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# Determinants of tourists' satisfaction in Etosha National Park, Namibia

Mary-Ellen Kimaro, Selma Lendelvo and Jesaya Nakanyala\*

## Abstract

Although tourism is one of the fastest growing industries in the world and contributes to socio-economic development, most tourist destinations are faced with the challenge of ensuring tourist satisfaction. Understanding determinants of tourism satisfaction through tourists' experiences on destinations could help improve the potential for tourism growth. This study was conducted in the Etosha National Park (ENP). Data collection was during the low and high seasons in February 2010 and September 2011, respectively. A total of 150 tourists were interviewed during both seasons. Results indicated that over 80% of visitors to Etosha National Park were of international origin of which more than half were first time visitors and self-drive tourists. In addition, the majority of tourists toured in groups of either related (51%) or non-related (44%) of 2-4 individuals. Tourists experienced crowding during the high season compared to the low peak season at different sites within the Park. Attractiveness of the Park, its facilities and its cleanliness were the major determinants of tourist satisfaction to the Etosha National Park. Specifically, the cost of accommodation and services, road infrastructure, environmental related issues, park management and control were among the issues tourists shared their experiences on during their visit to the ENP. Therefore, there is need to develop further tourist satisfaction research in ENP and in Namibia in order to provide a useful body of knowledge and guidance to tourism planners, managers, decision makers and marketers on the factors influencing tourist satisfaction in the Namibian context.

## Introduction

### Background

Tourism in Africa is the second largest growth market after the extractive sector (Chironga, et al., 2011). The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) annual report of 2012 states that tourist arrivals to sub-Saharan Africa grew from 20.9 million in 2005 to 33.8 million in 2012, with an annual average growth of 7.1% from 2005–2012 (World Tourism Organisation, 2013). In addition, sub-Saharan Africa is said to have an unexplored tourism terrain that has potential to attract an increased number of tourists (Dieke, 2000).

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\***Mary-Ellen Kimaro** is a Lecturer of Tourism Studies in the Department of Geography, History and Environmental Studies at the University of Namibia. Her research interests relate to sustainable tourism development, focusing on topics such as socially responsible tourism, tourism entrepreneurship, tourism and participatory tourism value chain analysis. E-mail: [mekimaro@unam.na](mailto:mekimaro@unam.na)

**Selma Lendelvo** is a Researcher in the Life Sciences Division (LSD) of the Multidisciplinary Research Centre (MRC) at UNAM focusing on rural livelihoods and development, socio-ecological systems and community-based natural resources management research. She holds an MSc in Natural Resources Management and Sustainable Agriculture from the Agricultural University of Norway and is currently pursuing a PhD in Natural Resources Management at the University of Namibia. E-mail address: [slendelvo@unam.na](mailto:slendelvo@unam.na)

**Jesaya Nakanyala** holds an MA in Geography and Environmental Studies from the University of Namibia. He worked as a research fellow at the Multidisciplinary Research Centre of the University of Namibia before joining the Department of Wildlife Management and Ecotourism of the University of Namibia as a lecturer. His duties include teaching and research in the field of ecotourism, protected area management and wildlife management. E-mail address: [jnakanyala@unam.na](mailto:jnakanyala@unam.na)

This has resulted in tourism attracting growing interest among planning and development experts, policy-makers and academics (Fortanier, 2010). Individual countries in sub-Saharan Africa have each attempted to harness efforts to enable their country to tap into these unexplored tourism potentials in the hope of creating jobs and alleviating poverty (Backman & Nzuki, 2011a, 2011b; Dieke, 2000; Hyman, et al., 1980; Rogerson & Visser, 2012). This obviously creates an atmosphere of competition to attract both new and repeat tourists to their individual destinations.

Namibia is a relatively young nation that gained its independence from the colonial regime of South Africa in 1990. Although tourism existed during this time, it started to attract more tourist arrivals after independence. This increase has been attributed to the country being relatively new as a destination and because of its political stability (Saarinen, et al., 2009). As a result, Namibia's tourism industry has increasingly become an important contributor to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Ashley, 2000; Hottola, 2009; Saarinen, et al., 2009), thus making it the third largest economic sector after mining and fisheries.

In Namibia's fourth National Development Plan (NDP 4), tourism has been identified as a strategic sector – considered vital for the country's economy, along with the logistics, manufacturing and agriculture sectors (GRN, 2013). NDP 4 runs from **2012/13 to 2016/2017**, and identifies the roles that each of these sectors can play in generating economic growth and job creation. Consequently, tourist satisfaction is one of the key components required to attain the goal of economic growth through tourism.

During 2011, tourists arrivals to Namibia were 1,027,229 and grew by 4.4% over the past year (MET, 2011). However, growth was positive only for those tourists coming from neighbouring African countries such as Angola and South Africa with 10% whose main purpose was to visit friends and relatives and shopping. Overseas tourist arrivals who visited for holiday and leisure shrunk by 10%, with the decline attributed to the global economic and financial crisis.

