

Borders as barriers to tourism: tourists experiences at the Beitbridge Border Post (Zimbabwean side)

*Getrude Kwanisai¹, Tapiwa Mpofu¹, Sebastian Vengesayi², Chiedza N. Mutanga¹, Brighton Hurombo¹ & Kumbirai Mirimi¹

¹Travel and Recreation Department,

²School of Hospitality and Tourism,
Chinhoyi University of Technology,
Chinhoyi, Zimbabwe.

E-mail: gkwanisai@gmail.com/gkwanisai@cut.ac.zw

*Corresponding author

Abstract

International borders greatly influence tourism development. In 2012 and 2013, a decline in tourists to Zimbabwe from South Africa was partially attributed to tourist border facilitation issues. It is against this background that this study sought to establish the nature of challenges faced by tourists when using the Beitbridge border post (Zimbabwean side). Questionnaire responses were thematically analysed and the study concluded that border administrative management related issues are a major barrier to tourism. Key among the study's recommendations is that the depressed tourists' border experiences obtaining at Beitbridge border post among other constraints have to be addressed as a matter of urgency. This will enhance Zimbabwe's accessibility, tourist satisfaction and the image of the country as a destination. The paper further identifies several destination managerial implications and future research priorities.

Keywords: *Tourist border facilitation; Beitbridge border post; Zimbabwe.*

INTRODUCTION

International tourism is growing at an ever-increasing rate. The year 2013 recorded 1 087 million international travelers and US\$1.4 trillion was generated globally from tourism (United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO), 2014a). The increase in arrivals represents over a hundred percentage growth from 1995 figures. In view of the fact that international travel involves crossing political borders; the relationship between tourism and international borders is a fundamental one. Border crossing experiences forms part of the whole destination experience.

Borders greatly influence tourism development and borderlands are usually

the first areas of a destination tourists experience in international tourism. This provides significant potential for destinations to make a positive first impression and convey a particular message or image (Ilbery, Saxena, & Kneafsey, 2007). Most importantly; border crossing experiences form perceptions on the accessibility of a destination. In some cases borders have been seen to function as substantial barriers for tourism: real and/or perceived barriers (Timothy & Tosun 2003). Though with varying degrees, this is common for both the developed and developing countries (Anderson, Maoh & Burke 2014; Bradbury, 2013; Christie & Crompton, 2001; Jayawardena, 2008a & b; MacLaurin & Wolstenholme, 2008; Nielsen & Spenceley,

2010; Regional Tourism Organisation of Southern Africa [RETOSA], 2011; United Nations Economic Commission for Africa [UNECA], 2010; Zhang, 2013).

Tourism in Zimbabwe contributes significantly to the economy. Prior to the new millennium, Zimbabwe was amongst the most competitive destinations in Africa. However the tourism industry suffered immensely from the repercussions of the highly controversial Land Redistribution Program launched in 2000. The resultant political and economic environment saw the industry recording a sharp decline in international tourist arrivals in the following years. The formation of the Government of National Unity (GNU) and the adoption of the multi-currency in 2009 breathed a new life to the tourism industry as arrivals and expenditure started to increase steadily. However, Zimbabwe recorded a decline in international tourist arrivals in 2012 compared to 2011. The African market recorded the highest percentage decline of 23%. The destination management organisation; Zimbabwe Tourism Authority (ZTA) partly attributed this decline to Beitbridge border facilitation issues. To quote ZTA:

“It should be noted that although there was a general decline in all markets, the arrivals were strongly pulled down by Mainland Africa...The negative growth in arrivals from mainland Africa was to a great extent influenced by the fall in South African arrivals (*the major African market*) during the year raising concern over issues to do with border facilitation...” (ZTA, 2012, pg 8).

South African visitors make up the largest segment of Zimbabwe's African market, it accounted for 46% of all African travelers to Zimbabwe in 2013 (ZTA, 2013). In 2013, the African market recorded an increase of 1% from 2012 figures, and again

this small percentage increase was attributed to a continued decline of the South African market. Just like in 2012, ZTA pointed border facilitation issues as continuing to contribute to the poor performance of the South African market.

