Impact of Sustainable Tourism Practices on Tourist Satisfaction in Ecotourism Destinations in Kenya
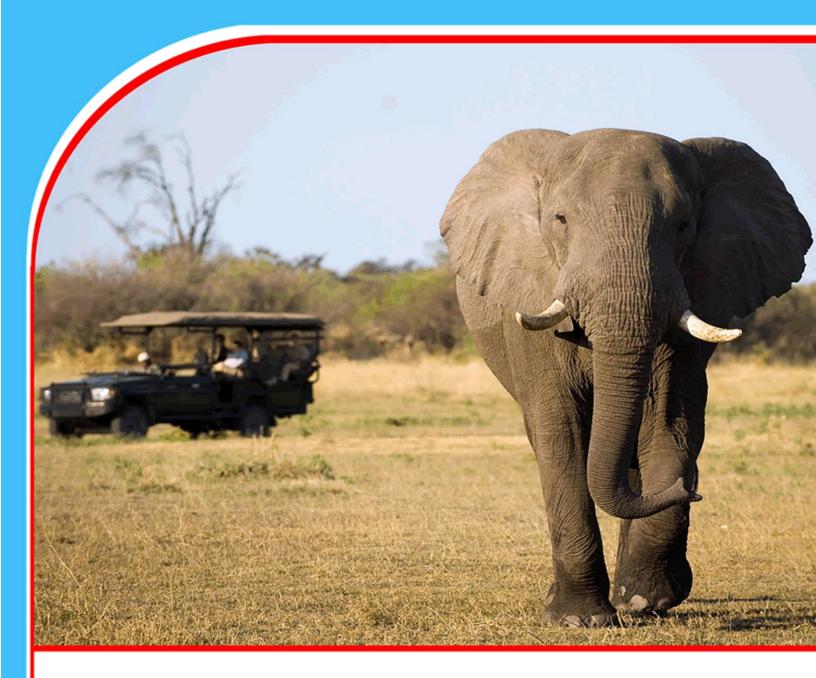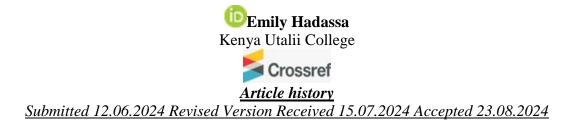
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Impact of Sustainable Tourism Practices on Tourist Satisfaction in Ecotourism Destinations in Kenya

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Crossref

Abstract

Purpose: The aim of the study was to assess the impact of sustainable tourism practices on tourist satisfaction in ecotourism destinations in South Africa.

Materials and Methods: This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

Findings: The study found that tourists increasingly prefer destinations that implement eco-friendly practices, such as waste management, conservation efforts, and the use of renewable resources, as these contribute to a positive perception of the destination. Furthermore, sustainable tourism fosters a sense of community involvement, allowing tourists to interact with local cultures and contribute to the economy, which in turn increases their overall satisfaction. Research also highlights that tourists who participate in activities aligned with sustainability such as wildlife conservation or cultural workshops report higher levels of satisfaction, driven by meaningful and unique experiences. Overall, sustainable practices not only enhance the ecological integrity of ecotourism destinations but also elevate the quality of tourist experiences, leading to greater satisfaction and repeat visits.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: Social exchange theory (SET), expectancy-disconfirmation theory and theory of planned behavior may be used to anchor future studies on assessing impact of sustainable tourism practices on tourist satisfaction in ecotourism destinations in South Africa. Tourism operators should develop and implement training programs focused on sustainable practices for all stakeholders involved in ecotourism. Governments and policymakers should develop and enforce regulations that support sustainable tourism practices within ecotourism destinations.

Keywords: *Tourism Practices, Tourist Satisfaction, Ecotourism Destinations*

INTRODUCTION

Tourist satisfaction is a crucial indicator of the quality of travel experiences, significantly influencing repeat visitation and overall destination competitiveness. In the United States, a study by Chen and Rahman (2021) indicates that 80% of international visitors reported high satisfaction levels with cultural attractions and hospitality services, reflecting a growing trend in tourist contentment. Moreover, the National Travel and Tourism Office (2022) reported an increase in visitor satisfaction scores across major destinations such as New York and Los Angeles, driven by improvements in service quality and amenities. Similarly, Japan has seen rising tourist satisfaction, with a 2019 survey revealing that 90% of foreign tourists expressed satisfaction with their experiences, particularly praising Japan's efficient public transport and cleanliness (Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism, 2019). This positive trend is vital for maintaining Japan's reputation as a leading tourist destination.

