

Measuring Tourist Satisfaction with Service Quality in Marine Protected Areas, Kenya

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Abstract

Over the years, studies on marine-based tourism have largely focused on the characteristics of tourists who visit their destination and its contribution to the national economy. Consequently, there has been paucity of information on tourist satisfaction with the service quality attributes in marine protected areas. This study used a case of Mombasa Marine National Park and Reserve (MMNP&R) to measure tourist satisfaction with the quality of services offered. Primary information was collected by the use of questionnaires. The results indicated that there were Ten (10) attributes about MMNP&R with which tourists were satisfied and Five (5) attributes with which they were dissatisfied. The mean value of the respondents' overall perceived level of satisfaction was 5.36, which tended towards the high end of the satisfaction scale.

Keywords: Characteristics of tourists, Marine based tourism, Marine protected Areas, Service Quality attributes, Tourist Satisfaction

Introduction

Marine tourism has developed over the centuries from one, which consisted of 'getaway' islands from the elites of the Roman Empire, to the discovery of seaside tourism in the Western Europe between 1750 and 1840, to the mass and special interest tourism of the twentieth century (Mohd, 1997). Indeed, marine tourism has grown into an industry which includes cruise tourism, large coastal and island resorts, as well as, other special interest tourism. Kenya is no exemption, and current trends show an increasing tourism performance in Marine parks over the years (Figure 1).

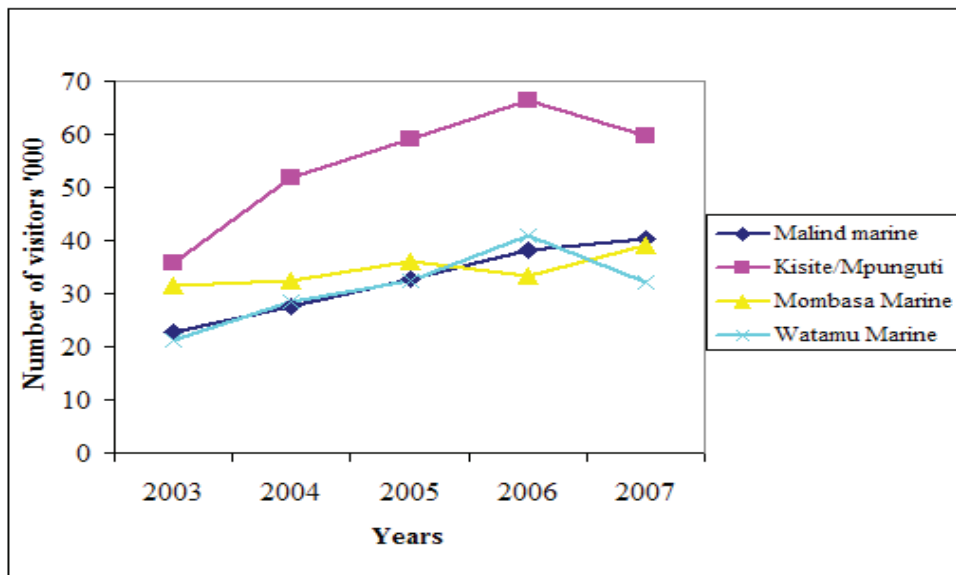


Figure 1: Number of visitors to MPAs in Kenya, 2003-2007 (Kenya government 2008)

In addition to income generation, Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) play an important role in conserving marine life and heritage. Consequently, the designation of MPAs has increasingly become a common strategy employed worldwide in a bid to improve conservation of natural resources and preservation of cultural heritage; and to create opportunities for coastal recreation tourism (marine based tourism). Over 1000 MPAs have now been designated by various governments worldwide. In Kenya, the conservation of marine resources has been achieved through the creation of MPAs under the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act Cap 376 of the laws of Kenya (Kenya Government, 1977; Wishitemi, 2008).

Several studies (e.g. Akama and Kieti, 2003; Backman, Backman and Malinovsky, 2000; Jing-Chi et al., 2011; Lee, Graefe and Burns, 2004; Tonge and Moore, 2007; Van Hyfte, 2009; Gessler and Rucks, 2011) on tourist satisfaction in terrestrial parks exists. However, Marine-based tourism research on the same subject is limited. In Kenya, for instance, there is inadequate information on tourist expectations and satisfaction levels with MPAs that can be applied with confidence for the management and development of national marine parks and reserves. Moreover, few studies have been done to establish whether overall tourist satisfaction will lead to intentions to repurchase.

Literature Review

Service quality and customer satisfaction

Over the past decades service quality has increasingly become a major area of interest to researchers, practitioners and managers due to its potent effect on business performance (Naik et al. 2010). Rosen et al. (2003) upholds that service quality is not just a business offering but a competitive weapon which is essential for customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, profitability and the general business survival. The ability to offer a superior quality of service has been

acknowledged as one of the most effective means of ensuring that an organization is able to distinguish its offering from the comparable offerings of its competitors (Parasuraman et al., 1991). Furthermore, a superior service policy can also be developed and implemented at relatively low cost with the probability of a reasonably speedy impact upon returns (Fuller et al, 2006).

