

**ECOTOURISM VISITORS' EXPERIENCE AT BOABENG-FIEMA MONKEY
SANCTUARY, GHANA**

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ABSTRACT

The Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS) is a Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) initiative that has developed into one of the most popular and rapidly growing eco-friendly tourism sites in central Ghana. Visitors' experiences play a vital role in shaping management decisions, enhancing service quality, and sustaining CBE. Despite the rapid expansion of ecotourism in Ghana, limited research has explored visitor experiences within a Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) context. We examine the experiences of both domestic and international visitors to BFMS, focusing on factors that attract and influence travel, on-site activities, and visitor satisfaction. We collected data from 198 international and domestic visitors using participant observation, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. Our results show that visitors are attracted to BFMS by destination attributes, the desire to escape daily routines, and self-challenge. They seek nature-based and socio-cultural experiences, with satisfaction linked to service quality and the physical environment. However, visitors expressed concerns about information technology services, road conditions, and the limited cultural content provided by guides. Visitors recommended improvements in digital communication, guide training, and facility upgrades to enhance the overall experience. The study emphasizes the need to address service and infrastructure gaps to strengthen the sustainability of ecotourism at BFMS.

Keywords: Community-Based Ecotourism, Visitor Experience, Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary.

1. INTRODUCTION

Ecotourism has grown significantly since its emergence in the 1980s, becoming an important subsector of the global tourism industry (Sivo, 2007). It is broadly defined as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment while enhancing the well-being of local people (Fennell, 2008; Kiper, 2013; TIES, 1990). Within this context, Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) has gained prominence, particularly in developing countries, as it integrates conservation of natural areas with the promotion of cultural heritage and economic benefits for local communities (Fennell, 2008; Kiper, 2013; Kiss, 2004; Owusu & Bofo, 2018).

In Ghana, CBE initiatives started in 1995 and have since grown to include more than 30 projects across the country, notably featuring the Wechiau Hippo Sanctuary, Tafi Atome Monkey Sanctuary, Paga Crocodile Pond, Duasidan Monkey Sanctuary, Sirigu Pottery and Art Village,

and the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (Owusu & Boafo, 2018; Zeppel, 2006). Ecotourism provides a variety of products and services, often focusing on visitors' experiences that offer social and psychological benefits. Destinations such as historic sites and theme parks highlight the importance of the experiential and emotional aspects of tourism (Chan & Baum, 2007a).

The concept of visitor experience refers to the set of activities and perceptions formed through interactions at an ecotourism destination (Eagles, 1992). These experiences are shaped by education, interpretation of natural and cultural attributes, and personal perceptions (Eagles, 1992; Higham & Carr, 2002). Ecotourism experiences are achieved when visitors gain a deeper understanding of unique natural and cultural environments (Chan & Baum, 2007a). Ecotourists often prefer experiences in less-crowded remote and wilderness areas, where they can explore wildlife and local cultures (Chan & Baum, 2007a; Dolnicar et al., 2013; Wight, 1996). Such experiences are characterized by the quality of interaction between the visitor and the site (Chan & Baum, 2007a). Many ecotourists also seek knowledgeable guides and interpretative services to enrich their understanding (Amuquandoh, 2017; Fennell, 1999). Thus, ecotourism can be considered a holistic, experience-based process (Chan & Baum, 2007a). While sociological factors such as income and socioeconomic status influence travel behaviors, their effect on the quality of experience is limited, as visitor experiences are shaped by complex emotional responses and attitudes (Page & Dowling, 2002).

In Ghana, however, few studies have examined ecotourism visitor experiences (Adam, Adongo, & Amuquandoh, 2017; Amuquandoh, Boakye, & Mensah, 2011; Eshun, Adjei, & Segbefia, 2016). Most existing research focuses on National Parks (Adam et al., 2017; Amuquandoh, 2017; Acquah et al., 2016; Agyeman et al., 2019), while very few focus on other protected areas. For instance, Amuquandoh et al. (2011) assessed visitor experiences at the Owabi Wildlife Sanctuary but concentrated only on international tourists. Consequently, little is known about visitor experiences within Ghana's Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) context.

