

BLEISURE AND INFORMAL BUSINESS TOURISM IN HARARE, ZIMBABWE

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Abstract: Extant research on the concept of bleisure is mainly in the context of the Global North or relates to travellers from the Global North. This investigation is the first in the environment of the Global South to examine the bleisure activities among informal business tourists. Using a survey of 700 informal business tourists in Harare, Zimbabwe, the results show that the accommodation choices and the bleisure activities undertaken by these informal business tourists in Zimbabwe's capital city are markedly different to those reported in studies of business travellers from the Global North. Bleisure activities identified as significant are visits to friends/relatives, participation in religious activities, personal shopping and the enjoyment of sports, musical events and Harare's night-time economy.

Keywords: bleisure, business tourism, informal business tourism, informality, Global South

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INTRODUCTION

Bleisure and informal business tourism in Harare, Zimbabwe

Business tourism is a critical dimension of tourism development and in Africa focused mainly on large urban destinations (Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021a). Davidson (2019) maintains that after many years of under-representation and neglect in tourism scholarship there is an observed upturn in the volume of international literature which is devoted to business tourism. Unsurprisingly, the majority of academic writings on business tourism relate to urban tourism destinations in the Global North. The Global South business tourism literature is relatively new, despite its growing importance and the evolving nature of this sector. Matiza (2020: 115) avers that “within the context of emerging African business tourism destinations, there is a discernible dearth of research into business tourism in general and, more pertinently, the decision-making process of business tourists, when considering visiting African destinations”.

In recent years, however, there has appeared a burst of scholarship on aspects of business tourism in Africa (Donaldson, 2013; Mahlangu, 2022; Makoni and Rogerson, 2023; Matiza, 2020; Rogerson, 2015a, 2015b; 2019; Tichaawa, 2017; Welthagen et al., 2023; Zhou, 2021). Beyond issues relating to various aspects of formal business tourism there is an emergent literature concerning the phenomenon of *informal business tourism* which is acknowledged as a distinctive aspect of business tourism in the environment of the urban Global South (Rogerson and Letsie, 2013; Rogerson, 2015a, 2018; Rogerson and Rogerson, 2021b; Tichaawa, 2021).

The concept of informal business tourism moves beyond Eurocentric viewpoints in tourism studies building upon the mobilities approach to tourism from so-termed ‘emerging world regions’ (Cohen and Cohen, 2015a, 2015b). In urban sub-Saharan Africa the need to transcend Eurocentric perspectives on tourism is highlighted by the dominant presence of ‘informality’. Across much of contemporary Africa informality is the permanent condition for the majority of its urbanites and more broadly a defining feature of the landscape, politics and economy of urban Africa. The urban geographer Richard Grant (2024) points out that informality looms large in sub-Saharan Africa. Although the precise definition of the term ‘informality’ is contested it usually is applied to “a range of behaviours and practices that are not regulated or controlled by the state or formal institutions, including those related to income generation, service provision and settlements” (Chen et al., 2016: 336).

Within sub-Saharan Africa the majority of urban dwellers work outside of the formal economy, live in informal housing, pursue business and the making of livelihoods without the use of banks (Carmody et al., 2024; Grant, 2015). In African cities the informal economy therefore assumes a vital role in the everyday lives and livelihoods of residents (Grant, 2024). On current estimates the informal economy accounts for as much as 80.8 percent of all employment in urban Africa and it constitutes “a critical, vital source of livelihoods, consumer goods and services in Africa's cities” (Carmody et al., 2024: 93). It must be understood that the term ‘informal’ is conventionally understood as work or labour which is conducted outside of formal state regulations and tax systems. This said, it does not mean that such work is illegal or beyond the reach of the state “given that much of the urban informal economy operates in plain sight of the state and is by-and-large accepted as an essential provisioner of goods and services to consumers” (Carmody et al., 2024: 92). Arguably,

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because of its size and significance in urban Africa the informal economy must be an essential element of the sustainable development agenda for sub-Saharan Africa (Ibidunni et al., 2024).

