Tourist experience, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions of rural tourism destinations in the Eastern Cape, South Africa

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Abstract

Tourism plays a pivotal role in the development of economies across the globe. South Africa is no exception and has benefited significantly from tourism over the past couple of decades. The latter has propelled the government to renew its efforts and commitment to improving the sector in order to attract larger volumes of tourists to the country. Despite the growth in international tourist arrivals to the country, little focus has been dedicated towards the rural tourism sector. This sector is underdeveloped compared to urban tourism destinations, and generally little information exist on tourists' experience, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions in these areas. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to investigate tourist's experience, satisfaction, and intentions of visiting rural tourism destinations in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. Two rural coastal tourism destinations served as the focus areas for the study. Using convenience sampling, a total of 196 usable questionnaires were obtained for the quantitative data analyses. The results of the study indicate that education, aesthetics, entertainment, escape, and peace of mind influence tourist's satisfaction of rural tourism destinations in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The results indicated that commonly, tourists had a positive experience, were satisfied visiting the selected tourism destinations, and had a favourable intention of visiting the same destination or recommend the destinations to friends and families. Rural tourism destinations can use the established satisfaction factors and recommendations offered in the study to enhance their competitiveness in the industry.

Keywords: Behavioural intentions; Customer satisfaction; Eastern Cape; Rural tourism experience; South Africa

Introduction

The tourism sector serves as a valuable source of national income and an important asset to job creation. In 2016, tourism in South Africa contributed 2.9% to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) more than when compared to the agricultural sector and 4.4% to employment, a rise from 3.8% in 2005 (Statistics South Africa, 2018). In the State of Nation Address (SONA) in 2019, the President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, identified the tourism sector as a key strategic area to boost economic growth in the country. However, the national marketing efforts mainly focuses and supports tourism in popular urban tourism destinations (e.g. Cape

Town, Johannesburg, Durban, and Pretoria) with little benefits flowing to other sectors such as rural tourism of the country (Viljoen, 2007).

Rural tourism destinations are predominantly located in rural communities. The rural tourism sector provides rural dwellers with an opportunity to contribute to tourism development and job creation. Despite possessing attributes that favour tourism development, many rural tourism destinations in South Africa are underdeveloped and fail to compete with established urban tourism destinations such as Cape Town, Durban, and Johannesburg. Some of the problems documented as impeding the success of rural tourism destinations in South Africa include accessibility and infrastructure, quality of products and services offered, availability of skilled employees, and lack of interest by investors (Viljoen & Tlabela, 2007).

Although these problems can be impediments, some small rural tourism destinations have managed to become sustainable and grew significantly to contribute towards local economic development (Viljoen, 2007). The results of this study will hopefully assist managers of rural tourism destinations to understand the tourist experience, their satisfaction, and behavioural intentions in South Africa. The latter might also assist rural tourism destinations to improve their services in order to benchmark their activities with urban tourism sectors in order to attract more tourists. Thus, the purpose of this study is to investigate tourist's experience, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions of rural tourism destinations in South Africa.

The remaining sections of this paper are set out as follows. The first section will contextualise on rural tourism and rural tourism experiences. Thereafter, the research methodology adopted will be discussed, which will be followed by the results of the study. The final sections of the paper will include discussions, conclusions, managerial implications and recommendations, limitations, and acknowledgment.

Literature review

Rural tourism

No consensus has been reached on the definition of rural tourism. For example, Ezeuduji (2017:947) defines rural tourism as "tourists' visits to a rural area to experience rural landscapes and participate in a rural way of life". Viljoen and Tlabela (2007:1) explain that rural tourism "consists of leisure activities carried out in rural areas and includes different types of tourism activities such as community-based tourism, ecotourism, cultural tourism, adventure tourism, guest farms, backpacking, riding, and agri-tourism". Nair, Munikrishman, Rajaratnam, and King (2015) posit that rural tourism takes place in rural areas and the main purpose of visiting these areas is to learn, experience, and enjoy unique cultures and natural attributes. The latter is the definition that will be adopted for this article. The central focus of rural tourism is on the emphasis of tourist visit to rural places of attraction to experience natural landscape and historical views. Many countries, both developed and developing, have identified rural tourism as an engine for economic growth (Osti & Cicero, 2018) as the sector contributes to job creation and a better standard of living especially to the people who live in the rural communities. The need to sustain this niche area is therefore important (Nair et al., 2015; Osti & Cicero, 2018).

