

Respect for Tourism Jobs in Ghana, West Africa

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INTRODUCTION

In January 2018 a study was conducted in Ghana, West Africa to identify perceptions of the hospitality and tourism industry by 18-24 year olds. While there were several findings that arose and deserve further study, the concept of 'respect' was identified as a significant factor influencing the willingness of young people in Ghana to work in the tourism sector.

The study was developed in part because Ghana fell short of WTTC projections for travel and tourism contribution to GDP over the previous four years. The author sought to understand why a country with so much to offer visitors was not growing its tourism sector? By working through partner organizations and the administration of schools close to and within Accra, the capital city of Ghana, the qualitative study consisted of interviewing twenty-one students. The study's focus was on four research questions related to barriers to hospitality and tourism education in Ghana.

The reaction to this study from one educational administrator is that the parents of her students do not believe that a career in hospitality or tourism is something to be sought after. "They don't believe it's a worthwhile ambition" (C. Twum-Ampofo, personal communication, January 22, 2017). The study findings echoed the sentiment by Mrs. Twum-Ampofo, in that the participants had very clear perceptions about working in the tourism industry, and it's worth as a pursuit.

While this is only a small portion of the comprehensive study, it remains an important area to further explore. The implications for young people not choosing a particular vocation, based on perceptions and not effective education, could result in an inadequate number of practitioners needed to grow the tourism sector properly.

METHODOLOGY

The intent was to administer the interview protocol to a minimum of 20 participants who were currently enrolled, or previously enrolled, at secondary or tertiary institutions. The target subject number (N=20) was chosen to ensure that enough data is collected to detect differences in responses from the participants. The goal was to understand the phenomenon from the point of view of study participants and its particular social and institutional context. A protocol of 10-15 interview questions was administered to men and women ages 18-24. The interview questions

were developed to be tightly aligned to four research questions; 1) what **access** do students have to knowledge about the industry; 2) what **basic knowledge** about the industry do students have; 3) what are their **perceptions** of the hospitality and tourism industry; 4) what **relationships** do these students have with people in the industry?

While the study certainly produced a large amount of data, the area of “respect and pay” has been pulled out to be focused on. We analyzed the responses from participants related to four areas of perception:

- Hospitality professional's ability to financially support self/family
- Compared to banker, hospitality professional respect and pay
- Tourism professional's ability to financially support self/family
- Compared to banker, tourism professional respect and pay

FINDINGS

The concept of 'respect' was challenging for participants, as was the interpretation of adequate pay for work. In the instrument, pay was intentionally vague as it is purely subjective. This was especially relevant when respondents were asked about those who work in hospitality and tourism, versus those that were 'bankers.' Participants for the most part saw bankers as being more respected. The mere fact that they wear a suit appears to generate more respect. Coincidentally there is a perception that they may not make more money, because they don't make tips. This was an under-explored area however, as gratuity was not part of a direct question. One participant talked about how being a banker generates less value because you don't really get to know your guests, since your primary role is to transact money.

In terms of a practitioner in the industry being able to support oneself or a family, the participants were essentially split. Only half of the participants felt that these professionals could support themselves. This does not encourage people to want to join an industry if they feel they can't pay their bills. Strangely while there was less clarity about tourism jobs, the participants had more confidence in them for good paychecks.

Some participants shared experiences that painted quite a negative picture of the tourism industry. One referenced the role of 'middlemen' that would hire individuals and withhold their pay. Aisha, 22, provided a clear example. When asked about her sister who works in the cargo area of Kotoka International Airport, she was asked if she makes enough money to support herself and possibly others. “Not really ... cause, they would go in and like he wouldn't bother giving them anything money-wise.” Aisha went on to explain that the middlemen scenario is fairly common in Ghana. This was not the only negative experience shared during the study. Some participants explained how some hotel or restaurant guests expect female practitioners to provide 'additional services' in exchange for tips.

Conversely, Kofi is a good example of a participant who's opinion was positively shaped from knowing someone in the industry. While many participants believe that bankers make more money than those in the hospitality industry, Kofi knows a dealer at a casino--and expressed that he makes a lot of money between pay and tips. This suggests that one personal relationship can

shift perceptions.

Even while recognizing that hospitality and tourism professionals may actually make more money than bankers because of tips, those working as tellers or attendants in a bank were seen as having a higher status.

Several participants mentioned the value of getting to know people as a form of social currency. When asked about pay in those jobs versus a bank, it appears that there is recognition of the value of relationships that evolve out of hospitality and tourism jobs. The alternative is a job where you just give and take money like a teller. So there seems to be a recognition of quality of life that may be better in hospitality and tourism versus the banking industry.

IMPLICATIONS

It's hard to consider choosing hospitality and tourism as a career when the pay is so small. Attendants at a restaurant earn less in one month than the bill for four people at a single dinner. Yet, people will justify working in banking even if pay is small because of the perceived respect it brings. Another factor may be the unwillingness to put oneself in a position of having to serve others, and in some cases to be mistreated. Perhaps a solution is to reduce the number of attendants in a venue and pay better trained/educated ones more. This may not help the unemployment rate, but it could raise the industry as a whole.

When speaking with participants about hospitality/tourism versus banking, roles were intentionally vague. Further research could be more specific; perhaps an entire study on perceptions of different jobs across many industries; medicine, finance, retail, etc. In Ghana “attendants” are everywhere and in every industry, and they all seem to be paid poorly.

It might be worth considering doing a campaign with professionals in the industry--showing them in photos wearing their finest suits and learning about their credentials. These are the people that should be presented to young men and women so that they can create a different visual in their minds when it comes to hospitality/tourism practitioners.

Ghana is full of beautiful people and amazing places to visit. With improved education related to domestic tourism and heightened attention to the development of existing professionals, each Ghanaian would be in a better position to promote the country. This would make the path to Ghana clearer for family, friends and colleagues—and visitors. Ghana has everything it needs to have a thriving tourism ecosystem. But everyone has to remember that it's not just about the money ... it's about sharing something beautiful with the rest of the world.

Keywords: Ghana, Tourism, Hospitality, Education, Respect, Africa, West Africa, Perceptions

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