



Assessment of the Potential of Adventure Tourism in the Mt. Kenya Region

Esther Wambui Makunyi

Department of Hospitality and Leisure Studies, Technical University of Kenya, Nairobi, Kenya

Email address:

essiewambokunyi@gmail.com

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Abstract: Today, adventure tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global tourism. It has experienced phenomenal growth in the last twenty or so years. However, despite this phenomenal growth, there is still conceptual ambiguity in literature on this niche market. Research on adventure tourism is limited but this is gradually changing. The purpose of the study was to discuss the prospects of developing adventure tourism in the Mt. Kenya region and challenges likely to be faced. The area has been a major tourist destination since colonial times, especially for mountaineers and campers. However, little effort if any has been made by various stakeholders to develop adventure tourism in the area. Available literature on adventure tourism in the Mt. Kenya region is scanty. This study aims to fill this research gap. A descriptive research design was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data provided information on opinions of tourists and industry officials interviewed concerning prospects and challenges for developing adventure tourism in the study area. Quantitative data provided information on major tourist attractions for adventure tourism in the study area. Data collection techniques such as questionnaire survey and interview schedules were used to assess the possibility of developing a viable adventure tourism industry in the area. SWOT analysis was used in the study to explain the current constraints and potential for adventure tourism in the Mt. Kenya region. In-depth literature review and SWOT analysis revealed that many prospects exist for adventure tourism in the study area. Mountaineering, rock climbing, camping and bungee jumping were identified as possible activities that can be developed and expanded for adventure tourism. Therefore, all the stakeholders in the tourism industry in the region should market the area more aggressively locally and internationally.

Keywords: Adventure Tourism, Camping, Mountaineering, SWOT Analysis, Mt. Kenya Region

1. Introduction

Today, adventure tourism is one of the fastest growing sectors of the global tourism [1-3]. It has experienced phenomenal growth in the last twenty or so years. Recent trends have also contributed to the upsurge in its growth. For example, baby boomers have shown growing interest in adventure tourism [1, 4-5]. Developing adventure tourism is a realistic strategy that may offer new opportunities for economic growth and environmental protection. This is already occurring at local levels in many parts of the world [6-7].

The study area was chosen for the study because of its climate, unique geology and ecology, which offer many prospects for adventure tourism activities such as mountaineering, rock climbing, bungee jumping and camping

among others. Mountaineering as an adventure activity in the Mt. Kenya region and other parts of the world such as the Himalayas appeal to visitors from all over the world [8]. The area has been a major attraction for tourists seeking adventure since colonial times. As Sindiga observes, this type of special interest tourism is underdeveloped in the region [9]. Available literature on adventure tourism in the Mt. Kenya region is scanty. Thorough research is needed to aid in full exploitation of the region's potential for the special interest tourism. This study is intended to fill this research gap.

1.1. Problem Statement

Despite rapid growth recorded in adventure tourism globally, there is still conceptual ambiguity in literature on this niche market [1, 10-11]. This could possibly be due to the many activities comprising adventure tourism and lack of clear

distinction between adventure tourism and adventure recreation. Adventure tourism is a contested concept with no consensus reached in literature [1, 10-12]. Swarbrooke et al, [1] argued that adventure tourism is a complicated and somewhat ambiguous concept. This could possibly explain the difficulty encountered in defining adventure tourism [11, 13-14]. The lack of concurrence on the definition of adventure tourism could be attributed to the different ways researchers perceive it. One researcher might consider an activity as an adventure whereas another one does not see it as such. However, most researchers classify mountaineering as a form of adventure tourism [15-16].

Mountaineering is an adventurous activity involving challenges, risk taking and satisfaction [16-19]. Throughout the world, mountains have always fascinated tourists. Mountaineering is healthy and offers opportunity to interact with the natural environment. Available literature demonstrates the health or wellness effect of soft and hard adventure tourism [20-22]. The scope of the study is not limited to mountaineering in the Mount Kenya region. It explores the prospects of developing other adventurous activities such as camping, bungee jumping and trout fishing among others. The study aims to enhance understanding of the opportunities offered by climate, geological structure and unique biodiversity in the development of adventure tourism

