



Measuring tourist satisfaction with Kenya's wildlife safari: a case study of Tsavo West National Park

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Accepted 26 February 2002

Abstract

Kenya's national parks form the pillar of the country's tourism industry. Over one million international tourists visit Kenya annually to partake in wildlife safari and other forms of nature-based tourism. However in recent years, the country's tourism industry has shown increasing signs of poor performance, especially in the volume of international tourists visiting the national parks. A number of reasons have been postulated as possible causes of this poor performance. They include the presumed degradation and reduction of the quality of the wildlife parks' tourist product, a deteriorating security situation in the country and poor infrastructure. However, most of these suggestions are not based on empirical research. This study investigates one of these arguments (i.e. the reduction of the quality of the parks' tourist product as it relates to visitor satisfaction) using the case study of Tsavo West National Park. The SERVQUAL service quality attributes were used to measure the quality of services, and the overall visitor satisfaction with tourist product and services of the park. A total of 200 international tourists were interviewed and interestingly, an overwhelming majority of the tourists (over 70%) indicated that they had a satisfactory experience. Thus, based on the tourists' responses, one may argue that at least for the case of Tsavo West, the park offers a quality tourist product. In this regard, the study contends that probably there exist exogenous factors that are responsible for the current decline and poor performance of Kenya tourism industry a reduction of the quality of the parks' tourist product is not a determinant of such decline. © 2003 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Servqual; Visitor satisfaction; Tsavo West National Park; Wildlife safari; Nature-based tourism

1. Introduction

Until recently, Kenya has been a popular tourist destination in Africa receiving over 6% of the total international tourist arrivals to the continent. Most of the country's tourism is based on wildlife safari. About 10% of the country has been set aside for the conservation of the African savanna wildlife and the promotion of safari tourism. In most of the country's national parks and reserves, first-class lodging, camping and other forms of accommodation facilities have been developed that allow visitors to, at least, stay overnight before and/or after conducting a guided game drive and sight-seeing in the expansive wildlife parks and reserves. Thus Kenya is popularly and variedly referred to in

overseas tourist advertisements and commercials as, 'the original home of safari tourism', 'the home of the big five', 'the wildlife Mecca' and 'a paradise for holiday makers'. These tourism promotional phrases are commonly used by overseas tour operators and travel agents to capture the imagination and interest of an increasing number of international tourists haggling for adventure and exotism in the African wilderness. As a consequence, most international tourists are attracted to Kenya mainly because the country offers a unique opportunity for wildlife viewing in a pristine natural environment.

Postmodern social and economic changes, especially in the developed countries in the North, have enhanced the value of natural areas and the promotion of nature-based tourism and recreational activities. In this regard, most tourists are usually influenced by 'push and pull' motivational factors when they make initial decision to travel to long-haul Third World destinations such as Kenya. The push factors may include the urge to escape

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from the pressures of the workplace and the stresses associated with the urban life and post-modern capitalism while the pull factors may include the urge to travel to different places in search of novelty and adventure in natural settings.

Over the years wildlife safaris have become a lucrative business for both the public and private sector. Currently, tourism is Kenya's second largest economic sector after agriculture, contributing over 12% to the country's Gross Domestic Product. However, defying government and expert projections, Kenya's tourism industry experienced an abrupt and unforeseeable decline in the 1990s, and currently the future of the country's tourism industry appears to be uncertain. For instance, the country's major tourism centres, namely the inland national parks and reserves, the Coast and Nairobi regions have experienced a major down-turn in the number of international tourist arrivals. Particularly, the number of tourists visiting the national parks and reserves including Tsavo West, Tsavo East, Maasai Mara, Amboseli and Lake Nakuru has fallen in recent years (see Table 1).

