



Analysing tourism stakeholder's perceptions of the attractiveness and competitiveness of the Garden Route as a tourist destination

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of tourism destination attractiveness and competitiveness which have been the subject of great research interest in recent decades. The majority of studies conducted have either focussed on models of destination competitiveness or perceptions of destination attractiveness by tourists. Very few studies, if any at all, have been done on evaluating the perceptions of tourism key stakeholders in a tourism destination relating to the destination attractiveness and competitiveness. Hence, this research paper seeks to contribute to filling this shortcoming through analysing tourism stakeholder's perceptions of the attractiveness and competitiveness of the Garden Route in the Western Cape Province of South Africa, as a tourism destination. The research used three key elements, which are considered essential for destination attractiveness. The first element relates to safety and security, the second element relates to availability of tourism resources and tourism activities and the last element relates to availability of infrastructure and superstructures to facilitate and support tourism and tourism activities. The study adopted a quantitative research methodology and used questionnaires as a data collection instrument. The study sample constituted tourism stakeholders who are involved in the various sub-sectors of the tourism industry and they were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study after they were invited to take part. The study of the results show that there was agreement that the Garden route as a tourist destination is safe and secure and that it has a good infrastructure and superstructure but the destination was considered not to have enough tourism resources and tourism activities.

Keywords: Tourism stakeholders, Garden Route District Municipality, destination competitiveness.

Introduction

Most of the developing countries have to come to realise that tourism is one of the fastest growing industries and has the potential to create employment and contribute to foreign income (Cucculelli & Goffi, 2015). In this regard, it is important to identify and analyse the factors that are key to destination attractiveness and competitiveness in order to attract potential tourists to the destination (Beerli & Martin, 2004). In this regard, there are close relations among tourist's expectation about destination attributes, nature of destination management, positive image of the destination and destination competitiveness (Dwyer, Cvelbar, Mihalič, & Koman, 2014). Successful identification of attributes that makes a destination attractive and competitive is thus significant to specific tourism sector for designing tourism management in a more appropriate way and in turn which will enhance destination competitiveness in a given location. The number of tourism destinations worldwide is constantly growing. As destinations strive for bigger market shares, there is great competition on the international tourism market. Competitiveness is increasingly being seen as a critical influence on the performance of tourism destinations in competitive world markets. According to Crouch and Ritchie (2000), a tourism destination attractiveness and competitiveness has huge ramifications for the destination and the tourism industry in general. In this regard, this



topic has attracted considerable interest of practitioners and policy makers alike. Echoing the above views, Enright and Newton (2005) suggested that a destination would only be considered attractive and competitive if it can attract and satisfy potential tourist and as such, both specific factors and a much wider range of factors that influence tourism service providers determine the competitiveness.

The views of Crouch and Ritchie (2000) are that tourism destination as an integrated set of facilities for tourist is key to destination attractiveness and its competitiveness rather than single aspects such as environmental resources, transportation, tourism services, hospitality amongst others. In an ever more saturated market, the fundamental task of destination management is to understand how tourism destination competitiveness and attractiveness can be enhanced and sustained. There is thus a strong need to identify and explore competitive (dis)advantages and to analyse the actual competitive position (Gomezelj, Mihaljič, 2008). Identifying competitors and determining the destination advantages and disadvantages relative to competitors is an integral part of successful marketing management of tourist destinations.

The relative competitiveness and attractiveness of tourism destinations influences their success in the global markets. According to dos Santos et al (2015), destination attractiveness and competitiveness are central and are increasingly important for countries that are looking to expand their tourism markets and those that want to use tourism to improve the lives of their community members. The United Nations World tourism Organisation (UNWTO) tourism vision 2020 indicates that tourism has become a leading leisure activity in the 21st century and therefore it is forecast that international tourist arrivals will reach 1.6 billion by the year 2020. This estimation begs the question “what should tourism destinations have in place if they are to share a slice of this growing and expanding market?” This question is central because tourism destinations compete in attracting visitors, residents, and businesses. The expectation is that a tourism destination with a positive reputation can easily get attention, resources and as such, it is able to build destination competitiveness and cents itself as worth visiting by potential tourists. According to Morgan et al., (2013:3), destinations must consider development and a sense of destination if they are to maintain strong reputations globally.

Literature review

Research done in the past has revealed a number of diversified managerial issues, which are central and important to increase destination competitiveness and attractiveness (Ritchie & Crouch, 2003). The implication therefore is that a destination requires a tourist friendly environment that is conducive and attractive to potential tourists (Roman & Scott, 2009). This is important since the decision-making process, choice and tourist perception about a destination is important, which emphasized on a set of attributes formed based on the sources of information. According to Fakeye and Crompton (1991), information sources along with a number of other factors are the persuading factor for potential tourist to a destination as these expose the destination and its activities. Therefore, a good image formed on a set of destination attributes is crucial to swing the decision-making of the potential tourist to prefer the tourism destination as their preferred holiday choice.

