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Tourism potentials of Mole National Park in Northern Ghana

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Abstract:

Poor access and long distances from major cities/towns have always been major problems debarring the full utilization of nature-related touristic resources. Despite this, some adventuresome tourists still make efforts to such wildlife sanctuaries to have a feel of nature. This study explores tourism exploits at Mole National Park (the largest in Ghana) which is located in the northern sector of the country. An inventory of facilities through field visits and observations were 'exacted' to identify different types of landforms, species of wildlife, vegetation and culture which were of touristic significance around the Park and also to have an overview of tourists' "traffic" to the Park. With regard to data collection, the questionnaire method including personal observation were employed to obtain information from the four communities that surround the Park, the Park officials and tourists who visited the facility from April to May, 2011. The results analysed revealed that turn out was comparatively low due to the remote location of the Park including poor accessibility and low income among Ghanaians. Tourism awareness among community members was found to be high. Tourists found the Park impressive in terms of its variety in wildlife and services rendered therein. It was discovered that the Park has a high tourism potential which can be harnessed to attract both domestic and international tourists and bring socio-economic benefits to Ghana. The paper suggests that improvements in road network to and in the Park and stiffer sanctions to curb poaching were major ways to enhance tourism/recreation in the Park and making it sustainable.

Keywords: Ghana, Mole National Park, tourism, wildlife, attraction

INTRODUCTION

The concept of 'national park' was developed in the United States of America in 1870 by a group of explorers at a historic campfire in Yellowstone Wilderness Area. Consequently, Yellowstone was gazetted a national park in 1872, the first in the world (Brockman, 1959; Turner, 1975). Studies also revealed that the first national parks in Europe were established in Sweden as early as 1909 (Lundmark el al. 2010). The concept also reached Africa in the early 1900s and resulted in the establishment of the Kruger National Park in South Africa in 1926 (Sayer et al, 1992). The importance of national parks was realized in Ghana in the 1950s but it was not until 1971 that Mole National Park was gazetted.

Generally, national parks play important roles in the development of nations and these include; wildlife and environmental conservation, tourism and recreation, education and scientific research purposes, and protection of sites and objects of cultural and historical heritage. The establishment of national parks helps to protect fauna and flora against over-exploration. Furthermore, the preservation of flora, particularly on

steep slopes protects the natural landscape against environmental degradation, and thus enhances the scenic beauty of the environment (Gwinn et al, 1989). National parks also provide opportunities to scientists to conduct research and to students to explore and appreciate nature (Youdeowei et al, 1986). National parks protect sites and objects of cultural and historical heritage. For example, Circeo National Park in Italy was created to conserve ancient Roman relics including the remains of Emperor Domitian's Palace which dates from the first century (Allavena, 1976).

National parks as areas for tourism and recreation have contributed immensely to the economic and infrastructural development of many nations. According to Braithwaite (1993), tourism brings visitors who provide market for agricultural produce in the locality. This enables farmers to diversify their agricultural produce to include fruits and vegetables for tourist hotels. Mackinnon et al (1986) noted that tourism development in and around national parks is one of the best ways of bringing economic benefits and development to remote areas as it provides local employment, stimulates local markets, improves transportation and communication systems.

Through tourism, national parks provide outdoor recreational opportunities to many people ranging from sport hunting, hiking, mountaineering, game viewing to bird-watching (avitourism). The protection of land is thus motivated not only by environmental concerns but by positive effects of rural development seen in other countries. The idea draws on experience from the USA and UK where positive regional development has been observed in direct relation to national parks (Moisey, 2002; Johnson et al. 2003; Lorah and Southwick, 2003, Frentz et al. 2004).

Tourism is the most widely acceptable form of use in national parks (Chidumayo et al, 1993). It brings significant economic benefits to many African countries (Mackinnon et al, 1986). However, it has been noted that the planning and management of national parks involve the investment of huge sums of money and energy in providing facilities and amenities such as roads, trails, accommodation, water, electricity and campsites. Provision of these facilities is important because it is only high-quality national parks that attract rich foreign tourists (Gwinn et al, 1989) and thus these very amenities have also been linked at least verbally to needs of the local people living in and around national park areas (Sandell, 2005; Zachrisson et al. 2006; Lundgren, 2009). Also, tourist will visit a national park when they have enough information about the park and its attractions (Hoff and Overgaard, 1974).