“The marginal growth in arrivals from mainland Africa was to a great extent influenced by the marginal decline in South African arrivals (the major African market) during the year. This continues to raise concerns over issues to do with border facilitation.....” (ZTA, 2013, pg.7)

Despite the crucial role of borders in tourism, much scholarly work on borders have been done in political geography, international relations, anthropology, transport and many other disciplines (Prokkola, 2008). Few notable studies have looked at borders in relation to tourism and much of the conceptual foundations were laid mainly by Timothy (1995a & b; 1999; 2000; 2001; 2002; see also Timothy & Butler, 1995; Timothy & Tosun, 2003; Timothy & Teye, 2004; Timothy & Webster, 2006; Gelbman & Timothy, 2010 & 2011; Woosnam, Shafer, Scott & Timothy, 2015).

The majority of studies on borders and tourism were done in the developed world, especially within the European Union and on the USA-Canada border (Ackleson, 2005; Anderson et al. 2014; Bradbury, 2013; Kindler & Matejko, 2009; Prokkola, 2008 & 2010; Timothy & Tosun, 2003; Woosnam et al. 2015). These studies mainly focused on border security issues and their impacts on traveler numbers; and opportunities for tourism development at borderlands. There is little information on comprehensive challenging experiences tourist encounter when crossing borders in the developing world particularly when border facilitation have been cited to contributing towards a decline in arrivals. Therefore, this study sought to address

these gaps by exploring the nature of challenges South African tourists face at Beitbridge border post, specifically the Zimbabwean side. Understanding the challenges from a tourist perspective would enable the responsible authorities such as the Ministry of Tourism and Hospitality, and ZTA to engage all the stakeholders involved in the facilitation of tourists at the border. Together, they may come up with strategies to manage the situation. This will benefit the tourists by enhancing their travel experiences. In light of tourism being one of the earmarked industries for economic revival, this study is of importance to Zimbabwe as a destination. The whole of Southern Africa also stand to benefit considering the importance of multi-destination packages within the region.

BORDERS AND TOURISM

International travel involves crossing political borders; and as already been pointed out, the relationship between tourism and international borders is a fundamental one. However the relationship is a complex one, and has seen studies being done on the subject area to explore and understand this association (Gelbman and Timothy 2010; Prokkola, 2010; Timothy, 2001; Timothy & Teye, 2004; Timothy & Tosun, 2003). Borders have mainly five functions; they: mark the limits of national dominion; filter the flow of certain goods into and out of a country; control the flow of people; are ideological barriers; are lines of military defense (Timothy and Tosun, 2003). The degree of permeability of borders is mainly determined by the function of the border (Donnan & Wilson, 1999) and, the relations and accords between bordering nations (Prokkola, 2008).

International borders wield powerful influence on international tourism in two ways: positively and negatively (Knowles & Mathiessen, 2009; Timothy & Tosun, 2003; Smith 1984). Borders create barriers to travel: perceived or actual barriers; and they

can act as attractions (Gelbman & Timothy, 2010 & 2011; Prokkola, 2010; Bradbury, 2013; Timothy & Webster, 2006; Ackleson, 2005; Zhang, 2013; Timothy, 1995). Barriers are created mainly by border-related government policies, administrative management on both sides of the border and the physical barriers created by the borders (Canally 2004). Borders are known to create unique attractions (Gelbman, 2008; Timothy, 1995b; Gelbman & Timothy, 2010 & 2011) and form great opportunities for tourism development. Medvedev (1999) is of the view that features of the border landscape, such as welcome signs, flags, passport controls and customs buildings, add intrigue and fascination to the crossing experience. The potential of borderlands in creating tourist attractions have seen cooperation among governments globally to create a conducive environment for tourism development at borders (Prokkola, 2008). For example in the European Union, numerous initiatives are in place to promote cross-border tourism amongst member states and these cooperatives are underpinned by the concept of sustainable tourism development.