According to Crompton (1979), tourists use the information received from information sources to form a perception about the destination in their minds before travelling and this is referred to as destination image. These are also referred to as the sum of beliefs, ideas, and impressions that a potential tourist has about the destination and this image is important to the overall success of the destination (Chen, 1999).

The views of Glavan (2000) as cited in Cornelius et al., (2010) are that evaluating tourism in an area is usually a difficult task since it may imply a decision around predicting source of tourism, which has implications for supply and demand. This is further compounded by the increasing tourism destination competition in the global market because of large number of newly emerging destinations. This places extreme pressure on destinations at mature stage



since they have to improve their quality in order to survive this intense competition. Kresic (2007) is of the opinion that destinations should try to innovate continuously to seek new sources of attractiveness and competitiveness as competitive advantage. These competitive advantages should be in the form of tourism resources and tourism activities, safety and security of the destination and the availability of infrastructure and superstructures to support the tourism industry.

Tourism destination competitiveness and attractiveness

A lot of research has been done in the past focusing on understanding of tourist destinations attractiveness and competitiveness as the most important determinants of destination reputation. Authors like (Mihalic, 2000; Pikkemaat, 2004; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Kresic, 2007 Cracolici & Nijkamp, 2009, Leask, 2010), have indicated that factors of destination attractiveness are defined as the attributes of the destination that has the potential to attract or motivate tourists to visit a specific destination. The implication is that tourists will not be motivated or will have no desire to travel to destinations, which have insufficient supply of tourism resources, or destinations, which are perceived as unattractive. Tourism destinations therefore, have to ensure that there is an overall attractiveness at least at the same level or higher level in comparison with its direct competitors.

Schejbal (2013) provided an analysis and evaluation of destination attractiveness. In his analysis, the author stated that attractiveness is of great importance for understanding and improvement of the tourist destination competitiveness and attractiveness and this was further supported by (Buhalis, 2000; Crouch & Ritchie, 1999; Hu & Ritchie, 1993; Kresic, 2008; Vengesai, 2003). Destination attractiveness and competitiveness has always been defined in relations to elements or attributes of a specific destination. Kresic (2008) highlighted that destination attractiveness and competitiveness is made up of those attributes of the destination, which attract or serve as motivation for tourists to visit the destination. Cho (2008: 221) further supported this idea where he indicated "an aggregated indicator of attributes that make a potential destination attractive". There is a debate on what constitute the attributes that makes a destination attractive and competitive and experts like (Cho, 2008; Gartner, 1989; Anholt, 2010; Harrison-Walker, 2011) suggested features such as price, transportation, climate, quality of accommodation as well as destination image. Vengesai (2008) is of the opinion that virtually every attribute of the destination can be identified at a certain stage as a source of attractiveness for tourists.

The views of Alegre and Cladera (2009) are that regardless of the type of tourist destination, there are few attributes that makes a destination competitive and attractive and have an influence on the satisfaction levels of the tourists. These include amongst others, climate, safety and security, good accommodation, relaxation of vacation and reasonable prices. Some of these aspects were used in this research to determine the attractiveness and competitiveness of the Garden Route area. The intensity of motivation for making trips is highly related to the choice of destinations. A large number of people are making travel primarily considering the food-related reasons. Desire to eating a typical food, eating outside home and drinking beverages are the important motivations for making trip along with few common motivational factors such as sightseeing, meeting friends, relatives and partners (Hall & Sharples, 2003). These motivational factors also differ significantly among the tourists according to their age, income level and spiritual belief (Cañizares & Canalejo, 2015).

In another view, destination specific attributes and facilities are crucial for the selection of destination by tourists over other destinations. Madhavan and Rastogi (2011) and McIntosh and Goeldner (1990) suggested that specific aspects like climate, recreation facilities, sightseeing location and information about the destination are important for destination attractiveness and competitiveness. Hueng, Qu and Chu (2001) suggested that tourism development factors such as quality of roads, private and public transport facilities and telecommunications are important for a tourist in choosing a tourism destination. Given the above, it is generally accepted that regardless of the type of the tourism destination, there are



few common attributes which are directly associated with the nature of ability to satisfy the tourists and those are amongst others, climate, safety and security, good accommodation, relaxation of vacation and reasonable prices (Alegre & Cladera, 2009; Shih, 1986). The views of Hall and Sharples (2003), are that majority of tourists are making travel decisions with the main motivation being that of food-related reasons. The desire of eating a typical food, eating outside home and drinking beverages are important motivations for making trip along with few common motivational factors such as sightseeing, meeting friends, relatives and partners. However, it is important to note here that these motivations for making a decision to travel to a particular destination by the tourists differ significantly based on their age, income levels and spiritual beliefs (Cañizares & Canalejo, 2015).

