Travel behaviour of tourists to a South African holiday resort

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Abstract

Travel behaviour refers to the way in which tourists behave according to their attitudes before, during and after travelling. Knowledge regarding travel behaviour can assist in marketing, product planning and development which can increase the number of visitors to tourism products such as resorts. However, it was found that very little research has been conducted regarding the travel behaviour of tourists visiting South African resorts. The purpose of this study was to determine the travel behaviour and, more specifically, the travel motivations and factors influencing travel decision making of tourists visiting a resort. Quantitative research was conducted by means of the distribution of questionnaires. The results indicated that the main travel motivations are resting and relaxation, enriching and learning experiences, recreational activities, personal motivators and social experiences. It was clear that there are various similarities with studies done in other countries and in South Africa which indicate the existence of universal travel motivations. The most important factors influencing travel decision making were found to be management and hospitality aspects, destination attributes, site attractiveness and economic benefits. These results also indicated similarities with the findings of previous research studies. However, studies focusing on factors influencing travel decisions in South Africa are scarce and demand attention, especially with the growing domestic market. It is therefore clear from the results that tourism marketers are required to do research on a continuous basis to determine tourists' travel behaviour to different tourism products such as resorts. The results can be used as a focusing point of the marketing strategies.

Keywords: marketing, resorts, travel behaviour, travel decision making, travel motivation.

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Introduction

The tourism industry is considered one of the largest and fastest growing industries in the world (Ninemeier & Perdue, 2008; Cooper & Hall, 2008). As a worldwide occurrence, it forms a very important part of the services sector and strongly influences the economy (Kay, 2003; Koc, 2004; Ninemeier & Perdue, 2008). For the tourism industry to maintain or improve its current status, it is dependent on tourists' travel decisions which are reflected in travel behaviour. Papatheodorou (2006) stated that destination choice has always been an important aspect in tourism literature and there are various factors influencing travel decisions. These factors comprise culture, travel motivations, finances and previous experiences, to name a few (Ankomah, Crompton & Baker, 1996).

Cooper and Hall (2008) state that tourism is subject to a collection of influences and factors that determine its relative distribution. Travel motivations form an integral part of travel behaviour and have been widely researched and applied in tourism marketing strategies. The need to see the unseen and know the unknown drives people to travel to new places and motivates them to visit new destinations (Venkatesh, 2006).

It is therefore important for tourism products such as resorts to understand travel behaviour, as this may assist in product development, improved marketing strategies, enhanced service delivery approaches, and the creation of a competitive advantage. Therefore, travel behaviour plays an important role in tourism in terms of concept, industry and economy, and demands investigation. Tourists are subject to certain behaviour before, during and after travelling. This is conceptualised as travel behaviour. This behaviour is the direct result of interaction between certain personal and environmental variables on a continuous basis. Attention is given to the influence of people and situations on both sides (in a person's personal life and in the surrounding environment) and the reaction according to this influence. Travel behaviour can therefore be defined as the way tourists behave according to their attitudes towards a certain product and their response by making use of the product (George, 2004; March & Woodside, 2005).

March and Woodside (2005) state that specific decisions embrace one or more of the behavioural intentions based on the need to behave in a certain way according to highly defined situations. To predict travel behaviour, it is important to understand how the individual characteristics of a person interact with the characteristics of the situation, thereby understanding the positive and negative evaluative factors influencing the destination choices of the tourists (Laws, 1995; Holloway, 2004; March & Woodside, 2005).

Various researchers have identified factors influencing the travel behaviour of tourists such as variables motivating the tourist to travel, the attitude of the tourist, various situational factors and environmental factors that influence the personal significance of the tourist (Laws, 1995; Venkatesh, 2006). According to Gartner (as cited by Pike, 2008), motivation initiates the decision-making process. This occurs when a certain need or want cannot be met at home. Motivations surface when a tourist wants to satisfy a need or want and this can be seen as a very important variable in relation to their travel decisions and the outcome of satisfaction (Chang, 2007; Correia, Oom do Valle & Moço, 2007).