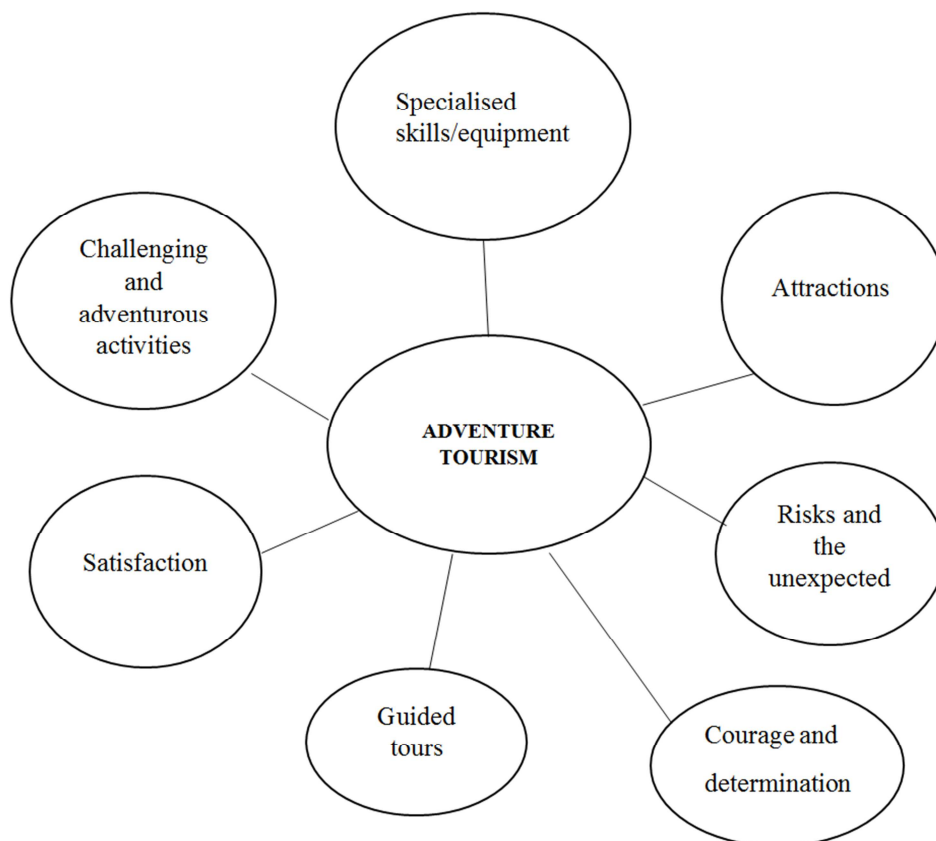
in the Mount Kenya region. It seeks to fill some of the gaps identified in the literature reviewed and provides some new insights to assist policy makers in developing a viable adventure tourism in the study area.

1.2. Study Objective

The overall objective of the study was to assess the potential for adventure tourism in the Mount Kenya region. Specifically, the study 1) identified the major natural resources that could be exploited for the development of adventure tourism in the area, 2) examined how the identified resources could be developed for adventure tourism, and 3) discussed the challenges likely to be faced in the development of adventure tourism.

2. Literature Review

According to the literature reviewed, adventure tourism can be considered as the expansion of active outdoor recreation [23], tourism in the environment [24], and physically challenging outdoor leisure in remote areas [19, 25]. This form of special interest tourism is a relatively new niche market in the world (Figure 1).



Modified from Swarbrooke et al. [1]

Figure 1. Components of adventure tourism.

Swarbrooke et al. [1] have provided a much broader perspective of adventure tourism. They view it as an

accumulation of several components such as attractions (natural environment and cultural heritage), adrenaline raising

adventurous activities, courage and determination, risks and the unexpected among others (Figure 1). These components should be considered in defining adventure tourism. Its components are classified as hard and soft adventure [15].

Hard adventure consists of activities, which are very risky; require a lot of concentration and great competence. Examples of hard adventure include mountain and rock climbing, bungee jumping and white water rafting among others. Soft adventure activities on the other hand have low levels of risk, requiring little concentration and basic skills. These include camping, hiking, bird watching, and fishing among others [15, 26]. For the purpose of this study, both hard and soft adventure activities are discussed. Today, many European adventure tourists prefer Africa and Asia where excellent hard adventure attractions are found such as Mt. Kenya, Kilimanjaro, trekking in Nepal and cycling in Vietnam [17].

