

Relationship between Tourists' Expectations and Experiences: Empirical Evidences from Visitors to Serengeti National Park in Tanzania

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Abstract

In most cases, tourists would visit a place or location because of certain and distinctive attraction features. Tourists' motive to visit a specific destination is, therefore, closely attached to certain expectations and the two can be said to be inseparable. The aim of this paper is to compare tourists' expectation before visiting with the actual experience after visiting Serengeti National Park (SENAPA) in Tanzania. Data were collected by use of questionnaire distributed to 390 tourists who visited the Park in August 2016. The findings showed mostly, the tourists visited SENAPA to experience wildlife. There were statistically significant and positive differences between scores on actual experience and expectations before visiting SENAPA. There was also strong positive correlation between expectations and actual experiences. Overall, tourists expected less than what they found after their trip to SENAPA except on the presence of fast internet and Wi-Fi. The paper recommends for deliberate measures by SENAPA management to make relevant and strategic investment aimed at widening the range of tourists' activities in the Park. They also should provide enough information about attractions present in the Park to the potential tourist through more effective advertisements. Besides, they should improve internet communication in the park.

Keywords: Tourists, Expectations, Experiences, Tanzania

1. Introduction

Tourism is the largest industry in the world (Goodwin, 2000; Neto, 2003). Globally, tourism has been a crucial sector which contributes to economic growth through exchange earnings, creating jobs, generating exports, boosting taxes and stimulating capital investment (WTTC, 2011). It is said to have been one of the few sectors in the developing countries that have consistently recorded trade surpluses relative to the rest of the world (Neto, 2003). Based on these grounds tourism is viewed as one of the most promising vehicle for economic

development of the poor countries in Africa and elsewhere (Lansing & De-Vries, 2007, Goodwin, 2006).

Tourism is, therefore, unarguably source of economic growth. Evidences show that tourism is the leading foreign exchange earner and is among the fastest growing economic sectors (Eagle and Wade, 2006; Okello and Yerian, 2009; Wade *et al.*, 2001) and Tanzania is not an exceptional. Evidences show that tourism industry in Tanzania contributes more than 17% of Gross Domestic Product and over 25% of the revenue generated by total exports (NBS & BOT, 2015). There is another evidence showing that tourist arrivals in Tanzania increased from 92,000 in 1981 to 1,077,058 in 2012 (URT, 2013). This increment contributed to the rise of revenue from 2,161 million USD in 1981 to 171,275 Million USD in 2012 (URT, 2013). In the financial year 2013/2014, revenue accruing from tourism amounted to USD 1,853 million and the industry contributed to more than 11% of total employment (NBS & BOT, 2015).

It is worth noting that Tanzania is among few countries in the world endowed with a vast range of tourist attractions (Luvanga and Shitundu, 2005; URT, 2014). The country possesses world famous natural attractions including Serengeti National Park (SENAPA), Ngorongoro Crater and Mount Kilimanjaro; among others. Serengeti National Park (SENAPA) is the keystone attraction in Tanzania's important nature-based tourism industry (Eagles and Wade, 2006, Kaltenborn *et al.*, 2011; Okello & Yerian, 2009). The park is famous for the large numbers of diverse wildlife. In recognition of its biodiversity, UNESCO designated SENAPA as a World Heritage Site and a Biosphere Reserve owing to the region's global importance in the preservation of biodiversity (Sinclair & Arcese 1995; Thirgood *et al.*, 2004). SENAPA is also globally known for its annual migration, whereby twice a year ungulate herds of unrivalled size move across its immense savannah plains (UNEP, 2012). Due to its unique diverse landscapes that support hundreds of wildlife, the Park has attracted thousand tourists from all over the world. In Tanzania, the Park is the second highest earning park after Kilimanjaro (TANAPA, 2012).

