

Experiences and enjoyment of national parks: study of Nyerere National Park in Tanzania

Nyerere
National Park

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Abstract

Purpose – This study examines experiences and enjoyment of national parks in the context of Tanzania.

Design/methodology/approach – A cross-sectional design with quantitative and qualitative methods is applied. The study area is Nyerere National Park in Tanzania. Data collected from fully completed structured questionnaires by 360 domestic tourists are subjected to descriptive statistics and Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling analysis. Content analysis is used to analyze qualitative data.

Findings – The findings have revealed that there is a significant relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists.

Research limitations/implications – The suggestion is for future studies to explore a longitudinal approach to determine the patterns of domestic tourists in reference to experiences and enjoyment of national parks so as to improve domestic tourism.

Practical implications – The practical implication is for the government, private sector and tourism stakeholders to improve infrastructure and conduct regular surveys and tour guide training.

Originality/value – This study examines experiences and enjoyment of national parks in the context of Tanzania and, specifically analyzes the relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists in Tanzania guided by types of tourists' theory.

Keywords Experiences, Enjoyment, National parks, Domestic tourists, Domestic tourism, Tanzania

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

National parks are attractions that have contributed tourism revenues for nations around the world. However, due to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), global pandemic declared by the World Health Organization (WHO) in March 2020 (WHO, 2020), there was loss of USD 4.5 trillion for the travel and tourism sector in 2020 (World Travel and Tourism Council [WTTC], 2021). As a result of various measures such as travel bans hence, the United Nations World Tourism Organization [UNWTO] (2021, 2023a, b), Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OCED] (2020), Mkwizu (2023a, b), Mogomotsi, Mogomotsi, Stone, and Stone (2022) and Yu, Zhao, Tang, and Pang (2023) advocated for reliance on domestic tourism for economic recovery as one of the alternative measures to boost tourism and return to pre-pandemic levels.

Within Africa, and particularly in Tanzania, Kideghesho *et al.* (2021) mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact by reducing revenues for tourism and therefore, recommended for remedy measures for the survival of the wildlife sector such as development of a comprehensive tourism recovery plan. This is a challenge which implies

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that efforts are still needed to promote domestic tourism including visits to national parks so that more Tanzanians can enjoy national parks. In addition, promotion efforts should continue so that the domestic tourism can also contribute in the estimation of 5 million tourists (international and domestic tourists) by 2026 as indicated in the National Five-Year Development Plan 2021/22-2025/26 of the [Ministry of Finance and Planning \(2021\)](#).

In general, past studies within and outside Tanzania have focused on tourism issues related to motivation, resilience, satisfaction, promotion, loyalty, benefit-sharing for protected areas and awareness ([Choo, Park, & Petrick, 2022](#); [Kara & Mkwizu, 2020](#); [Lopez-Sanz, Penelas-Leguia, Gutierrez, & Cuesta-Valiono, 2021](#); [Macha, 2021](#); [Martaleni, Hadiyati, Pertiwi, & Yasa, 2021](#); [Matolo, Salia, & Ndibalema, 2021](#); [Mkwizu, 2023a](#); [Pawaskar, Mekoth, & Thomson, 2020](#); [Rasoolimanesh, Noor, Schuberth, & Jaafar, 2019](#); [Snyman, Fitzgerald, Bakteeva, Ngoga, & Mugabukomeye, 2023](#); [Yoo, Yoon, & Park, 2018](#)). There is limited literature that exists on experiences and enjoyment in tourism such as [Boonpat and Suvachart \(2014\)](#). For example, [Boonpat and Suvachart \(2014\)](#) mentioned about direct experiences from tourism cultural perspective while [Mitas and Bastiaansen \(2018\)](#) explored tourists' enjoyment in tourism by adopting Cohen's types of tourists' theory and found that experiences and emotions are mediated by novelty. Hence, there is a need to focus on experiences and enjoyment of national parks in the context of Tanzania for purposes of recovering the tourism sector, which was negatively impacted by the COVID-19 global pandemic.

Therefore, to expand literature on the phenomenon of enjoyment in tourism, this study's main objective is to examine experiences and enjoyment of national parks guided by types of tourists' theory. The specific objective is to examine direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists in Tanzania. This study is significant to tourism stakeholders and decision makers in improving domestic tourism as nations are on the road to tourism recovery after the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, the outcome of this study aligns with the aspirations of the Tanzania Royal Tour in attracting tourists in Tanzania and beyond Tanzania to various attractions within the country including national parks. According to [Tanzania Investment Centre \[TIC\] \(2022\)](#), the Tanzania Royal Tour film is considered as a worthwhile move to lure visitors to visit attractions.

Literature review

Concept of direct experiences

Tourism is one of the economic pillars for several nations and [Obradovic et al. \(2023\)](#) commented that products in tourism provide comprehensive experiences in order to meet the needs of travelers. [Xu \(2010\)](#) also noted that experience is crucial in tourism products while [Breiby \(2015\)](#) and [Kim \(2012\)](#) described experiences in the context of tourism as remarkable, unique, personal, entertaining, memorable and meaningful. Furthermore, experiences in tourism can be in the form of direct experiences from tourists' own travels ([Boonpat & Suvachart, 2014](#)). Other scholars such as [Vergopoulos \(2016\)](#) referred to tourists' experiences as everything that happens in a tourist situation. Therefore, in this study, direct experiences are the interactions of domestic tourists with activities at national parks.

Concept of enjoyment

Enjoyment as a concept is associated with pleasure, fun, good feelings and having one's desire fulfilled ([Curtis & Davidson, 2013](#)). [Crompton \(1979\)](#) further stated that pleasure experiences among tourist activities can involve sightseeing and relaxation particularly in nature. Apart from nature experiences, other types of tourists' travel activities include fun, adventure, family, friends and excitement ([Crouch, Huybers, & Oppewal, 2016](#)). More

explanation of enjoyment in tourism from [Ruan, Yang, Zhang, Liu, and Li \(2021\)](#) revealed that tourists' enjoyment can be complemented with authenticity. In this study, enjoyment is defined as domestic tourists' pleasure, fun, good feelings and desires associated with activities in national parks such as walking safaris.

