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Research note

Application of destination choice model: Factors influencing domestic tourists destination choice among residents of Nairobi, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to assess the status of Kenya's tourist destinations and the factors that determine their choices among the residents of Nairobi. The study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey design that covered 118 respondents randomly selected from adult patrons at an up-market shopping mall in Nairobi. Data were collected using self-administered questionnaires. The Hypotheses were tested using chi-squares and Pearson Product–Moment Correlation at 95% confidence level. The results indicated that tourism in Kenya is almost exclusively centred on the south coast beaches and a handful of game reserves or national parks. The Kenya's domestic tourist market considered individual trait factors as being more significant in determining the choice of a holiday destination than the environmental factors. The findings further indicated that the factors that motivated Nairobi residents in the choice of domestic tourism destination in rank order include: knowledge and adventure; economic concerns; personal safety; destination information; travel arrangement; destination features; family and friends; leisure and relaxation; religious and cultural considerations and travel bragging. Statistical tests failed to reject the hypothesis that majority of Kenya's domestic tourist attraction areas do not fall within the evoked set of the destination choice model.

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1. Introduction

Domestic tourism has the potential to make several economic and socio-cultural contributions to a country, key among them being national integration and cohesion and creation of opportunities through various economic linkages at destinations (Cooper, Fletcher, Gilbert, & Wanhill, 1993). Additionally, while accounting for 80% of tourism in the world, it can also cushion economies from the volatile international tourism business. Kenya's tourism industry has experienced rapid growth in recent times, except for effects of the world economic crisis and political unrest in 2008 and the industry contributes over 10% of gross domestic product, despite recent upheavals (Republic of Kenya, 2000, p. 57 & 58; Republic of Kenya, 2006). However one of the problems facing the industry is over-reliance on the international market (Dieke, 1994). Packaging and presentation of tourism products, as well as pricing are oriented towards international markets. Anecdotally, the percentage of domestic market of overall tourism activities is small despite the industry being relatively mature. Consequently this study sought to profile Kenyan destinations within the destination choice sets of domestic tourists and establish the factors that determine destination choice among those tourists. The data were collected in Nairobi due to its affluence and the fact that it is Kenya's political and commercial capital.

2. Destination choice model

The study was based on a framework adapted from the Destination Choice Sets model (Hill, 2000). The two sets of factors i.e. the environmental factors and individual trait factors impact upon the destination transformation or the destination funnelling process and the final choice. Environmental factors refer to external forces (outside the individual) such as sources of information, culture, family, lifestyle, and destination features, among others that influence purchase decisions. Individual trait factors, on the other hand, refer to the personal characteristics such as personal motivation, personality, past experiences, among others that also affect decisions by the individual (Hill, 2000). A feedback system exists between the environmental and the individual trait factors. For instance, the level of disposable income may influence an individual's motivation to travel.

Within the funnelling process, there are four sets of destinations. The awareness set includes all travel locations which people might consider as potential destinations before any decision

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process about their trip has been initiated. For some destinations, the potential traveller might have too little information to consider. Such destinations would form the inert set. Some destinations would be rejected as destinations one would consider visiting. These would form the inept set. The evoked set includes all the travel destinations which potential travellers might consider being reasonable alternatives in selecting a specific destination. A final destination choice would be made from the evoked set. Destinations can be classified based on either their components i.e. the cognitive component (the physical features of the destination) and the affective component (relating to the tourists' values and motives) or tourist orientation, i.e. tourist-oriented or non-tourist-oriented (Baloglu, 2001; Baloglu & Brinberg, 1997; Cohen, 1988; Gartner, 1993; Lynch, 1972; Naoi, 2003). It is necessary to examine the destination classification in Kenya as this would form a key component in any effective destination positioning. For the purposes of this study, the seven circuits framework used by Kenya Tourist Board (KTB) was applied. Each of the circuits was regarded as a destination.