This study fills the gap by examining the experiences of both domestic and international visitors at the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS), one of Ghana's most prominent CBE sites, using an ethnographic approach. To gain a rich, contextual understanding of these experiences, the study employs an ethnographic method that allows for in-depth exploration of visitors' interactions, perceptions, and cultural meanings related to the sanctuary. The sanctuary is known for its population of primates, White-thighed Colobus and Lowe monkeys, which coexist with nearby human communities, adding cultural and ecological importance to the site (Eshun & Tonto, 2014; Kankam, Saj, & Sicotte, 2010; Sammy, 2010). Understanding visitor experiences at BFMS is vital for improving management strategies, ensuring successful ecotourism activities, and supporting community development socially, economically, and environmentally.

Accordingly, this study pursues three objectives:

- To examine visitors' motivations for travelling to BFMS by identifying attributes that attract them and factors that influence their travel decisions.
- To assess the activities visitors expect and undertake during their stay, highlighting the aspects that generate excitement and engagement.

- To evaluate visitor satisfaction with services and the physical environment at BFMS, focusing on elements that enhance or limit overall experience.

Analytical Framework

The analytical framework for measuring visitor experience in this study was adapted from Leask’s (2016) work on visitor attraction management. Leask identified several thematic domains in visitor attraction research, including visitor management, resource management, product management, and site management. For this study, emphasis was placed on visitor management, as it directly relates to visitors’ experiences at destinations such as BFMS (Table 1).

Within Leask’s (2016) categorization, three themes were considered particularly relevant: visitor profile, visitor motivations, and visitor satisfaction.

Visitor Profile: This involves identifying visitor segments based on demographic characteristics such as occupation, country of origin, age, and gender. At BFMS, visitors’ demographic attributes were analyzed to connect visitor profiles with their experiences. Previous studies in Ghana indicate that visitors from Europe and North America are primarily drawn to nature-based and wildlife-viewing experiences (Adams et al., 2017). Additionally, some researchers have emphasized the role of voluntourism, where international visitors come to Ghana primarily for volunteer work but also take the opportunity to explore ecotourism destinations (Adam et al., 2017; Amuquandoh et al., 2011; Amuquandoh, 2017; Eshun et al., 2016).

Visitor Motivations: Visitor travel decisions are typically influenced by natural attractions and personal connections with nature (Chan & Baum, 2007b; Eagles, 1992). Chan and Baum (2007b) distinguish between two categories: (1) push factors, intrinsic motivations such as the desire to escape daily routines or seek novelty, and (2) pull factors, extrinsic motivations tied to destination attributes such as natural or cultural attractions. At BFMS, visitor motivations were examined through variables representing pull factors (e.g., wildlife and rainforest) and push factors (e.g., escape and fulfilment).

Visitor Satisfaction: Visitor satisfaction is often linked to intentions to recommend a destination or revisit (Leask, 2016). This study evaluated satisfaction levels using Chen et al.’s (2011) dimensions of service quality (SERVQUAL), which include: (i) service quality, referring to staff performance and services received at BFMS; and (ii) physical environment, referring to the use and condition of facilities such as trails and the visitor information center. Visitor satisfaction was further considered in relation to infrastructure, activities, safety, sanitation, and staff performance. Previous studies revealed that tourists at Kakum and Mole National Parks expressed dissatisfaction with interpretation services, which negatively affected their likelihood of recommending or revisiting these destinations (Acquah et al., 2016; Adam et al., 2017). Such findings highlight the importance of visitor satisfaction for the sustainability of ecotourism in Ghana (Acquah et al., 2016).

Table 1. A conceptual framework for measuring visitor experience

Theme	Focus
Visitor Profile	Identifies visitors based on their age, gender, occupation, country of origin, and other demographic or cultural characteristics.
Visitor Motivations	Explains why visitors travel to the destination, linking their reasons to travel behavior, experiences, and decisions (e.g., whether to revisit).

