

## **International Tourists' Environmental Attitude towards Hotels in Accra**

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### **Abstract**

The available literature suggests that there has been a rise in green consumerism not only among general consumers but tourists. This has provided the impetus for the 'greening' of hotels as hotel guests have indicated their preference for hotels that 'take care of the environment'. Ironically, the environmental impacts of hotels especially with regards to the consumption of energy and water are more likely to be exacerbated by their guests. In spite of this, most studies on environmental management in hotels have centred on programmes and initiatives undertaken by management with little focus on the attitudes and behaviour of guests. This study sought to assess international tourists' environmental attitude towards hotels in Accra and the implications for environmental management by hotels. A sample of 343 international tourists was surveyed at major tourist attraction sites in Accra. The results of the study indicate that a majority of respondents generally held the view that hotels do not destroy the environment but contribute to the global environmental problems. Most of them (83%) were therefore willing to pay more to stay in a hotel with a responsible environmental attitude. There was also a significant positive relationship between some socio-demographic characteristics of tourist such age and sex and their environmental behaviour. The results of this study have implications for environmental education of guests and the marketing of hotels.

**Keywords:** Environmental, Behaviour, Attitude, Tourist, Hotel, Accra

### **Introduction**

The adoption and implementation of sustainable tourism practices by the tourism industry has been partly occasioned by the observation that tourists are becoming increasingly concerned about the environmental conditions of destinations they intend to visit. Foster, Sampson and Dunn (2000) identify consumer demand as one of the forces exerting pressure

on service sector firms to be environmentally friendly. Generally, there has been a growth of *green consumerism* (Holden, 2000). Consumers are increasingly becoming environmental-conscious and will buy products from organizations that 'take care of the environment'. The tourism industry has not been insulated from this wave of environmentalism since tourists are also becoming discerning and will travel to destinations that offer clean and green tourist products. In a study of UK consumers' attitude on package holidays by Market and Opinion Research International (Ipsos MORI) in 2000 which was commissioned by the Association of British Travel Agents (ABTA), 87% of respondents indicated that the not damaging the environment is the most important consideration when choosing a holiday whilst 76% indicated that their holiday should benefit the people of the destination they were travelling to. Also, Conde Nast Traveller Magazine conducted a readers' poll which showed that 96% of readers thought hotels and resorts should be responsible for protecting the environment they operate in, with 74.5% saying a hotels' environmental policies influence their decision to stay there (Conde Nast Traveller, 2007).

However, studies on the environmental performance of firms have concentrated on the supply side i.e. environmental practices and initiatives by businesses with customers often left out of the picture. Despite the importance of the environment in the tourist's choice of hotel, the issue has not been subjected to much intellectual discourse and empirical research. Research in this area has often been undertaken by research organizations such as J.D. Power and Associates and Ipsos MORI instead of academics. There have been very few attempts to look at hotel guests' attitude towards environmental management practices of the hotel industry. Research on travellers' attitudes toward environmentally friendly hotels and guest rooms has been limited to a few studies (Millar and Baloglu, 2011). Andereck (2008) is also of the view that few studies have considered tourists' views of environmentally responsible and innovative business practices.

Given the limited empirical academic research on the environmental attitude of tourists towards hotels in spite of growing environmentalism and green consumerism, this study sought to assess international tourists' environmental attitude and the implications for environmental management by the hotels. To achieve this objective, the study examined the perceptions of international tourists in Accra on hotel environmental issues, the extent to which environmental activities by hotels influence their choice of hotels, their willingness to pay more for a stay in an environmentally-responsible hotel and the relationship between their socio-demographic characteristics and their willingness to pay more.

### **Literature review**

There has been a general rise in green consumerism. European, North American and Oceanic researches have shown that care for the environment, and sub-themes like social responsibility have become of increasingly significant consumer value (Smith & Haugtvedt, 1997; Kotler, Bowen & Makens, 1999). Also, Synovate conducted a global survey in 2007 in association with Aegis, which was repeated it in 2008 in association with BBC World. The results of the survey indicated that consumers in most countries are becoming more aware and willing to act on environmental concerns. In the 2007 survey, 53% of respondents reported that they bought green products and this rose to 61% of respondents in 2008 (World Business Council for Sustainable Development, 2008). There is also recognition that tourists are becoming increasingly concerned about the environmental conditions of places they

travel to as evidenced in the popularity of green or ecotourism products (Weaver & Lawton, 2002).

