

Tourism and Churches: Profiling, Behaviour and Motivations of "Church Chasers" in South Africa

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Abstract

Churches in South Africa have a rich history. Church tourism is perfectly positioned to attract tourists to South Africa and forms part of heritage tourism. Church tourism involves tourists visiting sites of prayer and shrines for cultural, historical, and architectural reasons, but not specifically due to any religious motivation. Well-known church tourism attractions include the Notre Dame de Paris in Paris, the Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela, Ethiopia, and the Groot Kerk – Dutch Reformed Church in Graaf Reinet, South Africa. Data for the study was gathered through online questionnaires, resulting in the formulation of a new subdivision of church tourism, namely "church chasers". "Church chasers" generally do not travel specifically to visit churches. However, their decision to do so can be seen as secondary. They mostly spend time at churches during family holidays and weekend getaways. They find architecture, history, and sandstone buildings the most entertaining during a visit. The paper's main aim was to establish "church chasers" typical profile, behaviour, and motivation as a "new" kind of tourist pursuit by focusing on tourists visiting churches in South Africa. The broader aim was to determine whether "church chasers" as a subdivision of heritage tourism could revitalise small-town tourism in South Africa

Keywords: church tourism; church chasers; profiling; motivations; heritage tourism

Introduction

The South African government has identified tourism as one of the industries for future economic growth in the country (South African Government, 2022). According to the Domestic Tourism Survey (2019), the number of day trips in South Africa (83 million) surpassed the number of overnight trips (69 million) compared to previous years. Gauteng was the most popular destination for considering day trips within South Africa, followed closely by Limpopo and the Western Cape. Limpopo and KwaZulu–Natal were the most popular provinces in South Africa when referring to overnight trips (Statistics South Africa, 2020). However, 2020 saw an entirely different scenario for the tourism landscape within South Africa due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which resulted in the overall collapse of tourism (STATS SA, 2020).

For the first time in modern history, a pandemic has led to 100% of destinations worldwide imposing travel restrictions (UNWTO, 2020). The current COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in the travel and tourism industry being one of the most severely affected sectors globally. The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) stated that the current situation shows a potential decline of more than 78% in international tourist arrivals in 2020.

The effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the tourism industry could potentially lead to 100 to 120 million direct tourism jobs being put at risk worldwide (UNWTO, 2020).

The effect of the COVID-19 pandemic is also being experienced in South Africa. According to South African Tourism (SAT) CEO Sisa Ntshona, tourism was a key industry within the country before the outbreak of the pandemic (Friedman, 2020; Hebbard, 2020). The World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) estimated that 700 000 people were employed in the tourism industry in South Africa during 2019. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic reached South African shores during 2020, it wreaked havoc on the tourism industry, amongst others. From 26 March 2020, the country entered a complete lockdown, effectively bringing an end to business for 2020. Over the years, the tourism industry has consistently proven its resilience and its ability not only to bounce back as a sector but to lead the wider economic and social recovery (STATS SA, 2020; UNWTO, 2020). With domestic tourism expected to return to normality in South Africa by the end of 2020 early 2021, tourism product owners and Destination Marketing Organisations (DMO) must be prepared to satisfy tourist needs post COVID-19.

The rebirth of the tourism industry will require the industry to reimagine and reinvent themselves to satisfy the needs of the "new" breed of tourists, which are to be expected. Within South Africa, heritage tourism can be identified as one of the markets whereby the country could strengthen its global competitiveness. The "new needs" of post-COVID 19 tourists could be satisfied through heritage tourism. It could also assist with the growth of the tourism industry in the country (STATS SA, 2020).