A number of reasons have been advanced to explain the current poor performance and decline of the country's tourism industry. These include the degradation and reduction of the quality and natural beauty of national parks and reserves, a recent perception of

Kenya as an insecure tourist destination and a poorly maintained and crumbling transport infrastructure. However, most of these reasons have been proposed without any research pinpointing the underlying causes of the current poor performance of the tourism industry. In this connection, this study investigates one factor that has been suggested as contributing to the poor performance of Kenya tourism industry (i.e. the degradation and reduction of the quality and natural beauty of the country's national parks) using the case study of Tsavo West National Park. The Tsavo West and Tsavo East National Parks form the largest continuous terrestrial park in Kenya and attract over 200,000 tourists per annum. Specifically, the goals of the research are threefold:

- To evaluate the level of tourist satisfaction with the quality of service that is being provided in Tsavo West National Park.
- To identify the main park attributes which influence the overall visitor satisfaction.
- To determine whether the current decline in tourist arrivals is due to tourists' dissatisfaction with the quality of the park's service and natural attraction.

The research applied the SERVQUAL instruments as developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1990)

Table 1
Number of visitors to parks and reserves in the period between 1994 and 1998

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Nairobi NP	163200	113500	158300	149600	122300
Animal orphanage	182000	212100	210600	193700	164800
Amboseli	159500	114800	109100	117200	62900
Tsavo West NP	105400	93100	93600	88600	54900
Tsavo East NP	132400	228800	137500	123200	66900
Aberdare NP	60200	70100	60200	59000	47900
Lake Nakuru NP	164300	166800	156900	132100	111000
Maasai Mara NR	138200	133200	130300	118300	100400
Bamburi Nature park	98900	109200	107000	86800	77900
Malindi Marine Park	39400	38800	39300	27000	13700
Lake Bogoria	43200	14200	14200	24500	20600
Meru NP	7900	7300	7800	4100	1800
Shimba Hill	31600	20000	23400	22500	16800
Mount Kenya	17200	17200	17100	14800	10200
Samburu	9200	9100	9100	8300	7000
Kisite/Mpunguti	34800	32400	39900	35100	29200
Mombasa Marine	4800	23900	21700	15200	16200
Watamu Marine	32100	16100	20200	19400	18300
Hell's gate	44900	50100	52100	47200	57100
Impala sanctuary ^a	—	—	65600	62400	65600
Others ^b	15100	22400	14800	15500	13900
Total	1527500	1493100	1488700	1364500	1079400
%	21.97	21.47	21.41	19.62	15.52

^aFor 1994 and 1995, Impala sanctuary is included under others.

^bOthers include Mount Elgon, Ol-Donyo Sabuk, Marsabit, Saiwa Swamp, Sibiloi, Ruma NP, Mwea NR, Central Island NP, Nasolot NR and Kakamega National Reserve.

Source: Kenya Government (1999).

to examine whether there exist any gaps or discrepancies (positive or negative) between tourists' expectations and perceptions of the quality of the tourism services offered in Tsavo West National Park. Second, the research identified the main variables that have the strongest influence on overall tourist satisfaction and related these variables to the current status of tourism in Tsavo West National Park in particular, and Kenya in general.

The SERVQUAL model has been widely applied in measuring customer satisfaction in different ranges of service categories including hotels, tourism centres, parks and recreation services. However, it should be stated that despite its wide application, the model has notable deficiencies (Carman, 1990; Babakus & Boller, 1992; Fick & Ritchie, 1991). The service attributes that are used to measure service quality may not represent exact levels of service quality and/or may not measure all the important characteristics of a particular service. In addition, there are real limitations as related to interviewing respondents before and after the consumption of a given service; the so-called 'gap measure'. The service quality score (SERVSC) that is obtained from the gap measurement of perceived and expected attributes may therefore turn out not to be a very reliable measurement of the service quality as it relates to visitor satisfaction. However, from the perspective of a simple practical tool in alerting service providers and management to potential issues as relates to given services, the SERVQUAL model still possesses some value.

