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**THE IMPACT OF TOURISM  
ON CULTURE AND ENVIRONMENT.  
GHANA'S CASE STUDY**

**INTRODUCTION**

**C**ulture is a collection of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features and, according to UNESCO, it includes lifestyles, ways of living, values, traditions and beliefs (UNESCO, 2009) that have become objects of interest in the field of tourism, that has developed a type of immensely popular cultural tourism, which is mainly based on culture and architecture. Complexity of cultural tourism has led to many definitions, encompassing wide-ranging cultural aspects as it relates to tourism. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation during their 22<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly session in 2017 adopted a definition of the phenomenon of cultural tourism by describing it as a type of tourism activity in which the visitor is motivated to learn and experience cultural attractions during the visits of tourism destinations. These attractions could be

material, intellectual or emotional features of a society including architecture, heritage, music, culinary, lifestyle, values, etc. (UNWTO, 2022).

The relationship between culture and tourism is a mutually beneficial relationship which can strengthen the attractiveness and competitiveness of places, regions and countries. Culture is an increasingly important element of the tourism products as it creates distinctiveness in a crowded global marketplace.

Culture has been increasingly employed as an aspect of the tourism products and destination imaging strategies, and tourism has been integrated into cultural development strategies as a means of supporting cultural heritage and cultural production.

Years ago tourism and culture were viewed as largely separate aspects. Cultural resources were seen as a part of the cultural heritage of destinations, related to the education of the local population and the underpinning of local or national identities.

The widespread cultural, economic and social benefits lead to policies that promote linking culture and tourism or the narrower development of cultural tourism worldwide at continental, national and regional levels.

The development of tourism in African countries, particularly cultural tourism, is today in an advanced stage. Although there could be a significant variation in the level of tourism development, African countries rise to the challenges, offering top quality experience. Among them the dominants are: Kenya and Tanzania in the east, Mauritius and Seychelles in the Indian Ocean, Morocco and Tunisia in the north, South Africa, Namibia and Botswana in the south and Cote d'Ivoire, Senegal, Ghana and The Gambia in the west. These countries today have successfully established their tourism industries. The diverse indigenous cultures became the driving forces of the cultural tourism, especially in those countries, that have been solely concentrated on the wildlife safaris and beach tourism (South Africa, Kenya, Mauritius, Seychelles).

The global understanding of culture led to the creation of World Heritage Sites, which today attract millions of tourists on the global scale. Culture is seen as playing the most important role in establishing and reinforcing people's unique identity and sense of belonging to a particular place. This has led to the popularisation of heritage tourism, which we observe especially in the developing countries. Africa gained her strong voice and is opening up to the world, offering a unique and idiosyncratic experience to those who value African heritage and through cultural tourism want to pay tribute to the diversity of the continent.

### BETWEEN HISTORY, CULTURE AND TOURISM

As the 2022 began to roll, after two long years of stagnation caused by COVID-19 pandemic, many international industries boosted back to their full capacities. The middle of the year saw a huge growth in tourism, especially in international tourism. Airports and airlines still not fully operating after imposed restrictions, faced a colossal disruption and were unable to cope with the crowds of passengers and holidaymakers (Phillips, 2022). Tourist destinations have not omitted Africa either. Egypt, Tanzania, Kenya, South Africa or Ghana, to name but a few, have seen a surge in tourist numbers, which has contributed to the economic growth of these countries. Among them is Ghana, a country that has always attracted a great number of tourists, especially cultural tourists who, through their travels, desired to learn more about the country's painful history of colonialism and the slave trade. But Ghana has to offer a lot more. Rich history, with its tangible heritage in the form of castles, forts (Ghana Tourist Board, 2007) and places associated with the history of the nations living within the country, have also an impressive offer of recreation in nature.