However, despite this potential of borderlands in tourism development, governments implement diverse barrier policies to control and monitor the movement of people into and out of their territories. Barrier policies include stringent visa requirements (RETOSA, 2011; UNWTO, 2013, 2014b), tight security controls (Bradbury, 2013; Dibb, Ball, Canhoto, Daniel, Meadows & Spiller, 2014) and total ban (Timothy & Tosun, 2003). Visas are used for the following reasons: security; limitation of entry, duration of stay and activities; revenue generation; reciprocity (a country imposing a visa on another because the other country requires a visa of the issuing country's citizens); and control of demand (UNWTO & World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC), 2012). Tight security controls are becoming popular at borders because of the terrorism activities around the world. Travelers have to go

through rigorous security checks for them to cross into another country. This has implications on time spent to cross the border and traveler perceived harassment by the security personnel (Timothy and Tosun 2003). The USA-Canada border's stringent security measures implemented after the 9/11 terror attacks were found to cause a decline in travelers crossing the border, (Anderson et al. 2014; Bradbury, 2013). Governments may totally ban their citizens from crossing into a neighboring country. This is common in the existence of political conflicts between the countries, for example what used to exist between North and South Korea.

How borders are managed also affect permeability perceptions. How services are rendered during security, customs and immigration procedures, and border infrastructure can all be barriers to tourism. All these forms part of the border experiences and influence how travelers perceive the border. Long queues, poor service quality, communication skills by border officials, and poor infrastructure are some of the border management issues affecting travelers experiences (Kindler & Matejko, 2009)

Not all borders are real deterrents to travel, but their presence act as barriers because of how people perceive borders in general (Kwowlles and Metthiessen, 2009). Even borders which are relatively inconspicuous, they were found to have strong effects on travelers (Timothy and Tosun, 2003). It is also important to note that these perceptions on borders as barriers to travel vary from person to person (Knowles and Metthiessen, 2009). To some individuals, border processes may be considered necessary, while others view them as irritating.

Globalisation has seen incredible changes in government policies towards borders (Gilbman & Timothy, 2010; Prokkola, 2010), and in most cases more borders are open to flow of goods and travelers instead of being closed and fortified, and this encourages

increased flows of tourist. This is reflected in the liberalization of trade agreements and economic cooperation that leads to border-crossing agreements and the potential development of international tourism. For example the internal European Union borders and the Canada – United States of America border have the reputation of being open borders. Globally, various tourism organisations have been lobbying for the removal of all impediments to international travel through various programs and campaigns (UNWTO & WTTC, 2013; RETOSA 2011).

METHODS

1. Beitbridge border post context

Beitbridge is a border between Zimbabwe and South Africa. This is an open border as the movement of goods and people between the two countries is allowed. The two countries signed a memorandum of understanding to completely scrap the visa necessities in November 2012. This was part of regional integration within the SADC region. The abolishment of visa requirements between both countries made it much easier for citizens to move between the two countries as only a passport is now required for one to cross the border.

Beitbridge is the busiest inland port in sub-Saharan Africa. The border handles more than 3 500 vehicles and 9 000 people crossing daily with the figures soaring to 20 000 travelers during Easter Holidays and the festive seasons (Newsday, 2014). Poor facilitation of travelers in general and goods at Beitbridge border has been a topical issue for so many years now (Christie and Crompton, 2001; Mills, 2012; TradeMark Southern Africa, 2011; UNECA, 2010). Beitbridge border is known for delays in clearing travelers. The media reports that travelers would at times spend up to 8 hours at the border to be cleared (The Herald, 2011) and this vary with seasons. The question is, '*what causes these delays and are they only delays travelers experience at the border?*'

The 'green and red routes' were established as a way of easing congestion at the border. This is a customs clearance system which separates travelers with goods to declare and those without. Travelers with goods to declare use the red route, while those without will use the green route. That way, a traveler without goods to declare is cleared quickly. But the challenge of congestion still remained and some sections of the media reported that the government was considering creating a new border post between Zimbabwe and South Africa (Bulawayo24 News, 2013; Newsday 2014). Suggestions are to construct another road to South Africa through Kezi where it would be upgraded and a new border constructed over Shashi and a road constructed through Botswana.