Rural tourism experience

The rural tourist experience can be either positive or negative, and it is not only associated with the quality of the attractions but also the service quality and customer care (Osti & Cicero, 2018). Pine and Gilmore (1998) conceived the experience economy theory and argue that creating a distinctive experience is a source of economic value and a competitive battlefield for organisations. Sustainable rural tourism could, therefore, depend on the experience received by the tourist. The experience of the tourist is formed during the entire journey of

visiting a destination using senses, emotions, and cognition (Kransbühler, Kleijnen, Morgan & Teerling 2018). From the consumer perspective, the experience should be "enjoyable, engaging, and memorable" (Oh, Fiore & Jeoung, 2007). Pine and Gilmore identified four realms of experience namely Education, Esthetics, Entertainment, and Escape. A study by Amoah, Radder and van Eyk (2016) also identified Peace of Mind as an important dimension of the customer experience.

An educational experience would actively engage the tourist to interact with others and should enhance the skills and knowledge of the tourist (Oh, et al., 2007). Rural tourism destinations provide opportunities for tourist to learn new cultures, expand skills, learn a new lifestyle, and establish relationships (Hjalager, Kwiatkowski & Larsen, 2018). The aesthetic experience is associated with how the tourist conceived the environment or destination visited. Open spaces, flora, and fauna are leisure benefits for rural tourism destinations as it creates a beautiful environment (Osti & Cicero, 2018).

The entertainment experience occurs when tourists passively watch activities or listen to performances of others (Oh, et al., 2007). In the context of rural tourism, entertainment experience can take the form of visiting and watching cultural performances such as songs and dancing by local community members. Escape experience occurs when tourists' feel that they have attained an extraordinary experience which is entirely different from their routine activities (Oh, et al., 2007). Rural tourism destinations provide an escape for tourists to move away from urban environments to relax and enjoy quite landscapes (Osti & Cicero, 2018). The peace of mind experience occurs when tourists are of the view that the destination provided a safe, secure environment and that their privacy is prioritised (Ali & Kim, 2015; Amoah, et al., 2016). Provision of regular security patrol personnel at a destination would help to assure tourists of their safety and provide them with at least some peace of mind.

The four realms of experience (education, aesthetic, entertainment, and escape) have been tested in several studies. Oh, et al., (2007) tested the applicability of the four realms in the bed-and-breakfast (accommodation) industry. Their study found the four realms of experience to be practically reliable in the lodging context. Hosany and Witham (2010) demonstrated enough evidence of reliability and validity of the four realms on cruise experience. Kastenholz, Carneiro, Marques, and Loureiro (2018) confirmed the applicability of the four realms in a rural tourism context. While these experience dimensions were found to be valid and reliable in several contexts, an investigation into their influence on customer satisfaction is also relevant. Satisfaction occurs when experiences compared to expectations are met (Sánchez-Rebull, Rudchenko & Martín, 2018).