Theoretical frame

Cohen's types of tourists' theory assume that novelty creates enjoyment by fulfilling the goal of a tourism experience which is to experience something new and different from everyday life ([Cohen, 1972](#)). In Cohen's types of tourists' theory, there are four types of tourists which are organized mass tourists, individual mass tourists, explorers and drifters. These four types of tourists can apply as tourists' typology to understand novelty, enjoyment and tourism experiences. According to [Cohen \(1972\)](#), the drifters have the lowest familiarity, highest novelty, and considered as highly adventurous and living within the local community; the explorers have lower familiarity, higher novelty and tend to travel alone as well as seek comfortable accommodation and prefer transport which is reliable.

[Cohen \(1972\)](#) further explained that individual mass tourists have higher familiarity, lower novelty, not in a group and somehow controlled by time and itinerary, and organized mass tourists have highest familiarity, lowest novelty, follow a tour guide and fixed itinerary in advance. The application of Cohen's types of tourists' theory in the study by [Yoo et al. \(2018\)](#) indicated that tourists, travel motivations and destination settings tend to vary with the type of psychographics. Another application of Cohen's types of tourists' theory is the study by [Vergopoulos \(2016\)](#), which examined tourists' experiences and concluded that the tourists' experiences are merely experiences based on the frameworks of the tourists' consumption.

The adoption of Cohen's types of tourists' theory is evident in the study by [Amirahmaseb \(2007\)](#), which has revealed that the tourists in Iran are mostly those with venture personality and commonly display characteristics such as being adventurous, curious, self-confident and belong to a higher income level. However, scholars such as [Sharpley \(1999\)](#) noted that the types of tourists' theory did not account for demographic factors like age, gender and income. Equally, [O'Regan \(2018\)](#) opined that backpacking, which is categorized as drifters has progressed and widened socially and culturally including in Africa, Asia and South America and therefore, a re-conceptualization of a backpacker was needed for the present and future.

Due to the criticism highlighted by [Sharpley \(1999\)](#) on the types of tourists' theory, this study considers the demographic information of the respondents including age, gender, education and income. Therefore, this study adopts the types of tourists' theory by [Cohen \(1972\)](#) as a guide to understand the relationship between experiences and enjoyment of national parks among domestic tourists and specifically, the analysis on the relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists in the context of Tanzania.

Direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks

Experiences by tourists has received the attention of researchers in the tourism industry. For instance, [Rasoolimanesh, Seyfi, Hall, and Hatamifar \(2021\)](#) hinted that understanding tourists' experiences is important in order to meet their expectations. [Rasoolimanesh et al. \(2021\)](#) investigated experiences from a visitor's memorable experiences in heritage sites by employing Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) and found that there was a positive effect of visitor engagement, revisits and electronic word of mouth intentions in the local culture in Kashan City of Iran. In addition, the respondents expressed their intention to share their experiences in travel platforms ([Rasoolimanesh et al., 2021](#)).

Past scholars have also been concerned with experiences in tourism but from an economic vision. For instance, [Pine and Gilmore \(1998\)](#) conceptualized the experience economy whereby consumers search for experiences that are extraordinary and memorable. In fact, [Pine and Gilmore \(1998\)](#) identified four types of experiences, namely, educational, escapist, entertainment and aesthetics. The popularity of the experience economy is noted in other studies such as [Chai, Na, Ma, and Tang \(2022\)](#), [Hosany *et al.* \(2016\)](#), [Mehmetoglu and Engen \(2011\)](#), and [Yeoman and McMahon-Beattie \(2019\)](#).

Similarly, [Obradovic *et al.* \(2023\)](#) examined experiences of tourists in national parks with a special focus on memorable tourist experience in relation to environmental behavior. The sample used in the study was nature-based tourists for purposes of contributing empirical evidence on memorable tourism experience. In addition, the findings showed that memorable nature-based tourist experience is a mediator of experience and environmental responsible behavior of nature-based tourists visiting national parks in Serbia ([Obradovic *et al.*, 2023](#)). While Obradovic and others sampled local tourists to investigate memorable nature-based tourist experience in mediating the relationship of experiences and environmental behavior, this study selects domestic tourists to add literature on experiences of tourists in national parks by concentrating on the relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks in the context of Tanzania.

A previous study done in Portugal by [Blomstervik, Prebensen, Campos, and Pinto \(2020\)](#) examined experiences in relation to novelty in tourism national parks based on both domestic tourists and international tourists of which most of the respondents were university-educated females. However, this study focuses on domestic tourists which is an alternative to international tourism in contributing to tourism development and recovery after the pandemic.

Equally, enjoyment in tourism has been studied in connection with national parks as protected areas. For instance, [Curtis and Davidson \(2013\)](#) measured enjoyment using positive affect and fulfillment. Additionally, [Japutra and Keni \(2020\)](#) investigated tourists and holiday destinations and found that image is one of the fulfillments for tourists. In understanding enjoyment in tourism, [Lin, Gregor, and Ewing \(2008\)](#) also mentioned engagement as a dimension to measure enjoyment in marine protected areas. Although engagement has been covered by studies such as [Alamsyah and Wardi \(2020\)](#) and [Lin *et al.* \(2008\)](#), these are still limited studies and also, the results may not apply in other locations like Tanzania. Therefore, this study applies the dimensions of engagement, positive affect and fulfillment to measure enjoyment of national parks to further understand direct experiences in relation to enjoyment of national parks.

National parks as protected areas have been documented in tourism literature by scholars such as [Snyman *et al.* \(2023\)](#) with a focus on sustainability and less on enjoyment of national parks among domestic tourists. [Snyman *et al.* \(2023\)](#) adopted a triangulation method of data collection involving desk-based research, field surveys and interviews with interesting findings which revealed that the established benefit-sharing in terms of tourism revenue sharing program had positive linkage between the national parks and development. Furthermore, results showed that 80% of the funding from protected areas like Akagera National Park, Nyungwe National Park and Volcanoes National Park in Rwanda was utilized in projects related to infrastructure and education ([Snyman *et al.*, 2023](#)).