Customer satisfaction is often one of the main goals of every business. It is widely acknowledged that keeping extant customers is more cost-effective than having to win new ones. For example, Naik et al. (2010) assert that when customers perceive good service, each will on average tell nine to ten people, whereas, customers who receive poor service will, by and large, share their dissatisfaction to between fifteen and twenty others. Furthermore, if the service incident is so negative, the negative effects can last years through repeated remembrance and narrating of the negative experience (Naik et al., 2010). Consequently, intensified efforts of practitioners, managers and academic researchers are geared towards understanding the attributes that may in different ways contribute to customers purchase intentions, as well as, how customers perceive the quality of service. As LeBlanc (1992) notes, service quality and satisfaction share a common theoretical derivation and the conceptualizations of the two constructs overlap. Thus, gaining a full understanding of service quality and satisfaction requires a distinction to be made between the two constructs (Looy et al., 1998).

Generally, service quality is conceptualized as a form of attitude representing a long-run overall evaluation. It involves both technical and functional quality where the former refers to what is being delivered while the later is concerned with how the service is delivered (Van Hyfte, 2009). Conversely, customer satisfaction results from comparison of the service quality expected in a given service encounter with perceived service quality. In other words, satisfaction is the customer's evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether it has met their needs and expectations. Failure to meet the needs and expectations is assumed to result in dissatisfaction with the product or service. Jing-chi *et al.* (2011) highlight customer satisfaction as an important factor in creating and maintaining competitive advantages in today's highly competitive environment. An organization's ability to consistently satisfy customers is important in achieving its core objective (Van Hyfte, 2009). Consequently, monitoring visitor satisfaction has become critical in ensuring a satisfying overall experience (Gessler and Rucks, 2011). It is important to note that customer's overall evaluation of a service encounter does not rest solely on the processing of tangible attributes or the intangible elements from the service provider but on a combination of the above, paired with the customer's mood, emotions and attitudes (Mantel and Kardes, 1999; Chui *et al.*, 2010).

Tourist satisfaction

The growing number of tourism destinations available nationally, regionally and internationally, has intensified competition between destinations for tourists (Fuller *et al.*, 2006). In addition, tourists today are quite aware of quality of service they expect to receive and often are not prepared to compromise on quality which they regard as a very important part of any tourism offer. As is the case with other customers, tourists are increasingly demanding to get service worth their value for money. Hence, there is a need for nature-based operators to understand the criteria visitors use to evaluate quality and determine subsequent satisfaction ratings (Van Hyfte, 2009).

Service quality in a tourism context has been viewed mostly as the quality of opportunities available at a destination, and is related to a tourist's quality of experience (Crompton and Love, 1995). Offering quality services will result in positive perceptions and consequently customer satisfaction. Therefore, for tourism establishments and/or facilities to be on the winning end,

they should be committed to improving the available services to meet the tourist's expectation. Moreover, managers need to have the necessary information about their tourists' needs, experience sought, as well as, their overall level of satisfaction. An overview of previous studies (Akama and Kieti, 2003; Van Hyfte, 2009) demonstrate that satisfaction is considered a valuable concept in understanding the performance of a destination because it influences the choice of the destination, the consumption of the products and the decision to return (Tian-Cole and Crompton et al. 1995; Van Hyfte, 2009). In actual sense, satisfied tourists are more likely to recommend a tourism destination to others, which is the cheapest and cost effective form of marketing and promotion (Akama and Kieti, 2003) and is likely to enhance loyalty to a destination.

Tourists, like other customers, have preconceived and mental images (expectations) of a location before their visit. These expectations are formed mainly through information provided via tourism advertisements, commercials, brochures, mass media and information from friends and relatives. The extent to which tourist expectations are met will eventually determine the level of tourist satisfaction (Akama and Kieti, 2003). If the overall performance, while or after visiting a destination, exceeds or meets initial expectations then the tourist is considered satisfied. However, if perceived performance falls below initial expectations then the tourist may be dissatisfied. To reduce dissatisfaction levels, it is important for Destination Management Organizations (DMOs) to offer accurate information so as to create the right expectations.

Over time, satisfaction has become the principle measure of the quality of a tourist experience and numerous approaches have been used to examine the satisfaction of tourists. Chadee and Mattson (1996) attempted to measure the quality of tourist experiences by looking at the different quality factors that affect the global satisfaction of tourists. In their regression model, they found that distinct quality factors are significant for different tourist encounters. The expectancy-disconfirmation theory is noted to receive a wide acceptance among other theories. The theory is based on the premise that satisfaction is related to the size and direction of 'non-confirmatory' experiences defined by the difference between the initial expectations of the individual and the actual results derived (Millan and Estaban, 2004). Another popular tool for measuring satisfaction is the SERVQUAL (Service Quality) model. This model is a multi-item scale developed to assess customer perception of service quality in service and retail businesses (Parasuraman et al., 1988). It represents service quality as a discrepancy between a tourist's expectation for a service offering and the tourist's perception of the service received. SERVQUAL uses five dimensions which O'Neill and Hubbard (2004, p. 90) refer to as 'TATER', an acronym for reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness. Based on these five dimensions, customers' perceptions of quality service can be analyzed. The multi-item scale decomposes the notion of service quality into the following constructions:

Tangibles, which are considered as the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication material, all of which provide physical representations or images of the service that customers use to evaluate quality.

