

CRITICAL ECOTOURISM FACTORS APPLICABLE TO NATIONAL PARKS: A VISITOR PERSPECTIVE

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South Africa boasts 21 national parks managed by South African National Parks (SANParks), which is the leading conservation organization and also the largest provider of ecotourism experiences in South Africa. Because SANParks depends heavily on tourist spending, it is important to successfully develop and manage its tourism products and services. A key aspect of the successful development and management of ecotourism products is to have an understanding of how tourists perceive ecotourism. An insight to tourists' perceptions will assist in developing ecotourism guidelines, which will minimize negative impacts and at the same time add value to the tourist experience. The aim of this article is to determine critical ecotourism factors (CEFs) applicable to national parks from a visitor's perspective. A web survey was conducted via the SANParks' website. A factor analysis was performed and six factors were extracted. The factors include product development, local community involvement, environmentally friendly practices, food and activities, ethical behavior, and policies. It was the first time research of this nature had been conducted in South Africa. The results adhere to ecotourism characteristics. Key findings include: the high value respondents place on ethics and the importance of educational programs, staff training, visitor management, and environmentally friendly practices.

Key words: South Africa; Ecotourism; Perceptions; National parks; Factor analysis; SANParks

Introduction

According to the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), the growth of tourism is largely occurring in and around the globe's remaining natural areas (The International Ecotourism Society [TIES], 2006). Fillion, Foley, and Jacquemet (1992) indicated in as early as 1992 that 40–60% of

all international tourists are nature tourists, of which 20–40% are wildlife related. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) released statistics in 1998 that ecotourism and all nature-related forms of tourism account for approximately 20% of the total international tourism market (WTO, 1998). TIES (2006) has published statistics revealing that ecotourism/

nature tourism was growing globally three times faster than the tourism industry as a whole. South Africa has experienced the same trend in the growth of its ecotourism/wildlife tourism, where natural resources form the basis of the tourism industry, attracting millions of local and international ecotourists every year (Saayman, 2009; South African National Parks [SANParks], 2008).

One of the largest ecotourism providers in South Africa is SANParks (Saayman, 2009; SANParks, 2008). SANParks manages a system of parks that represents the indigenous fauna, flora, landscapes, and associated cultural heritage of the country. Most of the parks have overnight tourist facilities, with a variety of accommodation in arid, coastal, mountainous, and bushveld habitats. The 21 national parks offer visitors a range of diverse ecotourism activities such as game viewing, bush walks, canoeing, and exposure to cultural and historical experiences (SANParks, 2013).

During the 2010/2011 tourism season, the numbers of tourists to South African national parks increased by 0.5% from 4,512,478 to 4,536,491 (of which 80% were domestic tourists) with an average unit occupancy rate of 69.2%. This was significantly higher than the average occupancy rate of the rest of the accommodation sector in South Africa, which was 44–47% (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011; SANParks, 2011). This illustrates that national parks are major role players in providing ecotourism opportunities to foreign and local tourists in South Africa.

Research regarding visitor profiles, behavior, and travel motives to South African national parks during the period from 2002 to 2012 indicated that ecotourists to the national parks were brand loyal and visited national parks in South Africa at least two to three times per year (Kruger, Scholtz, & Saayman, 2012) (Table 1).

The profile of these tourists also correlates well with existing literature regarding the “ecotourist market profile.” Research has shown that ecotourists often seek more than the mere viewing of wildlife. They search for authentic experiences. Ecotourists often have a desire to escape from their daily routines and to relax, to “get away from it all.” It is for this reason that uncrowded, remote ecotourism destinations/sites are important aspects of the ecotourism experience. Further, ecotourists often seek experiences that provide a sense of closeness

Table 1
Visitor Profile of Tourists to South African National Parks

	Characteristics
Demographics	
Language	Afrikaans and English speaking
Province of origin	Gauteng was the biggest market, followed by Western Cape and Eastern Cape
Foreign visitors: country of origin	Foreign travelers were mostly from Germany, the Netherlands, and the UK, although various international markets were attracted to different parks
Education	Most visitors had a higher education qualification
Visitor behavior and motivations	
Reasons for visiting	Reasons varied for different parks, but included the following: learning about wildlife and nature; exploring a new destination; educational activities such as guided hiking trails/game drives; peace and quiet; scenic nature; appreciating endangered species; adventure activities such as canoeing
Type of accommodation	The preferred type of accommodation was self-catering which included: chalets, wooden huts, tented camps, and camping
Loyalty	Frequency of repeat visits had increased; The “Wild Card” had contributed to the frequency of visits

Source: Kruger et al. (2012).

