

# Profiling visitor characteristics at Tsitsikamma National Park, South Africa

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## Abstract

South Africa has many governmental and private owned national parks and game reserves. It therefore follows that there is high level of competition amongst these national parks and game reserves in attracting tourists to visit them. It has therefore become important for national parks and game reserve marketers and managers to determine who the tourists are who tend visit them are. The reason for this is that park management and marketers need to focus their efforts to optimise their limited resources. This can only be done once there is a clear understanding of who the market is, where they come from and their expectations. The literature study clearly showed that market segmentation is essential for the effective marketing of a tourism product or destination. A survey was done between November and December 2015, profiling tourists to the Tsitsikamma National Park, who stayed overnight at Storms River Camp. The study focussed on the profile of visitors to the Tsitsikamma National Park and the main objectives for the study were to investigate the biographical aspects of the visitors and investigating the motives of visiting the national park. The study adopted a quantitative research methodology using questionnaires as a research instrument. The main findings of the study revealed that majority of tourists visiting the park during the period of research were mainly South Africans, who are young and employed. The main reasons for visiting the park were to relax and to get away from the normal routine. Majority of the respondents prefer the national park for its beautiful nature and wilderness experience. These findings have greater implications for park management and its marketing efforts for future sustainability of the national park.

**Key words:** Tourist characteristics, Tsitsikamma National Park, Tourist satisfaction, South Africa

## Introduction

Tsitsikamma National Park stretches for 80km from the Krom River Forest Station to the Salt River. It lies between the Tsitsikamma Mountains and the coast. Tsitsikamma is a Khoisan (early inhabitants of the area) word meaning, "place of much water" and is Africa's oldest and largest marine reserve, playing a vital role in the preservation and conservation of marine fauna and flora.

The Tsitsikamma National Park includes spectacular scenery such as Indian Ocean breakers, pounding rocky shores beneath 180 m high cliffs, ever-green forests and fynbos (proteas and heath) rolling down to the sea in a lush carpet where ancient rivers have carved their path to the ocean through rocky ravines. Tsitsikamma National Park is the third most frequently visited out of all the national parks in South Africa. The park conserves a considerable portion of the natural biota (all living organisms) of the Garden Route.

Tsitsikamma national park protects a wonderland of inter-tidal and marine life. This is one of the largest single unit 'no take' (including fishing) Marine Protected Areas (MPA) in the world, conserving 11 percent of South Africa's temperate south coast rocky shoreline and provides a 'laboratory' for fisheries baseline research on endangered line fish species.

In 1964 when it was proclaimed, it became the first marine national park to be proclaimed in Africa. Approximately thirty percent of the park is covered in fynbos (Cape Floral Kingdom), scattered amongst the forest vegetation, boasting a wide variety of beautiful flowers, including proteas and heath.

A survey was conducted between November and December 2015, profiling tourists who stayed overnight at the Storms River Camp of the Tsitsikamma National Park. Below, (figure 1) shows Tsitsikamma National Park, Stormsriver Rest Camp.



Figure 1: Tsitsikamma National Park, Stormsriver Rest Camp (SANParks, 2014)

Tsitsikamma national park consisted of two rest camps which are Storms River Camp and Nature's Valley Camp but the study was conducted at Stormsriver Rest Camp which consisted of the following overnight facilities:

- 85 units (graded from 2- 3 stars)
- guest houses (graded 4 stars)
- 82 caravan stands (graded 2 stars with electricity)
- 12 tent stands (graded 2 stars with electricity)
- 18 tent stands (graded 2 stars without electricity)

## Literature Review

To ensure continuity and growth, a destination (attraction) is dependent on, inter alia, tourists and the satisfaction of their needs. Although total satisfaction of tourists' needs is not the goal in itself, striving to achieve this enables the attraction to attain its own goals (Strydom *et al.* 2000). To achieve maximum tourist satisfaction, marketing strategists divide the

heterogeneous market into fairly homogeneous groups of tourists, a process that is referred to as market segmentation. Through market segmentation one can develop a tourist profile that will enable Tsitsikamma national park to concentrate its resources and efforts so that maximum penetration of that market can be achieved (Doole & Lowe, 2001).

