

STUDENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ECOTOURISM AND ENVIRONMENTAL MANAGEMENT (FACULTY OF RENEWABLE NATURAL RESOURCES) OF THE UNIVERSITY FOR DEVELOPMENT STUDIES (UDS), NYANKPALA CAMPUS, TOUR SOME MAJOR ATTRACTIONS IN UPPER EAST REGION

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The Department of Ecotourism and Environmental Management of the Faculty of Renewable Natural Resources of the UDS has the mandate to train graduates imbued with the requisite skills to manage the nation's tourism resources. Tourism oriented courses run by the department include, tourism planning, economics of tourism and leisure, marketing for tourism and leisure, sustainable tourism, principles of ecotourism, tourism, leisure and recreation law, destination management, international tourism and cultural dynamics, events management and service quality management in tourism in addition to other environment related courses such as biodiversity and conservation, global environmental change, climate change mitigation, environmental economics, ecotoxicology, environmental monitoring and control and domestic waste management.

The northern parts of Ghana abound in tourism resources and being the only institution now offering ecotourism/tourism courses at the university level in this part of the country, the department's first batch of students are due to graduate in November, 2012. As part of their training the department with support of the faculty sends out students on tour to acquaint themselves with some attractions in the country. The first batch visited Mole National Park in October 2011 and the second (now in level 400) this year toured some major attractions in the Upper East Region of Ghana on the 12th of October, 2012. The aim of the tour was to see at first hand some of the country's attractions often talked about during lectures, listen to history from tour guides and make enquiries on management practices and problems emanating therein.

After driving from Nyankpala in a university coach with 70 students, two lecturers and three research assistants, the first point of call was regional offices of the Ghana Tourism Authority in Bolgatanga. Personnel were very welcoming and eventually released an officer to accompany the group to the sites. The first attraction visited was the Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Cathedral/Minor Basilica in Navrongo. On arrival, the tour guide in-charge, Mr Seyire Richmond welcomed the group and took the entourage into the Minor Basilica. Briefing the group, he explained that the Missionaries of Africa arrived in Navrongo in 1906 from Burkina Faso after travelling 33 days on horseback. Upon meeting the chiefs and elders of the land they were given a bushy area invaded by wild animals and mystical spirits as there was initial resistance to their settling within the community. Impressively however, they were able to drive the animals and spirits away. According to him, in 1907, the first ever chapel in northern Ghana was erected and in order to gain the confidence of the local people who were skeptical of their mission, the Missionaries of Africa decided to learn the language (Kasem), visited their homes, treated the sick suffering from malaria and in no time the church began to flourish.



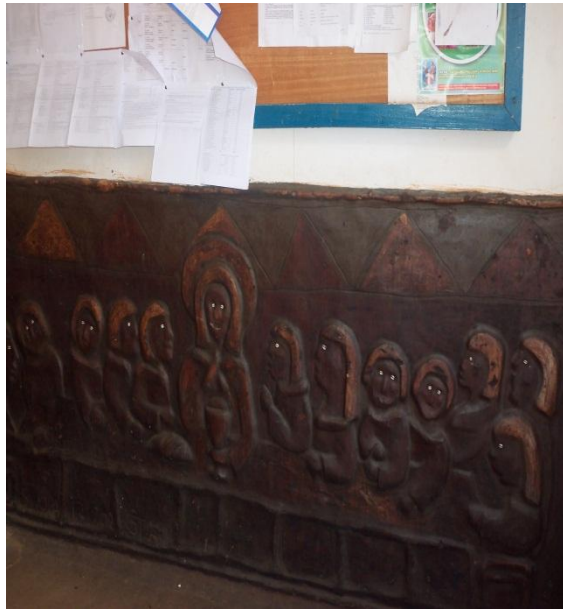
First church building, erected in 1907 where mass was originally said

In 1920, the main church (now minor basilica) was constructed; the interior decorations were done by women from Sirigu. The main construction materials used were mud, cow dung and dawadawa waste water which were the main building materials in use at the time. It was originally roofed with thatch but due to the fact that the grasses had to be taken off yearly and replaced, major rehabilitation work was done in 1987 and corrugated roofing sheets used this time. The cathedral is now listed as a UNESCO heritage site and it is important to point out here that the students in one of their courses (International tourism and cultural dynamics) have had lessons on criteria used to select World Heritage Sites enlisted by UNESCO. Though a new church is erected and in use, this old edifice is equally utilized for daily masses and anytime a Bishop comes visiting, mass is said in this cathedral/minor Basilica.