2. Data collection and analysis

After permission was granted by the Beitbridge border authorities (Zimbabwean side) and ZTA Beitbridge office, an open-ended questionnaire was distributed to South African tourists at Beitbridge border post in April 2014 as they were in queues for various procedures. The questionnaire was centered on the challenges tourists face at the Beitbridge border. The questionnaire was completed and returned to the researchers. A total of 163 usable questionnaires were obtained. In as much as an overall picture of the experiences would have been given by tourists who were served and done with border clearance, it was difficult to get willing respondents as they were rushing to leave the border. However this was compensated by the fact that other responses were provided by tourists in Kariba resort and Masvingo (Great Zimbabwe Ruins). A survey on tourist satisfaction was done by the researchers in these areas between October 2013 and January 2014 and immigration was one of the areas tourists were supposed to evaluate Zimbabwe on. There was a section where respondents could give their experiences with immigration and a majority of them cited the ports of entry they had used when narrating

their experiences. A total of 96 reviews were done on Beitbridge border by South African tourists. Thematic analysis was used in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Gupta & Levenburg, 2010; Woodhouse, 2006). It was useful for identifying patterns of meaning and experience in qualitative data provided through tourists' responses. The responses were read through to gain an overall perspective of the data in relation to the research goal. Then, the sections of data which answered the research questions were coded for more detailed analysis. Similar codes were grouped to highlight recurrent patterns, representing emergent themes. Exemplary quotations were then extracted for illustrating the identified themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Description of sample.

A total of 53.6% of the respondents were females and 46.4% were males. The age groups within the sample were represented as follows: 26-35 years (23.1%); 36-45(29.8%); 46-55(21.5%); 56-65(10.9%); 18-25 (7.7%) and more than 65(7%). 86% arranged their trips independently; and 14% were on a tour package. Most of the respondents were touring the destination for the first time (56.4%) while 43.6% were repeat visitors. Majority of the tourists had traveled for leisure (66.9%); 23.4% were on business trips and the remaining (9.7%) cited various reasons including visiting friends and relatives.

2. Challenges experienced by tourists at Beitbridge border post

Interestingly, 93% of the respondents indicated they experienced some challenges at the border and only 7% did not face any challenges at all. Tourists who did not encounter any challenges were on packaged tours and some of them indicated their agents were doing the border clearing

processes on their behalf. However, some of those tourists who were on these packaged tours complained of some bad experiences with the border.

Challenges faced by tourists at Beitbridge border are: Poor service (96%); poor infrastructure (57%); limited provision of information on border procedures (74%); too many procedures (87%); presence of touts and bogus agents (61%). These are discussed in more detail below:

2.1 Poor service delivery

Respondents indicated that the immigration and customs officials: are few; are very slow in serving people; spend a lot of time on their phones; harass travelers; do not control the queues; take a lot of time when changing shifts. The quotes below from the respondents indicate a serious border management problem which is creating a barrier to tourism in Zimbabwe.

Too much time is taken for the passports to be stamped. It's not busy and the queue is so short but we have more than three hours here.

Unclear procedures and too many stops. Even the officials do not know who is responsible for what.

People push in the queue and no one is controlling the queue.

Too few people to serve us, other counters are not being used yet the queue is so long.

Officers take too much time when changing shifts and we are here in this scotching sun.

Officers are phone mongers, they take forever on their phones forgetting to do their jobs and we are delayed.

Customs officials are very unprofessional and they harass us.

Poor service delivery at the border is the major problem tourists face as indicated by the greater percentage of responses and reviews which highlighted the aspect in one dimension or the other. One may conclude that poor service delivery is the major contributor towards the common 'delays' which have become a trademark of the border. With this finding, it will be pointless to open other borders between Zimbabwe and South Africa as a way to ease congestion at Beitbridge. The culture of what entails good service delivery at a border has to be inculcated first; this will help the immigration and customs officials to do their jobs efficiently. Tourists' perceptions of harassment by immigration and customs officials have also been found by Timothy and Tosun (2003) at the USA-Canada border, and at borders between the European Union (EU) countries and non-EU countries (Kindler and Matejko, 2009). However one may argue that the jobs of these customs and immigration officers requires them to be serious and intimidating to some degree for security and drug trafficking issues for example. This way they weed out those people who have legitimate reasons to be nervous or fearful. Few check points, long queues and delays were also found to be common at borders between Poland and Ukrainian with waiting hours ranging from four to six hours (Kindler and Matejko, 2009).

2.2 Limited provision of information on border procedures and too many procedures

Tourists indicated that they do not have access to information on border procedures, and the procedures are 'too many'. These 'too many procedures', combined with the poor service discussed above and the tourist having no idea of which office or desk to go to next; is a recipe for the

common 'delays' which the border is known for.