3. Methodology

The target population was Kenyan adult urban residents, both citizens and foreign nationals, who were considered as being endowed with high disposable income, education, exposure and mobility-factors considered favourable for the demand for the tourist product. The sampling frame included all adult shoppers in the chosen up-market Sarit Centre shopping mall in Nairobi.

A total of 118 respondents were randomly sampled from food courts within the mall over a period of several days. This study adopted a cross-sectional descriptive survey design. Destination choice sets were presented using the different levels of tourist destination awareness phrases i.e. "not aware (unawareness set)"; "aware but I need more information to decide on visiting (inert set)"; "aware but would not prefer visiting (inert set)"; "aware and I would very much wish to visit (evoked)" and; the "final destination choice". The respondents were also tested on their likelihood to take packaged holidays on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from "1" = Most unlikely to "5" = Most likely. The relative importance of factors influencing the choice of a domestic holiday destination namely personal trait factors (those within the respondent), and environmental factors (those factors outside the respondents sphere of control was investigated. The responses were recorded on a five-point Likert Scale ranging from "1" = Not Important to "5" = Very Important.

4. Results and discussions

Out of the 118 total respondents, 52% were males and 48% females. 90% of the respondents were Kenyan citizens while 10% were non-Kenyan citizens. The average age of the respondents was 34 years and an average income of Ksh.51, 478 (US$643). The majority of the respondents (76%) cited personal savings as their main source of holiday finances. On the importance of taking a holiday, 62% of the Kenyan citizens considered taking a holiday as either important or very important compared to 59% non-Kenyan citizens. More singles (74%) considered taking a holiday as being important compared to the married (44%). As pertains to gender, slightly more females (65%) considered taking a holiday as being important compared to the males (58%). Thus, majority of Kenyan citizens consider taking a local holiday as being important contrary to a widely held view that tourism in Kenya is a preserve of foreigners (Dieke, 1994). The finding that more singles considered taking a holiday as being important compared to the married respondents confirms the assertions by Kotler, Brown, and Makens (2003) that family commitments serves as a limiting to tourism demand. The Kenyan situation that more female respondents considered taking a holiday as being important compared to the male ones is in line with findings of Manninka (2005) at women travellers are increasingly forming the highest growthsegment in the travel industry.

The most popular tourist circuit is the Mombasa and the Coral Coast (Table 1). The least popular circuit is the Northern Tourist circuit. Although Nairobi National park was the most frequently visited domestic tourist attraction, Mombasa is the most popular destination with a repeat visit rate of 81.48% compared to the 52.3% of Nairobi National park. Nairobi National Park's popularity may partially be attributed to its proximity to the area of study. These findings confirm the findings of other studies that tourism in Kenya is almost exclusively centred on two geographical areas: the south coast beaches and a handful of game reserves or national parks (www.planetware.com [accessed on 21.05.07] in: www.idrc.ca [accessed on 21.05.07]). The study found out that individual traits (push factors) are more significant than the environmental factors (pull factors) as determinants of tourist destination choice (Tables 2–4). This might to some extent be attributed to the fact that most Kenyans were not aware of the tourist offers in most of the destinations, which would otherwise form the "pull factors" This view is supported by the fact that most of Kenya's domestic market rely more on personal experience and the "significant others? (i.e. others? personal experiences) and regard as the least, the internet and tourism marketers (Fig. 1).

Table 1
Visitation of attractions.