Visitor Satisfaction	Examine visitors' satisfaction with their experience, focusing on service quality and facility amenities, and whether satisfaction influences recommendations or return visits.
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Source: Adapted from Leask (2016).

This framework informed the design of interview questions, guided the thematic analysis, and structured the presentation of findings. The results are organized around the three themes, visitor motivations, activities, and satisfaction, providing insights into improving ecotourism management at BFMS.

2. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed an ethnographic research approach to gain insights into visitor experiences at BFMS. Ethnography was chosen because it allows researchers to observe and interpret human interactions and behaviors within their natural setting (Adams, 2012). Both domestic (Ghanaian) and international visitors aged between 18 and 90 years were considered. Eligible participants had engaged in at least one of the ecotourism activities offered at BFMS, including monkey viewing, forest hiking, tree climbing, listening to historical accounts, community tours, visiting the traditional priest's house, or purchasing local artefacts.

Study Area

The research was conducted at the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS), situated in the Nkoranza North District of the Bono East Region, Ghana (7° 43' N, 1° 42' W). BFMS is jointly managed by the Boabeng and Fiema communities, who combine traditional knowledge, taboos, and legal frameworks to conserve the forest and its wildlife (Attuquayefio & Gyampoh, 2010; Fargey, 1992; Kankam et al., 2010; Saj et al., 2006). It covers a forest area of 535 ha and a core protected forest area of 192 ha with sacred groves and monkey burial grounds (Kankam & Sicotte, 2013; Ormsby, 2012; Wong & Sicotte, 2006). Two primate species, White-thighed Colobus (*Colobus vellerosus*) and Lowei monkey (*Cercopithecus lowei*), are considered sacred and are central to both ecological and cultural conservation (Fargey, 1991; Ormsby, 2012). BFMS lies within the forest-savannah transition zone, with mixed vegetation, an annual average temperature of 26°C, and bimodal rainfall patterns (Amankwah et al., 2021; Kankam & Sicotte, 2013). Visitor numbers fluctuate annually, with peaks in 2009 (18,115) and declines in 2017 (8,842), reflecting changes in revenue and tourism activity (Data from BFMS 2019).

Sampling

A total of 198 participants participated in this study: 198 visitors, and opportunistic sampling was used for visitors based on their availability and willingness to participate during their visits. This method ensured a variety of perspectives on motivations, activities, satisfaction, and management practices.

Data Collection

Fieldwork was conducted between September and December 2019 using interviews and participant observation. Semi-structured interviews were held with 29 visitors. Questions were open-ended but guided by Leask's (2016) visitor management framework, focusing on motivations, activities, and satisfaction. Interviews lasted 10–15 minutes and were conducted in English or Twi, depending on participant preference. Unstructured interviews were conducted with visitors who had more time. These lasted 45–50 minutes, allowing for in-depth exploration

of experiences and management perspectives. Participant observation involved 159 visitors; 29 were interviewed, and 10 were both observed and interviewed. The observation focused on visitor behaviors, activities, and interactions at the site.

Community Entry and Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Calgary’s Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board (REB19-0927) and from the chiefs, elders, and BFMS management. Participation was voluntary. An introduction sheet was provided to participants to explain the purpose of the study, and consent was obtained through signed forms (available in both English and Twi). Participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, could withdraw at any time, and could choose whether to be audio-recorded.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed Dey’s (1993) three-phase model: description, classification, and interconnection. Interviews conducted in Twi were translated into English and transcribed manually. The transcribed data were categorized into themes and sub-themes, guided by Leask’s (2016) framework. Three central themes were identified: visitor motivations, visitor activities, and visitor satisfaction. Sub-themes were developed through systematic coding and comparison (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). These themes structured the presentation and discussion of results.