In the UK, the VisitBritain annual report (2022) highlighted that 85% of overseas visitors were satisfied with their experiences, citing attractions like the British Museum and the Tower of London as major draws. The report further noted that tourists appreciated the warmth and helpfulness of local residents, contributing to their overall satisfaction. Statistical trends show that satisfaction ratings have steadily improved, with a significant rise from 77% in 2018 to 85% in 2022 (VisitBritain, 2022). Additionally, various regions in the UK have implemented feedback mechanisms to address tourists' concerns, which has resulted in enhanced experiences. These developments demonstrate the effectiveness of targeted strategies in increasing tourist satisfaction across developed economies.

In Canada, tourist satisfaction has been steadily increasing, with recent studies indicating that 82% of visitors reported positive experiences during their trips (Destination Canada, 2022). The country's diverse landscapes, vibrant cities, and welcoming locals contribute significantly to this high satisfaction level. Notably, attractions like Banff National Park and the cultural experiences in Toronto are frequently highlighted as key factors enhancing tourist enjoyment. In a survey conducted by the Canadian Tourism Commission (2021), it was found that 75% of tourists appreciated the safety and cleanliness of their destinations, leading to an increase in repeat visits. This upward trend in satisfaction is essential for maintaining Canada's competitive edge in the global tourism market.

In Australia, the latest statistics reveal that 88% of international tourists expressed satisfaction with their visits (Australian Trade and Investment Commission, 2023). The iconic attractions, such as the Great Barrier Reef and Sydney Opera House, were particularly praised for their unique offerings. Furthermore, the Australian government has invested in infrastructure improvements and visitor services, contributing to a more enjoyable experience for tourists. According to Tourism Australia (2021), satisfaction levels have grown from 82% in 2019 to 88% in 2022, showcasing a commitment to enhancing the overall tourist experience. These efforts reflect Australia's focus on sustainable tourism practices, further boosting visitor satisfaction.

In developing economies, tourist satisfaction is often shaped by factors such as service quality, infrastructure, and cultural authenticity. In Thailand, a recent study indicated that 75% of international tourists were satisfied with their visits, especially highlighting the warmth of the Thai people and the quality of local cuisine (Som & Le, 2020). The Thai government has actively promoted sustainable tourism practices, which has led to increased visitor satisfaction, as tourists

appreciate efforts to preserve local culture and the environment. Moreover, according to the Ministry of Tourism and Sports (2021), satisfaction levels have risen from 68% in 2018 to 75% in 2021, indicating a positive trend in tourist experiences. Such improvements are crucial for fostering repeat visits and boosting Thailand's tourism sector.

Similarly, in Mexico, the tourist satisfaction index rose to 78% in 2022, as reported by the Mexico Tourism Board (2023). Key attractions like Cancun and Mexico City received high satisfaction ratings due to their diverse cultural offerings and improved infrastructure. The adoption of technology for tourist services, such as mobile apps for easy navigation and booking, has also contributed to enhancing visitor experiences. Surveys indicated that tourists felt safer and more satisfied with the services available, with 60% citing enhanced security measures as a factor in their satisfaction (Tellez & Ocampo, 2022). This focus on safety and service quality is vital for sustaining the growth of tourism in developing economies.

In India, tourist satisfaction levels have been recorded at approximately 78%, reflecting the country's diverse cultural heritage and hospitality (Ministry of Tourism, India, 2023). Visitors often highlight the richness of experiences available, from historical sites like the Taj Mahal to vibrant festivals. However, challenges such as overcrowding and inconsistent service quality still exist, impacting overall satisfaction. A study by Kumar and Singh (2021) found that 70% of tourists expressed a desire for improved infrastructure and better management of tourist sites to enhance their experiences. Addressing these concerns is crucial for maintaining India's appeal as a top tourist destination.

