

A profile of tourists visiting the Kruger National Park

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Due to shrinking budgets for conservation and an increase in the number of government and privately owned parks, it has become very important for parks to determine who the tourists are who visit one of South Africa's top tourist attractions. The reason for this is that park management and marketers need to focus their efforts to optimise their limited resources. This can only be done once there is a clear understanding of who the market is, where they come from and what they expect. The literature study clearly showed that market segmentation is essential for the effective marketing of a tourism product or destination. Two surveys were conducted, one in 2001 and a follow-up study in 2002, profiling tourists to the Kruger National Park. Different months were chosen to conduct the two surveys in order to get a more comprehensive profile of tourists visiting the park in different seasons.

Key words: market segmentation, profile, market, tourism, tourist/s, tourism industry, Kruger National Park.

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Introduction

One of the world's best-known and most profitable national parks, the Kruger National Park (KNP) in the Republic of South Africa, was established in 1898 as the Sabie Game Reserve. The park is one of the largest parks in the world, with the main aim to protect the biodiversity of the region. The latter includes 147 mammal species, 500 species of birds, 116 species of reptiles, 34 species of amphibians, 49 species of fish, 457 species of trees and shrubs, 1500 species of smaller plants and countless species of insects (Dennis 2000). The KNP covers a total surface area of 19 624 km², with a total length of 350 km and an average width of 60 km. Most of the park consists of flat grass and bush-covered plains, interrupted by the low Lebombo Mountains situated along the border of Mozambique. Negotiations are under way with neighbouring countries which will significantly enlarge the park to form the Limpopo Transfrontier Conservation Area. This will be the largest national park in the world. Approximately 950 000 people visit

this park each year, of which 80 % are South Africans.

To ensure continuity and growth, a destination (attraction) is dependent on, *inter alia*, tourists and the satisfaction of their needs. Although total satisfaction of tourists' needs are not the goal in itself, striving to achieve this enables the attraction to attain its own goals (Strydom *et al.* 2000). To achieve maximum tourist satisfaction, marketing strategists divide the heterogeneous market into fairly homogeneous groups of tourists, a process that is referred to as market segmentation. Through market segmentation one can develop a tourist profile that will enable KNP to concentrate its resources and efforts so that maximum penetration of that market can be achieved (Doole & Lowe 2001).

However, little is known about tourists who visit the park. The problem that KNP must deal with is that the 'product' sought by tourists can be satisfied by a number of attractions/destinations. This creates the need to develop an overall competitive advantage for KNP (Hassan 2000) and makes the pro-

filing of tourists crucial (Nickels & Wood 1997). The number of parks and game reserves in South Africa are on the increase, which leads to stiff competition. Except for national parks, there are also parks at local, provincial and government levels, as well as more than 8000 privately owned game reserves. All these parks and game reserves are offering an ecotourism experience. Other destinations/attractions are winning competitive battles through careful analysis and response to the core values and needs of the segmented travel market place (Hassan 2000). KNP needs to do the same. With regard to the international travel to South Africa, research by South African Tourism indicated that more than 80 % of these tourists travel to South Africa for game and nature experiences (SAT 2002). This creates yet another opportunity for marketers to profile tourists travelling to the KNP (SAT 2002).

It is no longer possible to serve a total market and it is therefore necessary to segment markets and concentrate on a single segment or a number of segments (Saayman 2001; Kinnear *et al.* 1995). Segments are evaluated according to a number of criteria, but the essence of the approach is to identify the most relevant characteristics of tourists seeking particular sets of benefits from their tourism and leisure purchases (Laws 1997; Pride & Ferrell 1987). In this process, consumer behaviour plays an important role. The tourist does not make purchase decisions in isolation. The mix of cultural, social, personal, psychological factors and previous experiences, all which influence behaviour, is largely uncontrollable. Because of the influence exerted upon patterns of buying, it is essential that as much effort as possible is put into understanding how these factors interact and ultimately how they influence decisions (Lamb *et al.* 2002). The attractiveness of KNP reflects the feelings, beliefs and opinions that an individual has about the park's ability to provide satisfaction in relation to his or her special vacation needs (Slabbert 2002).

