

THE ROLE OF HOTELS IN THE CONSUMPTION OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN KENYA

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Abstract

Tourism is Kenya's leading foreign exchange earner, yielding the country over US\$500m annually. The industry contributes over 10% of the GDP to the national economy. However, considering that the industry experienced a slump over the period 1994-2003, there are challenges on how to sustain the current tempo of growth in the midst of growing competition, especially in wildlife-based tourism. There is a general feeling that the tourism industry in Kenya needs to avoid over reliance on wildlife and diversify its tourism product base. The industry stakeholders (led by the government) are seeking means and strategies of differentiating the tourism product offering in order to become a destination of choice in international markets. It is with the foregoing in mind that this study focused on investigating the possibility of incorporating cultural tourism as a means of augmenting and diversifying Kenya's tourism product. This is in view of the fact that the country has a vast ethnic diversity with a total of 42 cultural groupings.

These groups spice up Kenya's heritage with various cultural attractions including music, food, dress, architecture, artifacts, dances, language, religious monuments, prayer and worship, family, government and leadership. The question that the research wanted to answer is how the hotels could contribute to the development of cultural tourism in Kenya. Being a key component and beneficiaries of improved performance in tourism, hotels, have a crucial role to play in shaping the nature of the cultural tourism product offering. The study established that many hotels have taken various specific measures in support of cultural tourism including: architectural designs and layouts that depict the surrounding culture; incorporation of local culture in branding and naming of facilities; inclusion of traditional tastes and choices in food; selection of staff uniform based on traditional designs and colours; emphasis on cultural uniqueness in overseas marketing campaigns; and formation of lobby groups seeking government support for cultural tourism. The research concluded with a recommendation that it would be a great gain if hotels and the Kenya tourism fraternity could develop consistent frameworks for promoting culture as part of tourism consumption. This would then provide a unique strategic marketing formula for Kenya to have an edge over her competitors.

Key words: hotel, cultural tourism, Kenya

JEL classification: D21, J24, L83

1. INTRODUCTION

International tourism arrivals in Kenya showed significant decline between 1994 and 1998 (Kenya, 1999). This trend grossly affected hotel sales and posed a great challenge to the hotel operators who had hitherto largely depended on the international tourism market. Although recent figures show a great improvement (Republic of Kenya, 2004, p.13), pressure from competing destinations remains a threat (Moss 2004, pp.23-34). There is need to re-examine Kenya's product offering in order to repackage and reposition it vis-a-vis the competition. To this effect, Kenya Tourism Board (KTB) has made a number of recommendations (Kenya Tourism Board, 2003, p.42). Key marketing strategies are geared towards making Kenya a destination of choice with a great variety and high quality products. Tourism is Kenya's third largest foreign exchange earner after tea and horticulture, (Republic of Kenya, 2004, p.13) a major

employer and currently accounts for around 10 percent of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

Tourism sector has been identified as one of the sectors that will contribute significantly towards poverty alleviation as set out in the government's *Economic Recovery Strategy for Wealth and Employment Creation 2003-2007* (Republic of Kenya, 2003, p.22). The predisposition of European experienced travellers to visit long haul destinations such as tropical Africa is high (Kenya Tourism Board, 2001, p.54). However, for Kenya to effectively compete against its Eastern and Southern Africa counterparts, product differentiation seems most appropriate. This could be achieved through emphasis on cultural tourism which at present attracts only 19% of tourists against nature and wildlife's 79% (Ibid.), a sub-optimal performance given the rich cultural heritage. It seems necessary for tourism stakeholders in Kenya to work together and seek a lasting competitive advantage. Part of the beneficiaries from this move would definitely

be hotels, as increased tourist arrivals would positively increase room occupancy. The question is how hotels could be actively involved in the development, marketing and maintenance of cultural tourism in Kenya.