Hosany and Witham (2010) established that the aesthetics and entertainment realms were significantly related to satisfaction. Park et al's., (2010) study into film festivals showed that education, aesthetics, and entertainment has a significant positive influence on satisfaction. Oh, et al. (2007) found that aesthetics has a positive influence on satisfaction. Huang, et al. (2012) study focusing on cultural performance found that the four realms positively influence visitors' satisfaction. Samrad and Rivera (2016) applied the four realms in the context of a music festival and found that the four realms have a positive influence on visitors' satisfaction. Yoon and Uysal (2003) found that escape experience has a direct positive influence on satisfaction, while Ali and Kim (2015) established that peace of mind has a positive influence on satisfaction.
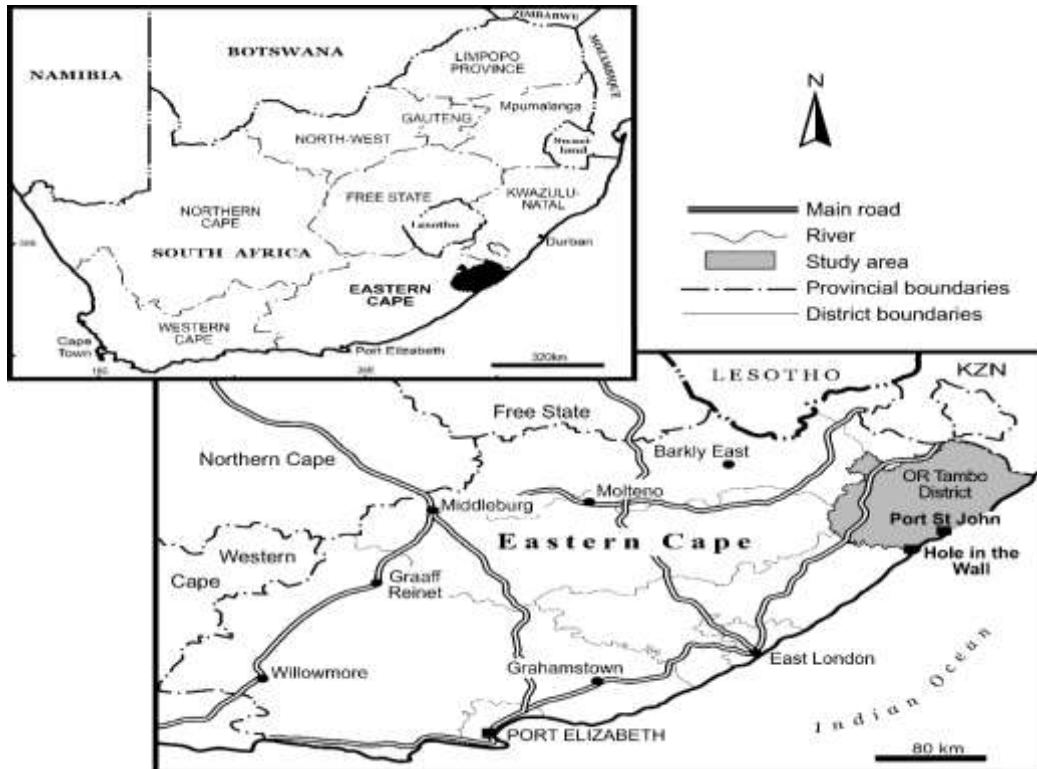
In addition, tourists' satisfaction is also linked with behavioural intentions (Hosany & Witham, 2010). Positive behavioural intentions refer to the likelihood of the tourist returning to a place or recommending the destination to another tourist (Chen & Chen, 2010). A satisfied tourist exhibit characters of positive behavioural intentions (Chen & Chen, 2010) resulting in loyalty and positive word of mouth influences. In line with several studies, satisfaction has a positive influence on behavioural intentions (Ling, Karim, Othman, Adzahan & Ramachandran, 2010; Nowacki, 2009; Žabkar, Brenčič & Dmitrović, 2010). In the following section, the research methodology of the study is provided.

Research Methodology

The data for the study was obtained through a self-administered structured questionnaire administered to respondents by means of convenience sampling after stringent ethical considerations. Two rural tourism destinations (Port St. Johns and Hole in the wall) (see Figure 1 for the map of study sites) located in the coastal parts of the Eastern Cape, South Africa were selected for the study. These rural destinations were selected as they are the most visited rural destinations in the Eastern Cape and have similar attractions such as sea/beach, and lodging facilities. The measuring instrument had a total of 28 items of which 16 items measuring education (4 items), aesthetics (4 items), entertainment (4 items), and escape (4 items) were adapted from the study conducted by Oh et al., (2007).

