
Experiencing Wildlife on Safari in Botswana

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This paper describes the experience of self-drive visitors to game parks in Botswana, from a goal oriented perspective; i.e. motives influence behaviour to gain underlying benefits. It also ascertains if the desired outcomes were achieved in order to understand the setting, or product design, from a visitor perspective. The decision making process guided the approach. The results may be used to improve the product offering, management and marketing of the attraction, and sustainability of this unique renewable resource. A qualitative survey was conducted and experiences observed. The most important motivations were nature, adventure, escape and mega-fauna and they were not disappointed at that. The greatest disappointment was management of the infrastructure. It is suggested that that Botswana invest in the development of staff and that promotion material should not only emphasize specific species; the Big 5. The unique attributes of the destination should be used to differentiate it and provide the benefits visitors are seeking.

Introduction

Travelling for pleasure as opposed to necessity, assumes that there is some experience out there which makes travel worth while (Cohen, 2004:6-18). Cohen argues that different kinds of people desire different modes of touristic experiences which is functional in relieving tension built up in the individual created by his/her values. It is essentially a temporary reversal of everyday activities which spans the range between the desire for mere pleasure to the quest for meaning and authenticity. While sights/sites have been the mainstay of tourism, differences in tourist values and the benefits they seek, provide opportunities to develop new attractions and experiences (Craik, 2004:40). Experience has become a new commodity in the tourism production process (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003:39). It usually results in some kind of encounter with "the other" which could be space, people, history, nature, or the tourist with himself, and through what the tourist engage in, he/she makes sense of the world (Crouch, Aronsson & Wahlström, 2004:281). However, what the tourist pursues in terms of experience is not necessarily realised. The purpose of this paper is to elicit what the tourist on safari pursues, through eliciting what he/she experience or do, and if the trip was worth while and different. March and Woodside (2005:918) say that research on planned strategy is suited to gain knowledge on how and why arriving tourists come to a specific destination, and research on realizing strategy, is suited for learning benefits realised and for studying post-experience attitudes and intentions, and this methodology, which resembles the consumer behaviour cycle, was found most suited for this study.

Wildlife tourism

Reynolds and Braithwaite (2001:258, 260) define wildlife tourism as "the experience of wildlife by tourists, and an area of overlap between nature-based tourism, ecotourism, consumptive use of wildlife, rural tourism, and human relations with animals". Since there is a wide range of possible experiences and wildlife human interactions it is suggested that these be examined in order to ascertain their attraction to tourists and their effect on wildlife (Björk, 2000, Bulbeck, 2005, Newsome, Dowling & Moore, 2005 and Okello, Manka & D'Amour, 2008). This overlap or coalescence in markets and concepts is confirmed by Buckley (2000:438) who uses the term Neat tourism; that is nature, eco- and adventure tourism, to describe the sector where nature and adventure are the product's primary attraction.

Buckley (2000:31-32) argues that a combination of social factors has led to sudden and rapid growth to a sector, at least the size of a quarter of the total tourism industry in developed countries such as the United States of America (USA) and Australia, and more in developing countries, with most occurring in and around national parks. In 2001 over 82 million USA residents 16-years and older participated in fishing, hunting, or wildlife watching (Bilgic, Florkowski; Yoder & Schreiner, 2008:771-782) and in Kenya wildlife-based tourism roughly added 12 percent to the country's Gross Domestic Product

(GDP) (Okello et al., 2008:571). Wildlife-viewing tourism also contributes to the GDP of many southern African countries (Barnes, 2001:146). Fringe areas of the Okavango Delta in northern Botswana offer great wildlife-viewing opportunities, and are of the most visited tourist destinations in Botswana (Mladenov, Gardner, Flores, Mbaiwa, Mmopelwa & Strzepek, 2007:409). Tourists are generally transported to safari camps by small plane or four-wheel drive vehicles (4WD) from Maun to *Moremi Game Reserve* and from Kasane to the *Chobe National Park*. Often visitors are self-driven to public campsites or part of an overland tour. The number of visitors to the Okavango Delta is estimated at 80 700 for 2001-2002 and their average annual tourist spending on safaris in the Delta calculated at US\$90.5 million (Mladenov et al., 2007:414).

On the other hand Uriely (2005:209) argues that it is not necessary to go away on holiday as tourist experiences are available in the routine of everyday life, for example through virtual reality displays in the comfort of one's home, and this seems to threaten future demand. In addition the popularity of wildlife experiences may substantially decline, as the demography of the aging population changes.