Kenya's fascinating cultural history stretches back over 4.5 million years, with some of the earliest known evidence of early man uncovered on the shores of Lake Turkana. Over 42 individual cultures now call Kenya home, including a wide range of nomadic pastoral and sedentary agricultural communities (Akama, 1997, pp. 221-224). The Kenyan coast is characterised by a blend of African and Arabic cultures, a mixture of which has created the unique Swahili culture. Kiswahili is the common tongue and Kenya's *lingua franca*. Kenya's landscape has a great range of variations stretching from the Indian Ocean and its tropical white sand beaches to the highland ranges and snow-capped peak of Mount Kenya, and continuing to Lake Victoria. The vast expanses of savannah, equatorial rain forests, deserts, extinct volcanoes, geysers, a series of fresh water and soda lakes, mountain-top afro-alpine moor lands and glaciers, all within the borders of a single country, make Kenya one of the most geographically diverse countries. The deteriorating world environmental standards due to global warming, pollution and destruction of the natural environment as a result of increased competition on diminishing natural resources is creating a threat to flora and fauna – tourist attractions (Aduda, 2003, p.21).

Over-dependence on wild animals and flora as tourist attractions may not be appropriate. Diversification strategies are necessary and indeed, culturally based tourism could be a viable option.

2. CULTURE AND THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Culture is an embodiment of a people's traditions and ways of life and is illustrated in the Food, rituals, dances, festivals, sculptures, building designs, religion, dressing and other practises. (UNESCO, 2001). According to Nasaa-art, culture is based on the mosaic of places, foods, traditions, art, rituals and experiences of a people. (Nasaa-art, 2004). Lietaer and Meulenaere (2003, pp.967-984) define culture as "a complex whole, which includes knowledge, beliefs, artistic expressions, morals, laws, customs and habits acquired by humans giving them an identity as a member of a specific society." Within this understanding, Kenya, being a multi ethnic nation with over 42 different communities holds a highly diverse mix of cultures. The interplay between culture and development is both complex and dynamic.

Nana and Mensah (2006, pp. 299-312) say that culture includes beliefs, values, attitudes, customs and institutions, which influence the way of life of a particular society. This means that culture is the total culmination of a people's way of life and not just the old traditional practices. This culture of often resides with the indigenous people, which justifies why some studies refer to cultural tourism as indigenous tourism. Cultural tourism therefore means travel concerned with

experiencing cultural environments, including landscapes, the visual and performing arts, and special (local) lifestyles, values, traditions, events as well as other ways of creative and inter-cultural exchange processes. This creates into the Tourism industry, an opening for the marketing of cultural tourism. It has been argued that mass tourism and an authentic living indigenous culture simply cannot coexist (Lietaer, Meulenaere, 2003, pp. 967-984). Thus, increasing numbers of tourists tend to ultimately destroy the exotic culture that tourists come to experience in the first place. Many major tourist destinations have gone through this process. Example abound in Europe where the Grand Tour, a tour of European Civilization and a part of any gentlemen's education, degenerated to a fashionable mass tourist product.

Heritage tourism, which is the same as cultural tourism, has often been criticized for converting local cultures and lifestyles into "commodities" for sale to foreign audiences (Nana, Mensah, 2006, pp. 299-312). In this argument, cultural commoditization contributes to the denigration of social customs, alienation of residents and the creation of homogeneity between places. These are some of the fears, which Kenya as a destination must be prepared to address. According to Sherlock (1999, pp. 126-127) the community is a fundamental component of tourism whether in the urban or rural setting. He sees the community as a group of heterogeneous people who share the locality, and who are an important instrumental in tourism design and sustainability. Thus, by looking at the power relations and roles within the community, it is possible to begin to dissect the needs and understand who benefits and who loses from tourism development. The necessary measures and precaution can then be put in place to avoid or minimize negative impacts of usage of culture as a tourist resource. Communities, whether rural or urban, could be used as agents of development, preservation and sustainability of cultural tourism in Kenya. This research examines the role of the hotels, as part of larger community, in the development of the destination's cultural tourism offering.