2. Tourist satisfaction

Tourists, like other customers, usually have initial expectations of the type and quality of services to be offered in a particular destination. These expectations are formed mainly through information provided via tourism advertisements, commercials, brochures, mass media and informal information from friends and relatives. The extent to which tourist expectations are met will eventually determine the level of tourist satisfaction. If the overall performance, while or after visiting a destination, exceeds or meets initial expectation then the tourist is considered satisfied. However, if perceived performance falls below initial expectation then the tourist may be dissatisfied.

Customer satisfaction is increasingly becoming a salient issue in most service industries. With reference to the tourism and hospitality industry, it can be stated that satisfied tourists are more likely to recommend the tourist destination to others, which is the cheapest and most effective form of marketing and promotion (Crosby, 1993; Söderlund, 1998). Furthermore, tourist satisfaction usually contributes to increased rates of the retention of tourists' patronage, loyalty and acquisition,

which in turn helps in realizing economic goals like increased number of tourists and revenues. As a consequence, there is usually a positive association between tourist satisfaction and the destination's long-term economic success. Moreover, tourists can express their satisfaction through many ways such as positive word of mouth, paying compliments to the service or product provider and development of long-term loyalty to the destination. At the same time, through tourist satisfaction, the relationship between the tourist and the tourist destination is strengthened.

Most studies that have been conducted on tourist satisfaction associate high tourist turnover in a destination with dissatisfaction or tourism product with dissatisfaction with the type of tourist services and goods that are provided in a destination (Parasuraman et al, 1990; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; Augustyn & Ho, 1998). Thus, the quality of a tourism product or services that are provided in a tourist destination have major influence in overall tourist satisfaction.

In this study, therefore, service quality is taken as the difference between what tourists expect from each of the service quality attributes and what the tourist eventually perceives to have received while visiting Tsavo West National Park. In this regard, if the tourists' expectations exceeded their initial perceptions then the park is considered as providing low-quality services and vice versa.

2.1. Price and perceived value

However, it should be stated that overall tourist satisfaction is affected not only by the quality of what the tourist receives, but also by price and perceived value of the product and/or service. This results from an evaluation of the rewards and sacrifices associated with the purchase of the tourism product (Magi & Julander, 1995).

In the service sector, both price and service quality are concurrently used to indicate the value of the service to the customer, where the tradeoff is between product quality and price (Chen, Gupta, & Rom, 1994). Consequently, for a tourist destination to be competitive, both tourism services and product should be perceived as of a quality similar to and/or better than those of other similar destinations. At the same time, the product/service price should be perceived as being competitive and commensurate to the perceived value of the product (Stevens, 1992). In the service sector, quality and value are frequently treated as separate constructs (Sweeney & Soutar, 1997). In this regard, quality may be taken as being a component of value, however, value in itself is not necessarily synonymous with quality, since not all consumers may want to buy the highest-quality item in a given service category. Consequently, value can be conceptualized to encompass

both the functional benefits of performance as well as non-functional benefits of a tourism product (Stewart, Hope, & Muhlemann, 1998).

3. Research method

3.1. Data collection

The field surveys were conducted in Tsavo West National Park between January and May 2000. A total of 200 structured questionnaires were distributed in four lodge and camping facilities that are situated inside the park.

Information on the quality of the park's product and price was obtained by the use of 29 statements containing various attributes on tourist expectations and perceptions. The 29 attributes on tourist expectations and perceptions were grouped into seven overall. Dimensions including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, price and perceived value in order to allow for systematic data collection and analysis. Essentially, the structured questionnaire contained most of the SERVQUAL attributes (see Table 2).

However, extra attributes were added to the original questionnaire (developed by Parasuraman et al, 1990) to measure specific park quality-related attributes such as 'uncrowded' and 'unspoiled' status of the park, adequate transport system, convenient location of park facilities. To determine the level of overall tourist satisfaction, respondents were asked to circle a value ranging from 1 (Much less satisfied) to 7 (Much more satisfied).

