

Urban Crime and Tourism: Curating Safety in Johannesburg Tourist Spaces

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How to cite this article: Malleka, T., Booyens, I. & Hoogendoorn, G. (2022). Urban Crime and Tourism: Curating Safety in Johannesburg Tourist Spaces. African Journal of Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure, 11(1):46-59. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.46222/ajhtl.19770720.210>

Abstract

Johannesburg, South Africa's economic heartland and major tourist destination, has long been seen as a breeding ground for crime and is commonly perceived as unsafe. The prevalence of crime in Johannesburg, and the associated negative public perceptions, are evidenced to impact travel behaviour stemming visitor flows. Regardless of this, urban tourism has grown in Johannesburg over the last decade and our findings on visitor perceptions in three main tourism precincts show that international tourists regard tourism spaces as relatively safe to visit. Tourists in our study return and readily recommend a visit to Johannesburg to others.

Keywords: Johannesburg; crime; visitor perceptions; safety and security; urban tourism

Introduction

Safety and security are basic prerequisites for urban tourism growth (Boakye, 2012; Williams & Baláž, 2015). However, the growth of tourism can, in turn, lead to increased levels of crime in cities (Lisowska, 2017; Mawby et al., 2000; Recher & Rubil, 2020). Nonetheless, a significant relationship between an increase in visitor numbers and crime rates is not evident in all cases (see Baker & Stockton, 2014; Grinols et al., 2011). While Perry and Potgieter (2013) caution that there are instances in which tourism can lead to increased crime, this is not a primary concern in debates on crime and tourism in South Africa. The dynamics around crime and tourism, therefore, play out differently in locations. Pizam and Mansfeld (2006:6), therefore, put forward that a "...geographical dimension of security incidents is of great importance" for understanding and responding to safety and security issues related to tourism. Indeed, spatiality (or the geographical dimension) is key in understanding urban crime and how it impacts urban tourism in South Africa (Breetzke, 2020; Mulamba, 2021). High levels of crime are an ongoing concern for tourism in South African cities (Chaturuka et al., 2020). This concern centres both on visitor safety and its perceived adverse impact on the continued growth and development of tourism as a main growth sector (Chaturuka et al., 2020; Mulamba, 2021;

Musavengane et al., 2020). Negative impressions of a destination can certainly inhibit prospective visitors or discourage return visitors and recommendations should visitors become victims of crime at a destination (George, 2003), as confirmed by a recent analysis on the impact of crime on tourist flows to Africa (see Santana-Gallego & Fourie, 2020). The South African case, however, presents a paradox. Despite the country being widely known for its extraordinarily high levels of crime – particularly in cities – urban tourism has grown dramatically since democracy in 1994 and up until the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic, with major cities performing strongest in South Africa’s tourism economy (see Rogerson and Rogerson, 2017). What is more, visitation to areas perceived as particularly ‘unsafe’ or ‘dangerous’, like inner cities and townships (see Breetzke, 2018; Ferreira & Harmse, 2000), has also grown dramatically. In fact, inner cities and townships are becoming niche urban tourism attractions (see Booyens, 2021; Hoogendoorn & Giddy, 2017; Opfermann, 2021; Rogerson, 2019; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2017).

While several studies have been published on crime and tourism in South Africa (Chaturuka et al., 2020; Ferreira & Harmse, 2000; George, 2003; 2010; George & Booyens, 2014; Moyo & Ziramba, 2013 amongst others), few studies have focussed on Johannesburg. This appears to be a conspicuous omission given the notoriety of the city concerning crime and its centrality in the tourism space economy of South Africa (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2017). Johannesburg is an important centre for regional, business and shopping tourism and the most frequented destination in the country (Rogerson, 2011).

When considering crime in urban contexts, different types of security incidents, and accompanying factors, should be taken into account. One such factor is location according to Pizam and Mansfeld (2006). Other factors which need to be considered with respect to security incidents include the number and frequency, motives and targets, and severity of incidents (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006). In this paper, we investigate the dynamics of safety and security in tourist spaces in Johannesburg, accordingly, through a geographical lens. This focus corresponds with the calls for greater consideration of place-based dynamics, local conditions and spatial sensitivities in urban tourism research (Brouder & Ioannides, 2014). We contextualise findings on visitor perceptions concerning safety and security in tourism precincts namely the Vilakazi precinct (Soweto), the Maboneng precinct (inner city) and Sandton City in the light of place-based dynamics of crime in Johannesburg. We reflect on what this means for the understanding of the spatiality of urban crime and its impact on tourism and our interpretation of the findings centre on how safety is ‘curated’ in tourist spaces by tourism stakeholders while considering the implications of this. A subsidiary aim of this paper is to challenge prevailing assumptions and reconsider how we think about urban tourism and crime in South Africa.