The tourism industry in Namibia is heavily reliant on nature-based tourism activities, many of which take place inside protected areas, tourism concessions and private and community conservation areas (known as conservancies) (NACSO, 2012). The industry is characterised by a low season from November to April and peaks between July and September (MET, 2012). The peak season coincides with the dry season that compels wildlife to seek grazing areas and waterholes thus presenting themselves much more easily for viewing, hence creating the best time for wildlife-viewing in Namibia. The peak season is also at approximately the same time as the major summer holidays in most European and North American countries (Naudé & Saayman, 2005).

Research has shown that when tourists visit a destination such as a national park, a combination of various attributes of the park shape their perception of satisfaction of their overall experience (Murphy, et al., 2000; Prayag & Ryan, 2011; Campo-Martinez & Garau-Vadell, 2010). Hence, the importance of gauging tourists' satisfaction and experiences with attributes such as the attractions, facilities, services, infrastructure, costs of products and services and park management issues especially after the implementation of the turnaround strategy is vital. It is crucial to ensure that the initial intended objectives of the turnaround strategy are achieved. Tourists' satisfaction at ENP ensures viability of the NWR parastatal in that satisfied tourists are more likely to pay a return visit, repeat purchase the products and services on offer and recommend the Park to other tourists. Instilling tourists' loyalty to visit the Park is one key feature of remaining a competitive Park (Lee, et al., 2007) while offering quality performance and benefits of products and services. The continuous study of the tourists' perceptions of these aspects of tourist satisfaction is

essential (Murphy, et al., 2000) and as stated by Oppermann (2000) collection and analysis of data on tourists' destination loyalty, ENP will be able to determine the composition of its tourists, enabling a better forecasting and demand estimation for the Park.

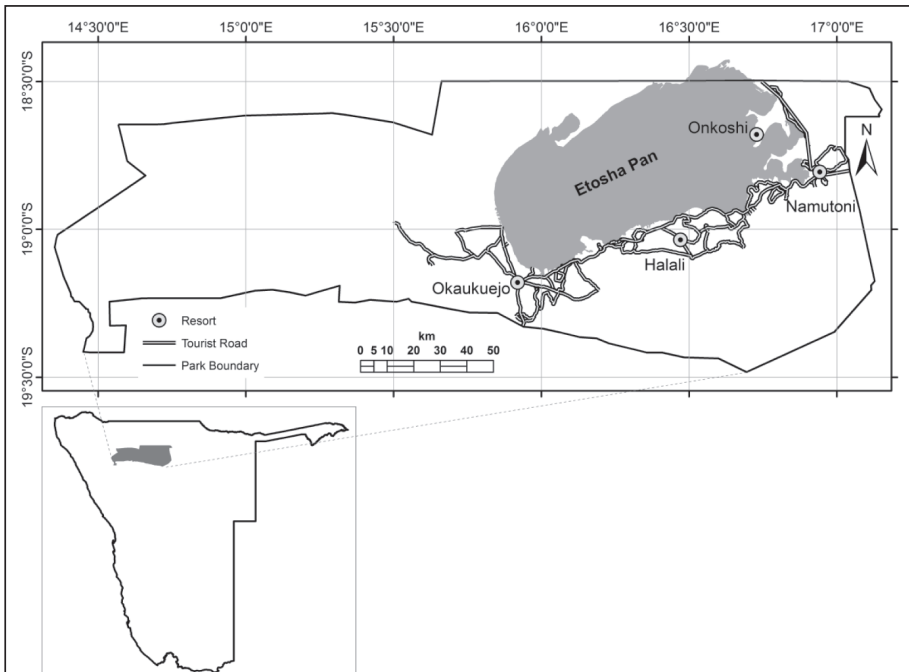
Information about tourist satisfaction with various elements of a tourism destination is crucial to monitoring, maintaining and planning for the desired sustainable number of tourist arrivals in the future, and maximizing their expenditure in the country. Such information provides guidance to decision makers and tourism developers regarding any necessary quality improvements, and it may provide useful information into further research that could be used to encourage repeat visits and ways to attract new markets.

Therefore, given the importance of Etosha National Park (ENP) as a tourism destination within Namibia, the purpose of this study was to identify the determinants of tourist satisfaction through the nature and experiences of tourists to ENP.

### **Tourism in Namibia**

In Namibia, Etosha National Park (Figure 1) is the second largest national park (22 270 km<sup>2</sup>) after Namib-Naukluft Park (Berry, 1997). It is the most visited national park and the third most visited place in the country (MET, 2013) after Windhoek and Swakopmund. Tourism was introduced to the park in the 1950s, paving the way for various tourism related recreational infrastructure development (Berry, 1997), with wildlife and the landscape being the main tourist attractions.