Reliability means that organizations deliver on their promises about service delivery, service provision, problem resolution and pricing. Ideally, customers want to do business with companies that keep their promises, particularly their promises about core service attributes.

Responsiveness is the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. This dimension emphasizes attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customer requests, questions, complaints and problems.

Assurance refers to employees' knowledge and courtesy and the ability of the firm and its employees to inspire trust and confidence. This dimension is likely to be particularly important

for services that the customer perceives as involving high risk and or about which they feel uncertain about their ability to evaluate outcomes for example, visiting tourist destinations for the first time.

Empathy is considered as the caring, individualized attention an organization provides to its customers. The essence of empathy is conveyed through personalized or customized service, that customers are unique and special. Customers want to feel understood by and important to firms that provide service to them.

According to Parasuraman *et al.* (1990) visitor's overall satisfaction may be related to their assessment of not only the above mentioned service quality dimensions but also product features and price. Sweeney and Soutar (2001) observe that satisfaction may be influenced by both service quality and value, although such situations may be particularly important in the case of tourism destinations where the costs of visitation are known to differ markedly. In this regard, tourist satisfaction is affected not only by the quality of what the tourist receives, but also by price and perceived value of the product and/or service. Such a scenario result from an evaluation of the rewards and sacrifices associated with the purchase of the tourism product (Magi and Julander, 1995 cited in Akama and Kieti, 2003).

In the service sector, both price and service quality, are concurrently used to indicate the value of the service to the customer, where the trade-off is between product quality and price (Chen, Gupta and Rom, 1994). However, Sweeney *et al.* (1997) note that quality and value are often treated as separate constructs. Often, quality may be taken as being a component of value, however, value in itself is not necessarily synonymous with quality, since not all consumers may want to buy the highest-quality item in a given service category. Correspondingly, value can be conceptualized to encompass both the functional benefits of performance as well as non-functional benefits of a tourism product (Stewart *et al.*, 1998). For a tourist destination to be competitive, both tourism services and products should be perceived as of a quality similar to and/or better than those of other similar destinations. At the same time, the product/service price should be perceived as being competitive and commensurate to the perceived value of the product (Stevens, 1992).

Several researchers have argued that satisfaction is a multi-faceted concept and is even more complex when the focus is on a destination rather than an individual service provider. In the case of destinations, satisfaction is assessed by reference to the many individual aspects of the holiday encounter, including the services and facilities used. But, again, the individual aspects of an encounter affect the satisfaction of the tourist in different ways. For example, according to Vargo *et al.* (2007, p.1 cited in King Har, 2008) some aspects of holiday encounter may increase satisfaction when present but do not increase dissatisfaction when absent, some aspects may increase dissatisfaction when absent but do not increase satisfaction when present, some aspects may impact satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and negative evaluations to the extent it is present or absent, and finally some have no impact on satisfaction or dissatisfaction. These experiences to satisfaction have been referred to by Cadotte and Turgeon (1988 cited in King Har, 2008) as "satisfiers, dissatisfiers, criticals and neutrals" respectively. Basically, satisfiers are concerned with the inherent needs of the customer while dissatisfiers meet the extrinsic needs of the customer (Vargo *et al.*, 2007, cited in King Har, 2008). This implies that the intrinsic needs of a customer must be met, for him or her to experience satisfaction.

The focus of much of the research on customer satisfaction is on the "disconfirmation of expectations" theory which explains that "the customer is satisfied when he or she feels that the product's performance is equal to or more than what was expected (confirmation). But if

perceived performance falls short of his/her expectations (disconfirmation), then the customer is dissatisfied. In other words, satisfaction is conceptualized as the outcome of the comparison between the tourists' expectations and experiences with the holiday destination attributes. With this understanding, the current study adopted the SERVQUAL attributes (Table 1) identified by Parasuraman et al. (1988) and modified by Akama and Kieti (2003).