In Indonesia, recent surveys show that 76% of international visitors reported being satisfied with their experiences, particularly praising Bali for its stunning landscapes and rich culture (Indonesian Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy, 2022). However, the tourism sector faces challenges, including environmental concerns and varying service standards. The government has been proactive in implementing sustainable tourism initiatives, which have contributed to increased satisfaction among tourists, rising from 71% in 2019 to 76% in 2022. Moreover, efforts to improve safety and sanitation have also positively influenced visitor perceptions, emphasizing the importance of continual improvements in the tourism sector (Sari & Indrawati, 2021).

In Sub-Saharan economies, tourist satisfaction can be significantly influenced by infrastructure challenges and the quality of services. In South Africa, a study revealed that tourist satisfaction levels were around 70%, with visitors particularly appreciating the country's natural attractions and wildlife experiences (Seth & Goyal, 2020). However, issues such as safety concerns and service inconsistencies were cited as areas needing improvement. The South African Tourism Board (2022) has reported initiatives aimed at enhancing tourist experiences, which led to a slight increase in satisfaction from 65% in 2018 to 70% in 2022. These efforts to improve the tourism landscape are essential for building a more favorable reputation among international visitors.

In Kenya, the level of tourist satisfaction has been reported at approximately 73%, with the Kenya Tourism Board (2023) highlighting that tourists are particularly satisfied with wildlife safaris and cultural experiences. A study by Muriithi and Mwangi (2021) indicated that improvements in service delivery and infrastructure have positively impacted visitor experiences, although challenges such as access to remote areas still remain. Statistical analysis indicates a growing trend in satisfaction, rising from 68% in 2019 to 73% in 2022. The focus on enhancing the overall tourist experience through community engagement and conservation initiatives is critical for increasing

satisfaction levels in Sub-Saharan economies. As these countries continue to address challenges, the potential for tourism growth and improved visitor experiences remains significant.

In Ghana, tourist satisfaction has been reported at around 72%, with visitors particularly appreciating the country's rich cultural heritage and friendly locals (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2022). Attractions such as the Cape Coast Castle and the vibrant festivals have been highlighted as major draws for international tourists. However, issues like inadequate infrastructure and inconsistent service quality remain significant challenges. According to a study by Ntiamoah and Asamoah (2021), improving infrastructure and enhancing customer service are critical areas for increasing tourist satisfaction. The Ghanaian government has recognized these challenges and is actively working on initiatives to boost the tourism sector's performance.

In Tanzania, satisfaction levels among tourists have reached 75%, primarily due to the country's renowned wildlife safaris and natural beauty, including Serengeti National Park and Mount Kilimanjaro (Tanzania Tourism Board, 2023). While most visitors report high satisfaction, issues such as accessibility and the need for more skilled service staff have been identified as areas for improvement. A recent study by Mhando and Mjema (2022) emphasized the importance of investing in training programs for local tourism providers to enhance the quality of service. The government's focus on promoting sustainable tourism practices has also played a role in increasing visitor satisfaction, reflecting a growing trend towards responsible tourism in the region.

Sustainable tourism practices are essential for minimizing the environmental impact of tourism while enhancing the overall experience for visitors. Four prominent sustainable tourism practices include waste management, eco-friendly accommodations, community engagement, and conservation initiatives. Effective waste management practices, such as recycling and composting, significantly reduce litter and pollution, creating a cleaner and more appealing environment for tourists (Mason & Paggiaro, 2021). Similarly, eco-friendly accommodations, which use renewable energy, implement water conservation measures, and prioritize local sourcing of products, contribute to higher tourist satisfaction by aligning with visitors' preferences for responsible travel (González & Lázaro, 2022). By integrating these practices, destinations can create a positive atmosphere that enhances the overall experience for tourists, encouraging them to return and recommend the destination to others.

Community engagement in tourism fosters a deeper connection between visitors and local cultures, enhancing satisfaction through authentic experiences. By involving local communities in tourism planning and operations, destinations can ensure that tourists receive a richer understanding of the local culture while benefiting the community economically (Bramwell & Lane, 2019). Conservation initiatives, such as protecting natural habitats and wildlife, not only preserve the environment but also attract nature-based tourists who appreciate these efforts (Schott & Hogg, 2020). Collectively, these sustainable tourism practices contribute to heightened tourist satisfaction by ensuring that destinations remain attractive and vibrant. As awareness of sustainability increases among travelers, destinations that adopt these practices are likely to see improved visitor experiences and positive word-of-mouth recommendations.