Mole National Park is Ghana's largest national park, and the only Park with developed tourist facilities (Barrow, 1997). However, apart from the studies conducted by Kpelle (1986) on "Visitors' Use of Mole National Park" and Hoff and Overgaard (1974) on "the Tourist Assets of Ghana", little is known about the attractions and facilities of touristic importance in the Park. Furthermore, long distances of parks to a country's main entry points, the nature of the road/accessibility of the park and the ability of animals in the park to withstand human presence are major elements/factors determining tourists flow and level of recreation in a nature

reserve. Ghana's Mole National Park unlike the parks in Kenya where a visitor arrives at the airport and within short distances begin to experience the 'thrills' of wildlife viewing is unfortunately not the case in the most popular national park in the Ghana which is several kilometres (692km) away from the main entry point (Kotoka International Airport) in Accra. Despite this scenario, it has been observed that Ghana has the most viable tourist attractions among West African countries with the potential of developing her wildlife resources to standards comparable to that of Kenya, Tanzania and Rwanda (Worthington, 1967; Eshun, 1987)

This implies that national parks in Ghana, including Mole National Park has the potential of generating revenue from tourism far greater than they are capable now. This study therefore seeks to explore, identify and unearth those potentials.

The main purpose of this study is to assess the tourism potentials of Mole National Park by seeking specifically to:

- Identify and appraise the status of resources of touristic importance in and around the park.
- Evaluate views of tourists on services rendered in the Park
- Determine the number of tourists to the Park from 1996 to 2007,
- Ascertain the level of awareness of local communities around the Park on tourism.
- Identify problems militating against tourism development in Mole National Park

WHAT THE LITERATURE SAYS

The primary aim of establishing national parts is to conserve nature and natural resources including flora and fauna. However, the concept of national parks can be sustained if only they are economically justifiable (Asibey, 1976) because the changing economic trends make wildlife preservation per se difficult to justify. Wildlife conservation must therefore be incorporated in the national land use policy. It is also the general belief in West Africa that unless parks and reserves are used for tourism as exists in East Africa, it is economically unwise to establish them (Sayer et al, 1992).

Many different attractions may induce tourists to visit particular areas or spend their holidays in specific regions. These attractions have been classified in a variety of ways. First, distinction is usually made between natural features such as landforms, flora, and fauna, and man-made objects such as historic buildings, monuments, and archaeological sites. A second category embraces man and his culture expressed through language, music, folklore, and dances (Mackinnon et al, 1986; Pearce, 1989). The uniqueness of flora as tourist attraction has been confirmed by Sheila (1993). According to her, the objective for establishing BezaMahofaly and Andahalela Project in 1977 was to protect riverine and spiny bush forest in south-western Madagascar to enhance ecotourism. Tourists are usually attracted to national parks by the beauty and diversity of the vegetation (Sayer et al, 1992).

Studies conducted by Vedder and Weber (1993) in Rwanda on fauna as a major source of tourist attraction showed that about 5,000 tourists visited Mountain Gorilla National Park annually to see gorillas. Doungoube (1993) considered chimpanzee, buffalo and

bongo which abound in the Bayongo region surrounding the Dzanga Reserve in Madagascar as valuable species of touristic importance. Although wildlife serves as a major tourist attraction, Mackinnon et al (1986) found that the reliability of locating them is important. He explained that it is not enough for tourists to know they have the chance to see a tiger or a lion, but there must be an assurance that they will see tigers or lions before they can visit a national park in their numbers. Hoff and Overgaard (1974) noted that the animals in Mole National Park are shy and this makes viewing difficult. This implies that it is not only the animal numbers that matter but the ability of the animal to endure human presence.

Senior and Okunnolifa (1983) identified landforms in and around parks as one of the attractions of tourists from Europe and North America to East Africa. For example, the interior of East Africa, particularly in the Mt. Kenya, Mt. Elgon and Mt. Kilimanjaro areas are of scenic interest. Their research findings indicated that more adventurous tourists enjoy excellent walking and rock climbing as a form of recreation. Studies also conducted by Eshun (1987) on tourist attractions at Shai Hills Game Production Reserve in Ghana showed that mountain climbing is as adventurous as it is daring and fascinating. Waterfalls, caves, scarps, and crater lakes have also been identified as other landforms or geological features that are of touristic interest especially when they are within vicinities of parks (Mackinnon et al, 1986; Eshun, 1987; Lokko, 1996).