The findings from [Snyman *et al.* \(2023\)](#) indicates the positive side of national parks. On the other hand, [Minton, Sisneros-Kidd, and Monz \(2020\)](#) concentrated on wildlife with much concern on negative effects of national parks such as safety rather than enjoyment of national parks. In fact, [Mkwizu \(2018\)](#), [Mogomotsi *et al.* \(2022\)](#), [Morupisi and Mokgalo \(2017\)](#) and [Stone, Stone, and Mbaiwa \(2017\)](#) have mentioned that generally studies related to domestic tourists and domestic tourism are scant in the African continent and thus urged for more studies in order to improve, promote and elevate domestic tourism.

While [Rasoolimanesh et al. \(2021\)](#) focused on local culture of Kashan City, this study's scope was direct experiences and enjoyment of national parks by domestic tourists. Additionally, [Boonpat and Suvachart \(2014\)](#) mentioned direct experiences while [Xu and Chan \(2009\)](#) opined that customers direct experiences are through evaluation of goods and services. Customers in the context of this study is domestic tourists. Within and outside Tanzania as summarized in [Table 1](#), the majority of studies focused on issues of visitation, digital marketing, mixed reality, augmented reality, sustainability, wildlife, virtual world, television advertising, advertising dynamics, perception, motivation and promotion such as [Abdou, Musabanganji, and Musahara \(2022\)](#), [Agyeman, Antwi-Bosiako, and Wong \(2022\)](#), [Macha \(2021\)](#), [Matolo et al. \(2021\)](#), [Minton et al. \(2020\)](#), [Mkwizu \(2018, 2020, 2021, 2022a, b, 2023a, b\)](#), [Mutanga, Vengesayi, Chikuta, Muboko, and Gandiwa \(2017\)](#), and [Snyman et al. \(2023\)](#). Given the limited literature on enjoyment of national parks particularly in the context of Tanzania, hence this study expands literature on enjoyment of national parks by specifically analyzing direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists in Tanzania.

Conceptual framework for direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks

The conceptual framework in [Figure 1](#) emanates from the empirical and theoretical literature review. Additionally, direct experiences serve as the independent variable while enjoyment of southern national parks as the dependent variable. This study hypothesizes that there is a significant relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists visiting Nyerere National Park in Tanzania. [Figure 1](#) indicates the hypothesis (H1).

Methodology

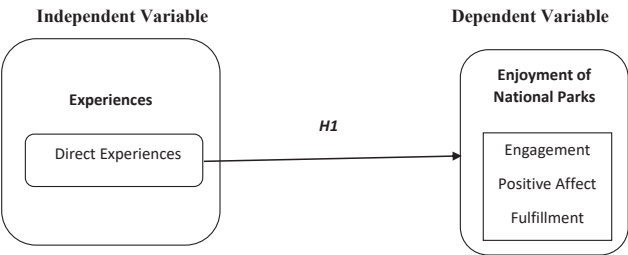
Research context and design

The study area for this paper is Nyerere National Park in Tanzania. Nyerere National Park is selected due to its tourism potential, and also according to [Tanzania National Parks](#)

Source	Findings
Alamsyah and Wardi (2020)	Engagement as a dimension of measuring enjoyment
Blomstervik et al. (2020)	Novelty in tourism national parks for international and domestic tourists with mostly female educated with university education
Boonpat and Suvachart (2014)	Direct experiences from tourism cultural perspective
Japutra and Keni (2020)	Image as a fulfillment for tourists
Lin et al. (2008)	Engagement as a dimension of measuring enjoyment
Minton et al. (2020)	Negative effects of national parks
Mkwizu (2018)	Studies related to domestic tourists are few. Urged for more studies on domestic tourists and domestic tourism
Mogomotsi et al. (2022)	
Morupisi and Mokgalo (2017)	
Stone et al. (2017)	
Obradovic et al. (2023)	Memorable nature-based tourist experience mediates the relationship of tourist experience and environmental responsible behavior
Rasoolimanesh et al. (2021)	In tourists' memorable experiences there was positive effect between visitor engagement and e-word of mouth in heritage sites
Snyman et al. (2023)	Positive linkage between national parks and development
Xu and Chan (2009)	Direct experiences through evaluation of goods and services

Note(s): Source and Findings

Table 1.
Summary of literature
review



Source(s): Compiled by author from empirical and theoretical literature review

Figure 1.
Conceptual framework

[TANAPA] (2022), it is considered as the largest national park in Tanzania and Africa. This study is cross-sectional with a survey design as well as adopts a positivism and interpretivism paradigms in order to understand direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks. The selection for positivism paradigm enables the use of quantitative method for deductive purposes on the basis of the pre-developed hypothesis (H1). The interpretivism paradigm provides the opportunity for this study to apply the qualitative method. The mixed method utilization is for purposes of having quantitative findings supplemented with qualitative data. Guided by the types of tourists' theory, which is embedded in the typology of tourists and the concepts of experiences and enjoyment, this study hypothesizes that there is a significant relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists. Previous studies such as Mkwizu (2018) also adopted mixed methods whereby quantitative findings were supplemented by qualitative data to enrich the research topic under investigation.