Informality is one of the most distinctive traits of urban tourism in sub-Saharan Africa (Rogerson, 2015a). This is especially the case with business tourism in Africa, which is overwhelmingly dominated by *informal* rather than formal business travellers. In tourism scholarship Timothy and Teye (2005) were the first to highlight the mobilities of such traders and vendors in research on borderland spaces in West Africa. Their work sought to investigate these informal traders as a “form of business traveller that is unique to the developing world” (Timothy and Teye, 2005: 83) and to extend from a developing world perspective “the traditional views of business travel in tourism”. The phenomenon of informal business tourism includes a segment of international informal business travellers - cross-border traders - which are observed widely across much of urban sub-Saharan Africa, as well as an often little acknowledged component of *domestic* informal business tourists. Several studies recently have been conducted to shed fresh light on the importance and workings of informal business travellers in sub-Saharan Africa and especially of their operations in its largest urban centres (Makoni et al., 2023a, 2023b; Rogerson, 2015b; Tichaawa, 2017).

The aim in this paper is to examine one unexplored facet of the informal business tourism economy of an African city. The case study is Harare, Zimbabwe’s capital city, where there is an extensive economy of informal business tourism comprised of both communities of international cross-border shopper-traders as well as of domestic informal business tourists. In previous studies the nature of Harare as an African business city, its competitiveness as a destination for cross-border trading, the drivers and economic contours of these informal business tourists have been detailed (Makoni and Rogerson, 2023; Makoni et al., 2023a, 2023b). Building upon this research the objective in this paper is to unpack what is termed the ‘bleisure’ economy of informal business tourists.

In the Global North ‘bleisure’ is defined as activities undertaken when individuals combine leisure with professional business obligations whilst travelling as formal business tourists (Ezeuduji, 2024). In business tourism destinations Pinho and Marques (2021) identified that business trips often were combined with leisure activities and that the length of stay at a destination is extended beyond the business event or professional requirements so that visitors can know the locality and its attractions. The bleisure economy is the blurring of the borders between leisure and formal business travel, an issue attracting considerable interest in Northern tourism scholarship (Park, 2023). This study is a pioneer in the Global South environment in terms of examining the bleisure activities among *informal* business tourists – certainly the first such investigation in urban Africa. Two further sections of material are presented. The next section contextualises the research within a review of existing literature on bleisure. Attention then turns to urban Zimbabwe and to examine the findings which are extracted from 700 interviews conducted with cohorts of international and domestic informal business tourists in Harare.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The origin of the term ‘bleisure’ is attributed by most researchers to The Future Laboratory, one of Europe’s leading trend, brand and future consultancies (Tala et al., 2011). In 2009 this consultancy proposed the concept to capture the blurred boundaries between business and leisure travel (Tsaur and Tsai, 2023). The term reflects the nexus between work and tourism and is indicative of the changing nature of contemporary work practices and of shifts in the traditional work-life balance (Batala and Slevitch, 2024; Dragomir et al., 2021; Travis, 2023). The concept of bleisure involves the blending of the two forms of travel as travellers either extend a professional business trip, bring friends and family with them to enjoy the facilities at the destination of their business travel, or pursue leisure travel activities during the period of the business trip (Ezeuduji, 2024; Lichy and McLeay, 2018; Park, 2023; Tsaur and Tsai, 2023; Walia et al., 2023).

Although the concept of bleisure has emerged in the scholarly literature only relatively recently it is not a new phenomenon. Dragomir et al. (2021: 36) affirm that what they style as ‘bizcations’ “has been popular for several decades”. Ozdemir and Celebi (2023) reveal that people combining leisure activities with business travel has been documented for many years. Likewise, Tala et al. (2011: 236) observe that whilst the term bleisure appeared recently “the trend of incorporating leisure activities into business trips was noticed in the early 2000s, even late 1990s”. In a prescient study Davidson (2002) undertook an analysis of the type of business visitor most likely to extend a business trip for leisure purposes. According to Lichy and McLeay (2022: 307) some observers “would argue that we have always consumed bleisure in some shape or form but lacked the terminology – or were reluctant to admit taking time out for ourselves during a business trip”. Harris and Pressey (2021) challenge, however, the common assumption that business tourists are fundamentally different from leisure tourists. It is pointed out that business travellers routinely undertake leisure activities and commonly “piggy-back leisure activities with business” (Harris and Pressey, 2021: 2).

These authors consider that viewing business travellers as a distinct sub-group is problematic and that it is more useful to view them through the lens of ‘hybrid mobilities’ within which business travellers are positioned more accurately as ‘hybrid tourists’. Similarly, Bassyouny and Wilkesmann (2023) maintain that in a digitalized world the artificially created distinction between business and leisure travel appears increasingly outdated. Nevertheless, Lubbe (2022: 398) re-asserts the distinction between leisure and business travel and points to the complexity of defining business travel as “it often includes a touristic and leisure component which has given rise to the term ‘bleisure’”.

