

**Customer service quality strategy in the tourism and
leisure industry: A case study of Mkabati Nature Reserve**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer defections have been linked to service encounter failure in the tourism, leisure and hospitality industry. This study embraces the idea of improving customer acquisition, retention and satisfaction through proactively promoting operational excellence and improved customer service strategies. Mkambati Nature Reserve is studied to evaluate its customer service levels and to lay the foundation for the development of strategies for customer service improvement.

Located in rural Transkei (Eastern Cape) wild coast, the resort is trying to position itself as a world-class holiday destination. However, increasing competition and the changing needs of its customers are threatening to erode its market share. The challenge for management is how to grow its market through customer acquisition and retention.

This customer service measurement survey is one of regular surveys meant to evaluate the levels of customer service at Mkambati. A research questionnaire was designed to establish the profile of the visitors, their impression of the levels of service they receive and the key attractions. The respondents were also required to give a general opinion of the service they received and any other factors of concern. The data collected has been used to test the proposition: Customers are satisfied with the level of customer service received at the game reserve, i.e. at reservations, arrival, game drives, with accommodation, at the beach, restaurant and bar, cultural village, and at departure.

A literature review of customer service in the tourism, leisure and hospitality industry has been undertaken. The unique features of customer service in the tourism and leisure industry emerged. These are variability, perishability, intangibility and inseparability. It also emerged that there are 10 dimensions of service quality i.e. reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding and reliability. However, they have been reduced to the five dimensions of service quality i.e. reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. The

SERVQUAL instrument has been used to analyse data relating to customer perceptions at Mkambati Nature Reserve.

The population of the research study consists of the residents and tourists in South Africa and the respondents were selected using a simple random sampling technique. A total of 300 questionnaires were issued and 270 were returned resulting in a 90% response rate. Mathematical and statistical data treatments have been employed to evaluate the survey results. Data has been presented using tables and graphs.

The research results were analysed using the computer software, Microsoft Excel and a statistical software package: Statistica. The statements in the questionnaire have been reduced to the five dimensions of customer service. It emerged that responsiveness has the highest rating of all service dimensions, followed by reliability, assurance, empathy. The least rating was for tangibles. The mean score and standard deviation stands at 60.3% and 5.9% respectively. The results of the survey revealed that the visitors are satisfied with the level of service they receive at reservations. At arrival, game drives, beach facilities, restaurant and bar, cultural village and departure there is moderate satisfaction. With an average score of 12 points, accommodation has the least service satisfaction. Thus its performance is below the expectations of the visitors. Therefore, the general conclusion is that the customers are moderately satisfied with the levels of customer service they receive at the resort.

Based on the research findings, management could develop proactive strategies to improve customer service, enhance customer acquisition and retention and reduce customer defection. There is need to focus on the measures that improve operational excellence. The measures recommended include the use of information technology, development of organisational service standards (benchmarks), generate positive emotions in the service encounter, measurement and management of customer satisfaction and service quality, prioritize accommodation improvement, process improvement, service customization, improvement of the beach facilities and employee empowerment.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The tourism and leisure industry in South Africa is going through a period of sizeable growth (12%). This requires Mkambati Nature reserve (also referred to as MNR) to revisit its operational strategies. This research is about operational excellence and is done, among other objectives, to identify areas that need prioritization and to evaluate the levels of customer service. Secondly, Mkambati Nature Reserve is aware that the value of earnings will be determined by the current and future customers. Mkambati Nature Reserve's strategy entails that consistent execution of the five dimensions of service quality ensure success. If need be the resort will redesign its customer service strategy to meet the customers' needs.

In an industry where there are limited features differentiating one role player from another, superior customer service should differentiate the reserve from the rest of its competitors. Evidently, a gap exists between the needs of the customers and the ability of the reserve to meet their expectations.

The Eastern Cape Tourism Board (cited by the Daily Dispatch, 2006) reported that tourism and leisure trends indicate a rise in attendance at both free and paid-for popular leisure attractions. In addition, the overall time for leisure is on the increase among the previously disadvantaged individuals. Together with the proposed construction of the N2 toll road along the Wild Coast there are increased opportunities to increase cash flow in the tourism and leisure industry. Therefore, it can be argued that the tourism and leisure industry is quite attractive to new competitors. As such, it will thus require new competitive strategies to survive.

Furthermore, the number of attractions competing in the tourism and leisure industry is increasing with little service differentiation. The innovative newcomers to the industry now offer new standards of service. As a result the role players in the leisure industry have to look beyond the generic marketing strategies to increase their share of the customer spend, to build customer loyalty, and to ensure customer retention and acquisition.

The tourism and leisure industry is under siege by its customers (tourists). The political changes in South Africa since 1994 and globalisation have expanded the tourism market so much so that different tourists need different services and customer care. They are increasingly demanding better services that suit their lifestyles, family size and purpose of visit. Consequently, to thrive in this new market-driven economy, Mkambati Nature Reserve needs to assess its current and future value and performance in the new economy reliably. This research is part of that process.

The customers in the middle to higher living standard measure (LSM) groups are more demanding of service and therefore pose new challenges. They need quality services (food, accommodation, facilities and activities) that will make their holiday pleasant and memorable. As a result, excellent customer service, particularly in the tourism and leisure industry is recognized as the key success factor for enhancing cash flows, customer satisfaction and ultimately profitability.

Mkambati Nature Reserve is committed to the highest levels of customer satisfaction and to achieve operational excellence. This customer service measurement (CSM) survey is done with the knowledge that happy satisfied customers will improve the profitability of the reserve. In the same vein, dissatisfied customers will lead to the reserve's descent into loss making. But shortfalls do occur from time to time. Mkambati Nature Reserve rectifies problems in real time on an incident-by-incident basis. Although this strategy has proved to be successful in the past, a modern approach to customer service management requires scientific research to determine real customer satisfaction levels.