However, individuals differ in their levels of environmentally friendly behaviour (Kals, Schumacher & Montada 1999; Carrus, Bonaiuto & Bonnes, 2005). A study by Crouch, Devinney, Dolnicar and Huybers (2005) indicated that 'environmentally caring tourists' differed significantly in sociodemographics, travel behaviour and travel motivations. Pollard, Kalafatis, East and Tsogas (1999) also used Ajzen's theory of planned behaviour to conclude that consumers might hold attitudes about the environment that do not translate into environmentally friendly behaviour. However, other researchers have suggested a positive relationship between environmental awareness and pro-environmental behaviour (Lee and Moscardo, 2005). The results of studies by Laroche, Bergeron and Barbaro-Forleo (2001) and Manaktola and Jauhari (2007) also indicated that people who were more concerned about the environment tended to have more environmentally-friendly buying behaviours.

The number of customers looking for green hotel properties has also grown (Manaktola and Jauhari (2007). According to a 2002 survey, in the UK, 87% of Brits, 60% of Australians and 54% of Americans indicated that they were more likely to patronize hotels with a "responsible environmental attitude" (IHEI, 2002). Available evidence suggests that hotel guests do not only expect their hotels to practice sound environmental management practices but are also prepared to pay extra to stay in hotels that are environmental-conscious (Arias *et al*, 2003; Masau and Prideaux, 2003; Han, Hsu & Lee, 2009). However, Manaktola and Jauhari (2007) in a study in India concluded that though consumers in the lodging industry had a positive attitude and behavior towards green practices in hotels, it did not translate into their willingness to pay more. In a related study by Millar and Baloglu (2011), a large majority of respondents (i.e. 77.5% of business travellers and 84% of leisure travellers) indicated they would pay the same price for a green hotel property just like for one that is not green. The available literature also suggests that cleanliness is one of the most important, factors in the selection of accommodation facilities (Dolnicar, 2002; Lockyer, 2003).

Studies by Vining and Ebreo, (1990) indicated that Customers who frequently engaged in environmentally-friendly purchasing behaviours were older than average. However, Andereck, (2008) found a negative correlation between age and perceived value of green practices, indicating that younger respondents valued environmental practices more highly. Research has also indicated that people with Judeo-Christian beliefs are less environmental conscious (Schultz, Zelezny & Dalrymple, 2000). Laroche *et al*. (2001) also proved that women were more environmental-conscious than men and were willing to pay more for green products. This is corroborated by Han *et al* (2009) who discovered in their study that female customers and older customers both had a stronger willingness to pay more for a green hotel. People with different social practices and cultural traits are likely to place different values on and have different attitudes toward nature or the environment (Johnson, Bowker & Cordell, 2004). Studies by Baysan (2001) suggested that German tourists appeared to have a greater consideration for the environmental consequences of tourism. In a related study, Sarigöllü (2009) discovered that Turks were more concerned about the environment than Canadians. Dolnicar (2010) also found in a study that having a higher level of environmental concern, being more altruistic, feeling more morally obliged to behave in an environmentally friendly way, being older and feeling a higher level of regional identity with the place of residence are the best predictors of pro-environmental behavior of tourists.

## Methodology

Data for this study were collected through a survey of international tourists at major attraction sites in the city of Accra such as *Osu Oxford Street*, *Kokrobite Beach*, *La Beach*, *Du Bois Centre* and *Nkrumah Mausoleum*. International tourists were targeted because by definition, they would patronize some form of overnight accommodation. Convenience sampling method was employed to select 384 tourists from some popular attraction sites in Accra. The fact that a non-random sample was used makes sample size determination for estimate accuracy non relevant. However if it could be assumed that the sample was representative than the following sample size determination would be informative. The sample size of tourists ( $n = 384$ ) was derived by computing the minimum sample size required for accuracy in estimating proportions by considering the standard normal deviation set at 95% confidence level (1.96), percentage picking a choice or response (50% = 0.5) and the confidence interval ( $0.05 = \pm 5$ ).

The questionnaire included close-ended questions on respondents' socio-demographic characteristics and environmental attitudes. Questions relating to attitudes were divided into cognitive (perception of hotel environmental issues); affective (preferences for environmentally responsible hotels); and behavioural (willingness to pay more for an environmentally-responsible hotel). Likert scales (e.g. 1 = strongly disagree – 5 = strongly agree; and 1 = no influence – 5 = very strong influence) were used to design response sets for the close-ended questions. These scales were used to collect data relating to attitudes of respondents. Fieldwork was undertaken between June and August 2010 in Accra. The questionnaire was self-administered to those who were identified as international tourists and accepted to participate in the study. To avoid problems of double response and response bias, respondents were first asked if they have not already taken part in the study. Also, care was taken not to sample all or majority of people in a group. A total of 343 questionnaires out of the sample of 384 international tourists were returned from the field and considered appropriate for analysis thus representing a response rate of 89.8%.

