

Profiling and Examining Travel Patterns Pertaining to Domestic Tourism in Lesotho

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Abstract

While some studies have examined aspects of tourism in Lesotho, there is limited research examining domestic tourist profiles and travel patterns, crucial to unlocking Lesotho's domestic tourism potential. There is a need for such research to enable the development of appropriate tourism products and strategies. This study then critically examines results from a household survey that was undertaken in Lesotho to assess domestic tourists' profiles, travel patterns, main motivations, and tourism products or services. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in 1 210 households across all administrative districts of Lesotho using a proportionate sampling approach. Within each District, a systematic sampling approach was adopted to minimise bias. Lesotho has several tourism products such as cultural and heritage sites, nature-based destinations and unique leisure experiences. Pre COVID-19 levels of domestic tourism and travel were relatively high. The study found that several socio-economic factors influence the willingness and ability of households to consume domestic tourism products. It is concluded that domestic tourism in Lesotho can be improved with better, more appropriate communication and marketing strategies, as well as an upgraded transport infrastructure and tourism services.

Keywords: Tourism, tourist profiles, Lesotho, household survey, tourism destinations, travel motivations

Introduction

Glaesser, Kester, Paulose, Alizadeh and Valentin (2017) and the United Nations World Trade Organisation (UNWTO, 2020) noted that the global tourism market has experienced continuous growth and diversification, making it one of the world's fastest growing economic sectors. However, Hall, Scott and Gossling (2020) specifically note that the tourism sector is extremely vulnerable to crises, as seen with the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite the severe COVID-19 pandemic disruptions which have brought the tourism sector to a standstill due to travel restrictions, fear of infections and economic hardships impacted on disposal income; it



is expected that the tourism sector will resume as an important economic contributor once the pandemic is brought under control (Ateino, 2020; Hall et al., 2020; Zheng, Goh & Wen, 2020). This is due to the UNWTO (2016) noting that tourism is one of the few sectors that has steadily shown expansion, growth and resilience to economic shocks and numerous challenges. Within this context, domestic tourism will play a vital role in aiding tourism recovery. It is, therefore, important to better understand domestic tourism, which is the focus of this article in the context of Lesotho.

Domestic tourism markets are viewed as being vital to offset drops in international tourism arrivals during crises and off-peak periods (Dogru & Bulut, 2018; Kabote, Mamimine & Muranda, 2017; Morupisi & Mokgal, 2017) as well as promoting tourism in countries that have limited international tourism potential, especially in the context of smaller economies, which is the case in Lesotho. Lesotho is a mountainous landlocked country with a population of just over two million people and approximately 500 000 households whose economy is highly reliant on South Africa. While some studies have examined aspects of tourism in Lesotho, there is limited research that assesses domestic tourists' profiles, travel patterns and motivations, and tourism products and services used in Lesotho. These aspects are crucial to unlocking the country's domestic tourism potential and developing appropriate tourism products and strategies. This paper critically examines results from a household survey that was undertaken in Lesotho. The next section examines key literature in relation to tourism and specifically domestic tourism, with a focus on tourism in Lesotho. This is followed by the methods section that provides an overview of the background to Lesotho and the household surveys undertaken as the data collection tool. Thereafter, the data analysis is conducted. Finally, concluding comments are presented.

Literature review

Pre-COVID-19 tourism was one of the fastest growing economic sectors worldwide with the UNWTO (2020) stating that in 2019, 1.5 billion people travelled globally and projected that this number would rise to 1.8 billion by 2030. The United Nations (2010: 1) defines tourism as "a social, cultural and economic phenomenon related to the movement of people to places outside their usual place of residence, pleasure being the usual motive". The United Nations (2010: 10) further indicates that "a visitor is a traveller taking a trip to a main destination outside his/ her usual environment, for less than a year, for the main purpose (business, leisure or other personal purpose) other than to be employed by a resident entity in the country or place visited". Becken's (2009) definition of domestic tourism includes all trips (which could be day trips or overnight trips) over 40 kilometres outside one's usual environment for specific travel purposes.

Page and Connell (2020) reveal that tourism has achieved rapid and consistent growth after the two world wars. They note that the main aspects of tourism include travelling away from home for more than 24 hours for leisure/ holiday or business purposes and discretionary spending (which is linked to disposal income). Page and Connell (2020) further state that there are different types of tourists (for example, domestic or international; inbound or outbound; long-haul or short-haul; and business or leisure, visiting friends and family or volunteers) and numerous types of tourism (such as nature-based/ ecotourism, cultural and heritage, events, rural, coastal and marine, cruise, sports, medical/ health and business tourism). The different types of tourism are also indicated by Camilleri (2018), who refers to these as tourism products, adding culinary, religious, and educational tourism. Camilleri (2018) also states that business tourism includes meetings, incentives, conferences and events. Glaesser et al. (2017) indicate that there are differences in relation to the types of tourism. They specifically indicate that UNTWO statistics show that in 2015, 53% of international tourist arrivals were motivated by

holidays, recreation and leisure-related travel followed; 14% for business and professional travel; and 27% travelled for other reasons which included visiting friends and relatives, religious reasons and health treatments. These trends are expected to continue. However, Glaesser et al. (2017) assert that data on domestic travel motivations and other trends are not available. Furthermore, Gössling, Scott and Hall (2018) caution that global patterns are often not relevant to understand patterns at specific destinations. Furthermore, trends in different contexts are likely to differ, and even within countries patterns may vary in relation to specific regions and groups of travellers. Thus, this study that focuses on Lesotho is a significant contribution given the research gaps in examining domestic tourism and the need for destination specific studies.