The reserve regularly conducts service measurement surveys and has already taken action to improve customer service before the current CSM exercise. Therefore, the areas covered in this research have been identified by management to find out whether improvement has indeed taken place. Mkambati Nature Reserve management has set a standard by which they can conform to and to ensure an improvement in customer service. Evidently, regular customer service measurement is one way of achieving that goal. This should translate into improved customer service and meeting customers' needs through improved service quality issues as identified by the research project. Excellent customer service should lead to improved customer satisfaction and loyalty, and profitability.

However, a customer service measurement survey can yield accurate data on service levels and highlight where the customers are least happy, but it can't solve the problems, improve the service and increase customer satisfaction. Furthermore, Mkambati Nature Reserve is aware that CSM is not the only way to monitor performance. It can be measured through benchmarking against other industry participants.

The challenge lies with management to redesign its customer service strategy to fill the gap between measurement results and the standards management is committed to. This could involve empowering the employees and enhancing their ability to improve the service levels through training and development.

1.2 A SNAPSHOT OF MKAMBATI NATURE RESERVE

The Eastern Cape has an extraordinary variety of scenic beauty with the Mkambati Nature Reserve being one of the major tourist attractions on the Eastern Cape Wild Coast. The reserve contains a large variety of flora and fauna, including the Mkambati forest - an evergreen coastal forest where black eagles breed. There is excellent swimming, surfing, beach games and fishing potential at the beach. All year round a wealth of leisure opportunities can be enjoyed in a malaria-free environment. In

addition, a rare blend of cultures, lifestyle and ethnic tradition shared by warm-hearted folk offers a unique holiday experience.

Mkambati Nature Reserve is located in the Eastern Cape, on a 6,000 hectare reserve. It has a rocky coastline extending for 10 km between the Msikaba and Mtentu rivers and includes parts of the Eastern Cape province's most scenic and secret coastline. The highlights of Mkambati Nature Reserve are isolated beaches, gurgling waterfalls, wide river mouths and deeply incised, forested ravines. The map of the Eastern Cape (appendix A) shows the location of Mkambati Nature Reserve.

The forest canopy and steep-sided cliffs of the reserve conceal a number of birds of prey, including the African eagle, and a breeding colony of Cape vulture. The endangered Cape vulture, fish eagle and crowned eagle can also be seen. Other wildlife at Mkambati includes gemsbok, red hartebeest, wildebeest, blesbok, eland and zebra. There are also bushbuck, bushpig and baboons.

There are a variety of walks, including one along the Mkambati river to the dramatic Horseshoe Falls, where clear, fresh water rolls and tumbles over spectacular rapids before cascading into the sea.

The reserve further offers excellent swimming facilities at the Mkambati beach, fishing, surfing and beach games (sports). Angling at the Msikaba and Mtentu river mouths is excellent and usually yields a good harvest of fish. Large grunter, kob, bream, rockcod, galjoen and shad can be caught in this area.

The reserve offers accommodation in six and eight bed cottages and three-bed rondavels, as well as in a comfortable lodge overlooking the Msikaba river, with 20 double rooms and a lounge for the guests. Guests can also camp at a fully serviced caravan park. The restaurant and bar offer excellent service to the guests and room service can be arranged.

Mkambati Nature Reserve operates in the highly competitive tourism and leisure industry. It faces the same pressures as other big businesses. Located on the Wild Coast

of the Eastern Cape, the reserve competes for customers with many tourist attractions in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal. The main challenges of the reserve are how to grow its market share, customer retention and acquisition.

The basis of this research project is to investigate the needs of customers in the tourism and leisure industry and to evaluate the resort's levels of customer service. Recent research by Tourism KwaZulu Natal (2006) points to the fact that tourists demand excellent customer service and processes. They seek value for their money and time. The research findings will be used to improve the operational processes.

The visitors to the nature reserve include researchers, children, leisure seekers and families. One thing they have in common is that they need quality service. The challenge for management is to offer the kind of service the visitors desire or even to exceed it.

1.3 MNR'S CURRENT CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

Due to the entrance of new competitors in the lucrative tourism, leisure and hospitality industry and the ever-changing needs of the customers, there is increasing pressure on the role players to improve customer service. MNR aims to achieve operational excellence and to offer exceptional customer service. Management's ultimate goal is to grow the resort's market share through customer acquisition and retention. This will translate into increased profitability and sustainable competitive advantage.

In order to realise sustainable profitability, MNR's target market comprises of middle to high-income group, emerging black middle class and the foreigner markets. The target markets pose new challenges since the needs of these groups are unique to each group. Secondly, management wishes to position the reserve as a world-class holiday destination – "home away from home". This calls for operational strategies that will enhance customer service satisfaction.

Management pursues a differentiation strategy that features offering the customers excellent customer service. Focus is on improving the key success factors in the tourism, leisure and hospitality industry i.e. accessibility, physical facilities, responsiveness to the customer needs, reliability and empathy. Hence the need to build competitively valuable expertise and capabilities, and to enhance customer satisfaction in all customer service encounters.