Successful segmentation is the product of a detailed understanding of the market and will therefore take time (Saayman 2001; McDonald & Dunbar 1995). Market segmentation is also one of the keys to developing a sustainable competitive advantage based on differentiation, low cost, or a focused strategy (Aaker 1998). Knowing the profile characteristics of target groups can help marketing strategists to tailor the product or service and promote the product or service more effectively. Each group can be targeted and reached with a distinct marketing mix (McDonald & Dunbar 1995). Communication effects have a direct bearing on the prospective tourist's decision to act. The prospective tourist decides whether or not to respond to the advertising by taking action (Pritchard 1998). To be of use, markets need to be segmented according to attributes that can relate to the product or service, distribution, price and media (Andereck & Caldwell 1994).

Benefits of market segmentation include:

- long-term relationships can be formed with tourists who are brand loyal (Nickels & Wood 1997);
- gauging the park's current position, as it is perceived by the tourists, relative to the competition;
- segmentation can help guide the proper allocation and use of marketing resources (Strydom *et al.* 2000; Semenik 2002);
- new markets can be detected and the success of marketing campaigns can be measured;
- scarce resources are not wasted and the marketing message/communication can be very specific;
- skills and insights used in segmenting the product market give the KNP an important competitive advantage by identifying buyer groups that will respond favourably to the park's marketing efforts (Slabbert 2002);
- long-term growth can be secured by understanding each tourist market as an individual group of tourists with their distinct cultural make-up (Reisinger & Turner 1998);

- better service and facilities can be delivered (Saayman 2001).

It is therefore important for the KNP to profile the target market accurately and to understand its diversity. The profiling of a tourist typically involves four components, namely demographic, geographic, psychographic and socio-economic characteristics (Saayman 2001 & Kotler *et al.* 1999).

Based on the above, the purpose of this paper is to determine the profile of the typical tourist visiting The Kruger National Park. This information will help park management and marketers in the formulation of marketing policies and development strategies in order to maintain a competitive advantage.

Methods

The methodology used in this research was twofold, namely a literature study and two surveys. The literature study focused on similar research as well as marketing literature in order to compile a questionnaire. Research by Kotler *et al.* (1999) and Saayman (2001) gave insight into what aspects are relevant for the development of a profile of tourists to the park.

The surveys were conducted in the KNP by means of questionnaires completed by field-workers whilst interviewing tourists. The 2001 survey was completed during the first two weeks of May and the 2002 survey was completed during the first two weeks of July. The reason for this was because the months of May to July are rated as shoulder to high season and it is also the best time of the year to view game in this park. A random sampling method was used to determine the number of tourists who should form part of the survey. Interviews with 220 people were conducted in 2001. Camps included in the study were: Berg en Dal (75), Satara (68), Shingwedzi (34) and Olifants (40). A total of 323 questionnaires were completed in 2002, viz., in Berg en Dal (62), Olifants (93), Shingwedzi (81) and Satara (87) (Fig. 1). The number of participants was determined by the availability of tourists and bed capacity. A structured questionnaire was used. The questionnaire dealt with demographic, socio-economic, geographic and psychographic information. Respondents had to rate aspects on a five-point Likert scale, where:

1 = less important, 5 = very important.

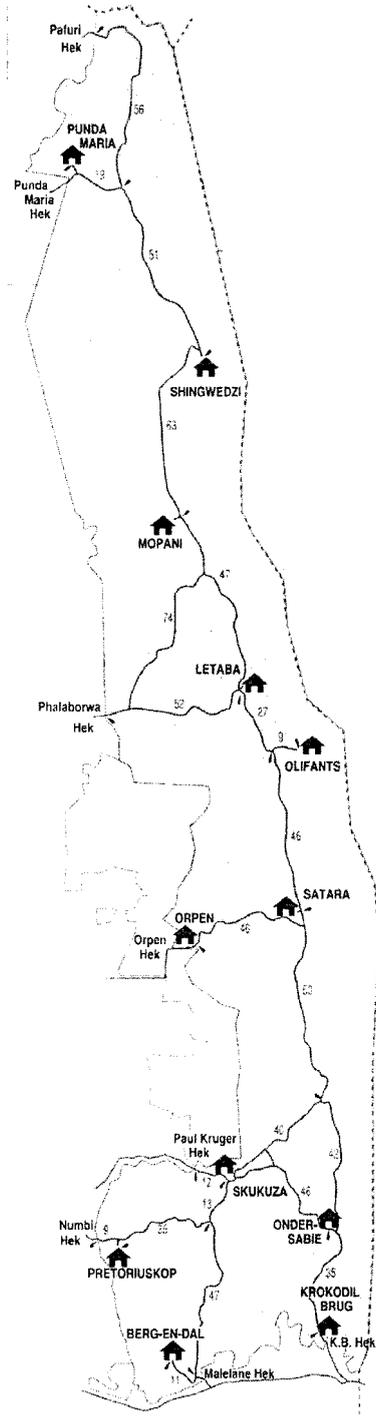


Fig. 1. Map of the Kruger National Park.