Heritage tourism is defined as "a form of tourism that specifically targets the art, architecture, history, monuments, museums, theatres, religious heritage, social interaction, food habits, and lifestyle of people in a certain geographical region" (Ambaw, 2015:48). Thus, further unpacking the definition of heritage tourism, the researcher determined that church tourism (religious heritage) can be identified as a subdivision of heritage tourism and a niche tourism market. Niche tourism, is defined as a custom tourism product that satisfies the needs and demands of a particular tourist. These tourists who are interested in a particular type of tourism, includes agriculture, the culinary arts, culture, heritage, literature, film, architecture, adventure and sports (National Department of Tourism Republic of South Africa, 2019:v). Church tourism is defined as visiting places associated with prayer, not necessarily motivated by any religious connotations (Aulet & Vidal, 2018; Griffin & Raj, 2017:iv; Woodward, 2004). Well-known international churches include the Notre Dame de Paris in Paris, and the Rock-Hewn Churches of Lalibela, Ethiopia. Churches within South Africa are architectural marvels visible throughout the entire country, from small towns to big cities (Anjana, 2020). Popular churches among South Africa tourists include the Roman Catholic Church in Van Reenen, Cathedral of St Michael, St George in Grahamstown, "Moederkerk" or "Mother Church" in Swellendam, Dutch Reformed Church in George, Dutch Reformed Churches in Aberdeen, Cape Town, Hanover and Clarens, and the twin-spired church in Bloemfontein (Anjana, 2020; Kennedy, 2016; Menache & David, 2010, 2012, 2015).

Tourism role players need to understand the market that focuses on heritage tourism, specifically church tourism in South Africa. This could potentially ensure that they can better assess their niche market's needs, wants, behaviour, and profile. The paper's main aim is to establish the typical profile, behaviour, and motivation of "church chasers" as a "new" kind of tourist by focusing on tourists visiting churches in South Africa. The broader aim is to determine whether "church chasers" as a subdivision of heritage tourism could revitalise small-town tourism in South Africa.

Heritage tourism

Both developed and developing countries in Europe and Africa, such as Ethiopia and South Africa, recognise the potential of their heritage tourism products towards the potential for economic development and its social benefits (Ambaw, 2015:57; Proos & Hattingh, 2019). Modern-day visitors are searching for new travel adventures and want to be engaged and involved in their experiences (Smorvik, 2021). National Geographic states that top travel trends include carbon offsetting and immersing local communities (Flint, 2020). Although tourists are still interested in visiting beaches, they are showing more interest in discovering, experiencing, participating in, learning about, and being included in everyday life of the destination (Smorvik, 2021). Heritage tourism is thus ideally positioned to satisfy these modern-day visitor travel needs.

Heritage tourism has attracted considerable academic attention in the past, and a substantial amount of international research has been conducted on heritage tourism which includes, amongst others, Bec et al. (2019); Hartmann, (2014); Poria et al. (2003); and Yu Park, (2010). According to Binns and Nel (2002:236), "South Africa's natural and cultural heritage is clearly one of the most appealing and rapidly growing tourist attractions in the world, (which) makes this sector, an area to which government, entrepreneurs and communities are currently giving serious consideration". This sentiment is further echoed by the National Department of Tourism Republic of South Africa Landmark National Heritage and Cultural Tourism Strategy, which acknowledges the critical policy relevance of heritage tourism in South Africa (Ivanovic & Saayman, 2013; NDTRSA, 2012; Rogerson & Van der Merwe, 2015:236; Van der Merwe, 2016).

South Africa is well known for its cultural heritage assets associated with struggle museums and monuments (Oberholster, 1972; Van der Merwe, 2016:120). However, South Africa also has other heritage tourism assets, including the religious heritage associated with church tourism (heritage churches) (Duncan, 2014). According to the UNWTO, religious heritage tourism is an international phenomenon involving thousands of people of different nationalities worldwide (UNWTO, 2016). The following section provides a discussion on church tourism.

