

The Impact of Crime on Tourism in the City of uMhlathuze, KwaZulu-Natal

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ABSTRACT

Tourism is a human activity that is sensitive and reacts rapidly to crime. The City of uMhlathuze KwaZulu-Natal has recently experienced high levels of crime, which has had an impact on tourism in the area. This study was conducted on the basis that several countries around the world have coined and implemented different mechanisms and strategies to prevent crime from crippling their tourism industry. Main objectives of the paper was to establish the extent to which the local communities are aware of crime related incidents in the study area, to observe the degree to which local communities participate in tourism activities and facilities with a history of crime, and to determine whether local communities are conversant with the benefits of tourism in the context of crime. Research data was collected from the local municipal officials, police officers and local community, comprising of a random sample of 107 respondents. Findings indicate that the majority of respondents are aware of the levels of crime in the area as a result they do not visit facilities with a history of crime. Finally, respondents were not conversant with the benefits of tourism in the context of crime.

KEYWORDS : *Human activity, Local Communities, Crime, Transnational Economies.*

INTRODUCTION

The Tourism Industry in South Africa has become one of the leading economic contributors to the country's economy. This potentially lucrative industry is seen as an answer to socio-economic problems experienced by various communities. During the apartheid era in South Africa, tourism was a limited and battling industry unknown to most people especially the previously disadvantaged and disenfranchised communities. When the present government came into power, doors opened to many economic opportunities and the South African Tourism industry began to thrive. Despite the shift in economic conditions and opportunities, the growth potential of tourism has been and still is threatened by many factors such as poverty, crime and unemployment. KwaZulu-Natal has the most beautiful, scenic and natural landscapes that attract both domestic and international tourists, yet crime are the biggest threat. According to George (2002) perception of high crime rate, mostly reported by media have discouraged both international and domestic tourists from visiting scenic popular destinations. Tourists are sensitive towards travelling to destinations where crime which may put them at risk is prevalent.

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Tourism has become an exciting and fascinating industry across the globe. The industry's contribution to national and trans-national economies is as enormous as its growth potential. The major threats to the industry are socio-economic problems which in most cases lead to an increase in the crime rates. The problem of interest in this study is crime. According to Ntuli (1998) as cited by Ntuli (2000) crime is a universal social phenomenon in that it threatens the safety and security of the people, property, their sense of well being, as

well as social order. Most importantly it reduces people's quality of life. If the quality of life of an individual is affected by crime, crime itself is seen as a social problem, Ntuli (2000). In many countries around the world especially in popular destinations, crime committed against tourists has become a major threat. The city of uMhlathuze is no exception to this problem. In the research conducted in 2002, Magi (2000) showed that in Kwa Zulu-Natal local respondents viewed tourism safety and security matters second only in importance to lack of disposable income that could be used for tourism purposes. The respondents from outside KwaZulu-Natal held the view that crime safety and security are most important matters. Reports in local newspapers like *Umlozi* and *The Zululand Observer* indicate that crime against tourists is considerably high. *The Zululand Observer's* column called the Roll of Dishonour indicates that most crimes that are committed and convicted by the court each time at least two or three were committed against our tourists. In the light of what has been said above, the purpose of undertaking this study is to ascertain the extent to which crime has an effect on tourism within the city of uMhlathuze. It is of vital importance to discover these effects as this can impact negatively on the city's tourism industry thus failing the city in realizing and reaching its full potential in tourism. The study is intended to help in ensuring and improving the safety and security mechanisms in tourism facilities and at popular tourist destinations around the city.

The city of uMhlathuze has become a popular tourist destination. As we know tourism is a human activity that is sensitive and reacts rapidly to situations of crime and lack of safety and security. The city of uMhlathuze has recently experienced high levels of crime committed against tourists and the researcher has assumed that this situation has had an impact on tourism in the area. Other countries around the world have had tourism industries affected by crimes committed against tourists. Thus they have coined and implemented different mechanisms and strategies to prevent crime from crippling their tourism industries. This study was with the aim to explore ways of protecting the "goose that lays the golden egg".

THEORETICAL VIEWS OF CRIME IN TOURISM

Crimes committed against tourists are not, a new phenomena that comes with the development of the tourism industry. Giddens (1990), states that crimes against travelers affect many people besides the victims and their families. This fact is very true, because unpleasant experiences of tourists at a particular destination are widely covered by the media or reported by tourist themselves to friends and families by the word of mouth. The destination will be subjected to bad publicity and the number of tourists visiting the area will decline.

In South Africa, tourists have been exposed to criminal attacks. This harms the tourists as individuals emotionally and physically. At times this goes to an extent where even the family and friends of that particular tourists are affected by the criminal act committed against the tourist. This occurs when criminal attacks such as rape and murder have been committed.