The culture of the people also serves as “fire attraction” to tourists from other countries. According to Foster (1985) and Ghosh (2000) culture can be centred on rural areas or based in towns offering special cultural activities including music, folklore, art and places of local architectural interests, historical monuments and birthplaces of famous people. Senior and Okunnrolifa (1983) also found that the culture of the people of East Africa (particularly the Masai who live in and around national parks) offers much interest to tourists from Europe and North America. Facilities essential for the development of tourism in national parks include roads, trails, health facilities, water and electricity supply, accommodation, campsites and interpretive services. (Brockman, 1959; Senge, 1974; Pearce, 1989). For example, roads, apart from the highway connecting the park to the rest of the country, link places of interest in the park. Hotels or motels with restaurant and bar facilities sited in parks provide sleeping places, catering services and entertainment for tourists. Campsites are located at convenient places within the park where tents and cabins can be temporary set up for tourists who wish to spend the night in the wilderness away from the hotel or wish to have extensive tour of the park. Interpretive and educational facilities include museums, roadside and trail-side exhibits, self-guiding nature trails, information lectures or campfire programmes, field trips, libraries and publications of materials pertinent to a given region. Interpretive activities are designed to enhance visitor enjoyment and or recreation in parks.

Tourism and recreation in national parks is often determined by certain socio-economic factors. Key among them are per capita income, transportation, leisure time, level of management and security (Clawson,

1972; Kpelle, 1986; Pearce, 1989). The more wealthy people are or the higher their incomes levels, the better they can afford to visit national parks (Clawson, 1972). He also noted that if transportation cost to national parks is high, few people can afford or will be prepared to visit them. Park use also appears to be directly related to available leisure time. In many countries, national parks are located far from town and city centres and may require more than one day to visit them (Clawson, 1972). According to Pearce (1989), the greater the population density in the catchment area of a national park, the greater the number of tourists it will receive/attract. However, age structure in population may also affect visits to national parks. Clawson (1972) again noted that a country with a large proportion of children is likely to show relatively low rate of visits to national parks. The reason is that children do not often visit national parks, and their presence in the family limits the time and money that their parents would require for such visits. The presence of other recreational areas such as zoos and botanical gardens also acts as substitutes to national parks and therefore deprive them of potential visitors (Foster, 1985). According to Yeboah (1997), the issue of security and safety of tourists is extremely crucial. She stressed that political instability, ethnic conflicts and terrorism are a threat to tourism. For example, wildlife tourism in Zimbabwe declined after the well-published shooting of tourists by terrorists (Mackinnon et al, 1986). Similarly, Mole National Park also experienced a decline in tourist arrivals between December 1981 and December 1983 due to the 31st December 1981 military coup in Ghana (Kpelle, 1986).

Publicity influences the number of tourists to national parks. Tourists, according to Hoff and Overgaard (1974), need information about their destination including that of attractions, transportation and route directions. The information can be provided through advertisement on national radio, television, newspapers, posters, guidebooks and brochures. The location of a national park greatly influences the number of tourists it attracts. The large patronage of Kakum National Park by both Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian tourists can be attributed in part to its nearness to Cape Coast (intervening opportunities) a major tourist attraction centre (Barrow, 1997). Similarly, a study carried out by Eshun (1987) showed that Shai Hills Game Production Reserve is a promising economic venture in terms of tourism because of its nearness to Accra, Tema and other identified tourists areas like Aburi Botanical Gardens, Akosombo Dam, Ada Estuary and the attractive sunny beaches of Ningo and Prampram all in Ghana.

In their report on the tourist assets in Ghana, Hoff and Overgaard (1974) identified Mole National Park as the only national park of importance. However, the long distance from other tourist centres like Paga Crocodile Ponds, Tongo Hills, the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary and the rich culture of Tamale, does not justify large scale investment development programmes.

Many governments have pursued policies that alienate wildlife from the people. Local people therefore see national parks and reserves, which

generate foreign exchange for the government as excluding and displacing them from the land they traditionally consider to be their own (Kiss, 1990). According to Olanre (1992), people in rural areas of most parts of Africa depend on hunting and trapping for their survival. He explained that they depend solely on wild animals and their by-products for their meat supply, preparation of traditional medicine and even income. It is therefore not surprising, according to Balakrishman and Ndhlovu (1992), that rural people protest against tourist and safari hunting which allow foreign tourists to harvest wildlife but deny the local people that opportunity. However, Balakrishman and Ndhlovu (1992) are of the opinion that tourism and safari hunting can offer sustainable benefits to the local communities only when wildlife conservation and management are integrated into rural economies. Their finding indicated that community involvement in wildlife conservation is gaining wide acceptance in East and Southern Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe (CAMPFIRE project) where revenue from hunting is paid to local communities.

A study conducted by Johnson (1997) in PaengDaeng village in Thailand showed that whilst some local people see tourism to be re-enforcing their culture, others regard it as hampering progress since it keeps people away from important work in the field. Local people are often made to wear their traditional cloths and wait for the tourists in the village instead of going to work. Also, festivals and traditions of the local people have shifted from being a source of teaching, history and cultural integrity to a commodity for tourist markets. However, the local people want tourism to be community-based so that culture and tradition can be preserved. Such alternatives include provision of local dance classes, traditional weaving workshops and training local people as tour guides.