On urban crime and visitor safety and security

The fear of crime denotes a range of social and political concerns. These may include public distress about becoming victims of crime along with precautionary behaviours which include avoiding certain situations or places (Jackson, 2002). Corona (2018) investigated the impact of violent crime on tourism in México for the period 1990-2010. He stressed that while violent crimes deter domestic and international visitors alike, the impact on the perceptions of international tourists appears to be stronger. News coverage of crime (in general and against tourists) plays a dominant role in forming a destination image of the country as unsafe (Ferreira & Harmse, 2000). Murder, rape and assault committed against tourists often make international media headlines (George & Booyens, 2014). Tourists’ fear of crime may be derived from various sources such as their personal experience, the influence of mass media and word-of-

mouth comments (George, 2003). A range of factors is associated with the fear of crime. These include gender, age, ethnicity and the seriousness of consequences (Selby et al., 2010).

Several studies, also in South Africa, show that visitors tend to change their perceptions of safety during or after a visit (Chaturuka et al., 2020; George & Booyens, 2014; Hasan et al., 2017; Hoogendoorn et al., 2020; Perry & Potgieter, 2013). In other words, visitors tend to view their experiences more positively while at destinations, or afterwards, compared to their initial fear or uncertainty about visiting. What is more, being a victim of crime, or knowing of someone who became a victim, while visiting a destination does not necessarily deter return visits (Holcomb & Pizam, 2006).

The relationship between location and security incidents affecting visitors should not be oversimplified (Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006). There is a need to establish causal links between risk and the severity of crime incidents affecting visitors. Whether tourists are targets for crime; how many tourism become victims of serious crime incidents; how often this happens and where are important questions to answer (see Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006). While South Africa has high incidences of violent crime overall, tourists are typically targets for petty crime owing to their appearance which includes the visible way in which they often carry valuables and general unfamiliarity with the environments they travel to (Boakye, 2012; Donaldson & Ferreira 2009; Opfermann, 2021; Perry & Potgieter 2013).

Williams and Baláž (2015:281) aver that while visitors cannot eliminate risk and uncertainly they are able to calculate probabilities clearly, they do make compromises and often try to mitigate risk through their choices. For instance: “They [tourists] may visit somewhere that is a ‘risky’ destination but decide to stay near the hotel”. What is more, Williams and Baláž (2015) underscore strategies at the destination level and stress that various intermediaries are involved in mediating identified risks. For example, the role of the police is indispensable for enhancing security. Visible policing leads to greater perceptions of security and lower levels of crime (Baker & Stockton, 2014; Pizam & Mansfeld, 2006). Tourism companies can provide a level of ‘securitization’ to visitors (see Williams & Baláž, 2015). While tourist firms lack control over the safety and experiences of their guests due to external factors and the number of people involved, organised travel is a way to manage tourism risk.

Tourism and urban change in Johannesburg

The growth of urban tourism is associated with the emergence of leisure, recreation and tourism urban spaces as part of the service-based and consumptive city economies in South Africa (Rogerson & Rogerson, 2017; Visser, 2020). This shift is evident in Johannesburg and the growth of tourism has played a key role in catalysing urban change leading to the revitalisation of urban areas like the inner city and the township of Soweto (Booyens, 2021; Hoogendoorn & Gregory, 2016; Gregory, 2019). The emergence of new tourism spaces, therefore, ensues. The study areas of this study, i.e. Sandton City, the Vilakazi precinct and the Maboneng precinct, are examples of such spaces as described below.

During the 1970s and 1980s, the major spatial focus for tourism in Johannesburg was the inner city (Rogerson & Kaplan, 2005). However, from the late 1960s through to the 1990s, the inner city experienced decentralisation of businesses in part due to rising crime and physical decay (Rogerson & Kaplan, 2005). This resulted in the decline of the tourism clusters in the city such as hotels, retail outlets, travel-related services and entertainment venues. In turn, this shift led to Sandton emerging as the foremost decentralised business node, becoming the key business and financial centre of South Africa and consequently a major tourism and retail hub (Rogerson, 2011; Rogerson & Rogerson, 2017).

Township tourism appeared as a form of urban tourism during the 1990s, especially in Soweto (Rogerson, 2008). This is the largest township in South Africa and is internationally

known for being an iconic site of the struggle against apartheid (Ramchander, 2007). Soweto has evolved as the most popular and best-developed township tourism destination in South Africa (Booyens, 2021). Most of the tourism activities in Soweto are clustered around the Vilakazi precinct in Orlando West (Hoogendoorn et al., 2020).