Theoretically many scholars worldwide have touched the issue of crime and tourism. In South Africa the tourism industry began thriving after the democratic government came into power. Little research has been conducted on the issue of crime and tourism. According to Pizam and Mansfeld (1996) the issue of crime and tourism date back to the Biblical days, where there were people who were always willing to take advantage of the tourists. This was done either by raising the price of an item or robbing tourists their possessions under the assumption that the tourists knew no better.

The social theorists like Durkheim and Mestrovic did not directly address the issues of crime and tourism but their focus was mainly on crime and deviance. These social theorists did distinguish among deviant actions taken randomly against unknown victims. These are actions taken against a specific person as well as the acts of violence against one or more people for political purposes.

Pizam and Mansfeld (1996) states that Durkheim observed that crime existed in all kinds of societies and despite centuries of efforts to control it. It has increased with the growth of civilization. Scull (1988) in Pizam and Mansfeld (1996) states that in America during the early 20th century studies on crime and deviance were of greater interest.

The Marxists or conflict theorists as they are often called had a different perspective. They assumed that crime was a manifestation of class frustration and that crime is mostly committed by those in the lower classes depending on the type of crime committed. The Marxists analysis of crime in tourism is that tourism as a visible form of the consumer society that is short lived, irritates the working class and makes it to react in a way that the bourgeoisie define as crime (Pizam and Mansfeld, 1996). The conflict theory is attractive to those who side with its sympathetic view of the underclass, which views tourists as victims. Tourists are then held responsible for their victimization.

Postmodernists like Boudrillard, Urry and others also contributed to the issues of crime in tourism. Postmodernists believed that seeing should not always be believing. Things are not always what they seem and that the positivists methodologies are not always the most useful tools of analyzing the world Roseman (1990) in Pizam and Mansfeld (1996). Post modernists also create a clear distinction between the "modern" world in which scholars develop clear and precise categories that make sense and the "post modern" world in which these categories are blurred.

Urry (1990) states that post modernism problematizes the distinction between representations and reality. He also believes that tourism lives in a postmodern paradigm that emphasizes the combination of the visual, the aesthetic and the popular. Urry (1990) states that the blurring of social and economic classes cause a paradigm shift from a life based on morality, fear and duty to one of fun.

In the postmodernist paradigm reality merges with the make-believe world where brochures only describe what the tourist would like to believe exists rather than what really exist in reality.

SOUTH AFRICAN PERCEPTIONS AND INTERVENTIONS ON CRIME AGAINST TOURISTS

According to the DEAT (1996) the South African government is committed to ensuring the safety and security of all tourists whether they are domestic or international tourists. Policy guidelines to protect and ensure tourist safety and security have been formulated to be implemented in all provinces.

The strategy that has been devised has short and long term actions and strategies to reduce crime and violence against tourists. This strategy will be implemented in collaboration with other relevant organisations such as the South African Police Services (SAPS), Traders Against Crime. (TAC), Community Police Forums (CPF's), Criminal Justice System (CIS) and many other relevant stakeholders who are interested in ensuring the safety and security of tourist at any destination in South Africa. It has been agreed that tourists should also be provided with adequate information or tips that will help them to improve their safety and security.

Kemp (1996) believes that Tourist Information Centres (TIC's) are a solution. TIC's are found in most towns and cities. These centres provide tourists and travelers with a wide range of information like brochures of local attractions, advice about travel arrangements and places of accommodation. These facilities are becoming commercial booking agent for travel and tourism products especially for the sale of accommodation.

George (2002) states that local tourism information centres which represent the provinces are the first contact and entry points in these regions for both domestic and international tourists. These tourists usually require information about accommodation, transport, tours and activities they can participate in. In Cape Town, the CAPTOUR is a TIC that makes use of technology to offer information to tourists.

The Cape Town Tourism Visitor's Centre was opened in June 1999. It was the first information office in South Africa to have a fully computerized information and technology as well as a late-night Internet café. Furthermore communication facilities such as multi-media kiosks are alternatives to traditional printed travel literature and brochures, which take up a lot of space, become easily disorganized and outdated.

Kiosks display a well-organized travel data, and also able users to access information faster and easily instead of going through piles of brochures. Kiosks can show video clips of destinations, restaurants, hotels, festivals and other local attractions and interactive location maps. Kiosks allow users to make reservations or dispense travel coupons via a touch screen system. Lastly Kiosks provide an interactive guide to a variety of tourist attractions and hospitality offerings.

Adequate resources are to be provided for ensuring the safety and security of all tourists. To develop appropriate legal procedures that would facilitate speedy and effective prosecution of cases where tourists were involved. The government also wants to coordinate all stakeholders to work together to ensure the safety and security of all tourists (George, 2002).

In the DEAT's annual review report of 2001–2002, it is stated that a multi-stakeholder workshop on national tourism safety and security was held in April 2001 to device a safety and security strategy. A communication strategy on tourist safety was developed and distributed to the different provinces and other authorities for comment.