4. Data analysis

The SERVSC for each of the 29 attributes was calculated using the following formula:

Service Quality Score

$$= \text{Perception Score} - \text{Expectation Score.}$$

A total summation of the interviewees rating of all the attributes was calculated, and the value was divided by the total number of attributes (i.e. 29) to obtain the mean expectation score for each respondent. Next, a summation of all the respondents' mean expectation scores was calculated for each of the 7 dimensions as stated above. The same summation procedure was used in the calculation of the tourists mean perception score. Eventually, the unweighted SERVSC for each of the service quality dimensions was calculated by subtracting the mean expectation score from the mean perception score.

Paired *t*-test was performed to determine whether there is a gap between tourists' expectations and

Table 2
Service quality dimensions: Item labels and wording

Dimensions	Items labels and wording
<i>Tangibles</i>	1. Visual attractive and appealing of natural attractions 2. Appealing and good condition physical facilities and equipment 3. Uncrowded and unspoiled park 5. Information centre with relevant information about the park 6. Modern looking looking equipment and facilities 8. Adequate transport systems 9. Accessibility of physical facilities and natural resources 10. Neat appearance of staff
<i>Reliability</i>	17: Giving prompt services to the tourists 18. Providing services at the promised time 21. Listening and providing accurate and correct information
<i>Responsibilities</i>	11. Willingness to assist tourists 12. Responding to the tourists questions 20. Informing the tourists about what is offered in the park.
<i>Assurance</i>	4. Safe and secure park 13. Staff who are consistently courteous of their tourists 14. Knowledge to answer tourists' questions 26. Adequate safety facilities
<i>Empathy</i>	15. Convenient opening hours 16. Giving personal attention to tourists 19. Understanding the specific needs of tourists 22. Convenient location of facilities and equipment 23. Good viewing and comfortable facilities 24. Adequate water supply
<i>Price</i>	25. Reasonable prices 28. Cheap accommodative and catering facilities 29. Cheap entertainment or recreational facilities
<i>Perceived value</i>	27. Providing service quality worth the money paid

perceptions of the service quality offered in the park and; also, between price and perceived value. Analysis was conducted on the 29 attributes of service quality, price and perceived value to determine whether differences in means occur between expectation and perception values. Interpretation of the results was done at 5% level of significance; where the value of $p < 0.05$ was considered as being significant, and $p < 0.01$ was considered as being highly significant.

5. Results

Overall perception values exceeded expectation values in 26 of the total 29 attributes. This means that there

Table 3
Service quality gap between tourist's perception and expectation in the Tsavo West National Park ($N = 104$)