The segment of ‘bleisure’ is identified as one of the important trends for future tourism development in many destinations and for assisting recovery in a post-COVID-19 environment (López et al., 2023; Mercan and Sandika, 2024). Ünal and Özgürel (2021: 1) describe it as “an innovative tourism type”. According to Tsaur and Tsai (2023: 24) given its characteristics bleisure travellers have spatial and temporal freedom when they undertake work and leisure activities and as such it can be viewed as a kind of ‘transformational tourism’. It is suggested that bleisure can increase work efficiency as

individuals who are on business travel without family and friends can experience “social deformation” (Mercan and Sandika, 2024). By combining leisure activities and relaxation bleisure tourism can reduce the stresses often associated with business travel and more readily achieve a healthy work-life balance (Tsaur and Tsai, 2023). Leisure components can play an important role in business travel in terms of work-life balance and subjective well-being (Park, 2023; Park et al., 2024). Chung et al. (2020) pursued an investigation of the bleisure tourism experience chain and of how marketing practices are created to encourage business travellers to have better experiences and spend more funds beyond business events.

In one of the pioneer studies on bleisure it was observed that the existing literature largely overlooks travelers whose tourism motivations are initiated by business travel but incorporate non-business activities (Lichy and McLeay, 2018). Mercan and Sandika (2024) argue the concept of bleisure tourism requires much greater academic attention because of its positive impacts for business travellers, tourism and hospitality businesses, and service providers. Yet Tsaur and Tsai (2023: 22) contend that “empirical research on bleisure travel remains scant”. Batal and Slevitch (2024) assert in particular there is a paucity of research into the business travel experience. Lichy and McLeay (2022: 307) correctly identify that “debate in the academic literature is just starting to emerge”. In addition, these authors aver that whilst “scholars have mainly focused on international bleisure, bleisure can also involve combining domestic travel and leisure tourism” (Lichy and McLeay, 2022: 306). One systematic literature review of bleisure tourist motivations to visit leisure attractions published in 2022 sourced only ten articles (Sohaili et al., 2022). Extant research on the bleisure travel ‘experience’ conducted on travellers from the Global North suggests this segment “has received a strong boost, especially from Millennials” (Pinho and Marques, 2021: 346). Batal and Slevitch (2024) differentiate two subgroups of bleisure travellers. The first devotes a portion of the day to business and the remainder to leisure, often late afternoon and evening time. The second group opts to extend their stays before or after the business period in order to undertake leisure activities. Tala et al. (2011) and Travis (2023) note that business travel by Global North travellers is associated with such leisure activities as visiting spa resorts, skiing, golf and sightseeing excursions to local places of interest. Harris and Pressey (2021) add night-clubbing to the list of other hedonic activities pursued by many business travellers.

The rich research of Batal and Slevitch (2024) suggests that bleisure travellers tend to avoid one-time events such as concerts, sports events or festivals with fixed schedules as they might miss such events if business activities take longer than anticipated. Accordingly, bleisure travellers largely sought out “leisure activities that could be postponed and done at a later time if necessary” (Batal and Slevitch, 2024: 3). One recent Turkish study identified cultural exploration, personal planning and factors such as discovering local cuisine as well as visiting architectural attractions as motivators for participation in bleisure activities (Çulfaci et al., 2024). At trade fairs hosted in Greece a significant share of visitors were reported to be participating in bleisure activities for ‘fun-entertainment’ (Kourkourides et al., 2024). Extant findings point to a conclusion that bleisure travellers mainly embrace ‘short-time leisure activities’ because their geographic and time constraints did not permit them to devote a full day to other leisure activities (Ezeuduji, 2024).

The short-term activities included visits to local museums, parks and markets. Many bleisure travellers also were reported to search for ‘educational-based experiences’ that they might participate, such as learning about the destination, its people, city and culture (Batala and Slevitch, 2024: 4). Overall, the limited international literature primarily concentrates on formal business tourists, Northern bleisure travellers and their experiences. Minimal attention has been given to bleisure in what Rogerson and Rogerson (2021b) style as ‘the other half of urban tourism’, namely cities in the Global South. In one of the few bleisure studies conducted in a Global South environment Caicedo-Barreth et al. (2020) consider the potential of Guayaquil in Ecuador to benefit as a competitive destination for business travellers. These authors concluded there is a lack of competitiveness in Ecuador because of the limited supply of products directed to this market segment as well as lack of capacity of the local tourism sector to satisfy this market. Of note is that this Ecuador investigation centred on issues surrounding bleisure and the formal business tourist.