According to George (2004) as well as March and Woodside (2005), travel motivations can be considered as one of the most important psychological influences of tourist behaviour. Motivations are the inner state of a person, or certain needs and wants of a person, which force them to act or behave in a

specific way and thus sustain human behaviour and the energy levels of the human body (George, 2004; Decrop, 2006). Maslow's theory is one of the most frequently used to explain the premise of motivation. Maslow uses five sets of goals which are also referred to as basic needs: physiological needs, safety needs, social needs, self-esteem and self-actualisation (Tikkanen, 2007). Tourists may need to escape, relax, and gain relief of physical and mental tension and for typical sunlust reasons. Crompton (as cited by Saayman, 2006) identified seven socio-psychological factors which motivate a tourist to travel: escape from an everyday environment, discovery and evaluation of oneself, relaxing or participation in recreational activities, gaining a certain level of prestige, for the purpose of regression (visiting places where the family came from), strengthening family ties, and facilitating their level of social interaction.

It is important to understand, and have adequate knowledge of, the motivations influencing the travel behaviour of tourists, for they have a direct impact on the decisions tourists make (George, 2004). Various researchers have analysed travel motivations to create a better understanding of travel behaviour (Crompton, 1977; Huang & Xiao, 2000; Lee, Lee & Wicks, 2004; Law, Cheung & Lo, 2004; Correia, et al., 2007; Saayman, Slabbert & Van der Merwe, 2009).

Travel behaviour and travel motivation are therefore considered as important fields in tourism research literature (Huang & Xiao, 2000; Lam & Hsu, 2006). The prediction of travel behaviour and knowledge of travel motivation play an important role in tourism marketing to create demand and assist tourists in decision making (Mazanec, Crouch, Ritchie & Woodside, 2001; Holloway, 2004; March & Woodside, 2005; Decrop, 2006). Thus, by having adequate knowledge and understanding of tourist behaviour, strategies and policies can be developed and implemented to increase the demand for tourism (Law *et al.*, 2004; March & Woodside, 2005; Papatheodorou, 2006). It is clear that international research has been conducted on travel motives and aspects influencing travel decision making. However, it is equally clear that very little research, if any, has been done on both these aspects of tourists to South African resorts. Two similar studies were found which were conducted on travel motivations, but neither of them was conducted in South Africa.

The two studies found were Correia, et al (2007) who conducted research on the travel motivations of tourists to exotic places, and Chang (2007) who did an analysis of travel motivations of package tour travellers. Chang (2007) indicated that the motives for package tour travellers are: relaxation and pleasure, social relationships, socio-economic factors and socio-psychological needs. On the other hand, Correia *et al.* (2007) identified the travel motivations to exotic destinations as: knowledge, leisure, socialisation, facilities, core attractions and landscape features. These two studies do not exhibit much correlation except for socialisation and leisure factors. A reason for this could be that different types of

tourists who travel to different destinations have different travel motivations, and are influenced by different aspects when making travel decisions, which emphasises the importance of this research study.

The purpose of this research is to explore the travel behaviour of visitors to a South African resort by analysing travel motivations and aspects influencing travel decision making.

Methods

An empirical survey was conducted at a resort in South Africa. A questionnaire was developed by analysing similar previous research studies and the questions asked were descriptive in nature. Two surveys were conducted for the purpose of this research study. The first survey took place at the resort, situated in KwaZulu-Natal. It was conducted during the last weekend of the winter school holidays, from 17 to 19 July 2009. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed by fieldworkers out of which 102 were completed and useful for data analysis. Sampling of this survey was based on the willingness and availability of tourists to complete the questionnaire and only one questionnaire per family was distributed.

