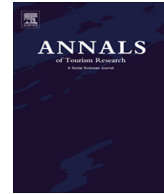




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# Africans and protected areas: North–South perspectives



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### ABSTRACT

The paper critically explores why most black Africans rarely visit protected areas. More specifically, the study examines non-Western tourists' perceptions of nature and nature-based tourism in comparison to Western tourists, using Botswana as a case study. The differences in perceptions are explored by adopting an interpretive paradigm to collect and analyze the data and using the North–South conceptualization of nature and tourism. Results indicate that for Western tourists visiting Botswana, nature symbolizes recreation, rejuvenation, and an opportunity “to get away from it all,” whereas for Botswana, it is perceived as a part of everyday life, not an exclusive leisure space. Furthermore, Botswana's conceptualization, relation to nature, and historical, cultural, and political backgrounds help explain their non-participation in nature-based tourism.

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### Introduction

Globally, protected areas receive about 8 billion visitors annually (Center for Responsible Travel, 2015). With an increasing number of people living in urban areas and adopting modern facilities and technologies, a clear disconnect with nature has occurred, thereby making “getting back in touch with nature” the ultimate holiday experience for urbanites (Kuenzi & McNeely, 2008). For many

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developing regions, nature-based tourism plays an important role in the economy. In southern Africa, it generates approximately the same revenue as farming, forestry, and fisheries combined (Balmford, Beresford, Green, Naidoo, & Walpole, 2009). Tourism is synonymous with wildlife safaris in numerous countries in the region (Ferreira, 2004), and many have designated large proportions of their land as protected areas. For example, 39% of land in Botswana has been allocated to wildlife and nature-based tourism management (Department of Tourism, 2012).

Despite this, locals' visitation to protected areas remains very low in Botswana. In 2011, domestic tourists comprised only 13% of non-guided visitors and eight percent of mobile tour operator clients (DWNP, 2014). This may be a reflection of the perception that international tourists are guests and locals can only be hosts (Alneng, 2002). The absence of locals in their protected areas and lack of appreciation of their own natural heritage could be a major impediment to the long-term sustainability of these spaces in post-colonial Africa. It is therefore important to gain insight into people's views and perceptions of protected areas (Karanth & Nepal, 2012).

This paper aims to identify Botswana's perceptions of nature-based tourism by comparing them to those of international tourists visiting the two most popular protected areas in Botswana: Chobe National Park (CNP) and Moremi Game Reserve (MGR). For this study, domestic tourists and local residents will be defined as citizens of Botswana (also known as *Batswana*<sup>2</sup>) and international tourists will be defined as Westerners visiting Botswana, as most of them are from Europe, North America or Australia. Given the low numbers of Botswana visiting national parks and game reserves, this study was guided by the following research questions: (i) what do nature-based destinations mean to locals? (ii) What meanings do locals attach to travel and tourism? (iii) Is tourism important to them? and (iv) What hinders travel to protected areas?

This study aims to bring a better understanding of a phenomenon that is yet to be fully addressed in the tourism literature. As developing countries such as Botswana look to diversify their economies and tourism industries, understanding their domestic markets is essential. By studying the national market, interventions based on local information can be implemented, thereby ensuring the sustainability of the industry. Furthermore, the past decade has seen growths in Botswana's per capita income, hence the domestic market offers prospects for tourism growth (Leechor & Fabricius, 2004). Moreover, commentators such as Berno (1999) suggest that tourism should be understood from an emic point, thereby developing native definitions of tourist and tourism.

This study provides a starting point for understanding and giving African tourists a voice in tourism research. By examining locals' thoughts, this study not only addresses a gap in the tourism literature in which the voice of Africans has been absent, but also contributes to an increased overall understanding of what tourism means to Africans as tourists. To lay out the foundation and help contextualize this study, we provide a synopsis of tourism in Botswana, followed by the theoretical groundwork, and a review of the literature on non-Western views of tourism and tourists.

## Literature review

### *Tourism in Botswana*

Botswana's economy depends on its natural resources: diamonds and tourism contribute 35% and 10.5% to the country's GDP, respectively (Throup, 2011). The country's tourism industry is heavily dependent on wildlife and wilderness, so tourism is promoted for economic reasons and to protect the environment (Department of Tourism, 2012). Protected areas, the main tourist attractions, are popular among international tourists (DWNP, 2014). The dependence on international markets and the alienation of locals from their own national parks call for a deeper understanding of the domestic tourism market.

Domestic tourism accounts for approximately 83% of global tourism (Pierret, 2011). Domestic tourists have the advantage of being familiar with their destination, its language and cultural context, so during their visits, they promote cohesion, goodwill, and cultural understanding (Pierret, 2011). They

<sup>2</sup> Botswana = country, Motswana = citizen of Botswana (singular), Batswana = citizen of Botswana (plural).

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