National parks opened to tourism often face many problems. For example, in Schenandoah National Park, USA, campers destroyed the ecosystem through excessive removal of plants, mechanical damage to trees, and uncontrolled fires (Simmons, 1974). Also, Amboseli and Nairobi National Parks ecosystems in Kenya were destroyed by tourist driving vehicles all over the park in search of various species of game (Olindo, 1974). Eltringham (1974) also noted that the many people and cars with their associated noise and the harassment of wild animals by cars in national parks, subject animals to psychological and physiological stress respectively.

According to Cott (1969), tourist harassment prevented the breeding of crocodiles in Murchison Falls National Park in Uganda. He explained that the crocodiles were forced to abandon their nesting sites leaving the eggs for predation by baboons and hyenas. Disturbances by tourists according to Eltringham (1979), are not only unacceptable to animals, but also deprive other tourists of valuable viewing experience. Another problem posed by tourism is the uncooperative and deplorable attitudes of some tourists, especially with regard to environmental pollution. Sinha (1992) observed that most visitor areas in Port Blair National Park in South Andamans were littered with food, plastic containers, scarps and polythene bags. He noted that without cooperation from

local communities and tourists, park staff alone cannot ensure environment ethics.

The effects of tourism on local communities can be negative or positive. One such negative effect is the compulsory relocation of indigenous people from national parks (Shiva et al, 1991). For example, the Ik people of Uganda were relocated in order to establish the Kidepo Valley National Park (Turnbull, 1972). Study conducted by Johnson (1997) showed that the community of Chiang Dao in Thailand face the problems of trash, polluted water, and loss of culture, especially among the youth. There, children are made to dress in traditional clothes and sing all night and this has affected their education.

However, tourism development in national parks can offer sustainable economic benefits relevant to the development of rural areas (Balakrishnan and Ndhlovu (1992). The tourism industry contributes to the development of handicraft industry as many tourists are keen to buying locally made handicraft such as carpets, leather goods, and brass work (Senior and Okunrolifa, 1983). According to Vellas and Becherel (1995), tourism in the USA has revived ancient crafts such as jewellery and ceramic-making by Indians in Arizona and New Mexico.

Braithwaite (1993) reported that tourism contributes to agricultural development. With tourism come visitors who provide market for agricultural produce. This is achieved by way of vegetable and fruit production for tourist hotels. According to Mackinnon et al (1986), local people benefit from tourism through the creation of employment. For example, in Zambia a number of local people have found employment in wildlife – related activities such as the village scout programme, wildlife culling, safari hunting and tourism (Balakrishnan and Ndhlovu 1992). Other economic benefits which tourism brings to rural areas are improvement in transportation and communications system, and utility service such as electricity and potable drinking water (Mackinnon et al, 1986).

THE STUDY AREA

Mole National Park covers an area of 4,912 km^2 and it is located in the Northern Region of Ghana. It is about 23km north-west of Damongo in the West Gonja District. The Park experiences two seasons: a rainy season which lasts from May to October and a dry season lasting from November to April. The geology is mainly Voltaian sandstone with lower Birimian schist to the west. The soils are predominately plinticferrosols in the south and rhodic in the north (Schmitt and Adu-Nsiah, 1993). Mole National Park lies in the Guinea Savanna zone and the dominant vegetation type is savanna woodland with a grass-layer that can reach up to 3m in height during the rainy season. Low, open grasslands, so-called boval, are found on areas with shallow soils and iron pan. Narrow bands of riverine forest grow along most of the streams. Other plant communities such as swamps and flood-plain grasslands cover only small areas. The dominant plant species include *Burkeaafricana*, *Terminaliaavianioides*, *Vitelleriaparadox*, *Detariummicrocarpum*, *Parkiabiglobosa*, *Anthocleistavogelii*, *Mimusopskummel*, *Andropogansp*, and *Sorghumvulgare*. Mole National Park has a rich fauna. Common species include

kob*(kobuskob)*, baboon *(papiocynocephalus)*, elephant *(LoxodontaAfricana*), waterbuck *(kobusdefassa)*, hartebeest *(Acelaphusbuselephus)*, and buffalo *(synceruscaffer)*.

Research Design

The stakeholders in tourism are mainly comprised of residents, visitors, local business owners and local government officials (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2003). All categories of respondents selected fell within this classification in the study area.The selection of the community members was based on both probability and non-probability methods. The technique made use of the Ghana Statistical Service 2000 Population and Housing Census (PHC) list for households where selection of household heads was based on the use of the simple random method, basically employing the lottery method. Others such as chiefs, members of management board and rangers who held key information about the Park were purposively selected. Those who had no formal education had their questionnaire translated to them in the local dialect (Gonja) and their responses recorded. The literate ones responded to the questionnaire on their own. They had a four week period to respond after which their scripts where retrieved. Data collection was from 1st of April 2011 to 30th May 2011.