to nature; they want to interact with and learn more about wildlife, nature, and local cultures. Other motivations include self-reflection, seeking adventure, self-actualization, and the sense of having a physical challenge (Backman, Petrick, & Wright, 2001; Beh & Bruyere, 2007; Chan & Baum, 2007; Wearing & Neil, 2009). The preferred type of accommodation in SANParks (self-catering, ranging from chalets to camping) also relates to the works of Fennell (2008) and Wight (1997), who aimed to provide a spectrum of different types of accommodation and their appropriateness to ecotourism. The different types of accommodation range on a continuum between

hard and soft. The “hard” side signifies the more primitive and closer to nature experience, whereas the more the experience moves to the “soft” side, the weaker the ecotourism experience will become. Weaver and Lawton (2002) added to this by identifying the “structured ecotourist,” who prefers a hard ecotourism experience when interacting with natural attractions, but a soft ecotourism experience at other times (e.g., comfortable accommodations and gourmet meals). Holden (2008) indicated that there are five major aspects to why people see themselves as ecotourists. They possess a sense of environmental responsibility; display a strong interest in learning about nature; love nature; participate in ecotourism activities such as observing wildlife; and visit national parks and other natural areas. The question that comes to mind is: What are the critical ecotourism factors (CEFs) from a visitor’s perspective?

It is important to understand CEFs as they provide park managers with guidelines to develop ecotourism products and services that suit the needs of ecotourists and assist in the management of sustainable ecotourism attractions. Therefore, the aim of this article is to determine the CEFs applicable to national parks from a visitor perspective. CEFs are those aspects that are key to the implementation of ecotourism principles. These factors therefore form the guidelines for the implementation of the said principles, which are significant because visitors play a key role in the ecotourism concept.

Ecotourism in Context

Ecotourism forms part of the sustainable tourism paradigm and although both have attracted much attention, little progress has been made to implement these principles in practice (Björk 2007; Fennell, 2002; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008; Wight, 2003). The term ecotourism dates back to the 1960s when a Mexican ecologist, Hetzer, first introduced the term ecotourism as a result of the increasing threat of exploitation to both the cultural and natural environments of destinations, as a result of mass tourism. These threats have increasingly been recognized and an intense debate has evolved concerning the ecological and social costs of tourism development (Björk, 2007; Pforr, 2001; Wearing & Neil, 2009). At first, ecologically oriented tourism (ecotourism) aimed at dealing with the issues of the immense

growth of mass tourism. This has led to alternative approaches to tourism development, which in turn have led to a range of new terms such as alternative tourism, sustainable tourism, responsible tourism, green tourism, and ecotourism, which forms an integrated part of nature-based tourism (Pforr, 2001) (see Fig. 1). Alternative forms of tourism differ from conventional (mass) tourism in the sense that they follow a sustainable approach, based on three pillars: to improve quality of life (sociocultural justice); to create a high-quality experience (economic efficiency) for the tourist; and to sustain the quality of the environment (environmental integrity) (Diamantis, 2004; Keyser, 2009; Saayman, 2009). To achieve economic prosperity while still maintaining sociocultural and environmental integrity it is necessary for all stakeholders to play a part in ensuring a sustainable tourism industry. Hence, the movement known as responsible tourism emerged. Responsible tourism can be seen as a management approach to achieve sustainable tourism development (Coetzee & Saayman, 2009; Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism [DEAT], 2003; Frey & George, 2010; Keyser, 2009). Figure 1 illustrates where ecotourism fits into the broader scope of alternative, sustainable, responsible, and wildlife tourism.

Hetzer (quoted by Fennell, 2008, p. 17; Higham, 2007, p. 2), who introduced the term ecotourism, identified four principles for ecotourism, namely that it: must have a minimum environmental impact; minimum impact on, and maximum respect for, the host community; maximum economic benefits for the host community; and maximum recreational satisfaction (including learning experience) for participating tourists. Although Hetzer was the person to introduce ecotourism, it was only later defined by Ceballos-Lascurain as: “travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals as well as any existing cultural manifestation (both past and present) found in these areas” (quoted in Björk, 2007, p. 27; Fennell, 2008, p. 18; Van der Merwe, 2004, p. 16).

This definition proved to be restrictive, as no reference was made to conservation. Ceballos-Lascurain himself later adjusted his definition by adding the conservation component as well as the idea of Hetzer to minimize the effects on the culture and nature and