However, if little is known about tourists who visit the park, then the limited marketing resources might be used in a wrong market segment. The problem that Tsitsikamma national park must deal with is that the 'product' sought by tourists can be satisfied by a number of attractions/destinations. This creates the need to develop an overall competitive advantage for Tsitsikamma national park (Hassan, 2000) and makes the profiling of tourists' crucial (Nickels & Wood, 1997). The number of parks and game reserves in South Africa are on the increase, which leads to stiff competition. Except for national parks, there are also parks at local, provincial and government levels, as well as many privately owned game reserves in South Africa. All these parks and game reserves are offering an ecotourism experience. Other destinations/attractions are winning competitive battles through careful analysis and response to the core values and needs of the segmented travel market place (Hassan, 2000). Tsitsikamma national park needs to do the same. With regard to the international travel to South Africa, research by South African Tourism (SAT, 2002) indicated that more than 80 % of these tourists travel to South Africa for game and nature experiences. This creates yet another opportunity for marketers to profile tourists travelling to the Tsitsikamma national park.

It is no longer possible to serve a total market and it is therefore necessary to segment markets and concentrate on a single segment or a number of segments (Saayman 2001; Kinnear *et al.* 1995). Segments are evaluated according to a number of criteria, but the essence of the approach is to identify the most relevant characteristics of tourists seeking particular sets of benefits from their tourism and leisure purchases (Laws 1997; Pride & Ferrell 1987). In this process, consumer behaviour plays an important role. The tourist does not make purchase decisions in isolation. The mix of cultural, social, personal, psychological factors and previous experiences, all which influence behaviour, is largely uncontrollable. Because of the influence exerted upon patterns of buying, it is essential that as much effort as possible is put into understanding how these factors interact and ultimately how they influence decisions (Lamb *et al.* 2002). The attractiveness of Tsitsikamma national park reflects the feelings, beliefs and opinions that an individual has about the park's ability to provide satisfaction in relation to his or her special vacation needs (Slabbert, 2002).

Successful segmentation is the product of a detailed understanding of the market and will therefore take time (Saayman, 2001; McDonald & Dunbar, 1995). Market segmentation is also one of the keys to developing a sustainable competitive advantage based on differentiation, low cost, or a focused strategy (Aaker, 1998). Knowing the profile characteristics of target groups can help marketing strategists to tailor the product or service and promote the product or service more effectively. Each group can be targeted and reached with a distinct marketing mix (McDonald & Dunbar, 1995). Communication effects have a direct bearing on the prospective tourist's decision to act. The prospective tourist decides whether or not to respond to the advertising by taking action (Pritchard, 1998). To be of use, markets need to be segmented according to attributes that can relate to the product or service, distribution, price and media (Andereck & Caldwell, 1994).

Research in the past has indicated the benefits of market segmentation to include amongst others:

- long-term relationships can be formed with tourists who are brand loyal (Nickels & Wood, 1997);
- gauging the park's current position, as it is perceived by the tourists, relative to the competition;
- segmentation can help guide the proper allocation and use of marketing resources (Strydom *et al.* 2000; Semenik, 2002);

- new markets can be detected and the success of marketing campaigns can be measured;
- scarce resources are not wasted and the marketing message/communication can be very specific;
- skills and insights used in segmenting the product market give the destination/attraction an important competitive advantage by identifying buyer groups that will respond favourably to the park's marketing efforts (Slabbert, 2002);
- long-term growth can be secured by understanding each tourist market as an individual group of tourists with their distinct cultural make-up (Reisinger & Turner, 1998); and
- better service and facilities can be delivered (Saayman, 2001).

It is therefore important for the Tsitsikamma National Park to profile the target market accurately and to understand its diversity. The profiling of a tourist typically involves four components, namely demographic, geographic, psychographic and socio-economic characteristics (Saayman, 2001 & Kotler *et al.* 1999).

Based on the above, the purpose of this paper is to determine the profile of the typical tourist visiting Tsitsikamma National Park. This information will help park management and marketers in the formulation of marketing policies and development strategies in order to maintain a competitive advantage.

### Methodology

The methodology used in this research was two-fold, namely a literature study and one survey. The literature study focused on similar research as well as marketing literature in order to compile a questionnaire. Research by Kotler *et al.* (1999) and Saayman (2001) gave insight into what aspects are relevant for the development of a profile of tourists to the national park.