The items measuring peace of mind (4 items) were adapted from a study conducted by Amoah, et al., (2016). A further four items each were formulated to measure satisfaction and behavioural intentions. All the items were face and content validated by three academic experts in the fields of tourism and marketing at a public University in South Africa. Their extensive review resulted in minor adjustments in wording of some of the items. A 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5) was used. A pilot study was conducted prior to the final data collection with the aim to allowing the potential target population to review the measuring instrument, advice on the clarity of items and relevance of those items in a rural tourism context. The feedback received resulted in further rephrasing of four items. The final questionnaire was completed by 199 respondents of which 196 was usable. Statistica, a computer software program was used to perform both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses on the data set. Eigenvalues were determined to establish the latent factors whiles Cronbach's alphas helped ascertain the reliability of the measuring instrument.

Figure 1: Map locating the study site

Source: Cartography department at University of Witwatersrand (2018)

Results

Profile of respondents

Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents. More males (57%) participated in the study compared to females (43%). A large proportion of the respondents (35%) were older than 51 years of age followed by respondents within the age bracket of 41-50 years of age (26%). In terms of the respondents' educational background, the majority of the respondents (65%) had a diploma or a degree certificate. A further 25% of the respondents possess a postgraduate qualification. More than half (63%) of the respondents earn an income exceeding R15000.

Table 1. Profile of respondents

	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	111	57
Female	85	43
Age		
18-30	27	14
31-40	50	25
41-50	51	26
51+	68	35
Country of residence		
South Africa	171	87
Other	25	13
Education		
Lower than high school	01	01
High school/certificate	17	09
Diploma/degree	128	65
Postgraduate	50	25
Income		
<R3000	08	04
R3000-R8000	20	10
R8001-R15000	44	23
>R15000	124	63

Descriptive statistics of items measuring tourist experience, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions

A descriptive analysis of the experience items, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions was undertaken to investigate how respondents viewed each of the items on the 5-point Likert scale. Overall the mean scores ranged from M=3.11 to M=3.84. This implies that the majority of the responses were either neutral or agreed to the statements.

The lowest mean score was item A20 (I felt that my privacy was respected everywhere at the various tourist destinations in the area) and the highest mean score was item A9 (I had lots of fun). All the standard deviation values were below 2.0, indicating that there were no concerns with regard to outliers (Drost, 2011). In addition, all the statements measuring the tourist experience, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions were negatively skewed.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the Experience items, satisfaction and behavioural intentions