Cultural tourism as an option

Sustainability of tourism has attracted great interest both in the practice and in academics. A study that was carried out by Totaro and Simeone (2000, pp. 238-249) found that the present market demand of tourism is largely targeted at the enhancement of the territory and its cultural heritage alongside a consideration for a recovery of the anthropological, archaeological, historical and architectural aspects. Accordingly, cultural heritage as a resource base for tourism is considered to be more sustainable than the natural heritage. This was the conclusion arrived at the International Congress on Economic Development and Sustainability: the Environmental and Cultural Tourism as New Occupation Opportunity in Capri Island (Ibid). Elmina Cultural and Heritage Management Project in Ghana has been described as a model cultural tourism project in Africa (Nana, Mensah, 2006, pp. 299-312). The main goal of this project was to develop a clear-cut strategy and

institutional framework for integrated urban cultural heritage conservation in the city of Elmina and to revitalize the identified mutual heritage.

This would ensure integrated cultural heritage preservation, guide future development and stimulate economic investment. This appears to be an example upon which cultural tourism development in Kenya can be modelled. Cultural tourism is an appropriate mechanism for visitors in particular locality to have the heritage experience. According to Hannabuss (1999, pp. 295-302) everything appears to be heritage in the modern context. A mine that closes yesterday becomes industrial heritage today. Breweries and aqueducts, fishing ports and jute factories, tenement flats and car factories go the same way. There is a clear trend in which many a society seems to be preoccupied by cultural preservation to attract visitors and future generations.

Hospitality, Food and culture

The symbolic connection between food and alcohol is readily acknowledged in numerous disciplines including psychology, sociology, and anthropology (Pettigrew, Charters, 2006: 169-180). Both products are deeply imbued with cultural meaning and as a result are heavily involved in ceremonial and mundane rituals alike (Douglas, 1987, pp.3-15; Wallendorf, 1993, p. 179). They are key elements in much social interaction and have an important social function as a mechanism for determining and communicating group membership and exclusion (Heath, 1987, pp.16-69; Barr, 1995, p.14). Consumption patterns relating to both food and alcohol are reported to demonstrate distinct relationships with demographic variables such as gender, age, and social class (Levy, 1981, pp. 49-61, 1986, p.43, Fiske et al, 1987, p.122), indicating the extent to which consumption is socially and culturally influenced. The notion of food playing a critical role in the cultural experience in various tourist destinations provides a great opportunity for Kenya. This dimension also enhances further the vital linkage between tourism and the country's agriculture, which is the mainstay of the economy at 23% of GDP.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of this research was to establish: cultural features that may constitute Kenya's hotel product package; how hotels facilitate cultural preservation as a resource for the promotion of national tourism, the extent to which hotels emphasise national cultural uniqueness in their overseas marketing campaigns; the contributions of the local communities to the development of cultural tourism; and how the hotels could influence government departments to support the development of cultural tourism. The practical value of the research was to identify cultural features that could help develop and differentiate the tourism product. Such findings will assist hotel operators in the development of strategic designs, which effectively appropriate national culture to attract international tourists. Ideas generated can be widely adapted to various destination situations. The research sample was obtained from 232 units of

Kenya's star rated tourist's hotels ranging from 3-star to 5-star (Kenya, 2003). These are assumed to have attained meaningful service quality levels. Eight hotels were picked randomly from each stratum (star) to make up 24 hotels whose managers and employees were interviewed. The questionnaires were dropped at each individual hotel and collected by the principal researcher at a time agreed upon. The primary data was complimented by secondary data and visual observations.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Questionnaires formed the main source of data. Each question was tabled with its series of responses. Frequencies of particular responses were registered to make up the outcome of the results based on percentages. Observations and unstructured interviews were also considered to compliment the survey results. One of the major difficulties that were faced in the course of this study is data availability. The businesses exhibited a high degree of protectiveness over institutional information making data collection a great challenge. In addition, there was scarcity of up to date statistical information from government sources. Out of the 24 hotels studied, only 8 or 33% had names that are reflective of the Kenya's diverse culture. Most of hotels studied i.e. 66% had names that uphold the international branding preference that is Western in nature. Most hotels have not tied their names or brands to the cultural surrounding.