The second survey took place during the first week of December 2009 by means of email. Tourists were identified by making use of the member database of the resort group, selecting tourists who visited the same resort during the December school holidays. Again, only one questionnaire per family was distributed. Based on availability sampling and the willingness to complete the questionnaire, 150 questionnaires were distributed of which 99 were suitable for analysis. Therefore, the results of this research study are based on the statistical analysis of a total of 201 questionnaires. The statistical analysis included descriptive analysis, more specifically factor analyses to reduce the large number of related variables to a more manageable number for interpretation purposes.

Results

The results of this study comprise four sections: The demographic profile and travel preferences of the visitors to the resort, a factor analysis of the travel motivations, and a factor analysis of aspects influencing travel decision making.

Demographic characteristics and travel preferences of tourists

A descriptive analysis of the data indicates that the gender percentage of the respondents visiting the resort appear to be almost equivalent, with 49% being female and 51% male. In terms of age distribution, the resort appears to attract relatively middle-aged tourists with 36% of the visitors between the ages of 41

and 50 as well as younger visitors between the ages of 31 and 40 (33%). The average age of tourists to the resort is 44. Tourists visiting this resort seem to be well educated with 38% having passed matric and 36% educated with a degree or diploma. Sixty-eight percent of tourists to the resort are married with children, compared to 21% of tourists who are married without children. 36% of respondents taking part in this study indicated that their children are older than 16. Age plays a role in travel decision making (Zalatan, 1996) and, as one of the demographic characteristics of a tourist, it influences travel planning and decisions. Most visitors to the resort (69%) were between 31 and 50 years of age.

The analyses of travel preferences indicated that 34% of tourists to this resort travel 3-4 weekends a year and 25% travel 5-6 weekends a year. When analysing the total number of vacations a year, other than travelling on weekends, it was indicated that 54% of respondents travel only once a year and 40% of respondents travel 2-3 times a year. On the length of stay at the resort, 33% of respondents indicated that they stay 5-7 nights, whereas 26% stay an average of 8-10 nights. The respondents can be considered frequent tourists as they travel once a year on a vacation of between 5-7 nights as well as 3-4 weekends per year.

Travel motivations

The main focus of the motives section was to explore the fundamental patterns of the travel motivations indicated by means of a factor analysis. For the purpose of this study, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy and the Bartlett test of sphericity were examined and used to assess the factorability of the data. This basically refers to a data reduction procedure to determine a correlation matrix for the motivational data of this study. By making use of the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy, one can explore and determine whether a relationship exists between certain variables and whether this relationship is sufficiently relevant to proceed with a factor analysis (Field, 2005). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure for this research was .844. In this case, the measure is acceptable. The Bartlett test (p<.00001) was also found to be significant and therefore the reduction of data by means of the principal component would be justifiable. Twenty-four motivational factors exist for this resort, on which a factor analysis with varimax rotation was performed. This method (varimax rotation method) was used due to few correlations existing between factors for this resort (Table 1).

The factors were determined according to similar features. Loadings of .28 were used for item inclusion and an eigenvalue (representing the amount of the total variance explained by a factor) of 6.438 was used for factor extraction criterion. This resulted in five factors for the resort representing 60% of the total variance.

Table 1: Component correlation matrix for motivations

Component	Recreational activities	Resting & relaxation	Personal motivators	Social experiences	Enriching & learning experiences
Recreational activities	1.000	-.314	.104	.150	.235
Resting & Relaxation	-.314	1.000	.030	-.100	-.210
Personal motivators	.104	.030	1.000	.311	.149
Social experiences	.150	-.100	.311	1.000	.307
Enriching & learning experiences	.235	-.210	.149	.307	1.000

The eigenvalues for these factors ranged from 1.178 to 6.438. Cronbach's coefficients were also examined to determine the scale's internal consistency. This was done for each factor and was above .67, which is highly acceptable for exploratory research (Tharenou, 1993). This determines the reliability of the analysed data and serves as a measure of internal consistency among the identified items. The factors for the resort were labelled as *Recreational Activities* (Factor 1), *Resting and Relaxation* (Factor 2), *Personal Motivators* (Factor 3), *Social Experiences* (Factor 4) and *Enriching and Learning Experiences* (Factor 5). Mean values were calculated for each factor based on the Likert-scale used in the questionnaire to determine the level of importance of each factor (Table 2).