A key aspect to consider in relation to tourism is motivations to travel (Camilleri, 2018). Tegar and Gurning (2018) specifically identify the key aspects that visitors consider in relation to a destination:

- Attractions linked to the purpose of travel: this provides the initial motivations to travel and includes aspects such as activities, culture and natural components
- Accessibility: ease of being able to reach a destination
- Price: relates to affordability including costs associated with the trip (for example, transportation, accommodation, food, attractions and tours and other services)
- Amenities: availability and quality of services and facilities associated with accommodation, transportation, recreational facilities, restaurants, visitor information, etc.
- Human resources: trained workers since tourism is regarded as a labour intensive sector and a key consideration is to ensure positive experiences of visitors
- Image: associated with a destination's uniqueness and reputation, environmental quality and scenery, security and safety, friendliness and service level, etc.

An important consideration is also factors that influence the length of stay at specific destinations since this influences spend and thereby economic sustainability at these locations and larger socio-economic impacts, ability to attract new and repeat visitors who stay longer and spend more, and assists to identify profitable target markets, investments to develop destinations and funding for conservation (Gössling et al., 2018). Scholtz, Kruger and Saayman (2015) categorise internal (associated with the visitors) and external (destination-specific attributes) that influence the length of stay. They identify the internal factors as socio-demographic variables (such as age, gender, level of income, occupation and family composition), behavioural aspects (such as activities visitors desire to participate in, preferred type of accommodation, mode of transport used and group size and type) and motives for visitation/ travel. External factors identified by Scholtz et al. (2015) are location and/ or distance to travel, climate and/ or season, the image of the destination, and services and amenities available.

Domestic tourism

Glaesser et al. (2017) state that tourist arrivals can be either international arrivals where tourists travel across international borders or domestic arrivals where tourists travel within their country. They further state, as indicated earlier, that availability of reliable data on domestic travel is limited and, therefore, most research and statistics tend to focus on international arrivals. However, Glaesser et al. (2017) note that domestic tourism is expected to expand continuously, creating additional future destinations and source markets. They also state that the rapid expansion of the sector is increasingly being driven by growth of the tourism markets in emerging economies, as well as an increase in the number of first-time travellers. Domestic tourism is important for reducing seasonality of demand and increasing local economic

development, which contribute to improving the sustainability of tourism products and tourism's contributions to both national and local economies (Kabote et al., 2017; Llorca-Rodríguez et al., 2020; Morupisi & Mokgal, 2017). Kabote et al. (2017) and Thetsane (2019) state that domestic tourism provides an opportunity for developing countries to mainstream domestic tourism as a panacea for sustainable tourism development. They also note the knowledge gap in terms of understanding domestic tourism. The importance of domestic tourism is further noted by Ndlovu, Nyakunu and Heath (2011) who assert that this type of tourism accounts for approximately 60% of the total tourist revenue that is generated in developed countries, such as Lesotho.

Although not a study that focuses on domestic tourism, Mearns (2011) underscores the importance of sustainability considerations as well, specifically using an evaluation framework based on selected sustainable tourism indicators (that covered social, economic, developmental, environmental and networking/ collaboration aspects) to assess community-based ecotourism ventures. Mearns (2011) used the Malealea Lodge and Pony Trek Centre as a case study. He emphasises the importance of baseline information, which this study contributes to establishing, and the need for continuous evaluations that are context-specific and adapted as required.

Llorca-Rodríguez, Garcia-Fernandez and Casas-Jurado (2020) specifically state that domestic tourism has unique attributes that can make its impacts on poverty reduction different from that of inbound tourism, which include reduced economic leakages, being serviced largely by local people and supplied mainly from the local markets (contributing to local job creation), requirements on accommodation infrastructure and services being lower, less resource demands on destinations and is less seasonal. Makhaola and Proches (2017) also raise the critical point that domestic tourism, unlike international tourism, is usually not vulnerable to health issues (the COVID-19 pandemic being a key disruptor and exception), safety and security considerations, the need for travel documents such as visas. Li, Chen and Goh (2016), Makhaola and Proches (2017) and Ndlovu et al. (2011) indicate that domestic tourism in underdeveloped regions (which is true for Lesotho) is dependent on local natural and socio-cultural resources. They also assert that domestic tourism is an important source of income generation, substantially assists with poverty alleviation, and generally contributes to overall economic development. Furthermore, as Winters, Corral and Moreda-Mora (2013) aver, although domestic tourists generally do not spend as much as international tourists, domestic tourism is better positioned to enable backward economic linkages and to create greater local opportunities and benefits. Llorca-Rodríguez et al. (2020) assert that the spending patterns of domestic tourism may be more closely associated with locally-produced goods and services and less reliant on imports. Additionally, Liu and Wu (2019: 253) show that:

when the productivity of the overall economy improves, inbound tourism demand expands more than domestic tourism demand, whereas when the productivity of tourism sector improves, domestic tourism consumption increases more than inbound tourism consumption.