A prime example of urban renewal in the inner city of Johannesburg is the Maboneng precinct, with the surrounding neighbourhoods of Hillbrow and Jeppe, which were considered some of the most dangerous in South Africa as per the SAPS (South African Police Service) crime statistics. This area has experienced significant change over the past decade, due to creative redevelopment linked to tourism. The urban regeneration of the area involved using arts, design and creativity to upgrade and redevelop the abandoned warehouses, transforming them into artistic, commercial, residential and entertainment locations (Gregory, 2016, 2019). Tourism offerings in and around the precinct include bicycle tours, events, major art exhibitions and inner-city walking tours (Hoogendoorn & Giddy, 2017; Opfermann, 2021).

Methods

Little, if any, official data on tourists as victims in South Africa exists (Perry & Potgieter, 2013). Neither the official crime statistics by the SAPS nor the figures available on the Crime Hub of the Institute of Security Studies report on visitors as victims of crime. Figures on crimes committed against tourists are not forthcoming from SAT (South African Tourism) either. What we know about crimes committed against tourists is largely anecdotal and derived from scattered and *ad hoc* media reports (see George & Booyens, 2014). A report by the Portfolio Committee on Tourism (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2019) acknowledges that while there are no official statistics on tourists as victims of crime, crime committed against tourists is a threat to South African tourism. Available evidence suggests that crimes against tourists include theft, burglaries, robberies and scams which are in most cases not reported to the South African authorities (Parliamentary Monitoring Group, 2019; Perry & Potgieter, 2013). Most of these are typical ‘opportunity crimes’, i.e. scams and the theft of highly visible valuables left unattended or easily accessed (Perry & Potgieter, 2013). Based on the extant evidence, or more precisely the lack thereof, is difficult to argue for a strong causal link (as stressed by Pizam & Mansveld, 2006) between violent crime and tourists as targets and victims in South Africa despite the fears of visitors and the high overall rates of violent crime in South Africa.

In this paper, we turn to visitors’ perceptions of their safety when visiting tourism spaces in Johannesburg, and insights gained from qualitative interviewing, to consider place-based dynamics associated with urban crime and the curation of safety in visitor spaces as a risk-mitigating strategy in South Africa. The three study areas are the Vilakazi precinct in Orlando West, Soweto, the Maboneng precinct in Jeppe in the CBD (Central Business District) and Sandton City located to the north of the inner city (see Figure 1). These are all popular tourist spaces in Johannesburg, chosen because of their strength in visitor numbers. Many of the tourists visiting Johannesburg would congregate in one or more of these areas and the findings would therefore provide a reasonable representation of the target survey population (see Malleka, 2021).

A self-administered survey questionnaire was distributed to willing participants (available subjects) in the three study areas. The survey consisted of 22 questions on tourists’ perceptions of safety and security in Johannesburg. Open and closed questions were included in the questionnaire. The survey was undertaken from October to November 2019. Data were analysed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) programme. The data was successfully collected from 318 respondents, of which 112 were in the Vilakazi precinct, 105 in the Maboneng precinct and 101 in Sandton City.