At this point it is pertinent to note that although Serengeti National Park (SENAPA) is among the leading parks in terms of biodiversity richness and abundance of variety of tourist attractions with unique ecosystems, the park receives fewer visitors (tourists) than other surrounding parks like Maasai Mara in Kenya which has relatively few attractions (Bhandari, 2014). The lower number of tourists raises a question as to whether tourists really meet their travel expectations or not. The aim of this paper is to assess tourists' expectations against actual experience using empirical evidences from visitors to Serengeti national park in Tanzania.

2. Literature Review

In the service industry and tourism sector in particular, quality of services is judged by the extent to which customers are able to meet their expectations (Hsieh and Yuan (2010). Oliver (1987) defines expectations as "the individual's beliefs about how a product is likely to perform in the future" (Oliver, 1987). According to Hsieh and Yuan (2010), customer expectations can be grouped into two levels based on desire and adequacy. Desired expectation is what customers expect to receive from the service providers while adequate expectation is defined as the service performance that customers can accept (Hsieh & Yuan, 2010). The desired expectation is in the higher level than the adequate expectation as it

relates to the customers' evaluation. Literature shows that there is a relationship between customer expectations and satisfaction (Kumar, 2010; Zhan *et al.*, 2005; Jones & Lockwood, 2004). In particular, Kumar (2010) posits that a customer will be satisfied if the quality of service offered is higher than earlier expectations. In terms of price-expectations nexus, the author observes that customers do pay for services with expectations their quality is worth the payments. Zhang *et al.* (2005) note that in the hospitality industry, customers expectations are met when they satisfied with quality of services and facilities. Similarly, Jones and Lockwood (2004) observes that customer expectations are dependent on the value of money (price) spent in acquiring services in the hospitality industries like hotels. This view is reinforced by findings of a study by Mason and Simmons (2012) which found that customer expectation occurs when customers predict the service quality by using their own characteristics, attitudes and preferences. Evidence showed that customer expectation was related to such other factors as a word of mouth, individual needs, external communication, company image, and past experience (Williams & Buswell, 2003).

Customers experiences were found to influence their loyalty to services or goods (Johnson & Kong, 2011; Barsky and Waite, 2013; Huang, 2008; Lax, 2012). Those experiences are defined as private events that occur in response to some stimulations as a result of direct observations or involvement in events (Sathish, 2011:1) and can be positive or negative; good or bad (Meyer & Schwager, 2007). Some evidence show that customers with good experience are likely to be more satisfied and therefore loyal to the services and products consumed (Johnson & Kong, 2011; Barsky & Waite, 2013). On the contrary, it is observed that customers with negative or bad experiences with services are often dissatisfied (Huang, 2008; Lax, 2012).

Studies revealed that destination loyalty in the tourism sector is influenced by various location characteristics (Castro *et al.*, 2007; Chen and Tsai, 2007; Chi & Qu, 2008; Lee 2009). Accordingly, a number of studies have shown that there is relationship between tourist motivations and their loyalty to destination (Chen & Chen, 2010; Chen and Tsai, 2008; Lee *et al.*, 2007; Lee & Hsu, 2011; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Personal characteristics were also found to influence tourists' motivation to travel and in turn their loyalty to specific destination. Evidence shows that different groups of tourists do have different motivations and do experience different levels of satisfaction in different locations or destination (Opperman, 2000; Yoon & Uysal, 2005; Chen & Tsai, 2007). Implicitly, therefore, different individual characteristics do affect tourists' loyalty to destination. This is particularly so given that motivation and satisfaction are linked to destination loyalty.