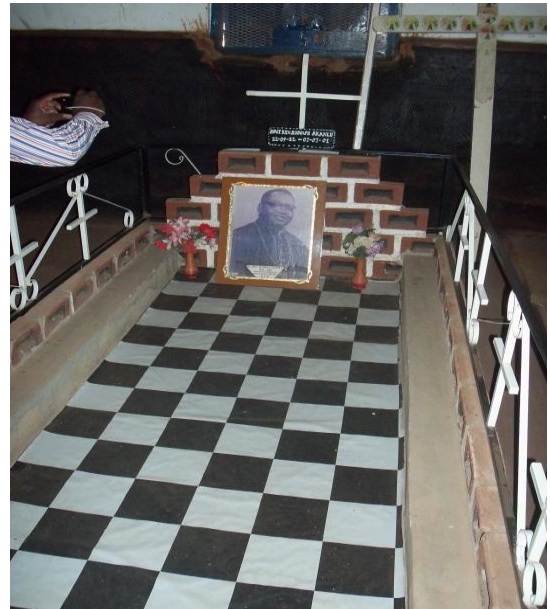


Our Lady of Seven Sorrows Cathedral/Minor Basilica (edifice built in 1920) in Navrongo

The interior decoration was executed by local arty women from Sirigu in 1925 with the walls showing paintings of animals which once inhabited the area. Other paintings depict the last supper of Christ with his disciples whilst a statue of the pieta donated by Italian friends of His Grace Most Rev. Lucas Abadamloora stands close to the altar. At the back of the cathedral and close to the main entrance is also the grave of Most Rev. Rudolf Akanlu, first native Bishop of the Diocese.



Wall art works executed by Sirigu women (in the Basilica) depicting the last supper



Bishop Akanlu's tomb (in the basilica)

The students were also ushered into the Basilica Museum close by which contained a wide collection of regalia used by the first missionaries including those used by deceased Bishops and a collection of artifacts and instruments from the community.



The Basilica Museum



Chasubles used by the first missionaries preserved in the museum to date

The tour of the Catholic premises took the group one and half hours after which the relevant fees were paid and we departed for the next attraction site. At about 1:30 pm, the group arrived in the township of Paga, a border town between Ghana and Burkina Faso. The Paga crocodile pond is a community based ecotourism project that attracts lots of visitors annually. Unique about the crocodiles in this area is that they are harmless and coexist with members of the community. Legend has it that the crocks visit their homes in the night. Upon paying an entrance fee, crocks were called out to be viewed by the students. It is a must for the visitor to buy a fowl which is used in feeding them. The peak season of visits according to the tour guides is June, July and August. Close to the pond is a restaurant and chalets for visitors who wish to pass the night at the destination. Thus, conservation is taught in principles of ecotourism whilst best practice is covered in destination management. This all comes to light on the field at the attraction site.



The SRC president who is also a student of the department poses for a snapshot with a crock

The students also took the advantage of an intervening opportunity, to visit the Pikworo slave camp in Nania, a suburb of Paga. Pikworo in Kasem according to the tour guide means “a place of rocks”. According to the tour guide, in 1704, a bushman whom the community named Bagao rode a horse from Burkina Faso and encamped at these rocks on his way to sell slaves at the main slave market in Salaga in the Northern Region. Later in time Pikworo became a resting and

exchange site for slave caravans. On the rocks, marks exist portraying slave activities in the area. Female slaves were sent up the rocks to cook for their masters and fellow slaves.