Church tourism

According to De Castro et al. (2014:92), church tourism has increased in the past decade and is forming an integral part of the tourism product of destinations. Church tourism can be demarcated as "visiting houses/sites of prayer and shrines for cultural, historical, and architectural reasons – not for any religious motivation" (Aulet & Vidal, 2018; Griffin & Raj, 2017:iv; Woodward, 2004). Relations between religious tourism and church tourism are becoming increasingly close (Aulet & Vidal, 2018:239). The most visible connection is the thousands of sacred buildings that are of interest to and visited by tourists (Aulet & Vidal, 2018:239). Bozic et al. (2016) proclaims an intertwinement between religious and church tourists. The latter is less concerned with the religious aspects of a journey *per se* (i.e., pilgrimage) but more concerned with tangible aspects relating to religion, such as churches. Subsequently, the basis of this interest must increasingly be attributed to churches' cultural and historical value as heritage elements rather than to their religious purpose (Page & Connell, 2014).

According to Raj (2012:95), minimal research has been conducted to understand the motivation of church tourists' visitation patterns. Previous studies on church tourist profile, behaviour, and motivation were conducted by Watson (2007), who examined the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviour of church tourists in England. Aulet and Vidal (2018:239) highlight that church tourists' motivation and characteristics have changed, for example, the social and



technological developments facilitated a vast increase in travel for religious motives. According to Duff (2009), people are motivated to visit churches with some spiritual inclination, and that visitors do not need to be believers to explore churches (El-Gohary et al., 2018). Smorvik (2021) states that there is a lack of knowledge on the topic of what motivates tourists to visit religious sites such as churches. Therefore, more recent research is required into church tourists' profile, behaviour, and motivation.

Reed (2018:1) stated that people had been drawn to churches for centuries. According to Duff (2009), churches are cultural assets contributing to local individuality that are integral to the local communities and destinations within which they have evolved. More and more people visit churches outside of formal service times, reflecting the growing interest in cultural heritage and family history amongst tourists (Duff, 2009). Research in Britain concluded that 55% of all-day trips include at least one visit to a cathedral or church (Duff, 2009). Church tourism has economic value to a region as tourists spend money on travel, food, accommodation, and other items while travelling to visit a church (Duff, 2009; The National Churches Trust, 2020).

According to Watson (2007), community churches are seen as physical examples of heritage and are common features of the landscape (often being the oldest building in the area). Well known examples of churches visited by tourists include the Sagrada Familia in Barcelona Spain, Saint Basil's Cathedral in Moscow, Notre Dame de Paris in Paris, St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and the Westminster Abbey in London (Aulet & Vidal, 2018:239; Triponzy, 2019; 10mosttoday.com, 2020).

South Africa has a remarkable variety of architectural styles that characterise its churches; however, many of these beautiful churches have been abandoned (Menache & David, 2015:3). Books related to churches and church tourism in South Africa include "101 Country Churches of South Africa" (Menache & David, 2010), "a Platteland Pilgrimage - 102 Country Churches of South Africa" (Menache & David, 2012), and "Church Tourism in South Africa a Travel Odyssey" (Menache & David, 2015). Social media pages dedicated to churches within South Africa include "Kerkgeboue van Suider-Afrika" (Church buildings of South Africa) and "My dopperdagboek" (My Dopper diary). Despite the social media pages being predominantly Afrikaans, there are many English-speaking members. Various English publications of Menache and David further indicate that there is interest in church tourism within South Africa. The researcher could not find a social media page in English dedicated exclusively to churches in South Africa. Academic articles mainly focus on religious tourism in South Africa, not church tourism *per se*. Some examples are Apleni and Henama (2020), Henama and Sifolo (2018), and Nyikana (2017), all focussing on religious tourism. There is thus a definite lack of research on church tourism within South Africa.