Mt. Kenya located on the Equator with its snow-capped peaks offers great scope for hard and soft adventure activities such as mountain climbing, rock climbing, bird watching, fishing, bungee jumping, kayaking and camping. The study area appeals to adventure tourists of all ages and nationalities [9, 17]. Hospitality facilities have been developed around the mountain to cater for the tourists visiting the area. The tourists also prefer safaris and game viewing in the National Parks and reserves where sighting the iconic big five is a great motivation. Bird watching and trout fishing are important soft adventure activities available too [9, 17-18].

3. Methodology

A descriptive research design was used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data provided information on opinions of tourists and industry officials interviewed concerning prospects and challenges for developing adventure tourism in the study area. Quantitative data provided information on major tourist attractions for adventure tourism in the study area. Data collection techniques such as questionnaire survey and interview schedules were used to assess the possibility of developing a

viable adventure tourism industry in the area. SWOT analysis was used in the study to explain the current constraints and potential for adventure tourism in the Mt. Kenya region. The analysis involved the use of open-ended questionnaire administered to tourists visiting the area and through brain storming session with tour operators, campsite owners and officials of the Ministry of Tourism. This was essential in order to reveal the region's competitive advantages. The responses to questionnaires and information obtained from published and unpublished reports were presented in form of a SWOT matrix. Each of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified was assigned a rating from 1-3 depending on its importance. The probability of strategic success (PSS) was computed based on the scores obtained to show whether there is potential for adventure tourism or not in the study area [27]. The PSS ranges from 0 (not important) to 1 (very important) [27].

The internal strength (SP) is calculated taking into account the list of strengths (S) and weaknesses (W), and the external strength (AS) by evaluating opportunity (O) and threats (T) [27].

$$SP = \frac{\sum S}{\sum S + W} \quad (1)$$

$$AS = \frac{\sum O}{\sum O + T} \quad (2)$$

$$PSS = \frac{SP + AS}{2} \quad (3)$$

Where PSS – coefficient of probability of a strategic success (e.g. developing adventure tourism potential), SP – the area's internal strength, AS – the area's attractiveness [27].

4. Research Findings

Tourists visit Mt. Kenya Region for different purposes. These are presented in table 1. From the table, it is apparent that mountaineering (a form of hard adventure) and holiday are the major trip purposes (66.3%).

4.1. Survey Results

Table 1. Trip purpose in Mt. Kenya region.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Holiday	24	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Mountaineering	29	36.3	36.3	66.3
	Game Viewing	8	10.0	10.0	76.3
	Business	16	20.0	20.0	96.3
	Other (Specify)	3	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data, 2023

Tourists visiting Mt. Kenya region participate in a variety of activities as shown in table 2. In the table, it can be seen that camping (soft adventure) and mountaineering (hard adventure)

are the most popular adventure activities in the region. Majority of the respondents (52.5%) participate in these two activities.

Table 2. Type of tourism activity involved Percentage.

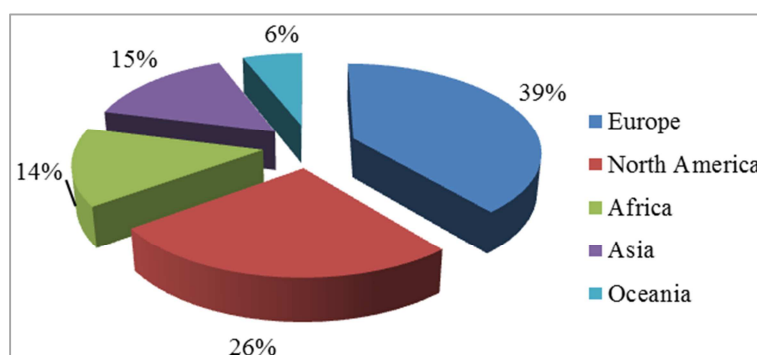
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Camping	16	20.0	20.0	20.0
	Mountaineering	26	32.5	32.5	52.5
	Sightseeing	6	7.5	7.5	60.0
	Trout Fishing	3	3.8	3.8	63.8
	Holiday	16	20.0	20.0	83.8
	Traditional Dances	3	3.8	3.8	87.5
	Cultural Villages	3	3.8	3.8	91.3
	Kayaking	4	5.0	5.0	96.3
	Bungee Jumping	3	3.8	3.8	100.0
	Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Source: Field data, 2023

Tourists visit the study area from different parts of the world. The findings are presented in Figure 2. From the table, it can be established that a big percentage tourists (39%) came from Europe. The rest of the tourists came from other regions

such as North America (26%), Asia (15%), Africa (14%) and Oceania (6%).