METHODS

The analysis draws from a recently completed large-scale investigation which involved semi-structured interviews with 300 international informal business tourists and 400 domestic informal business tourists in Harare for the purpose of either buying or selling goods in the city (Makoni, 2024). The interview research was undertaken during the period 2020-2022 and mainly conducted at the major bus terminals servicing the entry and departure points of international and domestic visitors to Harare. A convenience sampling approach was used to target respondents. In addition, during the initial data collection period, it became clear that a snowballing technique also could be used to add to the final data set that was collected. The choice of sampling approach was informed by the inability to extract a statistically representative population of informal business tourists and of their businesses in the city. Key issues researched in the survey included variously the reasons for engaging in informal business tourism, the socio-demographic profiles of the respondents, motivations for choosing Harare to conduct informal business, and challenges of their business operations. One sub-section of the survey sought to collect information on the accommodation choices of respondents and of the non-business activities which they undertook during their stay in Harare. It is the findings from this material which now are under scrutiny.

The Harare study findings

The informal business tourism economy of Harare must be understood as an integral part of the broader expansion of informality in Zimbabwe’s capital city (Bandaiko et al., 2021; Moyo and Gumbo, 2021; Rogerson, 2016). As is typical of many (if not most) large cities in sub-Saharan Africa informality is a distinguishing trait of daily economic life and the informal economy plays a predominant role in the production and consumption regimes of the city (Carmody et al., 2024:

92). Indeed, the informal economy has become the mainstay of the national economy and of the urban economy of Harare both in terms of its contributions to household income as well for poverty reduction (Chirisa et al., 2021). The groups of informal business tourists – both domestic and international – play a critical role in making available to consumers a supply of basic commodities which are either often unavailable or too costly in the city’s formal retail outlets (Makoni, 2024).

Within Harare’s economy of international informal business tourism the research disclosed two distinct sub-groups. First, are Zimbabwean cross-border traders who travel to Harare either to buy goods for resale in other countries in the region of Southern Africa or to sell in Harare goods that are purchased in neighbouring countries, mainly from South Africa. The strong historical linkages that exist between Zimbabwean cross-border traders and South Africa are documented in studies by Bamu (2017), Tawodzera and Chikanda (2017) and by Dzawanda and Matsa (2021). Second, are a cohort of cross-border traders from other African countries who travel to Harare as part of the activity of international informal business tourism. The study captured participants from 14 different countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including travellers as far as from Ghana, Nigeria and Gabon. The largest share (two-thirds) of the non-Zimbabwean cross-border traders were, however, drawn from surrounding countries, most importantly South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, Mozambique, and Zambia. The phenomenon of domestic informal business tourism is a vital aspect of the informal economy of Harare with business travellers in the city either bringing in goods for sale or purchasing goods (for resale outside Harare) at the informal and flea markets that have burgeoned across the city in recent years. In many cases the participants in domestic business tourism engage in a circular flow of movement bringing into city goods (often food) from small towns and the countryside for sale in the city and returning to the home area with a range of goods for sale which were purchased in Harare markets (Makoni, 2024).

Accommodating Informal Bleisure Travellers

For the overwhelming majority of Northern bleisure travellers an upmarket hotel, convention centre or resort represent the typical forms of accommodation that are used. Arguably, these would be the most common accommodation options irrespective of whether business travel is undertaken to a destination in the Global North or Global South. As a context for reviewing the bleisure activities of informal business tourists in the Global South it is instructive to examine the accommodation that is used in Harare by these travellers in order to appreciate the marked differences between them and the Northern formal business travellers. The responses obtained from the 700 informal business tourists interviewed in Harare reveal a different nature of accommodation choices to those of Northern business travellers. Multiple responses were given by the surveyed participants as to the type of accommodation they used when visiting Harare. All, however, stressed the need for securing budget low-cost (or minimal cost) forms of accommodation.

