



# Community attitude on winter festivals as a strategy to reduce tourism seasonality: the Christmas in July Hogsback Festival in the Eastern Cape Province, South Africa

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## Abstract

Marketing tactics to tackle the notion of low season are abundant yet seasonality remains a complex phenomenon in the tourism industry. This article explored the possibilities of using winter festivals to curb seasonality of tourism in South Africa, with a specific focus on the Eastern Cape Province. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used, while purposive sampling was applicable for the selection of surveyed areas. Respondents were selected through simple random sampling. A total of 180 questionnaires were successfully completed. The results showed that winter festivals can be useful as a tool in combating tourism seasonality, and indeed the number of tourist arrivals were noticed to be influenced by winter festivals. Winter festivals were also found to be addressing mainly community social issues such as entertainment and knowledge enrichment, hence the findings reflected a strong community support, while economic impacts were found to be of short-term. However, the study highlighted poor community involvement in the planning and management of winter festivals. Policy makers, destination marketers and event organisers need to promote winter festivals to reduce tourism seasonality, prioritise on new markets who are likely to spend more and ensure suitable venues for winter festivals are available.

**Key words:** Winter festivals, marketing strategies, community attitude, tourism, seasonality

## Introduction

The South African events tourism sector has shown market growth since 1994 (Tassiopoulous, 2010). Kruger and Saayman (2012) have highlighted that South Africa hosts more than 600 festivals annually, both large and small. The Eastern Cape Tourism Master Plan 2009-2014 (2009) considers that hosting of events especially festivals can be one of the mechanisms for enabling an area to combat the issue of seasonality in the tourism sector. On one hand, Connell, Page and Meyer (2015) argue that regardless of the growth of event tourism in a destination, fighting seasonality remains a challenge in the tourism industry. According to Corluka, Mikinac and Milenkovska (2016), there is no single definition of seasonality, but most common understanding is that tourism seasonality is an imbalance that occurs for short term and it can be expressed using visitor numbers, visitor expenditure, traffic on different forms of transportation, employment and admissions to attractions (Corluka *et al.*, 2016). Factors contributing to tourism seasonality include climate, location, weather, sunlight hours, calendar effects, leisure time, school holidays, social norms, available activities and trading patterns (Connell *et al.*, 2015; Corluka *et al.*, 2016), which are generally beyond the tourism industry's control. Seasonality is identified as one of the main weaknesses for the Eastern Cape (EC) tourism industry (Eastern Cape Tourism Master Plan 2009-2014, 2009). In the EC province, a low tourism season is experienced during the June to July months. This article paid attention on the perception of local communities on 'winter' festivals as a strategy to reduce seasonality in the EC province. Eastern Cape Tourism Master Plan 2009-2014 (2009); Connell *et al.* (2015) dispute that events have the ability to address seasonality of



tourism and bring more tourists especially in the areas that are less developed such as the EC province in South Africa.

## Literature review

### The concept of winter festivals

The Eastern Cape Province has a number of established festivals such as, Grahamstown's National Arts Festival, the Addo Rose Extravaganza, the Port Elizabeth Dance Festival, the Prickly Pear Festival in Uitenhage, a Shakespearean Festival, and Vodacom Splash Festival including the prestigious Billabong Pro Surfing Competition (Eastern Cape Tourism Master Plan 2009-2014, 2009). All of these festivals take place in a relatively well-developed tourism industry yet many of them are not marketed on a provincial level, and these events do not act as a draw card of tourists to the area, with the exception of the Grahamstown National Arts Festival and Billabong Pro Surfing Competition (Eastern Cape Tourism Master Plan 2009-2014, 2009). Meanwhile, most research studies in South Africa such as Bob and Swart (2009); Nyikana (2016) focus mostly on the perception and impacts of festivals and assess less the calendar effects and periodicity of festivals. This article focused on festivals that transpire during winter and how they are perceived by local communities as destinations' marketing tools. According to Foley and McPherson (2007); Connell *et al.* (2015) and Saayman (2016), the concept of winter festivals has being long established in many destinations such as Norway, and indeed it has been found that local communities do support low peak season events and attractions. Winter festivals generally lengthen tourist seasons', extend peak season as well as introducing new season into a community, establishing an image, and employment creation (Rajesh, 2014; Saayman, 2016).

Due to various benefits, winter festivals are organised in big cities and villages alike every year around the world (Egresi & Kara, 2014). According to Eastern Cape Tourism Master Plan 2009-2014 (2009), the Eastern Cape (EC) province has also recognised winter festivals as a draw card to boost tourism in and around the province.