Tourism behaviour: motivation, expectation and experience

From a planning and marketing perspective it is important to understand the consumer behaviour of ecotourists (Diamantis, 1998:515, Gnoth, 2004:284 and Ibrahim & Gill, 2005:178). The tourist chooses certain behaviour for its expected results; and tends to think about products in terms of positive and negative consequences also known as benefits and risks. In the words of Joubert and Mabunda (2007:42), consumers learn to choose products containing attributes (means) that are instrumental to achieve their desired consequences (ends). Gilbert and Abdullah (2004:112) proved that holiday taking did improve tourists' life satisfaction or well-being significantly, when compared to persons who did not go a holiday. This paper considers both the urge, or energisers for the behaviour, sometimes referred to as the enduring motives or push factors from within the tourist, as well as the attributes or characteristics of the attraction/destination, sometimes referred to as the situational or pull factors (Gnoth, 1997; Klenosky, 2002). Buckley (2007:1428) states that the most neglected part of recreation research may be the actual composition of an activity; in this case the experience.

The tourist *behaviour cycle* of stimulation, motivation, intention formation, actual behaviour and experience, and subsequent evaluation of consequences will be used as framework to describe the safari experience, as was mentioned above. Firstly it is necessary to elicit what motivated the visitor to travel to have that experience and then if the expected experience materialised. Push factors tend to be good predictors of satisfaction and repeating the trip (Gomez-Jacinto, Martin-Garcia, & Bentiche-Haud'Huyze, 1999:1026). Satisfaction with travel experiences contributes to destination loyalty which is reflected in visitor's intentions to revisit the destination and in their willingness to recommend it to friends and relatives (Chi & Qu, 2008:632-633). Destination image plays a central role in this behaviour cycle. For example national parks have a significant brand identity and are thus much more attractive than a conservation area (Reinius & Fredman, 2007:840). It is perceived by Westerners to focus on protection of nature and the environment and suggest aspects of tranquillity, inspiring and beautiful (Cochrane, 2006:986). However, Del Bosque and San Martín (2008:566) found that satisfaction is not influenced by image, but by expectations, supporting the findings of March and Woodside (2005:918).

Wildlife-tourism seems to generally lack information on the user in terms of motivation, expectation and satisfaction, especially for African destinations. Relevant studies that could be found will be used for comparative purposes and to build on the existing body of knowledge. These are; Akama and Kieti (2003:73-81), Beh and Bruyere (2007:1468-1469), Bresler (2007:175), Fannin (2007), Joubert and Mabunda (2007:39-55), and Kepe (2001:).

The purpose of the study

The purpose of this paper is to describe the experiences of self-drive visitors to two wildlife rich game parks in northern Botswana, to elicit what they pursued and if the outcome was successful. Because of the relationship between expectations and satisfaction (Del Bosque & San Martín, 2008:566; March & Woodside, 2005:918) it was necessary to establish tourist's ideal holiday which is reflective of their motivation, and expected experience outcome. The findings may assist destination managers in positioning wildlife safaris against the benefits tourists are seeking, and promote an appropriate image. This may contribute to increased visitation (Chi & Qu, 2008), because prior experience is a strong predictor of activity participation patterns (Lehto, O'Leary & Morrison, 2004:813).

Research method and profile of wildlife tourists on safari

It is an exploratory, descriptive, multi-method study, which is predominantly qualitative in nature. The methods used were a literature search, content analysis of documents, participant observation, and interviews with groups and individuals at campsites. A structured questionnaire with closed and open-ended questions was used. The universe was all self-drive safari visitors camping in the *Moremi Game Reserve* and the *Chobe National Park* in northern Botswana during the first two weeks in April 2006. The majority of the interviews were held at *Savuti* and *lhaha* public camps. It was a convenience sample, and the composition is reflected in table 1. Collectively these travellers spent 843 nights over a period of fourteen days in this area.

Table 1: Composition of the sample

Country of origin	No.	%	Province in SAfrica	N o.	%	Language	No.	%	Age group	Gender Male/fem	Total	%
SAfrica	70	75	Gauteng	65	95	Afrikaans	68	73	Children	5 8	13	14
Germany	12	13	WCape	3	3	English	13	14	Students	1 2	3	3
USA	11	12	Limpopo	2	2	German	12	13	25 to 40	11 12	23	25
									41 to 54	19 12	31	33
									55+ older	12 11	23	25
Total	93	100		70	100		93	100		48 45	93	100

Three quarters (75%) of the tourists came from the neighbouring state South Africa (SA), and almost all (95%) from its most densely populated province of Gauteng. Respondents travelled in groups with family and friends, and were Afrikaans (73%). The sample included all age groups with more mature adults (33% was between 41 and 54 years of age) and an almost equal split between males (48 or 51.6%) and females (45 or 48.4%). To ascertain if the sample selection was not biased, it was compared with the register of visitors through the *Sidudu* gate, from 1-13 April. They were very similar. The origin of these visitors (230) was; SA (145 or 63%), Europe (23 or 10%), North America (22 or 9%), UK (7 or 3%), New Zealand and Australia (2 or 1%) and Botswana (13%).