Table 1: SERVQUAL Attributes (Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) & modified by Akama & Kieti (2003))

Service Quality Dimensions	Item Label and Wordings
Tangibles	- Visual attractiveness and appearing natural attractions - Appealing and good condition physical facilities and equipment - Uncrowded and unspoiled park - Modern looking equipment and facilities - Adequate transport facilities - Accessibility of physical facilities and natural resources - Neat appearance of staff
Reliability	- Giving prompt services to the tourists - Providing services at the promised time - Listening and providing accurate and correct information
Responsiveness	- Willingness to assist tourists - Responding to the tourists' questions - Informing the tourists about what is offered in the park
Assurance	- Safe and secure park - Staff who are consistently courteous to their tourists - Knowledge to answer tourist's questions - Adequately safety facilities
Empathy	- Convenient opening hours - Giving personal attention to tourists - Understanding the specific needs of the tourist - Convenient location of facilities and equipment - Good viewing and comfortable facilities - Adequate water supply
Price	- Reasonable price - Cheap accommodation and catering facilities - Cheap entertainment or recreational facilities
Perceived value	- Providing service quality worth the money paid

This study sought to measure tourist satisfaction with the services offered in Kenya's marine protected areas. Specifically, the study used the case study of Mombasa Marine National Park and Reserve (MMNP & E) to first examine whether there exist any gaps or discrepancies (positive or negative) between tourists' expectations and perceptions of the quality of the tourism services offered and second to identify the main variables that have the strongest influence on overall tourist satisfaction.

The SERVQUAL model has been widely applied in measuring customer satisfaction in different ranges of service categories including hotels, tourism centres, parks and recreation services (Akama and Kieti, 2003; Fick and Ritchie, 1991). However, it should be stated that despite its wide application in a variety of sectors (Ryan and Cliff, 1997 cited in Van Hyfte, 2009), the model has attracted criticism for its conceptualization of quality measurement issues. For instance, the service attributes that are used to measure service quality may not represent exact levels of service quality and/or may not measure all the important characteristics of a particular service. In addition, there are real limitations as related to interviewing respondents before and after the consumption of a given service; the so – called 'gap measure'. The service quality scores (SERVSC) that are obtained from the gap measurement of perceived and expected attributes may therefore turn out not to be very reliable measurement of the service quality as they relate to visitor's satisfaction. However, from a perspective of a simple practical tool in alerting service providers and management of potential issues as relates to given services, the SERVQUAL model still possesses some value (Akama and Kieti, 2003).

The case study area

The research area for this study was Mombasa Marine National Park and Reserve- MMNP&R (Figure 2), which was gazetted under the Wildlife Conservation and Management Act cap 376 of the laws of Kenya (GoK, 1977). Though gazetted in 1986, it was not until towards the mid-1990s that park and reserve rules and regulations began to be strictly enforced. The objectives for establishing the park included preservation of the marine habitat, revenue generation through tourism, education and scientific research.

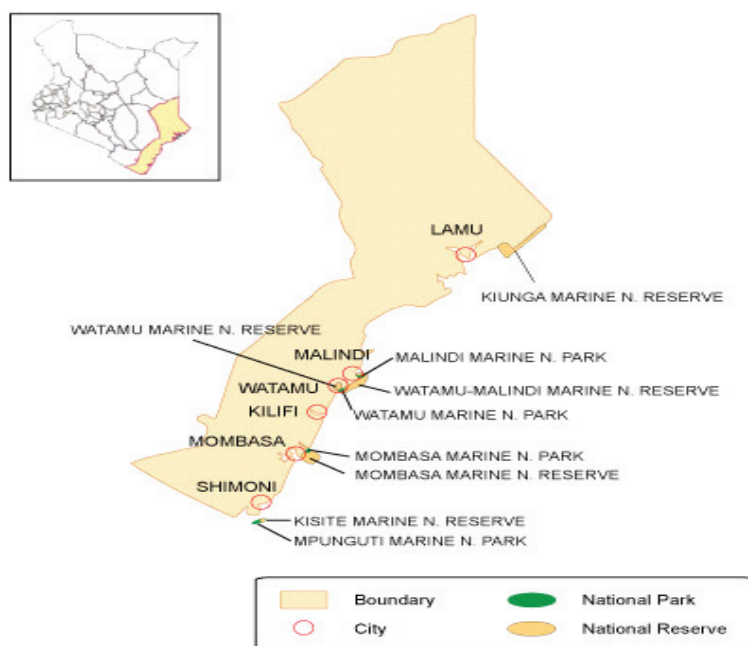


Figure 2: Geographic Location of Marine Protected Areas in Kenya (KTB (2007) Cited in Wishitemi (2008)

The area gazetted as park measures 10km² and lies between longitudes 39°40' and 39°54' East and latitudes 3°58' and 4°04' South (Weru *et al.*, 2001). Both the park and reserve are government property. Located on the north coast of Mombasa town, the Park extends from the Nyali area to Mtwapa creek. This area falls within the broader Mombasa Marine Reserve, which covers 200km². The Park and Reserve areas include extensive coral reefs, a coral garden, a channel, some cliffs and a number of beaches which offer recreation to locals and tourists alike. The Park accommodates the main recreational site for Mombasa town residents at the public beach. There are other water sport activities carried out apart from glass-bottom boats. These include; windsurfing, sailing, jet-skiing, swimming for leisure, scuba diving, snorkelling among many others. Moreover, the shoreline has excellent beaches, which are the mainstay of coastal tourism. The main beaches are located in the Nyali/Mombasa area and the Bamburi area, which has the longest beach. Their scenic and aesthetic value has attracted 32 beach hotels and resort development during the second half of the last century, with the first beach hotel, Nyali Beach hotel, established in 1946 (Weru *et al.*, 2001). Sun and sand bathing, leisure walking, bird watching and photography are the main aspects of recreation along the sand beach and cliffs.