According to Kasi (2006) the resort's strategy in 2006 included the following elements:

- To grow the resort's market share through customer acquisition and retention underpinned by exceptional customer service. The main objective is to achieve sustainable growth year after year.
- To make friendly service a company trademark. The resort personnel work hard at creating a positive, holiday experience for the visitors. MNR's employees are screened carefully for fun-loving and outgoing personalities prerequisites for excellent customer service.
- To improve customer service processes through operational excellence. MNR will need to provide superior value by enhancing convenience. Most importantly, customers have to be served more reliably and provided with good-quality service. A commitment to excellent service should be of paramount importance to ensure increased customer satisfaction.
- To improve accessibility and responsiveness e.g. making confirmation of reservations faster and paying attention to the individual need of the customers. A website was to be set up so that the visitors can be able to make reservation online. More importantly, the use of Internet technology will enhance communication with the customers and will eventually result in building lasting relationships with them.
- Customisation – promote the unique ability to deliver personalized customer services to meet the unique needs of the customers. Given the heterogeneity of the service industry, customisation will cater for the individual needs of the customers and therefore improve customer satisfaction with the level of customer service.

Management will need to build detailed customer bases for segmenting and targeting and responding quickly to customer needs.

- Renovation of the accommodation facilities to world-class standards, to enhance comfort and luxury. The rondavels were to be upgraded to make them more comfortable.

Out competing rivals based on excellent customer service as a differentiating feature is likely to make MNR a strong bottom-line performer and create sustainable competitive advantage. Customised customer service, however, requires up to date customer databases. This underscores the importance of this survey, which among other objectives aims, to determine the profile of the visitors and from the research findings recommend measures to enhance the levels of customer service at Mkambati Nature Reserve.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

In order to sustain continued industry/market share growth, often under unfavourable macroeconomic conditions, the focus continues to remain on cost cutting and promotion measures. These have, more often than not, yielded the same results for all competing tourism, nature conservation and leisure attractions.

Superior customer service is viewed as one of the most effective strategies to create sustainable competitive advantage. The argument is underpinned by its successful contribution to customer satisfaction, increased traffic and customer loyalty.

The challenge for management is to identify, firstly, the areas that needs to be measured. Secondly, to measure service levels of these areas and to determine its levels of satisfaction, and thirdly, to determine how to improve it. This should increase visitors' loyalty and satisfaction. As a result, this research attempts to address just that: identify areas, measure satisfaction and suggest to management how to improve these service levels currently offered at Mkambati Nature Reserve.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Mkambati Nature Reserve occasionally conducts research programmes aimed at improving customer service and to determine what appeals to the visitors most. This is done because past experience has shown that people's tastes change with time and due to the fact that competition in the tourism industry has intensified with new role players entering the industry. Therefore, the research sets the following primary research objectives:

- Determine the profile of the visitors to the reserve;
- Establish which activities are key attractions at Mkambati Nature Reserve.
- Evaluate the level of customer service; and to
- Provide a customer service management strategy.

1.6 IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

The importance of tourism needs no emphasis, and the Eastern Cape is no exception. Specifically the potential that tourism creates by creating employment opportunities is paramount. Secondly, as Mkambati Nature Reserve transforms itself from being a parastatal organisation to a competitive business enterprise, this research study will set out to establish the factors that lead to improved customer satisfaction and ultimately customer loyalty, and retention.

1.7 RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS

In an attempt to understand the underlying factors relating to customer service at Mkambati Nature Reserve, the research will test the following propositions:

- H₀ Customers are satisfied with the *level of customer service received at the game reserve*;
- H₁ Customers are satisfied with the level of service received at *reservations*;
- H₂ Customers are satisfied with the level of service received at *arrival*;
- H₃ Customers are satisfied with the level of service received at the *game drives*;

- H₄ Customers are satisfied with the level of service received with *accommodation*;
- H₅ Customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive at the *beach*;
- H₆ Customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive at the *restaurant and bar*;
- H₇ Customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive at the *cultural village*; and
- H₈ Customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive at *departure*.

1.8 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to ensure a comprehensive study, this research makes use of both a literature review and an empirical study.

1.8.1 Literature review

Within the scope of this research project, the primary and secondary sources of specific information encompass:

- Journals, tour and travel magazines/literature;
- Previous research project reports;
- World Wide Web internet sites;
- Wildlife and leisure industry association reports; and
- Textbooks and abstracts.

The reason why these sources are considered the most relevant is that their existence usually depends on establishing, analyzing and using data and information. As a result, an extensive literature review of customer service follows in chapter three.

1.8.2 Empirical analysis

The philosophical basis on which this research is founded is “quantitative research”, i.e. *hypothetico-deductive*. Thus an objective scientific approach to investigate the service levels has been selected to ensure a sound scientific base. Mathematical and statistical data treatment will be employed to evaluate all survey results. The following methods were employed:

- Questionnaires at the reception; and
- Interviews in case the responses to the questionnaires do not yield the expected results or needed to be clarified.

1.8.3 Sample selection and techniques

The population of the research study consists of the residents and tourists in South Africa for this is the population we want to generalise to. Therefore the sample frame will be drawn from that population. The sample frame will consist of visitors to the reserve. The sample size was limited to 300 visitors. The visitors were selected randomly.

Questionnaires were completed anonymously, but incorporated some non-identifying personal data that was used to develop a profile of the visitors. The questionnaire also provided demographical information about the visitors.

Because the survey sample frame does not constitute a census, one needs to consider the fact that the survey evidence consists of data that will be obtained from certain populations only.

1.8.4 Data interpretation and statistical testing techniques

The nature of data to be collected during the research project will be both discrete and continuous, and of ordinal, nominal ratio and interval make-up. Hence mathematical and statistical data treatment has been employed to evaluate the survey results. Where the analysis of collected data becomes mathematical and too complex for descriptive statistics the use of inferential statistics is employed.