Too many check points before one leaves the border.

Poor processes. At least let us know what is required to get into Zimbabwe with our vehicles and how it's actually done such that we don't waste our time doing useless processes that don't get us anywhere.

Declaration and clearance process is a hustle, seems like no one knows the exact procedure to be followed. Provide information on procedures to follow when crossing the border like other borders do.

Lack of transparency. No clear signs on where a visitor should go for assistance. Very frightening to a tourist who does not have a clue of where to go and what to do next to get through into Zimbabwe.

Stringent travel formalities and information provision on these formalities still remains a global challenge to the growth of the tourism sector (UNWTO, 2014b). Where entry procedures are more arduous, the border is seen as a barrier that is less likely to be crossed (Ascher, 1984; Knowles and Matthiessen, 2009), thus a reduction in tourist arrivals. Bradbury (2013) found that stringent security measures implemented at the USA-Canada border after the 9/11 have negatively impacted the movement of travelers across the border. The security procedures have actually complicated traveler identification operations at the border. As a result, tourism has suffered considerably in both countries due to longer waits and greater unpredictability of

crossing time at the border (Konrad, 2010).

2.3 Presence of touts and bogus agents

It emerged that the presence of touts and bogus clearing agents at the border is one of the challenges tourist face. Presence of touts is fueling corruption and theft at the border.

Due to the snail-paced queues, bogus agents are coming and offering an alternative for a fee. They are very harassing. The border is not safe for us.

Too many crooks and thieves who act as immigration officials and policeman without uniforms.

Due to long queues, people are forced to bribe the bogus agents for them to cross quickly.

Immigration officers are being bribed to serve late comers while we wait in the queue.

I lost my money, somebody robbed me. There is no order; you don't understand people moving up and down doing absolutely nothing.

With the economic challenges prevailing in the country resulting in high rates of unemployment, locals are looking for a means to survive. The long queues and delays create a lucrative opportunity for the touts since they know the travelers want to leave the border quickly and can pay a 'small' fee for someone to speed up the clearing processes for them. One would wonder if it is not possible that the customs and immigration officials are delaying travelers on purpose for them to pay the touts and bogus agents to speed up the processes for them. The touts will then pay the officials, that way they benefit from the delays.

Chene (2013) noted that corruption is exacerbated by a set of factors that create incentives and opportunities for corruption activities. These include poor infrastructure, lack of human and institutional capacity, low levels of automation and computerization, lack of training and professionalism, low public service salaries, weak controls. To curb corruption activities at borders, Igbunago (2011) suggest the following: simplifying and harmonizing customs and border procedures, encouraging the use of new technologies, and focusing on organisational and institutional development through better human resources management, integrity training, incentive systems,

2.4 Poor infrastructure

Tourists complained of limited parking space; inadequate dilapidated toilets and ablution facilities; poor waiting space; and absence of shopping facilities on the Zimbabwean side of the border. Tourists expressed concern over the limited space to park their cars at the border. This challenge is resulting in tourists paying touts to look after their vehicles as they do the border clearing processes. *"No parking space, I had to pay someone to look after my car"*. Others complained of the parking signage at the border, *"No clear signs of where to park"*, indicating that even when there is free space but one cannot just park anywhere. Inadequate dilapidated toilets and ablution facilities are posing as a health hazard to the tourists and as well as the other travelers in general. The toilets are said to be dirty and have no running water. With people spending so many hours at the border, there is need to have hygienic toilets and ablution facilities. *"The main challenge of them all is of sanitation: unclean toilets with no water, all the problems I can handle but with this one they are abusing us. It's high time they introduce clean toilets with working flush systems or they don't keep us here at all"*.

Respondents highlighted that there is no proper waiting space. Tourists will be standing all the time, for those hours they spend at the border waiting to be cleared. The buildings there provide shed only to a few people who will be closer to getting to the officials at the counters. *"We have been standing in the queue for more than 4 hours now, my legs are swollen but I can't afford to leave the line and rest in my car, with this disorder I will have to join the queue afresh"*. Even for those who will be in the shed inside the clearing buildings at the border, some raise concern over the ventilation in the halls, *"The hall is very hot, and it's difficult to breathe"*.