Sample Size determination

The sample size determination for the four communities was obtained employing mathematical formulae from Fisher, Laing, Stoeckel and Townsend (1998).

When the population of an area is less than 10,000, Fisher et al (1998), categorically stated that the desired sample size is calculated by the formula:

$$n_f = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n}{N}}$$, where

n_f = the desired sample size (when population is less than 10,000),
n = the desired sample size (when population is greater than 10,000),
N = the estimate of the population size

But to determine $n_{f,,}$ n would have to be calculated. According Fisher et al, when the population is greater than 10,000 the sample size is determined by:

$$n = \frac{z^2 pq}{d^2}$$

Where:
n= the desired sample size (when the population is greater than 10,000)
z= the standard normal deviation, usually set at 1.96 (or more simply 2.0) which corresponds to 95 percent confidence level
p= the proportion in the target population estimated to have particular characteristics
q=1.0-p
d= degree of accuracy desired, usually set at 0.05 or occasionally at 0.02

Assuming the target population that is aware of the tourism resources in the destination area is 85%, (a house to house survey was conducted and about 85% in each community were aware of their attractions and the tourism activities that go on in the locality). With the z statistic being 1.96 and desired accuracy at 0.05 percent, then the sample size is:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.85) (0.15)}{0.05^2}$$

n= 196

Therefore the sample size for the study

Community	Population	Number of respondents(sample)	Number of Respondents (% of sample size,188)
Mognori	393	16	8.5%
Kabempe	416	17	9.0%
Murugu	841	34	18.2%
Larabanga	2,971	121	64.3%
Total	4,621	188	100.0%

was determined by:

$$n_f = \frac{n}{1 + \frac{n}{N}}$$

n_f = the desired sample size (when population is less than 10,000),
n = 196
N = 1,161(the population of the four communities, obtained from Ghana Statistical Service, 2000 Population and Housing Census is as follows, Mognori, 393, Kabampe, 416 Murugu, 841 and Larabanga, 2,971 making a total of 4,621)

Hence, $\frac{196}{1+\frac{196}{4,621}}$

The desired sample size for the study was calculated to be 188. Percentages were found for the various individual communities taking into consideration the overall total for the four communities (4,621). The sample size of 188 respondents was shared taking each individual community's population and the overall total population to be able to obtain the number of respondents per community (see Table 1).

Table 1: Allocation of sample size by community

Source: Author's construct, 2011

A total of 146 tourists (102 foreign and 44 domestic) were met 'accidentally' over a one month period (April 1 to May 1, 2011) were also interviewed.

Results, Discussions and Data Analysis

Tourist Attractions in Mole National Park

Many tourist attractions of various kinds were identified in Mole National Park. These are described below:

Landforms

There are two scarps of touristic value in the Park, the dominant one is the Konkori Escarpment which runs north-south through the Park. On this scarp are located the Konkori and Gbanwelle caves. The caves are of ancient origin and were used as underground hideouts by the indigenes during the slave raids. In addition to serving as tourist attraction sites, the caves will provide research grounds for archaeology. The Konkori scarp and the caves are not visited by tourists due to poor accessibility and its distant location from the Park headquarters. The Park headquarters and motel are located in the southern part of the Park near a smaller escarpment. In the Park, the motel overlooks two dams close to the edge of the scarp. From the motel, tourists can view animals watering at the dams and others foraging on the adjoining plains. The smaller scarp is therefore being utilised to serve tourism purposes.

Rivers and Watering Points

The Mole, Samole, Lovi, Zuo, Polzen, and Kulpawn are the major rivers that drain through the Park. However, only the Mole, Kulpawn and Polzen rivers flow permanently. The other rivers dry up or are reduced to stagnant pools in the dry season. These rivers are important watering points for animals especially during the dry season. However, poor accessibility denies tourists the chance of visiting the Kulpawn to see hippos, the Asibey Pool and the Polzen waterfalls which is a haven for water birds.

Flora

Mole National Park located in the Guinea Savanna vegetation zone. However, unique vegetation sub-types exist which has been described by Schmitt and Adu- Nsiah (1993). These are *Vitellariaparadoxa* woodland, *Detariummacrocarpum* woodland, Mosaic of flood-plain grassland, swamp and forest on wet sites, Mosaic of communities on top of Konkori scarp, *Vitelleria-Angeissus* stands, *Boval*, *Riverine* Forest, scarpmforest

These vegetation types and the different plant species in the Park can be of significant value to tourists as well as students/researchers who visit the facility.