Tourist attraction	$N = 118$	Frequency (x)	%	Number of Visits	
				Once	More than once
Nairobi N. Park		88	75	42	46
Mombasa		81	69	15	66
L. Nakuru N. P		68	58	32	36
Masai Mara G. R		63	53	42	18
The North Coast Resort		56	47	7	49
The South Coast Resort		52	44	15	37
Amboseli		50	42	35	15
Hells Gate N. Park		47	40	30	17
Lake Bogoria		41	35	28	13
Malindi & Watamu Resorts		41	35	15	26
Arberdare Ranges		32	27	18	14
Tsavo N. Park		31	26	19	12
Mt. Kenya N. Park		31	26	21	10
Mt. Longonot N. P		30	25	19	11
Kakamega Forest		23	19	12	11
Lamu Island		23	19	12	11
Chyulu Hills		20	17	13	7
Samburu N Reserve		16	14	11	5
Shaba N. Reserve		16	14	10	6
Kisumu Impala Sanctuary		15	13	8	7
Meru N Park		15	13	11	4
Buffalo Springs N. Park		14	12	9	5
Shimba Hills N.P		13	11	12	1
Kerio Valley Reserve		13	11	10	3
Oldonyo Sabuk N. Park		11	9	8	3
Ndeere Island		10	8	8	2
Arabuko Sokoke Forest		9	8	6	3
Mt. Elgon N.P		9	8	4	5
Saiwa Swamp N.P		9	8	8	1
L. Turkana Central Island		9	8	6	3
Sibiloi N. Reserve		9	8	8	1
Maralal South Island		8	7	4	4
Rahole N Reserve		6	5	5	1

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Table 2
Factors influencing the choice of a domestic holiday destination.

Factor	*N*	Very significant (5)	Significant (4)	Total (5 + 4)	%
Get an opportunity to increase my knowledge of the country	110	75	20	95	89.6
Visiting places I have never been to before	106	78	16	94	88.7
Seeing unique features of the area	106	59	25	84	79.3
Destination that would provide value for holiday money	105	56	27	83	79
Experience new and different lifestyle	110	67	13	80	72.7
Outstanding scenery	108	63	16	79	73.2
Nice weather	101	53	23	76	75.3
To find thrills and excitement	105	45	30	75	71.4
Destination that will suit my household budget	105	59	16	75	71.4
Meet new and different people of different ethnic background	110	47	25	72	65.5
Possibility for recreation activities for the entire family	100	44	25	69	69
Availability of important information about the destination	104	41	28	69	66.4
A place that is easy to access	104	49	20	69	66.4
Standards of hygiene and cleanliness of the destination	105	57	11	68	64.8
Unpolluted environment	104	49	17	66	63.5
Travel arrangement (packaged/non-packaged)	105	44	21	65	61.9
Personal safety	104	59	5	64	61.5
Get a change from a busy job	106	42	20	62	58.5
Being together as a family	106	47	15	62	58.5
Exotic atmosphere	103	41	16	57	55.3
The best economic deal I could get	104	34	23	57	54.8
Seeking a place to just relax, doing nothing at all	106	37	20	57	53.8
Interesting rural countryside	99	28	28	56	57.6
Seeking a place to just have fun and luxury	105	43	12	55	52.4
Buildings and places of historical or archaeological importance	101	35	19	54	53.5
Get away from home area	110	34	20	54	49.1
Outdoor activities	100	34	19	53	53
Religious and cultural considerations	105	28	23	51	48.6
Meeting people with similar interest	107	30	21	51	47.7
Visiting friends and relatives	106	16	19	35	33
Going places my friends have not been	106	17	13	30	28.3
Primitive outdoor camping	101	15	12	27	26.7
To be like my friends/relatives/colleagues	105	10	5	15	14.3

Table 3
Individual traits factors ("Push factors").

Factor	*N*	Very significant (5)	Significant (4)	Total (5 + 4)	%
Get an opportunity to increase my knowledge of the country	110	75	20	95	89.6
Visiting places I have never been to before	106	78	16	94	88.7
Seeing unique features of the area	106	59	25	84	79.3
Experience new and different lifestyle	110	67	13	80	72.7
To find thrills and excitement	105	45	30	75	71.4
Meet new and different people of different ethnic background	110	47	25	72	65.5
Being together as a family	106	47	15	62	58.5
Get a change from a busy job	106	42	20	62	58.5
The best economic deal I could get	104	34	23	57	54.8
Seeking a place to just relax, doing nothing at all	106	37	20	57	53.8
Seeking a place to just have fun and luxury	105	43	12	55	52.4
Get away from home area	110	34	20	54	49.1
Meeting people with similar interest	107	30	21	51	47.7
Going places my friends have not been	106	17	13	30	28.3

Table 4
Environmental factors ("Pull factors").