Population, sampling and sample size

A stratified random sampling applies and the respondents are selected randomly. The sample size for this study is guided by the sample size table developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). Furthermore, Mathers, Fox, and Hunn (2009) advised to add 5% on sample size to account for low response rate. Hence, a sample size of 380 for the quantitative survey deemed sufficient from a population of 6142 domestic tourists sourced from the Ministry of National Resources and Tourism [MNRT] (2017). Additionally, a convenience sampling is appropriate for the qualitative data that supplements quantitative findings. Only those respondents that felt convenient to respond and gave their consent were interviewed. The interviews were carried out at the entry gate of Nyerere National Park where the domestic tourists are easily and conveniently accessible after they have completed their visit of the national park so as to capture their experiences and enjoyment of their visit before departure to other activities outside the national park. The face-to-face interviews reached a saturation level of 21 and this sample size is adequate for analysis. However, no further collection of qualitative data through the face-to-face interviews would have given new information. Saturation level has been defined as the point at which no additional data can be found (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Research instruments and validity

The survey structured questionnaire as the research instrument assists this study to collect quantitative data using the survey strategy for generalization purposes. Before actual field data collection, a pilot study was necessary to validate the items in the questionnaire. The pilot study is conducted in Mikumi National Park due to its proximity to Nyerere National Park. The pilot study involves pre-testing of the survey questionnaire to 50 domestic tourists

to ensure the questions are accurate and measure the intended objective of this study. According to [In \(2017\)](#), a pilot study sample size should not be less than 30 respondents. The background information of the respondents including demographic variables were adopted from [Mkwizu \(2018\)](#) and [TANAPA \(2019\)](#) while the independent variable (experiences) is measured using direct experiences. The statements for direct experiences are adopted and customized from studies by [Babin, Lee, Kim, and Griffin \(2005\)](#), [Kim \(2009\)](#), and [Lai, Hitchcock, Lu, and Liu \(2018\)](#).

On the other hand, the dependent variable (enjoyment) is measured using engagement, positive affect and fulfillment with statements that are adopted and customized from [Curtis and Davidson \(2013\)](#) and [Lin et al. \(2008\)](#). The statements for experiences and enjoyment of national parks use the 5-point Likert scale measurement.

Data collection, analysis, reliability and ethics

A self-administered questionnaire approach is used to collect the survey data (quantitative data) from the respondents while interview guide with open-ended questions is employed for qualitative data collection. Overall, a total of 360 survey questionnaires are fully filled and subjected to descriptive statistics using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25, which provides frequencies and percentages of the respondents' sample characteristics. In addition, PLS-SEM analysis is deployed to analyze quantitative data and test H1. The PLS-SEM analysis is assisted by SmartPLS version 3 as SmartPLS 3. The use of PLS-SEM with SmartPLS to analyze the moderation effects in research is highly recommended by [Ringle, Wende, and Becker \(2015\)](#). The rest of the other questionnaires are deemed not fit for analysis due to incompleteness.

Quantitative data for this study indicate composite reliability for experiences (0.922) and enjoyment (0.914), which are considered as acceptable values. According to [Hair, Howard, and Nitzl \(2020\)](#) and [Manley, Hair, Williams, and McDowell \(2021\)](#), the composite reliability value that is acceptable should measure reliability value of 0.70 and above to indicate that the questions are reliable.

For the interview information, the approach involves writing on the note book and the text from 21 respondents is typed and transferred in word document by the researcher only to ensure accurate transferability of data. After successful transfer of information to word document then the data are analyzed using content analysis. For replicability purposes, the content analysis involves summarizing the qualitative data into themes after coding themes that are relevant to the objective of this study.

Since data collection is done during the COVID-19 period with variants, in addition to seeking the consent of the respondents, the researcher did observe health requirements. The protection measures include wearing face masks, social distancing and sanitization to ensure that the survey and face-to-face interviews are safe.

Findings and discussion

Themes and sub-themes based on respondents' face-to-face interviews

Summary of the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the face-to-face interviews are highlighted in [Table 2](#) for purposes of supplementing the quantitative results shown in the following sub-sections of the findings and discussion of this paper. In addition, the data collection process completed safely despite the COVID-19 variants.

For direct experiences, the emerged sub-themes were mostly "family and friends," "fun," "learn," "improvements," "first-time visit," "pleasant" and "recommend," which imply that the direct experiences of domestic tourists are about being with family and friends when visiting national parks and that their experiences were fun, gave them the opportunity to learn and

comment where improvements are needed. Additionally, as first-time visitors they still found the national park pleasant and that some of the domestic tourists were recommended by family and friends to visit and are equally recommending others to visit Nyerere National Park, which is a positive move toward promoting domestic tourism. The theme for enjoyment of national parks emerged with core sub-themes namely “unique,” “enjoyed,” “amazing,” and “happy.” From the enjoyment perspective, it is clear that the sub-themes reflect that domestic tourists’ enjoyment of southern national parks is considered as unique, enjoyable, amazing and brings happy feelings.

Characteristics of the respondents

Most of the respondents are aged between 26 and 35 years (40.8%), from Dar es Salaam (54.7%) with income above 300,000 TZS (48.6%) and are males (60.8%) as per Table 3. Further findings indicate that the majority of the domestic tourists have university education (38.6%) characterized as first-time visitors to Nyerere National Park mostly by package tour (58.9%) and concentrated more on the wildlife safari activity (90%) as summarized in Table 3.

The findings on characteristics of the respondents imply that the bulk of domestic tourists that visit Nyerere National Park are mostly university-educated males from Dar es Salaam with income above 300,000 TZS and were first-time visitors on package tours having a wildlife safari as their preference of activity in the national park. Nyerere National Park is a newly established national park and therefore, the findings have shown that most of these domestic tourists are first-time visitors and therefore, they are unfamiliar to the park and its activities as supported by one of the domestic tourists who saying that:

This is my **first time** to visit Nyerere National Park . . . and I have thoroughly enjoyed the park and its wildlife . . . particularly the hippo pool and the beautiful sunset . . . I tried the walking safari and seeing some of the wildlife at close range was an amazing experience . . . I am thankful my friends recommended me to visit this park.

Guided by Cohen’s category of tourists, this implies that these domestic tourists are seeking familiarity of the park since they are unfamiliar with the park and its activities due to them being first-time visitors. However, some of the first-time visitors have also been to other national parks as reported by one of the interviewed domestic tourists:

I have visited Mikumi National Park which is among the many national parks we have in Tanzania. . .yes, if I can recall correctly as a country we currently have a total of 22 national parks . . . but . . . I must say that upon completing my safari tour of Nyerere National Park. . .it is indeed a **huge** national park . . . and the **game drive was pleasant**.