Findings

Respondents were first asked open ended questions such as why they go on holiday, what is their ideal holiday, why they came to Botswana, not anywhere else, what is the attraction, as it is more likely to uncover the benefits they are seeking, than when they are presented with a list of product attributes to rank or rate in order of importance (Botschen, Thelen & Pieters, 1999:38-42). They were then asked to rank selected attributes, to disclose prior knowledge, and to elaborate on aspects where their expectations were not realised.

Push and pull factors to ideal holiday destinations

The reasons most frequently given for going away on holiday were; to get away from everyday routine, to relax for a balance, to broaden experiences and learn more, and to be with family and friends, in this order. Respondents revealed the consequences or benefits of the safari; and not the attributes of the destination. Examples of responses are: "we need to get away from the rat race, at home we only work, we cannot always look after others, we are tired and want to switch off". Other responses were; "to

have different experiences at different places, we want to be in nature, we want to get away from push button conveniences, so that we can appreciate it when we get back, we want to see everything fresh again; from a new perspective, we want to be alone to spend time with family and friends". In terms of visitor motivation they may be classified in the escapists cluster identified by Beh and Bruyere (2007:1469).

As mentioned before, the ideal holiday is reflective of visitor expectations and satisfaction. It would seem as if places far away from everyday life and other people, where you have time to look after yourself and not your keys, time to think and meditate, with neither telephone nor television, were most attracting. Outdoor life was the ideal holiday for respondents, especially if they could see animals in their own environment and hear the sounds they made at night. In terms of the higher order values driving the decision to visit a wilderness area these motivations may be classified in the benefit segmentation of 'Personal well-being' and 'Quality of life', of the Hierarchical Value Map described by Joubert and Madunda (2007:51). Even though, water, the sea, beautiful beaches and white sands, as well as mountains were mentioned as ideal holiday destinations, nature escapes in the bush had more pulling power in terms of frequency of visits, because it was not perceived to be as busy as at the sea. Respondents liked places that held the promise of a different experience, such as surprising behaviour of wild animals. The ideal holiday was a balance between luxuries, and roughing it. Females also liked to be pampered in five star luxury. Respondents were explorers who preferred touring to staying at one place. Value for money was important too.

The attraction for wildlife tourists of going on a self-drive safari

A funnelling approach lead to the third question; why respondents decided to come to Botswana, why nowhere else, and what was the greatest attraction. They said; what made it unique was the abundance of wildlife in a genuine unspoilt wilderness, yet accessible. Some of the comments were: "here is no fences, no camp gates, very few campsites, more freedom, you can drive off the roads, not like in the Kruger National Park (KNP), it is less travelled, it is very quiet, the isolation, and this is not available in SA".

The dire need for solitude, and to experience magic moments, were other important push factors. This was strongly associated with the privileged of being there. In addition, a feeling of spirituality was evident. One group said; "the wilderness is the last genuine churches". Many used the words adventure and unknown. They enjoyed over-landing, and driving through the sand and mud with a 4WD. The vehicles were status symbols and a motivator to go on safari. A sense of self esteem, of superiority, was also evident with comments like; "ordinary guys go to the KNP, because I can afford to, not everyone can, I have the right vehicle". The fact that Botswana was safer than Mozambique and Zimbabwe was also mentioned as decision criteria. The findings validates that of Reinius and Fredmann (2007:850), that tourists are attracted to protected areas to experience nature, peacefulness and silence.

Importance of expectations form a self-drive safari visit to Botswana

To confirm the response from the open ended questions, tourists were asked to indicate the importance to them, of 15 statements describing wildlife viewing with reference to this safari, on a scale of one to five where five denoted very important and one not at all. The starting point was rotated. A summary of the findings is reflected in table 2 in percentage format.

Table 2. Importance of possible expectations from a safari to Botswana

Expectations from a safari trip to Botswana	Not at all important↔Very important					%
	1	2	3	4	5	
Be able to relax and forget about work or home				14	36	97 1
Witness unusual behaviour of animals; learn something new				14	36	97 1

A sense of being alone with only a few visitors; quietness				19	81	96.2
Yet, a safe environment/ no crime			5	19	76	94.3
Spend time with people sharing similar interests			10	14	76	93.3
Value for money, not being exploited	5			24	71	91.4
Contributing to conservation; keep nature unspoilt			14	24	62	89.5
Be amongst the animals and experience a feeling of danger		5	9	24	62	88.6
Diversity of animal species			10	47	43	86.7
Exotic or charismatic animals like the Big 5			10	47	43	86.7
Basic camping amenities, unlike home, do everything self			24	29	47	84.7
Spectacular scenery			29	24	47	83.8
Diversity of plant species	5		29	52	14	74.3
Buy souvenirs or art made by local people	34	33	14	19		43.6
Civilized infrastructure like at home & being spoilt by staff	57	19	24			33.3