## Discussion of findings

More than half (56.6%) of the respondents were females, mainly aged between 21 and 29 years (46.8%). They were however, fairly well-educated since more than half (52.8%) had obtained a bachelors degree or higher national diploma. In terms of their marital status, it was observed that they were mostly single (66.1%) but this could be attributed to their relative younger ages and high level of education. These findings coincide with the results of a study on tourists' vulnerability to crime in Ghana by Boakye (2010) who indicated that dominance of young people who are mainly single and are students of tertiary institutions in his sample. The highest number of respondents (27.8%) was Americans, followed by Brits and Germans respectively. The continent of origin of the respondents generally reflects the pattern of international tourist arrivals in Ghana where Europeans are in the majority (57.1%) and the Asia/Oceania region is the least represented (4.2%).

**Environmental attitude of international tourists**

McDougal and Munro (1994) claimed that attitude is comprised of cognitive (beliefs and knowledge), affective (feelings of like or dislike) and behavioural components (action or intent to act). The relation of all three components to tourists' environmental attitude towards hotels is herewith discussed. From Table 1, the greater majority of respondents (72.2%) did not believe that hotels impact negatively on the environment. The statements that attracted the greatest disagreements were hotels' claim to be environmentally responsible and education of their guests (Mean = 2.53 and 2.52 respectively). Only 14.7% of respondents agreed that hotels claiming to be environmentally responsible were indeed so.

**Table 1.** Perception of Hotel Environmental Issues

Environmental Issues	N	Percentage in agreement	Mean	Std. Dev
Hotels claim to be environmentally responsible is indeed so	341	14.7	2.53	0.91
Hotels educate their guests on environmental responsibility	326	19.7	2.52	0.98
Hotels contribute to environmental protection and conservation	337	39.8	3.14	0.90
Hotel development and operations destroy the environment	337	34.1	2.90	1.08
Hotels contribute to the global environmental problems	337	45.6	3.25	0.90
Hotels claim to be environmental-conscious to enhance their images	333	69.1	3.65	0.90
Hotels have a responsibility to preserve and protect natural areas	341	87.1	4.21	0.78
I am more likely to book a hotel with a responsible environmental attitude	340	82.4	4.13	0.87

Based on a scale of 1-5; 1= strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither agree nor disagree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree.

Tourists were therefore aware of the issue of greenwashing. Hotel managers should therefore ensure that their purported environmental friendliness reflects in their day-to-day operations. The fact that 69.1% of respondents agreed that hotels claimed environmental consciousness in order to enhance their images, lends further credence to this. This implies that when hotels are merely projected as environmentally-friendly through external communications to customers, it will not necessarily cajole them into believing and thereby patronising such hotels.

Moreover, less than one-fifth (19.7%) were in agreement with the statement that 'hotels educate their guests'. This pre-supposes that hotels in Accra were not doing enough to involve their guests in their environmental management activities though these guests could be more crucial to the realization of the environmental targets of such hotels (Anguera, Ayuso &

Fullana, 2000). Respondents were uncertain that hotels contribute to environmental protection and conservation ( $M = 3.14$ ) and to global environmental problems ( $M = 3.25$ ). Also, most respondents (87.1%) agreed that hotels have a responsibility to preserve and protect natural areas. Hotels therefore have a duty to protect the environment and when they live up to that responsibility they would be preferred by tourists since 82.4% of the respondents indicated that they were more likely to book hotels with responsible environmental attitude.

### Environmental activities influencing choice of hotel

Respondents generally felt that some environmental activities undertaken by hotels influenced their choice of hotel as observed in Table 2. Considerations which strongly influenced choice of hotel were 'good sanitation practices' ( $M = 3.86$ ) and 'location in clean and green environment' ( $M = 3.89$ ). These findings lend further credence to previous findings that cleanliness is one of the most important factors influencing the choice of accommodation (Dolnicar, 2002; Lockyer, 2003). A clean environment probably assures tourists of their environmental health and the quality of services to expect from a hotel.