MMNP&R faces diverse challenges. For instance, prior to the gazettment of the area into a Park/Reserve, the biodiversity and the general environment had faced considerable degradation and over-exploitation, especially from uncontrolled fishing, shell and coral collection, and coastal development (Weru *et al.*, 2001). Further, visitor statistics show a drastic decline since 1997, attributable to factors such as poor infrastructure and periodic incidents of insecurity within the coastal region. At the same time a number of internal difficulties hamper the smooth management of the Park, such as lack of funds and insufficient well-trained personnel. The protection of

marine resources is the responsibility of a national conservation body, the Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS). When the KWS implemented rules for the Mombasa Marine Park, part of the result was the immediate enclosure of an area previously regarded by fishermen as containing a 'common resource'. Enclosure and the associated prohibitions to entry and exploitation of the resource base have both been responsible for upsetting the previous pattern of use and exploitation and instead introduced a new system of resource management that is neither well understood nor accepted by traditional users. The local user community felt deeply antagonized by the shift in the decision making power, together with the view that the new management system reflects only the interests of the conservation authority and not those of indigenous resource users (Chebures, 1989).

Research Methodology

The survey was conducted for a period of four months at the five different points of entry to the marine park and reserve. The sample population for the research comprised both international and domestic tourists who visited MMNP&R between December, 2007 and March, 2008 which covered mainly the peak season.

The study used quantitative and qualitative approaches to collect data. Quantitative data was collected by the use of semi-structured questionnaires which consisted of four sections. Section one explored destination attributes influencing tourists' expectations and satisfaction levels. In this section, respondents were asked to give a score to each of the 24 attributes on the level of expectations and satisfaction using a 5-point Likert type scale, which ranged from very low expectation (1) to very high expectation (5) and from very dissatisfied (1) to very satisfied (5). This was followed with a general question about respondents' overall satisfaction with MMNP&R, which utilized a 7-point Likert scale which ranged from 1= extremely dissatisfied to 7= extremely satisfied. Section two dealt with tourist's demographic characteristics, section three looked at travel behaviour characteristics (purpose of visit, information sources, activity engaged in, previous visits to the park) and finally section four solicited for tourist's general comments.

Distribution of the questionnaires was carried out during day time. Respondents were approached after they boarded the boats for their excursions and were informed about the purpose of the survey. They were later given the questionnaires to fill immediately after their excursion. In order to ensure that there was a representative sample, the study adopted simple random sampling. This way, each visitor had an equal chance of being selected to participate in the study. Further, it permitted the researchers to apply inferential statistics, such as t-test. The study sample was drawn from the total number of tourists to the park and reserve on a day to day basis. The respondents under the age of eighteen years and below were excluded.

Qualitative data was collected through oral discussions with tourists before and after the excursion. This was meant to obtain study participants' opinions and thoughts on the diverse issues related to tourist satisfaction with the various service quality attributes in marine protected areas. This is in line with the call for increased utilization of qualitative methodology in hospitality and tourism research since it has been under – utilized (Riley and Love, 2000; Walle, 1997) and aimed at getting critical information to supplement information from the questionnaires. Purposive sampling was used to select respondents for the oral interviews, where, the target was those people who had the knowledge desired and who were willing to divulge it to the researcher. The rationale behind the use of this sampling technique was to seek information-rich tourists who could be interviewed to provide candid opinions on their satisfaction with different service quality attributes on MPAs. Besides, the tourists who participated in filling the questionnaire were excluded from oral interviews.

Results and Discussion

Out of 100 questionnaires, 70 were usable. This represented a response rate of 70%. Unusable questionnaires were either missing sections in either expectation or satisfaction or were not returned by the respondents.

Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The findings of the survey reveal that the sample of respondents consisted of 58.6% of male and 41.4% of female (Table 2). This could be attributed to the fact that most of the marine – based activities include surfing, sailing and scuba, which are highly adventurous or having higher risk of injury, hence they tend to be dominated by males (Beerli and Martin, 2003). With respect to age, the highest proportion of the respondents (41.4%) fell into the 19-30 year age group, followed by the over 41 year age group. The question on the educational level of respondents showed that 59.4% held a university or college education certificate, 31.8% held a high school education certificate and 8.7% held primary school education certificate. Regarding the country of origin of the tourists, 70.6% were from Europe. A further 22.0% came from Africa, while 7.4% originated from Middle East, Asia and USA collectively (Table 2). These findings agree with other studies (e.g. Karanja, 2003; Wishitemi, 2008; Akama and Kieti, 2003) and the general pattern of tourist population in the Kenya's protected areas.