Table 1
Demographic profile

	2001		2002	
Gender	64 %	Male	66 %	Male
	36 %	Female	34 %	Female
Language	54 %	Afrikaans	68 %	Afrikaans
	40 %	English	26 %	English
	5 %	Xhosa	4.7 %	Other languages
Marital status	78 %	Married	85 %	Married
	11 %	Unmarried	9 %	Not married
	6 %	Living together	3 %	Living together
Size of travelling group	68 %	1 to 2	47 %	3 to 4 people
	24 %	3 to 4	30 %	5 to 10 people
	8 %	5 or more	18 %	1 to 2 people
Occupation	27 %	Professional	43 %	Professional
	22 %	Other	14 %	Managerial
	17 %	Managerial	10 %	Other

Table 2
Socio-economic profile

	2001		2002	
Annual income	24 %	R 50 001 - R 100 000	16 %	R100 001 - R150 000
	13 %	R100 001 - R 150 000	15 %	R50 001 - R 100 000
	12 %	R150 001 - R 200 000		
Education	35 %	Diploma/degree	45 %	Diploma/degree
	31 %	Matric/Equivalent	18 %	Post graduate
	18 %	Professional	20 %	Matric
Mode of transport	36 %	Sedan	30 %	Sedan
	18 %	4 x 4	20 %	4 x 4
	15 %	Leisure vehicle	18 %	Kombi
Expenditure		R 3500 per travelling group per trip		R 4440 per travelling group per trip

Table 3
Geographic profile

	2001		2002	
Province	39%	Gauteng	42%	Gauteng
	11%	Northern Province	20%	Western Cape
			8%	Free state
Country of residence	11%	Other countries	22%	USA
			22%	Australia
			19%	UK

For the purpose of this article, certain aspects of the market segmentation model most frequently used in tourism research was applied (Saayman 2001; Kotler *et al.* 1999; Proctor 1996; Pender 1999; Nickels & Wood 1997). This segmentation model is used in profiling a specific market according to:

- demographic information, e.g., age, gender, income, marital status, education and nationality;
- socio-economic information, for example spending patterns;
- psychographic information, for example reasons for attending and most effective marketing tools;
- geographic information, e.g., where tourists come from.

Results

From the surveys the following results were obtained. Only the three highest percentages in each category are indicated in the results, therefore the total of some of the percentages will not equal 100 %.

Demographic profile

From Table 1 it is clear that in both years the respondents are mostly married, Afrikaans-speaking tourists who travel in groups of approximately three people and practise a professional occupation.

Socio-economic profile

Table 2 shows that the respondents' annual income varies between R 50 001 and R 150 000. Most of the tourists are well-educated and this supports the notion that they are in professional occupations. Their most common mode of transport is sedan vehicles, and the second-most common mode of transport is 4 x 4 vehicles. The average expenditure per travelling group in 2002 has increased by 26.8 % compared to 2001.

Geographic profile

Tourists to this park are mainly South Africans who reside in the Gauteng province. However, the 2002 survey indicated an increase in tourists from the Limpopo and Western Cape provinces. This could be due

to the school holidays in July, compared to May which is not a school holiday month. In July, international tourists were mostly from the USA (22 %), Australia (22 %) and the UK (19 %).

Psychographic profile

More than 50 % of the tourists in both surveys (Table 4) indicated that they had visited one of the national parks on average three times per year. This is an indication that most of the respondents are loyal. From a parks management perspective, it is necessary to maintain a high quality of service to persuade these tourists to return annually. The reasons for visiting this park are: to view the variety of animal life; to relax; and to break away from their normal routine. The decision to travel to KNP was made at least three weeks in advance and the respondents stayed between four and seven days.

From Table 5 it may be concluded that family and friends are an important source of information for tourists. Word of mouth was followed by magazines, specifically the *Get-away*, *Caravan* and *Outdoor Life*, as well as *OutThere*. The newspapers that are read most by respondents are the *Rapport* and *Beeld*. This correlates with the fact that these tourists are mainly Afrikaans-speaking. Television programmes most enjoyed by respondents are news and current affairs, as well as documentaries.