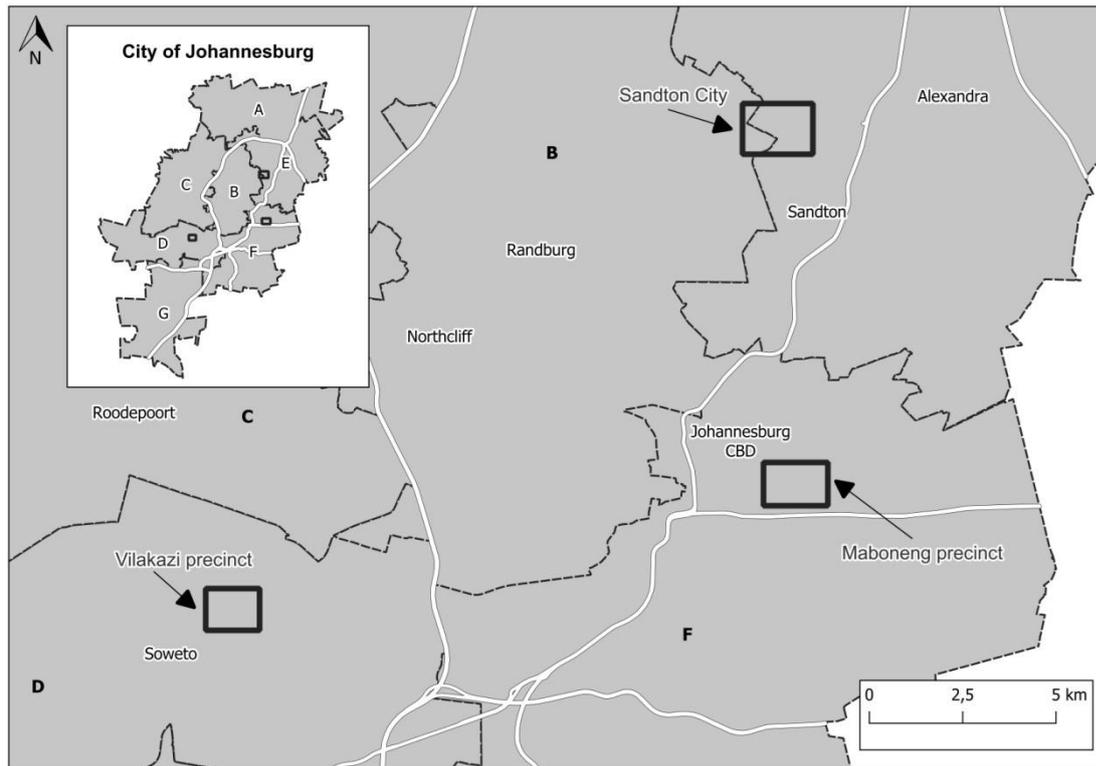


Figure 1: City of Johannesburg including Vilakazi precinct (Soweto), Maboneng precinct (inner city) and Sandton City (Source: Authors)

Findings

Visitor demographics and travel characteristics

Table 1 shows the demographics and travel characteristics of respondents in this study (all responses are taken together in this table).

Table 1: Respondents' demographics and travel characteristics

Demographics and travel characteristics	Overall percentage (%)
Gender	
Male	49
Female	48
Prefer not to disclose	3
Age (years)	
18-30	53
31-40	30
41-50	11
51-60	4
61+	2
Place of origin	
Europe	29
North America	25
Africa	21
Asia	13
Australasia	5
South America	6
Middle East	1
First-time/ repeat visitation	
First-time visitors	60
Return visitors	40

The gender distribution of the respondents across the three visitor samples were similar. Respondents were overwhelmingly aged 40 years or younger, with the largest cohort aged between 18 and 30 years. For all three areas, the composition of international tourists is consistent with SAT’s main overseas travel markets, namely the United Kingdom, North America, Germany, France and the Netherlands (OECD, 2020). Following these overseas countries, visitors were mostly from other African countries. In all areas, repeat visitation patterns are discernible.

Most visitors to the Vilakazi precinct were visiting for leisure purposes, followed by VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives) and educational purposes (see Figure 2). Visitors to the Maboneng precinct and Sandton visited for leisure, business and VFR purposes.