Makhaola and Proches (2017) argue that that domestic tourism is critical in developing contexts. They focus on South Africa, since it happens all year long which is a key difference compared to international tourism which is influenced greatly by seasonality, having peak and off-peak seasons. The sentiments expressed by the researchers reinforce the importance of domestic tourism in developing contexts and, therefore, the need for increased research in this area. Makhaola and Proches (2017) note that because domestic tourism occurs throughout the year, it can sustain local businesses and thus contributes to local economic development. The

key businesses that benefit from domestic tourism identified by Pillay (2017) are travel agencies and transport services, accommodation, restaurants and retail establishments, and tourist attractions as well as related leisure and recreational activities.

Llorca-Rodríguez et al. (2020: 198) state that interest in domestic tourism has increased and scholarly attention has focused mainly on the impacts of domestic tourism on economic growth, focusing primarily on the determinants of demand, motivations, spatial patterns and/or sustainability. They further note that this increase is despite:

the underestimation of domestic tourism, the problems in finding a commonly accepted definition of domestic travel activity and the strong international economics and finances objective of tourism statistics” which are “causes of the scarcity of information on domestic tourism flows.

The need for baseline information on social dimensions such as the profiles of domestic tourists, travel motivations and reasons, and awareness of tourism products/ sites/ destinations are important to improve marketing efforts and inform tourism infrastructure and services development. It is these aspects that this research focuses on.

Orams and Page (2000) assert state that understanding tourists (both domestic and international), their profiles, their interests/ desired, and their attitudes are important components within tourism studies. Jarvis Stoeckl and Liu (2016) aver that various studies show that expenditure is influenced by the general satisfaction with a destination, which affects repeat visitation and word-of-mouth marketing. They also highlight how socio-economic factors and attributes at destinations affect trip satisfaction and the prospects of visitors returning. Understanding potential visitor profiles and travel patterns promote more effective marketing and management of tourism as well as contributes to balancing resident and tourist demands at destinations (Gössling et al., 2018). Furthermore, Martinis, Kabassi, Karris and Minotou (2019) indicate that considering tourism activities and interests to enhance positive experiences as well as minimise disruptions will also protect the environment in the context of nature-based tourism.

Rogerson and Letsie (2013) assert that domestic tourism is a relatively neglected theme within tourism research in the global South. It is also important to note that few studies deal with domestic tourism in landlocked countries such as Lesotho. One such study is by Morupisi and Mokgalo (2017) in Botswana, which focused on identifying and explaining the current challenges faced in the development of domestic tourism in Botswana. They found that an increasing number of persons from Botswana visit countries regionally for leisure purposes with limited travel within the country by locals. Morupisi and Mokgalo (2017: 1) further assert that “in spite of consistent apathy within the developing world in developing domestic tourism, the sector has demonstrated its importance especially when used as a complementary market to the volatile international market”. In terms of domestic tourism challenges experienced, they indicate that socio-cultural (specifically that in Botswana during vacation periods most people travel to visit home villages with limited appetite for other types of travel in the country) and socio-economic aspects (especially disposal income) within destinations influence domestic tourism development. In terms of affordability, Morupisi and Mokgalo (2017) also reveal that tourism pricing practices focus on international tourists, and this makes it difficult for locals to afford tourism products in Botswana. They, therefore, advocate for concessionary rates for locals, especially during off-peak tourism periods. They also suggest that more research needs to be undertaken to understand domestic tourism. Similar sentiments are expressed by Melubo (2019) who found that local knowledge of tourism and protected areas, the lack of a travel

culture to experience nature-based tourism products, lack of finances and shortage of affordable accommodation facilities influence the low participation of Tanzanians to protected areas. Melubo (2019) asserts that this is the trend in most of Africa, suggesting that domestic tourism can be encouraged by specific and appropriate interventions such as local-oriented marketing, crafting tourism products and packages which are sensitive to local populations, awareness campaigns and increasing local economic opportunities.

Tourism in Lesotho

There are a few studies that focus on tourism in Lesotho. As indicated earlier, marketing is a critical factor in the promotion of tourism. Nqosa, Burger and Lekaota (2019) focus on identifying key success factors for marketing tourism establishments in Lesotho. They identified the main aspects as marketing planning and management, enhancing the attractiveness and accessibility of the tourism establishment, effectively advertising the establishment, and ensuring improved tourist satisfaction at the establishment. Thetsane (2019) focused on local community participation in tourism development in Lesotho, specifically using Katse Villages as case studies. Lekaota (2016) examined rural communities' participation in the planning and management of tourism developments in the Katse and Mohale Tourism Development Area. Lekaota (2016) and Thetsane (2019) found that local communities would like to be involved in and benefit from tourism development. Lekaota (2016) underscored that locally, community involvement in tourism development is limited, and the government should empower local communities to participate in all stages of tourism planning, development and management in rural areas. However, Lekaota (2016) and Thetsane's (2019) research did not include an examination of their willingness to participate in domestic tourism activities. Mapeshoane and Pather (2016) focus on the adoption of e-commerce in the Lesotho tourism industry, especially to create opportunities for small and local businesses to participate. These types of studies highlight the importance of local participation to contribute to sustainable tourism development but fail to acknowledge that this participation should include domestic tourism development as well.