Chen and Tsai (2007) found that different motivations are related to different expectations and images of a particular destination. The authors further noted that tourists' expectations were created based on images developed by individual visitors (Chen & Tsai, 2007). Crompton (1979) identified two categories of factors that shape tourists' expectations namely *push* and *pull* factors. Pull factors included tangible characteristics of location like landscape, events, culture, heritage, museums or climate. According to this author, push factors include individual intrinsic motives for travelling such as adventure, relaxation, evasion, leisure or business. Generally, literature shows that push factors relate with decision to travel while pull factors determine the choice of specific destination (Dann, 2002; Kozak, 2002; Bansal & Eiselt, 2004; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Although both push and pull factors shape tourists' expectations (Crompton, 1979), this study considered pull factors since they are the determinants of specific choices to be visited. It should be emphasized here that the push factors are important but the country or specific location to be toured has no control over them.

3. Methodology

This paper relied on the findings of a survey of tourists visiting Serengeti National Park in August 2016. Respondents were randomly selected using chance encounter techniques. In particular, the researchers visited different location in the park and, through the administrative staff of the park, sought to obtain respondents (tourists) who were willing to participate in the exercise. Given that number of tourists visiting the park during data collection period was unknown to the researchers, the following formula by Cochran (1997) was to determine the required sample size.

$$n = \frac{z^2 p(1-p)}{\ell^2}$$

Where:

n = sample size

z = the abscissa of the normal curve (1.96)

p = probability of selecting respondents with attributes that are present in the study population (0.5)

ℓ = the acceptable sampling error (0.05)

Using the above formula where $Z = 1.96$, $p = 0.5$, and $\ell = 0.05$, the required sample was calculated as follows:

$$n = \frac{(1.96)^2 (0.5)(1-0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = 384$$

However, to the advantage of the research, the researchers distributed a total of 450 questionnaires in fear that not all respondents would fill and return them. A total of 390 questionnaires were correctly filled and returned and thus the number exceeded the above required sample.

Data were gathered using a questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to collect information about tourists' expectations before visiting SENANA as well as actual experiences experience after visiting the Park. Respondents were required to rate 13 given aspects using a five-point Likert scale where: 1 = extremely poor, 2 = poor, 3 = neither poor nor good, 4 = good, and 5 = excellent. The 13 items included: cultural and historical sites; ecotourism, roads and tourism circuits; friendliness of local people; gastronomy; festivals, events and handcraft; medical facilities; night game drive; peaceful environment; quality of accommodation; reasonability of prices of goods and services; safety and security; shopping facilities; and spar facilities. The selection of the above 13 items was guided by previous similar studies (Beerli; 2012; Fodnes, 1994; Armario, 2013).

Respondents' rating of the expectations and experience were presented in percentages. Mean score and standard deviations were computed on each of the factors for expectation and actual experience. Paired t-test was conducted to determine mean difference for each of the 13 pairs of selected factors for expectation and experience. Results presented included t value and level of significance. Paired correlation analysis was conducted to determine

whether there was significant relationship between factors for expectation before visit and experience after visiting SENAPA.

4. Findings and Discussions

The study involved a total of 390 tourists including 198 (50.8%) males and 192 (49.2%) females. Age category for large proportion of respondents (46.9%) was 25 to 44 years. Also, a substantial proportion of them (31.8%) fell under age category of 45 to 64 years. Only 11.8% of respondents were aged 65 years or more. Among the tourists, 93.3% were visiting SENAPA for the first time while 6.7% had prior experience with the Park. The frequency of visiting SENAPA ranged from once to seven times. Average frequency of visiting SENAPA was 2.68. Length of stay in SENAPA ranged from one to 20 days. Average period of stay in the Part was 3.36 days.

4.1 Reasons for visiting SENAPA

The majority of tourists chose to visit SENAPA to experience wildlife (78.4%). Other reasons that motivated tourists to visit the Park included holiday (7.8%), to widen experience with other cultures (5.5%), relaxation (2.9%) and part of trip to visit family/friend (2.3%). Interestingly, both the first-time and experienced visitors indicated that the motive to visit SENAPA was to experience wildlife. This was evidenced in 79.9% of first-time visitors and 78.6% of experienced visitors who indicated that they visited the Park to experience wildlife. The findings further revealed that other popular motives for experienced tourists to visit SENAPA were holiday (15.4%) and business (7.7%). No experienced tourist visited SENAPA in search for fun or as part of visiting family member or friend. Detailed findings about individual experience and motive for visiting SENAPA are presented below.