Table 2.
Themes and sub-themes for direct experience and enjoyment

Themes	Sub-themes
Direct experiences	Family and friends Fun Learn Improvements First-time visit Pleasant Recommend
Enjoyment of national parks	Unique Enjoyed Amazing Happy

Nyerere National Park			
Variable		Frequencies (<i>n</i>)	Percentage (%)
Age	18–25	72	20
	26–35	147	40.8
	36–45	92	25.6
	46–55	36	10
	Above 55	13	3.6
Residence	Dar es Salaam	197	54.7
	Dodoma	16	4.4
	Lindi	1	3
	Morogoro	50	13.9
	Others	96	24
Income	No income	57	15.8
	<300,000 TZS	128	35.6
	>300,000 TZS	175	48.6
Gender	Male	219	60.8
	Female	141	39.2
Highest education	Primary	5	1.4
	Secondary	91	25.3
	College	125	34.7
	University	139	38.6
Your visit to the national park	First time	221	61.4
	Repeat	139	38.6
Type of tourist by package tour	Package tour	212	58.9
	Non-package tour	148	41.1
Activities in the national park	Wildlife Safari	324	90
	Non-wildlife safari	36	10
	Walking Safari	26	7.2
	Non-walking safari	334	92.8
	Boat ride	12	3.3
	Non-boat ride	348	96.7
	Bird watching	10	2.8
	Non-bird watching	350	97.2
	Fly-camping	00	00
	Non-fly camping	00	00

Table 3.
Summary of the
characteristics of the
study sample (*n* = 360)

Most of these domestic tourists are visiting the park on package tours meaning that they are visiting on pre-determined itinerary hence guided by Cohen's category definition of organized mass tourists, these domestic tourists can be categorized as organized mass tourists who seek familiarity rather than novelty. The findings of domestic tourists' characteristics of this study differ from previous studies like [Blomstervik et al. \(2020\)](#) done in Portugal. Although this study and [Blomstervik et al. \(2020\)](#) examine experiences in national parks, the variations in results are due to context differences but also different methods involving the unit of analysis whereby this study concentrates on domestic tourists only as the scope of the study while [Blomstervik et al. \(2020\)](#) samples both international and domestic tourists who are mostly university-educated females. Furthermore, the domestic tourists of this study are university-educated males; therefore, the results may differ from the findings of domestic tourists by [Blomstervik et al. \(2020\)](#).

Further findings have shown that respondents commonly agree on direct experiences in reference to their visit to Nyerere National Park as per findings in [Table 4](#). The findings indicate that the majority of the respondents (81.4%) agree on visiting the national park,

	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
Direct experiences			
I visited the national park, which is a place where I really wanted to go (EXP1)	8.6	10	81.4
I enjoyed activities in the national park, which I really wanted to do (EXP2)	9.1	13.9	77.0
I was interested in the main activities of national park for tourism experience (EXP3)	9.4	15.3	75.3
I was encouraged by friends, family or relatives to visit the national parks (EXP4)	14.7	13.1	72.2
Friends, family or relatives recommended the national park (EXP5)	16.1	12.5	71.4
Friends, family or relatives said positive things about the national park EXP6)	13.9	15	71.1

Table 4.
Direct experiences

which is a place where they really want to go whereas 8.6% disagree and 10% could not decide. More than three quarters of the respondents (77%) agree to enjoy the activities in the national park, which they really want to do while 9.1% disagree. Additionally, most of the respondents (75%) agree that they are interested in the main activities of the national park for tourism experiences with only 9.4% who disagree and 15.3% are neutral. Further findings reveal that many of the respondents (72.2%) agree that they are encouraged by friends, family or relatives to visit the national park with a mere 14.7% that disagree and 13.1% were undecided. Also, the findings in Table 4 have shown that a good number of respondents (71.4%) support the statement that friends, family or relatives recommended the national park while 16.1% disagree and 12.5% decide to be neutral. Over half of the respondents (71.1%) agree that friends, family or relatives said positive things about the national park and only 13.9% disagree and 15% are neutral.

For direct experiences involving domestic tourists' interaction with the national park and its activities, these findings suggest that majority of the domestic tourists agree that they visit the national park which is a place where they really want to go; enjoyed the activities in the national park which they really want to do; they are interested in the main activities of national park for tourism experience; they are encouraged and recommended by friends, family or relatives to visit the national park, but also friends, family or relatives said positive things about the national park. These results are consistent with Rasoolimanesh *et al.* (2021) in terms of visitors' positive engagement in the place they visit. Likewise, the investigations by both studies are on direct experiences and enjoyment in tourism although the differences in findings of this study and that of Rasoolimanesh *et al.* (2021) conducted in Iran lies in the contextual and methodological contribution. Adding to the quantitative results of direct experiences, some of the interviewed domestic tourists enjoyed and suggest improvements by stating that:

It was **fun** to go out. Family and friends had hinted to me on visiting national parks not just on weekends but also on public holidays . . . and . . . to me. . . this was a welcome suggestion and timely since there was a public holiday coming. I decided to visit this park especially given the fact that today is **Nyerere Day** (14th October 2021). So, I used this day to visit Nyerere National Park. . . and . . . the interesting activities I did include safari game drive where I saw the rich wildlife from giraffes, antelopes to elephants. . . oh yes. . . and plenty of hippos enjoying the waters of the great and largest River Rufiji of Tanzania

I **enjoy** visiting national parks but due to the corona pandemic, I was not able to visit that often. . . it is important to support tourism and one of the ways to do that is to visit tourist attractions like

national parks often. . . especially now that we have 22 national parks with Nyerere National Park as the largest in the country. Honestly. . . I love to **learn** about wildlife especially the big 5. When visiting a national park like Nyerere National Park, I get the chance to practice what I have learnt in college

It is my **first time to visit Nyerere National Park** and, I am pleased my family and friends who have been here before, **recommended** for me to visit the national park. It is definitely a place I wanted to visit but the **tour guide** needs to be more knowledgeable and skilled about the wildlife including **story telling**

These qualitative results complement the quantitative findings by demonstrating that domestic tourists specifically visited the national park of their choice, especially since some respondents mentioned that they decided to visit during a public holiday. The suggestions and recommendations from family and friends are key as direct experiences in visiting national parks. One of the respondents was happy to have visits to national parks more often, but the visits were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This finding supports the previous study by [Kideghesho, Kimaro, and Mayengo \(2021\)](#) on the negative impacts of the COVID-19 on Tanzania's tourism. More importantly, the act of visiting national parks even during the pandemic implies the resilience of domestic tourists in supporting the tourism industry, and this finding supports [Mkwizu \(2023a, b\)](#) for resilience in tourism. Therefore, efforts are needed to continue to encourage more domestic tourists to visit national parks.