3. RESULTS

Visitor Characteristics

A total of 198 visitors participated in the study, of whom 102 (52%) were male, and 96 (48%) were female. Age distribution showed that most visitors (70%) were youth (18–30 years), followed by 24.4% in the mature group (31–59 years), and 5.6% aged 60–89 years. Occupations included students (39.4%), church groups (18.1%), working professionals (27.3%), and retired individuals (5.6%), with 9.6% not disclosing their occupation.

Visitors’ origins reflected both domestic and international participation. Ghanaians constituted the majority (61%), followed by Europeans (28%), North Americans (8%), other Africans (1.5%), Asians (1%), and one Australian visitor (0.5%). International participants were predominantly from Europe and North America, consistent with earlier ecotourism patterns observed in Ghana.

Table 2: Social Demographic Characteristics of Visitors at BFMS

Visitors Profile	No. (Individuals)	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	102	52
Female	96	48
Total	198	100
<i>Age (years)</i>		
Youth (18 – 30)	139	70
Mature (31 – 59)	48	24.4
Aged/Senior (60 – 89)	11	5.6
Total	198	100

Occupation

Students	78	39.4
Church groups	36	18.1
Working groups (actively employed)	54	27.3
Retired	11	5.6
Unstated occupation	19	9.6
Total	198	100

Visitors' origin

Ghanaians	120	61
Europeans	56	28
North Americans	16	8
Other Africans (non-Ghanaians)	3	1.5
Asians	2	1.0
Oceania (Australian)	1	0.5
Total	198	100

Source: BFMS fieldwork 2019

Trip Characteristics

On average, visitors spent about one hour and fifteen minutes exploring the sanctuary. This time was typically devoted to guided tours, including walking through the forest, observing monkeys, and participating in selected activities. A smaller group of visitors chose to extend their stay by lodging at the BFMS guesthouse. In total, 41 visitors stayed overnight, with the majority (24) being female and 17 being male. Nearly all overnight visitors stayed for a single night, although one participant extended to two nights. Overnight stays provided opportunities for more immersive experiences, such as early-morning or late-evening monkey observations, which day visitors could not access. Similar findings have been reported in other Ghanaian ecotourism sites, where overnight facilities encourage extended engagement and enhance satisfaction (Amuquandoh et al., 2011; Adam et al., 2017).

Pre-trip Information

Visitors obtained information about BFMS from multiple sources. Personal recommendations, including word-of-mouth from friends, relatives, teachers, and tour operators, were the most influential, cited by 54% of participants. Media sources, such as television documentaries and internet platforms (including the BFMS website), accounted for 33%, while printed resources, such as guidebooks and maps, provided information for 13%. Word-of-mouth has long been recognized as a powerful influence on ecotourism decisions, particularly in developing-country contexts (Page & Dowling, 2002).

Despite this, only 26% of visitors made pre-trip contact with BFMS management before their visit. Those who attempted to do so largely relied on phone calls or emails, but many reported poor responsiveness. Some emails and calls went unanswered, reflecting weaknesses in BFMS's communication systems and internet connectivity. Similar communication gaps have been identified in other community-based ecotourism projects in Ghana, where poor ICT infrastructure limits marketing and visitor engagement (Owusu & Boafo, 2018).

Navigation to the site (BFMS) also revealed challenges. International visitors often used Google Maps, which worked well in some areas but caused confusion in locations with weak network signals or incorrect mapping. For example, some travelers were misdirected to Fiema rather than to Boabeng. Domestic visitors relied more heavily on road signs or asking locals for directions. However, inadequate signage and vague instructions sometimes cause delays and frustration. For foreign visitors, language barriers further complicated the process of seeking directions, a finding consistent with Amuquandoh (2017), who noted that international tourists in Ghana often face communication barriers during travel.