Problem Statement

The relationship between sustainable tourism practices and tourist satisfaction in ecotourism destinations is increasingly important in the context of growing environmental concerns and shifting traveler preferences. While sustainable practices, such as waste management, eco-friendly

accommodations, and community engagement, have been recognized for their potential to enhance the visitor experience, the extent to which they directly influence tourist satisfaction remains under-explored. Recent studies indicate that travelers are becoming more conscious of the environmental impact of their choices, leading to an expectation for destinations to implement sustainable initiatives (Bramwell & Lane, 2019; González & Lázaro, 2022). However, there is a gap in understanding how these practices translate into tangible satisfaction outcomes for tourists, particularly in ecotourism contexts where the unique relationship between nature and culture plays a critical role. This study aims to investigate the impact of sustainable tourism practices on tourist satisfaction in ecotourism destinations, providing insights that could help stakeholders enhance the quality of visitor experiences while promoting responsible tourism.

Theoretical Framework

Social Exchange Theory (SET)

Social exchange theory, developed by George Homans in the 1950s, posits that social behavior is the result of an exchange process aimed at maximizing benefits and minimizing costs. In the context of sustainable tourism, this theory suggests that tourists evaluate their experiences based on the perceived value of sustainable practices offered by destinations. When ecotourism destinations implement sustainable practices, tourists may feel a sense of reciprocity, enhancing their overall satisfaction (Olya & Alavi, 2020). This theory is relevant as it underscores the importance of mutual benefit between tourists and the host community in fostering satisfaction.

Expectancy-Disconfirmation Theory

Originated by Richard L. Oliver in 1980, expectancy-disconfirmation theory suggests that consumer satisfaction is influenced by the comparison between pre-purchase expectations and actual performance outcomes. In ecotourism, if sustainable practices exceed tourists' expectations, satisfaction levels will increase. Conversely, if these practices do not meet expectations, dissatisfaction may occur (Mason & Paggiaro, 2021). This theory is crucial for understanding how sustainable practices in ecotourism can align with or exceed visitor expectations, ultimately impacting their overall satisfaction.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

Developed by Icek Ajzen in 1985, the theory of planned behavior posits that individual behavior is driven by behavioral intentions, which are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. In the context of sustainable tourism, tourists' positive attitudes toward sustainable practices can lead to higher satisfaction levels when they perceive that these practices align with their values (Awan, 2023). This theory is relevant as it highlights the importance of tourists' attitudes and beliefs in shaping their satisfaction in ecotourism settings.

Empirical Review

Olya and Alavi (2020) explored the influence of social exchange factors on tourist satisfaction within the ecotourism sector in Iran. Utilizing a quantitative survey method, the researchers gathered data from ecotourists visiting various ecotourism sites. Their findings indicated that perceived benefits stemming from sustainable tourism practices, such as community involvement and environmental conservation, significantly enhanced tourist satisfaction levels. Tourists who felt that their presence contributed to the local economy and environment reported higher satisfaction than those who did not perceive such benefits. This study emphasizes the importance

of fostering a reciprocal relationship between tourists and host communities. By understanding social exchange theory, ecotourism operators can enhance visitor experiences by highlighting the positive impacts of their practices. The authors recommend that ecotourism businesses invest more in sustainable initiatives to create a sense of community and engagement among tourists. Additionally, they suggest that educating tourists about the environmental and social benefits of ecotourism can further enhance their satisfaction and loyalty. Overall, the study highlights the critical role of social perceptions in shaping tourist experiences and satisfaction in ecotourism. By prioritizing sustainability and social exchange, destinations can achieve not only higher satisfaction rates but also foster long-term relationships with their visitors.