Aspects influencing travel decision making

The main focus of the reasons section is to explore the fundamental patterns of aspects influencing travel decision making by means of a factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure for the study was .844. The Bartlett test ($p<.00001$) was also found to be significant and therefore the reduction of data by means of the principal component would be justifiable. Eighteen aspects influencing travel decision making formed part of the factor analysis with varimax rotation. The latter was used due to little correlation existing between factors for this resort. These correlations are indicated in Table 3.

Table 2: Factor analysis of motives for visiting the resort

Factor label	Factor 1: Recreational activities	Factor 2: Resting and relaxation	Factor 3: Personal motivators	Factor 4: Social experiences	Factor 5: Enriching and learning experiences
Entertainment	.789				
To have fun	.698				
To spend time with my family	.421				
To be part of recreational activities	.414				
To do something out of the ordinary	.285				
To break away from routine of everyday life		-.818			
To break away from everyday pressure		-.815			
To break away from everyday surroundings		-.790			
To rest		-.698			
To relax		-.611			
Influence of family			.912		
Influence of children			.829		
Influence of friends			.778		
Security			.537		
Status and prestige			.537		
To spend more time with friends				.801	
To meet new people with the same interests as mine				.642	
To learn more about my country				.571	
To satisfy my need for social interaction				.488	
Natural surroundings of the resort					.851
To see new places					.757
To visit cultural attractions					.593
To increase my quality of life					.474
Cronbach's Alpha	.715	.818	.710	.679	.751
Mean Values	2.96	3.63	1.78	2.02	2.89

Table 3: Component correlation matrix

Component	Management & hospitality aspects	Destination attributes	Site attractiveness	Economic benefits
Management & hospitality aspects	1.000	.386	-.348	-.256
Destination attributes	.386	1.000	-.280	-.303
Site attractiveness	-.348	-.280	1.000	.157
Economic benefits	-.256	-.303	.157	1.000

Table 4: Factor analysis for aspects influencing travel decision making

Factor label	Factor 1: Management and hospitality aspects	Factor 2: Destination attributes	Factor 3: Site attractiveness	Factor 4: Economic benefits
Friendliness and helpfulness of staff	.796			
Marketing of resort is effective	.773			
General management of the resort is good	.753			
Membership of the organisation (ATKV)	.545			
The resort is situated in a safe area	.535			
Positive previous experiences	.457			
Location of resort		.845		
Distance and accessibility of resort		.825		
Natural surroundings of resort		.707		
Popularity of resorts		.536		
The organisation forms part of my culture and heritage		.464		
Activities at the resort			-.837	
Entertainment at the resort			-.730	
Atmosphere of the resort			-.598	
Facilities at the resort			-.491	
Accommodation				-.627
Value for money				-.612
Affordable				-.547
Cronbach's Alpha	.793	.813	.813	.785
Mean Values	3.41	3.15	3.38	3.49

Loadings of .40 were used for item inclusion and an eigenvalue of 7.558 was used for factor extraction criterion. This resulted in four factors for the resort.

The four factors represent 64.88% of the total variance. The factors were grouped according to similar characteristics and were labelled as *Management and Hospitality Aspects* (Factor 1), *Destination Attributes* (Factor 2), *Site Attractiveness* (Factor 3) and *Economic Benefits* (Factor 4). The eigenvalues for these factors ranged from 1.016 to 7.558. Cronbach's coefficients were all above .70 which is highly acceptable for exploratory research.

Discussion

The discussion is divided in two sections. Section one focuses on travel motivations and Section two focuses on aspects influencing travel decision-making.