**Figure 1: The geographical location of Etosha National Park**



Approximately 12-15% of the park area is open for tourism and recreational activities. This tourism zone extends between Okaukuejo and Namutoni area in the eastern part of the park, where there are five rest camps and lodges (Okaukuejo, Halali, Namutoni, Dolomite and Onkoshi) offering various hospitality and recreational services.

The central and conspicuous feature in ENP is a large saline seasonal depression known as Etosha Pan, from where the name of the park is derived. This seasonal depression is a wetland of international importance, and occupies some 23% of the park area (Nakanyala, 2012). The Etosha Pan is managed as a Ramsar site (Cunningham and Jankowitz, 2010) owing to the fact that various bird species use this wetland as a breeding site.

ENP is home to over 114 mammal species, 340 bird species, several reptiles, amphibians and at least one species of fish which serve as the basis for nearly all the tourism activity in the park (Olivier and Olivier, 1993). Wildlife commonly seen in the park include but are not limited to elephants, black and white rhino, black-faced impala, lions, giraffe, leopard, eland, Burchell's zebra, springbok, blue wildebeest, gemsbok, Damara dik-dik (de Beer et al., 2006). Diverse vegetation communities and availability of water from natural springs and artificial waterholes are major factors determining wildlife abundance in the area and it is the waterholes, in particular, that provide favourable wildlife-watching and photography viewpoints.

In all of Namibia's protected areas, including ENP, Namibia Wildlife Resorts (NWR), a state owned enterprise, provides the management of the recreational and tourist facilities (primarily accommodation and camp sites and restaurants). In the mid-2000s, the NWR facilities received immense criticism from the Namibia Tourism Board (the regulatory Authority (MET, 2010) and the private sector for its dilapidated facilities and shoddy service, which were described as resulting in a degraded destination image, poor perceived quality and value of goods and services as well as lowering the overall tourism satisfaction in different tourism establishments including those in the ENP.

In an effort to rejuvenate tourism facilities and services countrywide, NWR implemented a "turnaround strategy" during 2007/2008. The aim was to turn the company from a loss-making to a profit-making and competitive enterprise, using a range of strategies such as upgrading all facilities in the NWR portfolio and entering into public-private partnerships to address the investment and development needs of certain facilities within the NWR portfolio. This strategy has resulted in major developments aimed at expanding and improving tourism infrastructure in ENP as well as improving the competitiveness of ENP as a tourist destination.

### **The conceptual framework of tourist satisfaction cognition**

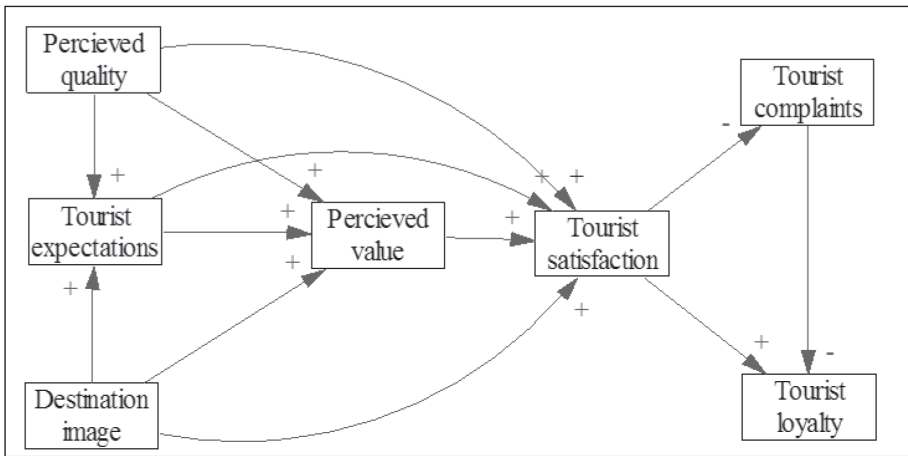
Understanding tourism satisfaction and experience is an important aspect of successful marketing for tourism because of its influences for visitor choice of a destination, the consumption of products and services at the destination, and the decision to return to such a destination (Huh, 2002). Several researchers proposed tourist satisfaction conceptual frameworks to explain relationships and interconnections among various factors influencing tourist satisfaction at destinations (e.g. Chi & Qu, 2008; del Bosque & Martín, 2008; Neal, et al., 1999; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2003). Mutually, those models emphasize the interaction between factors such as perceived value and quality, tourist expectations, destination image, tourist complaint and loyalty as main determinants of tourist satisfaction at destinations.

Thus, this study adopts the conceptual framework for tourist satisfaction (Fig. 2) after (Wang, et al., 2009). In accordance with this conceptual framework, tourism satisfaction results from an array of interconnected factors which are referred to as antecedents. Cause and effect relationships between those interconnected factors can either positively (+) or negatively (-) affect tourist satisfaction. This framework was particularly used because it can positively link perceived quality, tourist expectations and destination image to perceived value at the destination, which also influences the likelihood for tourist satisfaction. In addition, Wang, et al. (2009) tested the relationships within the tourist satisfaction model

which is essential for relating it to studies done elsewhere such as this one. They also linked their findings to the outcomes of different studies, which put more weight and confidence in using this framework.