Contrary to the stereotypes presenting the African continent as the cradle of famine, civil wars, diseases or corrupt dictators, Ghana appears as the „Gateway to Africa”, mostly making headlines for its legendary music, talented footballers or the hospitality of its citizens. For this is a country of expressive beauty, incredible history, rich culture and diverse traditions. With a rapidly growing reputation and the longest history of free, fair and democratic elections of any African countries, Ghana attracts more than one million tourists a year, both those who come for a short period of time and those who, captivated by the beauty of this West African country, decide to stay for longer. Just as the whole of the continent, Ghana's rich culture and custom is a huge part of Africa's contribution to the world civilisation.

Ghana was the first African country to achieve independence and it is also the birthplace of the father of Pan-Africanism, Kwame Nkrumah. But the history of Ghana is as well the history of the mighty and glorious Ashanti Empire. The story of today's modern nation stretches as far as 10 000 BC, as evidenced by archaeological findings suggesting that central Ghana was inhabited as early as 3000–4000 years ago. The country took its name from the mediaeval trading empire that existed between 4<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries A.D. The Empire of Ghana was formed by different Soninke tribes, united under the first king, Dinga Cisse.

„Ghana” in their language meant „King Warrior” and referred to the kings, but eventually began a description of the region. Ghana Empire was located in the northwest of present-day country, in where exactly Mauretania, Senegal and Mali is now. Attacks from north African tribal groups, who wanted the Empire to convert to Islam, driven Ghana towards coastal side, to the south, where at last the country was established. In the 13<sup>th</sup> century the Empire weakened and was incorporated into the Mali Empire.

The cultural reel in Ghanaian history began in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, after the contacts with Europe were established. A new era in trade began when the Portuguese arrived on Ghana’s shores in 1471. They were interested in trading cloth, hardware, beads, metals, spirits, arms, and ammunition, but mainly gold, which was visible in huge quantities even among the less wealthy inhabitants. This fact contributed to the new name of the country, Gold Coast, under which Ghana existed until the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when in 1957 gained independence, freeing itself from British imperial rule. A strong trend in trade with Portuguese, Dutch, British and neighbouring African states, made Ghana a country more known in the world. To this day, we still find tangible traces of those times in the form of castles and forts.

Henry the Navigator was the first coloniser to send the ship, to explore the west coast of Africa at the beginning of 15<sup>th</sup> century. Eventually the Portuguese reached the coast of today’s Ghana, nearly a century later, but at that point it was obvious that they had far-reaching commercial plans. A fort and trading post was established at Elmina, which over time has become a city, declaring itself an independent state. Inhabitants of the city were offered Portuguese protection but were forbidden to trade with any of the neighbouring trades, to which Portuguese reacted with aggressive force, especially after they introduced the locals to fire-arms, which made the dominance of the stronger tribes easier. Almost 700 kg of gold was exported annually from the Gold Coast. It was 1/10 of the world’s supply. Over time Elmina became more and more populated as everyone wanted to trade with the Portuguese, which led to the establishment of a West African monopoly.

The 17<sup>th</sup> century, which proved to be the most intense in terms of the trade between Europe and Africa, was mainly focused on the trade of enslaved people, who often captured in the African interior by the coastal tribes of slave-catchers, were sold to Portuguese traders in exchange for goods mainly textiles and horses. Held captive in the castle built on the shore, they were eventually



1. Ashanti Empire in 1800, map; source: public domain

led through the infamous „Door of No Return”<sup>1</sup> and transported to other European colonies in the Americas.

Those times coincided with the glory years of the Ashanti (also spelled Asante) Empire, which was actively engaged in trade of enslaved people with Europeans. From the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Asante supplied slaves to British and Dutch traders and in return they received firearms which helped them to enforce their territorial expansion (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2022).