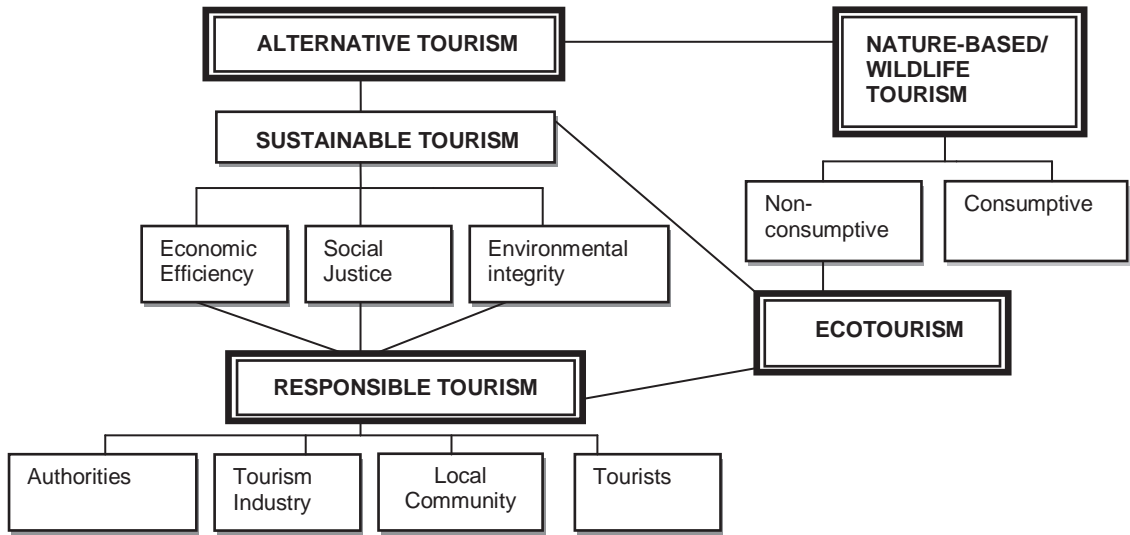


Figure 1. Ecotourism in the broader scope of sustainable nature-based tourism (adapted from: Coetzee & Saayman, 2009; DEAT, 2003; Higginbottom, 2004; Keyser, 2009; Newsome et al., 2005; Pforr, 2001).

maximize the benefits of tourism. Therefore, ecotourism was redefined as: “environmentally responsible travel and visitation to relatively undisturbed natural areas in order to enjoy and appreciate nature (and accompanying cultural features – both past and present), that promotes conservation, has low negative visitor impact, and provides beneficially active socio-economic involvement of local populations” (quoted in Björk, 2007, p. 27; Fennell, 2008, p. 17; Van der Merwe, 2004, p. 16).

Since the work of Ceballos-Lascurain appeared, numerous researchers have contributed to the attempt to define ecotourism. Following his article “A content analysis of ecotourism definitions,” Fennell (2007) aimed to define ecotourism after conducting a content analysis of 85 definitions, as: “a sustainable form of natural resource-based tourism that focuses primarily on experiencing and learning about nature, and which is ethically managed to be low- impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented (control, benefits, and scale). It typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation or preservation of such areas” (Fennell, 2008, p. 24). A similar analysis of ecotourism definitions was performed by Yacob, Radam, and Samdin (2011), who conducted a study regarding the perception and opinion of tourists towards ecotourism in Malaysia.

The definitions indicate that in the first place ecotourism occurs in a *natural or wildlife setting* and involves nature-based activities. Individuals are drawn to scenically appealing environments that incorporate aspects such as fauna and flora; geographical distinctiveness; and historical/cultural importance (Deng, King, & Bauer, 2002; Fennell, 2002). These natural areas owe their attractiveness and continuing existence largely to conservation reserves such as national parks and private conservation areas. It is for this reason that national parks have become popular ecotourism attractions, and also because they usually contain features such as remarkable natural scenery and topography, unique fauna and/or flora, unusual geological features, and cultural heritage (Hearne & Salinas, 2002; Lawton, 2001; Saayman, 2009). Lawton and Weaver (2001) argued that although emphasis is placed on *undisturbed natural areas*, spaces that have been modified (such as agricultural lands, urban and periurban areas, and even devastated landscapes) can also be utilized for ecotourism purposes, provided they contain some elements of the natural environment. Advantages of utilizing such areas for ecotourism include financial incentives to maintain and expand wildlife habitat; ecotourism in modified spaces can relieve pressure of this rapidly growing industry on undisturbed natural areas. Furthermore, these venues

are readily accessible and thus provide a more affordable and practical mode of ecotourism experience.

Secondly, the literature reveals that *local cultures* or local communities are an important component of ecotourism, particularly in developing countries (e.g., South Africa and India) where local cultures are viewed as part of the ecotourism product offering. Cole (2006) indicates that the community must be involved in the early planning stages in order to make suitable decisions and to promote greater motivation on the part of the local people. To overlook these rural communities is to overlook a large part of the ground principles of ecotourism (Blamey, 2001; Reid, 1999). Ways in which local communities can become involved in ecotourism could include any or all of the following: provision of knowledge while participating in an ecotourism activity or visiting an ecotourism product (information pertaining animal behavior, tracking, guiding), services (catering, cleaning, etc.), facilities management, and generating local products (souvenirs, arts and craft) (Diamantis, 2004; Page & Dowling, 2002; Van der Merwe, 2004; Yacob et al., 2011).