Rogerson and Letsie (2013) note the importance of informal sector domestic tourism in Lesotho. They indicate that informal sector business tourism in Lesotho challenges Western definitions of what constitutes business tourism. They assert that low-income travel among informal business owners requires a rethinking of what business tourism is in the global South as well as the characteristics of business tourists and related impacts. They concluded that informal sector business tourism is generally pro-poor.

Much emphasis has been placed on nature-based tourism in Lesotho in terms of research (Stockigt, Hoogendoorn, Fitchett & Saarinen, 2018). Noome and Fitchett (2019) and Stockigt et al. (2018) demonstrate snow tourism as a major tourism product for Lesotho, despite being vulnerable to climate variations and the weather. They give the example of Afriski, a skiing resort in Lesotho offering a unique skiing experience in the region, being only one of two ski resorts in Southern Africa. Stockigt et al. (2018) assert that climate change may present a challenge to snow-based tourism in Lesotho. Their analysis of TripAdvisor reviews among tourists who travelled to the Afriski resort in Lesotho highlighted the importance of snow and cold temperatures for the tourist experience. They then recommend artificial snow production and diversification of tourist activities to mitigate climate change impacts. Additionally, Hoogendoorn et al. (2020) reiterate that climate change is a major threat to snow-based tourism. In their 2020 study they explore the perceptions of tourists and managers at the Afriski Resort. They found that although there were high levels of concern of climate change effects and impacts in Southern Africa generally, they held lower rates of concern for the Afriski Resort

specifically. They conclude that future adaptive measures will influence the sustainability of snow-based tourism in Lesotho.

Noome and Fitchett (2019) used the Tourism Climate Index to assess the climate suitability of the Afriski Resort for outdoor tourism, noting that a substantial proportion of tourism activities in the country (such as mountain biking, hiking, music festivals, horse-riding, snowboarding and skiing) are dependent on climatic conditions because they are outdoors. They assert that these activities, especially those that are snow-based, are influenced greatly by the length of the season that permits these activities to occur, and tourist interest and satisfaction. They also highlight an important finding which reinforces the importance of domestic tourism given the tourism market that Lesotho competes in, especially with neighbouring South Africa being a landlocked country. They found that Lesotho has a Tourism Climate Index score of 64 compared to South Africa's scores ranging from 80-89. This, Noome and Fitchett (2019) assert, makes South Africa a more suitable tourism destination from a climate perspective.

Monaheng (2016) notes the increasing importance and growth of cultural tourism in Lesotho, especially contribution to local economic development and poverty reduction. Monaheng (2016: 37) also indicates that questions persist pertaining to whether "cultural tourism serves to promote or compromise the authenticity of the culture of the host community". Monaheng (2016) also underscores that cultural and ecotourism are interrelated in Lesotho as articulated in government policies that pay attention to promoting ecotourism as well as cultural and heritage tourism as part of a broader strategy to strengthen sustainable and community-based tourism in the country.

Methodology

Background

Lesotho is a small landlocked country surrounded by South Africa, with a population of approximately two million people residing in 10 Districts. Maseru is the capital city (Lesotho Government, 2017). Thetsane (2019) states that Lesotho is a low-income country. Lesotho Government (2017) in its Economic Review Outlook 2017 indicates that its territory is mostly highland with the lowest point being 1 400 m above sea level, which makes it the highest base altitude in the world. Mapeshoane and Pather (2016) state that Lesotho's economy is primarily based on subsistence agriculture and the country is dependent on South Africa for goods and services as well as jobs, which are mainly in the mining sector. They further assert that Lesotho also depends on the manufacturing of farm products such as milling, leather and canning to provide key sources of income. South Africa is also Lesotho's main international tourism market (Thetsane, 2019).

Tourism in Lesotho, according to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC, 2017) is relatively small, rated 169 out of 185 countries. Despite its relatively small size in comparison to other countries, the sector is economically important with WTTC (2017) indicating that the direct contribution of Lesotho's travel and tourism sector makes up 5.3% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the Lesotho Central Bank Economic Quarterly Review of 2017 (cited in Thetsane, 2019) revealing that the sector supported approximately 35 000 jobs in 2017, or 5.9% of total employment.

Lesotho has several tourism products including cultural experiences and activities (such as the Thaba-Bosiu Cultural Village, the Morija Museum and archives, the Moriji Arts and Cultural Festival and Moshoeshoe Day), rugged mountain landscape and scenic routes, conservation/ protected areas (such as the Boking Nature Reserve, Tsehlanyane National Park and Sehlebathebe National Park), the Katse Dam which has the highest dam wall in Africa, snow in winter, waterfalls, fishing, hiking, biking, camping and (Monaheng, 2016; Thetsane,

2019). These tourism products, according to Monaheng (2016: 38), are linked to the following aspects highlighted in the Strategic Plan for Tourism Development in Lesotho:

- The unique natural environment, including the mountain scenery and scenic routes, topography, flora and fauna.
- The rich Basotho culture and lifestyle that is intertwined with the physical environment and altitude – ponies as transport, stone architecture, blankets as protective wear, migratory grazing and herdboyculture, Basotho music and rich cultural traditions.
- A rich heritage including the Mountain Kingdom ‘story’, Thaba-Bosiu (meaning, the mountain which grows at night), Liphofung caves, San rock art, and dinosaur footprints.