Table 1:

Respondents' reason for visiting SENAPA and prior experience

Reason	Whether it was first time to visit SENAPA		Total (n = 384)
	Yes (n = 358)	No (n = 26)	
To relax/rest	2.5%	7.7%	2.9%
Search for fun	1.7%	0.0%	1.6%
Visit family/friend	2.5%	0.0%	2.3%
To experience wildlife	79.9%	61.5%	78.6%
Widen experience with other cultures	5.6%	3.8%	5.5%
Holiday	7.0%	15.4%	7.6%
On business	0.0%	7.7%	0.5%
Other reasons	0.8%	3.8%	1.0%

The above findings (Table 1) imply that wildlife experience was the single most factor that attracted tourists to visit SENAPA. The findings support the view that SENAPA was globally known for its unique migrations, where twice a year herds wild beasts move across the savannah plains of the park (UNEP, 2012). The findings, therefore, suggest that still the most popular attraction of tourists to SENAPA was wildlife experience and that little investment had been made, if any at all, to make the park more attractive.

4.2 Tourists' expectations and actual experiences on selected attributes

Rated mean scores for both tourists' expectations and actual experiences were computed with an intention of determining the difference. Since the answers of respondents were recorded in a five points Likert scale, a score of 3 and above indicated that the specific attribute was rated good or excellent. Paired t-test was carried out to determine whether there was statistically significance difference (diff) between scores of most of the matched pairs of experience (exper) and expectation (expect). Results were as presented in Table 2 below.

Table 2:

Differences between actual experience and expectation on selected attributes

Item	n	Mean (exper)	Mean (Expect)	Diff (exper-expect)	Std. Dev	T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Cultural and historical sites	306	3.69	3.43	0.261	0.851	5.372	305	0.000***
Ecotourism, roads and tourism circuits	335	3.82	3.48	0.346	0.865	7.328	334	0.000***
Friendliness of local people	350	4.61	4.15	0.463	0.901	9.616	349	0.000***
Gastronomy	324	4.12	3.59	0.537	0.968	9.988	323	0.000***
Festivals, events and handcrafts	229	3.28	3.16	0.122	0.938	1.973	228	0.050*
Medical facilities	185	3.03	2.72	0.308	0.883	4.746	184	0.000***
Night game drive	178	3.37	3.32	0.045	0.938	0.639	177	0.523
Peaceful environment	300	4.50	4.21	0.290	2.466	2.037	299	0.043*
Quality of accommodation	313	4.21	3.75	0.457	0.980	8.247	312	0.000***
Reasonability on prices of goods and services	306	3.78	3.52	0.258	0.963	4.692	305	0.000***
Safety and security	311	4.15	3.72	0.434	1.020	7.507	310	0.000***
Shopping facilities	244	3.22	3.05	0.168	1.062	2.471	243	0.014**
Spa facilities	185	2.97	2.64	0.330	1.002	4.474	184	0.000***

***. Difference is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed) **. Difference is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). *. Difference is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The findings showed that there was statistically significant and positive difference between scores on actual experience and expectations for 12 out of 13 attributes included in the analysis. Only one attribute namely night game drive did not show significant difference between scores on actual experience and expectations. Two major implications can be drawn from the findings on Table 2. First, tourists expected less than what they actually experienced after their visit to SENAPA. This is evidenced in positive difference between scores on actual experience after visit and scores on the expectation before visit to the Park. In other words, the desired expectations of tourists were higher than their adequate expectations (Hsieh & Yuah, 2010) and thus it can be said that they experienced a positive (or favorable) zone of tolerance (Brink and Berndt, 2008). Second, given that tourists expected less than what they found after their trip to SENAPA, it may imply that information available to them in form of

adverts did not provide enough details about what they would experience if they visited the Park.