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<sup>1</sup> „Door of No Return”, a door that looks out into the Atlantic. Thousands of enslaved Africans were led through that door, during 400 years of slave trade. Passing through it meant separation from homeland and a horrific journey across the ocean.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century Ghana fell under the dominance of the British Empire and was controlled on the national level by the colonial district commissioners. Although investment, infrastructure and development of institutions was provided, it was only concentrated on the coastal, urban areas, leaving the rural interior forgotten and neglected. The colonial regime, however, helped to strengthen resistance to British rule, resulting in a call for independence that was achieved in 1957, making Ghana the first sub-Saharan self-governing country. Through British rule, the country has developed a degree of national coherence. Colonialism provided a number of unifying influences that enhanced national integration in the cultural, economic and social fields. Independent Ghana was able to expand the educational system and reduce regional inequalities. The leaders followed the already expanding pan-Africanism. A great deal of attention has been paid to indigenous cultures that have been getting international attention. Through conservation and development programmes, these cultures have become a stimulus for the development of regional tourism.

Ghanaian society comes from six main ethnic groups: the Akan (Ashanti and Fanti), the Ewe, the Ga-Adangbe, the Mole-Dagbani, the Guan, and the Gurma and the major languages spoken are Twi, Fante, Ga, Hausa, Dagbani, Ewe and Nzema (World Atlas, 2022a). English, however, which is the official language, became the unifying influence to all cultural groups within the country. In all parts of Ghana, within every ethnic group cultural heritage is closely linked with religion. Christianity, Islam and traditional African beliefs are playing a critical role in the development of the country (World Atlas, 2022b). They all coexist peacefully, being tolerant of each other's practices.

Ghana is usually described as a land of festivals, music and traditional dances that have become a strong element of tourism. Afrochella Music Museum, Ghana Music Awards, Panafest, Paragliding Festival during Easter, December to Remember, to name but few (Events, 2021). These events are a huge driver for tourism. In 2021 Ghana registered over 623 000 tourist arrivals, which is double in comparison to 2020 (Tourism Report, 2021). Majority of tourists come from the USA, and this is associated with a Year of Return program that was officially launched in September 2018, by Ghanaian president Nana Akufo-Addo in Washington D.C., as a program for Africans in the diaspora, mainly to unite with Africans. The year was symbolic and commemorated 400 years, since first enslaved Africans touched down on American shores (Tourism Report, 2021). Since launching, the program has been successful. Majority of young Americans visit Ghana each year and also lots of international businesses find their



2. Elmina Castle; source: easytrackghana.com

own destination in this West African country. Almost 24% of tourists who visited Ghana in 2021 did so for purely recreational purposes. This is almost double the number compared to previous years. Another 30% of visitors declared to be visiting Ghana for professional and business purposes (Tourism Report, 2021).

History, culture and heritage of Ghana are proving to be a strong incentive to attract tourists. Tourism is developing and adapting to new needs, which include not only cultural attractions but also investments in any type of accommodation.

## ECOTOURISM

Ghana's equatorial climate and the fertile and well irrigated soils contribute to the diversity of ecosystems, with a high degree of plant and animal species that lead to the development of wildlife, from elephants and monkeys to sea turtles and crocodiles, as well as many types of birds and butterflies and over 3600 species of plants. There are twenty one World Protected Areas in Ghana totalling 1 347 600 ha which is 5.6% of the country territory. This includes a network of seven National Parks, six Resource Reserves, two Wildlife Sanctuaries, one Strict Nature Reserve and five coastal wetlands (International Union for Conservation of Nature, 2010).

In recent years, Ghana has pioneered Community-Based Ecotourism in Africa, which aims to create a three-way relationship between conservationists,



3. Mole National Park; source: public domain

tourists and local communities. Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary, home to sacred troops of monkeys and black-faced monkeys, which was established in 1995 is still a prime example for some 30 other community-based tourism projects across the country. These projects range from Wechiau Hippo Reserve in the Upper West and Amansuri Wetland Sanctuary in the Western Region, to cultural and historical sites such as Domana Rock Shrine, located near Kakum National Park, and painted houses and pottery in Sirigu in the Upper East.