The destination image and perceived quality is built through marketing and has an effect on whether the tourist will return or refer the destination to others (Prebensen, 2007; Reza Jalilvand, et al., 2012; Zhang, et al., 2014). A higher tourist satisfaction level would positively affect loyalty and return visit to the destination. However, if tourist satisfaction is low, this would result in an increased tourist complaint, which would negatively affect tourist loyalty to the destination. Tourist complaints can also be viewed based on how the complaints are handled or solved which is carries more weight than just airing the complaints. Loyalty to a destination is also made up of returning to a destination or referring the destination to others (do Valle, et al. 2006; Wang, et al. 2009).

**Figure 1: The conceptual model for tourist satisfaction (redrawn from Wang et al., 2009)**



In summary, tourist satisfaction is an important determinant of tourist patterns. Unsatisfied visitors would become less loyal to the destination and opt to visit other places (Aksu, et al., 2010).

Tourist satisfaction influences the choice of a destination and the decision to return to that destination (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Many studies have shown the importance of attributes or features of a destination such as attractions, accommodation, infrastructure and services in tourist satisfaction and its consequences. For instance, Baker and Crompton (2000) studied the relationships between the quality of attributes and service of a destination, tourists' satisfaction, and behavioural intentions of tourists, and supported the idea that enhanced performance quality of the destinations' attributes such as comfort, amenities and entertainment leads to visitor satisfaction. They also found that service providers' performance had a stronger influence on intentions for repeat visit than tourists' satisfaction. Similarly, Chen, et al. (2009) sought to understand tourist satisfaction with the destination's attributes such as facilities, transportation, hotel, restaurant, attractions and the service performance and linked this to tourists' willingness to revisit as well. Both studies concluded that tourists satisfaction with the attributes of the destination visited did indeed lead to behavioural intentions including repurchase and word of mouth advertising. Chen and Tsai (2007) reached the same conclusion by adding aspects such as destination image, trip quality of the tourists encompassing the tourists on-site experience

with destination attributes such as attractions, amenities and other services and their perceived value.

However, Hui, et al. (2007) concluded that price was insignificant in shaping overall tourists satisfaction whereas attributes such as food and accommodation was significant for the North American tourists overall satisfaction as was attractions and culture for the Asian and Europeans tourists' satisfaction. Kozak (2001) focused on attributes of the destination that included attractions, facilities and services with the aim of understanding repeater's behaviour. Accordingly, Okello and Yerian (2009) also indicated that perceptions of tourists on facilities and services can enhance the perceived value of the destination when their quality is improved, hence, leading to high tourist satisfaction.

Customer satisfaction is key to success in competitive business environments (Del Bosque & Martín, 2008). Customer satisfaction has thus received considerable research attention (Neal, et al., 1999; Sánchez-García & Currás-Pérez, 2011). In the tourism industry, satisfaction is an important aspect of successful destination marketing because of its influences for visitor word of mouth advertising, the consumption of products and services at the destination, and the decision to return to such a destination (Huh, 2002).

It is often a challenge for managers of national parks to identify factors that influence overall tourist satisfaction as well as understand the patterns of tourist decision making processes (Bernini & Cagnone, 2012). These authors further state that attributes such as attractions, quality of accommodation establishments, perceived value for money and infrastructure all play an important role in tourists choosing a destination. Further, improving the quality of services leads to repeat visits and it also increases the prospects of attracting new tourists as found by Zabkar, et al. (2010), who agree that destination attributes affect the perceived quality of tourists offering which has a positive effect on satisfaction and the intentions to revisit the destination. Nowacki (2009) found that although service performance affects the behaviour intention to revisit, benefits gained including price also have a greater influence. Therefore, in order for ENP to have a competitive advantage as a tourist destination, an understanding of the attributes that determine tourist satisfaction is crucial.

## **Methodology**

### **Study design and sampling**

ENP was selected for this study because of its relatively high number of visitors and its importance as a nature tourism destination, and its role as a major attraction in drawing tourists to visit Namibia. The study was conducted in the ENP during the months of February 2010 (low season) and in September 2011 (high season) at Okaukuejo, Halali and Namutoni and Onkoshi resorts (refer to Figure 1). These data collection periods were selected to ensure a sample of tourists from both the low and high seasons.

A semi-structured questionnaire containing both open- and closed-ended questions was administered to tourists visiting ENP. The questions were arranged under three main themes, namely, (i) tourists' background and frequency of visits to ENP, (ii) views on the main attractions of ENP and (iii) tourists' experiences and satisfaction levels at ENP.