In 2003, Vengesayi developed a holistic model on tourism destination competitiveness and attractiveness (TDCA). This model was based on elements of demand and supply on the basis that competitive advantage of a destination depends on what the tourism destination offers from the supply side and by the specific needs of the potential tourists from a demand side. In real terms, this model allows for evaluation of what the destination invests in and what the potential tourists who will visit the destination are looking for at the destination. Benedetti (2010) suggested that the TDCA model focusses on the ability of the destination to provide social, physical, and economic benefits to the host destination population whilst at the same time providing a satisfactory experience to the tourists. Vengesayi (2003) contested that the destination experience environment was crucial in destination competitiveness and attractiveness. He stressed that the types of tourist's attractions available at a destination provide motivation for tourists to visit a particular destination. These tourist attractions have to be supported by tourist activities, which also add value and ultimately serve to enhance the touristic experience.

The destination experience environment will include tourism experiences such as crowding, safety and security, human resources development, competition and cooperation as well as elements such as accommodation, transport facilities and infrastructure and support services. According to Benedetti (2010) the factors from the supply side also includes branding, communication and promotion as these activities can increase the attractiveness of a destination and its competitiveness by inducing tourists to differentiate and choose to visit a certain destination instead of its competitors. The model also underlines pricing, as an important factor as the costs associated with a particular destination is also indicative of its competitiveness. The costs associated with a destination and its market performance can demonstrate its level of competitiveness. The inter play of the factors creates three important outcomes and these are related to tourism destination image, tourist satisfaction and organizational performance and these can be measured to determine competitiveness (Vengesayi, 2003).

Differentiating between destination attractions and destination attractiveness

According to Kresic and Prebežac (2011), the understanding of destination attractiveness should be based on distinguishing between the notions of destination attractiveness and destination attraction. Tourist attractions refers to specific elements of the destination such as climate, landscape elements, and activities in the destination amongst others, which have the ability to attract tourists to the destination. In contrast, destination attractiveness is based on cognitive significance such as mental image of the destination that exists only in the mind of potential tourists. Tourist attractions can be understood as physical manifestations of destination attractiveness and destination attractiveness as a mental image that is formed based on natural attractions available in the area. Tourist attractions form a very heterogeneous category and their nature can be very diverse. Therefore, it is important to classify them into different categories with a higher degree of homogeneity for the purpose of transparency of a complex system of tourism, and to facilitate their studies.



Research methodology

The study adopted a quantitative research methodology and used questionnaires as a data collection instrument. The study sample constituted tourism stakeholders who are involved in the various sub-sectors of the tourism industry and they were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study after they were invited to take part. The respondents were from accommodation providers, travel and tour operators, government officials who work in the tourism departments, transport providers for tourists and others who render services to tourists at the destination. The research used three key elements, which are considered essential for destination attractiveness. The first elements relates to safety and security, the second element relates to availability of tourism resources and tourism activities and the last element relates to availability of infrastructure and superstructures to facilitate and support tourism and tourism activities.

Results of the study

Table 1: Status of Garden Route as a tourism destination

Statements	Disagree	Agree	% Total
1. Garden Route has enough tourism resources and tourism activities to allow for good tourist experience in the area.	54.50%	45.50%	100%
2. Garden Route has enough infrastructure and superstructure to support the tourism industry and its activities	26.70%	73.30%	100%
3. Garden Route is a destination that is safe and secure for tourists (Personal safety and security of the place)	11.10%	88.90%	100%

The results of the study as shown in Table 1 above, infer that respondents do not agree that the Garden Route has enough tourism resources and tourism activities to allow for good tourist experience in the area. Just over half (55%) disagreed with the statement whilst 46% agreed that Garden Route has enough tourism resources and tourism activities to allow for good tourist experience in the area.

The high number of respondents who do not agree that the Garden Route as a tourist destination has enough tourism resources and tourism activities are in contrast with the vies Vengesayi (2003) who contended that the destination experience environment was crucial in destination competitiveness and attractiveness where the author stressed that the types of tourist's attractions available at a destination provides motivation for tourists to visit a particular destination. These tourist attractions have to be supported by tourist activities, which add value and enhance the tourist experience. These results therefore infer that currently, the Garden Route does not have enough tourism resources and activities that should serve as motivation for tourists to visit the destination.

The results further indicate that majority of respondents (73%) agreed that the Garden Route has enough infrastructure and superstructure to support the tourism industry and its activities whilst only 27% disagreed with the statement. This finding is in line with the views of Hueng, Qu and Chu (2001) who suggested that tourism development factors such as quality of roads, private and public transport facilities and telecommunications are important for a tourist in choosing a tourism destination.