1.9 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter one provides an introduction to the study. It provides a snapshot of the problem statement, research problem, propositions and methodology. In chapter two a review of the tourism and leisure industry in South Africa and the operations at Mkambati Nature Reserve is presented. This includes the historical profile, current and future trends. Evidently, the general trend is positive, with consecutive year on year increase in the tourist bookings. A general demographic profile of the individuals likely to engage in the tourism and leisure activities also sketched. It is evident that the figures for Mkambati Nature Reserve compare well with the national statistics.

A literature review of customer service is presented in chapter three. An attempt is made to identify the ideal customer service strategy, and how to enhance its effectiveness in attracting the visitors and customer retention. The research methodology and results follow in chapter four. The study concludes by making conclusions and offering some recommendations in chapter five.

1.10 SUMMARY

Tourism is an ever-expanding leisure activity in South Africa. With an annual growth rate of approximately 12%, there is much potential in this lucrative industry. The key success factor is operational excellence, which should translate into improved customer

service. Excellent customer service will result in improved customer satisfaction, i.e. narrow the gap between service satisfaction and expectation.

Chapter one has painted a picture of the research problem, hypothesis, objectives and methodology. The research project will set out to determine whether improved customer service can lead to customer satisfaction, loyalty, customer acquisition and retention. For Mkambati Nature Reserve it will test the hypothesis that the visitors are satisfied with the level of customer service they receive at the resort i.e. at reservation, arrival, game drives, accommodation, beach facilities, cultural village, and restaurant and bar.

Consequently, a profile of the visitors will be determined, followed by the establishment of the key attractions, evaluation of the level of customer service and lastly, using the findings, to provide a customer service management strategy based on the results.

This research makes use of both a literature review and an empirical study. Journals, previous research project reports, worldwide web internet sites, text books and wildlife and leisure industry association and reports are used. The empirical research is done using a questionnaires completed by the visitors selected using simple random sampling.

The next chapter provides an analysis of the tourism and leisure industry. This will provide information about the state of tourism at Mkambati Nature Reserve as compared with the national tourism trends. It will be followed by a preview of customer service and customer measurement in chapter three.

CHAPTER 2

TOURISM AND LEISURE INDUSTRY

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Poon (2006) reports that the tourism industry is one of the largest, most diverse, profitable and fastest growing industries in the world and tourism is acknowledged to be an activity of great economic importance. Evidently, tourism is an attractive industry with increasing growth and profitability. However, success in this lucrative industry is closely related and dependant on satisfactory levels of customer service, which is in turn, a function of managerial inputs such as benchmarking, innovation, excellent human resource management and the use of information technology, to name but a few.

The leisure industry comprises a wide range of activities, facilities and services, including sport, physical fitness, recreation, entertainment, hospitality and above all the tourist industry. It is devoted to providing ways to fill its customers' leisure time.

Tourism comprises of the activities of people travelling to and staying outside their usual environment for more than one consecutive day for leisure, business, and other purposes.

There are six categories of tourism:

- Domestic tourism involving residents of a country visiting within that country i.e. both inter-provincial and intra-provincial tourism;
- Inbound tourism involving non-residents of a country;
- Outbound tourism involving the residents of a country visiting other countries;
- Internal tourism, which comprises domestic tourism and inbound tourism;
- National tourism, which comprises domestic tourism and outbound tourism; and
- International tourism, which comprises inbound and outbound tourism.

The Eastern Cape Tourism Board (2006) reports that eco-tourism (travel to natural areas to experience rare and beautiful ecosystems) is on the increase in the Eastern Cape and South Africa in general. The central attraction is the quality and uniqueness of the natural environment. This is often combined with encountering equally important cultural and historical resources associated with the indigenous population.

The tourism industry and the government concentrate more on eco-tourism as a product, whereby the image of a unique natural environment appeals to a growing sector of the tourism market (Eastern Cape Tourism Board, 2006). Consequently, the growth of eco-tourism has resulted from two major factors:

- Tourists have become more interested in a learning experience in natural environments and have grown dissatisfied with traditional, crowded tourist centres and resorts; and
- Eco-tourism has been boosted by improved infrastructure, an increased number of tour companies, widespread publicity and recognition by the government.

All types of travellers engaged in tourism are described as visitors. The term visitor may further be subdivided into same-day visitors and tourists:

- Same-day visitors are visitors who do not spend the night in a collective or private accommodation facility in the place visited;
- While tourists are visitors who stay at the place visited for at least one night.

Needless to say, both types of visitors are important for increased profitability of the tourist attractions.

This chapter concentrates on the analysis of the tourism and leisure industry i.e. historical perspective, industry characteristics, key success factors and the industry's core competencies.

2.2 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A snapshot of South Africa's tourism and leisure industry, with special reference to Mkambati Nature Reserve from 2001 up to 2005, is presented in this section. A comparison is also made of the figures of each year and the seasonal variations.

In the past few years a number of factors have caused the present huge growth of the tourism and leisure industry, thereby, justifying its attractiveness. Secondly, the changes in the environment in which the customers live, work, compete and make decisions lead to customers becoming part of the Mkambati target market, hence the 12% growth rate. Most importantly, the socio-political changes in South Africa have led to a more positive attitude towards the country, leisure and tourism. These encouraging developments hold a promise of considerable expansion within the local tourism industry, thereby justifying the view that the tourism and hospitality industry is very attractive. The challenge is how to increase profitability in the face of fierce competition.

An increase in leisure time resulted from reduced hours of labour, long holidays, early retirement, and higher unemployment. Similarly, greater general affluence has meant that more money has become available for leisure. Greater mobility has provided access to leisure facilities and led to the proliferation of hotels, restaurants, and caravans and camping parks, as well as themed attractions.