There are many different denominations of churches found in South Africa. These range from Reformed, Anglican, Methodist, Lutheran, to Roman Catholic (Schoeman, 2017:2). With such a diverse range of denominations within South Africa, there are many different church buildings in the country. Churches in South Africa stretch as far back as 300 years, with the foundation stone of the Groote Kerk (the oldest church in Cape Town) being laid in 1700 by Willem Adriaan van der Stel. Most small towns in South Africa were formed as a result of a church being established to hold Sunday services for locals in the region (Dreyer, 2004). South Africa has a diverse history and has seen its share of conflicts comprising of the Colonial and frontier conflicts (1795 – 1906), Voortrekker battles (1836 – 1848), Anglo-Zulu War (1879), and the South African War (1899 – 1902) (Von der Heyde, 2013, 2017; Proos & Hattingh, 2019). During the South African War (1899 - 1902), many of the churches in South Africa were used by British forces as lookout posts such as found in Cradock and Prince Albert. Churches were also used as hospitals during the South African War (1899 - 1902), with the

Twin Spired church in Bloemfontein a well-known example. Churches have therefore played a major role in South Africa's history and continue to do so today.

Profiling of tourists

According to Owlgen (2020), the profiling of tourists refers to gathering complete information about the tourist, including specific characteristics such as the tourists' place of residence, age and sex, educational status and occupation, economic activity status, purpose and frequency of visit, and factors influencing the choice of destination. It is crucial for tourism role players and DMOs who focus on heritage tourism to understand church tourists' profile, behaviour, and motivation to better understand their customers (needs and wants). This could enable them to market their product to church tourists more effectively as church tourism forms part of the product offering of many towns and cities in South Africa. Watson (2007:292) states that several transformations have taken place in the demand for tourism and, consequently, the very content of touristic space. Increased differentiation in touristic motivation, the development of niche segments in the tourism market, and the inclusion of a greater variety in objects and nature of touristic space are all amongst the transformations that had taken place.

Materials and methods

This investigation adheres to positivism. To address the research objectives, the researcher made use of online questionnaires constructed via the QuestionPro online Application. QuestionPro enables the researcher to construct various online survey questions and advanced online survey tools for academic research (QuestionPro, 2020). Church tourism falls into the niche category of heritage tourism, and it entails visits to churches by tourists. As churches are widely dispersed throughout South Africa and are a niche segment, it was decided to use online questionnaires to reach as many church tourists as possible.

The online questionnaire was made available on the social media platform Facebook (i.e., "Kerkgeboue van Suider-Afrika" and "My Dopperdagboek"), and LinkedIn. Social media pages utilised for data gathering were selected due to their relevance to the aim of the study. Online questionnaires were chosen as a method for data collection due to the target audience being readily available on these pages. The questionnaire was developed from the research of Bozic et al. (2009); De Castro et al. (2014), and Duff (2009). The questionnaire was structured to acquire the demographic profile, motivation, behaviour, and recommendations of tourists visiting churches in South Africa (Muzeza, et al., 2018; Nheta, 2017; Saayman & Slabbert, 2004; Vitale et al., 2019). Data was captured on the QuestionPro Application.

Nonprobability sampling was used, associated with case study research design and qualitative research. Case studies tend to focus on small samples and are intended to examine a real-life phenomenon and not make statistical inferences about the wider population (Taherdoost, 2016; Yin, 2003). The questionnaire was open for completion by respondents for four months (July to October 2020) and was compiled in English. Some 100 respondents answered the questionnaire; however, only 67 completed the questionnaire in full. The request to complete the questionnaire was repeated four times from July to October 2020 after the admin members of the mentioned social media pages granted permission. Potential respondents were motivated by the admin members to complete the questionnaire after seeing the importance of such research being conducted within South Africa.

Limitations

The number of complete responses received (67) thus has certain limitations. Interpretation and inference from this research have been made with caution and with suggestions in mind. While the sampling for this study is low, more research will be needed in future. As there is no

information on the number of church tourists in South Africa, an accurate number of visitors to these sites could not be ascertained. This research thus provides baseline information about typical church tourism tourists in South Africa, their behaviours, and motivations for visiting these church sites. Practically this provides basic information for tour operators who can use the information to add specific churches to their itineraries or even to develop dedicated church tourism tours as a niche product. Although the information may be rudimentary, it forms the backbone of available information for destinations trying to develop niche travel markets by tapping into the potential church tourism niche market in South Africa.