Mason and Paggiaro (2021) analyzed the impact of waste management practices in tourism on tourist satisfaction. Their review synthesized findings from various studies, providing a comprehensive overview of how effective waste management influences visitors' experiences in tourist destinations. The authors found a strong correlation between well-implemented waste management practices and increased tourist satisfaction, revealing that tourists are more likely to enjoy their stay in destinations that prioritize environmental cleanliness and sustainability. They noted that when tourists observe responsible waste management, such as recycling, composting, and proper disposal methods, their overall perception of the destination improves significantly. This positive perception is often linked to a greater likelihood of repeat visits and recommendations to others. Based on their findings, the authors advocate for stakeholders in the tourism industry to prioritize sustainable waste management practices as a means of enhancing the tourist experience. Moreover, they suggest that destinations could benefit from incorporating educational campaigns that inform visitors about local waste management efforts and their importance. By fostering awareness and participation, tourists may feel a greater connection to the destination, thereby enhancing their satisfaction. The study underscores the necessity of integrating sustainability into waste management strategies to not only protect the environment but also enrich tourist experiences.

Awan, Latif and Khan (2023) explored the relationship between sustainable practices and tourist satisfaction within the context of Pakistan's ecotourism sector. Employing a mixed-method approach, the researchers utilized interviews and surveys to gather insights from ecotourists visiting various destinations in Pakistan. Their findings revealed that tourists' positive perceptions of sustainability significantly impacted their overall satisfaction levels. Specifically, the study highlighted that visitors who engaged with sustainable practices, such as eco-friendly accommodations and community involvement, reported higher satisfaction compared to those who did not. The authors recommend that ecotourism destinations rigorously implement sustainable practices to align with the growing expectations of eco-conscious travelers. They emphasize that highlighting these sustainable initiatives in marketing strategies can attract more visitors and improve overall satisfaction. The research also points out that providing tourists with educational resources about local environmental conservation efforts can deepen their connection to the destination. By fostering this connection, destinations can cultivate loyalty among eco-minded tourists, encouraging repeat visits. This study contributes to the understanding of how sustainable practices can enhance the overall tourist experience and satisfaction in ecotourism settings. Ultimately, it advocates for a stronger commitment to sustainability in the tourism sector to meet the evolving demands of travelers.

González and Lázaro (2022) examined the impact of eco-friendly accommodations on tourist satisfaction in Spain. Their research focused on various hotels that have adopted sustainable practices, such as energy efficiency, water conservation, and sourcing local products. The findings indicated that guests' satisfaction increased significantly when they perceived their accommodations as committed to sustainability. This increase in satisfaction was linked to a greater appreciation for the environmental efforts made by the hotels, leading to more favorable reviews and recommendations. The authors suggest that sustainable practices not only enhance the guest experience but also serve as a competitive advantage in the hospitality sector. They highlight that satisfied guests are more likely to return and recommend eco-friendly hotels to friends and family, ultimately benefiting the local economy. Additionally, the study emphasizes the importance of transparency in communicating sustainable initiatives to guests, as this fosters trust and reinforces their commitment to sustainability. The authors recommend that hotels invest in marketing their sustainable practices to attract eco-conscious travelers. This research underscores the direct connection between sustainable accommodations and tourist satisfaction, advocating for the broader adoption of eco-friendly practices in the hospitality industry. Overall, the study presents a compelling case for hotels to prioritize sustainability as a means of enhancing guest experiences and loyalty.

Kelleher and DeLaCruz (2021) examined the role of community engagement in ecotourism and its effect on tourist satisfaction. Their research highlighted how local community participation in conservation efforts significantly boosted tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The authors employed qualitative methods, conducting interviews with both tourists and local stakeholders to gather insights into their experiences. The findings revealed that tourists who engaged with local communities and participated in conservation activities reported higher levels of satisfaction compared to those who did not. The study emphasizes the importance of creating authentic experiences that resonate with travelers, highlighting the mutual benefits of community engagement in ecotourism. The authors recommend that more destinations adopt community-centric approaches to ecotourism, as these strategies can enhance visitor experiences and promote environmental stewardship. Furthermore, they suggest that tourism operators work closely with local communities to develop programs that allow tourists to participate actively in conservation efforts. By fostering a sense of connection and responsibility among tourists, destinations can cultivate loyalty and enhance overall satisfaction. This research underscores the significant impact of community involvement on tourist experiences, advocating for a more integrated approach to sustainable tourism practices.