Variable	Item	Mean	Median	Std. Dev.	SK
Education					
A1	The experience made me more knowledgeable	3.53	4.00	0.87	-0.51
A2	I learnt a lot at the various tourist destinations	3.62	4.00	0.82	-0.36
A3	The experience stimulated my curiosity to learn new things	3.59	4.00	0.95	-0.30
A4	The experience at this destination really enhanced my skills	3.56	4.00	0.92	-0.28
Esthetics					
A5	The destination offered a sense of harmony	3.68	4.00	0.97	-0.32
A6	The experience received was very pleasant	3.70	4.00	0.90	-0.36
A7	The environment was very attractive	3.63	4.00	0.94	-0.31
A8	The environment provided pleasure to my senses	3.73	4.00	0.93	-0.24
Entertainment					
A9	I had lots of fun	3.84	4.00	0.82	-0.46
A10	I enjoyed watching what others do at this tourist destination	3.56	4.00	0.86	-0.34
A11	Watching others perform made me feel happy	3.63	4.00	0.97	-0.49
A12	Activities of others were amusing to watch	3.56	4.00	1.03	-0.57
Escape					
A13	I felt like I played a different character being at this destination	3.64	4.00	1.00	-0.67
A14	I felt like living in a different time or place when in the tourist destination	3.62	4.00	0.99	-0.42
A15	The experience made me feel like someone else	3.43	4.00	1.06	-0.58
A16	The experience provided a complete escape from reality	3.51	4.00	0.97	-0.25
Peace of mind					
A17	I felt physically comfortable visiting this tourist destination	3.42	4.00	1.04	-0.40
A18	I felt that my property was safe when visiting various tourist attractions in the area	3.18	3.00	1.11	-0.20
A19	I felt this destination provided a sense of personal security	3.13	3.00	1.12	-0.21
A20	I felt that my privacy was respected everywhere at the various tourist destinations in the area	3.11	3.00	1.12	-0.07
Satisfaction					
A21	Overall I am satisfied with my visit to this destination	3.71	4.00	0.87	-0.67
A22	Overall, my stay was better than I expected	3.71	4.00	0.93	-0.67
A23	I am satisfied with my decision to visit this destination as a tourist destination	3.73	4.00	0.91	-0.42
A24	Taking everything into consideration (e.g. money, time, resources), I am satisfied with my visit	3.68	4.00	1.02	-0.46
Behavioural intentions					
A25	I will return to this destination again	3.67	4.00	1.05	-0.66
A26	I will recommend this destination to others	3.76	4.00	0.95	-0.79
A27	I will say positive things about this destination	3.58	4.00	0.94	-0.35
A28	I will visit again even if it costs more than my last visit	3.38	4.00	1.07	-0.39

Eigenvalues and Reliability test

The eigenvalues of the correlation matrix were used to identify the number of factors that can be extracted from the 28 items. It emerged that 7 factors can be extracted with eigenvalues larger than 1 (see Table 3). Factor 1 extracts 26.8% of all the variations in the data. The 7 factors extracted were subjected to reliability scrutiny (see Table 4). As widely accepted, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients were determined to measure the reliability of the items. The results revealed that the Cronbach alphas for education, escape, aesthetics, peace of mind, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions exceeded the recommended threshold of 0.7, indicating that the items measuring these variables were reliable (Hair, et al., 2012). Although

entertainment had a Cronbach alpha of 0.625, it is deemed acceptable (Morar, Venter & Chuchu, 2015).

Table 3. Eigenvalues of correlation matrix, and related statistics

Value number	Eigenvalue	% Total
1	7.49	26.76
2	3.20	11.43
3	2.02	7.23
4	1.65	5.90
5	1.37	4.90
6	1.20	4.30
7	1.08	3.87

Table 4. Cronbach's alphas

Variables	Cronbach alphas
Education	0.732
Escape	0.710
Esthetics	0.738
Entertainment	0.625
Peace of mind	0.873
Satisfaction	0.824
Behavioural intentions	0.821

Canonical Correlation Analysis (CCA)

Canonical Correlation Analysis (CCA), a multivariate technique was employed to allow for simultaneous comparisons among the observed variables rather than performing many statistical tests (Sherry & Henson, 2005). CCA is most appropriate when the intention is to examine the relationship between two variable sets and the significance of such relationships (Sherry & Henson, 2005). The results of the CCA for this study is presented in Table 5.

The first CCA was between education experience and tourist satisfaction. The results indicate a positive relationship (r=0.299) and a p-value (<0.0001). It emerged also that there is a positive relationship between aesthetics and satisfaction (r=0.323) and a p-value (<0.0001). Further investigation revealed that a positive relationship exists between entertainment and satisfaction (r=0.351) and a p-value (<0.0001).

The fourth CCA was between escape and satisfaction which also showed a positive relationship (r=0.388) and a p-value (<0.0001). The results further indicate a positive relationship between peace of mind and satisfaction (r=0.344) and a p-value (<0.0001). Finally, the results proved that there is a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions (r=0.742) and a p-value (<0.0001).

All the p-values were less than 0.05 suggesting that the established relationships were statistically significant (Zaykin, Zhivotovsky, Westfall & Weir, 2002).