Monaheng (2016) specifically focuses on cultural tourism resources in Lesotho which are strongly associated with the Basotho people who are the custodians of indigenous culture in the country, stating that the preservation of cultural heritage resources is a strategic objective of the Lesotho government.

Method

Structured surveys were administered at selected households in 2015. The surveys included closed-ended questions that focused on:

- Details of the District where the interview was held
- Tourism travel patterns (group size, how often travelled domestically, and details on where travelled)
- Reason/s for travel
- Awareness of tourism products/ sites/ destinations in Lesotho
- Barriers to participation in domestic tourism
- Future interests and willingness to travel domestically
- Respondent and household socio-economic profiles

Face-to-face interviews were conducted in all the Districts in Lesotho to ensure a geographical spread. The interviews generally took about 20 minutes to complete. A proportionate sampling approach was adopted, whereby more surveys were conducted in Districts with higher population sizes. Within each District, a systematic sampling approach was adopted to minimise bias. In total, 1 210 households were surveyed, a statistically significant sample size.

Face-to-face interviews were conducted at specific households with an adult member of the household in locations throughout Lesotho using a multi-stage, spatially based, systematic sampling approach which included the following stages:

- The sample size per District was determined to ensure a proportionate spatial distribution in relation to population density, that is, more surveys were conducted in Districts with larger numbers of households.
- Within each District, cities/ towns and rural villages were identified. The sampling size was determined using population density figures, as indicated earlier. The specific locations within the towns/ cities and which villages to collect data in were chosen using the convenience sampling approach to ensure that the different types of communities in the Districts were covered. Also, all three regions in Lesotho (Highlands, Lowlands and Foothills) were adequately represented.
- At the specific location, a systematic sampling approach was adopted. For example, if the area had approximately 200 households, and it was determined that 20 households should be surveyed in the area, then every 10th household was chosen. The supervisor purposively chose the first household and then indicated to the fieldworker the area to cover. If the chosen household was not available (for example, no one is at home or an

adult member is not available) or chooses not to participate (which they are ethically entitled to do), then a neighbouring household was interviewed.

The number of interviews completed is presented in Table 1 below, including the percentage of households sampled in the 10 Districts in Lesotho, reflective of the proportionate sampling approach adopted where population sizes of the Districts were used. The largest proportion of households interviewed (25.5%) was in Maseru. This was followed by Berea (15.1%), Leribe (14.7%), Mafeteng (9.3%) and Mohale’s Hoek (9%). The least numbers of households were surveyed in Thaba-Tseka (6.9%), Quthing (6.7%), Buthe Buthe (4.8%), Mokhotlong (4.2%) and Qacha’s Neck (3.8%); the Districts with lower population numbers and densities. Figure 1 the Districts referred to in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of interviews per District

District	Number of completed interviews	Percentage of interviews per District
Maseru	309	25.5
Berea	183	15.1
Leribe	177	14.7
Mafeteng	113	9.3
Mohale’s Hoek	109	9
Thaba-Tseka	84	6.9
Quthing	80	6.7
Buthe Buthe	58	4.8
Mokhotlong	51	4.2
Qacha’s Neck	46	3.8
TOTAL	1 210	100

(Source: authors)

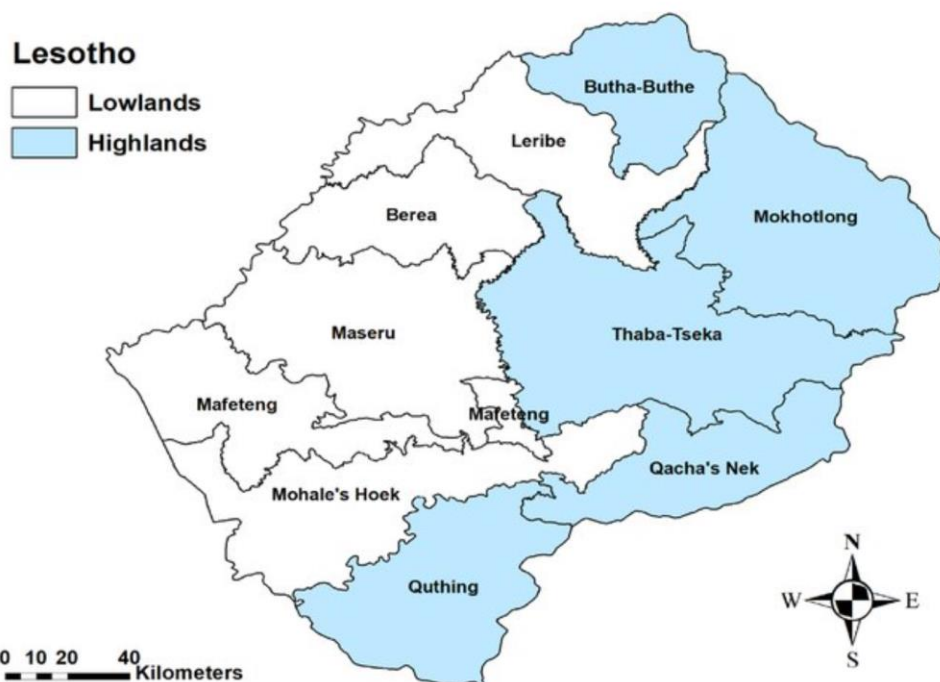


Figure 1: Lesotho District map indicating Highlands and Lowlands (Source: Lepheana, Oguttu and Qekwana, 2018)