The three most important factors for tourists were to be able to relax and forget about work or home, and to witness unusual behaviour of animals to learn something new; both with a total rating of 97.1%, and a sense of being alone with only a few visitors or quietness with a rating of 96.2%. The two least important factors were a civilized infrastructure like at home and being spoilt by staff, with a rating of 33.3%, and to buy souvenirs or art made by local people (43.6%). The ranking did validate the findings in the open ended questions discussed above. Visitors were also probed to add items to the list, for construct and content validity purposes, and a lively discussion followed on both expectations and experiences. Each factor will now be discussed independently, in order of the richness of the responses they elicited.

- Everybody had something to say about the requirement of **spectacular scenery**; this is in the eyes of the beholder; "It could be anything as long as it was a good specimen; every part of nature had it own

appeal; one at a time". "It could be rocks, hills or a mountain, desolated or inhospitable like the *Richtersveld*, wide open spaces and barren like the *Kalahari* or a savannah, salt pans or the flat landscape of the *Makgadikgadi*, even monotonous sand; the one was not superior to the other". The sun set, stars and rivers were mentioned by many tourists, and trees came up frequently. They may be big, even dry, or a pristine example of a specific species such as a beautiful Camelthorn tree. In Botswana the silence, the bush, the wilderness, the delta and river, as well as the abundance of animals and birds was spectacular, especially to see an elephant swimming. According to the study done by Joubert and Mabunda (2007:51) the *attributes* of scenery, vast natural area, nature, wilderness, and unspoilt, result in the *consequences* of tranquillity, solitude, secluded, privacy, peace of mind and ultimately satisfy the *values* of personal well being and quality of life.

- The **diversity of fauna and flora** fell in the same category as the scenery; each had its own appeal; "As long as they were healthy and a good representation of what can be expected of the particular habitat". "It was the combination that mattered". "Seeing it must trigger a flow of adrenaline". It was also mentioned that expectations depended on the purpose of the visit. "If you go to a lion park to see only lions, or want to hunt springbuck sameness was fine. That is what is expected, but not in the wilderness, where a fragile ecosystem depends on many species and a tiny little flower has its unique support role to fulfil".
- To experience **exotic or charismatic animals** like the *Big 5* was quite something. (Big 5 denotes elephant, lion, leopard, buffalo and rhinoceros and are the five most dangerous animals to hunt on foot because they are aggressive when wounded). Seeing them caused an adrenaline rush, but it was not considered essential to SA respondents. It was suggested that it be extended to be the big ten. To see the rare sable [swartwitpens] or water-buffalo were equally strong pull factors, and to spot a snake or rare bird caused an adrenaline rush. However, to hear an elephant pass your tent at night and see its enormous footprints the next morning; to live amongst the animals in their territory was the ultimate draw card for South Africans. How many animals you saw, and what new things you saw every day, in other words, if it was proliferate was important. Tourists from SA were inextricably linked to nature, they returned time and again to witness something they have not seen before and learn something new. "To see a chameleon, a very old tortoise, a red lechwe or puku, or the sitatunga walking on the leaves, a rare bird or even a fish eagle, were equally important than seeing an elephant". When tourists saw a bird unknown to them such as the jakana, pigmy-geese or a heron (squacco) they would make notes, study their own reference books and consult with friends for confirmation of identification.
- With respect to **safety**, tourists from SA were in unison that they were not afraid of wild animals; they were knowledgeable about their behaviour and possible danger, were cautious, alert, and behaved responsibly. However, some admitted that they wanted to experience a few scary moments. Because of the vulnerability of campers, they were united about zero tolerance for crime. This was one of the reasons they preferred to camp in Botswana as opposed to lawless SA; camping at Port St Johns were mentioned as an example. But a few respondents said it was changing. In Maun they felt uneasy, and at *Ihaha*, park rangers warned them that people from Namibia drove down the Chobe River with small boats to steal from visitors camping on the Botswana side of the banks. Only one group associated safety with medical care, and said they took out additional medical insurance and carefully selected the contents of their first aid box.
- Respondents were not quite sure how to respond to the statements about a **civilized infrastructure and basic amenities**. Many females said: "it all depends". Self-drive visitors on safari want to camp in the bush, as close as possible to nature, preferably under big trees on a flat clean surface, far away from strangers. They would rather make the people with them happy than have others doing things for them. A sophisticated infrastructure in the wilderness was superfluous. Amenities had to be different from home, yet a hot shower and ice cubes would be appreciated. Tourists brought along their own amenities, even showers. Their only expectations from the park were fire wood, clean water, serviced rubbish bins and properly maintained ablution blocks; especially toilets. It must be mentioned that some respondents took a break for a day or two, to stay in a luxury lodge at Kasane or Victoria Falls, to be spoilt, to wash off the dust, and for the children to have an ice cream, and swim. These are *attributes* or characteristics of the destination classified by Joubert and Mabudu (2007:48) as camp appearance and accommodation leading to the *consequences* of safety and pride, and ultimately to the more abstract *value* of self esteem.
- To **get away** from the noisy, polluted, crime ridden Gauteng was a prime push factor. Not to be reachable by e-mail or cell-phone, not to be concerned about the news, and get away from the constant pressures imposed on them by people, were strong motivators. Tourists on safari did not want to hear