The survey was conducted at the Tsitsikamma national park by means of questionnaires completed by tourists who stayed overnight at the Storms River Rest Camp. The survey was completed during November and December 2015. During this period 120 questionnaires were completed and returned from the 200 that were distributed. This represents a response rate of 60%. The reason for this was because the months of November to December are rated as high season and it is also the best time of the year to visit the park. A structured questionnaire was used to collect the primary data. The questionnaire dealt with demographic, socio-economic, geographic and psychographic information. Respondents had to rate aspects on a five-point Likert scale, where: 1 = less important, 5 = very important.

### Results

From the surveys all the results will be shown on the tables but not all the results from the tables will be discussed. Interesting and extreme cases will be the main focus of results discussions. For the purpose of this article, certain aspects of the market segmentation model most frequently used in tourism research was applied (Saayman, 2001; Kotler *et al.* 1999; Proctor, 1996; Pender, 1999; Nickels & Wood,1997). This segmentation model is used in profiling a specific market according to:

- demographic information, e.g., age, gender, income, marital status, education and nationality;
- socio-economic information, for example spending patterns;
- psychographic information, for example reasons for attending and most effective marketing tools; and
- geographic information, e.g., where tourists come from.

**Table 1: Demographic profile**

Gender	
Male	56.5%

Female	43.5%
<b>Language</b>	
English	40%
Afrikaans	30.8%
Other languages	29.2%
<b>Marital status</b>	
Married	52.1%
Not married	30.3%
Divorced	.8%
Living together	15.1%
Widowed	1.7%
<b>Accompanied by children</b>	
Yes	24.8%
No	75.2%
<b>Age</b>	
17 – 25 years	20%
26 – 35 years	25%
36 -45 years	12.5%
46 – 55 years	22.5%
56 – 65 years	14.2%
66 years and older	5.8%

From table 1, it is clear that the respondents are mostly males, married, English speaking tourists who were not accompanied by children and they are mostly between the ages of 26 and 35 years. This finding may imply that these tourists are young married couples who still want to enjoy each other's company before they start to have children. It can be assumed that they take these trip as part of continuation of their honeymoon. The results may also infer that national park is popular amongst tourists who are not married (30.3%) as well as tourists who are between the ages 46 to 55 years (22.5%).

**Table 2: Socio-economic profile**

<b>Annual income</b>	
R50 000 or less	5.7%
R50 001 - R100 000	16.1%
R100 001 – R200 000	20.7%
R200 001 - R300 000	17.2%
R300 001 – R400 000	16.1%
R400 001+	24.1%
<b>Employment</b>	
Employed	62.6%
Self-employed	13.9%
Retired	10.4%
Student	9.6%
Unemployed	1.7%
Other	1.7%
<b>Education level</b>	

Primary	.9%
Secondary	9.9%
Tertiary	89.2%

Table 2 shows that the respondents' annual income varies between R 50 001 and R 400 000 and above with the highest income recoded for those earning between R 400 000 and above at 24.1%. This was slightly followed by those earning between R100 001 and R 200 000 with recordings of 20.7%. The least recorded annual income was for those tourists who earn less than R 50 000 per annum with 5.7%. Most of the tourists are well-educated, supported by the findings of 89.2% who have a tertiary qualification and this supports the notion that they are in professional occupations. This finding further supports the finding of annual income which revealed that most of these tourists earn an annual salary of R4 00 000 and above since these tourists are well educated and are employed.

**Table 3: Geographic profile**

<b>Country of residence</b>	
Republic of South Africa	52.5%
Germany	13.3%
Netherlands	6.7%
Holland	1.7%
United Kingdom	6.7%
Belgium	3.3%
Australia	4.2%
United States of America	5%
Spain	.8%
China	1.7%
Ireland	2.5%
Canada	1.7%
<b>Province if from South Africa</b>	
Gauteng	9.7%
Western Cape	50%
Eastern Cape	17.7%
Northern Cape	3.2%
Free State	1.6%
Kwazulu Natal	4.8%
North West	6.5%
Mpumalanga	1.6%
Limpopo	4.8%