Absence of shopping facilities at the border was highlighted by tourists as one of the challenges they face. Travelers are finding it difficult to shop at the border and yet they are made to spend so many hours there. Only vendors will be loitering around the border selling their wares. *"There are no food outlets which supply hot, proper food and purified water of which one spends hours in the queue"*. Other tourists are of the view that the vendors should be chased away and a formal shop be opened for the convenience of the travelers. *"At least a formal shop should be opened at the border such that as we wait in the slow moving queues, we can buy hygienic food and water. Vendors should be chased away"*

Border infrastructure still remain a challenge in many countries around the world (African Development Bank, 2007; Kindler and Matejko, 2009; UNECA, 2010). Kindler and Matejko, (2009) noted that traveler's overall negative perception of the quality of services provided at border crossing points between EU and non EU countries resulted from the uncomfortable and sometimes even dangerous conditions in the queues as well. Lack of well-equipped waiting rooms and areas before customs clearance and passport control, low quality or utter lack of restrooms, or the lack of sufficient number of buildings to carry out detailed controls on persons or cars characterises other borders

elsewhere, for example the Polish-Russian and Slovak-Ukrainian borders.

The use of 'green and red routes' or "nothing to declare lane" is not really efficient if not supported by the appropriate infrastructure and management. Just like how the green and red routes concept failed to yield desired results in easing congestion at Beitbridge Zimbabwean side, Kindler and Matejko (2009) echoed the same sentiments on borders between EU and non EU countries. The "nothing to declare" lane often failed to proceed as quickly or efficiently as it is expected. Many travelers expect that the "nothing to declare" lane would provide the most swift way of crossing the border; they were somehow regarded as "suspicious" and subjected to the same treatment as informal petty-traders and delayed in the process.

3. Tourist behavioral intentions

The perception of a dreadful service tourists experience at the border has detrimental effects to Zimbabwe as a tourism destination. Some responses indicated that the tourists will never come again or reduce trips to Zimbabwe; advise other tourists not to come to Zimbabwe; or operators not taking their clients to Zimbabwe. *"Beitbridge is a nightmare border post and I will avoid it at all costs". "Zimbabwe is beautiful, but this border is unbearable". ".....yes we want to take tourists to Zimbabwe but it is unfortunate to say this, the border delays our clients all the time and they could not do as per the planned trip because. To avoid disappointing our clients, we will not make them cross to Zimbabwe".*

The kind of image the border is portraying has grave depressing consequences for the country's tourism. This is proved by the continual decline in tourist arrivals from South Africa.

CONCLUSION

Globally, border experiences influence tourism development. The experiences of crossing the Beitbridge border post into Zimbabwe has been a topical issue for years. The port is known for delays. The impact of tourist experiences with the border was felt by the tourism industry through a decline of tourists from South Africa in 2012 and 2013. This study sought to establish the nature of challenges tourists face at the border.

The study concluded that border administrative management issues on the Zimbabwean side of the border are the major barriers to the movement of tourists. The study established that tourists experience the following challenges: poor service; poor and inadequate infrastructure; presence of touts and bogus agents; limited access to information on cumbersome immigration and customs procedures. All these contribute towards the common delays which the border is known for.

The depressed experiences tourists have at the border are creating a perception that Zimbabwe is inaccessible. This is negatively impacting on tourism in Zimbabwe as indicated by tourists who indicated they are not going to come back to Zimbabwe or they will reduce the number of trips. Tour operators are making it clear that they will not take their clients to Zimbabwe for multi destination packages within the region. The country is set to lose out much potential tourism revenue if the situation obtaining at Beitbridge is not addressed.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

For this study only tourist experiences with the Zimbabwean side of the Beitbridge border was looked at and data was collected over a short period of time. Future studies should focus on tourist experiences with the South African side of the border. This way a complete picture of the nature of

challenges tourists face when using the Beitbridge border will be explored. Collecting data throughout the year will enable understanding the influence of seasonality on the nature of challenges tourists encounter when using the Beitbridge border to get in Zimbabwe. Considering the presence of multi-destination packages in the region, experiences of other nationalities when using the Beitbridge border should be examined as well.

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