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Domestic tourism challenges in Botswana: A stakeholders' perspective

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Abstract: The study aimed at identifying and explaining current challenges faced in the development of domestic tourism in Botswana. A review of recent travel patterns by Botswana shows an increasing outbound movement for leisure purposes. This in itself shows a propensity to travel which is an antecedent to tourism engagement. However, the good outbound leisure travel numbers have not translated to domestic tourism consumption. The research used a focus study approach with purposively selected tourism stakeholders to explore the challenges encountered in the development of domestic tourism. A constant comparative method of data analysis was used to analyse the data collected. The findings indicated that domestic tourism in Botswana is lacking behind because Botswana has a mono product tourism offering which is wildlife based and highly priced leaving Botswana with one option of travel which is outbound. The second finding is that the culture of Botswana generally does not involve travelling for leisure activities because they always have to be in their farms and cattle posts. Thirdly the policy which advocates for a high value-low volume approach has resulted in high prices for tourism services in Botswana especially accommodation. In conclusion the study observes that outbound travel by Botswana is a response to lack of choice locally and recommends diversification to the product offering in Botswana to take advantage of this market. Education, awareness campaigns and concessionary rates for residents during off-season are also recommended to sensitise the residents about product offerings within the country and address the affordability issue.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Lelokwane Mokgalo – Lecturer in Tourism Studies at the Botswana Accountancy College. The paper encapsulate the author's interest in domestic tourism development as a measure to cushion seasonality and external shocks in the local industry. Other interests are in sustainable and responsible tourism practices across the different sectors within the industry.

PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

Recent statistics have shown that a growing number of Botswana citizens and residents visit places outside the country for tourism purposes while in comparison only a sixth of that number visit local attractions. From the perspective of private and public stakeholders in the industry, the paper looks at the challenges of low domestic participation. It was found that the predominant single wildlife product, high prices of services in the tourism industry, lack of planning for leisure travel and a culture of low leisure travel are the most factors challenging the growth of domestic tourism in Botswana. Therefore to address these, diversification into different products, education, awareness campaigns and concessionary rates for residents during off-peak are some of the strategies that could help improve domestic travel within the country and help local authorities and businesses tap into this extensive market.

Subjects: Tourism Management; Niche Tourism; Tourism Behaviour; Tourism Development/ Impacts

Keywords: domestic tourism; internal tourism; tourism development; challenges; stakeholders; perspectives; highly priced

1. Introduction

Tourism engagement in general is preceded by the propensity to travel. An analysis of the recent travel patterns by Batswana shows an increasing number visiting countries regionally for leisure purposes (Business Monitor International, 2014; Namibia Tourism Board, 2008; South African Tourism, 2009). This demonstrates a predisposition to travel by local residents which one would expect to signify a similar if not much better enthusiasm in travelling within Botswana. However, evidence suggests that the situation is rather grim in as far as domestic tourism is concerned (Arca Consulting, 2000; Mbaiwa, Toteng, & Moswete, 2007). Furthermore recent statistics show that only 6.1% of total visits to national parks and reserves in Botswana were made by Batswana (Department of Wildlife & National Parks, 2010) which pales in comparison to South Africa's 75% domestic tourists to parks (SANPARKS, 2008). Such low domestic tourism observations however are not only peculiar to Botswana. Similar observations have been made in the developing world though with some noted improvements in South Africa – especially among the black African population (Butler & Richardson, 2013), Vietnam (Bui & Jolliffe, 2011) and Iran (Alipour, Kilic, & Zamani, 2013). Nonetheless some studies have reported good domestic tourism growth in South and South East Asia (Ghimire & Li, 2001; Michaud & Turner, 2006; Sethi, 2010; Wu & Cai, 2006) as well as South Africa (Cornelissen, 2005; Kaosa-ard, Bezic, & White, 2001; SANPARKS, 2008). In spite of consistent apathy within the developing world in developing domestic tourism, the sector has demonstrated its importance especially when used as a complementary market to the volatile international market. Domestic tourism has been noted to foster national pride among citizens, bridge the seasonality gap, increase employment and investment opportunities as well as increase benefits to SMEs (Bui & Jolliffe, 2011; Fabricius, 2009; Mazimhaka, 2007; Rogerson & Lisa, 2005).