A third important aspect is local involvement, which could be beneficial to the community as the multiplier effects increase through local employment and the imported leakages due to expatriate (i.e., nonlocal) workers decline. Additional benefits to the community that could emerge because of ecotourism include improved *social welfare, education, and infrastructure* (Diamantis, 2004; Yacob et al., 2011). Fennell (2002) asserts that a variable of substantial importance is that development should meet the needs of the people in the long term, but that this must also be carried out in an ecologically sensitive and sustainable manner. It is therefore imperative that all role players recognize their responsibility in achieving *sustainable development*. Role players include authorities, the tourism providers, tourists, and the local community (Björk, 2007; Saayman, 2009).

The fourth aspect is *conservation* or environmental protection. Ecotourism has proved to have exerted a positive impact on wildlife where fauna and flora were once on the verge of extinction. In most cases, tourists pay for visits to ecotourism destinations that sustain conservation as governments do not always have the financial means to maintain the parks, as is the case of SANParks (Buckley, 2009). Wunder

(2000) adds that conservationists often see ecotourism as a “win–win” situation where tourist spending serves as a tool for capitalizing on biodiversity and natural sites and thus could constitute a vital contributor to nature conservation. Many countries have established wildlife reserves and have implemented firm laws to protect these species; consequently, many endangered species have begun to flourish again (Page & Connell, 2009).

Fifthly, Honey (2008) stated that one method to minimize the impact on the environment requires that visitor numbers be limited and that their behavior be managed. Consistent with most ecotourism definitions, a tool that is often employed to achieve the aforementioned is *environmental education*, which adds another important dimension to ecotourism and distinguishes it from other forms of tourism (Littlefair, 2004; Powell & Ham, 2008). Weaver (2001) maintains that environmental education has two main purposes. Because ecotourism draws visitors who desire to interact with the environment in order to increase their understanding, awareness, and appreciation thereof, the first purpose of education concerns providing an *enlightening experience* for the visitor and being able to satisfy the demand for information regarding the natural and cultural environment. Yacob et al. (2011) add that this generates satisfaction for tourists. The second purpose is to influence the attitude of the visitors, as well as the host community, to behave in a more environmentally and culturally sensitive manner (Honey, 2008; Littlefair, 2004; Page & Dowling, 2002; Van Wyk, 1995; Weaver, 2001). In addition to influencing the attitude and behavior of the host community by means of environmental education, the involvement and benefits received also play an important role in fostering a protective attitude towards the environment (Cole, 2006; Van der Merwe, 2004).

Drawing from the above-mentioned definitions of ecotourism, ecotourism is based on four pillars: conservation and enhancement of natural and cultural attractions, environmental education, sustainable management, and tourist experiences (Fig. 2).

- **Conservation and enhancement of natural and cultural attractions:** The natural environment contains vital resources of biodiversity and cultural heritage, which render these areas attractive

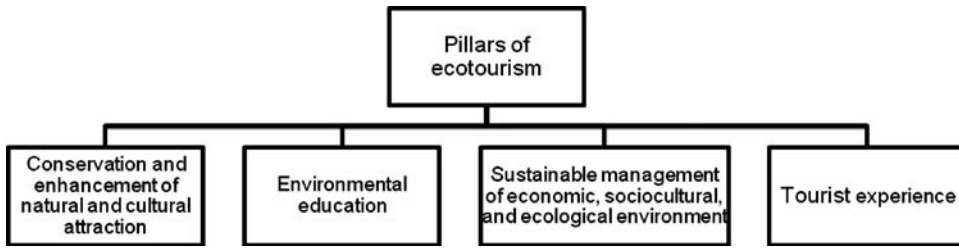


Figure 2. Pillars of ecotourism (adapted from: Blamey, 2001; Diamantis, 2004; Geldenhuys, 2009; Van der Merwe, 2004; Weaver, 2005; Yacob et al., 2011).

sites for development projects (Hearne & Salinas, 2002; Wood & Glasson, 2005). Saayman (2009) emphasized that the future of ecotourism is dependent on *sound environmental practices*.

- **Environmental education opportunities:** Page and Dowling (2002) point out that the vital characteristic that differentiates ecotourism from any other form of nature-based tourism is *environmental education and interpretation*. Further, these are significant tools to create an enjoyable and meaningful ecotourism experience.
- **Management practices that adhere to the principles of ecological, sociocultural, and economic sustainability:** Sustainable tourism management is based on three aspects: environmental management, social equity, and economic development. These need to be balanced to ensure sustainable tourism product development (Coetzee & Saayman, 2009).
- **Tourist satisfaction (experience):** Clearly, ecotourism experiences are created by integrating a number of factors. The purpose of creating these experiences is to satisfy the needs and wants of current and potential ecotourists (Chan & Baum, 2007; Clifton & Benson, 2006).