A non-probability convenience sample was used for the selection of a target population of tourists who were visitors to ENP. If a tourist was selected as a respondent and did not wish to participate then the next willing tourist was asked to participate in the study. Tourists were approached at their accommodation, at restaurants or at waterhole viewpoints of Okaukuejo, Halali, Namutoni and Onkoshi Resorts. Questionnaires were completed during the morning hours, before respondents departed for their activities (6:00 am to 8:00 am) and in the evening when they returned from their tours (6:00 pm to 9:00 pm). Each questionnaire was completed by one tourist. For tourists who were in

groups, a maximum of two members per group were interviewed to minimize repetition. Questions were asked in English; and for the few tourists who could not communicate in English, tour guides helped by acting as interpreters.

Some 150 questionnaires were completed for each season at the four sites within a period of two weeks each (Table 1). Onkoshi resort was relatively new during the survey period, having commenced operations during 2010. This contributed to low interviews. Data was analysed using SPSS Version 18.

**Table 1: Study sample at the different resorts within ENP for the two seasons**

Location	Feb 2010 (Low season)	Sept 2011 (High season)
Okaukuejo	53	50
Halali	44	50
Namumtoni	50	50
Onkoshi	3	1

## Results

### Visitation patterns

Etosha National Park receives visitors from over 20 countries. German and British nationals visit in higher numbers than other nationalities, while regional visitors come mainly from Angola and South Africa (Table 2). Only 6% of the visitors interviewed were Namibians. Asians mainly hailed from China, South Korea and India. All of the surveyed tourists stayed at least overnight in the park. The average length of stay in the park during the low season was three days with the shortest stay being one day and the longest stay being thirty days, while during the high season, the average length of stay was four days with longest stay being thirty two days.

**Table 2: Categories of tourists who participated in the study**

Nationality	Low season (%) n=150	High season (%) n=151	All seasons (%)
German	27	37	31
British	7	11	9
Rest of European nationals	20	14	16
South Africa	17	3	10
Australia/New Zealand	6	7	7
USA	2	5	4
Namibia	5	6	6
Angola	2	1	2
Asian nationals	4	1	3
Others	10	15	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Most visitors were self-drive tourists (66%) without a professional tour guide, with the remaining one-third on guided tours. The self-drive tourists either used private or rented cars. Private cars were mainly used by Namibian, Angolan, South African and a few German and British nationals. Virtually all visitors to the ENP travel in groups (Table 3 and table 4), with very few travelling alone.



**Table 3: Travelling groups**

Travelling groups	Percentage (%)
Single	2.0
Couples only	40.4
Family	10.6
As a group	44.4
Other	2.6
Total	100

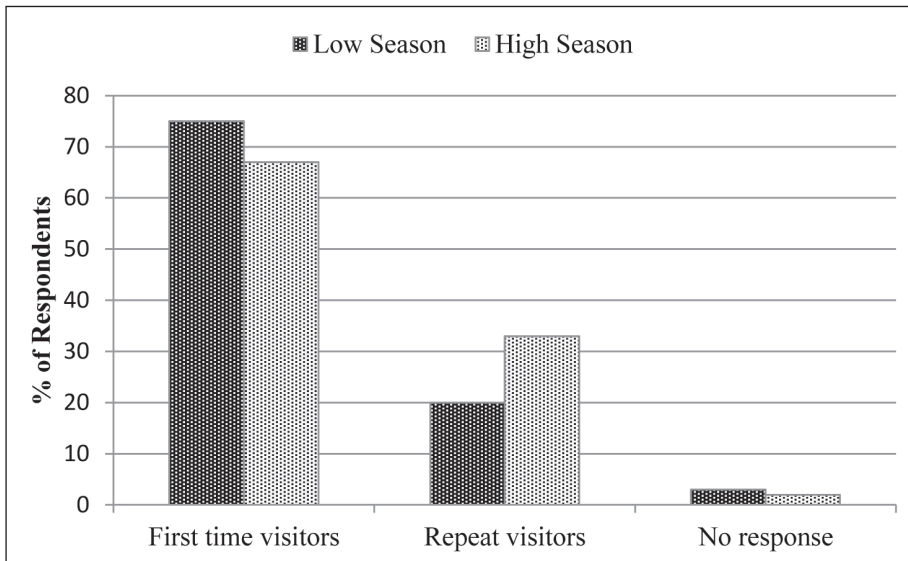
**Table 4: Group size**

Group size	Percentage (%)
1	4
2-4 people	63
5-7 people	13
more than 7	20
Total	100