Provinces and businesses have developed programmes to ensure tourist safety with more emphasis put on incident prevention. The Tourism Safety Network setup will clearly state the roles of the DEAT, police, health care professionals, local authorities and the community based victim support in protecting tourists.

Lastly research concerning tourism security trends will be carried out. This will enable effective monitoring of safety and security measures by the government. In South Africa areas like Cape Town, Gauteng Johannesburg and Western Cape have had a chance to experience crime in tourism and to intervene in those situations using different strategies which have been developed and implemented. The City of uMhlathuze's tourism officials can be able to learn from and to use some of these strategies in solving issues of crime in tourism.

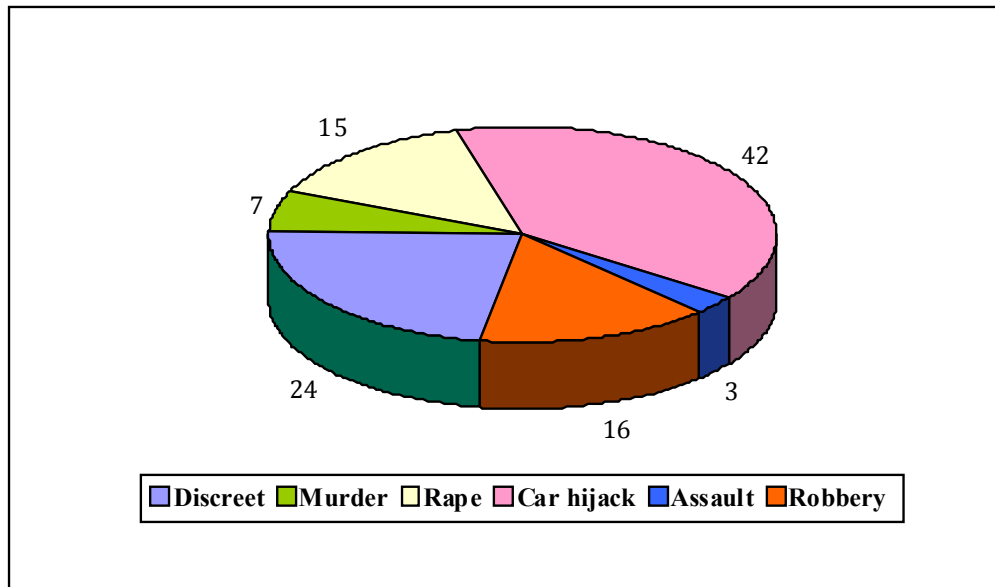
METHODOLOGY USED TO COLLECT RESEARCH DATA

Research data was collected from members of SAPS, Crime Analyst Unit, Local Municipal officials and Tourist (domestic and international) through face to face interviews from local community, Empangeni, Richards Bay, Esikhawini, Ngwelezane, Nseleni, Vulindlela and surrounding tribal authorities. A sample comprising of 107 residents were interviewed through questionnaires. This data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of the respondents are aware of the levels of crimes within the study area. In participating in tourism activities, the majority of respondents do not visit tourism facilities with a history of crime. Some respondents were not conversant with the benefits from tourism in the context of crime. Starting with awareness of levels of crime 75% of the respondents are aware of tourism related crimes that are committed against tourists, Popular crimes mentioned included car hijacking, robbery and assault. Murder and rape rarely occurs. This was confirmed by the member of the SAPS in the crime analysis unit.

A pie chart showing awareness of tourism related crime by respondents indicates that 75% said yes they are aware of such crimes, 16% said no, 13 % were not sure whether there are aware of such crimes and only 3% did not want to respond. Participation in tourism activities and facilities, it was observed that the local communities do participate by engaging in tourism activities and visiting tourism facilities in the area. The study also indicated that respondents were aware of the history of crime incidents in some of the

facilities they visited. Respondents suggested that tourists should be warned about dangers they may encounter at these tourism facilities but in the process should not be scared. Be encouraged to travel in groups. Lastly be aware of people around them and keep their valuables in hand.

Figure 1: Types of Tourism Related Crimes



For local communities benefits from tourism in the context of crime, respondents are not conversant of the benefits they receive through tourism, they do not know the value of having tourist visiting the city and respondents are not aware of the employment opportunities available for them when tourist visit the city.

It is recommended that tourism authorities and other stakeholders should ensure and improve safety and security around tourism facilities. Put warning signage. There must be police presence around tourism facilities. The justice department should impose heavy sentences to criminals who commit crimes against tourists. Authorities should set up community based project for an example a tourism crime prevention forum which will be community driven. Put in place programmes for developing and supporting SMME's to make them aware of tourism benefits and lastly to develop a justice policy to deal with tourism related crimes within the city.

CONCLUSION

Crime does affect tourism negatively and can dent the image of a destination. It is vital that safety and security be tightened to ensure growth and sustainability of the tourism industry within the city of Umhlathuze. All the interested stakeholders in tourism will hopefully join forces in combating crime within the city.

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