Attribute	Expectations mean (SD)	Perception mean (SD)	Gap	<i>T</i> value
Attractive and appealing natural attractions	6.10 (1.14)	6.45 (1.05)	0.35	3.18**
Good and appealing physical facilities and equipment	5.62 (1.28)	5.81 (1.56)	0.19	1.15
Uncrowded and unspoiled park	5.78 (1.54)	6.08 (1.54)	0.3	1.72
Information centre with information about the park's natural and physical facilities	5.70 (1.26)	5.52 (1.73)	-0.18	-0.99
Modern looking equipment and facilities	5.23 (1.35)	5.49 (1.65)	0.26	1.62
Good and adequate transport system	5.68 (1.15)	5.78 (1.40)	0.1	0.60
Access of physical facilities and natural attractions	5.58 (1.32)	5.86 (1.22)	0.28	1.72
Neat appearance of the park' staff	5.98 (1.18)	6.27 (1.25)	0.29	2.49*
Staff giving prompt services to the tourists	5.74 (1.19)	6.14 (1.43)	0.4	3.06**
Staff meeting their promises on time	5.93 (1.07)	5.85 (1.49)	-0.08	-0.51
The willingness of the staff to listen and provide accurate and correct information	5.85 (1.05)	6.00 (1.41)	0.15	0.98
Staff's willingness to help the tourists	6.20 (1.20)	6.32 (1.24)	0.12	1.19
Staff not being busy to respond to the tourist's requests	5.91 (1.24)	6.12 (1.41)	0.21	1.65
Staff keeping the tourists informed about the park	5.83 (1.06)	5.95 (1.52)	0.12	0.83
Staff and secure park	5.99 (1.30)	6.30 (1.25)	0.31	2.58*
Easy to use facilities	5.75 (1.09)	5.92 (1.26)	0.17	0.43
Staff's constant courteousness with the tourists all the time	5.94 (1.16)	6.22 (1.31)	0.28	2.38*
Staff's knowledge to answer the tourist's questions	5.75 (1.28)	6.13 (1.37)	0.38	3.86**
Adequate safety facilities	5.93 (1.22)	6.16 (1.33)	0.23	1.84
Convenient opening hours to the tourists	5.51 (1.37)	6.05 (1.42)	0.54	3.42**
Staff giving personal attention to the tourists	5.50 (1.22)	6.01 (1.48)	0.51	3.97**
Staff's understanding of the specific needs of the tourists	5.69 (1.05)	5.94 (1.35)	0.25	1.71*
Conveniently located facilities and equipment	5.53 (1.20)	6.10 (1.27)	0.57	4.83*
Comfortable and good view accommodation facilities	6.04 (1.14)	6.39 (1.14)	0.35	3.39**
Clean and adequate water	5.77 (1.26)	6.10 (1.42)	0.33	2.50*
Reasonable prices charged by the park	5.91 (1.09)	5.87 (1.50)	-0.04	-0.24
Service quality worth the money paid	5.98 (1.25)	6.33 (1.24)	0.35	2.85**
Cheap accommodation and catering facilities	5.05 (1.59)	5.79 (1.46)	0.74	4.22
Cheap entertainment/recreational facilities	5.02 (1.71)	5.59 (1.37)	0.57	4.66

A negative gap indicated that, tourist perceived service quality was not meeting the tourist's expectations. A positive gap showed that, tourist perceived service quality was exceeding the tourist perceptions.

* $P < 0.05$ (two tailed *t*-test).

** $P < 0.01$ (two tailed *t*-test).

was a positive gap in the 26 attributes (Table 3) thus, in the overall, Tsavo West National Park offers, relatively, a high-quality tourism product and services to the tourists (as per the calculated perceptions and expectations of the international tourists). It should also be stated that all the mean scores of the 29 service quality attributes had a relatively high standard deviation (> 1). This indicates that there was relatively high discriminatory power in all the service quality attributes. Consequently, all the 29 attributes can be taken as appropriate visitor satisfier variables and their availability enhance visitor satisfaction and vice versa.

The majority of respondents stated that they were more satisfied (50.96%), and 25.96% stated that they were much more satisfied. Whereas, 11.54% of the international tourists were slightly more satisfied, and 9.62% were just satisfied. Finally, 0.96% of respondents were either slightly less satisfied or less satisfied (Fig. 1).

Further, it should be stated that a sizeable number of the tourists (23%) were repeat visitors, and some of the visitors had over the years made several trips to Tsavo

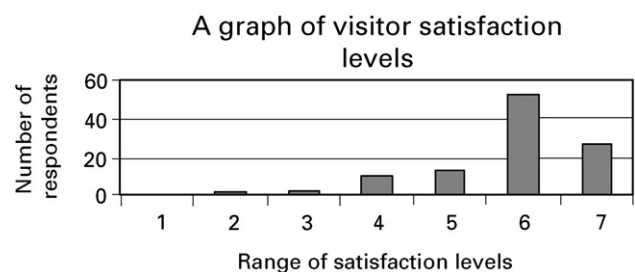


Fig. 1. Visitor satisfaction levels. Key: 1—much less satisfied; 2—less satisfied; 3—slightly less satisfied; 4—just as satisfied; 5—slightly more satisfied; 6—more satisfied; and 7—much more satisfied.

