



Segmentation by motivation for rural tourism activities in The Gambia



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HIGHLIGHTS

- We conduct a survey of 430 tourists in The Gambia to find out about market potential for rural tourism.
- We employ a combined factor-clustering method to extract distinct market segments for tourism activities in The Gambia.
- We find four distinct market segments.
- There is high (latent) market potential for rural tourism businesses in The Gambia.
- We sketch out a ‘development path’ on how an event-based rural tourism can actually be implemented.

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ABSTRACT

In The Gambia, as in many other African countries, rural areas rarely profit from the turnover earned in the country's tourism sector. In academic and political literature, however, rural tourism is frequently identified as a diversification strategy that may trigger local economic development in remote communities. To promote rural tourism development, further knowledge is required to understand why tourists are motivated to engage in distinct tourism market segments. In this study, survey data was collected from 450 tourists in The Gambia using a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was constructed to identify the key characteristics and motivations of tourists so that the significant market segments could be categorized and the (latent) tourist demand for rural tourism activities could be gauged. This study identified four distinct segments of tourists in The Gambia: *heritage & nature seekers*, *multi-experiences seekers*, *multi-experiences & beach seekers*, and *sun & beach seekers*. Drawing on our key findings, we conclude by identifying a development path that could diversify Gambia's tourism sector. The development path would also include event-based rural tourism initiatives that align with the motivations of the identified market segments and may additionally benefit rural communities by reducing economic leakage rates.

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1. Introduction & background

In many developing countries, a growing tourism industry is seen as a potential solution to issues such as low employment rates

or the need for foreign currencies and generating higher government revenues (Rahier, 2008). In The Gambia, the tourism industry's contribution to monetary GDP was an estimated 13% in 2004 and is projected to increase to approximately 18% in 2020 (Mitchell & Faal, 2007, p. 6). Likewise, in the same period of time, tourism-generated employment is projected to increase from around 16,000 jobs in 2004 to around 35,000 in 2020 (Rahier, 2008, p. 2).⁴ Still, The Gambia's most important source of income is groundnuts,

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⁴ Employment figures are for full-time jobs, or full-time equivalents in the case of persons who may derive only part of their income from tourism. The total number of people either fully or partly dependent on tourism, i.e. in the informal sector, is larger than the employment figures alone would suggest.

“but it is unable to compete with subsidised American peanut farmers” (Goodwin & Bah, 2006, p. 1). Thus, developing the Gambian tourism industry has some major advantages, as developed countries cannot place tariff barriers against tourism exports.

Tourism development in The Gambia, however, is somewhat limited as it is mainly restricted to “sun and beach” activities and high seasonal fluctuations in tourism revenues (Job & Lutzenberger, 2009). Owing to the low diversification of tourism offerings, The Gambia has difficulties standing out from numerous other sun and beach destinations, although the tourism industry has been encouraged by the Gambian Government since the late 1960s to foster the country’s economic development (Thompson, O’Hare, & Evans, 1995, p. 580). Given the growing international competition in the global tourism marketplace, tourist destinations are trying hard to identify unique market positions to be able to compete effectively (Leslie & Wilson, 2006).

One way of achieving competitive advantage over other tourism destinations is to establish rural tourism as a tourism development strategy (Petrzelka, Krannich, Brehm, & Trentelman, 2005). Furthermore, rural tourism has been discussed as having some potential to combat the high leakage rate of foreign currency or the non-arrival of capital in the Gambian tourism sector (Rahier, 2008, p. 4). Currently, for The Gambia, a leakage rate of 75% is reported, due to repatriation of profits earned by foreign investors and tour operators, imported skilled labour and luxury products, and marketing, transport and other services based in the originating country (Ashley, Boyd, & Goodwin, 2000). Approximately 84% of tourists arriving in The Gambia are on package tours, which include flights, transfers and accommodation (Emerging Market Group, 2005). Package tourism significantly reduces the share from tourism turnover for Gambian tourism businesses, as most of the money spent by tourists remains in the countries of their origin (Job & Lutzenberger, 2009, p. 191).