Eco-tourism could be defined as responsible travel to the natural areas of conserved environment, keeps the wellbeing of local people and serves educational purposes (Forestry Commission, 2021). In recent years Ghana has developed many eco places that have been regularly visited by small groups of tourists, people who respect the natural, ecological and environmental heritage. Ghana focuses on the encouragement of investments into community based eco-tourist sites. The government believes this kind of action will help preserve and upgrade the protected areas and save the environment. Conservation and development of wildlife heritage brings socio-economic benefits in the forms of tourist expenditure, but also through employment of local tourism support-



4. Mole National Park, pathway to ecovillage; source: public domain

ers to work in the protected areas. The most popular eco-tourist destinations in Ghana are the vast Mole National Park, the forested Kakum National Park, Kyabobo Range National Park, with Ghana's second highest peak Mt. Kyabobo, Digya National Park, the oldest protected area in the country and many more (Forestry Commission, 2021).

Mole National Park is Ghana's largest wildlife refuge. Located on 4590 km<sup>2</sup> in the Savannah Region, represents the history of Gonja people, who in the past lived as farmers and hunters and today they are focused on conservation and development of the area as a major biodiversity spot and a tourist destination. The territory of the park is also linked to the history of slave trade as the ancient routes towards Mali and west coast of the continent passed through the centre of Mole (History, Anthropology and Archaeology of Mole, 2022). Today the park is the best spot for viewing savannah animals, incl. elephants, buffaloes or antelopes. Tourists and visitors have a chance to view lions, leopards or hyenas in the Lovi Nyanga sector of the park. There are also over 300 species of birds identified in the area of Mole. Designated places of the park have been adapted to the needs of up to 20 000 visitors a year. The park is surrounded by 33 communities, with a total estimated population of 40 000 people. Their main economic activity is farming crops and livestock but also other activities incl. pottery, basket weaving or traditional shirt (smock) production (Fringe Com-



5. Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary and Cultural Village before redevelopment; photo by Eric Ankrah



6. Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary and Cultural Village after redevelopment by Ghana Tourism Authority; photo by Eric Ankrah

munities, 2022). The living conditions and infrastructure within these communities are challenging, but sustainable tourism recently generates a sustainable income and the development and investment in the Mole National Park gradually improve infrastructure of the villages.

Ghana has a prospering ecotourism industry that covers the country's micro-worlds from the sea on the south to the forests and lakes in the middle and the dry savannah in the north. The local communities alongside The Ministry of Tourism and other designated organisations work together to attract visits to the natural resources across the country in a responsible and sustainable manner.

### SUSTAINABLE TOURISM AND ITS IMPACT ON THE COUNTRY

West Africa has a huge tourist potential, but there are negative factors that hold the region back from flourishing in the tourism industry. Poor transport or security concerns are the main obstacles that affect many African countries. The solution lies in concerted reforms that can boost a number of visitors. Ghana has managed to establish the tourism sector as the fourth largest source of income for the country. As a peaceful and stable state, Ghana became a huge tourist attraction.

Hollywood actor Jesse Williams once said about his experience in West Africa:

*When I was in college, I went to [...] Ghana for over a month, and that was transformative in my life, culturally, historically. Finding an incredible beauty and sophistication in a place that the world swore had neither. That comes to mind as my number-one, game-changing experience, [the kind] that encourages you to keep chasing that and keep travelling (Menza, 2021).*

He described it as the best vacation of his life. Ghana indeed has plenty to offer. The tourist resources are immense and diverse. The country has many natural, historical and cultural attractions. Being economically and politically stable and easily accessible from each site of the continent, Ghana's tourism industry leads by example in the West of Africa.

United Nations Member States in 2015 adopted the Agenda for Sustainable Development. The goals they set up are expected to be achieved before 2030 (United Nations, 2022). There are 17 Sustainable Development Goals, all of them call for urgent action by developed and developing countries to work in partnership. Tourism has the potential to contribute to all of the goals and has been placed as a target in many of them. Achieving this agenda requires a clear



7. Accra; source: bnnbloomberg.ca

implementation of the framework. Sustainable tourism is nothing else but responsible tourism, ecologically and culturally sensitive. It may have different effects on the social and cultural aspect of life in Ghana, depending on the region and strength of the country.