Factor	*N*	Very signicant (5)	Significant (4)	Total (5 + 4)	%
Destination that would provide value for holiday money	105	56	27	83	79
Nice weather	101	53	23	76	75.3
Outstanding scenery	108	63	16	79	73.2
Destination that will suit my household budget	105	59	16	75	71.4
Possibility for recreation activities for the entire family	100	44	25	69	69
Availability of important information about the destination	104	41	28	69	66.4
A place that is easy to access	104	49	20	69	66.4
Standards of hygiene and cleanliness of the destination	105	57	11	68	64.8
Unpolluted environment	104	49	17	66	63.5
Travel arrangement (packaged/non-packaged)	105	44	21	65	61.9
Personal safety	104	59	5	64	61.5
Interesting rural countryside	99	28	28	56	57.6
Exotic atmosphere	103	41	16	57	55.3
Buildings and places of historical or archaeological importance	101	35	19	54	53.5
Outdoor activities	100	34	19	53	53
Primitive outdoor camping	101	15	12	27	26.7

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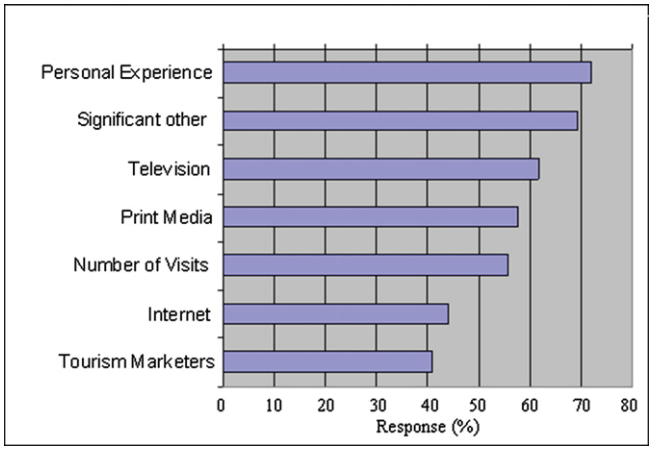


Fig. 1. Sources of travel information.

Table 5
Importance of information sources in creating destination awareness.

Source of information	*N*	Very significant (5)	Significant (4)	Total (5 + 4)	%
Personal experience	109	63	22	85	78
Friends/colleagues/relatives	106	70	12	82	77.4
Television	106	45	28	73	68.9
Print media	104	39	29	68	65.4
Number of visits	104	40	26	66	63.5
Internet	104	38	14	52	50
Travel agents/marketers	110	20	28	48	43.6

The results confirm the findings by Beerli and Martin (2004) that while the primary sources of information (e.g. previous experience) will influence the perceived destination image, the secondary sources of information (e.g. interpersonal interactions) play a relevant and essential role in forming images of the alternative destinations to be considered in the choice process (Tables 5 and 6). Such was the view by Crompton (1981), Gitelson and Crompton (1983), and Nolan (1976).

Factor analysis of the data indicated that the top five most important push factors were: "opportunities to increase one's knowledge"; "going places I have never been before", "seeing unique features of the area"; "experience new and different lifestyle"; "to find thrills and excitement" (Table 7). On the other hand, "going places my friends have not been" and "to be like my friends/ relatives/colleagues" were considered the least important. The top five most important pull factors included: "destination that would provide value for holiday money"; "nice weather"; "outstanding scenery"; "destination that will suit my household budget"; "possibility for recreation activities for the entire family".

Table 6
Importance of information sources in making final destination choice.

Source of information	*N*	Very significant (5)	Significant (4)	Total (5 + 4)	%
Personal experience	100	61	24	85	85
Friends/colleagues/relatives	107	62	20	82	76.6
Print media	103	37	41	78	75.7
Number of visits	102	40	26	66	64.7
Television	98	44	16	60	61.2
Internet	99	41	12	53	53.5
Travel agents/marketers	103	27	19	46	44.7

Table 7
Mean ratings of performance of factors determining destination choice.