Findings

Demographic profile

This section of the paper presents the demographic profile of the respondents (Table 1). According to Owlgen (2020), the profiling of tourists refers to gathering complete information about the tourist for example specific characteristics such as the tourist's place of residence, age and sex, educational status and occupation, economic activity status, purpose and frequency of visit, and factors influencing the choice of destination.

Table 1: Demographic profile of respondents

Gender:		Highest level of education:	
Male	70%	Matric	20%
Female	30%	Diploma	20%
Race:		Bachelor's degree	27%
Black	4%	Master's degree	21%
White	96%	Doctorate degree	11%
Age:		Other	1%
18-30	7%	Country of residence:	
31-40	15%	South Africa	97%
41-50	21%	Other	3%
51-60	24%	Province of residence:	
61-70	22%	Free State	26%
71 and older	11%	Gauteng	42%
Annual income:		Eastern Cape	6%
R0 – R300,000	47%	Western Cape	16%
R300,001 – R500,000	27%	Northern Cape	6%
R500,001 – R 700,000	15%	Other	4%
R700,001 or more	11%		

As illustrated in Table 1, 70% of respondents were male and 30% female. Most of the respondents were white (96%), whilst 4% were black. Most of the respondents are between 51-60 (24%), followed by 22% between 61-70, and 21% between 41-50. A large proportion of the respondents indicated that their annual income is between 0 to R300,000 (47%), while 27% indicated their annual income between R300,001 and R500,000. 11% of the respondents earned R700,001 or more.

The majority (27%) of the respondents have a bachelor's degree, followed by a master's degree (21%), and both Diploma and Matric by 20%, respectively. The vast majority of respondents (97%) indicated that they reside in South Africa, whilst 3% were from other countries such as Sri Lanka, South Korea, and England. Gauteng (42%), Free State (26%), and Western Cape (16%) were the most prominent provinces where respondents resided within South Africa. The following section will allude to the motivations and behaviours of church tourists.

Motivations and behaviour

Respondents were required to indicate whether they travel specifically to visit churches. The responses were as follows, 73% do not travel specifically to visit churches; however, when

provided the opportunity, they will visit churches. Whilst 23% indicated that they travelled specifically to visit churches in South Africa. Respondents that indicated that they travel specifically to visit churches listed that their decisions to do so are premeditated (71%), whilst for only 29%, it was a spur of the moment decision. Most respondents (45%) indicated that they visit churches during family holidays, whilst 23% identified weekend getaways as when they visit churches. The respondents' alternative times included during business trips (12%), long weekends (10%), and only 10% whilst on specific weekend getaways to visit churches. The researcher identified these tourists as "church chasers" rather than church tourists resulting from the research findings.

When required to identify how much time respondents spend at churches, the respondents highlighted between one and two hours. What respondents find most interesting about visiting churches includes the architecture (23%), the history of the church (20%), and the sandstone buildings (15%). Whilst visiting churches, the respondents indicated that they also visit monuments (27%), museums (25%), restaurants (25%), and statues (15%) during their visit to a particular area. Nearly half (47%) of the respondents indicated that they select a specific town or city to visit and overnight in the town where the church is located. The majority of the respondents (81%) indicated that they take pictures of the churches they visit, and then post them on social media such as Facebook or keep them for their own personal collection. A total of 65% of the travellers that accompany the respondents join them whilst they are busy visiting a church, 12% partake in another activity, 11% travel alone, only 6% indicated that the travellers accompanying them wait in the car. Almost all the respondents (97%) indicated that they would like to gain access to the inside of the church for various reasons (refer to Figure 1 for the reasons).