the noise of a generator or radio. The desire to have time to think, relax and build relations with friends that mattered, made them get into their 4WDs and drive far, far away. It was quite obvious that they were like minded, functioned as teams and spent many hours socialising. They considered work around the camp, driving to seek and find animals, as relaxing and spoiling themselves. These were done voluntary, no instructions were required, almost like bees in a hive. It may be necessary to mention that people do not leave their deep-rooted habits at home, but take them along on holiday and participate in similar activities (Brey & Lehto, 2007:173; Carr, 2002:975).

- **Value for money**, not being exploited, and making a **contribution to conservation** created lively discussions, and a consumer surplus was evident. Everybody was willing to put their hands deep into their pockets to maintain this paradise. Some tourists were not price sensitive when on holiday; they felt "to experience this atmosphere is invaluable, and it is such a privilege, no price tag can be put to it". On the other hand, the perception of being overcharged were held, that the cost was getting prohibitive, and they did not see evidence of money going back into conservation or the infrastructure. Road maintenance was appalling; facilities management non existent, reservation information not properly kept, and administration open to bribery.
- The majority of SA visitors showed now interest in **buying souvenirs** or art made by local people. They either had boxes full at home or no place to carry it along, or considered them to be overly expensive in comparison to prices in SA; "it costs four times more here". If they bought souvenirs it would be purely to help local people. However, overseas tourists enjoyed the local culture; the encounter with bushmen/San.
- As mentioned above, tourists were asked to add any other items they considered important deliverables. **Lack of information** was added by 60 percent of the respondents. Self-drive tourists required road maps, adequate sign posting and a manual on how to prepare for a safari trip. A GPS (global positioning system) was essential to find your way, but inadequate because of insufficient guiding points; some tourists got hopelessly lost. Park authorities must also be able to advise tourists when roads are inaccessible in the rainy season.
- **Professional management** was expected. Even though tourists felt people from Botswana were generally friendly and helpful, the state of the ablution facilities and road maintenance was considered shocking. It was exciting to get stuck in the mud or sand, but it must be possible to get out. The fragile roads should not be used by very heavy trucks which caused irreparable damage. Examples of overbooking were cited, booking confirmation unobtainable, and administrative staff seemed to be open to bribery. Some tourists expected more **convenience facilities** along the way from SA to Botswana.

Knowledge about wildlife and nature

Since knowledge, or ignorance, profiles the visitor and elicit expectations and possible satisfaction, respondents were asked to disclose their knowledge about nature, and to rate it on a scale of one to ten. This varied from as little as three for international tourists to ten for some tourists from SA, meaning that they knew almost all the animals, birds and trees of the area, but not all the other plants. This is not surprising given that the respondents included a former conservationist, a zoologist, a horticulturist, a registered big game hunter, a forester, a couple that was dairy farmers and four couples owning game farms in SA; and family and friends with them had often been at these farms. These respondents could identify grass types, knew the nutritional value of plants and diagnosed the veldt conditions. On average the rating was seven, and the most frequently given rating was eight, which can be ascribed to them possessing a variety of reference books on fauna and flora, especially on wild animals, birds and trees. The three outdoor educational magazines mostly read were *Weg*, *Getaway*, and the *National Geographic* in that order. Respondents also watched the *National Geographic* television (TV) channel and *50/50*, an educational nature TV programme in SA.

What were wildlife tourists on self-drive safari ignorant about?

On the question what visitors were ignorant about, there was nothing much to report by repeat visitors, but disappointments. All but 15 of the 93 visitors had been to Botswana before. For example, some "did not expect the deterioration of the facilities to be so extensive after a lapse of only two years". Repeat visitors found the conditions of the roads to be worse than expected, and surprised that officials were not informed. People in Botswana were generally expected to be very friendly and helpful, which had not always been the case.