Travel motivations

Similarities between the results of this study and the results of previous studies could clearly be identified. Factor 1 (*Recreational Activities*) revealed similarities with studies by Crompton (1977), Venkatesh (2006) and Swanson and Horridge (2006), who also identified it as 'recreational activities'; Loker and Perdue (1992) refer to these activities as 'adrenalin excitement seeking'; Law, et al. (2004) labelled these as 'outdoor activities and sport'; Meng and Uysal (2008) referred to 'adventure'; and Saayman et al. (2009) identified recreational activities as 'leisure activities'. The second highest motivator delivered a mean-value of 2.96 (*Recreational Activities*). This indicated that tourists visit the resort for recreational activities. Entertainment, fun, spending time with family and doing something out of the ordinary, are all factors motivating tourists to travel to the resort. Thus, resorts should ensure that they provide holiday programmes that attract the attention of tourists in terms of personal entertainment needs. This resort is also situated in an environment that offers endless opportunities for various recreational activities, such as windsurfing, quad biking and deep sea fishing. Management should explore all these opportunities and determine feasibility of these types of activities so as to offer the tourist an ultimate recreational experience.

Crompton (1977) referred to rest and relaxation as 'escaping from everyday environment'; Loker and Perdue (1992), Schneider and Backman (1996) referred to it as 'escape'; Chang (2007) labelled these items as 'relaxation and pleasure'; and Backman, Backman, Uysal and Sunshine (1995), Venkatesh (2006), Swanson and Horridge (2006), Correia et al. (2007) and Saayman et al. (2009), identified items acknowledged as motives in terms of 'rest and relaxation' (Factor 2). Factor 2 delivered the highest mean-value for this study (3.63). Therefore, it indicates that the most important factor motivating tourists to travel is to rest and relax. It is deemed necessary that this should be a key aspect in the development of an effective and successful marketing plan. Resorts should focus

on those aspects that promise ultimate resting and relaxation for tourists visiting the resort, especially when developing marketing strategies.

Personal Motivators (Factor 3) also played a role as motivators in previous studies conducted by Loker and Perdue (1992) – 'family and friends-orientated'; Backman et al. (1995); Venkatesh (2006) – 'family situation'; Meng and Uysal (2008) – 'family'; and Saayman et al. (2009) refer to *Personal Motivators* (Factor 3) as 'personal attachment'. Factor 3, *Personal Motivators*, delivered the lowest mean of 1.78. Security is considered a deciding factor in travel decision making. However, results indicate that security did not play the most important role for this resort.

Factor 4, *Social Experiences*, indicated similarities in terms of items with Crompton (1977) – 'facilitating of social interaction'; Backman et al. (1995), Schneider and Backman (1996), Lee et al. (2004), and Correia et al. (2007) – 'socialising'; Swanson and Horridge (2006) – 'social interaction'; Chang (2007) – 'social relationships'; and Saayman et al. (2009) – 'socialisation'. Visitors enjoy spending time with friends and family and consider a holiday at the resort the ideal time to spend with loved ones. With a mean value of 2.02 this factor is seen as of average importance.

The last factor, Factor 5, showed similarities with most of the articles on previous research studies. Items categorised as *Enriching and Learning Experiences* (Factor 5) were also identified as a travel motivator in articles by Backman et al. (1995) – 'external factors'; Oh, Uysal and Weaver (1995) – 'culture and history seekers'; Baloglu and Uysal (1996) – 'culture' and 'learning'; Huang and Xiao (2000) – 'learning and investigation'; Lee et al. (2004) – 'cultural exploration'; Swanson and Horridge (2006) – 'cultural attractions'; Correia et al. (2007) – 'knowledge and intellectual motivators'; Meng and Uysal (2008) – 'culture'; and Saayman et al. (2009) – 'novelty'. This indicates that tourists travel due to the impelling need to learn more about the natural environment, discover new places, to improve their quality of life, participate in cultural activities and partake in exciting events. The resort is situated in the province of KwaZulu-Natal, which offers various natural attractions, such as the beach, new experiences, such as uShaka Marine World, and cultural experiences such as the Battlefields Route. This can be used in marketing strategies, and the natural surroundings most definitely offer new learning experiences daily. Tourists' quality of life can be improved through a basic aspect such as quality service at the resort, seeing that the main motivator is resting and relaxation.