Fauna

A wide variety of wild animal species ranging from insects to elephants abound in Mole National Park. Some of the species which were common to sight are monkeys (see plates 1 and 2)

Plate 1: Monkeys on the Park's Administration Building

Plate 2: Monkey seated on a rangers' motorbike in the Park

Others include kob, bushbuck (Tragelaphusscriptus), elephant (see Plate 3) warthog (see Plate 4) and many species of birds.

Plate 3: Elephants at their watering points in Mole National Park

Plate 4: Warthogs in Mole National Park

Some species of interest but which were not easily sighted are buffalo, lion *(Pantheraleo)* hippopotamus *(Hippopptamusamphibious)*, roan antelope *(Hippotragusequines)* and hartebeest. During the dry season, some of the animals agglomerate around water holes making their sighting easier. The reason for this being that all the other sources of water would have dried up except the few that are known to be permanent within the Park.

Tourist Attractions around Mole National Park

Many tourist attractions were identified in the local communities. Most of them are located along the road bordering the southern sector of the Park.

The Kpevor Cave:

Is situated 10km north-west of Murugu and is an underground cave measuring 25m × 18m × 19m with a narrow entrance. The cave can only be explored with the help of a flashlight even during the day time. The hill, in which the cave is found, is situated in a grove that makes it difficult to locate without a guide. It was used as a hideout by the people of Murugu during times of slave raids. The surroundings are littered with relics of human tools and crafts. The area can serve not only as tourist attraction, but also as research site for historians and archaeologists.

Kojo-Doozia Pool

This pool is located 12m south-east of Murugu. The pool is found in a hollow depression in a rocky hill. Reflections under bright sunlight make it difficult to look at the water. However, the water is cool to the touch in spite of its exposure to the full blast of the sun. It is believed that a man named Kojo used to spend the night at this pool whenever he went hunting. Hence, the name Kojo-Doozia.

Kabeso Palm Forest and Nye-Nye Spring

This is a forest dominated by oil palm trees very unusual of the Guinea Savanna vegetation. It is located to the east of Mognori. The area is hilly with a permanent spring called Nye-Nye. Pythons *(Pythonsebae)* and hyaenas*(Hyaenashyaenas)* are said to inhabit this forest.

Wawatu Waterfalls

It is located 8km from Laribanga on the Sawla road south of the Park. Like the other attractions mentioned above, it is inaccessible to tourists. Little is also known about these attractions. They can be developed for tourist use through community initiatives. These features, that is waterfalls, scarps, caves and other landforms identified as areas of touristic interest in national parks conforms to the findings of (Mackinnon et al, 1986; Eshun, 1967 and Lokko, 1996) as attractions that appeal to tourists visiting national park areas.

Cultural Attractions

Festivals, local architecture, and handicrafts were also identified as cultural attractions of touristic importance in the local communities.

FESTIVALS

Krubii and Ramadan

The Krubii is celebrated three day in advance of the Ramadan as a period of fasting to mark the descent of the Holy Koran from heaven. Children sing through the streets of the villages at night up to 10pm before retiring while Adults keep vigil and say prayers all night in anticipation of a star whose appearance claimed by respondents is worth thousand nights in one's life time. Three days after, the Ramadan, a general prayer session is held in the morning, followed by feasting and presentation of gifts to friends and relatives. The Krubii and Ramadan together form a great occasion which is celebrated by Muslims at Mognori, Kabempe, Murugu and Laribanga.

Fire Festival ("Dintigii in Gonja)

It has both Islamic and traditional significance. The Muslims associate it with the subsidence of the flood in Prophet Nuhu's (Biblical Noah) days. Nuhu is believed to have lit a torch to help him come out of the ark after the flood. It is on this occasion that the oldest Koran in Ghana (still in tablet form) kept in the Ancient Mosque of Laribanga, is brought out and read in public. It is also a fortune telling and blessing day. People from all over Ghana and Burkina Faso visit Laribanga including fortune seekers who come for spiritual fortification. Traditionally, the occasion is celebrated as a war festival. It is marked by drumming, dancing and singing of war songs. Pacification and purification of ancestral, communal and personal gods are also done on this occasion. It is an interesting occasion and can win the admiration and patronage of tourists. All four villages, Mognori, Kabempe, Murugu and Laribanga celebrate the fire festival. The Muslim calendar is used in fixing dates of celebration of these festivals and therefore is not specific. However, when studied critically, a time table can be drawn each year and advertised to the general public.

Local Architecture

The buildings in these communities have unique architectural designs typical of northern Ghana in the olden days. An outstanding example is the Ancient Mosque at Laribanga (see Plate 5).