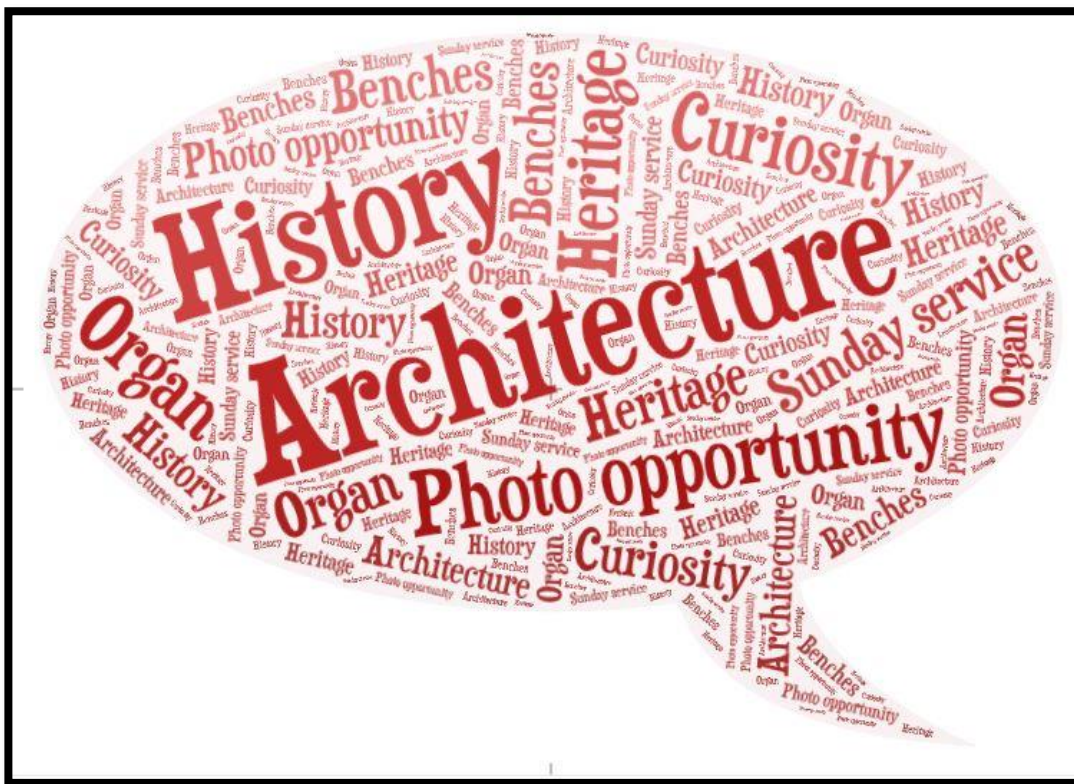


Figure 1: Reasons to gain access to the inside of a church
(Created by authors)

It emanates from the above section that respondents would like to gain access to the inside of the churches. Reasons to gain access to the inside of a church include satisfying their curiosity about the look of the inside, and to admire the differences between churches. Other popular reasons mentioned by respondents include seeing the inside architecture, the organ, obtaining more information on the specific church's history, and partaking in a Sunday service. Table 2 indicates the motivation of respondents to visit churches within South Africa.

Table 2: Motivations to visit churches within South Africa

Motivation:	
Interested in the history/heritage	23%
Interested in churches overall	18%
Searching for something different	3%
Rest and relaxation	3%
Family outing	3%
Curiosity	12%
Architecture	16%
Sense of belonging	12%
Iconic sites	10%

Table 2 demonstrates that most of the respondents (23%) are motivated by their interest in the history/heritage of the church. Other motivations include interest in churches overall (18%), architecture (16%), sense of belonging (12%), and curiosity (12%). The provinces mostly traversed by respondents who visit churches are the Free State province (18%), Western Cape (16%), Northern Cape (13%), and the Eastern Cape (12%) (refer to Table 3). 63% of the respondents indicated that the overall conditions of the churches they visited in South Africa are satisfactory. In comparison, 23% indicated that the conditions are excellent.