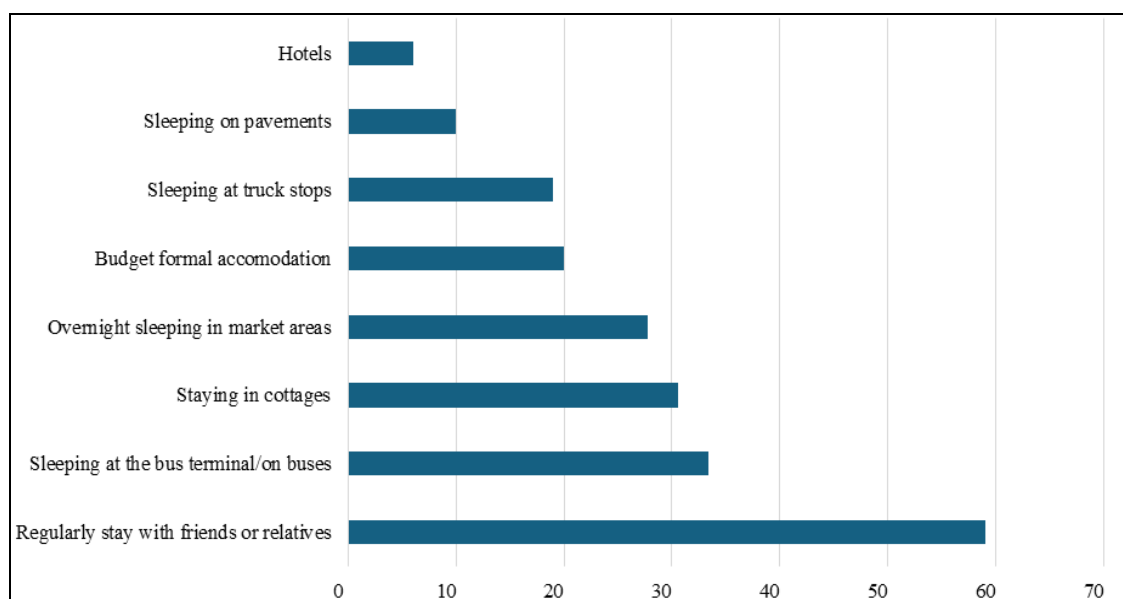


Figure 1. Accommodation Usage by Informal Business Tourists in Harare (Source: Authors)

Figure 1 shows that the most common situation was that on their visits to the city informal business tourists were hosted in the homes of friends and relatives. Sleeping at the bus terminal or on buses that were parked overnight in the terminal was the next most common arrangement used by one-third of travellers. Stays in cottages was preferred by 30 percent of respondents and followed by overnight sleeping in market areas – in particular at the flea markets. Cheap motels or guest houses – budget formal accommodation – was the choice for 20 percent of the survey participants.

The informality of sleeping at truck stops or night refuge on Harare’s street pavements also were options that were used by some travellers. In addition to the foregoing, smaller numbers (less than 10 percent) found accommodation either in hostels or stayed over with prostitutes whilst on visits to Harare. The overwhelming emphasis on securing low budget or minimal cost options for accommodation is evidenced by the finding that only 6 percent of the 700 survey interviewees regularly stayed in one of Harare’s formal hotels.

This broad picture of accommodation choices can be unpacked for the different groups of informal business tourists in Harare, namely the Zimbabwean cross-border traders, the domestic business tourists and the non-Zimbabwean cohort of international traders from various countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Not surprisingly, over two-thirds of the Zimbabwean business tourists – the domestic cohort as well as those engaged in international cross-border trade - were staying with friends and relatives on their regular visits to the capital city. Beyond hosting by local friends or relatives the Zimbabwean informal business tourists chose either budget motels or the minimal cost options of sleeping on buses or in bus terminals. Among the non-Zimbabwean cohort the share who were accommodated by Harare friends or relatives was only around 20 percent. For non-Zimbabweans the more common forms of accommodation were payment for cottages, guest houses, hostels or hotels. Of note is that it was among the group of international informal business tourists that several were sharing accommodation with local prostitutes in Harare. Further insight into the accommodation choices made by survey respondents is revealed by the detailed responses obtained in the research interviews. The importance of stays with local friends or relatives was a recurrent theme among Zimbabweans:

I have a relative in Harare who gives me accommodation during my time in Harare (Female fashion designer [Muzarabani] 32yrs). When I visit Harare, my boyfriend who stays there accommodates me. He has been supportive since I started this business and he is always fetching me from the bus station when I have a lot of stock, and he drops me off again when I am leaving Harare (Female fisherwoman [Norton] 32yrs).