Table 5. Canonical correlations of experience items with satisfaction, and satisfaction with behavioural intentions

Item	Factor Structure	Item	Factor Structure	Canonical Correlation (R)	p-value
Education		**Satisfaction**		0.299	<0.0001
A1	-0.322796	A21	-0.548373		
A2	-0.594790	A22	-0.661129		
A3	-0.654239	A23	-0.718850		
A4	-0.936044	A24	-0.950062		
Esthetics		**Satisfaction**		0.323	<0.0001
A5	0.755516	A21	0.857233		
A6	0.756604	A22	0.760727		
A7	0.718528	A23	0.853311		
A8	0.743793	A24	0.756476		
Entertainment		**Satisfaction**		0.351	<0.0001
A9	0.716011	A21	0.589249		
A10	0.339285	A22	0.930530		
A11	0.410574	A23	0.850049		
A12	0.820727	A24	0.550485		
Escape		**Satisfaction**		0.388	<0.0001
A13	0.138765	A21	0.926905		
A14	0.917628	A22	0.510444		
A15	0.118505	A23	0.789472		
A16	0.480047	A24	0.682976		
Peace of mind		**Satisfaction**		0.344	<0.0001
A17	0.882930	A21	0.665238		
A18	0.823737	A22	0.629846		
A19	0.643876	A23	0.637593		
A20	0.770223	A24	0.974602		
Satisfaction		**Behavioural Intentions**		0.742	<0.0001
A21	0.805367	A25	0.832430		
A22	0.663287	A26	0.825385		
A23	0.854713	A27	0.882326		
A24	0.842911	A28	0.603321		

Discussion and conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate tourists' experiences, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions of rural tourism destinations in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. In order to achieve this aim, five experience dimensions were adapted from existing studies (Ali & Kim, 2015; Amoah et al., 2016; Oh, et al., 2007) to measure tourist experience. These dimensions were further used to determine whether tourists were satisfied with the destinations visited and whether they will revisit or invite friends and families to visit these destinations.

Based on the mean scores it emerged that all the items measuring tourists' experiences were above M=3.0 but below M=4.0. This suggests that the responses from tourists were either neutral or they agreed with the statements in the questionnaire. Item A9 (I had a lot of fun) attracted the highest mean score (M=3.84). This was followed by item A6 (the experience received was very pleasant) (M=3.70). This finding supports the assertion that tourist visits rural tourism destinations so as to enjoy and experience unique attributes (Nair, et al., 2015). The lowest means score (M=3.11) were established in item A20 (I felt that my privacy was respected everywhere at the various tourist destinations in the area). Based on the findings, it is evident that tourists had a positive experience with the destinations selected for the study. A critical observation of the means scores of the experience items shows that items A17-A20 attracted the lowest means score. This item measured the peace of mind dimension. This

seems to suggest that the tourists were concerned about their safety, security, and privacy which constitute the peace of mind dimension. The means score for items measuring satisfaction also ranged from M=3.68 to M=3.71. These values were closer to M=4.0 suggesting that tourists agreed to be satisfied with their experience at these destinations. With reference to respondents' behavioural intentions, it emerged that the means score ranged from M=3.38 to M=3.76. Item A28 (I will visit again even if it costs more than my last visit) had the lowest means score. This suggests that tourists seemed to be more concerned about cost when visiting rural tourism destinations. Higher prices such as those for accommodation, food, sale artefacts, and cost of entertainment activities may in fact deter tourists from revisiting the same destination.

The relationships of the various experience dimensions with satisfaction were determined using CCA. It was evident that there is a positive relationship between tourist experience of education and satisfaction and this corroborates the finding by Park, et al. (2010). The study also established that there is a positive relationship between tourists' experiences with the aesthetics and satisfaction, and this supports the findings from other studies (Hosany & Witham, 2010; Oh, et al., 2007). Enough evidence also points to the fact that there is a positive relationship between tourist experience of entertainment and satisfaction and this is closely linked to the findings by Hosany and Witham (2010) and also Huang, et al. (2012).