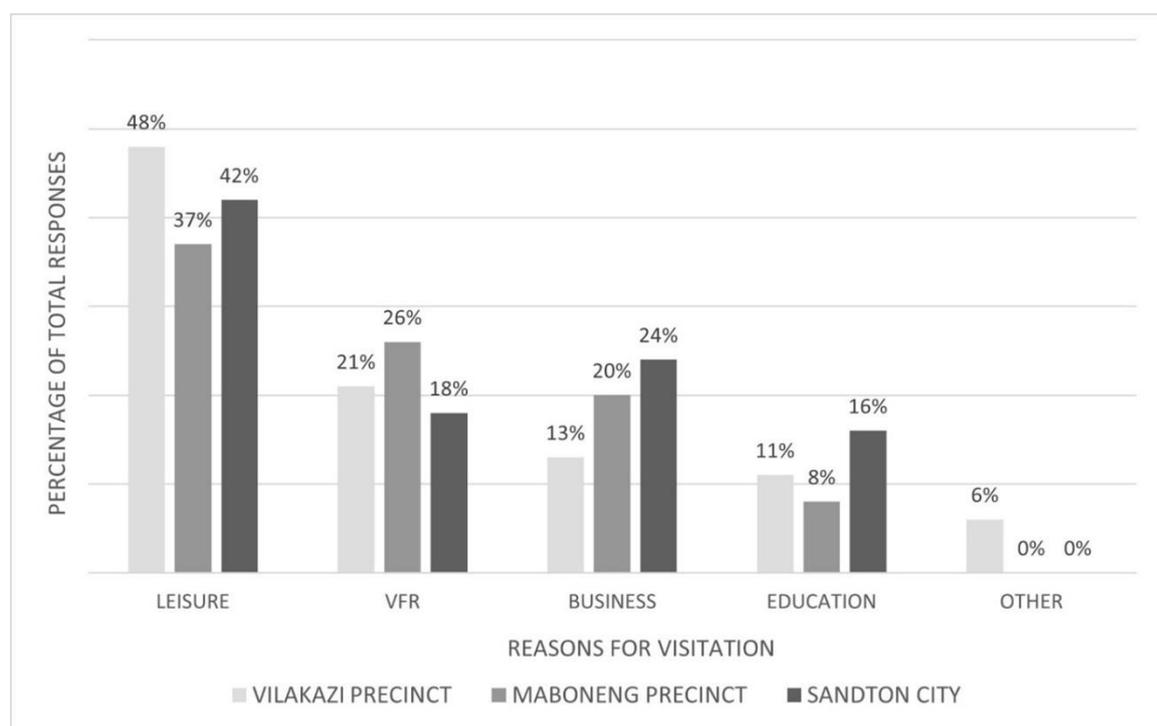


Figure 2: Primary reason for visiting tourist spaces

Awareness of crime in the study areas, participation in tourism, and risk perceptions

The 2019 crime statistics from the SAPS confirm that assault with the intent to inflict GBH (Grievous Bodily Harm) and common robbery are high in the study areas of Orlando (Vilakazi precinct), Jeppe (Maboneng Precinct) and Sandton (Sandton City). In 2019, 637 cases of assault (GBH) were reported in Jeppe, with 530 cases were reported in Orlando and 93 in Sandton. In the same year, the reported cases of common robbery were: Jeppe (N=325), Sandton (N=306) and Orlando (N=137). A further safety risk was the 2019 outburst of xenophobic violence against African foreign nationals in Johannesburg’s CBD, which also occurred in Jeppe, affected tourism activity at the Maboneng precinct with various outlets and establishments choosing not to operate due to rioting and looting during the time of the attacks (Simelane and Haffajee, 2019).

The majority of respondents said that they were aware of crime in the city. Of the respondents, 57% in Vilakazi, 45% in Maboneng and 65% in Sandton confirmed that they were aware of the high crime levels in Johannesburg before visiting. Traditional news media and friends/relatives (word-of-mouth) were the most important sources about crime for all visitors, with social media as a third source of information.

Despite being aware of the crime in the city, tourists felt that they were not greatly at risk and the threat of crime did not have a substantial effect on their participation in tourism activities in the city. For 86% of visitors to the Vilakazi precinct, 80% of visitors to the Maboneng precinct and 75% of visitors to Sandton City, the risk of crime did not hinder their participation in tourism activities in Johannesburg (see Figure 3 for the total number of responses per area). This said, a few respondents in the Maboneng precinct and Sandton City felt that the risk of crime hindered them from participating in tourism activities. These respondents were acutely aware of the xenophobic attacks in the country at the time.