### Background of Hogsback Christmas in July Winter Festival

Besides the festivals that take place in the most affluent areas of the province, various festivals have been established in the small towns of the province, these include Hogsback Christmas in July Winter Festival (HCJWF). HCJWF is a three day festival held in one of the smallest areas of the EC province, the Hogsback Hamlet (Nkonkobe Local Municipality, 2014). The idea of Christmas in July winter festival in South Africa was first adopted from Australia by Anleen Low, who is the founder of the HCJWF (Nkonkobe Local Municipality, 2014). Pham (2015) mentioned that in Australia this type of festival is celebrated to reflect the British and European heritage, to have private gatherings with family and friends, public events and ticketed function without replacing the real Christmas which takes place in December (Pham, 2015). However, the phrase 'Christmas in July' initiates from countries in the southern hemisphere such as New Zealand and South Africa (Pham, 2015). July is generally the coldest month in Australia and South Africa, and the celebration emulates the atmosphere of the northern hemisphere winter (Pham, 2015).

According to the Nkonkobe Local Municipality (2014), HCJWF was launched in 2001 as a strategy to combat the seasonality of tourism, and increase the number of visitors in the Eastern Cape Province. Nelson Mandela Tourism (2011) states that HCJWF has been a successful event that attracts visitors from all over South Africa and overseas, who come to enjoy the European style the festival has. HCJWF is one of enduring events that has been able to develop an extensive reach and a reputation of the EC province.



## Methodology

The current research used a mixed research method, by using a combination of both qualitative and quantitative for a better understanding and combined responses to research questions that are deeper than would have been by the use of either one method alone. Furthermore, incorporation of qualitative and quantitative research methods offered the researchers the ability to address issues involved that are more extensive than they could have been reached by one research method. The methods and tools of data collection, such as primary and secondary methods, were applied. The total population size was determined, and the sampling methods were identified. The population for the current study was 1029, which is the total number of Hogsback community members (Statistics South Africa, 2011). Since it was disputed by Khalid, Hilman and Kumar (2012), that it is not possible for researchers to study the whole population, a sample was drawn.

Based on Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size calculator, a total population of 1029 required a sample size of 278, which was then considered for this study. A simple random sampling method was applied to select the respondents. Simple random sampling is a type of probability sampling in which the chances of being included in the sample can be calculated for each member of the study population and is equal (Reid & Bojanic, 2010). In addition, purposive sampling was used to identify the surveyed areas. Hogsback Hamlet was then demarcated into three sections: the first place represented the central business district (CBD), while Esikhulweni and Ballpoint were both chosen due to their close proximity to the event area. Respondents were further selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. Permission to collect data was obtained from the organising committee of HCJWF. Questionnaires were used as an operative and suitable instrument for primary data collection. A survey was then conducted among the communities in the selected areas. A total of 180 questionnaires were completed and collected from respondents. The questionnaire comprised of both open and close-ended questions. Open-ended questions were applied so that the respondents could express their views of specific issues. The study aims, interviewer's name, questionnaire number, date and location, as well as the declaration of confidentiality were outlined at the beginning of the questionnaire. The researchers used a questionnaire, with twenty sets of questions. The questionnaires were administered over weekends for the duration of a month to allow those working during the week to participate in study. Secondary data was also used.

This data is information collected by an individual for his or her own research, and which is used by another researcher (Kumar, 2008). Various sources for gathering secondary data for the current study included relevant books on issues related to tourism, events, and festivals. Other sources of secondary data that were considered for the study included a series of academic journals, such as *Tourism Management*, *Festival Tourism*, *International Journals of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*, and the *Melvian International Journal of Education*. Keywords were used for conducting of the literature research, such as events tourism, festival tourism, and community perceptions of festivals.

Data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The procedure for data analysis involves making sense of texts, as well as image text, preparing data for analysis, conducting various analyses, as well as the interpretation and presentation of the data (Botma, Greeff, Mulaudzi & Wright, 2010). In order to obtain validity for the study, efforts were made to ensure that the questions in the questionnaire were constructed in line with research objectives and the literature. In addition, validity and reliability were addressed through conducting the pre-testing or pilot survey study. Each question in the survey was attached to a particular objective of the study, and all questions were phrased in a direct manner to accommodate diverse levels of respondents' intellectual capacities of the respondents.

## Results and discussions

### Eastern Cape Province as an ideal destination for winter festivals

The EC province is one of those areas that experience the problem of seasonal tourism Eastern Cape Tourism Master Plan 2009-2014 (2009), and uses festivals to combat the seasonality of tourism. Quinn (2009) asserts that festivals influence the extension of the traditional tourist season as well as off-peak periods. The respondents were then asked to indicate if the EC province is perfect to host winter festivals in order to increase the number of visitation. Table 1 shows that the majority, (96.7%) of communities indicated 'yes', whereas 3.3% stated otherwise. These findings reveal that the EC province communities support the hosting of winter festivals. A positive perception on an event by communities is important, as communities are the owners of tourism resources.