West National Park and other wilderness areas in Kenya as well as other parts of Africa. It was expected that if in the recent past, the overall quality of the park's product had gone down, the repeat tourists would have most likely detected such a phenomenon unlike the first timers.

A comparative analysis was undertaken between the overall SERVSCs of the first time and the repeat visitors

to determine whether there was any significant difference between the two categories of tourists. Interestingly, there was no observed significant difference between the two categories. Thus both categories of visitors rated the quality of the park's wild-based product highly. For instance, a tourist who has been making annual visits to the park in the last 6 years without fail commented:

Visiting this wilderness area and other parks in the country, especially Masai Mara, Amboseli and Lake Nakuru has always been a refreshing experience to me. My husband and I always make sure that we visit this beautiful tropical country once a year and we have never been disappointed. There is always something new to experience in the wider expanses of Kenya's unique wilderness areas. The country provides a wildlife paradise unrivalled anywhere and we will continue visiting so long as our means allow.

6. Discussion

The findings of the study provide an interesting basis for discussion on the overall current status of Kenya's tourism industry, particularly, as pertains to the decline in the number of visitors to the country's national parks and reserves. The study indicates that Tsavo West National Park provides a relatively high-quality wildlife-based tourist product. This is shown by the overwhelming majority of the international tourists (77%) who stated that they were satisfied by the quality of the park's nature attractions and the services that are provided by the park's employees. Thus ideally, from the business perspective, it should therefore be expected that the volume of tourists visiting the park should not be falling as the case is currently. If anything, the number of visitors visiting parks should, at the very least, remain constant or at best increase over the years, as a direct response to the quality services provided in the parks. It should be noted that the downward trend in visitor volume experienced in Tsavo West National park is quite similar to what is happening in other national parks, reserves and generally speaking in other tourist destinations in the country. Thus, the central question which has to be asked is, if Tsavo West National Park, and by extension, other national parks in Kenya still provide quality tourist products and services, then what is the cause of the current decline of the country's previously flourishing tourism sector?

It may be argued that the provision of specific tourist attractions, in a given tourist destination (particularly Third World tourist destinations which usually depend on long overhaul overseas tourists), no matter how appealing the attractions are, is not the only factor which determines the volume of visitors to the

destination. Thus, notwithstanding the fact that the quality of a destination's tourist attractions is crucial, there are other equally important exogenous factors which tourists take into consideration, as a whole, when making final decision as to whether to visit a given tourist destination or not. As consequence if various congruous factors are not adequately provided for in a given tourist destination, tourists and even tour operators and travel agents may decide not to send tourists to the destination, even if that destination has got quality and/or unique tourist attractions. Moreover currently overseas tour operators and travel agents in major source countries have many alternative tourist destinations, especially in the Third World, which offer similar tourist attractions to choose from when deciding where to take prospective tourists. Thus perceived unfavourable and sometimes even incidental political and socioeconomic factors in one destination can make tour operators and travel agents to reroute prospective tourists to alternative destinations, which provide similar tourist attractions.

6.1. *Recent perception of Kenya as an insecure destination*

In the case of Kenya (based on the findings of the study) it may be argued that the country's tourist attractions, particularly the unique and diverse wildlife attractions, are still quite appealing to tourists. Thus there must be other exogenous factors in the overall tourism system that are responsible for the general poor performance and decline in the number of international visitor arrival to the country. In this regard, one critical element that international tourists and overseas tour operators take into consideration when making decisions whether to visit or send tourists to a given destination, particularly far-flung Third World destinations, is the perceived overall safety of the destination.

Thus, it may be argued that initially, an important condition which contributed substantially to the rapid development and expansion of tourism in Kenya was, unlike its neighbours in East Africa that were experiencing political turmoil and civil disorder, the country remained relatively stable. Kenya was generally perceived as an 'island' of economic and political stability in a 'sea' of political turmoil in the African continent. It may therefore be argued that it was this tranquil image, among other factors, which contributed to an increasing number of international tourists visiting the country, particularly in the 1970s and the 1980s. Furthermore, the perceived sociopolitical and economic stability in Kenya encouraged an increasing number of multinational companies to invest in the country's tourism and hospitality industries. Consequently, the initial post-independence image of political stability and social

tranquility helped boost the international tourist demand for Kenya as one of the leading tourist destination in Africa.