**First time and return visits**

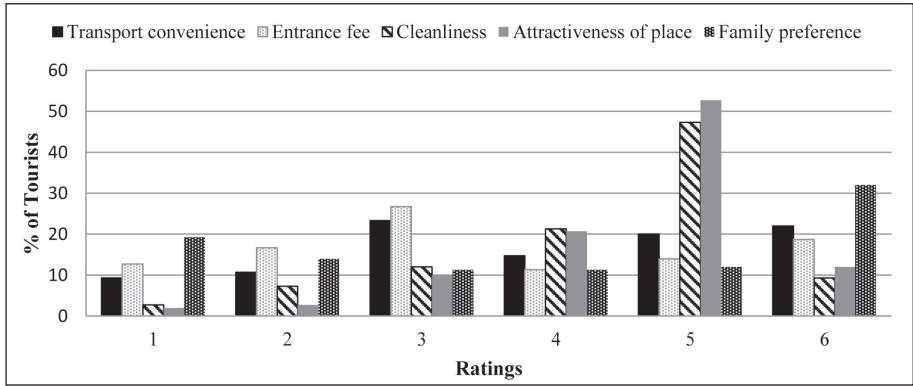
On average, 71% of the visitors who participated in the survey were first time visitors in both seasons (Figure 3). Repeat visitors had different frequency of visits to the ENP. Although data was not available for the low season, 60% of the tourists who visited during the peak season indicated their intention to revisit the ENP.

**Figure 3: Proportion of first time and repeat visitors to ENP during the low and high season**

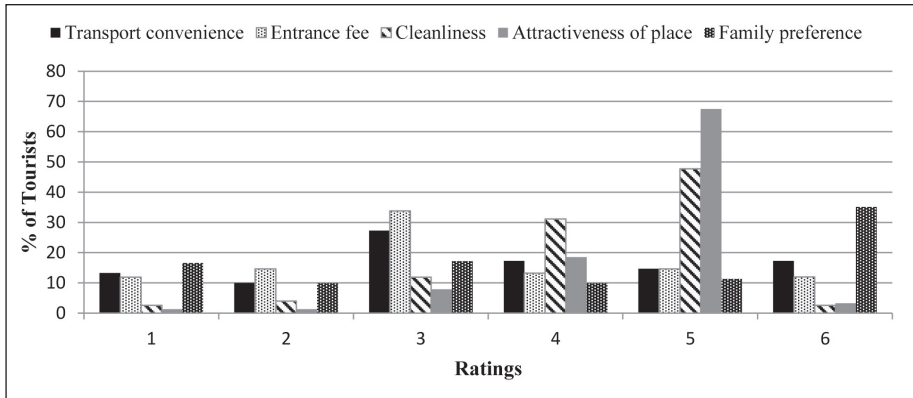


### Factors that influenced choice of ENP as a holiday destination

Respondents indicated a number of factors that influenced their decision for choosing the ENP as a holiday destination. In both low and high seasons, the main deciding factors were the same; the attractiveness and cleanliness of the park (Figure 3). In addition, a few suggested some factors that influenced their choice such as the abundance of wildlife and good viewing as well as service provision and accessibility of essential facilities such as Automatic Teller Machines.



#### (a) Low season



#### (b) High peak

*(Rating: 0 not considered at all, 1 – play little role, 5 – play most important role, 6 – no response)*

**Figure 3: Factors influencing choice of ENP as holiday destination for tourists who visited during the (a) low season and (b) high season**

### **Tourists' experiences**

The experiences of tourists to the ENP were gleaned from general comments tourists were asked to give and were grouped together during the data analysis phase. These experiences are discussed in further detail below, with the main issues described, by category, in Table 5.

**Table 5: Perceptions of tourists that negatively influenced satisfaction levels at the Etosha National Park**

<b>Cost of accommodation and services</b>	<b>Road infrastructure</b>	<b>Environmental related issues</b>	<b>Park management and control</b>	<b>Congestion in the park</b>
Expensive for overseas visitors	Poor road signage	Smoking in public places	Speeding in the park	Game viewing points
Expensive restaurants with little variety	Lack of paved roads within the park	Dusty campsites	Big trucks scare off animals	Campsites, restaurants and kiosks
Resort expensive for locals	Dangerous potholes on roads	Untidy rooms	Wildlife in the camp site	Swimming pools

### **Congestion experienced at park facilities and sites**

On average, only 4% of the tourists who visited during the low season indicated that they experienced congestion at sites within the Park as compared to the 20% of those who visited during the high season. During the high season, congestion was experienced at different sites: (a) roadside game viewing points (20.1%), (b) camping sites (18.4%), (c) game viewing waterholes (16%), (d) restaurants and kiosks during lunch hour, particularly at the Halali and Okaukuejo resorts, (16%) and (e) swimming pools (15.2%). Some tourists commented that the effect of congestion reduced their ability to do their activities as scheduled e.g. time schedules for tour itineraries could not be adhered to because of long queues at the lunch kiosk in Okaukuejo.