However what makes Botswana's case more desperate is the fact that literature on domestic tourism is almost non-existent. Visitor numbers to most attractions by residents and the performance of the sub-sector in general is also not available save for the Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) which have visitor numbers to the protected areas. Mbaiwa et al.'s (2007) paper on "problems and prospects for the Development of urban tourism in Gaborone and Maun, Botswana" is the only known academic paper that touches on the subject. However it doesn't consider the issue holistically as it is focused only on the two urban areas and leaves out the views of other stakeholders. Business Monitor International's report on Botswana tourism 2014 also fails to shed light on domestic tourism consumption though the report has statistics on outbound and inbound tourism. One publication which considers domestic tourism is The Department of Tourism (2012) report which covers the 2010 domestic tourism estimates and is the only such report thus far. This goes to show that domestic tourism is neglected and as is consistent with most developing countries, Botswana has put most of the resources and focus on attracting international tourists to the detriment of domestic tourism potential.

It is therefore important to identify the challenges faced by the development of this important sector. This study therefore engages the key tourism stakeholders in a focus group approach to explain this problem. This paper contributes to the body of literature in several ways. Firstly there is need for literature on the subject to generate knowledge and understanding to aid policy direction and marketing. Secondly the views of the key stakeholders are very critical as they are the leading drivers in tourism development and as such their views help shed light into challenges faced by domestic tourism. Lastly through understanding the challenges, proper and appropriate interventions can be implemented to aid the development of domestic tourism in Botswana.

The paper is arranged as follows; literature review on domestic tourism, methodology used in carrying out the research, results and discussions and finally conclusion which considers recommendations and implications of the study.

2. Literature review

Domestic tourism is defined by the UNWTO as travel by residents undertaking tourism activities “within the country of residence” (Libreros, 2009, p. 5). Domestic tourism is referred to as part of “internal tourism” along with inbound tourism as consumption for both forms of tourism is taking place within the country. However there are noted challenges in the definition and measurement of the “domestic” tourist (Eijgelaar, Peeters, & Piket, 2008; Telfer & Sharpley, 2008). Some definitions consider the distance travelled away from normal place of residence, some include same-day visitors while others exclude them and others include only those accommodated in lodging facilities neglecting Visiting Friends and Relative (VFR) (Eijgelaar et al., 2008). Though defining this segment is hard, gathering the data is even harder due to lack of clear methodology in the approach to data collection. UNWTO (2007) further compounds the definitional conundrum as it draws a distinction between a domestic tourist and a domestic visitor. A domestic tourist travels outside the “usual environment” overnight for any tourism purpose including visiting one’s second home, while a visitor doesn’t stay overnight outside the usual environment. The definition above brings out two critical issues that need to be carefully considered in a Botswana context. Firstly the term “usual environment”, fundamental to tourism, poses problems in defining it. Literature sometimes attaches the notion of usual environment to an individual while in some instances it relates to a household (Libreros, 1998). The authors argue that individuals in the same household can have different “usual environments”. This becomes even more profound when considered along the second issue raised above of “second homes”. By definition, a second home is a “dwelling used for temporal visits by the owner or someone else, and is not the user’s permanent place of residence” (Marjavaara, 2008, p. 7). In Botswana context, it is not uncommon for individuals to have multiple places of residence. Werbner (2004) refers to such individuals as “Urban Villagers” in that while they live in cities or towns they are proud of their village origins and maintain a residence there which they refer to as “the home where they truly belong” (p. 31). The village residence is considered a permanent home and visited often. In this sense the distinction between the two concepts of “usual environment” and “second home” in Botswana context can be blurred and often poses difficulty in consideration of VFR as a tourism activity. However in the context of this paper, much emphasis is on domestic visits that involve interaction with the tourism industry without necessarily discriminating VFR. Such could be business, leisure, medical, entertainment, recreation and VFR as long as such visits involve what Wang and Pizam (2011) refer to as “spatial movement”. This means the visitor depends on the tourism industry (transportation, accommodation, restaurants etc.) for support since he/she has left the usual support behind.