16 out of 24 hotels studied i.e. 66.6% were found to be located in three major towns in Kenya i.e. Nairobi, Kisumu and Eldoret. The others are located at the beaches close to the seaside resort city of Mombasa while others are located in the national parks and game reserves. Thus, despite Kenya's rich cultural heritage, there is very little cultural consideration in the location of these hotels. The proximity to holiday and safari attraction or major towns seems to have pre-eminence over cultural aspects. The respondents were asked to state their tourist preferences, given that most hotels target tourists in one way or another. The results show the preferred tourist type (*Table 1*).

Table 1 - Form of Tourism and Hotel Interest

Interest	No of Hotels Expressing Interest	% of Total
Big Five Tourists (Animal Lovers)	18	75.0
Natural Sceneries (Inclusive of Flora)	16	66.7
Sports	8	33.3
Beach Holiday	4	16.7
Religious	2	8.3
Cultural	5	20.8

Note: Hotels can report multiple interests

It is evident that most of the hotels studied prefer to target tourists coming to Kenya for the big game safaris and for sightseeing (natural sceneries). Culture holds very

little emphasis as a focus for attracting tourists. Only a cumulative 28% of the hotels target tourists coming in for culture, sports and religion combined. This means that Kenya continues to be in a vulnerable position given that competing destinations like Tanzania, Uganda, South Africa and Zimbabwe rely heavily on wildlife. Culture provides a means for differentiation. The research went further to find out those cultural aspects that are deemed attractive to tourists. There were differing responses as to what is unique about the Kenyan culture and which could be used to differentiate Kenya as a tourist destination (Table 2).

Table 2 - Cultural Indicators Unique to Kenya

Cultural Indicators that are Unique to Kenya	No of Hotels in Acceptance	% of Sample studied
Local People	10	41.7
Site and Locations	9	37.5
Local language	16	66.7
Tales and Legends for Entertainment	15	62.5
Dressing	8	33.3
Cultural Architecture	9	37.5
Wood Carvings	16	66.7
Soap Stones	21	87.5
Beads and Jewellery	15	62.5
Weaving	3	12.5
Leather	3	12.5
Ceramics	3	12.5
Music	6	25.0
Food and Drinks	18	75.0
Religion	2	8.33

From the above, it is reasonable to conclude that, from the hoteliers' perspective, there are five major cultural elements that Kenya could use to differentiate itself from the competition: richness of the local languages; tales and legends; artefacts; decorations, beads and jewellery; and food and drinks. The study went further to investigate the extent to which the hotels applied the various cultural manifestations in the service provision or location, design and interior decoration of their establishments. Only 6 out of the 24 hotels studied or 25% have architectural designs that are reflective of the Kenya culture. The rest are designed out of the modern Western technological innovations. Most of those that hold African designs are located in the games parks and reserves and holiday beach resorts. The architectural designs that have popularly been applied in the hotels studied include: Maasai hut structure; Samburu hut structure; Swahili village structure. As noted earlier, none of the hotels studied registered that their location was chosen based on cultural consideration. However, the 6 hotels that have tradition/local architectural designs accept that the hotels were given those designs as a result of their locations and the cultural influence of the communities living around. 20 hotel units or 83.3% state that their hotel rooms and general interior decorations have a cultural orientation.

This is a very high record of cultural application. The research then sought to find out what exactly constitutes such interior design and décor. The following were recorded by respondents: tropical sunrise painting; tropical sunset painting; traditional shield wall hangings; traditional pictures of rulers of the 18th century; soap stone materials for ash tray in guest rooms; African wood carvings for reading table, chair, doors and beds. It was also observed that all hotels (100% of the hotels studied) describe menu and beverage list items in both English and the local or Kiswahili language. There were local menu items presented by these hotels. The beverage lists also carried local drinks.