Ironically, in recent years, particularly from the mid-1990s, Kenya is increasingly being perceived as an insecure destination, whereas the opposite is the case with many countries in the region, such as Botswana, Uganda and Tanzania. This is due to the fact that unlike Kenya, the sociopolitical situation in these countries has improved considerably in recent years.

Since the fragmentation of Kenya's political space (i.e. the advent of multiparty democracy) in 1991, there have been increasing sociopolitical feuds and civic strife as different political groups (mainly based on ethnic affiliations instead of ideological or philosophical orientation) have attempted to seize power. In many instances, the political feuds have led to physical confrontation and occasional bloodshed. Thus in recent years, 'politically instigated violence' has been experienced with increasing frequency in different parts of the country. Furthermore, accompanying the recent waves of violence are increasing levels of crime and a general breakdown of law and order in many parts of Kenya. A feature reporter on travel and leisure who is based in the UK appropriately explained the current dilemma confronting Kenya's previously flourishing tourism industry as follows:

Kenya experienced a historical crisis in the tourism industry from the late 1997 and the slump is still being experienced with the overall growth drop projected to be about 60 per cent. Tourism was a major foreign exchange earner for Kenya but political uncertainty, fueled by constant inter-ethnic clashes was the most dominant factor attributed to the slump. Foreign tour operators especially from Kenya's principal market of Europe had to cancel or suspend their flights into Kenya (Daily Nation, December 2, 1998)

Moreover, with the recent advances in electronic media, whenever these ugly incidents of political disorder and civic unrest occur, they are often widely and almost instantaneously covered in local and international media. In consequence, tourists and overseas investors are increasingly receiving disparaging news reports concerning Kenya. Thus, it is no coincidence that whenever there are reports, particularly in Western media, concerning political unrest in Kenya, there are always immediate and massive cancellations of advanced booking of visits to the country due to the perceived insecurity.

Worse yet, most governments in the main tourist source countries in Europe and North America are increasingly issuing travel advisory warnings to their citizens who are planning to visit Kenya. The travel advisory warnings are usually taken very seriously, and

tend to discourage prospective tourists from travelling to Kenya. Consequently, Kenya is currently being perceived, especially in the West, as an insecure destination, and the country is losing hundreds of international tourists who now prefer travelling to countries in the region which offer similar nature-based tourist attractions, and are generally perceived as being secure. These countries include Uganda, Tanzania, Botswana and South Africa.

The following statements by key personality in Kenya's tourism industry also confirm the fact that the country's security situation has played a critical role in the recent decline in international visitor arrivals to Kenya. The Chief Executive of the Kenya Association of Tour Operators, Mr. J. N. Nguru states:

Personal security and well being are of highest concern (to prospective visitors). There has been a rise in violent crime, and some incidents reported involved tourists. But what has been witnessed come nowhere near a breakdown of law and order. In the remote areas where tourists undertake safaris, the few incidents reported cannot be termed banditry... In spite these, Kenya is considered unsafe in the tourist markets... The reason for the negative image that the country has suffered is partly due to "ignorance" by sections of Western media (Daily Nation, December 4, 1995).