A friend of mine offers me a place to sleep at her pharmacy. I have to get up very early before the business of the day starts so I can prepare and leave before my friends start work (Female fashion designer [Muzarabani] 32yrs).

My friends accommodate me because I want to save money. The good thing is that Zimbabweans are very friendly people and very accommodating, but you just have to also help with buying food items or small groceries to appreciate them (Zimbabwean [Kwekwe] female CBT 23yrs).

For those not staying with friends or relatives in the city the imperative to secure low budget or no cost forms of accommodation in Harare was striking among Zimbabweans and especially for the group of non-Zimbabwean cross-border traders. Typical responses were as follows.

I am always looking for cheap places to stay because I am coming to work not for holiday. I want to save money as much as I can (Angolan [Benguela] female CBT 28yrs).

There are lot of cheap places to rent in Harare, even there is Airbnb. I always try to get the cheap ones, the problem is the transport in Harare. Where there is cheap accommodation is far from the city centre and it's not easy to get transport early and also when you have luggage it becomes a big problem, So sometimes I just end up sleeping at the flea markets (Malawian [Mangochi] female CBT 33yrs).

I rent in a cheap place with other traders. It's very cheap that way (Mozambican [Maputo] male CBT 36yrs).

The reasons for sleeping in bus terminals or at the market places where traders do business were elaborated by several respondents.

The best option is sleeping at the bus rank when we arrive here. Most of the times the bus arrives here in the evening and everything is closed. So the bus drivers allow us to sleep in the buses with our luggage, then in the morning we start our business. In the evening if the business is not done, we either sleep in the flea markets or we come back to the bus stations and ask our drivers to let us sleep in the buses again (Zambian [Kitwe] female CBT 32yrs).

Accommodation is out of question to me, I just come here for business and to make money. I stay in the buses because now I know many drivers so I just go to the rank to see which bus will be ranking for the night and I ask them to let me sleep in there (Malawian [Lilongwe] female CBT 30yrs).

In this business, there is not time to think about where you are going to sleep, we just sleep here in the bus and when we wake up we just do face wash and go to hustle. We will sleep properly when we get back home (Tanzanian [Mwanza] male CBT 40yrs). I always sleep at the bus terminus because I cannot afford to rent, I need every cent I can get and I don't want to waste money on hotels (Male cobbler [Kadoma] 40yrs).

We spend the day in the city going around selling our products, then in the evening we ask the bus drivers of the parked buses to let us sleep in the buses. We normally buy them food or pay them small money for them to allow us to stay there. It is a very cheap way to get accommodation (Female vendor [Gweru] 31yrs).

Safety considerations were highlighted as important for several participants in choosing where and how to overnight in Harare whilst conducting their informal business activities.

I sleep at truck stops because it is safer for me and my goods there. I am not very concerned about accommodation, for as long as I get a safer place to sleep, even at garages, and get somewhere to freshen up in the morning, even in public toilets [Translated from Ndebele language] (Male herbalist [Gwanda] 30yrs).

I do not worry about accommodation, just a place to sleep during my days here. In most times I sleep here at the open spaces because it is the only place safe and available and where everyone can see (Male craftsman [Gweru] 35yrs).

I sleep at the flea market because it's accessible to everything. My customers come to me, and my goods are safe because I am close to the bus station and it is easier to carry my products when I am here when the police come (Male vendor [Gweru] 33yrs). There are many people who sleep here at the market place, it is safer also for me to stay here because I feel safe and protected. We protect each other here because we have same situations. We even have cross-borders that stay here with us (Male carpenter [Plumtree] 37yrs).

I organise with other people coming here to find where we can sleep, accommodation is not a problem. We just want a place where we can sleep, sometimes we sleep with our goods at the flea markets. It is not allowed because we can be arrested by the police if they see us, so we are always prepared to run away or to bribe (Female vendor [Mutare] 34yrs).

The above sets of qualitative responses highlight the relationships which exist between bus drivers and the communities of informal business travellers in Harare. In addition, they point to important relationships and bonds that develop between the traders themselves for their collective protection and for their businesses. Finally, in terms of accommodating informal business tourists in Harare the nexus of accommodation and prostitution was raised in a small number interviews. The choice to be accommodated by prostitutes in Harare is disclosed in the following responses.