As Mkambati Nature reserve transforms itself into a competitive business venture, it understands the challenges it faces and need to take charge of the industry factors that drive the industry. Currently Mkambati Nature Reserve is not noted to be a fierce competitive rival in the industry. It can best be described as an industry follower. This research identifies ways to use service satisfaction as a strategic tool in becoming a competitive role player in the tourism and leisure industry, and to, ultimately, use this vehicle to increase its market share.

2.2.1 Industry characteristics

The tourism and leisure industry is characterized by fierce rivalry, high growth rate and increasing market size and profitability due to globalisation and socio-political changes in South Africa. The improvement in technology has also levelled the playing field, yet there is less scope for differentiation. These characteristics underpin the strategic moves Mkambati Nature Reserve should take in order to increase its market share and competitiveness. Furthermore they will be used to determine whether improved customer service can lead to sustainable competitive advantage. In this regard, George (2001:20) observes that offering an experience (such as a visit to the nature reserve) ties in the four distinctive characteristics of a service offering. These characteristics are:

- Intangibility – Virtually all tourism and hospitality offerings are intangible. They cannot be seen, tested, felt, heard or smelled before being bought. An element of risk exists for the buying consumers because they are unsure of exactly what they are purchasing;
- Inseparability – In the context of tourism and hospitality refers to instances where a service and provision occur at the same time with both provider and consumer involved in the process of delivery;
- Variability – Tourism and hospitality offerings and experiences vary according to a given situation. Different customers have different demands, expectations, tastes, moods, perceptions and emotions; and
- Perishability – Tourism and leisure offerings cannot be saved, stored, resold, or returned. Because of the perishable nature of tourism and hospitality offerings they are often discounted, especially at the last hour.

Consequently, the decision to buy a tourism and hospitality offering usually involves the purchase of several offering. This calls for operational excellence across all customer service dimensions to add value to customer experience and enhance customer satisfaction.

It is evident that management's task is to put in place effective strategies to manage the demand of the tourism and hospitality offerings.

2.2.2 Key success factors

Given the intangibility, inseparability, variability and perishability of the tourism and hospitality offering, one needs to look at the key success factors in the hospitality industry in order to achieve operational excellence. These include:

- The human resources– The employees are important elements in the delivery of all tourism and hospitality services. Success is closely linked to the selection, training, motivation and management of people;
- Use of information technology - In the face of globalisation, new technology is helping empower service employees and customers by giving them more information more quickly. It can also help redesign and reengineer the service strategies to cater for the foreigner tourist market segment;
- Strong e-commerce capabilities – The use of a user friendly web site and/or skills in using the Internet technology applications to streamline operations accessibility, reservations and responsiveness adds to customer value and enhances accessibility;
- Courteous, personalized customer service;
- Customisation of processes and empowerment of employees to provide non-standard services when needed;
- Improved accessibility i.e. reservations, responsiveness and infrastructure.
- High quality facilities – accommodation, beaches, restaurant and bar, game drive facilities, etc, and;
- Natural beauty and variety of wildlife.

The research findings of this research study will identify the shortfalls of service quality. Secondly, the shortfall will indicate the key priority areas of service improvement in a quest to improve customer satisfaction.

2.2.3 Core competencies in the tourism and leisure industry

Swarbrooke (2000:116) contends that whether or not visitors perceive an attraction to offer value for money depends on the amount of time spent on the site, quality of customer service and facilities and the variety of on-site attractions. Therefore, in the face of increasing competitive rivalry and increasing demand by visitors for excellent services, customer satisfaction is becoming an increasing challenge.

For long-term profitability and increased market share, the role players need to have competencies that lead to customer satisfaction, and retention, and long-term competitive advantage. The core competencies include motivated workforce, high quality environment, good customer service, excellent facilities and an offer that is perceived to be value for money. Evidently the research questionnaire is designed to measure, among others, the perception of the visitors' customer satisfaction with services and facilities at Mkambati Nature Reserve.

Tourism KwaZulu (2006) reports that the volume of tourist activity on a national basis is unevenly distributed with the majority of the tourists visiting coastal towns, and big commercial centres like Johannesburg, Durban and Cape Town. There is also empirical evidence that tourism is enjoyed essentially by wealthy individuals, who have the necessary disposable income, available leisure time and the motivation to travel. Most importantly, the political changes in South Africa have created a new breed of black middle class, with disposable income and the motivation to travel.

Mkambati Nature Reserve management needs to position the resort as a key role player in the tourism industry. Given the unique nature of the resort and its location, its ability to acquire appropriate competencies will lead to increased competitiveness.

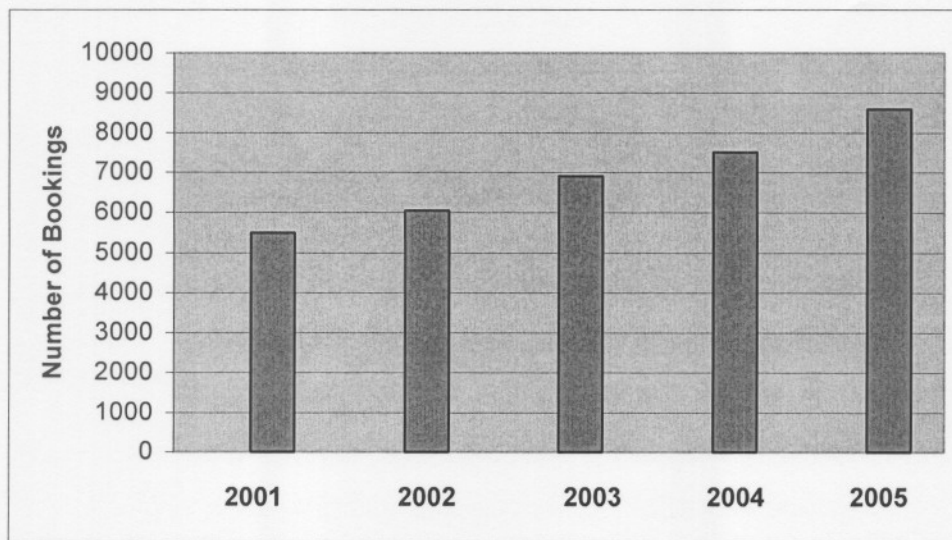
Possibly the most important factor in the success of Mkambati Nature Reserve in relation to the customer is to ensure that the attraction is targeting markets with high growth potential and to offer excellent customer service to them. Examples of growth

markets include the older age group, a desire among many people to use the attraction to learn something new and a desire among families to find attractions offering something new for the children. Evidently, to succeed Mkambati Nature Reserve will need to tap into the growth markets and to monitor consumer behaviour trends.