Whereas the Chairman of Kenya Tourist Board, Mr. R. Matiba also states:

The image created (by Western media) is that of an insecure Kenya, where security and infrastructure have collapsed. These are the reasons why tourists preferred other destinations as compared to Kenya (The Sunday Standard, November 25, 2001)

6.2. *Accessibility of Kenya's tourist attractions*

The issue of accessibility of tourist attractions is crucial for the development of tourism. Thus a relatively well-developed transport infrastructure that allows for efficient movement of visitors from one attraction centre to another in a tourist destination is probably one of the basic requirements for the development of tourism. In this regard, there are serious concerns about the provision and maintenance of basic transport infrastructure in Kenya. Of particular significance is Kenya's inland road infrastructure linking important tourist areas which is in a deplorable state of disrepair (i.e. road tarmac and gravel has peeled-off and huge cracks or 'potholes' have developed over large sections of most of the country's inland road network). Consequently, in many parts of the country, including major tourism centres, such as Mombasa, Malindi, Nairobi and the popular wildlife parks, the existing road network is

approaching a state of total collapse, due to many years of neglect and lack of proper road maintenance. The Mombasa–Nairobi Highway, for instance, which is Kenya's major transportation artery and the leading transit route, particularly for international tourists travelling to different inland attractions, is currently in a deplorable state of disrepair and many sections of the highway are almost impassable, particularly during the wet season. In consequence, travel between Mombasa and Nairobi (Kenya's leading tourist centres and the main entry and linkage points for international tourists) which used to take 4 h drive, on average, currently takes more than double that time.

Worse yet, important feeder roads to the country's world famous game parks and reserves such as Tsavo, Maasai Mara and Amboseli are, also, almost impassable due to the state of disrepair. In consequence, most of Kenya's world famous inland wildlife parks and cultural centres which used to be frequented by over 600,000 international tourists per annum (Kenya Government, 1990), are currently, almost inaccessible except either by air-transport or four-wheel drive. Furthermore, tour and travel firms that use the inland feeder roads are incurring increasing financial losses due to high vehicle maintenance and repair cost, increased time wastage, and probable occurrence of accidents. Consequently, tour operators and travel agents are increasingly diverting tourists to other destinations in the regions that are perceived to have better transport infrastructure. In this regard, it is no wonder that an overwhelming majority of the tourists (70%) who were interviewed stated that the road network in the areas where they had passed was in a state of disrepair and needed major improvement to bring it to the requisite standards.

7. Conclusion

The study investigates whether the current poor performance of Kenya's tourism industry, particularly the decline in the number of international tourists visiting the national parks is as a result of tourist dissatisfaction with the quality of the parks' tourist product. Over the years, Kenya has been perceived, in tourist generating countries, as one of the few remaining places that offers immeasurable opportunity for wildlife viewing in pristine natural habitats. However, defying expert and government projections there was abrupt decline in the volume of tourists visiting the country's wildlife parks in particular, and other tourist attractions in general. It has been postulated in many quarters that one of the main factors which is responsible for the current decline in the number of visitors to the national parks is increasing visitor dissatisfaction with the quality of the parks' tourist product.

However, according to the findings of this study, contrary to existing opinion, most of the international tourists indicated that they had a satisfactory experience in Tsavo West National Park. Thus, it may be argued that the factors that are responsible for the current poor performance and decline in the volume of visitors to Kenya's national parks may be found elsewhere, and not the reduction of the quality of the parks' tourist product. As discussed above, such exogenous factors may include increasing perception of Kenya as an insecure tourist destination and the poor condition of the infrastructure, especially the transport network.

It can be said that, particularly the issue of international security and safety is of paramount importance for international tourism and travel as witnessed in last year (2001) September 11 bombing of the World Trade Centre in New York and the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Due to these unfortunate incidents, international travel, especially air travel, was greatly affected with major cancellations of planned visits to different part of the world, especially visits to the USA due to perceptions of insecurity. The world travel industry is still to recover fully from last year's incidents.

In this regard, it may be argued that the success of a destination, particularly the long over-haul Third World destinations, in attracting international tourists may depend more on the overall image, particularly as relates to security and perceived safety of a destination or lack of it, than on a specific tourist attraction. However, more empirical research needs to be conducted on the exogenous factors as they relate to the overall rating of Kenya as a tourist destination and the current poor performance, and decline of the country's tourism industry.

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