Plate 5: Laribanga Mosque (local edifice which is still in use was built in AD.1432)

It was noted during this study that tourists who visited the Laribanga Mosque also seized the opportunity to go for a walk in the village to admire local architecture/buildings and take photographs of them.

Local Handicrafts

Most of the local people are skilful "batakari" or straw hat weavers, leather material designing, and wood carvers. Foreign tourists, especially Europeans and North Americans show keen interest in locally made handicrafts and will provide ready market for them. Hence local culture identified here confirms the findings of Foster (1985) and Ghosh (2000) that the culture of people living around national parks is also an attraction to tourists.

Socio-demographic Information on Tourists to Mole National Park

Views gathered from tourists revealed that 67% of those who responded were males and 33% female. About 48% were within the 21-30 age groups, 32% were within the 31-40 age groups, 12% within the 41-50 age groups whilst 8% were 51+. Hence it gives the clue that the younger generation (15-24) had a greater propensity to travel to new places as posited by Cooper and Boniface (1994). On duration of stay 72% stayed for three days, 20% stayed 2 days and 8% stayed just a night.Withreference to nationality of tourists 30% of them were of Dutch origin, 15% were from Switzerland, 12% were Americans, 12% German, 10% were Canadians, 8% Britons, 6% were French nationals, 4% Australians and 3% Ghanaians. This confirms the fact that foreigners outnumber local tourists arriving in the Park and this has been the trend for long.

Views of Tourists on Fees Charged and their Source of Information about the Park

About 64% of tourists interviewed rated entrance fees (GHc 10 per foreign tourist) to the park as reasonable, 12% indicated it was low, 10% saw it as high whilst 4% passed no comment. With regard to guide fee (GHc5 per foreign tourist), 92% indicated it was reasonable

while 8% found it to be low. The general impressed gathered from visitors was that they found fees charged at the Park to be affordable. Most of the tourists (78%) obtained information about the Park from guide books, 13% from friends and relations and 9% from embassies abroad.

Ratings of Tourists on Animal Species and Quality of Services Rendered in the Park

All guests to the Park found it richly diversified in wildlife and majority (94%) were very satisfied to see elephants in the Park. Close to 78% of tourists rated guide services as excellent. 60% were dissatisfied with guide's interpretative display at the Park because they lacked knowledge in that regard. It is therefore imperative on the part of management to train guides to imbue them with interpretative skills. All other services were rated good (see Table 2).

Table 2: Ratings of tourists on quality of services rendered in the park (N=146)

	Ratings			
Service	*Excellent*	*Good*	*Poor*	Total (%)
Guide services	78	20	2	100
Direction to the park	41	55	4	100
Reception	35	65	0	100
Direction to park	25	70	5	100
Entrance formalities	40	60	0	100
Ticketing	42	58	0	100
Information on park	20	70	10	100
Interpretative display	0	40	60	100
Accommodation facilities	35	65	0	100
Restaurant	33	64	3	100
service	45	55	0	100
Camping facilities				

Source: Field survey, 2011

Annual Tourists Arrivals to Mole National Park

The total number of tourists who visited Mole National Park from 1988 to 1996 showed an increasing trend. A look at the trend for domestic tourism portrayed a fluctuating pattern. Whilst the number of domestic tourists declined for most of the years under study, that for non-Ghanaians (foreign tourists) increased significantly annually (see Table 3).

Table 3: Annual visits by tourists to Mole National Park

Year					
1988	703	42	970	58	1,673
1989	628	36	1,046	64	1,674
1990	858	41	1,227	59	2,085
1991	698	33	1,420	67	2,118
1992	617	25	1,858	75	2,475
1993	684	27	1,852	73	2,536
1994	691	25	2,103	75	2,794
1995	634	22	2,301	78	2,935
1996	897	25	2,610	75	3,564
1997	*				
1998	*				
1999	*				
2000	*				
2001	2,918	51	2,836	49	5,754
2002	1,957	27	5,338	73	7,295
2003	3,441	44	4,463	56	7,904
2004	4,130	40	6,297	60	10,427
2005	5,414	43	7,108	57	12,522
2006	5,117	40	7,617	60	12,734
2007	5,512	40	8,222	60	13,734

Source: Mole National Park Records (1988-1996 and 2001-2007 *Records not available

Records for 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 were equally not available