Respondents by Continent of Origin



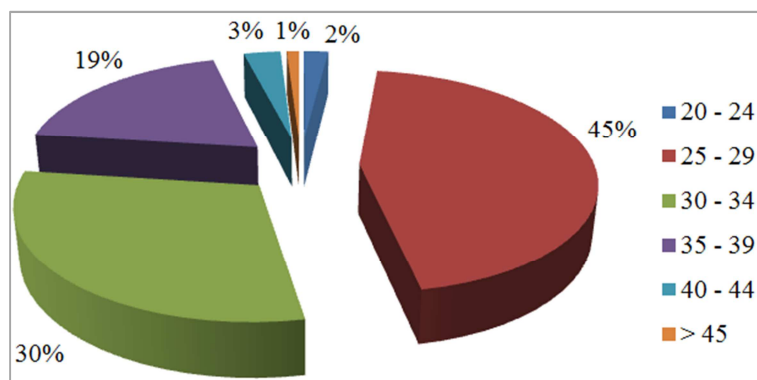
Source: Field data, 2023

Figure 2. Respondents by Continent of Origin.

The ages of the tourists visiting the study area are presented in Figure 3. In terms of age, the respondents ranged from 20-51 years. According to the findings, a majority of tourists

visiting Mt. Kenya region were aged between 25-34 years (75%).

Respondents by Age



Field data, 2023

Figure 3. Respondents by age.

4.2. SWOT Analysis

SWOT analysis revealed that the study area has enormous potential for adventure tourism. Many opportunities for adventure tourism exist and operators in the area should take full advantage of them (Table 3). A brief discussion of the

results of SWOT analysis is presented below.

This involved an evaluation on an accepted scale of key internal and external factors, and determining whether there are more strengths than weaknesses and more opportunities than threats in the study area [27]. The internal strength (SP) is calculated taking into account the list of strengths (S) and

weaknesses (W), and the external strength (AS) by evaluating opportunity (O) and threats (T). The computed SP was 0.6 while the computed AS was 0.61. The probability of strategic success (PSS) (probability of having adventure tourism

potential) was computed based on the scores obtained. PSS ranges from zero (not important) to one (important). The computed co-efficient value was 0.61, which is greater than the required coefficient of 0.5.

Table 3. SWOT Analysis Weighted Scores.

Internal environment			
Strengths	Weighting Rating Score		
Unique geological structures and cultural attractions	0.15	3	0.45
Abundant and/or rare fauna and flora species	0.05	2	0.10
UNESCO Heritage site	0.12	3	0.36
Large number of campsite and tour operators	0.09	3	0.27
Trout fishing	0.03	1	0.03
Attracts high -end tourists	0.06	2	0.12
Nearness to Nairobi attracts leisure travellers	0.01	1	0.01
Participation of and support of the local Communities	0.04	2	0.08
Total			1.42
Weaknesses			
Lack of policies and legal frameworks to regulate adventure tourism	0.09	3	0.27
Little or no customer awareness concerning safety	0.15	3	0.45
Not able to meet international safety and rescue standards	0.02	1	0.02
Lack of specialised equipment for adventurous activities	0.05	2	0.1
Poor marketing to attract tourists during off-peak season	0.04	2	0.08
Lack of or inadequate medical facilities at destination	0.01	1	0.01
Total			0.93
External environment			
Opportunities			
Existing untapped adventure tourism potential	0.15	3	0.45
Marketing destination using technology	0.09	3	0.27
Environmentally conscious travellers	0.03	2	0.06
Growing global demand for adventure	0.15	3	0.45
Interest in cultural heritage of destination	0.01	2	0.02
Improvement of transport infrastructure	0.02	2	0.04
Improvement in safety and rescue standards	0.06	3	0.12
Total			1.41
Threats			
Stiff competition from other African destinations	0.12	2	0.24
High charges during peak season	0.01	2	0.02
Global warming and climate change	0.15	3	0.45
Environmental/human induced hazards e.g. forest fires	0.01	2	0.02
Environmental degradation of destination	0.08	2	0.16
Exchange rate fluctuations	0.02	1	0.02
Total			0.91

Source: Author, 2023

5. Discussion

Mt Kenya region has many tourist attractions that make it a favourite destination for adventure seekers. It is an attractive region with the mountain's snowcapped and scenic peaks striding across the equator. Camping facilities catering for different leisure and adventure travellers' interests dot the area. The presence of imposing Standalone Mountain offers good camping environment with natural vegetation cover ranging from savannah grasslands to montane rain forest. Due to wide range of tourist attractions, the region forms a good base for adventure tourism [17]. The major players in the tourism

industry in the region should appreciate the potential of adventure tourism and market the area more aggressively and jointly.