Tourism provides the funding to preserve and conserve cultural heritage, gives back cultural pride, revitalises customs and traditions as well as opens the door for cultural sharing and learning (Smith, 2013). Notable positive impacts of tourism on culture include increasing cross cultural interactions; understanding, maintaining and keeping local culture, arts, crafts and traditions; empowering host communities; and strengthening cultural values. On the Dodi Island located on the Volta Lake, the indigenous community have preserved their cultural heritage such that it has become a hot spot for tourists to visit. Tourism has opened the door to establish cultural identities like houses, food, and simple daily routines (Experience the Dodi World, 2022).

The Marine Drive Project, which is estimated to cost about \$1.2 billion, is a Public-Private Partnership project expected to transform the beachfront in Accra into a vibrant business and commercial enclave that will transform the city's skyline, create jobs, spur tourism growth and boost the national economy. Moreover it will celebrate Ghana's rich history. The project, covering an area of over 240 acres, is located within the ministerial enclave that serves multiple functions (Marine Drive Tourism Investment Project, 2022).



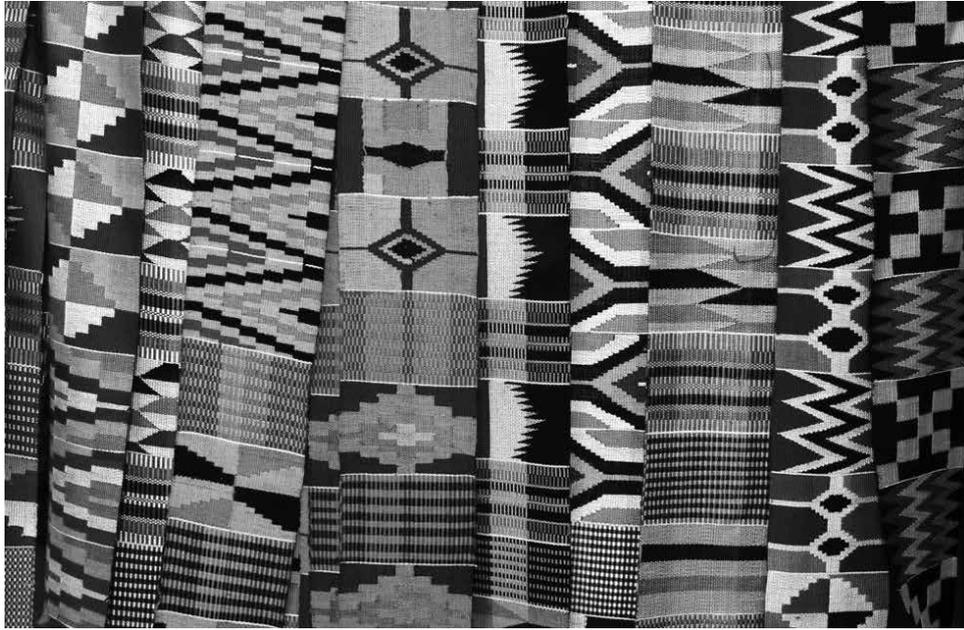
8. Accra, Marine Drive Tourist Project, plan; source: public domain

Developments interfere with nature causing damage to water bodies, air pollution and land pollution. And waste disposal problems may arise as well. The recent rush for gold has polluted many rivers in Ghana, deforested reserves and damaged farmlands. The need for coastal area development caused the displacement of many local communities. The Marine Drive Project is a classic example.

When local people entertain tourists, they adapt tourists' needs, attitudes and values and ultimately start following them. Often, this happens in less sophisticated societies where stronger culture dominates the weaker (Burns, 2003). But, the diffusion of innovation of cultural components in a social framework depends on compatibility, advantage and complexity of the cultural objects (Lew, 2022). Particularly, the youth are vulnerable to this impact and women are ahead of their male counterparts in this regard. By following tourists' lifestyles young people bring changes in the material goods they use and in their gestures and postures, which is defined as Demonstration Effect. The process of adaptation and adjustment is referred to as acculturation. In many communities in Ghana young people have adapted western style in fashion, instead of Kaba and Slit, a traditional Kente Clothing<sup>2</sup>. This acculturation is also linked to dietary change, adapting in everyday life to globally popular meals.