<b>Table 1: Eastern Cape province is an ideal for winter festivals</b>	
<b>Responses</b>	<b>Total (n=180, in %)</b>
Yes	96.7
No	3.3
<b>Possible reasons for winter festivals to be held in EC</b>	
<b>Total (n=174, in %)</b>	
Increase number of tourists' arrivals	47.9
Short term economic benefits	22.3
Boost tourism	14.9
Bring vibes during winter season	9.9
Competitive advantage	5.0

In a follow up question, the respondents who answered 'yes' that the province is an ideal place for winter festivals, were further asked to support their answers, and Table 1 additionally presents the findings. The highest percentage (47.9%), believed that hosting winter festivals in the province increases the number of tourist arrivals although providing short-term economic benefits (22.3%). According to Nkonkobe Local Municipality (2014), HCJWF was launched as a strategy to combat the seasonality of tourism and increase the number of festivals in EC province. The communities are also in agreement with Nkonkobe Municipality statement, as the highest number pointed out that winter festivals could increase tourist arrivals in the area. The presence of tourist arrivals during the winter period was further validated by Raasch (2017) who reported that this year several visitors were spotted enjoying the snow at Hogsback village during the winter season. Although a short-term economic benefit is noted in this study, Lee, Lee, Lee and Babin (2008), argue that a long term economic benefit can easily be obtained through attracting new markets rather than repeat business. Indeed Table 4 shows that the festival attracts a very low number of new market (10.4%). Nonetheless, a total of 14.9% of the respondents were certain that winter festivals boost tourism, while 9.9% pointed out that not much happens in the province during the winter season. Other respondents, 5% stated that hosting winter festivals can be a competitive advantage for the province.

Kruger and Saayman (2012) agree that festivals compete with each other in terms of attracting visitors, popular artists and for funding. In overall, these findings suggest that winter festivals have a potential to increase tourist arrivals although long-term economic benefits need to be addressed. Arguably, short term benefits of festivals are generally highlighted even with festivals that take place during the peak season, for instances, a short term economic benefits of Buyel'Ekhata Pan-African Cultural Music Festival is noted by Gozini and Tseane-Gumbi in 2017. Although the current results are of similar nature of those festivals that take place during peak season, winter festivals' impacts are weightier as most businesses are unlikely to run their usual activities during winter, therefore capitalising on festivals becomes very important.

The respondents who answered ‘no’, (that the EC province is not an ideal place for winter festivals) were asked to provide possible reasons for their answers. Table 2 presents the findings. A total of 40% mentioned cold weather, and lack of necessary venues for hosting such festivals. According to Hsu and Lin (2006), festival attendees normally consider factors, such as weather and venue when choosing a festival to attend. The remaining 20% of respondents indicated that they do not have money and this could be the reason they do not attend or see the importance of winter festivals. In brief, the results suggest that the EC province require suitable venues (warm) to accommodate winter festivals.

	<b>Total (n=6 in %)</b>
Winter is cold	40
Eastern Cape Province does not have venues for hosting winter festivals	40
We do not have money during winter season	20

### HCJWF attendance, motives and occurrences

The success of any festival is influenced by the level of visitor attendance (Shone & Parry, 2013). Respondents were requested to state whether they had attended the HCJWF before. In response, it was ascertained that the majority (90.3%) of the respondents had attended this festival before, see Table 3. This shows that communities do support and participate in Hogback Christmas in July Festival.

<b>Attended HCJWF before</b>	<b>Total (n =180, in %)</b>
Yes	90.3
No	9.7
<b>Reasons to attend HCJWF</b>	<b>Total (n=163, in %)</b>
Entertainment	37.4
Cultural	27.6
Knowledge and learning	22.1
To meet people with similar needs	12.9

The results entailed in Table 3 further point out that 37.6% attended the festival for entertainment, followed by 27.1% who stated cultural experience. McMorland and MacTaggart (2007) argue that festival organisers and destination managers should take priority in investigating the motives in choosing a festival or visiting festival destinations. Moreover, 22% of the respondents mentioned that they attended HCJWF for knowledge and learning as well as to meet people with similar needs (12.8%). This confirmed by Cudny (2013) who asserts that festivals reinforce the social capital of a community because they provide a platform to exchange ideas, as well as learning. Besides, festivals reinforce the social capital because they are spaces where people with similar interests and same social background meet (Cudny, 2013). These results reveal that most of respondents attending HCJWF do so for entertainment and knowledge enrichment.