It has been argued that one form of reducing leakages is through locals becoming more directly involved in terms of ownership and levels of control of tourism businesses (Ashley & Roe, 2002; Mahony & van Zyl, 2002; Scheyvens, 2002; Simpson, 2008, p. 6): Community-based tourism enterprises (CBTE) or Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT) initiatives have been predominantly observed in collaboration with the informal tourism sector in The Gambia. Here, new partnerships and business linkages have been developed to encourage tourists to purchase locally produced crafts and curios (Bah & Goodwin, 2003; Goodwin, 2002, p. 7). Rural tourism can help remote communities to become directly involved in and benefit from tourism by generating and diversifying revenues for farmers and helping to create a value-added market channel for local products, such as handicrafts (Park & Yoon, 2009, p. 99). Snyman (2012) reports on various impacts of CBTE and ecotourism from studies in Botswana, Malawi and Namibia. Results show that additional jobs were created by community-based tourism initiatives in rural areas and “monthly income from ecotourism employment was shown to enable households to invest in assets, education and ‘luxury’ goods, which improved financial security and social welfare in remote, rural areas” (Snyman, 2012, p. 395). Mafunzwaini and Hugo (2005) found similar evidence from field surveys and interviews with stakeholders of the tourism industry in Limpopo province in South Africa, and reported that rural tourism was a viable development tool for that area (Mafunzwaini & Hugo, 2005). Likewise, Lapeyre (2010) reports on findings from field work in Namibia and states that a CBTE, the Daureb Mountain Guides association in the Tsiseb Conservancy in Namibia, indeed was proven to contribute to local livelihood, empowerment, training through on-the-job learning, diversification of income, and enhancement of resilience to unexpected negative shocks. Lapeyre (2010), however, also points to a negative development of

some CBTEs in the long run, as CBTEs can suffer from weak institutional and managerial capacity and inadequate support by donors and non-governmental organizations as well as lack of competitive advantages within a highly competitive tourism commodity chain.

More recently, community benefit tourism initiatives (CBTIs) have been discussed as a concept to develop a form of tourism that benefits local communities and hence reduces leakages. In CBTIs, community participation is aimed for but not seen as necessary to deliver benefits to local communities, as involving communities might prove difficult in achieving “the goal of benefit delivery [due to] internal conflicts or unrealistic expectations” (Simpson, 2008, p. 2). CBTIs focus on benefit delivery by the success of tourism enterprises and by implementing a professional management network of stakeholders (e.g. industry, government, and NGOs). Such investors may be more willing to invest in the development of rural tourism businesses and may be less concerned about including community shareholders and decision makers. In the past, some CBTIs proved that externally owned tourism businesses indeed delivered economic benefit to locals. Examples include direct employment or employment in related jobs, higher social standards, health care and health insurance, and educational benefits (Simpson, 2008).

Rural tourism activities, however, make for only a small proportion of the net earnings in the Gambian tourism sector at present. At the political level, alternative tourism strategies have been discussed for helping spread tourism business from the urban to the rural space; however, governmental bodies have not yet come to an agreement on appropriate concepts and development strategies (see Bah & Goodwin, 2003; Emerging Market Group, 2005; Republic of The Gambia, Office of the President, 2010). Other governmental or government-related agencies have set up tourism policy recommendations for The Gambia, such as the “Responsible Tourism Policy” (by the Responsible Tourism Partnership), that encourage locals to participate more in tourism (Goodwin, 2002). The Responsible Tourism Partnership has “an increasing interest [...] that over the next decade tourism will develop in the rural areas” (Goodwin, 2002, p. 5) in order to increase revenues earned in the tourism sector. The Gambia Tourism Authority (GTA) is seeking to implement this policy recommendation through partnerships with local communities and non-governmental associations in supporting rural tourism development.

Tourism in The Gambia is affected by seasonal climatic change, which leads to high seasonal variation in visitor numbers. In the low season, between April and October, turnover in tourism is very low and makes for only around 30% compared with high season earnings (Emerging Market Group, 2005). This recently led Job and Lutzenberger (2009) to state that “there has been no progress [in The Gambia] to extend the season into the European Summer” (p. 196). The authors, however, argue that tourist arrivals during the off-season period are low because no major new markets or market segments, such as rural tourism, have been developed. There is a need, therefore, not only to promote the country’s tourism sector but also to develop new tourism products that can both balance the seasonal fluctuations and benefit rural communities. Consequently, in this study, we investigate the market potential for rural tourism with a special focus on the off-season period.

The study aims to analyze the market potential for rural tourism activities in The Gambia by surveying tourists in The Gambia with regard to their characteristics, motivations, and preferences. The Gambia was chosen as the case study area as it has received little attention in tourism research and because it is predominantly regarded as a developing country where seaside tourism is the prevalent form of tourism (Job & Lutzenberger, 2009, p. 192). Having close to 111,000 tourist arrivals in 2005, The Gambia is one

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