A positive relationship was also found between the tourist experience of escape and satisfaction which supports prior studies (Huang, et al. 2012; Yoon & Uysal 2003). There is also a positive relationship between the peace of mind experience dimension and satisfaction and agrees with a prior study conducted by Ali and Kim (2015). Further assessment of the relationships revealed that the education experience attains the smallest relationship (r=0.299), followed by aesthetics (r=0.323). Education experience involves imparting knowledge to a person/s or opportunities granted to the tourist to acquire new or additional knowledge. This seems to suggest that tourist's did not experience adequate educational experience to boost their satisfaction levels. Aesthetics, on the other hand, focuses on the serenity and attractiveness of the physical surroundings. This also seems to suggest that the attractiveness of the physical environment was not of the standard envisaged by the tourists. This finding suggests a need to improve the educational and aesthetics experience of rural tourism destinations.

It became evident that there is a positive relationship between tourist satisfaction and behavioural aspects (r=0.742). This supports other studies by Ling, et al. (2010), Nowacki (2009) and Žabkar, et al. (2010). The findings seem to suggest that tourists would likely tend to revisit the selected rural tourism destinations and would recommend to friends and family members.

Managerial implications and recommendations

In South Africa, as well as elsewhere, tourism has been identified as one of the key areas to support economic growth and stimulate job creation. Renewed government efforts to support and strengthen the sector seem to point in a positive direction. However, little focus is dedicated to rural tourism, as the sector is generally underdeveloped with a huge deficiency in infrastructure (such as good access roads to certain destinations), lack of skilled owners and employees managing some destinations (Viljoen & Tlabela, 2007). To enhance the competitiveness of this sector, the current study aimed to investigate the factors influencing tourist experience, satisfaction, and behavioural intentions of rural tourism destination in the Eastern Cape, South Africa. The findings of this study revealed that holistically tourists had a

positive experience with the rural tourism destinations visited. Tourists' were also satisfied with their experiences and had a positive intention of revisiting these destinations or recommending these to friends and family members. It became known in the study that the education and aesthetic experience dimensions attracted the lowest relationship value with satisfaction. Therefore, in terms of enhancing the educational experience, managers of rural tourism destinations are encouraged to recruit tour guides who are efficient and also well trained to provide professional information about the destination, their products, and services on offer. Since employees also interact directly with tourists, it is recommended that employees should be adequately trained to equip them with knowledge and skills in handling queries from tourist. Besides capacitating the personnel, it is also recommended that ample information (e.g. in the form of brochures) should be made available at strategic areas where tourist would normally visit. Ample provision of historical artefacts and cultural history would undoubtedly contribute significantly to enhance the educational experience of the tourist.

With reference to the aesthetic dimension, it is recommended that the general physical appearance of the destinations should be clean, and improve the odour or scent of the area. The landscape could be decorated with grass, flora, and flowers to beautify the environment. This should be properly maintained in an ongoing basis. Finally, the means scores also revealed that tourists expressed concerns about their peace of mind (safety, security, and privacy). This could have negative implications for future intentions if not addressed. It is recommended that every effort should be made to protect tourist at rural tourism destinations. Destination managers should employ reliable private security personnel and task them with the purpose of patrolling and ensuring that tourists who have visited their destination are safe and protected at all times. It is also recommended to collaborate with the police, opinion leaders (e.g. the chief of the community), and support community patrol personnel to ensure that tourists have peace of mind during their visit.

Limitations and recommendations for further studies

It is acknowledged that the current study has made a significant contribution to the body of scholarly knowledge and to society. However, it is also important to highlight the following limitations which can assist in future studies. The current study focused on two rural tourism destinations in the Eastern Cape, South Africa, therefore, the future studies should attempt other rural tourism destinations in the Eastern Cape Province to generalise the findings. Additional dimensions can also be established in future studies to provide more scientific evidence within the study area.

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