Ward and Wills (2022) examined the impact of conservation initiatives on tourist satisfaction in New Zealand's ecotourism sector. Using a mixed-method approach, the researchers combined quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews to assess tourists' perceptions of conservation efforts in the destinations they visited. The findings indicated that tourists highly valued conservation initiatives, such as wildlife protection and habitat restoration, which positively influenced their satisfaction levels. Tourists expressed a strong preference for visiting destinations that actively engaged in environmental conservation, leading to an overall enhanced experience. The authors recommend that policymakers promote eco-friendly practices and conservation initiatives to enhance tourist satisfaction and attract more visitors to ecotourism destinations. Furthermore, they suggest that tourism operators incorporate educational programs that inform visitors about the significance of their conservation efforts, fostering a sense of connection and

responsibility. By doing so, destinations can cultivate loyalty among eco-conscious travelers, leading to repeat visits. This study highlights the critical role of conservation in shaping the satisfaction of ecotourists, advocating for a greater emphasis on environmental stewardship in tourism planning and development. Ultimately, it underscores the positive correlation between conservation initiatives and tourist satisfaction in ecotourism settings.

Chen, Lee and Lee (2021) investigated the impact of sustainable practices on tourist satisfaction in Taiwan's ecotourism sector. The researchers employed a quantitative research design to gather data from a diverse sample of tourists visiting various ecotourism sites in Taiwan. Their findings revealed that tourists were more satisfied when destinations implemented comprehensive sustainable tourism strategies, such as biodiversity conservation, waste management, and local community involvement. The authors emphasized that visitors are increasingly seeking destinations that prioritize sustainability, and their satisfaction levels are closely linked to the effectiveness of these practices. The study recommended that policymakers develop frameworks that promote sustainable practices to enhance overall tourist satisfaction and competitiveness in the ecotourism sector. Additionally, the authors suggested that tourism operators actively engage tourists in sustainability initiatives to deepen their connection to the destination and improve satisfaction levels. By fostering a participatory approach, ecotourism destinations can create memorable experiences that resonate with eco-conscious travelers. This research highlights the significant impact of sustainability on tourist experiences and satisfaction, advocating for a more integrated approach to sustainable tourism development. Overall, it emphasizes the need for destinations to align their practices with tourists' evolving sustainability values.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a desk methodology. A desk study research design is commonly known as secondary data collection. This is basically collecting data from existing resources preferably because of its low cost advantage as compared to a field research. Our current study looked into already published studies and reports as the data was easily accessed through online journals and libraries.

RESULTS

Conceptual Gaps: One major conceptual gap is the need for a more nuanced understanding of how specific sustainable practices impact different aspects of tourist satisfaction. While existing studies emphasize the general correlation between sustainability and satisfaction, they often lack granularity regarding which specific practices such as waste management, community engagement, or eco-friendly accommodations contribute most significantly to satisfaction. For instance, although Awan, Latif, and Khan (2023) highlighted the importance of eco-friendly accommodations, they did not dissect the particular features within this category that enhance tourist satisfaction. Furthermore, the role of tourists' personal values and motivations in mediating the relationship between sustainability and satisfaction remains underexplored. This gap indicates a need for theoretical frameworks that encompass diverse dimensions of tourist experience and satisfaction, including emotional, cognitive, and social factors. Additionally, the studies often fail to consider the interplay between tourists' expectations and their actual experiences concerning sustainability initiatives, suggesting that a gap exists in examining how perceptions of authenticity and engagement influence satisfaction. Expanding research in these areas can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of tourist satisfaction dynamics within ecotourism.

Contextual Gaps: Contextual gaps also persist, particularly regarding the cultural and socio-economic factors that shape tourists' perceptions and experiences of sustainability in ecotourism. The studies predominantly focus on destinations in specific regions such as Iran, Pakistan, and New Zealand without thoroughly examining how cultural contexts influence tourists' satisfaction levels concerning sustainable practices. For example, Kelleher and DeLaCruz (2021) emphasized community engagement in Costa Rica but did not address how cultural attitudes toward conservation vary across different tourist demographics or regions. Understanding these contextual differences is essential, as tourists from diverse backgrounds may have varying expectations and values regarding sustainability. Moreover, the literature lacks studies examining how the local socio-economic conditions affect the implementation of sustainable practices and, consequently, tourist satisfaction. For instance, destinations with varying levels of economic development may approach sustainable tourism differently, impacting tourist experiences and satisfaction. This calls for more context-sensitive research that considers local cultural dynamics and socio-economic realities in ecotourism studies.