**Table 2.** Environmental activities influencing choice of hotel

Environmental activities of hotels	N	No influence	Some influence	Strong influence	Mean	Std. Dev.
Use of recycled materials such as paper and plastic	341	32.6	52.5	15.0	2.30	1.15
Use of water and energy-efficient appliances	341	17.3	46.9	35.7	2.88	1.20
Use of local materials	339	18.9	55.8	25.4	2.69	1.16
Design which reflects the local architecture and landscape	338	13.6	50.5	35.8	2.97	1.14
Contribution towards the conservation of the environment	339	14.5	49.3	36.2	3.02	1.17
Use of home or locally grown vegetables and fruits	339	27.4	44.3	28.3	2.62	1.29
Promotion of towel and napkins reuse programmes	336	27.4	50.0	22.6	2.53	1.25
Good sanitation practices	341	5.9	23.8	70.4	3.86	1.11
Location in a clean and natural environment	341	5.3	22.6	72.2	3.89	1.06

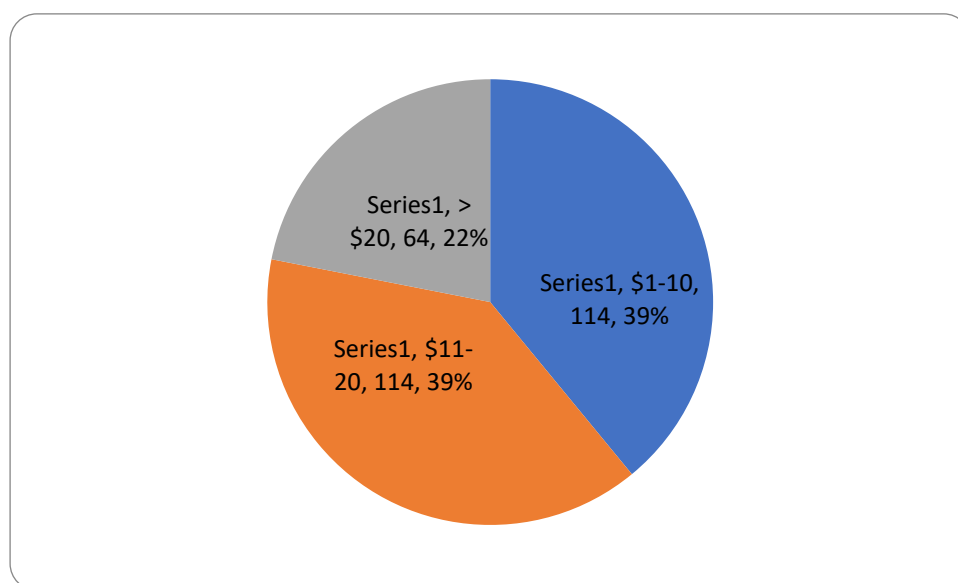
However, the hotels' use of recycled materials had the least influence (2.30) on choice of hotel by the tourists. Almost a third of respondents (32.6%) believed it had no influence on their choice of hotel. It appears from the foregoing that tourists placed higher premium on the physical appearance of the environment; namely how clean, healthy or green the physical environment of the hotel is. Environmental activities of hotels that reinforced conservation of resources and enhanced the well-being of host communities such as 'use of recycled

materials’, ‘use of water and energy-efficient appliances’ and ‘use of home or locally grown vegetables and fruits’ did not have much influence on tourists’ choice of accommodation.

**Willingness to pay more for a stay in environmentally-responsible hotel**

Studies by IHEI (2002) have revealed that most tourists preferred to stay in hotels with a responsible environmental attitude. Indeed, almost all respondents (96%) indicated that they preferred to stay in hotels which take good care of the environment.

**Figure 1.** Extra Amount Tourists are willing to Pay



This epitomizes growing green consumerism and environmental consciousness among tourists, from especially the developed world; since most of the respondents were from Europe and North America. It also coincides with the results of a poll conducted by Accor in Sydney where 90% of guests polled preferred to stay in hotels that cared for the environment (Hotelonline, 2000). Also, 84% were willing to pay more for their stay in a hotel which was environmentally responsible.

**Table 3.** Willingness to Pay More and Socio-demographics

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Willing to pay more
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Characteristic	Yes	No	$\chi^2$	<i>p-value</i>
<b>Age (n= 341)</b>				
Less than 20	9.4	21.8	13.352	0.010*
21-29	45.1	54.5		
30-39	21.3	14.5		
40-49	14.0	7.3		
50 or more	10.1	1.8		
Total	100	100		
<b>Gender (n= 342)</b>				
Male	42.5	47.3	0.427	0.306
Female	57.5	52.7		
Total	100	100		
<b>Level of Education (n = 342)</b>				
Secondary	15.0	25.5	4.722	0.094
Bachelors or HND	52.6	52.7		
Masters or Doctorate	32.4	21.8		
Total	100	100		
<b>Religion (n = 303)</b>				
Christian	77.0	70.2	9.003	0.061
Moslem	4.3	4.3		
Jew	5.5	2.1		
Non-religious	9.8	23.4		
Other	3.5	0.0		
Total	100	100		
<b>Marital Status (n = 329)</b>				
Single	62.8	82.7	7.860	0.020*
Married	27.8	11.5		
Separated	9.4	5.8		
Total	100	100		
<b>Annual Income (n = 307)</b>				
Less than \$25000	22.0	33.3	8.201	0.145
\$25000-\$34000	24.7	35.4		
\$35000-\$44000	18.9	10.4		
\$45000-\$54000	13.9	6.3		
\$55000-\$64000	11.2	8.3		
\$65000	9.3	6.3		
Total	100	100		
<b>Continent (n = 330)</b>				
European	55.0	70.0	5.654	0.130
American	34.6	24.0		
Asian/Oceanic	5.0	0.0		
African	5.4	6.0		
Total	100	100		