Many times I come here I sleep over at a prostitute's place. So how they charge, it's between US \$ 10-15 for a short time, and if you want to sleep over you pay about 30 dollars or more. It's all about how you negotiate with them. But you have to be clever because they charge you based on how you look. If you show her you have money they charge high. But whatever you do you must make sure you pay because they will sort you out...

And the thing is most men are buying prostitutes and they are even regulars of some prostitutes who even act as their wives when they go sleep over there. They cook for you and wash your clothes, it all depends on how you pay them. I am a regular also here. My prostitute loves me very much and she does everything for me when I am here. When I have enough money we even go to the club together (Zambian [Lusaka] male CBT 43yrs).

I like to sleep at prostitutes' houses because I know my money comes with more benefits than just going to sleep alone in the guest house. They even cook for us and wash our clothes. The prostitutes here are different from the ones in my country. Here they know their business and I am not ashamed with walking around with them because they have dignity sometimes you never know that it's a prostitute (South African [Polokwane] male CBT 41yrs). In addition, some women engage in prostitution as a 'second hustle' book in rooms at a brothel during their stay in Harare.

Accommodation is not a problem when I am here. You know I am a prostitute, so I stay in the brothel where I work here in Harare. I have to call them when I am coming so they prepare my room. I stay for at least two weeks here doing this business, and we pay rent per week this business is good here than in Kwekwe. I use the money I get to buy things I will go and sell in Kwekwe [Translated from Shona Language] (Female prostitute [Kwekwe] 29yrs).

Taken as a whole the above findings concerning the accommodation preferences and options of informal business tourists in Harare are clearly radically different to those of the usually well-resourced (formal) business traveller from the Global North. Informality and business travel are associated with the imperative for securing accommodation at minimal cost and with due regard to safety considerations. The significant role of VFR hosts for informal business travellers is evident from the record of Harare.

The bleisure activities of Harare's informal business travellers

In view of the marked differences in accommodation between formal business travellers in the Global North and our case study of Harare informal business tourists, it is not surprising that major differences exist also in 'bleisure' activities. The Harare findings emerge from the responses given by 700 informal business tourists of their 'non-business' activities undertaken whilst visiting the city. Multiple responses were offered by survey participants on the 'bleisure' activities they pursued alongside doing business in Zimbabwe's capital city.

The results overall point overwhelmingly to visits to friends and relatives as the most widely undertaken activity. In total 72 percent of the informal business tourists undertook such visits, a finding that parallels the role of Harare residents as hosts for accommodating informal business travellers. The next most significant 'bleisure' pursuits - each accounting for almost 50 percent of the sample - were doing personal shopping, enjoying nightlife entertainment activities (such as clubbing) and participation in an array of different religious activities which included attending various churches and visiting prophets and pastors. Religion plays a crucial role in many African communities, shaping social and cultural structures (Stambach, 2020). Different churches across the continent not only provide spiritual guidance but also serve as crucial centers for education, health services, and social support (Öhlmann et al, 2020). Another popular activity for 29 percent of the sample was attendance at sports events in Harare, especially of football matches. Other activities that engaged between 10 and 20 percent of the informal business tourists were sightseeing to places of interest (16 percent), music events and festivals (13 percent), visiting traditional healers (12 percent) and enjoying the sexual services on offer from local prostitutes (10 percent).

Some variations were observed between the three different sub-groups of informal business travellers. The largest group of domestic informal business tourists were heavily committed to religious activities, visits to friends and relatives, shopping, enjoying Harare's nighttime economy and visiting sports events. For Zimbabwean cross-border traders VFR activities were overwhelmingly dominant followed by personal shopping, clubbing and supporting musical events. Similar findings were observed for the non-Zimbabwean traders - as many as two-thirds visited friends or relatives in Harare - 51 percent participated in the night-time economy and 38 percent in personal shopping. This international cohort of informal business tourists is distinctive for recording the highest participation (one-third of the sample) in local sightseeing and visiting local places of interest in the city. Of all the different forms of bleisure pursued by Harare's informal business tourists the visits to local places of interest is the only close alignment with findings reported on the bleisure activities by the more well-resourced travellers from the Global North.