2.1. Domestic tourism in Botswana

Statistics indicate that the numbers of domestic trips are still trailing international arrivals. According to the Department of Tourism (2012) in their tourism statistics 2006–2010 report, an estimated 2.1 million international tourists visited Botswana in 2010 against 1.2 million domestic visitors in the same period. The domestic tourist figure represents a significant number and though there are no statistics of this sector prior to 2010, it is assumed there has been growth (Department of Tourism, 2011). A larger portion of the domestic visits though are the VFR category at 63%. The proportion of VFR to domestic tourism observed is consistent with regional trends. South Africa also observed that VFR visitors were 66% of the total domestic tourism visits in 2013 (South African Tourism, 2009). Rogerson and Visser (2007) and Faulkner, Laws, and Moscardo (2003) reiterate that tourism in most of Africa is predominated by VFR. Furthermore Faulkner et al. (2003) state that contrary to argument, VFR does not contribute much to the tourism economy due to implications on the accommodation and restaurant sectors. Taking such into consideration, Botswana’s domestic tourists spending was P72 million on accommodations against P2.2 billion by international visitors which further signifies low contribution of the VFR market to the local economy.

The Botswana tourism statistics also indicate that there were 185,416 domestic leisure trips in 2010 (Department of Tourism, 2012). Though this looks like a significant number given the relative small population of the country, it pales in comparison to the outbound visitor numbers. Business Monitor International (2014) indicates that 634,000 Botswana took leisure trips outside the country mostly to neighboring countries of South Africa, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Therefore the statistics demonstrates a propensity to travel by Botswana residents which could create a platform for a sustained domestic consumption.

The Department of Tourism (2012) and the Business Monitor International (2014) in their analysis of the domestic and outbound tourism market, fail to specify neither the areas visited nor the activities partaken by the tourists. This could have helped ascertain the types of activities that interests local visitors for better marketing and specified product provision. However, data on this segment as already alluded is always a challenge. It is also important to look at the policy and regulatory frameworks that govern tourism in Botswana to appreciate its role in the development of domestic tourism.

Tourism was not a priority until the formulation of regulatory and legislative frameworks in the early 1990s and therefore the industry is even up to now, not fully developed. The Tourism Policy (1990) is a document which preceded the regulatory Tourism Act (1992) which sets procedures for licensing, regulation of tourism enterprise categories. The two legal frameworks also advocated for a high value/low volume approach to tourism development which has been in existence ever since. The Tourism Regulations (1996) sets the license and training levy fees as well as requirements for grading of tourism establishments which were later driven by the Botswana Tourism Organisation (BTO) after its establishment (Leechor & Fabricius, 2006). Botswana Tourism Master Plan (2000) is another document which set future goals for the development of tourism. It identifies product diversification, citizen participation, public/private partnerships and ecological/economic sustainability to be given priority in driving tourism development. The master plan further advocates for a mix of high/medium/low price tourism. The ecologically sensitive areas of Chobe and Okavango will maintain the high price/low volume policy and a mix of medium and low price will be employed elsewhere. Furthermore the development and promotion of domestic tourism to attract more visitors in the low season is another area identified by the master plan. However there is a noted lack of coordination between organisations tasked with these documents (Leechor & Fabricius, 2006; World Travel & Tourism Council, 2007) as well as lack of an implementation plan. As such there is little progress made in implementation efforts until recently when the country had provision of events (cultural and sporting) which are aimed at diversifying the tourism product and appeal to the domestic market. However such events are seasonal which affects sustenance of the domestic tourism sector.