Overseas visitors learned a lot about animal behaviour and a genuine wilderness. Their ignorance resulted in pleasant surprises. Some first time visitors to the area did not expect to come so close to so many wild animals. It seemed as if the animals trusted them. Animals looked them straight into the eye and proceeded with what they were busy doing without moving away as if they expected no danger, sometimes even fearlessly walking towards visitors as if visitors were not intruding. This was contrary to the behaviour of wildlife in game parks in SA. Newcomers did not expect to be so vulnerable. They now know that one cannot go on safari on your own, that you literally have to take everything along, and that tourist information is nowhere to be found. They did not expect to find so few people, and that roads would just end without any signposting. First time visitors did not realise that the water puddles in the road would be such an obstacle, and that it would take so long to conquer 40 kilometres.

The most disappointing experience of wildlife tourists on safari

Tourists were asked to share their most disappointing experience with the researcher for triangulation purposes. It was evident that this can be attributed to poor management, the state of neglect of the park facilities and infiltrating corruption. Unfortunately this was perceived, even by overseas respondents, to be the case with everything managed by the government in Botswana, and for all SADEC countries (neighbours to SA). Officials did not seem to take pride in their work. Their response to queries or requests was slow. For example, at a border post visitors were expected to tediously fill in forms in duplicate without providing them with facilitating carbon paper. At the *Kazungula* border post about 100 trucks had been waiting for two weeks to pass the confluence of the Chobe and Zambezi Rivers on a ferry. Respondents mentioned that game ranging and wildlife conservation were recent career developments and inappropriately propagated in Botswana, it was generally looked down upon. Respondents said only when in private hands were products/ services perceived to be appropriately managed in Botswana.

Everybody was keen to share their disappointments; dissatisfaction, thus lead to negative word-of-mouth. One group was furious that their meat was confiscated at the *Kazungula* border post even though they had a permit, and another testified that unless you asked for change when paying for goods or services, nothing was given. The same applied to getting receipts. Products were seen to be overpriced and service delivery lacking. The toilets at *Liayanti* camp was for one group their most disappointing encounter, but the location of the camp on the *Liayanti River* bank, was for another group their most outstanding experience. However, respondents suggested some solutions; that basic necessities and information material be sold at entrance gates. Park officials should send out scouts to camping sites before visitors arrive to ensure that it is clean, that fire wood and running water was available, and that the toilets can be flushed. Sign posts with distances must be erected, and officials educated about attitude, making visitors feel welcome, to secure the sustainability of their careers.

Management of information was inadequate, and travel distances unavailable. At one border entry post officials were having a conversation amongst them and merely stamped permits without checking information. Tourists found it difficult to secure a reservation at the parks; this had not improved over a period of seven years and there were no website to facilitate electronic bookings. Even though wildlife attractions were widely published abroad, information was not available in German. Three bridges to *Moremi* were closed due to heavy rains and the park officials were oblivious of the fact.

In addition, the allocation of camp sites was inappropriate. A group, irrespective of its size was allotted one camp site, generally suitable for two to three vehicles. The result was that a large group could stay in "squatter camp" conditions, which was considered ridiculous, taking into consideration the vastness of the park areas. The allotted rubbish bins would then soon fill up, result in spillage if not routinely emptied, and attract baboons scouting for something to eat. This could lead to unhealthy animal behaviour change. The experiences thus varied from pleasant surprises to disappointment, contrary to Bresler's findings (2002) that visitors, especially ignorant first time visitors, to game lodges in SA had only pleasant, delightful surprises.

The most outstanding experience of wildlife tourists on safari

To elicit testimonials that could be used as in promotion material, visitors were asked to share with the researcher what they would tell their friends upon return. Positive emotional experiences lead to recommendation and intention to revisit. Each and everyone would show their videos, photos and CDs share the experience, make their friends jealous and persuade them to come along next time. Words

such as: "amazing, fantastic, a feast, very peaceful, really different", were used to describe their emotions. One said "you cannot tell somebody, this must be experienced firsthand" and another; "there are really no fences, the animals walk on both sides of the park entrance, even in the streets of Kasane!", "You hear the animals breaking the leaves around your tent at night". The fact that it stirred deeper emotions needs to be mentioned. One respondent said he would share the feeling of vulnerability; he felt completely powerless. In the words of Ryan et al. (2000:159) " it evokes a feeling of wonder and a sense of awe, but not of intellectual curiosity".

Respondents will also testify to the uniqueness of the destination and share advice on what precautions to take. Examples were; "go with a group of people who know, planning is very important, you must be self-reliant, your equipment needs to be reliable, you must be cautious". Others said, "If you need help, or something, it will take you a full day trip to get it, do not expect to find any *MacDonalds* or *Steers* and there is no place for a laptop".