2.2.4 Analysis of the last five years' bookings

Figure 2.1 below shows the booking records for Mkambati Nature Reserve for the years 2001 to 2005. Evidently, the number of visitors has been increasing over the years. The increase was 9.1% in 2002, 15% in 2003, 9% in 2004 and 15% in 2005. This gives an average increase of 12%. These figures include all guests to the reserve including those at the self-catering caravan park and same-day visitors. The general trend shows a year-on-year increase in the number of visitors at the reserve.

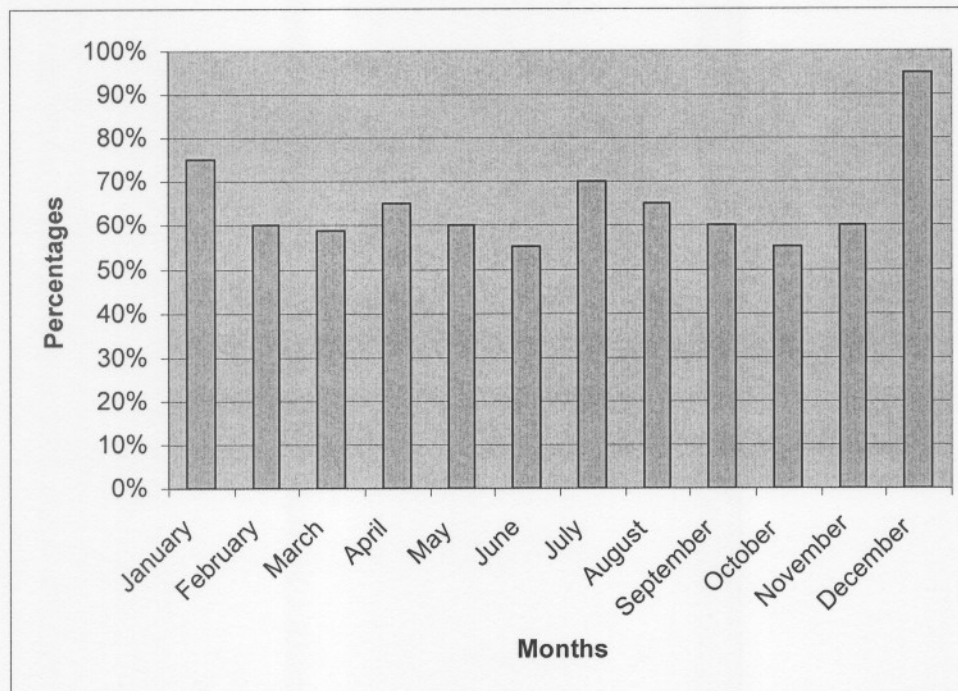
FIGURE 2.1: NUMBER OF BOOKINGS FOR THE LAST FIVE YEARS



2.2.5 Seasonal Tourists Variation

Figure 2.2 below illustrates the seasonal variation in the booking for 2005. These figures also reflect the general trend over the last ten years. It is evident that the bookings peak during July and December coinciding with the school holidays. Lower bookings are recorded between February and June and between August and November. The same trend reflects chalet occupancy percentages and at the caravan park.

FIGURE 2.2: SEASONAL TOURIST VARIATION IN 2005



2.3 VISITOR LOYALTY

The tourism industry is characterized by a lack of customer loyalty. Consequently, few tourists return to a holiday destination because they are loyal. Those who return do so because of the pleasant experience they had on their previous visits. However, adventurous tourists want to visit new places for a new experience. A few visitors come back but it is difficult to attribute the return visit to customer loyalty because different

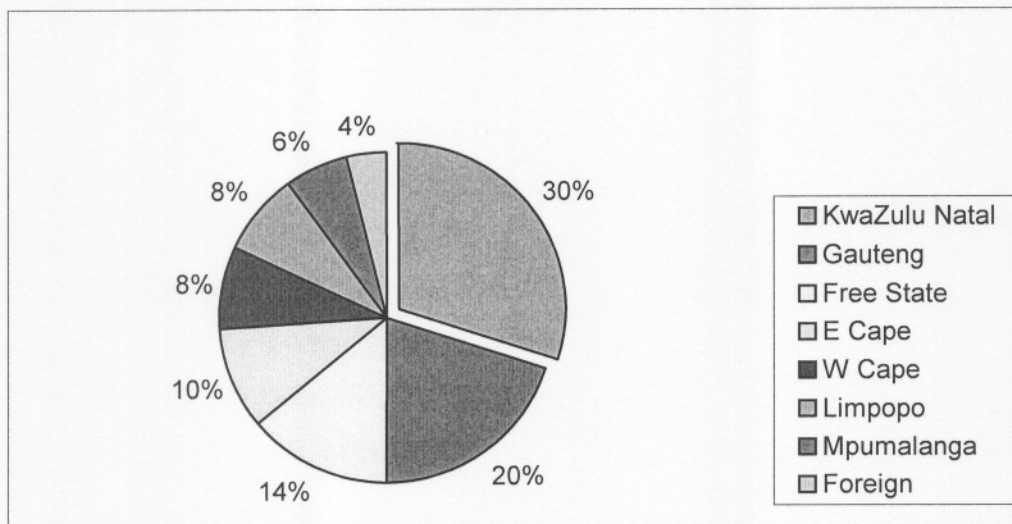
tourists cite different reasons for their return. These include security, nice weather, game experience and a memorable experience.