In [Table 5](#), the findings for enjoyment of national parks measured using engagement, positive affect and fulfillment statements revealed that most of the respondents (77.2%) concur that during the activity they are engrossed and 8.4% disagree while 14.4% are neutral. The majority of respondents (82.3%) agree that during the activity they concentrate fully with 6% that disagree and 11.7% undecided. More findings show that most of the respondents (82%) felt happy with few (8.6%) who disagree and 9.4% being neutral. Many of the respondents (81.7%) felt content with few 8.3% disagreeing and 10% being neutral. The findings also show that the mass of respondents (86.4%) agree that the national park activity is worthwhile whereas the majority of the respondents (85.6%) are of the opinion that the national park activity is fulfilling.

These results imply that enjoyment of the southern national parks measured using engagement, positive affect and fulfillment indicated that the bulk of domestic tourists agreed that during their activities in the national park they were engrossed, concentrated fully, felt happy and content. In addition, many of the domestic tourists agreed that activities in the national park were worthwhile and fulfilling. These results are in line with [Kang, Lee, Moon,](#)

Statements	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)
<i>Engagement</i>			
During the activity I was deeply engrossed (ENJ1)	8.4	14.4	77.2
During the activity I concentrated fully (ENJ2)	6.0	11.7	82.3
<i>Positive affect</i>			
During the activity I felt happy (ENJ3)	8.6	9.4	82.0
During the activity I felt content (ENJ4)	8.3	10	81.7
<i>Fulfillment</i>			
The activity was worthwhile (ENJ5)	5.8	7.8	86.4
The activity was fulfilling (ENJ6)	7.2	7.2	85.6

Table 5.
Enjoyment of southern
national parks

and Kim (2019) in terms of enjoyment of national parks. The quantitative findings of this study connect and support qualitative data whereby some of the interviewed domestic tourists reported that:

Yes, I **enjoyed** my tour of Nyerere National Park because I saw a lot of wildlife today. I **really liked** the elephants. Last time, I was here but I did not see elephants but today it was amazing because there were so many. I also **enjoyed the barbeque** we had inside the park when we toured. This was an organized tour experience and specialwe had a place where we **could grill meat, eat and enjoy**

The **wildlife is amazing** and the park is big. . . I heard about the park being the largest in the country when it was officially established as a national park in 2019 but I had to see this for myself and . . . I can say that, . . .it covers many miles on end with breath-taking views of the river, landscape, the bush, the wildlife and today, the weather was sunny and lovely. . . I could not ask for a better relaxation moment. . .yes, it is my first time to visit this park . . . I am extremely **happy** and I have enjoyed my tour

The inferential statistics for the relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists is done using bootstrapping. However, before embarking on the bootstrapping analysis, this study tests for outer loadings, discriminant validity as well as collinearity of the constructs. The outer loadings for EXP1 to EXP3 in Table 6 are above 0.70. The values of above 0.70 for outer loadings support the threshold for outer loadings suggested by Hair et al. (2020). The variables for EXP4 to EXP6 are dropped due to low loadings and are not included for further analysis. The outer loadings for enjoyment (ENJ1 to ENJ6) are acceptable values, which shows that the constructs are reliable.

Discriminant validity values based on the Fornell–Larker Criterion in Table 7 showed direct experiences (0.893) and enjoyment (0.831) and these values are close to 1. Hamid, Sami, and Sidek (2017) and Hair, Hult, Ringle, and Sarstedt (2014) noted that discriminant validity is the extent to which constructs differ from one another empirically by measuring the degree of differences between the overlapping construct. This study performs a discriminant validity using the Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio (HTMT), and according to Hamid et al. (2017), values close to 1 show that there is lack of discriminant validity. Hence, the values of these constructs are acceptable.

Table 6.
Outer loadings for
direct experiences and
enjoyment of
national parks

Variables	Outer loadings
<i>Direct experiences (EXP)</i>	
EXP1	0.775
EXP 2	0.817
EXP 3	0.812
EXP 4	0.683
EXP 5	0.695
EXP 6	0.632
<i>Enjoyment (ENJ)</i>	
ENJ1	0.784
ENJ2	0.830
ENJ3	0.890
ENJ4	0.866
ENJ5	0.829
ENJ6	0.787

Collinearity test in Table 8 show that the values for direct experiences (EXP1 to EXP3) and enjoyment (ENJ1 to ENJ6) are not beyond 5, hence acceptable. This means that there is no multicollinearity for the measured constructs. Hair, Risher, Sarstedt, and Ringle (2019) mentioned that the variance inflation factor (VIF) value should have a threshold close to 3.0 or less but not exceeding 5 since any value above 5 indicates a critical collinearity in the formative indicator.

The bootstrapping tested the relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks with significance level of 0.05. The findings show that for the Hypothesis H1, there is a significant relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks ($p = 0.000$) as indicated in Table 9. Additionally, Figure 2 show that the estimate model of the tested relationships means that the indicators of EXP1 to EXP3 for direct experiences have a significant relationship with the indicators (ENJ1 to ENJ6) for enjoyment of southern national park among the domestic tourists who visit Nyerere National Park. H1 is accepted.