All the hotels studied largely use English as the language of communicating with guests. Again, all these hotels accept that there are circumstances in which staff has been challenged to use foreign languages including German, French, Spanish, Italian, Japanese, as well as Kiswahili and local languages. The research established that the hotel staffs don't use any other local language in service provision apart from Kiswahili, which is the *lingua franca*. Kiswahili was found to be fairly frequently used as most tourists endeavour to learn the language by speaking it with hotel staff. In addition, all the hotels studied use local language in the branding of the services or facilities offered to hotel guests. Some of the terminologies used in the branding of hotel services, products and facilities are listed in Table 3.

Table 3 - Local terminologies and hotel facilities and service branding

Brand name	Brand meaning
Kirinyaga grill	Roof Top Restaurant
Wataalamu Restaurant	Executive Restaurant
Simba Grill	Lions Restaurant
Café Mandhari	Spice Café
Msafiri Bar	Travellers' Bar
Maisha Fitness club	Fitness Centre for Life and Health

It is notable that while hotels don't use local language widely for branding services and facilities, the guests find excitement in the usage of these terminologies as it makes them learn and experience the local language.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Kenya's hotels have the pivotal role in the development of cultural tourism. In addition, hotels in contribute immensely to national development in a number of ways. They provide employment directly and indirectly. Some of the hotels and lodges located in the rural areas maintain roads linking them to main roads to the benefit of local population. Hotels also attract other services, which the government would not consider viable to provide to the rural areas such as telephone and electricity. Some of the hotels have built schools and

dispensaries that are used by the local communities. In this regard, the presence of hotels in some regions has actually ignited development by attracting various service providers. Hotels provide recreational facilities such as dance halls, entertainment parks and some times sport facilities. Some hotels endeavour to grow trees as a way of conserving and preserving the natural environment.

The impact of tourism in the economy is felt mainly through forward and backward linkages expressed as demand for goods and services in the agricultural, textile, beverage, transport and entertainment sectors. Hence the tourist dollar has such multiplier effect that its absence would affect the general government revenue collection. Kenya enjoys a rich cultural diversity. It would be greatly advisable that the country's tourism system appropriates this diversity as a means of differentiating her tourism. Hotels being the greatest beneficiaries of tourism apart from the government, should work towards promoting cultural tourism. The following are some suggestions on how this can be done:

- Fund cultural activities in the country to encourage the development and preservation of these cultures;
- Make use of traditional entertainment groups in tourist programmes;
- Employ naturalists as part of their staff for example a real Maasai *Moran* (warrior);
- Include in their menu a greater variety of traditional African dishes;
- Initiate projects that would encourage the displaying of traditional cultures from various tribes of Kenya;
- Establish hotel properties in culturally rich regions.

The contribution of cultural tourism to hotels cannot be over emphasised, as has been observed by this research. Hotels that have embraced cultural aspects in their systems, although few, testify that there is great excitement from guests who pick the taste of culture in

their visits. More tourists are willing to watch and even participate in the traditional cultural dances than those seeking pop music while local dishes are becoming a favourite of many a tourists who have had their first experiences. All these factors combined with the cosy hotel rooms and quality services are major attraction of customers to hotels. It is notable that hotels promoting cultural tourism have registered increased domestic tourism, which is able to cushion the tourism system from effects of seasons of low international tourist arrivals. Kenya's athletic culture should be promoted abroad. The history of excellence in long distance running has even led to the conception of Nairobi Marathon, an event that now draws worldwide participation. In order to encourage sports related tourism, the government needs to implement the following:

- Promote all sports in the country by sponsoring various clubs;
- Build sufficient sports centres of international standards to encourage international championships to be held in the country;
- Encourage participation of Kenyan clubs in regional and international contests.

The diversity in culture should be viewed as strength in marketing of Kenya. This research has attempted to justify the fact that over reliance on wildlife could be exposing Kenya to unnecessary competition and that cultural tourism is a viable option. One of the objectives of this research was to stimulate further research in this area of cultural tourism. There is need for more quantitative approaches in research in this area. There is also the need to determine the quality of cultural experiences as well as the relative importance of culture when compared with other attractions from the tourists' perspective.

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