

A multiphase analysis of the personal benefits derived from cultural educational tour experiences

Asa Grahn – Graduated 2011

Abstract

In recent years, educational tourism has been established as an alternative to conventional mainstream tourism with a focus on learning through travelling. Cultural educational tourism is a type of tourism engaged in by travellers whose primary motivation is to learn about and to experience a host culture through in-depth encounters. This niche has had research attention, most commonly with a focus on educational tourism where the primary motivation is studying or learning (Go & van Fenema, 2006; Kalinowski & Weiler, 1992; Lück, 2003). This research explores the nature of Swedish tourists' experiences on cultural educational tours to Tanzania. The principal objectives of the research were to gain an enhanced understanding of the cultural educational tour experience and to understand the nature of personal benefits derived from the experience.

For purposes of the research, a phenomenological approach was adopted and pure qualitative research techniques with a temporal framework were implemented. The applied methods were semi-structured interviews, participant observation and personal travel diaries, which were implemented throughout cultural educational tour experiences that took place in Tanzania during three different tours. The empirical research was conducted during the anticipation, actual, reflection and recollection phases in order to gain an in-depth insight into the dynamic and complex experience of the participants. Twenty-seven Swedish tourists were included in the sample and in a total, 72 semi-structured interviews were conducted and divided throughout the following phases: 18 during the anticipation phase, 27 in the reflection phase and 27 in the recollection phase. As well, 20 personal travel diaries were completed by the tourists during their tour experience. Researching cultural educational tour participants' subjective experiences through a longitudinal process and with the same participants throughout the various stages of the tour experience is rare, if not unprecedented, in the tourism literature. The qualitative materials employed in this study were generated in association with three extended tours to Tanzania in February, June and October of 2006, each lasting three weeks. The researcher was present on two tours for a total of 6 weeks.

The interpretation and analysis of qualitative materials indicates that participation had a profound effect on all participants in the study. Participants reported on a benefit that related to a personalised cultural awareness and appreciation of the culture being visited, as a result of close cultural interactions with the hosts, and which intensified in the months following the tour experiences. The study also presents evidence of personal growth, which in turn gives rise to a sense of enhanced tolerance and understanding of one's own actions during and after the tour. As well, critical interrogations of attitudes towards non-sustainable and ethical tourism development built up during the actual tour. This seemed to be most prominent among participants travelling for the first time with the specific tour operator. The findings highlight the strength of recollection which builds, with reflection, over the six months immediately following the actual tour experience. By generating insight into the complex and dynamic phases of the cultural educational tour experiences, the study has demonstrated the usefulness of a phenomenological approach to understanding participants' tour experiences. The thesis concludes with a number of reflections in terms of theory and methods,

as well as recommendations for future research that may further inform the study of a unique contemporary tourism phenomenon.