Critical success factors for managing the visitor experience at the Kruger National Park

Abstract
Nature-based tourism destinations have shown significant growth over the past decade and, with the ever increasing numbers of tourists travelling to national parks, the right management structures, goals and objectives need to be determined. South African National Parks (SANParks) manages all 22 national parks in South Africa with the Kruger National Park (KNP) being the biggest of them all and generating more than 80% of SANParks income. The KNP is one of the world’s largest parks conserving a staggering 1 962 362 ha of land which is bigger than countries such as Israel and Holland. When taking the KNP into perspective, park management must have the right management styles and factors in place to ensure that the park is managed in a sustainable manner and exceeds the expectations of the tourist to provide a memorable experience whilst visiting the KNP. The goal of this study was therefore to determine the critical management aspects or critical success factors (CSFs) needed to create a memorable visitor experience at the park. This goal was achieved by conducting a questionnaire survey at four rest camps within the KNP from 27 December 2010 to 4 January 2011. The rest camps used for the survey were: Skukuza (152 questionnaires), Berg and Dal (98 questionnaires), Lower Sabie (85 questionnaires) and Satara (101 questionnaires). During this time a total of 436 questionnaires were completed and included in further analysis. In Article 1, the key management aspects that visitors regard as important for a memorable visitor experience at the KNP were identified. These CSFs assist management in providing quality services and products for the tourist, leading to a memorable experience. A factor analysis was performed on the expectations of the tourists to national parks. There were nine CSFs identified that management can implement to ensure a memorable visitor experience. The three factors that have not yet been identified in previous research were wildlife experience, interpretation and luxuries. Other factors that have been identified were General management, Variety activities, Accommodation, Green management, Hospitality management, and Facilities. The results showed that park management needs to become aware of what the visitor sees as important factors for a memorable visitor experience and they can adapt certain aspects to improve the visitor’s experience. In Article 2, gaps within the park management were identified. These gaps were measured by taking the 62 variables and asking the tourist what their expectations were with regard to a memorable experience versus their actual/real experience at the park. A factor analysis on the expectations and the actual/real experiences was done and each of these factors was given a score. The scores of each factor were measured against one another indicating the differences and gaps in management. The twelve factors that were identified were General management, Education activities. Accommodation facilities, Green management, Information provided, Layout of the park, Wildlife, Facilities in the park, Food and Beverage management, Interpretive activities, Bookings and General services, and Outdoor activities. These twelve factors have also been grouped into three sub groups containing four factors each and either the expectations were exceeded, did not meet expectations or were neutral. The main gaps were Education, Accommodation facilities, Interpretations facilities and Wildlife. If management want to ensure a memorable visitor experience at the KNP they must not only focus on these gaps, but also strive to exceed visitors’ expectations on all levels. This research found that there are certain CSFs for managing a national park and gaps within park management that need to be addressed. These gaps or problem areas can be overcome by the implementation of a continuous evaluation process that will ensure effective and efficient management of the park. Park management can therefore improve their services and products as well as the quality thereof by knowing what the tourists see as important when visiting a national park to obtain a memorable experience that will lead to positive word of mouth, loyalty, increased revenue and sustainability of the KNP. Even though it is not a requirement of a masters’ dissertation to make a contribution, this research has made a significant contribution towards the methodology as the method applied determined the gaps in visitor experience and expectations and this has not been used before. Future research can make use of this type of method determining individuals’ expectations and experiences when visiting a national park or any other nature–based destination.

URI
http://hdl.handle.net/10394/6928

Collections
Kruger National Park Guide. Spotlight on South Africa's premier safari reserve. Menu. This admittance cost goes towards the park's conservation and you'll pay the rate up front at the entrance gate, for each day you're booked into the park. The entry cost for South African citizens and residents (permanent and temporary) is much less than for foreigners. Current ticket prices, until 31 October 2019, are: Visitor. Price per person per day. Adult.