2.2. Domestic tourism challenges

There are various challenges identified in the literature that impede maximum realization of the potential in domestic tourism. The challenges are at various levels in different destinations in that while some are policy and marketing related issues at destination management level, others are more to do with socio-cultural and socio-economic aspects within destinations.

As alluded in various literature (Alipour et al., 2013; Aramberri, 2004; Cochrane, 2009; Ghimire & Li, 2001; Mbaiwa et al., 2007; Michaud & Turner, 2006; Wu & Cai, 2006;), there has been deliberate efforts to prioritize international tourism promotion over domestic tourists by destinations especially in the developing regions. However the facilities and infrastructure intended for international travelers have benefited the domestic market and led to its growth (Ghimire & Li, 2001; Wu & Cai, 2006). Wu and Cai (2006) observe that a resort in China was ultimately marketed to the domestic market after efforts to attract foreign visitors failed. Even where initiatives were aimed at the domestic market, they are reactive mainly as a result of declining international arrivals or increasing outbound travel by citizens. These meant authorities were led to promote domestic tourism to curb diminishing foreign exchanges and employment due to outbound travel and low foreign visitation. A case in

point is Thailand authority that had to come up with initiatives to encourage domestic tourism due to increased marketing by regional competitors which had resulted in more Thais going outside the country (Kaosa-ard et al., 2001). This shows that marketing plays an important role in the development of the domestic sector just as it plays a critical role in international tourism arrivals. However such marketing communication needs to be relevant to the target audience for it to be effective. Butler and Richardson (2013) noted lack of knowledge and awareness due to non-availability of information in vernacular language understandable by the target black audience in their study of “young Sowetans and tourism participation” in South Africa. Mbaiwa et al. (2007) also observed that poor marketing and development of tourism assets have contributed to low domestic tourism participation in developing countries and more specifically in Botswana.

Conversely a destination’s regard for tourism in general can inhibit domestic tourism development. Alipour et al. (2013) noted an overarching policy-makers suspicion on international tourism in Iran, whose attitude extended to domestic tourism and resulted in a lack of domestic tourism policy. Unequal development of regions or areas within a destination can also pose a challenge to domestic tourism. Haddad, Porsse, and Rabahy (2013) observed that regional attributes were vital in domestic tourists’ choice which led them to conclude that investment in tourism infrastructure is needed to improve their attractiveness and increase the tourist choices.

Notwithstanding the above, socio-cultural and socio-economic aspects within destinations pose problems for domestic tourism development. Disposable income has been noted as a dominant determinant and a “push” for tourism participation. This means the level of income greatly influences participation in tourism. Often due to a focus on international tourism, prices for tourism services could be prohibitive as has been noted in Botswana (Mbaiwa et al., 2007). Likewise lack of financial means, prohibitive transportation costs and lack of organised tours have been noted as challenges among young Soweto dwellers in South Africa (Butler & Richardson, 2013). Therefore growth in income levels frequently corresponds with tourism participation and drive the development of related industries within a destination (Alipour et al., 2013; Yang, Liu, & Qi, 2014). Nonetheless some of the obstructions are non-economic. Butler and Richardson (2013) observed a perception by mostly young people that national parks in South Africa are “not exciting for young people” and that “... Wildlife is for white people” (p. 317). These the authors believe are a result of a dark past associated with apartheid South Africa which reinforced messages that national parks are the exclusive preserve of “whites”. However in spite of cultural and racial background, novelty also plays a role in the choice of domestic attractions, a point emphasized mostly in support of diversification of attractions in different areas in a destination. Canavan (2012) detected in one area in Isle of Man, UK, domestic tourists’ preference for “out-of-the-way” places as local attractions were not considered novel as they were well known.