Table 3: Provinces mostly traversed by respondents

Province:	
Free State	18%
Western Cape	16%
Northern Cape	13%
Eastern Cape	12%
Other	41%

Travelling with friends/family was indicated as the most popular way of visiting churches within South Africa by 81% of the respondents, whilst 19% travelled alone. 26% of the respondents indicated that they research before visiting a church, and 74% indicated they do not research before visiting a church within South Africa. The most popular resource to gather information before a visit to a church was the internet (38%), written materials (26%), and social media (14%). Facebook was identified by 60% of the respondents as the social media platform they use to gather information before a visit to a church.

Recommendations

The vast majority (94%) of the respondents indicated that church tourism is not marketed sufficiently. Suggestions from respondents regarding the marketing of church tourism included making churches more accessible to tourists, providing tour guides at churches, and ensuring that the responsible authorities own marketing of local churches. Other suggestions included the provision of pamphlets to visitors with information regarding the local churches (not forgetting the social media possibilities), and making tour busses stop over at churches on visits to destinations. The placing of geocaches at churches were also a popular suggestion amongst respondents. Geocaching is defined by Morrison (2013:393) as 'a real-world outdoor treasure hunting game. Players try to locate hidden containers, called geocaches, using GPS-enabled

devices and then share their experiences online. Geocaches are usually placed at places of historical importance or interest, and thousands of people are Geocachers (Strickland, 2019). Recommendations from 34% of the respondents included developing church tours, 25% recommended promoting churches as part of the tourism product, 66% suggested using social media pages more, 49% proposed opening coffee shops at local churches, and 33% recommended potentially starting a church tourism route for regions or even a church tourism route for the entire South Africa.

Discussion of findings

The following section provides a brief discussion on the findings and their implications. At the outset of the study, church tourism and church tourists were explored; however, through the findings from the study, a subdivision of church tourism and church tourists, namely "church chasers" were identified by the researchers. Data gathering and analysis of the findings indicated that "church chasers" differ from church tourism and church tourists as they generally do not travel specifically to visit churches per se; their decision to do so can be seen as a secondary activity. They mostly frequent churches during family holidays and weekend getaways when they travel. They spend approximately one to two hours at a church, which was in stark contrast as to which was found in the study of Watson (2007). Watson (2007:304) concluded that church tourist spent only an average of twenty-two minutes in a church, the longest being twenty-seven minutes. "Church chasers" find the architecture, history, and churches made from sandstone the most entertaining during a visit.

Through insight into the behaviour and what the typical "church chaser" within South Africa resembles, focused marketing initiatives and entrepreneurial opportunities can be identified and suggested to assist the local product owners in South Africa. The typical profile of a "church chaser" within South Africa is a white male between 41 - 70+ years. Similarly, Brice et al. (2003) concluded that the 41+ years was the most prominent age group in their research conducted in England, with both males and females being prominent amongst respondents. "Church chasers" annual income ranges from R0 – R500,000, and they are well educated (typically in possession of a bachelor or master's degree). They generally reside in South Africa in either Gauteng, Free State or Western Cape. Churches are primarily visited by "church chasers" in the Free State province, Western Cape, and Northern Cape. Interestingly, these findings share similarities with the study conducted by Proos and Hattingh (2020) who established the typical profile of South African War enthusiasts (another niche tourism market in South Africa). Proos and Hattingh (2020) concluded that the typical profile of this niche tourism market are males of the ages of 18-30 and 50+ years, with an annual income ranging from R0 – R500,000, they are also well educated, and they generally reside in the Free State or Gauteng.

The fact that significant highways to popular tourism destinations, such as the N1 and N9, traverse these provinces makes it easier for "church chasers" to add visits to churches along the way to their final destination. Examples of churches in the major highways are Graaff-Reinet and Winburg. Furthermore, the Karoo, which is situated primarily in the Northern Cape province, mostly consists of small and quaint rural towns. Many towns have beautiful churches (i.e., Merweville and Sutherland) and attract "church chasers".