A follow-up question requested those respondents who stated that they attended the festival to indicate the number of times they have attended it. Table 4 presents the findings in which 37.4% of the respondents noted attending the festival 2-3 times and more than 5 times respectively. Furthermore, 10.4% of respondents attended 1-2 times, 8.7% reported 3-4 times and 6.1% pointed out 4-5 times. According to Lee *et al.* (2008), repeat visitors are important to festivals as they are more stable source of revenue and act as an information channel. However, first time visitors should not be over looked as they can spend more than repeat

visitors and are likely to explore the festival destination extensively (Lee *et al.*, 2008). These results prove that HCJWF satisfies most respondents as they attend more than once.

<b>Table 4: Number of times the respondents attended HCJWF</b>	
<b>Times attended the HCJWF</b>	<b>Total (n=163, in %)</b>
2-3 times	37.4
5> times	37.4
1-2 times	10.4
3-4 times	8.7
4-5 times	6.1

### The continuity and future of HCJWF

Respondents were requested to indicate whether HCJWF must be continued. Table 5 illustrates that the majority of respondents, 96.5% stated that the festival must continue and 3.5% stated otherwise.

<b>Table 5: Continuity of HCJWF</b>	
	<b>Total (n=180, in %)</b>
Yes	96.5
No	3.5
<b>If yes, why should HCJWF be continued?</b>	<b>Total (n=174, in %)</b>
It is a major boost for community renewal	46.1
Marketing platform for local businesses	33.3
Instills pride in local diversity	11.1
Increases family reunion	2.8
Increases media coverage	6.7

A follow up question to respondents who stated that they would like this festival to continue was posted in order to establish reasons for their responses. Table 5 once again shows that 46.3% stated that the festival is a major boost for community renewal. Over a third of respondents (33.3%) indicated that HCJWF instills pride in local diversity and it is a marketing platform for local businesses. while 6.7% mentioned that the festival increases media coverage. As alleged by Fredline and Faulkner (2010), festivals increase community pride and improve morale. Moreover, other respondents (2.8 %) believed that the festival increases family reunion. Social impact was the main reason for the continuity of this festival, which then coincide with the results in Table 1, where short term economic benefits were highlighted.

### Challenges facing HCJWF

The respondents were requested to mention challenges that face this festival. The highest percentage (42.4%) indicated lack of community involvement in the festival. As acknowledged by Morscado (2007), the importance of community involvement in festivals contributes to the success of any festival. Respondents also mentioned lack of financial supports (16.7%); others stated racism (15.2%) and marketing (7.6%) as some of the challenges. In addition, 6.1% of the respondents indicated cold weather, poor preparation (4.5%), as well as lack of local services (4.5%). Few of the respondents (3.0%) mentioned the duration of the festival as a challenge as they felt that a weekend is too short to host this type of an event, see Table 6.

<b>Table 6: Challenges facing HCJWF (n=180, in %)</b>	
<b>Challenges faced by HCJWF</b>	<b>Total (n=180, in %)</b>
Local community involvement	42.4
Financial support	16.7
Racism	15.2
Marketing	7.6
Cold weather	6.1
Lack of preparation	4.5



Lack of local services	4.5
Short duration	3.0

### Suggestions to improve the festival

This subsection presents the suggestions that were made by the respondents to improve HCJWF, the results are presented in Table 7. A significant portion of respondents indicated local community involvement (37.8%), (26.1%) felt that the issue of racial discrimination should be dealt with in order to improve HCJWF, marketing was mentioned by (16.1%) and funding by (13.9%). A longer duration was reported by (3.9%). A small number of respondents, (2.2%) recommended a limited number of visitors.

Suggestion to improve HCJWF	Total (n=180, in %) Multiple responses permitted
Local community involvement	77.8
Address racial discrimination	26.1
Improve marketing activities	16.1
Source more funding	13.9
Increase the duration of the festival	3.9
Focus on limiting number of visitors	2.2

### Conclusions and recommendations

It is evident that winter festivals assist to reduce seasonality of tourism. There are four main areas that are outlined in this article; a strong support of communities for winter festivals, an increase of tourists' arrivals in winter season. Moreover, winter festivals are mainly considered for entertainment, learning and community renewal. Local involvement is still limited when it comes to winter festivals. In order to increase the popularity of winter festivals in South Africa, policy makers need to provide proper venues for winter festivals and marketers should be made more aware and promote first time visitors in order to extend the economic benefits in the area, while maximising community involvement. As indicated by Lee *et al.* (2008), first time market visitors spend more than repeat visitors and are likely to explore the festival destination further. In this manner winter festivals such a HCJWF could provide long-term economic benefits to communities and the tourism industry at large.

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