The significant results are in line with a similar study by Rasoolimanesh *et al.* (2021), which had positive relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment. However, there

Variables	Direct experience	Enjoyment
<i>Fornell-Larker criterion</i>		
Direct experiences	0.893	
Enjoyment	0.624	0.831
<i>Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio</i>		
Direct experiences	–	–
Enjoyment	0.687	–

Table 7.
Discriminant validity
for direct experiences
and enjoyment

Variables	VIF
<i>Direct experiences (EXP)</i>	
EXP1	2.670
EXP 2	3.380
EXP 3	1.985
<i>Enjoyment (ENJ)</i>	
ENJ1	2.673
ENJ2	3.107
ENJ3	3.380
ENJ4	3.305
ENJ5	3.461
ENJ6	2.714

Table 8.
Collinearity test for
direct experiences and
enjoyment of
national parks

	Path coefficient		T statistics	p value
Direct experiences to enjoyment	Original sample 0.624	Sample mean (M) 0.622	12.524	0.000

Table 9.
Direct experiences and
enjoyment of national
parks (H1)

are differences with the study by [Rasoolimanesh et al. \(2021\)](#) on the indicators which in this study for direct experiences indicates “I visited the national park which is a place where I really wanted to go (EXP1),” “I enjoyed activities in the national park which I really wanted to do (EXP2)” and “I was interested in the main activities of national park for tourism experience (EXP3)” that are related to indicators of enjoyment (engagement, positive affect and fulfillment) of southern national parks, which are “During the activity I was deeply engrossed (ENJ1),” “During the activity I concentrated fully (ENJ2),” “During the activity I felt happy (ENJ3),” “During the activity I felt content (ENJ4),” “The activity was worthwhile (ENJ5)” and “The activity was fulfilling (ENJ6).”

Furthermore, the significant results on the relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks support the use of types of tourists’ theory as a guide to examine the variables of direct experiences and enjoyment in the context of southern national parks for the case of Nyerere National Park. In addition, the characteristics of the sampled domestic tourists who gave their opinions on the statements regarding direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks are first-time visitors, but most of them are under package tours meaning they have toured using organized tour operators. These significant results as empirical evidence of this study from quantitative data are complemented by the interviewed domestic tourists who provided supplementary qualitative evidence by commenting that:

I came with friends under **organized tour** . . . since we wanted to come as a group to enjoy national parks and . . . we loved seeing the wildlife. It was really relaxing. I will come again to make a tour . . . I will definitely do so . . . because the wildlife experience was amazing. But the **roads need improving** and there should be **more toilets and sign posts**. Last time I could not visit as it was a rainy season and . . . they told me the roads are not passable. So, I recommend that if possible, the roads should be improved

My experience with this national park is **unique** because seeing the wildlife relates to my theory lessons about wildlife especially lions. There was also a **cultural tree** which I found this interesting. I am currently taking a course on wildlife to enhance my knowledge about wildlife in tourism . . . you know. . . the lions to me. . . are not wild, only that if you get too close to the lions then they get angry and defensive . . . it is important to keep your distance. In fact, . . . I really enjoyed visiting Nyerere National Park. . . and I highly recommend that Tanzanians and also foreigners to visit this wonderful national park

These opinions by some of the interviewed domestic tourists using face-to-face approach imply that domestic tourists also visit national parks in organized tours, like to relax, enjoy wildlife and find Nyerere National Park unique as it helps to connect theory and practice

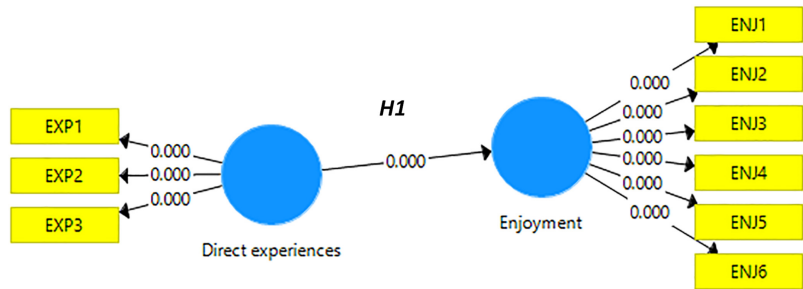


Figure 2.
Direct experiences and
enjoyment of
national parks

Source(s): Field data, 2021, 2022

especially for those taking courses on wildlife in tourism. Observations in terms of infrastructure entail the need to improve the public transport and facilities within the national park. These findings are different from the study by Obradovic *et al.* (2023) in the sense that both studies examined domestic tourists from the experience aspect but each contributing empirical evidence on experience in connection to different concepts hence enriching the understanding of domestic tourists' experiences in national parks.

Besides, the tested hypothesis H1 indicated that direct experiences are significantly related to enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists with findings showing significant value ($p = 0.000$). The significant relationship of direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks is predicted by indicators of direct experiences, which are "I visited the national park which is a place where I really wanted to go," "I enjoyed activities in the national park which I really wanted to do" and "I was interested in the main activities of national park for tourism experience" that are related to indicators of enjoyment (engagement, positive affect and fulfillment) of southern national parks among domestic tourists who visited Nyerere National Park in terms of "during the activity I was deeply engrossed," "during the activity I concentrated fully," "during the activity I felt happy," "during the activity I felt content," "the activity was worthwhile" and "the activity was fulfilling."

The results for hypothesis H1 validate the use of types of tourists' theory by contributing to the significant results which emanated from the type of domestic tourists who were organized mass tourists. In addition, in the context of Tanzania from a demographic information point of view whereby the domestic tourists were characterized not just as organized mass tourists but also as university-educated males with income above 300,000 TZS and first-time visitors on package tours having preference of wildlife safari over other activities offered in the national park such as bird watching.

Conclusion

The conclusion is that direct experiences have a significant relationship with enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists. The significant relationship is explained by the predicting variables of direct experiences, which are "I visited the national park which is a place where I really wanted to go," "I enjoyed activities in the national park which I really wanted to do" and "I was interested in the main activities of the national park for tourism experience" in relation to indicators of enjoyment (engagement, positive affect and fulfillment) of southern national parks among domestic tourists who visited Nyerere National Park in terms of "during the activity I was deeply engrossed," "during the activity I concentrated fully," "during the activity I felt happy," "during the activity I felt content," "the activity was worthwhile" and "the activity was fulfilling."

