a tool for achieving sustainable development. When ecotourism principles are correctly adhered to, it will enhance the quality of the environment and contribute to residents' economic, social, and cultural empowerment (Eshun & Asiedu, 2021). Despite these benefits associated with ecotourism, it can also threaten the environment and local culture if the appropriate strategies are not implemented.

Ghana has over 40 tourist destinations, including nature, cultural, and historical sites. Some nature attractions are Kakum National Park, Bobiri Forest, Butterfly Sanctuary, Boabeng Fiema Monkey Sanctuary, Boti Waterfalls, Wli Waterfalls, and Mole National Park. Some historical attractions include Cape Coast and Elmina Castles, and cultural sites include Adawumase Kenter Weaving and Manhyia Palace (Eshun et al., 2015). In addition, event tourism is organized to draw discretionary tourists. This includes the Pan African Festival (PANAFEST), and Easter paragliding activities. Tourist arrivals in Ghana stood at 354,236 in 2022, and 221,728 in 2021 (GTA, 2022). Some authors have outlined some perceived risks of tourists to Ghana, including physical, psychological, performance, financial, and safety risks (Tergu et al., 2022).

Many countries have embraced ecotourism since it serves as a tool for enhancing environmental quality (Abbasi et al., 2021; Yang et al., 2023). In Ghana, most tourism destinations are tagged as ecotourism because of their benefits (Eshun, 2021). However, ecotourism is only possible when eco-tourists are poised to visit destinations to enjoy the attractions. Destination images play a crucial role in attracting eco-tourists. Destination images include the environmental quality, the people, and the social cohesion at the destinations (Abbasi et al., 2021; Leong & Ab. Karim, 2019). The people are the primary and actual resources at destinations that can ensure peace that will attract tourists to destinations and, at

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