At each location, surveys were checked on-site by field supervisors for quality assurance. All fieldworkers and supervisors underwent a two-day training programme that included a

thorough overview of the questionnaire (including translation), ethics protocols and procedures, data collection processes, screening questions, the sampling framework and piloting. Fieldworkers were bilingual (in the local language and English). A training manual was developed and used. The data was inputted into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and analysed.

Results and discussion

The analysis of the survey results is undertaken thematically. The first section presents the respondents' profiles. This is followed by discussion of respondents' travel patterns. Thereafter, the use of tourism products and services in Lesotho by the respondents is examined.

Respondents' profiles

Information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents is important to examine the profile of individuals who travel domestically as well as socio-economic factors that influence travel patterns and choices, as discussed in the literature review section. Almost all the respondents interviewed (99.5%) were Basotho, while 0.5% were expatriates. This is reflective of the Lesotho populace. Among the six expatriates interviewed, three lived in Maseru and one each in Berea, Mafeteng and Thaba-Tseka. In terms of promoting domestic tourism, from a socio-cultural perspective, the dominance of Basothos needs to be integrating in terms of appropriate marketing strategies.

In terms of the marital status of the respondents, most were married/ living with a partner (55.4%) followed by single (22.7%) and divorced/ widowed/ separated (21.6%). A few (0.3%) did not respond. Most of the respondents were females (71.7%) with 28.3% males. This is dissimilar to Thetsane's (2019) study where 52% of the respondents were males, and 48% were females. It is important to note that the results from this study which is national rather than focusing in a particular District as was the case with Thetsane's (2019) study, is not indicative of the gender profile of adults in the household but indicates who in the household participated in the study. Additionally, given the migratory and work patterns in Lesotho (and many parts of Africa), women tend to be home during the day when interviews were conducted. The dominance of women in households also links to Mapeshoane and Pather (2016) assertion that there is a dependency on jobs in South Africa's mining sector, which employs males. The average age of the respondents was 40 years and ranged from 18 to 92 years (Table 2). Many of the respondents (55.4%) were in the 18 to 25 years (29.3%) and 26 to 35 years (26.1%) age categories, which was also the case in Thetsane's (2019) study.

The educational level of the respondents indicate that the majority of the respondents (53.2%) had ten years or less of schooling with 15.1% having no formal education, 0.2% indicating pre-schooling, 30.2% completing primary schooling and 17.9% completing secondary schooling (Table 2). A further 17.9% of the respondents completed high school with 17.9% also attaining post-schooling qualifications, specifically certificates/ diplomas (13.1%), undergraduate degrees (3.5%) and postgraduate degrees (1.3%). Educational levels are important to consider to assess interest in different types of tourism activities as well as develop appropriate domestic tourism products and marketing strategies.

Table 2 shows that close to a third of the respondents (33.7%) were unemployed, followed by those who were labourers/ unskilled (13.4%) and self-employed (11.8%). Other main employment categories of the respondents were professionals (7.9%), housewives (6.8%), students/ scholars (6.1%) and pensioners/ grant-holders (4.5%). The high unemployment rate was also noted in Thetsane's (2019) study and affects levels of disposal income noted in the literature review as an important attribute that affects whether residents can afford to travel for tourism purposes.

Table 2: Age, highest level of education, employment status and monthly income of respondent (n=1210). Ranked data

	Frequency	Percentage
Age (in years)		
No response	7	.6
18 to 25	354	29.3
26 to 35	316	26.1
36 to 45	170	14.0
46 to 55	159	13.1
56 to 65	119	9.8
66 to 75	55	4.5
> 76	30	2.5
Highest level of education attained		
No response	11	.9
Primary completed (7 years of schooling)	365	30.2
Secondary completed (10 years of schooling)	216	17.9
High school completed (12 years of schooling)	216	17.9
No formal education	183	15.1
Certificate/ diploma	159	13.1
Undergraduate degree	42	3.5
Postgraduate degree	16	1.3
Pre-school	2	.2
Employment status		
No response	52	4.3
Unemployed	408	33.7
Labourer/ unskilled	162	13.4
Self-employed	143	11.8
Professional	94	7.8
Housewife	82	6.7
Student/ scholar	74	6.1
Pensioner/ grant holder	54	4.5
Farmer	31	2.6
Businessperson	29	2.4
Administrator/ manager	24	2
Artisan/ technician	24	2
Retired	21	1.7
Sales/ marketing	12	1
Monthly income in Maloti (M)		
No income	587	48.5
No response/ confidential	89	7.4
1 to 500	113	9.3
501 to 2500	235	19.4
2501 to 5000	103	8.5
5001 to 7500	47	3.9
7501 to 10000	25	2.1
>10000	11	.9

(Source: authors).