4. VISITOR MOTIVATIONS

Visitors' motivations for travelling to BFMS fell into three broad categories: destination attributes, escape factors, and self-challenge.

i. Destination Attributes (Pull Factors):

The majority of visitors (82%) were motivated by the sanctuary's natural and cultural attractions. Central to this was the opportunity to observe the two monkey species, particularly the White-thighed Colobus monkeys, which occur in significant numbers only at BFMS. This uniqueness distinguished the sanctuary from other ecotourism destinations in Ghana, such as Tafi Atome and Duasidan, which host only Mona and Lowei monkeys (Afenyo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Zeppel, 2006). The rainforest environment, the chance to witness human-monkey interactions, and the sanctuary's central location also enhanced its appeal. Many international visitors included BFMS as a stopover while travelling between southern and northern Ghana, describing it as a convenient "intervening opportunity" (Eshun & Tonto, 2014).

ii. Escape Factors (Push Factors):

Around 18% of visitors described their trip as an escape from stressful work routines, noisy urban environments, or repetitive daily activities. For some, the visit offered relaxation and restoration, while others saw it as an opportunity to socialize, picnic, or spend quality time with family and friends. These motivations are consistent with the push factors described by Eagles (1992) and Chan & Baum (2007b), who emphasize escape and relaxation as key drivers of ecotourism.

iii. Self-Challenge:

A smaller proportion (13%) travelled to BFMS to pursue personal learning or professional interests. For instance, researchers sought to understand conservation practices, forestry issues, or community-based management systems. Others visited to explore cultural narratives, such as local legends that monkeys were once humans transformed by a priest during times of war. This reflects findings by Dolnicar, Yanamandram, & Juvan (2013), who highlight that ecotourists are often motivated by curiosity, learning, and cultural exploration.

5. VISITOR ACTIVITIES

Visitors engaged in a blend of nature-based and socio-cultural activities, though participation in each varied.

Nature-based activities included monkey viewing, forest walks, tree climbing, and wildlife photography. Feeding monkeys was common despite management policies prohibiting it. Guides often encouraged visitors to purchase bananas and peanuts to attract the monkeys, especially the mona species, which sometimes climbed onto visitors' shoulders. While these activities provided excitement and memorable encounters, they also introduced risks of scratches, bites, and

potential disease transmission. Similar observations have been made in other sanctuaries in Ghana where visitor–wildlife interactions are poorly regulated (Saj, Mather, & Sicotte, 2006).

Socio-cultural activities included listening to guides recount local history, visiting the monkey cemetery, touring the traditional priest’s house, observing cultural dance performances, and purchasing local crafts. However, these activities were less frequently experienced. Observations revealed that guides often prioritized natural over cultural components, providing limited information unless visitors specifically asked. This imbalance reflects a common challenge in ecotourism where cultural interpretation is underutilized (Ayala, 1996; Amuquandoh et al., 2011).

Visitors expressed the highest levels of excitement during interactive activities such as monkey feeding, climbing the hollow Ficus tree, and taking selfies with monkeys, which were often shared on social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Conversely, activities such as visiting the monkey cemetery generated less enthusiasm, though some visitors appreciated its symbolic value for conservation. This supports Chan & Baum’s (2007a) argument that memorable experiences in ecotourism are shaped by the intensity of interactions and emotional engagement.

6. VISITOR SATISFACTION

Thirty-nine participants were interviewed to assess their satisfaction with tour activities and services at BFMS. Visitor satisfaction is crucial, as positive experiences strongly influence intentions to revisit and recommend the destination (Adams et al., 2017; Chen et al., 2011; Swanson & Davis, 2003). For this study, satisfaction was examined under two dimensions: service quality and physical environmental quality.

• Service Quality

Visitors consistently praised guides for being polite, approachable, and knowledgeable, with some describing the guiding as “five-star” quality. Guesthouse caretakers also received positive feedback, particularly for their friendliness and provision of essential items to overnight guests. Visitors who experienced local dishes such as fufu, ampesi, and banku expressed satisfaction with the catering services.