Table 2: Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<i>Gender</i>		
Female	29 (n=70)	41.4 (100%)
Male	41	58.6
<i>Age (Years)</i>		
19-30	29 (n=69)	40.5 (99.9%)
31-41	15	21.7
41 and above	26	37.7
<i>Country of Origin</i>		
Europe	48	70.6
Africa	15 (n=68)	22.0 (100%)
Asia	3	4.4
Middle East	1	1.5
USA	1	1.5
<i>Education Level</i>		
Primary School	6 (n=69)	8.7 (99.9%)
High School	22	31.8
College/University	41	59.4

Travel Behaviour Characteristics of the Respondents

The majority (77.1%) of respondents were first time visitors to MMNP&R. Only 22.9% of the respondents were repeat visitors. Although 65.7% of the respondents indicated that they were willing to make repeat visits, 21.4% preferred to visit other destinations. The research findings further revealed that a majority (38.6%) of respondents travelled as a couple, 22.9% with their family members while the rest of respondents were either individual traveller or travelled in

organized groups. This travel behaviour is very much in line with recent trends in international tourism development and movement of travellers to different regions of the world.

The respondents identified various sources of information about MMNP&R, which included tour guides, friends and families; and hotels among others. This finding is similar to Okello et al. (2012) research conducted in Nairobi National Park. Evidently, the glass-boat tours was the most (36.7%) common activity tourists engaged-in while sport fishing/deep sea fishing was the least (2.0%) popular amongst the respondents (Table 3). A total of 58.6% of the respondents mentioned exploration as their motivation of visiting MMNP&R. This is in line with Akama and Kieti (2003) arguments that most tourists are often influenced by the urge to travel to different places in search of novelty and adventure in natural setting.

Table 3: Travel Behaviour Characteristics of the Respondents (n=70)

Variable (%)	Frequency	Percentage
<i>Past Experience at MMP&NR</i>		
First time visit	54	77.1
Repeat Visit	16	22.9
<i>Plans to Visit again</i>		
Yes	46	65.7
No	15	21.4
Undecided	9	12.9
<i>Membership in a group</i>		
Alone	10	14.2
Couple	27	38.6
Friends and Relatives	16	22.9
Organized Group	17	24.3
<i>Source of information*</i>		
Friends and family	15	20.0
Park publications	4	5.3
Tour guides	29	38.7
Tourist Information Centres	3	4.0
KWS Website	2	2.7
Hotel	20	26.7
Diving Centres	2	2.7
<i>Activity engaged in during the visit*</i>		
Snorkelling	33	33.7
Scuba-diving	27	27.6
Glass-boat tour	36	36.7
Sport fishing/deep sea fishing	2	2.0
<i>Motivation/choice to visit MMP&R*</i>		
Previous experience	7	9.5
Recommendation from friends & relatives	12	16.2
Exploring something new	42	56.8
Work basis	9	12.2
Other reasons	4	5.4

Purpose of visit

Recreation	59	84.3
Research	2	2.9
Education	2	2.9
Work	7	10.0

** Represents multiple response expressed in absolute numbers*

Satisfying Attributes, Indifferent Attributes and Unsatisfactory Attributes

The results indicated that there were 10 attributes about MMNP&R with which tourists were satisfied and 9 attributes with which they were dissatisfied (Table 4). Tourists were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with 5 attributes.

Satisfying Attributes

Satisfying attributes were considered as those whose satisfaction scores (t-values) were above expectation ($p < 0.05$). Evidently the tourists were satisfied with visual and appealing natural attraction, neat appearance of the staff, meeting of promises on time, the willingness of the staff to assist, listen and provide accurate and correct information, the staff's ability to respond to questions, their courteousness and the manner in which they gave personalized attention (Table 4). They were also satisfied with the convenient location of facilities and equipment and lastly good view and comfortable facilities. The findings of this study reveal that the service provider and physical facilities' attributes were the major satisfying attributes. Similar observations were made by Henry et al. (1991) in Maasai Mara National Reserve. Elsewhere, literature review suggests that employee's empathy, competence and responsiveness (Atkinson, 1988; Knutson, 1988), convenient location (Knutson, 1988) and physical facilities (Choi and Chu, 2001; Marković, 2004) are attributes that hotel guests perceive as being important. Besides, a number of studies (e.g. Crouch, 2000) assert that the interaction between customers and tourism service providers is acknowledged in tourism services research as essential to service quality. Hence, from a tourist's perspective, it is the service element, involving tourist and employee interaction in a tourism service interface that increases the value of a destination product – service offering. Furthermore, because service delivery occurs during the interactions between contact employees and customers, attitudes and behaviours of the contact employees can influence customers' perceptions of service quality (Ramseook-Munhurrin et al., 2010). Arguably, the nature of tourists' experiences especially in protected areas depends on the relationship between the tourist and the service provider (Shackey, 1996).