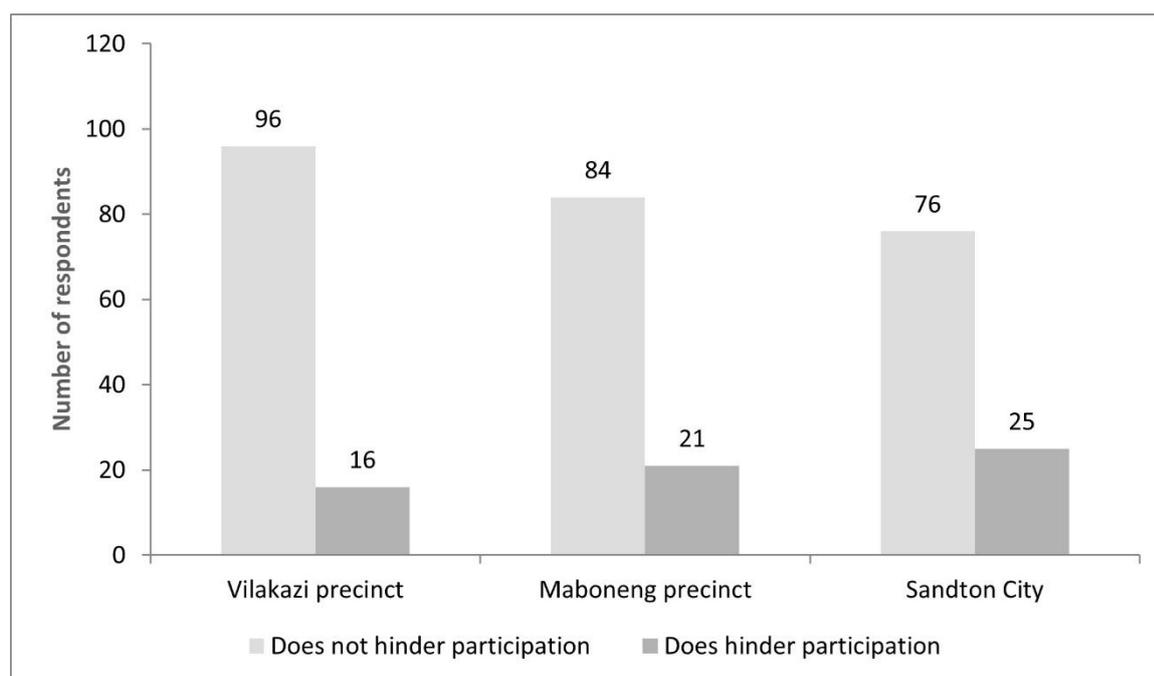


Figure 3: Visitor participation in tourism considering of safety risks

Table 2 unpacks visitor perceptions of safety and security risks in the study areas. The results show that visitors overwhelmingly felt safe while taking part in tourism activities during the day. By and large, respondents in all areas indicated that they did not experience any danger generally regarded Johannesburg as a safe destination. Several respondents believed Johannesburg was relatively safer than other cities that they have visited. A few respondents, however, were concerned about petty theft.

Table 2: Safety perceptions per area

Touring during the day*	Felt Safe	Felt Unsure	Felt Unsafe
Vilakazi precinct (N=112)	97%	3%	0%
Maboneng precinct (n=105)	77%	14%	3%
Sandton City (n=101)	81%	15%	4%
Changes in safety perceptions**	Changed perception	Perceptions unchanged	Unaware of area pre-visit
Vilakazi precinct (n=111)	42%	19%	39%
Maboneng precinct (n=101)	58%	12%	30%
Sandton City (n=101)	40%	32%	28%

*Safety perceptions per area based on a three-point Likert scale: 1=safe and 3=unsafe

**Changes in perception according to pre-trip vs during visit based on a three-point Likert scale: 1=changed and 3=Not aware of the area before visiting

Most respondents said that they would recommend Johannesburg to others and all the visitors claimed that they were likely to revisit Johannesburg (see Table 3).



Table 3 Overall percentages of respondents' revisit and recommendation levels to Johannesburg

Scale item	N	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Unsure	Likely	Very likely	%
Revisit intention	317	0	1.0	2.0	97.0	0.3	100
Recommendation intention	318	0.3	0.3	4.0	94.0	1.0	100

Qualitative insights

The qualitative questioning offers insights concerning the views of visitors, which are observed to be largely consistent in all study areas. Respondents appeared to feel reassured about their safety when they were part of organised groups accompanied by tour guides, relatives or friends. One respondent stated: ‘Many of the activities we engage in are found in tourist areas and we are always in clusters or groups, which is much safer’. Respondents also said that past travel to Johannesburg impacted their perceptions, behaviour and awareness, citing that they were ‘familiar with the destination’ and have not had ‘bad experiences’ before. Respondents said further that they take precautions whenever engaging in tourism activities to reduce the risk of being victims of crime. For example, it was noted by one respondent that: ‘I think it is much easier to take part in activities in a group or with friends, especially in a foreign country or city, luckily I have my friends with’. The positive views of visitors are further explained by the overall positive experiences they associate with visiting, accompanied by high overall satisfaction with their overall travel experiences in South Africa. Several respondents pointed to the friendliness and helpfulness of hotel staff and described the locals and residents of Johannesburg as ‘welcoming’, ‘friendly’ and ‘not hostile’. Safety and security measures in all areas were also noted by respondents as contributing to their perceptions of safety. Most respondents said that they would recommend Johannesburg to others and all the visitors claimed that they were likely to revisit Johannesburg.

Concerning the Orlando precinct, respondents who indicated that their perceptions had improved, stressed that they had expected a far worse experience in the townships owing to the negative portrayal of townships in the media. Other respondents claimed that their perceptions had changed because of positive engagements with residents in and around the precinct. One respondent explained; ‘I have visited Soweto in my previous trips, and I see it keeps on developing and the precinct keeps on improving, such a fancy and clean economic hub of the township too’. This comment corresponds with the Hoogendoorn et al. (2020, p. 1141) study, where residents alluded that improved safety could be the result of an increased police presence in the areas frequented by tourists. In the Maboneng precinct, repeat visitors said that they had previously been impressed with the precinct and its safety measures. Similarly in Sandton City, respondents stated that they felt safe because of the presence of 24-hour security guards, patrolling vehicles and CCTV (Closed-Circuit Television) cameras at various facilities. Also in Sandton City, visitors said that their pre-visit perceptions had been shaped by the negative public perception of Johannesburg, but that this had improved upon visiting. For example, a respondent explained; ‘From what I read, I assumed that all areas in the City of Johannesburg lacked safety and infected by crime but my trip to Sandton made me realise that this is not the case.’, while another noted; ‘African cities are not really portrayed as developed and safe; however, things are not that bad and Sandton City is quiet developed and safe’. The media can also play a positive role in shaping perceptions. A few respondents indicated that their safety and security perceptions of Sandton City were influenced by the good reviews from the internet, media reporting, travel book guides and friends.