However, dissatisfaction emerged in several areas. The absence of catering facilities at the visitor center discouraged longer stays, as visitors had no food options during or after tours. Guesthouse services were sometimes criticized for poor cleanliness, and several visitors noted the lack of adequate safety information about potential risks such as monkey aggression. Others desired more cultural content in guide narratives, particularly from traditional authorities or priests. These findings are consistent with Adam et al. (2017), who reported that weak interpretation services negatively affected visitor satisfaction at Kakum and Mole National Parks.

• Physical Environment

Visitors were highly satisfied with BFMS’s natural setting, including its monkeys, trees, rainforest ambience, and well-maintained trails. Many described the sanctuary as serene, refreshing, and distinctive. The monkey cemetery was appreciated as a conservation symbol, reinforcing local respect for wildlife. Facilities such as litter bins and handwashing stations were also recommended for improving sanitation.

Despite these positives, some concerns were raised. Toilets and urinals were poorly maintained, lacked roofs, and were insufficient for the number of visitors. The poor condition of access

roads, dusty in the dry season and muddy in the rainy season, was a significant source of dissatisfaction, with many recommending government interventions to improve infrastructure. Similar infrastructure-related challenges have been documented across Ghana's ecotourism destinations (Eshun et al., 2016).

7. DISCUSSIONS

This study explored the experiences of domestic and international visitors at the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS), focusing on motivations, activities, and satisfaction. The findings provide insights into how visitor experiences are shaped within a Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) setting in Ghana.

Visitor Motivations

Consistent with push-pull motivation theory (Chan & Baum, 2007b; Eagles, 1992), visits to BFMS were influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Pull factors, particularly the sanctuary's wildlife and rainforest, were the dominant motivators. The unique presence of large groups of white-thighed colobus monkeys distinguishes BFMS from other ecotourism destinations in Ghana (Afenyo & Amuquandoh, 2014; Zeppel, 2006). Escape factors also played a role, with visitors seeking relief from stressful work or urban life, aligning with findings by Adam et al. (2017) that eco-visitors often travel for relaxation and socialization. A smaller proportion of visitors were motivated by self-challenge, reflecting a desire to explore or understand conservation practices and cultural narratives. This reinforces earlier observations that ecotourists often seek unique learning opportunities and deeper engagement with nature and culture (Higham & Carr, 2002; Dolnicar et al., 2013).

Visitor Activities

The results demonstrate that nature-based activities dominated the visitor experience, while socio-cultural components were underemphasized. Although visitors expected both natural and cultural engagement, guides largely focused on monkey viewing and forest activities. This imbalance limited exposure to the cultural richness of BFMS, such as the monkey cemetery and the priest's rituals, which could otherwise enhance the visitor experience (Ayala, 1996; Chan & Baum, 2007b). The excitement generated by interactive activities, such as feeding monkeys and climbing the Ficus tree, illustrates the importance of active participation in shaping memorable experiences (Eagles, 1992). However, feeding practices, encouraged despite being against BFMS policy, raise concerns about visitor safety and potential negative impacts on monkey behavior, echoing the need for stricter management interventions.

Visitor Satisfaction and SERVQUAL Dimensions

Visitor satisfaction was strongly tied to both service quality and the physical environment, aligning with SERVQUAL's core dimensions (Chen et al., 2011). Visitors appreciated the guides' politeness and interpretive skills, as well as the guesthouse's caretaking and catering services. However, dissatisfaction emerged over the lack of catering facilities at the visitor center, inconsistent room cleanliness, and inadequate safety information. These findings are consistent with studies at Kakum and Mole National Parks, where poor interpretation services reduced visitor satisfaction and revisit intentions (Adam et al., 2017).

Regarding the physical environment, visitors expressed high satisfaction with the natural attractions, trails, and sanitation facilities (e.g., litter bins and washing stations). Yet dissatisfaction with toilets, urinals, and road access reflects broader infrastructural challenges facing ecotourism sites in Ghana (Eshun et al., 2016). These gaps in physical infrastructure risk

diminishing visitor experiences and reducing the likelihood of positive word-of-mouth or repeat visits (Swanson & Davis, 2003).