\*significant at the  $p < 0.05$  significance level

This result confirmed previous studies by Arias, Becerra, Munoz and Sainz (2003), Masau and Prideaux (2003) and Han et al. (2009) which indicated that tourists were willing to pay more

for their stay in environmentally-friendly accommodation. For those who were willing to pay more for a stay in an environmentally responsible hotel, 39% of them were willing to pay between \$1-10 for a one-week stay as shown in Figure 1. The same percentage was willing to pay between \$11-20. It could also be deduced from this finding that it pays to be environmentally-responsible since guests are willing to pay more for a stay in environmentally-responsible hotels. Hotels can therefore cash in on their environmental management and sustainability programmes.

Available literature suggests that guests' willingness to pay for environmentally friendly products and services is related to their socio-demographic variables such as age, sex and religion. Table 3 shows a chi-square test at  $p < 0.05$  which indicate that only marital status and age were significantly related to willingness to pay more. There were also strong relationships between willingness to pay and level of education ( $p = 0.094$ ) as well as religion ( $p = 0.061$ ). However, the relationship was only significant at the  $p < 0.10$  level. Majority of respondents who were single (82.7%) were not willing to pay more for accommodation in environmentally friendly hotels. Relatively more of the married people were willing to pay more (27.8%) than those who were not (11.5%). Also, there were less singles willing to pay more (62.8%) compared to those not willing to pay more (82.7%).

A similar trend was observed in terms of age and willingness to pay. There were more people under 20 years (21.8%) who were not willing to pay more than those willing to pay more (9.4%). However, a greater percentage (10.1%) of those who were 50 years and above were willing to pay more compared to of those not willing to pay (1.8%). The older a person, the greater the willingness to pay more for a hotel that is environmentally-responsive, a finding which is consistent with that of Han *et al* (2009) who revealed that older customers have a stronger willingness to pay more for a green hotel.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

First, the positive environmental attitude of tourists, provides enormous opportunities for improving the environmental performance of hotels. The majority of respondents (87.1%) agreed that hotels have a responsibility to preserve and protect the environment and that they (82.4%) are more likely to book a hotel with a responsible environmental attitude. The majority of international tourists had a positive attitude towards environmental management by hotels. They expected hotels to protect the environment and they preferred to stay in hotels which protect the environment. In fact, 95.9% of respondents indicated that they prefer to stay in a hotel which takes good care of the environment.

Tourists therefore believe that hotels have a responsibility to protect the environment and they are also more likely to book a hotel with a responsible environmental attitude. In fact, they are even willing to pay more for a stay in a hotel which is environmentally responsible. This should provide the needed impetus for hotels to embark on environmental management programmes, knowing that such efforts will be appreciated and rewarded. It is also a recipe for the success of environmental management programmes initiated by the hotels since guests will be willing to play an active role if only they are involved.

The environmental-consciousness among international tourists and their preference for hotels which are environmentally-responsible has implications for future demands for hotels and consequently, hotel development. Tourists consider the environmental conditions of hotels before patronizing them. The study reveals that good sanitation practices and location in a clean and green environment are the most important considerations for choosing a hotel

by international tourists. It means that hotels which remain unclean and impact adversely on the environment risk losing some of their customers. It is therefore hotels that offer a clean, green and healthy environment that will remain competitive and not necessarily those that offer the best of facilities and amenities.

Finally, the hotels must also step-up environmental education among their guests. Only 19.7% of respondents agreed that hotels educate their guests on environmental responsibility. The hotels must make their guests an integral part of their environmental management activities. Before guests check into their rooms, they must be informed about the environmental programmes the hotel is undertaking and what is expected of them. Such information should also be readily available on the websites of the hotels. Hotels could also provide bulletin boards at their receptions which will display environmental information and tips. Frontline staff should be educated so that they can in turn dialogue with guests. Verbally engaging guests and responding to their queries and concerns would be more effective than merely displaying notices on environmentally-responsible behaviour expected from guests.

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