Because tourist satisfaction (tourist experience) is identified as being one of the core pillars of ecotourism (Chan & Baum, 2007; Clifton & Benson, 2006; Geldenhuys, 2009) it is important for ecotourism product developers to determine how ecotourists perceive ecotourism. An understanding of tourist perceptions is also important in that it provides developers with information to help prevent the occurrence of negative impacts on the environment and communities, while also creating experiences to meet the expectations of the ecotourism

market (Clifton & Benson, 2006; Petrosillo, Zurlini, Corliano, Zaccarelli, & Dadamo, 2007). Such an understanding further assists ecotourism product providers to educate tourists with regards to the principles of ecotourism, and areas of misunderstanding regarding ecotourism can be identified.

As previously indicated, SANParks is the leader in providing ecotourism products in South Africa, thus rendering this research regarding the perceptions of ecotourism from a demand side important (Saayman, 2009; SANParks, 2008; Van der Merwe, 2004). Authors such as Arabatsiz and Grigoroudis (2009), Chan and Baum (2007), Dolnicar, Crouch, and Long (2008) and Yacob et al. (2011) indicate that ecotourism product providers must take into consideration perceptions and motivations of ecotourists in order to deliver a quality ecotourism offering. Therefore, the question that arises is: What are the CEFs for SANParks as seen from a visitor's perspective?

Method

An exploratory research approach was followed to get a better understanding of how visitors view ecotourism; therefore, a quantitative research approach was followed in order to collect data from a large number of respondents. A web-based survey was conducted, aimed at respondents from the demand side, in other words, visitors to South African National Parks. Web-based surveys have become a preferred method for both researchers and respondents. Benefits of the web-based method include quick response, flexibility, lower costs, and ease of data handling (Reynolds, Woods, & Baker, 2007). According to Cooper and Emory, (1995) a total of 451 (*n*) questionnaires would be needed in

order for the data in this study to be statistically valid, and to enable a statistically sound analysis.

The questionnaire consisted of 55 items pertaining to aspects of responsible ecotourism that were identified based on a literature review. Sources that were mainly used in the development of the questionnaire included the works of authors who contributed significantly to the field of sustainable, responsible, and ecotourism, for example, Björk (2007), Blamey (2001), Diamantis (2004), DEAT (2003), Fennell (2008), Frey and George (2010), Geldenhuys (2009), Keyser (2009), Saayman (2009), Spenceley (2008), and Weaver (2001). The questionnaire included development aspects, ecoefficiency, environmental education opportunities, local community upliftment, ecotourism activities, and ecotourism policies. The senior management of SANParks formed part of the process of selecting the 55 items. The items were measured on a Likert scale of 1 (*not important at all*) to 5 (*extremely important*).

A pilot study was conducted on the SANParks' website for 2 days in February 2011 in order to identify possible constraints and problems. Subsequent to the pilot study, minor technical modifications were made to the questionnaire for the final sample. A news item that announced the survey and contained a link to the questionnaire was placed on the homepage of the SANParks' website. The researchers received a time slot of 1 month from SANParks for the survey to be conducted. The survey was launched in March 2011, which coincided with the school holidays in South Africa, using the Unit Command Climate Assessment and Survey System (UCCASS). As an incentive for participating in the research, respondents' e-mail addresses were entered into a draw where they stood a chance of winning a prize from SANParks that consisted of a "Getaway Weekend for two" at the Golden Gate National Park. A total of 1,014 questionnaires were received, of which 993 were adequately completed.

The data were analyzed by means of the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software program. In order to determine key aspects of ecotourism for SANParks, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted. The pattern matrix with the principal axis factoring extraction method and the Oblimin rotation method were employed, with which six factors were extracted according to Kaiser's criterion, thus explaining 61.95% of the total variance, which

is considered as being good, because more than 50% of the variance is explained (SPSS, Inc., 2009). Cronbach's alpha (1 = very reliable) and interitem correlation reliability tests were conducted in which all the factors proved to be reliable.

Results

Six factors (Table 2) were extracted from the pattern matrix factor analysis: product development, local community involvement, environmentally friendly practices, ethical behavior, food and activities, and policies. This section discusses the aforementioned factors.

Factor 1: Product Development

Factor 1 had a mean value of 4.46, which ranked third out of the six factors with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.91. This factor (Table 2) consists of the following constructs: Promote environmental awareness and ethical behavior; Development should take place at an appropriate scale; Actions must be implemented to reduce carbon footprint; Staff should be trained; Tourism products must be sustainable; It is important to get feedback from customers; Conservation; and Implement practices to reduce pollution and litter. These aspects are supported by the standard principles of ecotourism (Blamey, 2001; Fennell, 2008; Geldenhuys, 2009; Reid, 1999). If planned and developed in a responsible manner, ecotourism can add value to the local area by achieving local economic benefits, increased quality of life, and an improved quality of the environment (Edgell, 2006; Keyser, 2009; Saarinen, 2009).