Respondents were asked to categorize the type of experience as either special interest tourism, nature based tourism, adventure tourism or wildlife tourism, but a conclusive decision could not be reached. Nature based plus adventure tourism was suggested by most. There was nothing more respondents wanted to add to the interview which confirms content and construct validity or that all important aspects of wildlife viewing on safari in Botswana had been covered.

Discussion and management implications

The findings will be discussed in the sequence of the decision making process. It will be compared with relevant literature, firstly to build on existing knowledge and secondly to elicit recommendations with respect to improved product positioning. The provision of high-quality, creative, relevant, and meaningful experiences is becoming the most critical challenge facing destinations. The experience quality is a critical challenge for destination managers. As experience increase, the interest to participate in certain activities become more specialised, and knowing more of tourists' activity preferences, sheds more light on product development which must be done from the perspective of the user. Only then can the destination be positioned successfully - when based on informed decisions.

The study validates the findings of a number of relevant studies. Firstly that satisfaction is derived from **expectations** (Del Bosque & San Martín, 2008:566), and secondly that research on planned strategy is suited to gain knowledge on how and why arriving tourists come to a specific destination, and that research on realizing strategy, is suited for learning benefits realised and for studying post-experience attitudes and intentions (March & Woodside, 2005:918). Thirdly the study confirms the findings of Reinius and Fredmann (2007:850) that tourists are **attracted to protected areas** to experience nature, peacefulness and silence (pull factor), and fourthly, that the image of the Botswana wilderness and a national park, increases the value of the area for tourists as well as for the region (Reinius & Fredman, 2007:840). Fifthly that satisfaction with travel experiences contributes to destination loyalty which is reflected in visitor's intentions to revisit the destination and in their willingness to recommend it to friends and relatives (Chi & Qu, 2008:632-633). Because most respondents were repeat visitors it can be expected that many will return for wildlife-viewing in Botswana. Prentice (2006:1164-1167) demonstrated that experience tends to seduce. Experiential familiarity stands out in importance in terms of propensity; i.e. the behaviour expected in the following two years. According to Lehto et al. (2004:810-814), the most frequent tourists tend to have the most focussed activity choice sets. They tend to visit fewer places and choose a narrower set of activities. The total amount spent by them, both at the destination and over a lifespan, tends to be much greater. It is thus imperative that park management have a thorough understanding who the visitors are and what they expect.

In terms of **visitor motivation** respondents may be classified in the escapists cluster identified by Beh and Bruyere (2007:1469) meaning that the following motivations are most important: 1) General viewing of wildlife and scenic beauty. 2) To be close to and learn about nature. 3) View and learn about mega-fauna. 4) Escape from usual demands of life, work and home, avoid responsibilities and crowds of people, get away from home to have a change from everyday routine to relax and experience tranquility. 5) To have adventure, experience excitement, gain new travel experiences, have stories to tell, be with others who enjoy the same things.

The **profile** of the wildlife tourists on safari, of this study, is similar to that of 4WD tourists. Taylor and Prideaux (2008:78, 80, 84) ascertained that the psychological motivations or push factors for the experiences of 4WD trips were; socializing with like minded people, personal discovery, getting away from

it all and from the city, facing challenges and developing and maintaining friendships. Both a wildlife safari and 4WD trip represents the same contradiction whereby the wilderness is desired for its solitude but at the same time a catalyst for enjoying the company of friends. Wildlife tourists on safari to Botswana were expecting a more affective than cognitive experience which is supportive of the findings of Ryan, Hughes and Chirgwin (2000:159). The promise to satisfy more inner-directed emotional needs and values were more important than the more outer-directed, or cognitive needs. These expectations are indeed reflective of the attitudes of the visitors as stated by Gnoth (1997:298).

The findings of this study also complement and refine those of Okello et al. (2008:756-758) and Ryan et al. (2000). Okello observed the **large mammal interests** of tourists in *Amboseli National Park* in Kenya, in terms of the duration of viewing, and availability. They found that the *Big 5* consistently attracted tourists but that not all members of the *Big 5* shared the same popularity. It was the diversity and high density of large mammal species that seemed to attract most tourists for viewing. Vehicles always stopped when they encountered a lion, cheetah or waterbuck, and while many tourists stopped for elephants, many have also passed due to their great availability after initial viewing. The interest is nowadays on seeing interesting animals, behaviours, and natural phenomena, rather than solely having a close encounter with an animal that has the potential to cause bodily harm to the tourist. Ryan et al. (2000) ascertained the themes for satisfaction of visitors to *Fogg Dam*, in Australia, was the birds (the amount of birds in one location, being able to observe them so closely, and seeing many species) and naturalness of the area (openness, space, peace, quiet, and the natural sounds). Being able to share it with family and a slight educative theme was also discerned.