3. Methodology

The researchers have chosen to carry out a descriptive qualitative research design to explore factors which contribute to low participation in domestic tourism in Botswana. Qualitative studies allow researchers to explore behaviour, perspectives, feelings, and experiences in depth (Blaxter, Hughes, & Tight, 2006) which was deemed to have the potential to benefit the study. A focus study approach was adopted as a data collection procedure. The procedure involves engaging a small number of people in an informal group discussion focusing on a particular topic (Wilkinson, 2004 cited in Onwuegbuzie, Dickinson, Leech, & Zoran, 2009). According to Onwuegbuzie et al. (2009) focus groups are less threatening or intimidating given the environment is made comfortable for the participants in order for them to discuss and express themselves. Eight participants were selected overall using an expert sampling technique. This type of purposive sampling technique is used where there is need to gain knowledge from individuals that have particular expertise (Teddlie & Yu, 2007). Participants were purposively selected from two categories. One being public sector tourism organizations as well as the industry representative group, Hospitality and Tourism Association of Botswana (HATAB) which are the main tourism stakeholders. From this category, one representative (Public Relations Manager) was selected from BTO, two (chief tourism officer and senior tourism officer)

from the Department of Tourism (DOT) and one (wildlife officer) from the DWNP and another one (marketing officer) from HATAB. The other category was the travel industry. This group could not be part of the focus group because they had already made a commitment to attend the World Travel Market which conceded with the date of the focus group; therefore interviews were conducted one-on-one with each participant. There were three participating companies drawn from this category; selected due to the fact that they are some of the first travel and tour companies in Botswana and therefore have extensive knowledge of the industry. The companies selected were Seabelo Travel and Tours, AT & T Monnakgotla Travel & Tours and Harvey World Travel which had one representative each. The participants therefore had knowledge and expertise, resided in Gaborone for ease of access and had agreed to form part of the focus group.

Informed consent was obtained from the participants through a consent letter which was signed by them. The focus group was conducted at the Botswana Accountancy College boardroom on an agreed date and time. An interview guide was used for guidance and a tape recorder was used to record the proceedings. Recorded audio material was transcribed for analytical purposes and a constant comparative analysis technique was used to analyse the data. This method was formulated by Glaser and Strauss (1967 cited in Boeijs, 2002; Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009) and involves the data collected being coded, grouped into categories and finally developing themes identified. The technique was selected because it allowed analysis to be done between the two sets of participants in a comparative manner. It allows for themes to be refined as it allows for researchers to assess if themes from one group will emerge from the next group (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2009). The participants were given pseudo names to ensure confidentiality and for analysis purposes. The focus group was coordinated and led by Mr. Morupisi (the first author) and the respondents were all allowed to respond to questions synonymously.

4. Discussion of findings

The results from the focus group and the interviews revealed themes that were consistent between the two subject groups. The challenges that emerged from the analysis were in three main themes; culture of Botswana, monotonous tourism product and price. However there were other emergent themes which could not be discarded as they linked with the identified main ones and they were discussed too.

4.1. Culture of Botswana (local people)

The tourism stakeholders clearly pointed out the culture of Botswana as one of the reasons why Botswana do not travel locally. Culture of Botswana in this case refers to generally the way of life and what locals perceive as their norm.

In terms of travelling, Botswana were viewed to be open to the idea of travelling. Just that they travel to their home villages mainly to visit their relatives, to the farm or the cattle post. However, in terms of actually going to the tourism attractions in Botswana, it was not viewed as a necessity. This attitude was blamed on the way Botswana were raised which contributed to them feeling they do not need to travel for leisure. The view is encapsulated by many of the respondents during the focus group discussion in the following citations:

The way we were raised knowing that after going to town with intentions to make money out there, one has to go back home during the holidays and show parents what you have been working for by helping around with what's needed or going to the farm checking on the livestock and the caretakers. Even weekends, most Botswana use these weekends to go to their cattle posts and farms hence not much time to travel for leisure. (Lerato -Wildlife Manager)

There is this belief or perception that travelling is for the international tourists only. This can be traced back to our culture of believing that travelling involves going to the cattle post and the farm and then back home. (Keletso - Policy formulation Manager)

This went on to be the case as one official went further and said:

When it's a holiday, Motswana would think of going to the farm and for some who don't have farms, they dwell more on having fun especially drinking alcohol rather than going to Maun (Setso – HATAB).