Implications for Community-Based Ecotourism

The findings highlight that while BFMS has strong natural attractions, management practices need improvement to provide a balanced, holistic experience. Enhancing cultural interpretation and enforcing safety guidelines could significantly enrich visitor experiences. In addition, improving information technology and responsiveness to visitor inquiries is critical, as poor digital communication limits a destination's competitiveness in an era when pre-trip planning relies heavily on online resources. These improvements would align with calls for capacity building and multi-stakeholder involvement in Ghanaian CBE projects (Owusu & Boafo, 2018).

8. CONCLUSION

This study examined visitor experiences at the Boabeng-Fiema Monkey Sanctuary (BFMS), one of Ghana's flagship Community-Based Ecotourism (CBE) projects. Using interviews and participant observation, it explored visitor motivations, activities, and satisfaction. The findings revealed that natural attractions, particularly the populations of White-thighed Colobus and Lowei monkeys, remain the primary motivators for visitors, consistent with studies emphasizing the central role of wildlife in ecotourism (Eshun & Tonto, 2014; Adam et al., 2017). Escape factors, such as relief from urban life, and self-challenge, such as the pursuit of knowledge or research, also contributed to travel motivations, echoing the push-pull framework highlighted by Chan and Baum (2007b) and Eagles (1992).

Visitor activities were dominated by nature-based engagements such as monkey viewing, feeding, tree climbing, and forest walks, while socio-cultural elements received less attention. This imbalance reflects gaps in the interpretation of guides and suggests the need to integrate cultural storytelling into ecotourism experiences, as recommended by Ayala (1996) and Amuquandoh et al. (2011). Excitement was highest when visitors interacted directly with monkeys or participated in unique activities such as climbing the Ficus tree, reinforcing earlier observations that interactive and participatory experiences shape memorable tourism encounters (Higham & Carr, 2002).

Visitor satisfaction at BFMS was strongly linked to both service quality and physical environment, consistent with SERVQUAL dimensions (Chen, Chen, & Lee, 2011). Guides were generally praised for politeness and knowledgeability, but dissatisfaction arose due to inconsistent safety information, poor guesthouse services, and the absence of catering facilities, similar to challenges documented in Kakum and Mole National Parks (Acquah et al., 2016; Adam et al., 2017). Visitors were highly satisfied with the natural environment, but concerns about sanitation facilities and road access reflect broader infrastructural weaknesses that continue to limit Ghana's competitiveness in ecotourism (Eshun et al., 2016).

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

To enhance visitor experiences and strengthen BFMS as a sustainable CBE model, the following measures are recommended:

Firstly, BFMS's information technology and online systems must be upgraded. At present, the sanctuary lacks reliable internet and an updated website, limiting its ability to provide timely responses and booking options. As many visitors rely on online information when planning trips, this gap risks diverting them to other destinations. Management could address this challenge

through low-cost training and partnerships with universities or volunteer programs. Such collaborations would allow skilled volunteers to train staff, maintain the website, manage bookings, and digitize visitor records, benefiting both the sanctuary and the volunteers.

Secondly, the capacity of tour guides needs to be strengthened. Guides are central to the quality of visitor experiences, yet their knowledge and delivery vary, particularly in cultural and historical interpretation. Regular training workshops, supported by a comprehensive guide manual, would improve consistency. Partnering with relevant institutions could also build guides' awareness of human-monkey interactions, feeding, and noise impacts, ensuring that visitor engagement enhances both learning and conservation.

Thirdly, upgrade visitor facilities by improving sanitation, raising guesthouse standards, and introducing catering services at the visitor center. These improvements would encourage longer stays and generate additional revenue, as observed in other CBE sites (Amuquandoh, 2017).

Finally, improve access infrastructure by collaborating with district authorities to rehabilitate the roads leading to BFMS. This would reduce dust and mud challenges and enhance visitor comfort, an essential factor in destination competitiveness (Page & Dowling, 2002).

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