4.3 Correlation between tourists' expectations and experience

Paired sample correlation analysis was carried out between the scores on the 13 pairs of items included in the list of expectations as well as in list of actual experience of tourists. The intention was to determine whether there were strong correlations between what tourists expected from SENAPA prior to their visit and the actual situation after their visits. The results were as presented below.

Table 3:

Paired Samples Correlations between scores on expectation and on experience

Pair	Item	n	Correlation (r)	Sig.
Pair 1	Cultural and historical sites	306	0.676	0.000***
Pair 2	Ecotourism, roads and tourism circuits	335	0.666	0.000***
Pair 3	Friendliness of local people	350	0.453	0.000***
Pair 4	Gastronomy	324	0.522	0.000***
Pair 5	Festivals, events and handcrafts	229	0.582	0.000***
Pair 6	Medical facilities	185	0.635	0.000***
Pair 7	Night game drive	178	0.654	0.000***
Pair 8	Peaceful environment	300	0.164	0.004**
Pair 9	Quality of accommodation	313	0.514	0.000***
Pair 10	Reasonability on prices of goods and services	306	0.588	0.000***
Pair 11	Safety and security	311	0.484	0.000***
Pair 12	Shopping facilities	244	0.523	0.000***
Pair 13	Spa facilities	185	0.649	0.000***

Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed). **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Generally, the findings revealed that all 13 pairs of expectations and experience were significantly correlated. For instance, tourists' expectations about cultural and historical sites ecotourism roads and tourism circuits; medical facilities; night game drive; and spa facilities were strongly correlated with their actual experience. Nevertheless, tourists' expectations on two items namely peaceful environment and safety and security were not highly correlated.

Strong correlations between expectations and actual experience imply that SENAPA made efforts to market the Park with real information. This fact is supported by evidences showing that 98.9% of respondents indicated that their overall expectations were met. It is also supported by another secondary finding from the 2013 SENAPA's Visitors Survey involving 106 respondents which revealed that 98% of respondents (tourists to SENAPA) met their expectations of visiting the Park. The findings, therefore, support the role of marketing in fostering expectations of tourists. This point is in line with Williams and Buswell (2003) who

found that customer expectation was related to such other factors as a word of mouth, external communication, company image, and past experience. The findings are also supported by evidence from a study by Chen and Tsai (2007) which found that tourists' expectations were created based on images developed by individual visitors (Chen & Tsai, 2007).

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The findings showed that the majority of tourists chose to visit SENAPA to experience wildlife. This leads to a conclusion that wildlife experience was the SENAPA's most attractive feature of tourists. Also, it was showed that there were statistically significant and positive differences between scores on actual experience and expectations before visiting SENAPA. There was also strong positive correlation between expectations and actual experiences. Nonetheless, the findings showed that tourists expected less than what they found after their trip to SENAPA. Based on these findings, it may be concluded that information available to the tourists in form of adverts did not provide enough details about what they would experience if they visited the Park. Furthermore, the findings showed tourists' experience on some factors like presence of fast internet and Wi-Fi were poorer than their expectations. This particular finding leads to a conclusion that SENAPA management had not made enough investment on internet communication infrastructure in the part.

Based on the above conclusions, this paper puts forth the following recommendations. SENAPA management should make relevant and strategic investment to widen the range of tourists' activities of the park different from the current situation where wildlife experience is the single most attractive factor. The investment to be made should aim at making the part the best place for holidays, relaxations and fun; among other leisure activities. Also, the Park's authority in collaboration with local and international tourists' agents should avail enough information about the attractive features available at SENAPA. In other words, the prospective tourists should be provided with enough information about the Park to guide their right construction of expectation. Accordingly, SENAPA should make efforts to improve internet communication infrastructure in the part especially because tourists normally have high need to communicate with their families or friends from the locations of origin.

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