The observations made above are consistent with Werbner (2004) observation about “urban villagers” who live in cities but identify more with their rural origins and regards their village homes as places where they truly belong. In such instances time away from work involves visiting the second home which might or might not be viewed as leisure activity in as far as the definition of the concept of “leisure” is concerned. However given the UNWTO conceptual clarification of the domestic tourist, second homes, farms and cattle posts falls within the “usual environment” which then disqualifies such visits as domestic tourism. Another findings by Butler and Richardson (2013) in South Africa noted that national parks are not exciting for the youth and that wildlife is viewed as the preserve for “white” people could also explain the choice where time is spend away from work.

4.1.1. *Lack of preparedness*

Notwithstanding the above observation, it appeared not to adequately explain the increasingly high numbers of outbound leisure travel. However the travel industry respondents seemed to provide a different but related view. It was observed that while culture might be an issue, lack of preparedness for leisure travel by citizens is a challenge to explain low participation.

What I have realized is that Batswana are the last minute people. They don't plan ahead in terms of travelling and they don't seem to understand that travelling involves parting ways with a lot of money ... (Lerato)

Leisure travel like most other household expenditure, involves financial outlay best prepared for in advance. However such preparedness is also attached to the priority placed to the expenditure. Therefore one might argue that the lack of preparedness demonstrates the value placed on leisure travel by the domestic market. Nonetheless one cannot discount the pull of the external destinations especially regionally as one of the factors contributing to less interest on the local tourism provision. As encapsulated by a statement from one of the travel agents;

... like the saying always goes. The grass is always greener on the other side. I think that's what Batswana believe that it's better to travel outside than to travel within the country. (Victoria)

The lure of different products offered regionally especially access to the sea, cannot be ignored as a pull factor to local tourists. Such assertions are given credence by the Business Monitor International (2014) figures of outbound tourism which stood at 634,000. Furthermore it appears another underlying factor is that domestic tourists also have to contend with apathy from the local service providers who favour international visitors. This is emphasized by one of the travel operators.

If you travel going to places like Kasane and Okavango...there is that stereotype that it's a place meant for the international tourists. So they are not quick to assist you if you are a Motswana. So I think that's where the problem comes in that they treat you as a Motswana. They don't treat you as a tourist. (Nametso – AT&T Travel & Tours)

Therefore even though lack of preparedness might present a challenge as mentioned, the other underlying issues also present an amalgam of factors which best highlight the prevailing situation in the Botswana domestic tourism consumption habits. Such factors might best provide a more over-riding rationale given the demonstration of propensity to travel by the citizens in their outbound consumption pattern.

4.2. Monotonous tourism product

Botswana tourism is wildlife based and this has been viewed as one of the reasons why Batswana do not travel much within Botswana as cited by all respondents. Firstly nature-based tourism is the only and predominant product on offer in Botswana so much that an average Mtswana's top-of-the-mind awareness of tourism attractions in Botswana is Okavango Delta and Chobe National Park which are both nature-based products. This was emphasized by one government official, who asserted much to the giggles of fellow group members;

.....and when you talk about tourism in Botswana what comes to mind to an ordinary Mtswana is the Okavango delta and the Chobe national park. The Okavango delta has been our reflection. (KELETSO – Policy Formulation Manager)