Natural spring which supplied water for cooking and drinking at the camp. This spring never dries up even to date



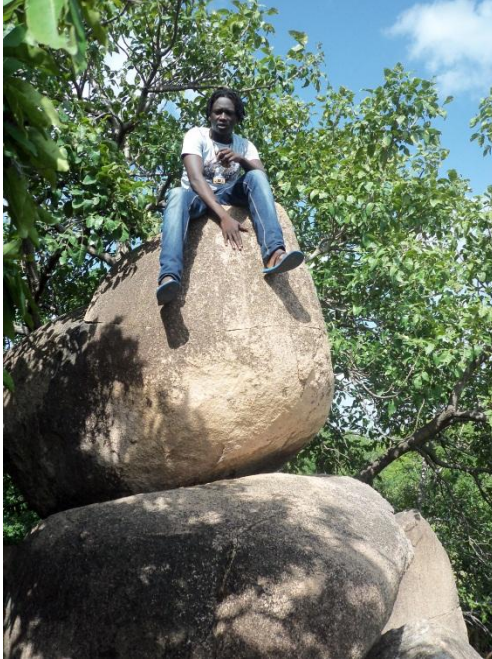
hewn spots on the rock which were used as plates to serve food to slaves



Grinding stone used by female slaves to turn grain into flour at the camp



Tour guide demonstrates how slaves were laid on the punishment stone and lashed



Tour guide sitting on the watch tower that was used by the slave raiders. An armed guard stood on this rock to keep watch over slaves who might attempt to escape and also to guard against intruders.



Some community members perform on a rock that was used by slaves to play music praising the slave master and ironically encouraging themselves that there were better days ahead. Some slaves at the time danced for rewards such as cola nuts, tobacco or simply more food.



A section of students listening to a narration by the tour guide at Pikworo slave camp

A few students interviewed the gruesome treatment meted out to Africans by fellow Africans and the European slave masters during the era of cartel slavery on the continent. This visit to

Pikworo slave camps has to do with our country's historical heritage which is handled in the principles of ecotourism course. The group departed for the Sirigu Pottery and Arts Project. Briefing the group on the inception of the project, a tour guide revealed that a daughter of the town of Sirigu by name Melanie Kasise was educated by her mother to the university level with proceeds obtained from sale of pottery products. She rose up to become an educationist and retired as regional manager of Catholic Education Unit in 1997. She was very instrumental in forming the Sirigu Women in Pottery and Art (SWOPA) project which brought together seven (7) women groups totaling 350 and who are into weaving, painting and pottery. This laudable project was to curb rural urban drift and to supplement incomes of rural households. On August 19, 2012, the then UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, visited the facility and had this to say *"these are women who have not given up"* Currently activities of interest include village tours, do-it-yourself painting sessions and visiting the SWOPA display room. Accommodation is also available for visitors who wish to spend the night. Culture is the main attraction here and this is widely covered in the sustainable tourism course outline handled in level 300.



Typical hut designs in Sirigu



A blend of both indigenou and modern designs



Woven baskets for sale on display in the visitor centre in Sirigu



Designed pots for sale in the visitor centre in Sirigu

The final leg of the tour took the group to the Tongo hills and Tenzug shrines. The attractions here include rock complexes, caves of various kinds, local shrines, palace tour and a cave school where formal education in the community is said to have started. From the topmost palace roof

one has a beautiful view of the indigenous roofing of the other living quarters within the palace precincts. The palace alone accordingly has a total of 307 inhabitants. The rock complexes in the area is said to resemble the Motopos hills in Zimbabwe, both of which are to be inscribed on the UNESCO heritage list hence making this attraction part of lectures handled in courses in the department such as international tourism, sustainable tourism and principles of ecotourism.



Aerial view of the traditional accommodation around the palace



Cave school, where formal education started in Tenzug. It could contain 25 pupils

Aside from the Catholic Cathedral/Minor Basilica in Navrongo which is an entity managed by the church, the other attractions sites, ie Paga crocodile pond, Pikworo slave camp, Sirigu Pottery and Arts Project and the Tongo Hills and Tenzug Shrine are community-based tourism (CBT) projects. CBT's are intended to put control of these facilities in the hands of the local people and bring benefits directly to them. With the passage of the tourism act recently in Ghana, it will be recommendable if a greater quantum of funds accruing is channeled to these community-based tourism projects to enable more rural people take better control of their destiny through tourism. It is also high time domestic tourism be encouraged in Ghana to give a boost to receipts in attraction sites and finally it is our candid opinion that some tour guides especially in Paga need in-service training on host-guest relations.