Aspects influencing travel decision making

Studies of this nature are scarce, especially for the South African tourism industry. Factor 1 was labelled *Management and Hospitality Aspects* and revealed the second-highest mean value (3.41). Quality service and effective management influence tourists' decision to travel to the resort. Resorts should consider participating in the South African Grading System which demands certain levels of service expected by tourists. This also influences the perceptions of value for money. Tourists who are happy with the service levels will also return to the resort in the future. The high score of this factor makes it clear that tourists consider effective management and a hospitable environment as important factors contributing to travel decision making, and therefore resorts should continually focus on improving service quality.

Factor 2 (*Destination Attributes*) plays the least significant role in travel decision making, with a mean value of 3.15. This refers to aspects such as location, driving distance, accessibility, natural surroundings and popularity. Dellaert, Ettema and Lindh (1998) found the attributes of the destination to be important. The surrounding environment can add direct value to the resort and should therefore form part of the marketing strategy of the resort. It is important to inform tourists what is on offer in the surrounding area. It was also clear that tourists will drive far for quality service and a product that adheres to their needs. Tourists are probably so focused on what the resort has to offer that they do not consider what the surrounding environment has to offer, seeing that a resort holiday is seen as an all-in-one package.

Factor 3, *Site Attractiveness*, consists of activities offered, entertainment opportunities, the atmosphere of the resort and other facilities at the resort. The mean value of 3.38 indicates the relative importance of Site Attractiveness. It is, however, still important to inform tourists of the activities offered by the resort when arriving at the resort, or on the website by means of video clips. Nanda, Hu and Bai (2006) found that families pass through different stages which bring along their own needs and wants, and travel decisions are usually based on the needs and wants of spouses and children, which is more activity driven. Woodside and MacDonald (1994) found activities to be an important aspect influencing travel decisions. Marketers should use the information regarding activities, entertainment and facilities available at the resort in marketing material to create an awareness of needs. The resort should develop an entertainment programme that can satisfy various needs.

Economic Benefits (Factor 1) were seen as the most important factor with a mean value of 3.49. Dellaert, Ettema and Lindh (1998) also found pricing to be an important factor in travel decision making. Pricing strategies of the resort should ensure value for money and affordability. Marketers of the resort should use

physical evidence, such as photographs of accommodation facilities, in marketing material enabling tourists to see what the product offers and how it relates to value for money and affordability.

Economic Benefits (3.49), was seen as the most important factor, followed by *Management and Hospitality Aspects* (3.41), *Site Attractiveness* (3.38) and *Destination Attributes* (3.15) as factors influencing travel decision making. It is clear that value for money is regarded as very important but resorts can also focus on delivery of quality services and experiences to tourists.

Conclusions

The results revealed that the motives of tourists travelling to a South African resort were to rest and relax, to participate in recreation activities, to have social experiences, to have enriching and learning experiences and to satisfy personal motivators. *Rest and Relaxation* was indicated as the most important travel motivator. These results confirmed motives identified by previous research studies. The results also revealed the following aspects as influencing factors in travel decision making: management and hospitality aspects, *Destination Attributes*, *Site Attractiveness* and *Economic Benefits*. This was seen as the most important factor influencing travel decision making.

Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to determine the travel behaviour of tourists to a South African resort with specific reference to travel motivations and aspects influencing these travel decisions. The results revealed specific motivations and aspects influencing travel decisions. It is clear from the research that travel behaviour should be researched on a continuous basis to determine changes in tourists' travel behaviour. This research should be done on a larger scale (other resorts) that will enable comparisons and a more comprehensive view on travel behaviour of resort tourists. It is also recommended that this type of study be done for other types of tourism products to determine similarities and/or differences. These results will have a direct impact on marketing and planning strategies of any tourism product.

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