Furthermore, these findings are supplemented by direct experiences of domestic tourists, which are themed as "family and friends," "fun," "learn," "improvements," "first-time visit," "pleasant" and "recommend." Conversely, enjoyment of national parks has core sub-themes of "unique," "enjoyed," "amazing" and "happy." These findings avail empirical evidence of direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourist who had visited Nyerere National Park despite the adverse effects of the COVID-19 pandemic in order to support the country's tourism sector.

Implications of the study

Most of the domestic tourists agreed that they visited the national park, which is a place where they really wanted to go and enjoyed the activities in the national park which they really wanted to do. This implies that the practical implication is for the government, private sector and relevant tourism stakeholders to ensure that the activities which are in place at

Nyerere National Park are maintained and even improved to tailor the needs of the domestic tourists. In fact, most of the domestic tourists agreed that the activities they did in the national park were worthwhile and according to the characteristics of the domestic tourists, most of these domestic tourists enjoyed and preferred wildlife safari. This further implies that the policy makers can consider these findings when updating policies like the National Five-Year Development Plan for 2021/22–2025/26 for purposes of targeting the 5 million tourists including domestic tourists by 2026.

The significant findings of the relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists implies that the understanding of the phenomenon of enjoyment of national parks can be guided using the types of tourists' theory in the context of Tanzania's largest national park which is Nyerere National Park. These results have a theoretical implication, which is the validation for the use of types of tourists' theory since the domestic tourists' demographic information revealed that the type of domestic tourists are mostly organized mass tourists. The addition of demographic information also characterized domestic tourists visiting Nyerere National Park as university-educated males with income above 300,000 TZS and first-time visitors on package tours having preference for wildlife safari.

While Cohen's types of tourists' theory received criticism for not adding demographic information. On the other hand, this study added demographic information such as age, gender, income and education as this was important in providing more details of the type of domestic tourists visiting Nyerere National Park since it is still a relatively new national park having been established only in 2019. This study went further to also include the variables of "your visit to the national park," "type of tourist by package tour" and "activity at the national park" in order to enhance the profile of the domestic tourists that visited Nyerere National Park and thus understood their direct experiences as domestic tourists who were characterized as (university-educated males/earn income/first-time visitors/package tours/prefer wildlife safari) in relation to enjoyment of southern national parks. Hence, in the context of Tanzania's Nyerere National Park, the type of tourist is not only by using types of tourists' category by Cohen but added and applied demographic information and the three variables of "your visit to the national park," "type of tourist by package tour" and "activity at the national park."

Contribution of this study

This study contributes to empirical evidence on the relationship of experiences and enjoyment of national parks with a study of Nyerere National Park in Tanzania by specifically examining the relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of national parks among domestic tourists. The findings have shown that there is a significant relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists who visited Nyerere National Park, which is the largest national park in Tanzania as well as in Africa. Therefore, these findings can also be useful to other countries particularly national park administrators such as park managers and park rangers within Africa and beyond Africa for comparison purposes and future studies related to enjoyment of national parks.

In addition, the indicators of direct experience that had a significant effect on enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists are: "I visited the national park which is a place where I really wanted to go," "I enjoyed activities in the national park which I really wanted to do" and "I was interested in the main activities of the national park for tourism experience." Hence, the practical contribution is for tourism stakeholders to consider that enjoyment of southern national parks is dependent on domestic tourists visit to national parks according to the national parks that they want to visit, activities that they want to do in the parks as well as their interests in the main activities of the national parks.

On the other hand, the theoretical contribution of this study reveals that there is a significant relationship between direct experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks among domestic tourists in the context of Tanzania. The use of the types of tourists' theory to guide this study contributes theoretically by showing that the opinions from the majority of the domestic tourists being organized mass tourists indicates a significant relationship between the indicators of direct experiences (I visited the national park which is a place where I really wanted to go; I enjoyed activities in the national park which I really wanted to do; I was interested in the main activities of the national park for tourism experience) and enjoyment of national parks in terms of (engagement, positive affect and fulfillment). In addition, past scholars consider the types of tourists' theory as insufficient due to the exclusion of the demographic information in categorizing tourists. Therefore, in this study, the domestic tourists are not only organized mass tourists but have demographic characteristics of being mostly males with university education and earn income as well as first-time visitors to Nyerere National Park using package tours for wildlife safari.

Furthermore, the methodological contribution of this study is evident in the use of PLS-SEM to test the developed hypothesis but also profiling the demographic information of domestic tourists by adding the variables of "your visit to the national park," "type of tourist by package tour" and "activity at the national park" in the context of Tanzania due to the deficiency of Cohen's types of tourists' theory.

Recommendations

Results indicate that there is a significant relationship between experiences and enjoyment of southern national parks. Therefore, the recommendation is that the private sector in collaboration with the government and the tourism stakeholders may consider not only to maintain the current activities at the national park but also improve accessibility by upgrading roads as some domestic tourists opined that roads need improving and are not passable during the rainy season. Other improvements in terms of infrastructure include toilets and sign posts. This can be achieved by constructing and building additional toilets and sign posts in various tour routes of the national parks considering the fact that the national park is very large. In addition, improvements are needed in reference to tour guides that need to be more skilled so that they have knowledge of the tourism products and services they deliver to domestic tourists. Training programs are needed to upgrade the skills of tour guides such as story-telling skills.

Some of the domestic tourists stated the uniqueness of the cultural tree at Nyerere National Park and hinted that it can serve as a cultural tourism location within the national park hence tourists visiting Nyerere National Park can enjoy both wildlife-based tourism and cultural-based tourism. Therefore, this is a calling for the marketing managers and tour operators to design tour packages that are oriented toward attracting more domestic tourists to visit southern national parks like Nyerere National Park.

Limitations of the study

This study is cross-sectional and uses domestic tourists as the unit of analysis.

Direction for future studies

Future studies may explore a longitudinal approach to determine the patterns of domestic tourists' experiences and enjoyment of national parks so as to boost domestic tourism in Tanzania. Also, other researchers can expand the study to include international tourists as the unit of analysis in order to further understand enjoyment of national parks among tourists.

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