### **Costs of services**

Close to half of the tourists (43%) who visited during the low and high seasons felt that the cost of accommodation, products and services at the NWR resorts were expensive. This view was expressed by visitors of different origins including local, regional and international tourists. A handful of tourists who had visited ENP previously were not happy with what they referred to as 'unexpectedly high rates'. For example, an Italian tourist indicated that "I visited Etosha during 2003 and 2004, the food was cheap but now it went up high. Also, the tourist shop is so empty, not like 2003 and 2004". Another tourist from Belgium expressed his dissatisfaction with the high cost of accommodation facilities in the ENP by comparing it to about nine parks he visited in South Africa.

### **Road infrastructure**

There were mixed feelings on the road infrastructure from tourists who visited during the low and high seasons where some perceived that road infrastructure was in a poor condition while others indicated it was in a good condition. About 40% of the tourists who visited during the low season felt that the park had poor infrastructure and services. Road infrastructure was said to be in a poor condition, with potholes and mud as well as grass

growing on pavements. Few tourists who visited during the high season (6%) experienced problems with poor road signs and roadside dust, resulting in reduced visibility of roadside habitats and wildlife. A small fraction of tourists (5%) with experiences from other African protected areas indicated that Namibians tarred and gravel roads are in very good condition, including in ENP as compared to other African states they visited. In addition, 1% of tourists during the low season characterised the road between Halali and Okaukuejo as 'very busy' and needed regular maintenance.

### **Environment related issues**

Overall, few tourists commented on hygienic issues. However, more visitors during the high season (25%) as compared to the low peak (5%) expressed discontent with various health-related issues in the park. Issues that were raised included untidy bathrooms, poorly maintained sewage system especially in the roadside toilets, camping sites covered in dust as well as smoking by other tourists at the waterholes and other viewing points which inconvenienced non-smoking visitors. Cigarette stumps and empty bottles also polluted waterhole sites.

### **Park management and control**

Park regulations are important to ensure the safety, security and comfort of visitors. Proper control and management are required to ensure such regulations. Although, few tourists (15%) commented on this issue, those that commented mainly mentioned road safety, noisy night drives and the presence of small mammals in campsites. Tourists are concerned about speeding on the roads because speeding vehicles scare wildlife away from the roadside where it can be viewed, and also increases the chances of roadside accidents, given the high abundance of wildlife in the park.

With respect to wildlife in the campsites, mainly small mammals and jackals come to feed on food residues at campsites and some tourists were not comfortable, stating that the presence of these wild animals close to them might lead them to contracting diseases such as rabies. Some tourists indicated that night game drives at some camps are noisy and distract the comfort of others, especially at Halali.

### **Discussions**

The findings of this study show that the ENP attracts tourists from across the world, though mainly from European countries. Low numbers of visitors are from within Namibia and neighbouring countries, especially Angola and South Africa. An area for further research would be comparisons of the different nationalities in terms of satisfaction. This information may help guide the park management on areas of improvement and those of meeting the different cultural groups' needs.

Tourism seasons appeared to have affected the experiences of the tourists differently during low and high seasons. The high season in Namibia (June- September) is characterised by clear weather which is conducive for wildlife viewing activities. However, during the low season, which is the rainy season, vegetation in the park is green, thick and dense. It is during the rainy season that there is ample grazing and browsing areas for wildlife far from the noisy cars, which has a negative effect on game viewing. Game viewing in Namibia during the low season is also influenced by the high abundance of ephemeral ponds around the Park, which means wildlife does not need to regularly visit water points at the tourist resorts. This is likely to affect the expectations of tourists and their satisfaction. In addition to this, roads are more likely to be damaged and muddy during the rainy season, explaining at least partly the difference in perceptions about road infrastructure between high and low season tourists.

More tourists to the ENP were travelling as couples and groups of mainly 2 – 4 individuals. These are mainly self-drive tourists who make use of either rented or own transport. These findings support the Namibia exit survey that indicated that the majority of tourists to Namibia were self-drive tourists (MET, 2012). The availability of transport, the destinations safety and readily available quality information about the destination and /or site visited tend to encourage self-drive tourists. The factors such as satisfactory rent a car services, the tranquillity and safety of being able to drive through most of the remote areas of Namibia before and after visiting ENP, as well as the advance in technology such as Global Positioning Systems and others factors are seen as the reason for the increase in the number of self-drive tourists to Namibia.

The results also showed a high average proportion of first time visitors. Tourist satisfaction and loyalty is created when tourists indicate their desire/willingness to repeat their visit to a destination or act as ambassadors of that destination through word of mouth publicity (Rajesh, 2013, Som and Badarneh, 2011, Wang et al., 2009). With 60% of tourists indicating their wish to return to the park, overall satisfaction levels can be assumed to be relatively high. However, it must be recognised that actual return visits of international tourists might not always materialise due to affordability issues, and the economic climate in the generating countries, amongst other reasons.

The relatively high number of repeat visitors to the park or destination may be a good indication of tourists' satisfaction with the park. A satisfied tourist who has had a positive experience is more likely to return to the park and is also likely to remain loyal to the park. Tourists' satisfaction will lead them to compliment the park to others by word of mouth about the attributes of the park they were satisfied with, thus creating an increase in the number of return visits, that may enhance the possibility of achieving the NDP4 goal of economic growth and job creation.