Lastly, an overwhelming majority (89%) agreed that the Garden Route is a destination that is safe and secure for tourists (Personal safety and security of the place) with only a fraction (11%) disagreed with the statement. The results above are in line with the views of (Alegre & Cladera, 2009; Shih, 1986) who indicated that safety and security is an attribute which is directly associated with the nature of ability to satisfy the tourists at a tourist destination.



Table 2: Chi-Square tests for destination attractiveness and competitiveness.

Statement		Accommodation (n=18)	Gov/Dept (n=3)	Travel/Tour operator (n=6)	Transport (n=15)	Other (n=18)	
Tourism resources and tourism activities	<i>Disagree</i>	66.7%	55.0%	50.0%	40.0%	50.0%	X ² =30.5 Df=8 P=0.0002
	<i>Don't know</i>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
	<i>Agree</i>	33.3%	45.0%	50.0%	60.0%	50.0%	
Infrastructure and Superstructure	<i>Disagree</i>	33.3%	0.0%	0.0%	40.0%	33.3%	X ² =21.8 Df=8 P=0.0053
	<i>Don't know</i>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
	<i>Agree</i>	66.7%	100%	100%	60.0%	66.7%	
Safety and security at destination	<i>Disagree</i>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	20.0%	20.0%	X ² =48.0 Df=8 P=0.0772
	<i>Don't know</i>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	
	<i>Agree</i>	100%	100.0%	100%	80.0%	80.0%	

The study thought to compare the respondents views to check whether there were any significant statistical differences on how they responded based on the tourism sub-sector they work in. The results as shown in Table 2 above show that respondents across the different sub-sectors of the tourism industry had different views at extreme levels regarding their views on available tourism resources and tourism activities in the Garden Route with almost equal distribution between those in agreement with the statement and those who disagreed with the statement. A Chi-square was conducted to check if there were any significant statistical differences in their responses regarding the availability of tourism resources and tourism activities. There results infer that there was a statistical significant differences in how these respondents responded showing a Chi-squared value = 30.5; a degree of freedom (DF) = 8; and a P = 0.0002) which means that the response patterns amongst the five groups were significantly different statistically. The results of the study with reference to availability of infrastructure and superstructure to support the tourism industry, show that the responses were very similar in the sense that there were mostly agreement especially those in government departments and travel/tour operations as all of them agreed with the statement. A Chi-squared test was done to test whether the responses from the respondents were significantly different statistically. The test yielded a Chi-squared value of 21.8, a DF of 8; P value of 0.0053) which reflects a small statistical significant difference in how they responded to the question.

Lastly, the results of the study show that there was a general agreement with the statement of safety and security at the destination. The respondents as a majority across all tourism sub-sectors agreed that the Garden Route is safe and has good security for visiting tourists. A Chi-squared test was done to test whether the responses from the respondents were significantly different statistically. The test yielded a Chi-squared value of 48.0, a DF of 8; P value of 0.0772) which reflects no significant statistical difference in the response patterns amongst the five groups.

Conclusion and implications

It is of great importance to rate the attractiveness and the competitiveness of the destination, not only from a tourist perspective but also from a destination stakeholder perspective. This paper provided the views of those stakeholders involved in the tourism industry who are also



involved in rendering the services to the tourists. The results generally showed that these tourism stakeholders are of the opinion that garden Route does not have enough tourism resources and tourism activities to satisfy the tourists. The stakeholders are of the opinion that Garden Route has enough infrastructure and superstructure to support the tourism industry. These respondents also feel that the Garden Route is a safe destination for the personal security of the tourists visiting the destination.

The implication of these results imply that destination attractiveness and competitiveness should constantly reviewed and improved so that destinations remain competitive in the tourism market even though its determination is very difficult. The implication is for those in decision-making in the area to continuously consider destination attractiveness and competitiveness in relation to further development of tourism in the territory.

It is increasingly recognised and accepted that resources must be maintained and managed in an appropriate way if undue deterioration is to be prevented. Therefore, the few tourism resources that Garden Route has, as a tourism destination, should be preserved for future use and industry sustainability. Whilst this research focussed mainly on tourism resources and activities, availability of infrastructure and superstructure to support tourism as well as safety and security at the destination, there is a need to explore the relative importance of the different dimensions of competitiveness. Thus, for example, how important are the natural resources compared to residents' hospitality, how important is the service quality compared to prices. Such researches must be prepared for the specific destinations and specific visitor market segments. More research needs to be undertaken on the importance of different attributes of destination competitiveness. There is a need for more detailed empirical studies of consumer preferences and the determinants of travel decision.

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