Geographical Gaps: Geographically, there is a notable absence of research addressing the impact of sustainable practices on tourist satisfaction in emerging ecotourism destinations, particularly in regions such as Africa and South America. Most existing studies focus on well-established ecotourism markets, leaving a gap in understanding how sustainability affects tourist satisfaction in less studied areas. For example, while Mason and Paggiaro (2021) and González and Lázaro (2022) examined the influence of waste management and eco-friendly accommodations in well-developed tourism markets, there is limited research on these practices in developing contexts where resources may be constrained. Furthermore, exploring how geographical factors, such as climate change or biodiversity levels, influence the sustainability practices of different regions could provide valuable insights into their impact on tourist satisfaction. Future research could focus on comparative studies across various geographical contexts to identify best practices and learn how different regions address sustainability challenges in ecotourism. By bridging these geographical gaps, scholars can contribute to a more inclusive understanding of ecotourism dynamics and tourist satisfaction worldwide.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

In conclusion, the impact of sustainable tourism practices on tourist satisfaction in ecotourism destinations is significant and multifaceted. As the demand for eco-conscious travel experiences continues to grow, it becomes increasingly vital for ecotourism operators to implement effective sustainable practices that resonate with the values of modern travelers. Studies indicate that initiatives such as community involvement, waste management, and eco-friendly accommodations not only enhance the overall satisfaction of tourists but also foster loyalty and positive perceptions of the destination. Tourists who engage with sustainable practices tend to report higher levels of satisfaction, as they feel a greater connection to the local environment and community. Moreover, the positive correlation between sustainable practices and tourist satisfaction underscores the need for stakeholders in the tourism industry to prioritize sustainability as a strategic approach to attract and retain visitors. By integrating sustainability into their operational strategies and effectively communicating these efforts to tourists, ecotourism destinations can enhance visitor experiences, promote environmental stewardship, and ensure long-term viability. Ultimately, prioritizing

sustainable tourism practices is not only essential for satisfying today's eco-conscious travelers but also for safeguarding the integrity of the natural and cultural resources that underpin ecotourism.

Recommendations

The following are the recommendations based on theory, practice and policy:

Theory

Future research should seek to expand upon established theories, such as the Social Exchange Theory and the Theory of Planned Behavior, by integrating sustainable tourism practices as a core component influencing tourist satisfaction. By examining how perceived benefits from sustainability initiatives enhance the reciprocity between tourists and host communities, researchers can contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics at play in ecotourism. Scholars should aim to develop new theoretical frameworks that specifically address the intersection of sustainable tourism and tourist satisfaction. These frameworks could guide further empirical studies and enhance the academic discourse surrounding sustainable tourism practices.

Practice

Tourism operators should develop and implement training programs focused on sustainable practices for all stakeholders involved in ecotourism. This training should include practical applications of waste management, community engagement, and eco-friendly service delivery to ensure that staff members understand the importance of sustainability in enhancing tourist satisfaction. Destinations should market their sustainable initiatives more effectively to attract eco-conscious travelers. By showcasing the environmental and social benefits of their practices through storytelling, social media, and targeted campaigns, they can improve tourist perceptions and satisfaction levels. Ecotourism operators should foster greater community involvement in sustainable tourism practices. This can be achieved by collaborating with local stakeholders, providing opportunities for cultural exchanges, and involving communities in decision-making processes, thereby creating authentic experiences that enhance tourist satisfaction.

Policy

Governments and policymakers should develop and enforce regulations that support sustainable tourism practices within ecotourism destinations. This may include incentives for businesses adopting eco-friendly practices and guidelines for waste management, biodiversity conservation, and community involvement. Policymakers should allocate funding for research and development initiatives focused on sustainable tourism practices and their impact on tourist satisfaction. This could facilitate evidence-based decision-making and enhance the effectiveness of sustainable tourism policies. Governments should facilitate collaboration among stakeholders in the tourism industry, including local communities, businesses, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to create comprehensive strategies for sustainable tourism development. By fostering partnerships, stakeholders can share resources, knowledge, and best practices, leading to improved tourist satisfaction and sustainable outcomes.

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