Further details relating into the nature of the bleisure economy of informal business tourism in Harare emerged from the interview responses that were collected. Notable were the findings in relation to religion. Outside of business operations going to a local church or visits to prophets or pastors was widespread especially amongst domestic business travellers. A growing interest was observed of people travelling for spiritual deliverance, a trend that has resulted in religious figures such as pastors, evangelists, prophets as well as African apostolic churches becoming very popular in Zimbabwe. This aspect of religious visits was also found to be tied to the fact that many informal sector domestic

tourists as participants indicated that they engage in some form of spiritual consultation before undertaking their journeys to Harare. But the importance of religious activities was not confined only to local business travellers as signalled by responses from South African cross-border traders.

I am always coming here around the weekends so that I can go to church. In Harare there are so many apostolic churches and prophets who can help you with your issues. So you can go to any of the apostolic churches, but you need someone from Zimbabwe to just help you find the right one, when you get there, a prophet may just point at you and tell you what is happening in your life and tell you all the problems that you are facing. They also tell you what to do and they can help you with water that they pray for and ask you to bath with it. I love this because we are living in a spiritual world and fighting with the spirits we don't know, but these Prophets help a lot that why I always visit them every time I come to Harare (South African [Gqeberha] female CBT 29yrs). The Zimbabwean pastors are very good and their churches have English translations, and they make everything interesting in their churches with their worship songs and dances. It's good to attend their churches (South African [Cape Town] female CBT 33yrs).

Since I heard of the Vapostori [African Apostolic prophets] in Harare I always make sure that I visit them before I go back. They really help and they don't ask for any money (South African [Gqeberha] female CBT 29yrs).

Several respondents asserted the significance of personal shopping as a non-business activity and made clear the differentiation made between shopping for purposes of business and shopping for pleasure.

My business is when I am buying things I want to sell at home. I do that and finish. Then I start window shopping or shopping for my personal things when I have free time before I leave Harare (Nigerian [Lagos] female CBT 38yrs).

What I mean is that when I am shopping I am just like any customer around here looking around for just anything to pick, which is different from the things I buy for my business (South African [Johannesburg] female CBT 30yrs).

When I go to the flea market, I am buying medicines and tools that I want to go and sell in Malawi. That is part of business and I have a budgeted money for buying those. Even sometimes I use a list of the things I must buy for business. Then when I am shopping I am using the personal money not of the business to buy my personal stuff. So I can go to Joina City [referring to one of the popular malls in Harare] to buy shoes or shades [referring to sunglasses] for me (Malawian [Lilongwe] female CBT 26yrs). Harare's vibrant nightlife, music concerts and sports events were highlighted also as an enjoyable non-business activity whilst in the city. International cross-border traders – especially from South Africa – indicated the cheaper cost of such activities as compared to home.

I go clubbing when I am in Harare. There is a good vibe and the people are fun loving, also its cheaper here (South African [Durban] female CBT 24yrs).

I love the music concerts in Zimbabwe, they are the best and the musicians are big entertainers. I heard that in two days there is a concert at Rainbow Towers and I think its Winky D performing, I will attend the concert because I love Winky D's songs and I want to see him live (Zimbabwean [Gweru] female CBT 27yrs).

Yes, of course it's interesting to go around and enjoy doing other things, and Harare is very cheap and you can do a lot of things. Yesterday I went to the stadium to watch one of the league games and I think I will go again if I am still here next week (South African [Johannesburg] male CBT 30yrs).

CONCLUSION

Research conducted on informal business tourism in African cities contributes a new dimension to what Rogerson and Rogerson (2021b) style as the 'other half of urban tourism', namely that of destinations in the urban Global South. This investigation is the first in the environment of the Global South to examine the bleisure activities among *informal* business tourists. It has been demonstrated that both the accommodation choices and the bleisure activities undertaken by these informal business tourists in Zimbabwe's capital city are markedly different to those reported in studies of business travellers from the Global North. In Harare the groups of informal business tourists economize on accommodation costs and opt for low-budget or minimal cost forms of accommodation in the city, most importantly staying with friends and relatives, or sleeping at bus terminals, on buses or at market places. Bleisure activities identified as significant are visits to friends/relatives, participation in religious activities, undertaking personal shopping and enjoying sports, musical events and Harare's night-time economy. Further research is merited on other cities in the Global South in order provide a broader base of material on the bleisure activities of informal business travellers.

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