Factor 2: Local Community Involvement

Factor 2 had a mean value of 3.98 and ranked fifth of the six factors with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.92. This factor (Table 2) includes the following constructs: Empowerment of communities and economic benefits; Equitable access to parks for communities and people with universally challenged needs; Involvement of community in planning; Support local suppliers; Fair labor practices; Educational and awareness programs such as HIV awareness and environmental education; and Provide information concerning community and

Table 2
Pattern Matrix Factor Analysis

Constructs	Factor 1: Product Development	Factor 2: Local Community Involvement	Factor 3: Environmentally Friendly Practices	Factor 4: Ethics	Factor 5: Food and Activities	Factor 6: Policies
Mean values	4.46	3.98	4.37	4.71	3.46	4.48
Cronbach alpha	0.91	0.92	0.94	0.93	0.79	0.81
Tourism programs must increase environmental awareness among tourists and promote positive environmental ethics.	0.545					
Sustainable/responsible tourism development must be on an appropriate scale and human footprint.	0.449					
To implement and manage actions to reduce greenhouse emissions and other contributors to climate change.	0.446					
To provide staff with appropriate training programs to improve their skills relevant to tourism in environmentally and culturally sensitive areas.	0.320					
Sustainable/responsible tourism products must be sustainable in the long term.	0.319					
To invite customer feedback on all tourism experiences and to take corrective steps where appropriate.	0.305					
Tourism within SANParks must be in support of conservation.	0.290					
To implement practices to reduce pollution and litter.	0.226					
Ecotourism offerings by national parks must stimulate economic activity, provide equitable employment opportunities, and empower the local communities adjacent to national parks.		0.884				
Equitable access to natural, historic, and sociocultural sites of significance located in the parks must be provided to local communities for enjoyment.						0.741
SANParks must involve interested and affected parties, including the local community, in the planning and development of tourism products.						0.715

As far as possible, local and fair trade goods and services must be bought from local suppliers.	0.640
To provide educational programs for communities such as environmental education.	0.639
To provide educational programs for staff such as literacy skills and HIV awareness.	0.610
SANParks must venture beyond its borders to a broader community in order to grow its constituency of conservation.	0.570
SANParks' tourism offerings must provide tourists with the opportunity to learn and be educated about the local culture and conservation.	0.491
Where possible, SANParks must make use of locally produced products.	0.439
To provide guests with information about conservation and/or community projects.	0.416
Commitment to fair labor practices.	0.311
To provide accessible tourism to persons with universally challenged needs (e.g., for the blind, or for those with other physical needs).	0.213
SANParks must make use of energy-saving techniques and devices.	0.884
SANParks must make use of renewable energy sources where possible.	0.835
SANParks must make use of water-saving techniques (low-flow or dual-flush toilets and low-flow showerheads).	0.795
Facilities must be designed and built to optimize natural heating, cooling, and light.	0.749
Collecting of rainwater for alternative use where feasible.	0.733
SANParks must implement environmentally friendly purchasing policies.	0.664
SANParks must implement the reduce, reuse, and recycle principle in all operations.	0.645

(continued)

Table 2
Pattern Matrix Factor Analysis (*Continued*)

Constructs	Factor 1: Product Development	Factor 2: Local Community Involvement	Factor 3: Environmentally Friendly Practices	Factor 4: Ethics	Factor 5: Food and Activities	Factor 6: Policies
The use of environmentally friendly consumer products such as biodegradable soap, recycled paper, and pesticides.			0.620			
SANParks should make arrangements with suppliers to minimize the amount of packaging.			0.555			
To implement a solid waste management plan with quantitative goals to minimize waste.			0.522			
The use of local and natural building materials for the construction of tourist facilities.			0.383			
Visitors must be informed regarding environmentally friendly practices (e.g., water-saving and recycling techniques).			0.354			
The use of low-impact promotional mechanisms (e.g., the printing of brochures on recycled paper or making use of electronic format).			0.327			
Tourism offerings should be designed in a manner to allow for an enlightening nature-based experience with the least disturbance.			0.292			
To take measures to eradicate invasive alien species.			0.259			
SANParks' tourist facilities must blend in and respect the natural and cultural heritage of the surrounding environment.			0.201			
Do not feed the animals.				0.797		
Remain inside the car (no part of the body may protrude from a window or sunroof) except at designated areas.				0.789		
Do not talk loudly at a sighting.						0.777
Stick to the speed limit.						0.771
Everyone (staff and visitors) has a responsibility to maintain a litter-free environment.						0.756