Close to half of the respondents (48.5%) did not have an income which corresponds closely with respondents who were unemployed, housewives, students/ scholars and were retired (Table 2). Some (7.4%) did not respond and stated that the information was confidential and did not disclose their income. The average monthly income among the respondents who indicated an amount was M2 740.51 and ranged from M200 to M36 000. The main income categories are indicated in Table 2. Most of the respondents (28.7%) who stated the amount had an income of less than M2 500 or less. The results indicate that there are substantial differences in relation to income among the respondents.



Tourism travel patterns in Lesotho

Almost two-thirds of the respondents (66.4%) indicated that they had travelled domestically for tourism purposes during the previous 12 months, with 33.6% stating that they did not travel (Table 3). The number of times travelled ranged from none to 54, with an average of 2.6. Among those who travelled, most travelled 1 to 3 times (45.1%). Additionally, 8.8% travelled 6 to 10 times. The results reveal that a significant proportion of respondents have travelled domestically, and many made multiple trips during the last 12 months. The results indicate that domestic mobility is widespread in Lesotho. Future studies should examine total household income which is likely to be a better indicator of disposal income given migratory employment patterns. The respondent income results presented earlier would suggest that households do not have disposal income to travel. However, the domestic tourism travel patterns indicate that most households do travel domestically, which could be related to affordability and accessibility factors given the size of Lesotho as well as the prominence of visiting friends and relatives and therefore not having to pay for accommodation and meals.

Table 3: Number of times travelled domestically for tourism purposes in the last 12 months (n=1210, Average = 2.6)

	Frequency	Percentage
None	407	33.6
1	274	22.6
2	163	13.5
3	109	9.0
4	47	3.9
5	52	4.3
6 to 10	106	8.8
11 to 15	32	2.6
16 to 20	6	.5
>20	14	1.2

(Source: authors)

The variations in income, especially the large proportion of respondents who do not have an income, together with many respondents indicating that they have travelled in Lesotho denote that personally having access to discretionary funding in Lesotho is not a key criterion to travel. This suggests that other persons pay for the travel costs and/ or costs are limited because of the trend to visit friends and family.

The main composition of the group during the last trip was family members (29.5%), followed by business associates (4.7%), church groups (4%), friends (3.4%), tour groups (1.3%) and school groups (1%). A substantial proportion of the respondents (23%) travelled alone, and a few respondents (1.2%) stated other. The results reveal the importance of social and familial groups when travelling in Lesotho, which is similar to trends identify by Glaesser et al. (2017) and Page and Connell (2020), and also indicate, albeit a relatively smaller proportion, that organised tours or group travel is also noticeable in Lesotho, especially in relation to business, church, school and tour group travel. This creates the platform to respond to potential markets and create targeted packages. The importance of better understanding markets and domestic consumption patterns, including the ‘invisible’ tourists in Sub-Saharan Africa that Rogerson and Letsie (2013) refer to, is key to unlock domestic tourism potential in Lesotho. The focus on domestic tourism is even more important in a COVID-19 world as it is seen as the first step to guide the tourism sector into a recovery stage (Smith, 2020). This is aligned to sentiments expressed by Dogru and Bulut (2018) and Kabote et al. (2017) that tourism generally (and specifically domestic tourism) are more resilient and recover from external shocks (such as economic recessions) quicker than other sectors.

In terms of the specific Districts respondents travelled to, for the last three trips taken during the past year, most respondents travelled to Maseru. The next most visited District was Leribe followed by Berea, Mafeteng, Mophale's Hoek, Buthe Buthe and Thaba-Tseka. The Districts least visited Districts were Mokhotlong, Quthing and Qacha's Neck. The results indicate that travel occurs across the Districts, although at different rates, with most travel occurring in the Districts with the highest populations. Cross-tabulations with Districts where the interview was conducted, and the Districts travelled reveal two important trends. Firstly, trips were generally within the District where the respondent resided, again suggesting that travel was likely to be less costly and destinations were targeted that were more accessible in terms of distance. Secondly, the most prominent District travelled to for all respondents regardless of the District where the interview was conducted was Maseru. The results reveal that the most visited Districts with higher population densities.

The main purpose of the trips identified by the respondents was visiting friends and relatives (73.6%). This was followed by business/ professional (17.6%), religious (13%), holiday/ vacation (8.3%) and medical and health/ well-being (6.2%) purposes. Half of the respondents stated other responses which generally further reinforce the prominence of social and family-related visits. For example, funerals emerged as an important other response (30.2%).

Visiting friends and family is the most prominent purpose for domestic travel in many countries, as indicated by Glaesser et al. (2017). This is clear in the Lesotho context, as shown by Rogerson and Letsie (2013) as well. Furthermore, Rogerson (2017) indicates that visiting friends and relatives is a neglected research area, although it is an important travel sector in Sub-Saharan Africa. Leisure/ vacation/ holiday is not as prominent as is the case in other countries such as South Africa as noted by Rogerson (2015). It is interesting to note that funeral travel is important in other parts of Africa as well with Okech (2008) identifying funeral tourism as part of cultural tourism. The results reinforce Camilleri (2018) and Page and Connell (2020) that tourists travel for multiple purposes. Furthermore, respondents participated in different types of travel and tourism types, as reflected in the multiple responses among many of the respondents.