"Church chasers" are accompanied by friends on their excursions, and if they research their trips, they review written literature, search on the internet for information, and make use of social media. Interestingly, according to Brice et al. (2003) local literature such as leaflets available at tourist information centres in the area or guidebooks, and Ordnance Survey Maps were the most popular way to gather information on churches. This indicates the shift away from leaflets to more electronic formats such as the internet amongst "church chasers" in recent

years. Duff (2009) indicated that people visit churches as part of a wide range of activities. "Church chasers" also partake in activities such as traversing museums, eating at restaurants, and viewing monuments in the town/city where they visit church(es). Pictures taken during a visit to a church is usually posted on social media pages such as the ones available on Facebook. Travellers accompanying the "church chaser" usually partake in other activities or wait in the car. "Church chasers" indicated that they would like to gain access to the inside of the church(es) to take photos and learn more about the church's history. It is important to note that "church chasers" are not motivated by any religious experiences, and to classify them as religious tourists would not be an adequate description. Smorvik (2021) also states that the majority of visitors to religious sites do not seek a religious experience. The typical "church chaser" within South Africa is motivated by a special interest in the history/heritage of the churches, overall interest in churches, and architecture. Likewise, Brice et al. (2003) concluded that tourists interested in heritage are most likely to visit churches. However, this is opposite as what was highlighted by Duff (2009) and Watson (2007) as to why people visit churches. Duff (2009) and Watson (2007) stated that the individuals interviewed were not interested in the history, or the architecture of the different churches they visited, clearly indicating the differences.

Churches are looking towards tourism as a form of income generation (this is also highlighted by Duff, 2009), and the respondents have identified many possibilities in the study. Entrepreneurs can connect with their local churches in their region and form a relationship whereby "church chasers" can sit and have a coffee at the church coffee shop whilst visiting the church. The opportunity then arises whereby local tour guides can take "church chasers" on a church visit before or after visiting the coffee shop. Money can be generated for the church and tour guide through a small entrance fee as it seems to be popular under "church chasers". The coffee shop can also afford the "church chasers" the opportunity to upload their recent pictures of the church onto a dedicated church tourism Facebook page by offering free Wi-Fi to patrons. Competitions can be started on the social media page whereby the best selfie/picture of the church can win monthly prizes/or recognition on social media, this is possible as the majority of the respondents in the study already identified that they take pictures of churches. As mentioned, geocaches can also be placed at churches to entice "church chasers" to visit churches. The coffee shop and church tours can potentially become popular under Geocachers. As heritage/history of the churches was identified as a popular motivator under "church chasers", church tours with a local guide that knows the history can enlighten the tourists. Respondents also indicated that they tend to visit monuments in the town/city where they visit churches. A link to the town's history can be incorporated into a visitor's package for visiting the churches.

Conclusion

The study set out to determine the typical profile, behaviour, and motivation of "church chasers" visiting churches in South Africa. It can be concluded that "church chasers" is a niche market within South Africa, and that "church chasers" could potentially lead to revitalising small-town tourism in South Africa. South Africa has an abundance of churches within the country which could attract potential "church chasers" from across the world. It is thus important to consider the findings from the article as this could be exploited in marketing campaigns. Tour operators can use the information to add specific churches to their itineraries or even to develop dedicated church tourism tours as a niche product. Tourism marketers can now better assess their niche market's needs, wants, behaviour, and profile. This opportunity did not previously exist.

Direction for future research

Suggested future research could potentially include establishing how important the average South African tourist rank church tourism, and a "church chaser" route, which can be developed as there is no such route currently in South Africa. This route could traverse the whole of South Africa and could also be divided per province. To develop such a route would need the identification of the main churches as attractions. A marketing strategy could be developed to make tourists aware of exciting churches and thus attract tourists to different towns and provinces. This can be done either per province or countrywide. The buy-in of the public sector will be essential whilst the local businesses in the immediate vicinity will also need to be made aware of the benefits of such a route. Furthermore, the establishment of a Destination Marketing Organisation (DMO) can also be implemented in the future.

Declaration of interest statement

We hereby declare that this is our own work and has not been submitted for publication anywhere else.

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