Specimens should not be collected and taken out of the park.	0.714
Visitors should not drive "off-road," or on roads with a "no entry" sign.	0.676
Everyone (staff and visitors) has a responsibility to save water and electricity.	0.65
To implement practices to reduce negative impacts such as noise, light, and erosion.	0.364
Restaurants should include venison dishes on the menu, and other game products such as biltong should be available for purchase.	0.721
There must be an opportunity to experience traditional cuisine of the area.	0.548
SANParks should provide a variety of products and activities within its usage zones.	0.462
Restaurants in SANParks must make use of free range and/or fresh organic foods.	0.451
SANParks must provide a variety of facilities for interpretation.	0.363
To make the sustainable/responsible tourism strategy publicly accessible within the park management plans.	0.605
To comply with all relevant national, provincial, and local legislation, regulations, licenses, and permits as may be required.	0.503
All stakeholders including government, tourism product providers, tourists, and local communities should recognize their responsibility to achieve sustainable tourism.	0.387
Promotional materials must be accurate and complete and not promise more than can be delivered.	0.336
Ensure managers, staff, and contract employees understand and adhere to all aspects of the SANParks' policy to prevent negative impacts on the environment and local communities.	0.221

conservation projects. The local community is an important role player in the successful development of responsible ecotourism and the aspects listed are essential to creating a sustainable situation (Cole, 2006; D. Hall & Richards, 2003; Van der Merwe, 2004; Wight, 2003; Yacob et al., 2011).

Factor 3: Environmentally Friendly Practices

Factor 3 yielded a mean value of 4.37 and ranked fourth of the six factors with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.94. This factor (Table 2) includes the following constructs: Responsible use of resources such as water and energy; Waste management; The use of environmentally friendly products; Environmentally friendly purchasing policies; and Use of natural building materials for facilities. Environmentally friendly practices are becoming increasingly important in the tourism industry due to environmental problems such as global warming (Coetzee & Saayman, 2009; DEAT, 2003). Ecotourism must maximize positive impacts and minimize negative impacts on the environment. By implementing environmentally friendly practices, it can contribute greatly to the latter being achieved (Diamantis, 2004; George, 2008; Holden, 2008; Hudman & Jackson, 2003; Page & Dowling, 2002).

Factor 4: Ethical Behavior

Factor 4, ethical behavior, was the factor with the highest mean value of 4.71 and had a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.93. This factor (Table 2) includes the following constructs: Tourists and staff should behave in an ethical manner and adhere to the rules of the park, such as no feeding of animals, remaining inside the car, not talking loudly at sightings, using resources such as water and electricity responsibly, not littering, obeying road signs and rules, and not collecting specimens. Not only are these principles important in order to minimize negative impacts on the environment, but also to enhance the quality of experience for the visitor, as found in a study conducted by Du Plessis (2010).

Factor 5: Food and Activities

Factor 5 yielded a mean value of 3.46 and ranked last with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.93 This

factor (Table 2) includes the following: Restaurants should include venison dishes on the menu; Make use of free range and/or fresh organic foods where possible; Provide facilities for interpretation; and Provide a variety of activities within usage zones. The ecotourist has become more sophisticated nowadays and is interested in more than merely viewing game. Part of the ecotourism experience is that it should include authentic experiences, such as opportunities to experience and learn about the local culture (Backman et al., 2001; Beh & Bruyere, 2007; Chan & Baum, 2007).

Factor 6: Policies

Factor 6, policies, indicated a mean value of 4.48 and ranked the second highest of the six factors with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.81 This factor (Table 2) includes the following constructs that should be considered in policy development for ecotourism: Transparency and accessibility by all stakeholders; Compliance with legislation; Credibility; Involvement of stakeholders; and Adherence to policies. It is important that ecotourism policy does not occur in a vacuum, but should stem from all the stakeholders' interests and values that influence the development and management processes of ecotourism (C. M. Hall, 2003). SANParks is governed by national legislation and policies as well as by international agreements that were signed by the South African government (SANParks, 2006). SANParks' coordinated policy framework is available on their website for all stakeholders to view.

Discussion

Based on the results, the following interesting findings and implications were revealed. The first finding reveals that visitor perceptions as portrayed by the CEFs in general support the literature review and specifically the four pillars as indicated in Figure 2. Pillar one, namely, *conservation and enhancement of nature and local culture*, is supported by factors 1, 2, and 5. Pillar two, *environmental education*, is supported by factors 1, 3, and 6. Pillar 3, *sustainable management of economic, sociocultural, and ecological environment*, is supported by factors 1, 2, and 6. Pillar 4, *tourist experience*, is supported by factors 1, 4, 5, and 6. Compared to the literature

review, tourist ratings reveal similar but different CEFs. From a practical and visitor point of view, the aspect of ethics is viewed as extremely important. The implication is twofold: in the first place, SAN-Parks must assure that their management policy addresses the CEFs; and secondly, regular evaluations should be conducted in order to improve the implementation of CEFs.