Indifferent Attributes

Indifferent attributes were defined as those attributes with a non-significant t-value regardless of a positive mean difference. The results showed that respondents were indifferent ($p > 0.05$) with five (5) attributes including modern looking equipment and facilities, informing tourists about what is offered, safe and secure park and finally convenient opening hours. This showed that respondents' satisfaction was confirmed with their expectations, and resulted in a neutral feeling or indifference in relation to those attributes.

Dissatisfying Attributes

Dissatisfying attributes were defined as those attributes with expectation scores outweighing satisfaction scores, had a negative mean scores ($p > 0.05$). Results indicate that tourists were dissatisfied with the conditions of physical facilities and equipment, crowded and spoiled park and reserve, availability of information centres, accessibility of the physical facilities and natural resources, knowledge to answer questions, adequate safety facilities, understanding specific needs and the service quality in comparison with money paid (Table 4). The findings on tourist's dissatisfaction with the availability of information centres may imply that tourists felt that they did not receive adequate information as expected. Similar problem has been reported elsewhere both in Kenya and outside Kenya. For example, in Maasai Mara National Park and Rwanda's Mountain Gorillas, tourists frequently requested for better information provision (Henry et al., 1991; Shackey, 1996). By ensuring that there is adequate information, protected areas will be able to increase the level of satisfaction of tourist hence increasing the probability of revisit (Kieti, 2000). The study's findings on the aspect of the price charged versus the service offering points to the existing body of literature that asserts that the service price should be perceived as being competitive and commensurate to the perceived value of the product (Akama and Kieti, 2003).

Table 4: Results of Paired t-test Between Tourists' Expectations and Satisfaction

Attribute	Satisfaction Mean (SD)	Expectation Mean (SD)	Mean Difference/ Gap	T-value	Significance Difference (2-tailed)
Satisfying attributes					
Visual attractiveness and appealing natural attractions	4.43 (0.88)	4.31 (0.99)	+0.12	+1.02	0.031*
Neat appearance of staff	4.60 (0.82)	4.03 (1.08)	+0.57	+3.77	0.000*
Providing services at the promised time	4.44 (0.88)	4.24 (0.98)	+0.20	+1.22	0.023*
Listening and providing accurate & correct information	4.34 (0.95)	4.19 (1.11)	+0.15	+0.82	0.042*
Willingness to assist	4.37 (0.90)	3.93 (1.05)	+0.44	+2.87	0.005*
Responding to questions	4.56 (0.26)	4.30 (1.03)	+0.26	+1.68	0.001*
Staff who are consistently courteous	4.44 (0.75)	4.34 (0.85)	+0.10	+0.73	0.047*
Giving personal attention to tourists	4.36 (0.90)	4.01 (0.93)	+0.35	+2.06	0.043*
Convenient location of facilities & equipment	4.16 (0.91)	3.84 (0.99)	+0.32	+2.02	0.047*
Good viewing & comfortable facilities	4.20 (1.00)	3.73 (1.08)	+0.47	+2.78	0.007*
Indifferent attributes					
Modern looking equipments & facilities	4.70 (4.62)	3.94 (1.17)	+0.76	+1.36	0.177
Giving prompt services	4.46 (0.86)	4.41 (0.99)	+0.05	+0.26	0.798
Informing tourists about what is offered	4.53 (0.78)	4.47 (0.83)	+0.06	+0.41	0.683

Safe & secure park	4.53 (0.70)	4.51 (0.86)	+0.02	+0.11	0.914
Convenient opening hours	4.47 (0.91)	4.37 (0.87)	+0.10	+0.71	0.481
Dissatisfying attributes					
Appealing and good condition of physical facilities and equipment	4.09 (1.11)	4.23 (1.00)	-0.14	-0.93	0.357
Uncrowded and unspoiled park and reserve	4.31 (0.93)	4.81 (1.60)	-0.50	-0.83	0.412
Available information centres with relevant information about the park & reserve	4.00 (1.19)	4.29 (0.84)	-0.29	-1.57	0.121
Accessibility of physical facilities & natural resources	3.81 (0.89)	3.96 (1.04)	-0.15	-0.86	0.395
Knowledge to answer questions	4.40 (0.84)	4.47 (0.85)	-0.07	-0.50	0.619
Adequate safe facilities	4.44 (0.91)	4.51 (0.78)	-0.07	-0.47	0.638
Understanding the specific needs	3.96 (0.96)	4.06 (0.90)	-0.10	-0.67	0.503
Reasonable prices	3.70 (1.10)	4.27 (0.85)	-0.57	-3.09	0.003*
Providing service quality worth the money paid	4.16 (1.00)	4.24 (1.01)	-0.08	-0.46	0.647

*= Significant at $\alpha_{0.05}$; **Note:** Standard deviations are in parentheses; Satisfaction means ranges from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied); Expectation means ranges from 1 (very low) to 5 (very high). A negative gap indicated that, tourists were dissatisfied with those attributes while a positive gap showed that, tourists were satisfied with those attributes.

