



A field study in Ghana

Before departure

My first encounter with minor field studies was at a lunchtime lecture right before the application opened. I was convinced right away and didn't waste a minute before starting an application with my classmate. Since we didn't know anything about minor field studies before this lunch lecture we had to start from scratch. At last, we got in contact with Engineers Without Borders Sweden (EWB-SWE), and from them we got our topic for a project and a country to visit. When that was completed, we started our preparations for the trip. Our project with EWB-SWE was new and quite broad, and therefore it required us to start working right away. The work before our trip was quite time-consuming, but it gave us an important insight while also preparing us for our work in Ghana. Additionally to the work with the project, we also had to prepare for visa, flight tickets, accommodation, and vaccination. We got tips from our contact person in Ghana for accommodations, which helped us a lot. Through him, we could easily book and pay for our stay. The flight tickets were also relatively easy to fix, because we booked them through a travel agency that gave us suggestions for the cheapest and best way to fly down to Ghana. Vaccination was also smooth to fix, but it's necessary to start in time! I would suggest going straight to a vaccination company to check what's necessary and when to start with the vaccination. As for the visa, that was the most difficult part. My best tip is to apply for it as soon as you can. Always think that it's going to take longer than you think, because most often problems will arise that delays the process.

Upon arrival

Since our project was ongoing before the field study, we could decide on our own when to start our trip. We decided to start with research at home and then go to Ghana in the beginning of February. In order to have the time to collect information, while also having the time to finish the master thesis, we decided to stay for two months. Our first two days consisted of me and my friend settling in. Among the first things we did was to shop food and get a sim-card with an internet bundle. It was quite difficult to get around in a new country without having access to internet, but our accommodation was very helpful. As for our contact person, we had some miscommunications during our first days in Ghana, and our start-up meeting did not happen until a week after our arrival. However, that gave us time to settle in and do a bit more research.

Financials and accommodation

Shockingly Ghana was quite pricey when it came to accommodation and grocery shopping. When it came to accommodation, we decided it was worth to pay a bit more to have better standards. And it was worth it! When it came to food, the costs were both high and low. Of course, when shopping imported food, the prices were quite high, while local food such as fruit and greens were cheap. Therefore, we tried to go for the local food and not the imported. Since our project required us to travel and meet people, we had to pay for taxi often. We could choose to go with the local buses but that would make the trip much longer than necessary. The taxi was more expensive than the local buses, but still not that expensive. So, for us we often found value in paying that extra amount because it could improve our trip in different ways. I would therefore say that you should go for the options that you feel are worth it and does not affect your trip in a negative way.

As I mentioned before, our accommodation was recommended by our contact person in Ghana. He was very helpful and sent us many different options in different areas in Accra, Ghana. It is very important to at least check with your contact person because he/she know the area and can inform you if it's good or not. Overall, the accommodation in Accra was rather expensive, and our accommodation was not an exception. However, we thought it was important to have a place where we could relax and study without any problem.

Project

Me and my friend went to Accra as volunteers for EWB-SWE and as students for KTH. We were there to collect data on projects and organizations that use sustainable and local building materials. The data was used for a feasibility study made for EWB-SWE in collaboration with Social Enterprises Ghana, as well as our master thesis. The thesis covers the barriers for implementation of sustainable building in a developing country, and the motivational drivers to overcome the perceived barriers.

The feasibility study aims to investigate the possibilities to implement a solution to sustainable construction in the rural areas of Ghana. Three methods are analysed - Interlocking Compressed Earth Blocks, Rammed Earth and Timber. The feasibility study's main focus was to explore the feasibility to implement sustainable and affordable building materials overall. Further, since we had to interview different actors in the Ghanaian construction industry, we also had the chance to see potential future collaborations. The feasibility study will be a document that will help in the decision of whether it is worth to continue with implementation or not. Our master thesis is in the same topic, but here we analysed the barriers and motivation when implementing sustainable building in a developing country.

During our stay we could sit and write at our contact persons organisations office, which gave us a possibility to go somewhere else than our apartment to write. However, the contact person did not have much experience in the construction industry which made it quite difficult to get support. Overall, we did much of the work ourselves, i.e. finding people to contact and going out for interviews. They tried to be as helpful and they were interested in what we did, but for most part we worked on different things. Right before our flight back to Sweden we held a presentation on our data and everyone was interested in the work.



Home-made 'fika' for our last presentation

Country

Since we lived in Accra, we had a lot of possibilities that often doesn't exist in smaller cities. For instance, we could use uber or bolt to travel around in the city. The contact person and the volunteers of the organisation was used to working with different nationalities. Therefore, we didn't experience much of a culture shock, but of course, it's still very different from Sweden. The people we met during our stay in Ghana were really friendly and helpful which was great for our stay and data collection.



We ordered the traditional meal Fufu.



Field Trip to Cape Coast

Leisure and social activities

When staying in Accra, there's a possibility to explore in the city but also travel outside of the city. While in the city, we went to different restaurants and visited museums. Since Accra is a coastal city, we also went to see the ocean. However, we did not go down to the beach to swim. We went out to different restaurants that played live music, which was great. One of them was called Zen Garden, and they have both food and drinks. The music was a mix of everything and went on for a few hours.

As for trips, I went to Cape Coast on a daytrip during my last weekend in Ghana. We went to the castle and Kakum national park. It was a lovely trip, and I would really recommend going there. It's not too far away from Accra, and it's possible to go over a day or stay even longer. Me and my friend also went to Busua for a weekend with a few other people. During our trip there we learned some Twi (local language in Ghana) and went for surfing lessons. This was about six hours away from Accra, and the roads were quite bad on our way there. But the trip was amazing!

As for getting to know other people we had a few other volunteers at the office we were sitting at. We usually just met at the office, but some days we went out for dinner or went together on trips. We were lucky to have other people at our office, because otherwise we did not meet a lot of people. Spontaneously I would say that it could be difficult to get in touch with people, but then again, we never really tried to reach out that much. We met a lot of people through our project and at the office, so for us it was a good balance. Every person that we met in Ghana was so so friendly and helpful! It is one of the best things during our trip.



Trip to Cape Coast



Workshop with Social Enterprise Ghana

Sustainability

For our flights to and from Ghana we added a fee for the environment. As for our trips in Ghana for the project we took taxis to our destinations, and that was because we could not use any other transportation. Since our project had the theme sustainable building and sustainable building materials, we can connect it to a few different Global Sustainable Development Goals. Such as goal 11 sustainable cities and communities and also goal 8 decent work and growth. Further, we had a close collaboration with Social Enterprise Ghana which focuses on a few other goals. Goal 5 gender equality was really important to them, as well as goal 10 reduce inequalities. In that way we got in contact with other sustainability goals, without having them in our actual project. We can see the importance of the sustainability goals when working with both EWB-SWE and Social Enterprise Ghana. Which is a rather important thing in the minor field study and for KTH as well.



Other recommendations and observations

My biggest recommendation is to start with the visa asap!! It was an unnecessary stress for us right before the trip just because we started our application late. It went well, and I think it will always work out, but you can really avoid unnecessary stress. Also, ENJOY!! It is a wonderful country with lovely people.



Our last presentation at Social Enterprise Ghana's office