The second finding indicates that respondents place a high value on ethical behavior as the CEF with the highest mean value for both staff and tourist alike. Various researchers attest this finding by stating that the behavior of the tourist is critical in order to minimize the impact on the environment, which requires that visitor behavior should be managed (Buckley, 2004; Honey, 2008; Newsome, Dowling, & Moore, 2005; Wearing & Neil, 2009). According to Eagles, Bowman, and Chung-hung (2005), access points and reception areas are important as this is where managers have the most control over fees being collected, and over visitor numbers and their behavior. It is also the place where information about the area and desirable behavior can most readily be distributed to visitors as they arrive. The information given to visitors plays an important role in guiding their behavior. Education programs must therefore be designed to encourage visitors to consider the impacts of their actions and should aim to promote an ethical attitude towards the environment they are visiting (Eagles & McCool, 2002; Marion & Reid, 2007). Among the most important behavioral problems are the feeding of animals, remaining in vehicles, adhering to the speed limit, the collection of species, and talking loudly at animal sightings. These impact on the sustainability of parks as well as on the tourist experience, because a bad experience could lead to poor recommendations and, consequently, a decline in future visits by potential tourists. Therefore, it is evident that the behavior of people plays an important role in ecotourism. As a means to manage tourist behavior, respondents felt that severe penalties should be applied to staff and tourists in the case of non-compliance with the required ethical behavior. The penalties could be in the form of fines, disciplinary hearings (staff), and suspension/expulsion from visiting national parks, to name but a few. This research concurs with the findings of Yacob et al. (2011). The implication of this finding to SANParks

is to firstly educate visitors and tourists by means of educational programs regarding ethical behavior in national parks, and secondly, to train staff to set an example. Examples of educational programs for tourists include: programs for school children; information correspondence on park rules and regulations to be sent with the booking confirmation letters; information and educational boards in rest camps; exhibition areas that exhibit examples of offences by tourists and the results thereof (e.g., animal killings due to speeding), and an award system for people who report bad behavior. Another major implication of the findings of this research is that training programs for tourism and conservation students at all levels who wish to work in protected areas or national parks should include a course on ethical behavior.

Thirdly, the research finds that interpretation and education play a prominent role in ecotourism in national parks and protected areas as indicated as by the *product development* factor. This is supported by Du Plessis (2010) and Orams (1996). Page and Dowling (2002) and Yacob et al. (2011) point out that environmental education and interpretation are what differentiates ecotourism from any other form of tourism. Interpretation and education can be applied in the following format: field trips by school groups and visitors; environmental programs; posters; expert talks, signage, and radio programs, to name but a few. This would also assist in promoting a positive and ethical attitude, as well as appropriate behavior in national parks.

The fourth finding is that SANParks need well trained staff who would directly influence the visitor experience. Respondents indicated the importance of staff training to uphold service standards. The implication thereof is that staff should be made aware of their influence on the environment and the role that they play in terms of tourism (e.g., customer satisfaction) and in providing a healthy environment (e.g., adhering to environmentally friendly practices). Professionalism of staff in the ecotourism industry should be a priority. It is important that staff are adequately trained, properly rewarded, and retained (Eagles, 2001; George, 2008). The aspect of training of tourism employees is echoed throughout the tourism industry as this is a service industry and therefore it should be compulsory to deliver good service.

The fifth finding is that environment-friendly practices should be applied in national parks and conservation areas. This is necessary in order to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on national parks and the environment and further includes the responsible use of resources such as water and energy, waste management, the use of environment-friendly products, environment-friendly purchasing policies, and the use of natural building materials for facilities. This notion is confirmed by Du Plessis (2010). The implication of this is that SANParks should communicate environmentally friendly practices to all its stakeholders and also select suppliers that follow a strong environmental ethos to minimize negative environmental impacts. Fennell (2008) also emphasized the need for facilities to blend in with the surroundings, with a low impact. National parks could even host competitions in this regard. According to Saayman (2009), careful planning is necessary in order to ensure that facilities are sustainable and should take into consideration tourist satisfaction and sensitivity to the environment when developing facilities.

Lastly, this research confirms the important role that local communities play in ecotourism (see Fig. 1), even from a visitor's perspective. This is confirmed by D. Hall and Richards (2003) and Yacob et al. (2011). This is evident in factor 2, *local community involvement* and factor 5, *food and activities*. In general, this implies that park management should be more involved in the local community and should also communicate regularly with the communities. Policies with regards to parks should stress community involvement.

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to determine the CEFs for SANParks from a visitor's perspective. This research revealed six factors that were identified by means of a factor analysis, namely, *local community involvement, environmentally friendly practices, ethical behavior, food, activities, and policies*. These CEFs can be used as guidelines in achieving ecotourism objectives. It is clear that visitors rate ethical behavior as being the most important CEF.

The main contribution of this study is threefold. Firstly, it was the first time that visitors' perceptions

were assessed regarding the CEFs for national parks. Secondly, it makes a contribution to the discourse on national parks as ecotourism products by indicating that which is important from a visitor's point of view, and therefore, to the literature concerning these issues. Thirdly, the research also assisted in developing criteria or guidelines of ecotourism for national parks and most probably for other parks in Southern Africa offering similar products as well. It is further recommended that the CEFs must be measured each year by visitors and park management in order to improve the product of ecotourism in national parks. As South Africa has no official ecotourism rating criteria (similar to the five-star rating criteria) for ecotourism products, including for national parks, it is recommended that this be explored in the future.

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