However, the attractiveness of ENP has the potential to generate a wonderful experience and provides an optimum sense of well-being during a holiday trip (Jin, at al., 2012). This is evident in the factors influencing the tourists' choice of ENP as a holiday destination which indicated that the majority of the tourists in the high season and low season choose to visit ENP due to its attractiveness and cleanliness. The success of tourist destinations depends on the attractiveness of characteristics that make up the tourist strengths of a certain area (Craocolici & Nijkamp, 2009).

In ENP, tourists displayed mixed views on different attributes of the park such as cost of accommodation and services, infrastructure, environmental issues, park management and facilities. The cost of services surfaced at the centre of tourists' experiences with the ENP with different views on affordability, comparison with other parks and also comparison over the years for the same destination, and show negative tourist views regarding costs.

For a tourist destination such as ENP to remain competitive, the product and services at the park should be perceived as being of quality similar to and/or better than those of other similar destinations and the price should be perceived as competitive and commensurate to the perceived value of the product in order to maintain tourists' satisfaction. However, prices have been slightly declining in recent years (Table 6) which may go some way toward alleviating tourists' concerns about high prices, and improve their perceptions with regard to value for money.

**Table 6: Accommodation rates during the year 2008-2013 as single rates in Namibian dollars (N\$) in Etosha National Park (Source: Namibia Wildlife Resort LTD, 2011)**

Facility	2007-2008	2008-2009	2009-2010	2010-2011	2011-2012	2012-2013
Halali	800-1200	800-1500	800-1500	800-1050	500-600	500-600
Namutoni	1700-2000	1700-2000	1400-2000	950-1150	600-750	600-750
Okaukuejo	800-3000	800-3000	800-3000	800-1100	600-700	650-850
Onkoshi	-	5500-5995	5500-5995	3200-3400	750-1200	1200-1450
Dolomite	-	-	-	750-1200	750-1200	900-1250

The study shows that despite concerns about the cost of services, condition of facilities, congestion, etc., tourists still indicated their wish to return to the park. This suggests that these attributes can act as signals for areas of destination improvement, in order to increase tourists' satisfaction and experience in the future. Indeed, many aspects could be addressed with relatively simple solutions – road surfaces can be maintained using sprinkled recycled water, and signage within the park can be improved and refurbished.

The low response on hygienic issues was in accordance with the research findings of Narayan et al. (2008) that hygiene was among the factors that did not have a significant impact on tourist satisfaction. Indeed, hygienic attributes are generic infrastructural elements and can lead to dissatisfaction toward a destination when their quality goes below the expected standard (Crompton, 2003). This is encouraging for ENP and NWR in particular, but points to areas where pro-active improvements may be beneficial in order to prevent any further declines in quality and, therefore, prevent future dissatisfaction.

Various visitor management techniques may be implemented to improve the environment at campsites and in the rooms, and to manage the number of visitors at restaurants and kiosks, roadside game viewing sites and waterholes during the peak season. Continuous monitoring and expansion may be required to manage the high numbers.

Park management also needs to react to practices breaking park rules and undermining both tourism activities and conservation such as speeding, noisy night drives and the presence of jackals in the campsites.

## **Conclusion**

Understanding tourists' satisfaction is without a doubt a challenging task; however, understanding tourists' satisfaction in ENP remains key to creating, enhancing and maintaining it. The consequences of tourist satisfaction, tourist complaints and tourist loyalty would also require measurement. Strengthening of park management and control and further improvements on the tourists' experiences through meeting and exceeding tourists' expectations lead to a positive perceived value of the purchase and is crucial in recognizing and responding to tourists needs and creating tourists' satisfaction. Information on tourists' satisfaction will always aid in understanding areas of potential improvement. A well-managed Park is likely to entice tourists to share their great experiences which acts as a powerful marketing effort and leads to destination loyalty. In the process of satisfying the tourists' needs, both the NWR and the park management (the Ministry of Environment and Tourism) are likely to require a development strategy with a balanced approach which aims at addressing concerns and issues emanating from tourists' experiences and expectations and those pertaining to the preservation of the park's natural environment.

Finally, there is need to develop further tourist satisfaction research in ENP and in Namibia in order to provide useful body of knowledge and guidance to tourism planners, managers, decision makers and marketers on the factors influencing tourist satisfaction in the Namibian context. In order to plan for marketable tourism products and services at destinations such as ENP, information on tourist satisfaction is required. The assessment of tourists' satisfaction must be a parameter used to evaluate the performance of destination products and services especially following the implementation of the NWR Turnaround strategy. This information will enable tourism planners, managers, decision-makers and marketers enhance the image of the ENP specifically and tourism in general leading to the country's economic growth and job creation.

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