2.4 TYPES OF VISITORS

2.4.1 Source of the Tourists

According to Mkambati Nature Reserve's records, 30% of the tourists come from KwaZulu Natal, 20% from Gauteng, 14% from the Free State, 10% from the Eastern Cape, 8% from the Western Cape, 8% Limpopo, 6% from Mpumalanga, and 4% comprise of foreign visitors. Thus domestic tourists dominate with KwaZulu Natal and Gauteng being the main source. One can argue that KwaZulu Natal leads due to its close proximity to the reserve, which in turn aids accessibility. With the fairly high income associated with the residents of Gauteng, it is not surprising since they tend to have more disposable income than their counterparts from other provinces. Figure 2.3 below illustrates the major sources of tourists.

FIGURE 2.3: SOURCES OF TOURISTS



Of the eight sources of tourists, the least number of domestic tourists comes from Mpumalanga province and a much smaller number comes from overseas. These sources

have major implications as far as tourists targeting, positioning and communication strategies are concerned. However, the latest statistics will be derived from the findings of this research study.

2.4.2 Profile of the Tourists

FIGURE 2.4: PROFILE OF THE TOURISTS

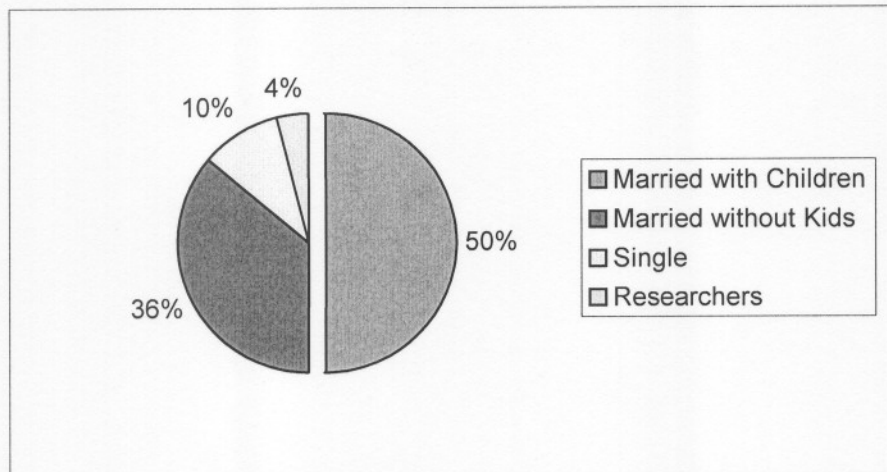


Figure 2.4 shows that if we were to use the marital status, family size and motive for visiting Mkambati Nature Reserve, there are four different types of tourists:

- **Visitors who are married and have children.** Family size ranges from three to five members per family. The average duration of the visit is seven days. However, some visitors stay for up to two weeks or more, especially during the school holidays. It is therefore imperative to provide for the entertainment of the children. Secondly, since these are financially empowered couples, it is important to target this market segment for future profitability;
- **Married without children.** This market segment comprises of mainly young couples i.e. husband and wife and individuals who are co-habiting. This group's visits are erratic in nature. Some tour off-peak periods while others visit during the peak periods. Most of the visitors are attracted by activities like the game and beach activities.

- **Single visitors.** Many of the single visitors (not married) are male tourists visiting either alone or with friends. Most of them are attracted by the outdoor activities, mainly the beach activities (surfing, fishing, swimming) and above all nice weather. Single visitors usually stay for a weekend.
- **Researchers.** The researchers are mainly male, conducting research in eco-tourism and wildlife. Their stay lasts for two to three days. It therefore implies that there is also a need to create a quiet environment that is conducive to research work.

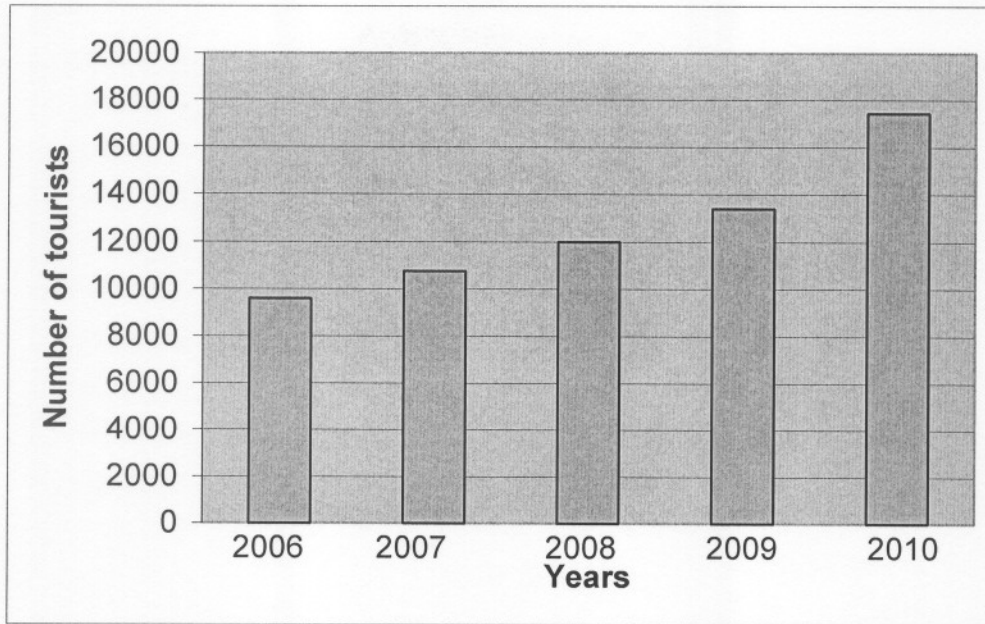
These categories of visitors have important implications as far as customer service is concerned. Needless to say, most of the visitors belong to the middle and upper LSMs, with high disposable income and free time. There is a need to target this market segment and for Mkambati Nature Reserve to be positioned as their ideal holiday destination. The challenge for this research is to identify what appeals to the visitors, to aid an informed strategy and policy-making process to satisfy their needs.