Interpretation and discussion

A key consideration for the perceptions of crime and tourism is related to understandings of place. Hoogendoorn et al. (2020) argue for an understanding of place in tourism investigations, taking historical issues, locational specificities, social interactions and other dynamics into

account. Place-based dynamics are significant when it comes to considering urban crime. African cities, and particularly precarious neighbourhoods, are faced with the societal risk associated with poverty, inequality and vulnerability (Leonard et al., 2020). Clear spatial patterns are discernible which respect to urban crime incidents in South Africa with inequality being the key feature (Breetzke, 2020; Maharaj, 2020; Mulamba, 2021). The townships near South Africa's six major cities are the main hotspots for crime (Breetzke 2018; 2020). Violent and sex crimes, property and petty crime concentrate in these neighbourhoods. High incidences of crime in poor urban areas in South Africa point to complex societal issues, which involve endogenous, place-specific and path-dependent factors.

The findings of this study show that tourists visit Johannesburg, including precarious areas like the inner city and townships, regardless of knowing that these areas are unsafe. While participating in tourism activities in the Vilakazi precinct, Maboneng precinct and Sandton City they do not fear for their safety and consider these areas as relatively safe. While it appears evident that visitors will be more at risk in areas with high crime rates, as stated by Ferreira and Harmse (2000), George (2003) and Mawby (2000), our findings reveal that inner-city and Soweto were not considered to be more dangerous or unsafe by visitors since perceptions of safety were largely consistent in all areas.

Our findings also reveal that travel experience shapes visitor perceptions of safety and security. A large portion (not by design) of our interviewees were repeat visitors and the more mature travellers were less likely to consider Johannesburg as unsafe, stating that in relative terms they did not consider Johannesburg more unsafe in comparison to other places visited. While a range of factors such as gender, age and ethnicity impact the fear of crime while travelling (see George, 2010; Selby et al., 2010; Odufuwa et al., 2019), our findings confirm the observations of studies that indicate that gender does not play a major role concerning influencing perceptions of fear while on holiday (see Mura & Khoo-Lattimore, 2012). As also observed in Nigeria (Odufuwa et al., 2019), our findings show that older, more experienced travellers tend to be less fearful overall. Visitors from other African countries, however, felt most unsafe as revealed in our qualitative findings. This is explained by a flare-up of xenophobic violence in Johannesburg before and during the fieldwork, including in the inner city where interviews were conducted (see Human Rights Watch, 2020; Simelane & Haffajee, 2019). Xenophobia remains a grave concern in South African cities (see Opfermann, 2021; Wilhelm-Solomon & Pedersen, 2017, Zack, 2015). Its impact on tourism along with the experiences of visitors from African countries, a key regional tourist market (see Rogerson, 2011) are not understood well and remain under-explored.

Our study confirms findings of other South African studies that point to the fact that visitor perceptions about the places they visit change for the better during and after visiting (see Chaturuka et al., 2020; Donaldson & Ferreira, 2009; George & Booyens, 2014), and that the media appears to have a disproportionate role in painting a negative and arguably skewed picture of the safety and security of visitors to South Africa (Brunt et al., 2000; George & Booyens, 2014). Fear of crime in South Africa is disproportionate to actual incidents of crime (George & Booyens, 2014; Musavengane et al., 2020) and our findings suggest that visitors experience a different reality to that which was presented to them before visiting. Conversely, residents are more exposed to crime than tourists and are indeed the main victims, particularly of violent crime (see Breetzke, 2018). Mulamba (2021) points out that wealthier communities experience property crime in the form of burglaries and theft while violent crime is rife in townships. The recent crime figures presented in the paper confirm that violent crime is higher in precarious neighbourhoods than in more wealthy areas like Sandton. It is important to consider the nature of crime in South Africa being endemic with its particularly violent manifestations and its historic and socially-embedded characteristics which pre-dates South

Africa's rise on the global tourism scene since the democratic transition in the mid-1990s. The lasting legacy of apartheid is correlated directly to spatial inequality, poverty and deprivation as starkly evident in cities (Breetzke, 2018; 2020; Mulamba, 2021). A resultant breakdown of informal social controls leaves poor neighbourhoods vulnerable (Breetzke, 2020).