Table 3 shows that tourists who visit this park are mainly South Africans (52.5%) who reside in the Western Cape Province (50%). These results maybe because Tsitsikamma national park is located in the Eastern Cape Province on the border with the Western Cape Province and hence it is easier for tourists from the Western Cape Province to access the park as well as closer (distance reasons). The other notion could be that generally most people prefer to have their holidays outside of their own provinces and hence the tourists from the Eastern Cape Province where the park is located are less (17.7%) than tourists from the Western Cape Province. The least number of domestic tourists were from the provinces of Free State and Mpumalanga with 1.6% respectively. However, from an international perspective, the highest recorded numbers of international tourists (13.3%) were from Germany, followed by United Kingdom and Netherlands (6.7%) respectively and they were slightly by United States of America with 5%. The least number of tourists were from Spain with .8%.

**Table 4: Psychographic profile**

<b>Frequency of visits</b>	
1 <sup>st</sup> time	31%
2 <sup>nd</sup> time	17%
3 <sup>rd</sup> time	22%
4 <sup>th</sup> time	13%
5 <sup>th</sup> time	13%
More than 5 times	4%
<b>Purpose of visit</b>	
To relax	85.3%
To get away from my regular routine	9.2%
To learn about flora and fauna in general	5.5%
<b>Preference of the park</b>	
Beautiful nature	48%
Wilderness experience	30%
Variety of plant, bird and wildlife	22%
<b>Length of stay</b>	
1 - 3 days	42.5%
3 – 5 days	24.1%
5 – 8 days	17.2%
8 days and more	16.1%

Table 4 shows that during the time of the survey, the national park was mostly visited by first time visitors (31%) with 13% of the tourists visiting the park the fourth and fifth time respectively. Amongst the respondents, 22% of the tourists during the time of the survey were visiting the park for the third time whilst 4% of these tourists had visited the park for more than five times. This is an indication that most of the respondents are loyal to the park and are satisfied with both the quality of service and experience offered by the park as they are repeat visitors. From a parks management perspective, it is necessary to maintain a high quality of service to persuade these tourists to return annually.

The reasons for visiting this park were dominated by those who wanted to relax (85.3%); to break away from their normal routine (9.2%) and then followed by those who wanted to learn more about flora and fauna species in general (5.5%). The results indicate that 42.5% respondents stayed between one and three days in the national park followed by those who stayed between three and five days (24.1%). The main reasons for the tourists to prefer visiting Tsitsikamma national park rather than other national parks in South Africa were that the park has beautiful nature (48%) and this maybe because the park is located in the coastal area and tourists have access to ocean view, hiking trails along the coast together with black water tubing experiences. 30% of the tourists chose the park because of wilderness experiences offered in the park whilst 22% chose the park for reasons related to variety of plant, bird and animal species.

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The aim of this paper was to determine the profile of a typical tourist visiting the Tsitsikamma national park. From this research the following conclusions can be drawn:

- tourists visiting the Tsitsikamma national park are brand loyal and a quality service should sustain this market well into the future. This creates a situation where marketers can identify other potential markets to focus on them;
- needs of current tourists are basically the same, which makes it easy for the park to gain a larger part of the market.

Based on the conclusions the following recommendations can be made:

From a marketing point of view, park management knows who the target market is, especially during the months of November to December. The marketing message for the international market should therefore focus on convincing potential tourists that November to December is the best time to visit the national park since it is summer and very warm for one to have a wonderful experience in a coastal national park. If the policy is to focus primarily on the domestic market during these months, then the *status quo* should be maintained since the results showed that the majority of visitors during the time of survey were South Africans. From a management policy point of view, an analysis of certain aspects of the profile, e.g., number of stay days in the park, can give important information on how to create a situation where tourists can spend more days in the park. This may imply that the national park needs to incorporate some of the tourist activities that they can participate in around the Tsitsikamma area, outside the park whilst they are lodging inside the park. Another option could be the development of more recreational facilities for children. This will not only lead to more spending in the national park but also to investing in a future market for this national park. Other national parks can take note of these results and implement similar research in order to compare results. In general the results of the study infer that Tsitsikamma national park has enough support of domestic tourists who are well educated and who earn a good enough annual income. These results may infer that the future sustainability of the national park is in no doubt since it has enough support by the tourists both domestic and international.

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