This indicates that Mole National Park has a brighter future for foreign rather

than domestic tourism. Peak season of tourists visit to Mole National Park occurs in January-April, July-August and November-December. A total of 21,854 tourists (averagely 2,428 per annum) visited Mole National Park from 1988 to 1996 (see Table 2). This number is low for a park of long standing popularity compared to a recently established Kakum National Park in the Central Region which recorded 2,000 tourists for 1993, 7,000 for 1994 and was projected to hit 18,000 for 1995 (Barrow, 1997). Accessibility problems and long distance of the Park from the country's major cities and towns make transportation cost high resulting in few people visiting the park as identified by (Clawson, 1972). Access roads to the park are seriously hampered during the rainy season and during the dry season they tend to be rough and dusty, so tourists who make first time trips are not encouraged to make return journeys. It has also been found out that the number of tourists visiting a national park is influenced by the size of the population in the catchment area of the park. Once again, unlike Kakum National Park which is situated in an area with high population density (140 persons per sq km^2), Mole National Park is situated in an area with low population density of 20 persons per sq km^2 (Ministry of Food and Agriculture, 2007). Another possible cause of the generally low patronage of the park is the low per capita income/minimum wage of Ghanaians (minimum wage of Ghanaians currently is GHc3.73 per day/US$2.27). Given the existing low incomes of most citizens, they hardly are able to make ends meet let alone visit a national park. Only wealthy people who earn higher incomes can afford to visit the distant Mole National Park (Clawson, 1972). Ghanaians and most Africans have also been noted to lack the culture of travel for leisure and moreover most of them experience nature passively in their day to day lives.

Perceptions of Local Communities on Tourism

The results analysed revealed that 87% of respondents in Mognori, 89% in Kabempe, 86% in Murugu and 93% in Larabanga communities have visited Mole National Park before and are aware that tourists come to the facility because they have seen them. Whilst 13%, 11%, 14% and 7% respectively have never visited the Park or are not aware that tourists come to the facility. The result therefore showed that there is high level of awareness in the local communities about tourism in and around Mole National Park and this can be harnessed by park management including the Ghana Tourist Board to enable them (local people) benefit from visits (establishment of craft villages) to enhance their livelihood.

Problems Hampering Tourism Development in Mole National Park

Among the problems the respondents mentioned and to which in their view can hamper tourism development in the area were the poor nature of access roads to the Park (see Table 4). They indicated that the main road from Fufulso (Damongo junction) through to the district capital (Damongo) to Larabanga and finally to the Park is not tarred.

Table 4: Tourism development challenges (N=188)

	Nature of challenges				
Community	Poor access roads	Lack of tourists accommodation in communities	Prevalence of mosquitoes and tsetsefly	Low levels of literacy/ poaching issues	Total (%)
Mognori	75%	12%	10%	7%	100%
Kabempe	72%	11%	6%	11%	100%
Murugu	70%	10%	12%	8%	100%
Larabanga	65%	5%	20%	10%	100%

Source: Field survey, 2011

During the rainy season most parts of the roads are washed away in addition to potholes being created making travel laborious and unsafe. Again, during the dry season, the roads become very dusty. Other problems identified were lack of accommodation in the communities, prevalence of mosquitoes and the low levels of literacy (19% were literates) in the communities leading to poaching which can retard community based tourism in the area. Low literacy levels bring about communication barrier which further culminates in poor interpretative services.

Conclusion

It was discovered during the study that Mole National Park is rich in many wildlife species valuable for game viewing and photography however most of the animals aside from the baboon and the elephant are timid and shy away from visitors. The Park is also endowed with other attractions including caves, scarps, waterfalls and reverine forests whilst the communities within the fringes of the Park also have attractions in the forms of unique architecture, festivals with associated dances which could all be exploited for the purposes of community based tourism/ecotourism. Tourists who visited the facility aside from poor interpretative services rendered were satisfied with other services provided therein and it was generally discovered from their records that foreign tourists patronised the Park more that domestic tourists. The community members were also found to be aware of the tourism activities that go in the Park and identified the major problem hampering tourism development in the area as poor access roads.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are advanced to make the Park more recreation worthy

- The animals in the park need to be habituated to guests through the introduction of artificial salt

licks along game viewing routes and trails. This will enable tourists come into closer contact with nature and make their experience memorable and 'engineer' return visits.

- It is also highly imperative on the part of central government to make frantic efforts at the rehabilitation of the road from Fufulso through Damongo to Sawla. This will boost tourism activities in the area with a 'rippling' effect of livelihood enhancement to the local people living around the park.
- Data collection and record keeping in the Park should be properly supervised to provide authentic information to tourists and researchers. Tour guides should be trained to give relevant interpretative services. This has the potential of positive word of mouth advertising which will help market the Park if guests are given a good treat.
- There is the need to stiffen sanctions to curb poaching which is threatening the survival and sustainability of the park. This however can only be achieved through appropriate collaborative initiatives with the local people in the communities.

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