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<sup>2</sup> A Ghanaian textile made of strips of silk or cotton, previously the most popular among Asante and Ewe ethnic groups. In modern day Ghana, kente clothing is being used to mark special occasions in the country. Due to the beauty of these fabrics, they have become very popular around the world. They are mass-produced and exported mainly to the West (Asamoah-Yah, E., Osei-Bonsu Safo-Kantanka, 2017).



9. Kente fabric; source: Getty Images

Locals tend to fuse aspects of their local culture with the foreign one thereby creating a Hybrid Culture, which affects the indigenous cultures with foreign influences, causing the loss of their exceptional character. But despite the slight loss in cultural uniqueness, the local communities agree to the changes, because tourism brings them economic benefits.

## CONCLUSION

Tourism is a great way to educate a global audience about Ghana, its regions and areas. Improving the environment and enhancing or preserving it attracts tourists to visit the country. Promotion of tourist areas through social media is fulfilling its role. Tourists, enchanted by history and the natural environment are more often choosing Ghana as a destination. In order to ensure the best promotion of the country and attractiveness to visitors, environmental protection seems an obvious step. Measures should be taken to properly dispose of waste and preserve the environment as well as to ensure the safety of visitors.

Tourism has many implications that are influenced by a myriad of factors, including the ability and willingness of communities to embrace change. Tourism could definitely be an economic survival, but for some community groups

it is a mixture of both positive and negative elements. In Ghana, there are communities where tourism has generated negative effects that the population was not ready for. Cultural clashes originating from tourism can sometimes be seen as a negative side of globalisation, and since tourism products in Ghana are mainly concentrated at foreigners, unfortunate situations inevitably arise. Cross-cultural tensions can be overcome in African countries before it is safe to state that tourism has contributed to achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

To avoid these unpleasant situations and also to maintain a high level of tourist satisfaction, there is a need for planning and close monitoring by authorities within communities. Tourism development should be a part of economic and cultural development and it should be done in a sustainable manner with a full respect for the socio-cultural authenticity of host communities.

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STRESZCZENIE

Turystyka obejmuje krótkoterminowe podróże ludzi do miejsc poza ich domami i społecznościami. Turyści odwiedzają dane miejsca z różnych powodów, w tym w celach edukacyjnych, religijnych, medycznych lub rozrywkowych. Miejsca i wydarzenia związane z kulturą i dziedzictwem kulturowym przyciągają tysiące odwiedzających, którzy chcą uzyskać informacje z pierwszej ręki o przeszłości i poznać kulturę danego miejsca. W tym celu uczestniczą, obserwują, uczą się lub cieszą się wydarzeniami kulturalnymi danej grupy etnicznej lub społecznej. Ghana, ze swoją bogatą kulturą i unikatowym środowiskiem naturalnym, jest jednym z głównych punktów na turystycznej mapie Afryki, krajem, który przyciąga zarówno lokalnych, jak i zagranicznych turystów.

Niniejszy artykuł ma na celu określenie relacji pomiędzy turystami kulturowymi a społecznościami i kulturą, w ramach domeny turystyki w Ghanie. Analizuje również wpływ turystyki na społeczeństwo, kulturę i środowisko Ghany. W badaniach wykorzystano współczesną literaturę i prasę. Analiza ta jest zalecana władzom lokalnym i rządowym, które pracują nad tym, aby turystyka kulturowa stała się priorytetem i próbują osiągnąć jej zrównoważony rozwój, a tym samym przyczynić się do zrównoważonego rozwoju społeczno-kulturowego i środowiskowego.

**Słowa kluczowe:** dziedzictwo, historia, kultura, tradycje, turystyka kulturowa, zrównoważona turystyka, zrównoważony rozwój