Tourism products or services personally used or visited

Respondents were asked whether they personally used or visited specified tourism products in Lesotho. Table 4 shows that most of the respondents travelled overnight for medical/ health and wellness purposes (73.2%). It is important to note that Carrera and Bridges (2006) and Khan et al. (2020) refer to the increase in medically-related travel, attributing this increase in the high costs of elective treatment and medical care in specific locations as well as fewer barriers to travel. Khan et al. (2020) note that in Africa, specific locations have inadequate health care facilities, and people must travel to centralised facilities. This is the case in Lesotho where most of the health care facilities are in areas with higher population densities in towns, especially Maseru. Thus, in Lesotho, most health-related overnight trips are likely to be necessary rather than for elective medical procedures or wellness purposes such as spas.

Cultural, religious or entertainment events (60.3%), cultural, religious and heritage sites (51.4%) and crafts and cultural artefacts (47.4%) were also identified as activities respondents participated in and travelled for. This links to the rich cultural heritage of the Basotho people, as highlighted by Monaheng (2016). It could also be associated with cultural tourism being a key component of Lesotho's Strategic Plan for Tourism Development noted earlier. Respondents also travelled overnight to participate in recreational activities such as visiting shopping locations/ malls (61.8%), sporting facilities and events (52.5%) and casinos (20.2%).



In terms of shopping, this could be because of limited shopping facilities in many rural areas in Lesotho. Conferences and exhibitions were also identified by 38.3% of the respondents.

Fewer respondents participated in nature reserves/ park/ wildlife areas (34.9%) and other outdoor/ nature-based activities (29.8%). Thus, in terms of international tourist interests, nature-based tourism is least important in relation to domestic tourism compared particularly to cultural tourism products in Lesotho as well as sporting, medical and shopping products. The bias towards nature-based (particularly snow tourism) in the literature, for example, Noome and Fitchett (2019) and Stockigt et al. (2018), therefore reinforces the position that tourism research in Lesotho is focused in international tourism and neglects domestic tourism. It is interesting to note that 41.6% of the respondents indicated that they used tourism accommodation facilities, including hotels and resorts. This indicates that domestic tourism does contribute to accommodation spend. Many of the accommodation beneficiaries are locally-based, as noted by Rogerson and Letsie (2013). Thus, domestic tourism contributes to local economic development in relation to accommodation spend. Further research is required to establish the types of accommodation specifically used and spend patterns to establish the actual economic contribution. The lower responses compared to the substantially higher number of respondents who indicated that they travelled overnight for various purposes, suggest that many respondents stayed with friends and family. The prominence of staying with friends and relatives again emphasises the importance of this category of travellers in relation to domestic tourism in Lesotho as noted earlier.

Table 4: If personally used or visited general tourism products in Lesotho: Multiple responses (n=1210)

	Frequency	Percentage
Medical/ health and wellness	886	73.2
Cultural, religious or entertainment events	730	60.3
Shopping locations/ malls	748	61.8
Sporting facilities and events	635	52.5
Cultural, religious and heritage sites	622	51.4
Crafts and cultural artefacts	574	47.4
Accommodation (including hotels and resorts)	503	41.6
Conferences and exhibitions	464	38.3
Nature reserves/ parks/ wildlife areas	422	34.9
Other outdoor/ nature-based activities	361	29.8
Casinos	244	20.2

(Source: Authors)

Conclusion

The importance of the domestic markets in reducing seasonality of demand and thereby improving the sustainability of tourism products and suppliers has been highlighted in the literature, reinforcing the importance of examining domestic tourism. The main findings reveal that Lesotho has several tourism products which include cultural and heritage sites, nature-based destinations and unique leisure experiences. The current levels of domestic tourism activities are relatively high. However, it is important to note that the main reasons for travelling were not tourist motivations linked to leisure/ vacation activities, with travel for medical/ health-related, cultural/ religious, shopping and sporting purposed being most dominant. Thus, a key finding is that domestic tourism is occurring on a large scale, but it differs from developing contexts in that travel is not leisure focused. The main reasons are visiting friends and relatives as well as business-related. Several factors influence the willingness and ability of households to consume domestic tourism products in Lesotho which include disposal income, travel patterns and motivations, and proximity of tourism destinations sites/ locations to households and/ or friends and family. Residential location and socio-economic variables influence travel patterns in Lesotho. The results indicate that there are

variations among respondents in terms of their socio-demographic backgrounds, yet most have travelled overnight for various purposes. The profiles of domestic tourists reveal the dominance of social and familial groups.

This study contributes to the knowledge pertaining to domestic tourism, specifically addressing the gaps in relation to the limited research that focuses on domestic tourists' profiles and knowledge of domestic products in Lesotho. This is critically important to unlocking Lesotho's domestic tourism potential. Recommendations to improve domestic tourism in Lesotho includes better and appropriate communication and marketing strategies about tourism products, packages for domestic tourists and encouraging a culture of travel for tourism. Improved transport infrastructure and tourism services are also important to consider. The development of the domestic tourism strategy for Lesotho will need to be underpinned by research and proper monitoring and evaluation of initiatives undertaken to support the growth of the domestic tourism market.

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