Secondly the product is very familiar to the average man on the street due to their upbringing. Many observed that due to most people's rural upbringing in Botswana, wildlife and nature was familiar as there was interaction with them at one point at the farming land or cattle post. This has caused locals to be attracted to the unfamiliar outside of their country. The sheer mention of wildlife and nature is not appealing to locals even if they have not experienced the tourism products locally. Canavan (2012) made a similar observation in a study of micro-domestic tourism of one area of the Isle of Man in the UK, as local attractions were not considered novel enough and locals preferred attractions in other regions. However, where there is unequal development between regions as is the case in Botswana, tourist choices will be reduced prompting outbound travel. Haddad et al. (2013) emphasized the need for investment in regional tourism infrastructure as they are vital in domestic tourists' choice. Furthermore, in Botswana there is limited knowledge of the product offerings which compounds the problem, a point also noted by Mbaiwa et al. (2007) when they identified poor marketing as a challenge. A travel agent had this to say;

Batswana don't know their country. Even in the past when someone mentions travelling, they will want to go to Capetown or Sun City [South Africa]. Maybe it's because they are really not sure about what's on offer. Or maybe it's because they [products] are wild animals that we know, we grew up at the cattle post seeing plenty of animals. (Phetso – Travel Agent)

... Like you go to Khutse, you go to the CKGR, its excellent because you can really be within nature. But as for Batswana, I don't think that is what Batswana they are looking for. (Victoria – Harvey World Travel Agent)

Thirdly the options available from regional competitors are more appealing to Botswana tourists. This makes it easy to resist an undesired option locally if there are better choices available. Mbaiwa et al. (2007) also noted poor development of tourism assets in Botswana as a major contributing factor to low domestic tourism participation. Furthermore the positioning of Botswana in the middle of Southern Africa makes other regional destinations easily accessible by her citizens. One travel agent had this to say;

The options available to Batswana if they go to South Africa, it's much more than what might be available if they go to Serowe, to Khama rhino sanctuary or ... the kind of tourism that Botswana offers is very specific. (Victoria – Harvey World Travel Agent)

In addition to the above, a government official respondent made an observation that Botswana tourism product is also not family-oriented as it is not children-friendly which is discouraging to some travellers who would want to travel with their children.

One of the reasons why there is lack of travel locally has been seen to be the way the product of Botswana is packaged. It is not a family oriented product ... Batswana would want to travel as a family and when you look at a place like Chobe for example and you look at the product that we have at Chobe, It is not necessarily child friendly ... in the sense that, adults may enjoy the sun down, as for a kid they won't find that fascinating (Dikeledi – Destination Marketing).

4.2.1. High prices

All the respondents were in agreement that prices charged at local facilities were too high. The initial strategy made by the government of Botswana through the Tourism Policy (Government of Botswana, 1990) was specific in advocating for high quality standards and prices to shift the typology of tourists from “casual campers to those who occupy permanent accommodation” (Government of Botswana, 1990, p. 3). This was further reinforced implicitly by the SADC protocol on the development of tourism (SADC, 1998). There was a particular focus on attracting high paying international tourists instead of regional campers who paid little and brought with them their own provisions, degraded the environment and left no benefits. The approach led to the standard and pricing of tourism products in Botswana being too high. Though the intended benefits were realized, the domestic market on the other hand was left out as the prices were beyond what local people could afford. This was asserted by most respondents.

The prices being charged are a bit high and Botswana cannot afford to go to these lodges. Maybe that’s one of the reasons why people don’t travel within our country. (Keletso – Policy Formulation Manager)

A government official added:

the problem could be the expense side like you mentioned, some other lodges around Botswana they are charging more for the camps Which is a lot of money for an individual Botswana who has a regular pay in our economy state. (Setso – HATAB)

The point was reiterated by the travel agent respondents;

Am sure you are aware that going to the delta is extremely expensive, that is the Okavango delta. And it is only a niche market that can afford to go to the delta. (Victoria – Harvey World Travel Agent)

One other problem will be the pricing. A hotel accommodation in cape town or Mozambique or Durban, it’s much cheaper than a hotel in Kasane. (Nametso – AT&T Travel & Tours)