The product **knowledge** of SA respondents also support the findings of Diamantis as cited by Ladkin (2000:217), that frequent ecotourists showed expertise in ecotourism through their internal value domain by which they are driven. Frequent ecotourists tend to have a rich understanding of their holidays. Respondents may be classified as **mindfull**, meaning they possess information and question what is going on at the setting (Moscardo, 1996:381-382). Moscardo argues that mindfull visitors, in comparison to mindless visitors, are more likely to enjoy their visit, express satisfaction with the visit, learn from their visit, be interested in discovering more about the topic or place, and are capable of reassessing the way they view the world.

The preferences and **behaviour** of visitors on safari to Botswana render them environmentally conscious, and they may be classified as "small footprint" meaning that they leave a smaller ecological footprint (Dolnicar & Leisch, 2008:673-677). Dolnicar and Leisch proved that the vacation behaviour of persons who behave in a more environmentally friendly manner differs from the "large environmental footprint" tourists. They stayed at camping sites and with friends relatively more frequently and were less likely to typically patronise hotels, they experience more nature, maintaining unspoilt surroundings, having little traffic at destinations, having good company and getting to know people.

The **experience** of the respondents was rich and intense, one of high enthrallment in terms of the framework suggested by Reynolds and Braithwaite (2001:268-274) due to the exhilaration, authenticity and uniqueness, as well as involvement, duration and the species status/popularity. It means that the experience generates intense excitement due to factors such as anticipation, the knowledge of the observer, the uncertainty of the length of the exposure to the stimuli, and because the interface is not managed with consequent potential danger of unpredictability. Shackley (1996:57) refers to these as peak experiences. There are also parallels among the findings of Bresler (2002:237-239, 249), in that SA visitors to game lodges were repeat visitors; wildlife aficionados, and overseas visitors did not come to SA only to see wildlife; they were ignorant about what to expect. Both markets experienced the wildlife encounter as intense excitement, were price sensitive, but there was a consumer surplus. The experience is also in more than in one realm, and close to the *sweet spot* of Pine 11 and Gilmore (1998).

This study supports the perception that wildlife watching is **expensive** because of remoteness and access, specialised equipment and transport, and prior skill requirements which provide an indirect measure of risk (Buckley, 2007:1430-1432). The **consumer surplus** that was evident validates the findings of Fannin (2007:75) that visitors are willing to pay a premium to visit places where a high standard of biodiversity conservation is maintained. It is assumed that the visitation will decrease if higher fees are charged as proved by Schwartz and Lin (2006:1392).

With respect to the respondents' interest in **buying souvenirs** or art made by local people, Kepe (2001:158) found the same attitude amongst visitors to a nature reserve in SA. Visitors in the Kepe study were mostly from nearby areas and not interested in learning about the history or culture of the communities who lived adjacent to the area; they have neither visited the neighbouring villages, nor

intended to do so, and did not purchase anything from them. However, there is a difference between local and overseas visitors; local wildlife-tourists want to do just that, visit a wilderness area. Overseas tourists may well be interested in cultural tourism when visiting rural areas. The respondents in the study by Kepe (2001:157-158) expressed the same **disappointment with the management** of a nature reserve in SA. They chose *Mkambati* because they considered it to be less crowded, with more unspoilt environments and less commercial, compared to other areas but they would consider choosing another place to visit because of the poor facilities in the cottages, and poor infrastructure such as roads and electricity. A large percentage rated the personnel as either mediocre or downright disappointing.

Recommendations and conclusion

Recommendations are made with respect to product positioning in terms of product design, service delivery and promotion, based on the findings that support the notion that experience should be studied separately as a new commodity in the tourism production process, and that products ought to be developed for experiences, to be successful.

The findings suggest that designated vehicle stops could be established at scenic points under special trees, blending into the landscape, offering a more varied experience. The unique attributes of the destination that attract tourists to the area would then be used to differentiate it in the minds of potential visitors and provide the benefits they are seeking.

Campsites with more amenities need to be considered. Loon and Polakow (2001:899-901) compared the financial viability of three ecotourism ventures namely upmarket game lodges, middle-of-the-range chalets and campsites. A campsite operation was found to be the least risky and was expected to generate a return of almost 1,000% for up to 15 years.

Management of the parks must be improved; especially with respect to maintenance, staff training, and information management. Price increases must be considered cautiously.

Promotion material should not only emphasize specific species (the Big 5) but also include camp-life at a novel place, expansive scenery, vista points creating an image of relaxation away from daily routine and 4WD safaris with some challenging driving. The list of popular species in promotion material needs to be expanded, by including the rare species, which would alleviate viewing pressure on only a few species. Since the experience is intangible, the exhilaration, authenticity and uniqueness must be tangibilised through testimonials by visitors. When positioning is reflective of these push and pull factors, visitation and word of mouth promotion will ensure sustainability of this unique renewable resource.

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