According to the findings, a majority of tourists (75%) visiting Mt. Kenya region were aged between 25-34 years (Figure 2). This is the age when most people may be single or young couples with little or no family commitment. Therefore, they have free time to engage in adventure tourism activities. This is significant because players in travel and tourism industry should respond appropriately by promoting adventure activities that appeal to that age bracket. This is an important finding because it is consistent with the global trend where younger tourists appear to immerse themselves in

adventure and other forms of special interest tourism [4-5].

Another important finding was that majority of the tourists interviewed (65%) came from Europe and North America (Figure 3). This could be due to the colonial legacy since Kenya was formerly a British colony and possibly the country is better marketed in Europe compared to other parts of the world [28]. It was also found out that the Asian market is becoming increasingly important and should be targeted by the Kenya Tourist Board (KTB), campsite operators and tour operators. The Asian market is likely to expand and diversify the tourist source regions rather than the country depending on a narrow market dominated by Europe and North America. The African market is also of growing significance.

SWOT analysis also confirmed the presence of enormous potential for adventure tourism in the region (Table 3). The geological structure of the Mt. Kenya region can be considered as a strength benefiting those offering outdoor adventure tours. This is mainly due to the lure of snow-capped Mt. Kenya lying on the Equator. It attracts many adventure tourists from all over the world every year, whose primary motivation is mountaineering. Abundant and/or rare fauna and flora species such as the rare Bongo are also found here that attract many tourists interested in sightseeing. Other strengths identified included attraction of high-end tourists to the area and the presence of many well-trained campsite operators, tour operators and tour guides.

The Mt. Kenya region outdoor adventure segment has massive untapped potential given the vast, undeveloped natural environment of the area. The diversity of the natural environment provides ideal locations for both hard adventure such as mountaineering and soft adventure such as nature trails, bird watching and trout fishing.

SWOT analysis also led to the identification of some possible weaknesses and threats that would adversely affect the potential of adventure tourism in the Mt. Kenya region if not adequately addressed. Of major concern is the lack of policies and legal frameworks to regulate adventure tourism in the country, which also affects the development of adventure tourism in the region. Since adventure tourism is not well developed in the region, some of the local mountaineers are not aware of the international standards required to ensure their safety. This is exacerbated by lack of specialised equipment for use in adventurous activities such as mountaineering, white water rafting and bungee jumping.

Some of the leading threats identified in SWOT analysis included stiff competition from other African countries that have developed adventure tourism such as Seychelles and Mauritius. Kenya needs to develop adventure tourism including provision of well-priced camping and other facilities in the region. Global warming and climate change also pose a serious threat to the development of adventure tourism in the study area. This contributes to the rapid melting of the mountain glacier. Many adventure tourists prefer to walk on and have a feel of snow. If the snow on the top of Mt. Kenya melts, then its appeal for climbers will disappear. The rivers inhabited by trout fish will also dry up. Some of the opportunities identified included growing demand for

adventure travel worldwide and environmentally conscious travellers. These are important opportunities to exploit in order to develop a viable adventure tourism industry in the study area.

6. Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the study concluded that the Mt. Kenya region has a huge potential for adventure tourism. This potential needs to be exploited in order to diversify the tourism industry in the country. Survey results revealed that majority of the tourists visiting Mt. Kenya (52.5%) participated in camping and mountain climbing. This shows that the tourists visiting the region immersed themselves in some adventure tourism activities besides leisure and business. It can also be concluded that as the trend in other parts of the world shows, that majority of the tourists visiting the region were young people, aged 25-34 years (75%).

The survey results were consistent with the information obtained from SWOT analysis. The implication of this research is that great potential exists for adventure tourism in the study area. This calls for more investments by the various stakeholders in the area. Various operators in the region should create awareness for adventure tourism potential and market it aggressively locally and overseas.

The research was exploratory in nature and only examined the potential for adventure tourism. Future research should discuss how the adventure potential identified should be tapped by the various stakeholders operating in the area. Research could also be carried out on the types of adventure tourist facilities to be developed by private investors in the study area. All these studies should contribute towards providing database for adventure tourism management in the region and the country as a whole.

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