Pizam and Mansfeld (2006) observe that in some cities security incidents only marginally affect tourism demand, which seems to be true for South Africa. Tourism experiences in South Africa are largely 'controlled' through package tours, guided tours, organised transport and group and VFR travel. This points to the 'securitization' of tourism as a strategy by the tourism industry to mitigate safety risks (see Williams & Baláž (2015). Measures can either be formal or informal, such as security cameras and personnel in places like Sandton and Maboneng and informal security practices such as 'car guards' in places like Orlando West. Recent research in Orlando West noted that residents feel safer because of the heightened visibility of police in the area owing to its tourism popularity (Hoogendoorn et al., 2020). Visitors are also protected through group travel which is very common in townships – with specific reference to Soweto as confirmed by this research (also see Booyens, 2010). Visitors are routinely warned against venturing around in townships on their own and therefore the safety in numbers approach also limits the potential opportunity for crime. Opfermann (2021) suggests that tour guides often position themselves as 'insiders', who know an area and are known by others in the area, to facilitate a safe experience for the tourists. Managers of hotels, attractions, restaurants and shopping centres furthermore ensure a measure of safety within their premises. It, therefore, is possible that visitors are moved from one 'controlled' environment to the next in townships and inner-city areas.

Concerning informal measures of control, Boayke (2012) explains that in Ghana, police presence does not necessarily enhance perceptions of security in itself. Perceptions of safety are rather achieved by orderliness and professionalism in tourist spaces. Orderliness and professionalism are typically offered by tourist guides, operators, hotels staff and shop assistants. These tourism intermediaries also act as buffers between visitors and persons like vendors and beggars who invade their privacy and make them feel unsafe. Visitors to the Maboneng and Vilakazi precincts also raised the presence of street beggars as a concern. The improvement of city (and inner-city) spaces to enhance cleanliness, orderliness and safety is unmistakable in Johannesburg through the efforts of the council, the police and the CID (City Improvement District) initiatives (see Johannesburg CID Forum, online). These initiatives focus on cleaning streets and landscaping which contributes to the curation of inner-city spaces. In some areas, hawkers are actively discouraged and sometimes removed by the police. CIDs work with charities and government organisations to address issues associated with the homeless, especially in the inner city (Johannesburg CID, 2016).

Essentially, we argue that tourist spaces in Johannesburg are 'curated' for safety through a range of formal and informal controls to ensure a measure of safety within localities. On a collective level, 'tourism bubbles' or 'sanitised' tourism spaces insulated from the larger urban milieu (see Füller & Michel, 2014), are often curated at tourism destinations (Ioannides et al., 2019; Taylor & Toohey, 2011). This is enhanced through improvement measures implemented at the local government level in collaboration with local stakeholders as seen in Johannesburg. While city improvement has its merits, 'sanitised' spaces enhance social exclusion in the neoliberal contexts as is also observed in South Africa (see Atkinson & Laurier, 1998; Booyens, 2012; Ioannides et al., 2019). In the process of curating spaces for tourism, exclusionary practices are implemented whereby locals and the poor are marginalised to make urban spaces safe for visitors. Protection for visitors is seen as a priority by tourism businesses and government stakeholders because of the financial benefits, while locals – who are most at risk when it comes to crime – are for the most part side-lined (Musavengane et al.,

2020; Perry & Potgieter, 2013). This is a stark departure from the inclusive tourism development ideals in South Africa (Leonard et al., 2020). Musavengane et al. (2020) underscore that the poor should be regarded as part of the solution to reduce urban risk. While the poor have been included in terms of provision of security in many instances (i.e. locals becoming security guards) this is a negligible factor with respect to the broader socio-economic problems experienced in urban areas. Because of the high levels of crime in certain South African communities, it should be stressed that the challenge for policymakers is not only to ensure visitor safety but also community safety – making urban areas safer for residents and visitors alike.

Conclusion

South Africa presents a paradox concerning crime, visitor safety and perceptions thereof. Even though South African cities are widely known for having extraordinarily high levels of crime, visitors say that they feel safe as shown in several African studies and confirmed by this research. We stress that the dynamics associated with urban crime in the country are complex, historically embedded and place-based. We suggest that tourists largely stand ‘outside’ these dynamics and are not the main targets of crime, especially violent crime. While it is often assumed that tourists should be at risk, and therefore afraid, in areas with high crime rates, the available evidence does not support this. Our research points to the curation of visitor safety in tourism spaces - an overlooked factor as to why visitors, on the whole, have positive experiences and return to South Africa despite high incidences of crime. However, we caution that while tourism ‘bubbles’ benefit tourists and the tourism sector, it enhances, or arguably perpetuates, social exclusion in South African cities and accordingly undermine inclusive tourism ideals. This said, issues concerning tourism spaces, safety and social dynamics require further and more in-depth research in South Africa.

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