4.2.2. Benefits vis-a-vie access

However the respondents from the public sector cautioned that though it’s admissible that high prices are restraining domestic travel, it is important to consider that the government has to obtain maximum benefits for their investment in this sector. As such for that to be realized, some unpopular decisions will have to be taken based on the best return on investment. The respondents argue that the pricing is not much of a concern for the targeted international market as long as the standards and service match it. This was emphasized by one BTO respondent;

As we are complaining about the pricing, international tourists simply walk in and demand the product regardless of the price.... We have to take unpopular decisions, and such include taking decisions that would have a better pay for government at a lower investment than those that will require us to invest a lot and not necessarily get a return of investment. (Dikeledi – Destination Marketing)

Therefore considering the current pricing model match the target market’s expectations, public sector respondents feel changing the pricing model will not only affect government income but small businesses as well.

... the other issue we have with domestic tourism is that if you were to go with the domestic travellers wish, pricing in Botswana will be messed up. Remember, Mary is running a business after all, and she has got overheads of that business, you see what I mean? (Dikeledi – Destination Marketing)

Further to that, such high prices are not predominant in all tourism areas within the country. There are areas especially in the south which don’t attract a lot of international tourists and whose prices

of services are deemed reasonable to attract domestic tourists. However developments are lacking behind in such areas as Moremi gorge, Mmankgodi, Otse and Matsieng footprint making them less appealing. Public sector respondents link such deficiency in developments to rationalization of costs where investment in tourism facilities and infrastructure is considered based on their appeal to the international market.

4.3. Conclusion and recommendations

The study sought the views and perceptions of the tourism stakeholders concerning the domestic tourism situation in Botswana. All the respondents affirmed that the state of the domestic market is not where it should and there are challenges that need to be addressed for progress to be realized. The culture of the local people is one stumbling block that needs to be overcome. The fact that most Batswana consider holidays and free time away from work, an opportunity to visit home villages, cattle posts and farming areas affects tourism negatively. Literature shows that engagement with the tourism industry during one's travel regardless of motivation is critical to the sustenance of the industry. The above challenge has not been helped by an undiversified tourism product offering in Botswana. Respondents believe that nature based tourism dominated by wildlife and the wilderness does not appeal to most prospective travellers simply because they seek novelty. This and the high prices for services in the industry that is predominantly international focused does not help the situation and therefore pose a barrier to domestic tourism growth.

The study therefore drew the following recommendations from the discussions with participants. There is need for a revision of the current tourism policy. The policy has been in existence since 1990 and served the country well. However as was first highlighted by the Tourism Master Plan, there is a need for a mix of the pricing model. That means the ecologically sensitive areas could maintain the High value-low volume approach while a different approach is applied elsewhere. As highlighted earlier the issue was recommended by the Master plan but implementation has been a problem. The first step then is for the policy to be reviewed incorporating the recommendations of the master plan for domestic tourism to grow. Such a review will also catalyze the provision of other tourism products and aid diversity. The new policy also needs to make a provision for concessionary rates for residents especially in the accommodation sector during the offseason. Statistics show that there are a growing number of outbound leisure travellers to regional destinations. This in itself indicates a market for leisure tourism products which can benefit from a diversified provision and better pricing at home which will lead to more benefits for the country in increased employment and addressing the seasonality issue. With a diversified tourism product, public awareness campaigns could then be done to sensitize the market about the product offering in the country.

The study is not without limitations as there is a clear lack of up to date statistics on Botswana domestic tourism. This affected the paper as growth or lack of it of the sector could not be ascertained. There is scope for further research on the perceptions of the domestic tourists on what challenges they encounter in local tourism consumption. Furthermore research on the domestic tourists could also consider marketing information like the preferred products by this sector as well as identify segments which can then inform any product diversification initiatives that can be undertaken. The outbound travel market also presents a research opportunity to understand what rationale informs their choices of products and destination to visit. This will in turn best inform local authorities in rationalizing investment to target this market and meet their demand.

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