Tourists' overall satisfaction with MMNP&R services

Respondents were asked to indicate their overall level of satisfaction with MMNP&R. From the research findings, majority (81.4%) of the respondents indicated that they were satisfied, very satisfied or extremely satisfied with service offered at MMNP&R (Table 5). The mean value of the respondents' overall perceived level of satisfaction was 5.36, which tended towards the high end of the satisfaction scale. As observed by King Har (2008), overall satisfaction is more like a general evaluation from past encounters rather than an instant assessment of an individual service encounter. King Har adds that since it is accumulated over time, overall customer satisfaction is held to be a more reliable measure of customer satisfaction. However, it is important to note that the overall satisfaction can be based on a few service encounters or many service encounters. From the study findings, it can be argued that MMNP&R provides tourists' with a satisfying experience. Thus, ideally, from the business perspective, the number of visitors visiting MMNP & R should at the very least, remain constant or at best increase over the years as a direct response to the quality of services provided.

Table 5: Tourists' Overall Level of Satisfaction with MMNP&R

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Extremely dissatisfied	1	1.4
Very dissatisfied	2	2.9
Neutral	9	12.9
Satisfied	24	34.3
Very satisfied	21	30
Extremely satisfied	12	17.1

Note: Overall satisfaction means ranges from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied)

Table 6 illustrates a two-tailed independent t-test and one-way ANOVA results of the mean difference of overall satisfaction by the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Previous studies by Beerli et al. (2004) assert that tourists' demographic characteristics are important factors that influence tourists' level of satisfaction. The findings of this research suggests otherwise. No significant difference between age, gender, education level and overall satisfaction of the respondents was found. In fact, the significant difference in the overall satisfaction of the respondents was found only by country of origin ($F=2.653$, $p<0.05$), whereby respondents from USA were found to be more satisfied than those from other regions. Likewise, no significant difference was found between the overall satisfaction of the first time and the repeat visitors to MMNP & R. Additionally, the study revealed that repeat tourists were more likely to be loyal, whereas first-timers were more likely to switch to other destinations. The results suggest preliminary confirmation of other studies by Akama and Kieti (2003) in Tsavo West National Park, where they found that repeat tourists were likely to be loyal. In fact, one of the tourists who has been making annual visits to Tsavo West National Park without fail had this to say:

...My husband and I always make sure that we visit this beautiful tropical country once a year and we have never been disappointed. There is always something new to experience in the wider expanses of Kenya's unique wilderness areas...

Table 6: Overall Satisfaction by Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variable	Frequency	Mean
Gender ($t=67.972$)		
Male	41	($n=70$) 5.32
Female	29	5.41
Age (Years) ($F=0.845$)		
19- 30	27	5.04
31 – 40	15	($n=68$) 5.60
Over 41	26	5.54
Country of Origin ($F=2.653^*$)		
Europe	48	5.56
Africa	15	4.47
Asia	2	($n=68$) 6.00
Middle East	2	5.50
USA	1	7.00

Education levels (F=1.258)

None	1		5.00
Primary	6	(n=70)	5.50
Secondary	22		4.95
University/College	41		5.56

*Note: Overall satisfaction mean ranges from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 7 (extremely satisfied) *p<0.05*

Generally speaking, tourism services mainly depend on several factors and tourists always try to buy that product which has many factors or attributes fulfilling their desire. Tourist satisfaction is developed on the information from all prior experiences with the service supplier and is considered as a function of all prior transaction and information (Paulrajan and Rajkumar, 2011). Consequently, the level of tourist satisfaction holds a considerable influence in the relation of tourist intention for repeat visitation to a destination. In fact according to Metin (2001) the strength of the association between tourist overall satisfaction and behavioural intentions to visit destinations is substantial. Thus, delivering superior service is the best way for success and survival of the business in today's competitive environment.

Conclusion and recommendation

This study sought to evaluate tourist satisfaction with the quality of service offered in MMNP&R and identify attributes that influence tourists' satisfaction. The study established that tourists were generally satisfied with the MMNP&R experience with the overall performance of the tourist's services exceeding or at least meeting their expectations. The general appearance and performance of the staff were among the satisfying attributes while calm marine environment and abundance of marine life also enhanced tourist experience. Dissatisfying attributes included condition and safety of physical facilities, and availability of information centres. Most tourists were interested in making repeat visits to MMNP&R which confirms high satisfaction levels.

This study contributes to the body of literature on visitor satisfaction with marine environment in Africa and in Kenya where there is lack of comprehensive information on tourist expectations and satisfaction levels with services offered in marine protected areas. The findings can be used as a guide for marine protected areas to improve crucial quality attributes and enhance service quality and business performance. Besides, the findings reveal that the management of marine protected areas in Kenya need to focus on the identified dissatisfying attributes, in particular, the condition and safety of physical facilities, and availability of information centres in its effort to achieve repeat visitation and positive word of mouth.

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