Profile of the tourist

In order to make sense of the information obtained above, Plog (1976) recommended the personification of target groups, so that dull statistics are transposed into a 'living' profile to which economists and marketers can respond more easily. Using this approach introduced by the Plog research group, the typical tourist to the Kruger National Park is personified as Chris and Penny Steyn.

Chris and Penny Steyn are living in Pretoria, in Gauteng province in the Republic of South Africa. They are Afrikaans-speaking and have a son, Chris junior. Chris (senior) is

Table 4
Personality type

	2001		2002	
Personality type				
Preferred leisure activities	88 %	Game viewing	90 %	Game viewing
	78 %	Travel	67 %	Travel
	72 %	Reading	20 %	Movies
Buying behaviour				
Frequency of visits to national parks (per year)	51 %	2 - 5 Times	58 %	2 - 5 Times
	20 %	Once	27 %	Once
	14 %	5 - 10 Times	11 %	5 - 10 Times
Preference of the park	42 %	Variety of wildlife	59 %	Variety of wildlife
	22 %	Beautiful nature	15 %	Wilderness experience
	18 %	Wilderness experience	9 %	Other
Reason for visiting	82 %	To relax	61 %	To relax
	78 %	To get away from my regular routine	49 %	To get away from my regular routine
	66 %	To learn about animals in general	35 %	For the benefit of my children
Length of stay	35 %	4 - 7 Days	34 %	7 - 14 Days
	26 %	7 - 14 Days	33 %	4 - 7 Days
	16 %	2 - 4 Days	24 %	2 - 4 Days
Private game reserves	64 %	No	63 %	No
	36 %	Yes	37 %	Yes
Booking arrangements	66 %	21+ Days	84 %	21+Days
	19 %	1 - 7 Days	8 %	1 - 7 Days
	8 %	15 - 21 Days	4 %	15 - 21 Days

Table 5
Media usage

	2001		2002	
Came to hear of the park	51 %	Family and friends	64 %	Family and friends
	24 %	Magazines	27 %	Other
	12 %	SANPARKS	5 %	SA Tourism
Magazines	54 %	Getaway	66 %	Getaway
	44 %	Caravan and outdoor life	68 %	OutThere
	36 %	Timbila	60 %	Caravan and outdoor life
Newspapers	40 %	Beeld	50 %	Rapport
	36 %	Rapport		
Radio and television programmes	76 %	News and current affairs	69 %	Documentaries
	76 %	Documentaries	66 %	News
	58 %	Movies	56 %	Sports

graduated, drives a sedan and works as a manager for a company in Pretoria where he earns approximately R150 000-00 per annum. The family loves to visit the Kruger National Park at least once a year and stays for five days.

They heard about the park from their friends and family and regularly see articles in *Get-away* as well as in documentaries on television. Chris and Penny enjoy watching game as well travelling. They visit the Kruger National Park to relax and enjoy themselves. They enjoy the Kruger National Park because of the variety of game. Because Chris and Penny prefer and love this park, they do not visit privately owned game reserves and remain brand loyal.

Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of this paper was to determine the profile of a typical tourist visiting the Kruger National Park. From this research the following conclusions can be drawn:

- there is not a notable difference between the results, therefore a change from the months May to July, of the surveys done in 2001 and 2002. What does change, however, is that there are more foreign tourists in this park in July than in May. This might be explained by the fact that it is then the European summer holidays;
- a specific market segment has been determined, portrayed by Chris and Penny, which can streamline all marketing efforts and makes it easy to target this particular market;
- tourists visiting the KNP are brand loyal and a quality service should sustain this market well into the future. This creates a situation where marketers can identify other potential markets to focus on them;
- needs of current tourists are basically the same, which makes it easy for the park to gain a larger part of the market.

Based on the conclusions the following recommendations can be made:

- From a marketing point of view, park management knows who the target market

is, especially during the months of May to July. The marketing message for the international market should therefore focus on the fact that May to July is the best game viewing months of the year. If the policy is to focus primarily on the domestic market during these months, then the *status quo* should be maintained. From a management policy point of view, an analysis of certain aspects of the profile, e.g., spending, can give important information on how to create a situation where tourists can spend more money. One way of addressing the latter is by the development of more recreational facilities for children. This will not only lead to more spending in the park but also to investing in a future market for this and other parks. Other parks can take note of these results and implement similar research in order to compare results.

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