Factor	Mean	Std dev
Factor1: Knowledge and adventure	4.06	0.52
Get an opportunity to increase my knowledge of the country	4.41	1.11
Visiting places I have never been to before	4.54	0.94
Seeing unique features of the area	4.19	1.18
Meet new and different people of different ethnic background	3.85	1.29
Meeting people with similar interest	3.24	1.44
Experience new and different lifestyle	4.14	1.29
Factor 2: Economic concerns	3.86	0.32
Destination that will suit my household budget	3.98	1.39
Destination that would provide value for holiday money	4.11	1.39
The best economic deal I could get	3.5	1.4
Factor3: Personal safety	3.78	1.58
Personal safety	3.78	1.59
Factor4: Destination information	3.75	1.36
Availability of important information about the destination	3.75	1.36
Factor 5: Travel arrangement		
Travel arrangement	3.72	1.38
Factor6: Destination features	3.65	0.42
Interesting rural countryside	3.59	1.23
Exotic atmosphere	3.57	1.45
A place that is easy to access	3.82	1.40
Standards of hygiene and cleanliness of the destination	3.93	1.37
Unpolluted environment	3.79	1.42
Nice weather	4.05	1.28
Outstanding scenery	4.13	1.25
Buildings and places of historical or archaeological importance	3.5	1.40
Outdoor activities	3.48	1.37
Primitive outdoor camping	2.65	1.40
Travel arrangement (packaged/non-packaged)	3.72	1.38
Factor 7: Family and friends	3.54	0.49
Visiting friends and relatives	2.97	1.31
Possibility for recreation activities for the entire family	3.85	1.30
Being together as a family	3.8	1.30
Factor8: Leisure and Relaxation	3.54	0.29
To find thrills and excitement	3.98	1.18
Seeking a place to just have fun and luxury	3.54	1.49
Get away from home area	3.27	1.51
Get a change from a busy job	3.56	1.51
Seeking a place to just relax, doing nothing at all	3.35	1.57
Factor 9: Religious and cultural considerations	3.22	1.48
Religious and cultural considerations	3.22	1.48
Factor 10:Travel bragging	2.27	0.42
Going places my friends have not been	2.57	1.47
To be like my friends/relatives/colleagues	1.98	1.33

A 5-point Likert-type Scale: 5 = Very Significant, 4 = Significant, 3 = Fairly Significant, 2 = Insignificant, 1 = Totally insignificant.

Travel arrangement was found to be one of the most significant environmental factors that would influence choice of a destination As such, holiday packages will not only be a marketing enticement to the domestic market, but will also help to open up less popular destinations.

The majority of Kenya's domestic tourist attraction areas do not fall within the evoked set of the destination choice sets. Out of the 38 attractions identified by the KTB, only 46.7% of the total destinations were found to fall within the evoked set. The study failed to accept the null hypothesis that the determinants of domestic destination choices are not significantly different among Nairobi residents of different socioeconomic and demographic status with a chi-squared statistic of 95.2 against a distribution chi-square of 82.7 at 5% significance level being obtained.

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5. Conclusion

The study established that Nairobi residents and, therefore Kenyans may not be aware of domestic tourist destinations as classified by the Kenya Tourist Board. Most respondents seem not to have sufficient information that would enable them decide on whether to visit the areas. Further, tourism in Kenya is almost exclusively centred on the south coast beaches and a handful of game reserves or national parks. The most popular tourist circuit is the Mombasa and the Coral Coast while the Northern Tourist Circuit is the least popular with the domestic tourist market. Individual traits factors were regarded as being more significant than the environmental factors in determining travel destination choice. Specific key factors that determine the choice of a domestic tourist destination in Kenya include the need for knowledge and adventure; economic concerns; destination Information and travel arrangement. This study thus provides a simple and relatively cost effective application of the destination choice model.

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