2.5 FUTURE TRENDS

Given the fact that the number of tourists has been growing at an average rate of 12% per annum, the number of visitors is set to increase to 9,600, 10,750, 12,000, 13,400 and 17,400 per annum, from 2006 to 2010. Tourism Industry Intelligence (2006) contends that major sports events boost tourism. Therefore, the general trend is that growth rate is tipped to peak in 2010 with the soccer World Cup showpiece to be hosted by South Africa. Furthermore, the growth rate is expected to include guests in the caravan-park and same day visitors. This explains the high figures expected in the year 2010.

Figure 2.5 shows the future trend for tourism activity at Mkambati Nature Reserve. This trend is expected to be in line with the national tourism growth rate which is expected to peak in the year 2010. Thereafter, the 2010 soccer World Cup boom will drop over the next three to five years after the tournament and the normal trend (approximately 12% annual growth) will resume.

FIGURE 2.5: EXPECTED FUTURE TRENDS



The amount of time and money available for leisure has never been greater than it is today and the trend is expected to continue. Evidently, there is a need for more new mixed leisure concepts providing varied and extensive combinations of activities. The challenges for management are:

- How to provide the kind of service that meets the expectations of the guests and/or even to exceed it; and
- How to grow the tourism market share and to develop sustainable strategies to increase market share.

This research attempts to explore the expectations of the visitors and to make recommendations on the appropriate strategy and action plan.

2.6 SUMMARY

This chapter has explored the features of South Africa's tourism and leisure industry relevant to Mkambati Nature Reserve, with special reference to domestic and inbound tourism. Note is also made that greater general affluence and the socio-political changes have meant that more money has become available for leisure. It is evident that the

tourist industry is very attractive with a high growth rate and increasing profitability. This explains the fierce competition that characterizes it. Consequently, the industry success factors have been identified. These include effective human resource management, improved customer service, use of information technology and availability of unique facilities and natural beauty. Mention is made to the effect that Mkambati Nature Reserve has the ability to compete in the sub-region to increase its market share and improve customer satisfaction.

The historical perspective shows an analysis of the last five years bookings. Evidently, there has been a year on year increase in the bookings over the last five years at an average growth rate of 12% per annum. In the same vein, the impressive economic figures, pointing to economic growth and the fact that economists are still upbeat about the prospects of economy auger well for the tourism and leisure industry.

It is important to indicate that with limited evidence of visitor loyalty, it is inappropriate to give testimony to that effect as most of the visitors normally want to visit new places. Those who return may not necessarily be loyal visitors but do so for other reasons like good weather, game and beach activities experience.

The profile of the visitors is quite interesting. It is evident that the tourism industry thrives on both domestic and foreign tourists. It is also clear that it is the wealthy individuals who have high disposable income that do visit the tourist attractions. There is also evidence of increasing tourism by families. This observation also applies to Mkambati Nature Reserve.

There is an increase in the number of people visiting the tourism and leisure attractions. The future trend in South Africa and Mkambati Nature Reserve specifically, points to an increase in tourism activity. For Mkambati Nature Reserve, tourism is expected to grow at an average rate of 12% per annum. This growth is expected to peak in the year 2010. This implies that there is need to put measures in place to cope with the increasing number of tourists. The measures are explored in subsequent chapters.

The next chapter provides a literature review of the concept customer service, whilst also introducing the reader to the concept of customer service measurement.

CHAPTER 3

CUSTOMER SERVICE AND CUSTOMER SERVICE MEASUREMENT IN TOURISM AND LEISURE INDUSTRY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In today's competitive marketplace, companies that take the best care of their customers have a strong competitive advantage. Equally important, good service – though costly – goes hand in hand with good financial performance. This underscores the importance of good customer service and a need for hardheaded analysis and commitment to help customers. Since customers generate the revenue that keep organisations in existence and deliver its profits, they are important in organisational strategy.

The role of excellent customer service and quality in creating sustainable competitive advantage was highlighted in the previous chapters and it forms the basis of this research survey. However, in many instances, it is surprising that much greater emphasis has been given to some aspects of strategic development to competition rather than the customer. It is therefore easy to lose sight of the direct strategic importance of the customer and quality of customer service. If the environment is incorrectly defined the competitors may creep up and steal the customers without the service provider realizing until it is too late.

The following discussion will define the concepts customer service, service quality and describe the significance, and barriers to excellent customer service. In addition, the review of the literature gives a descriptive review of the 10 criteria used to assess customer service and the tools of customer service measurement. A review of the relevant academic texts on the current trends in customer service management in the hospitality industry, the *Gaps model* of service quality and the use of the SERVQUAL

instrument have been undertaken. The findings will be used to evaluate customer service at Mkambati Nature Reserve.

3.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

3.2.1 Customer service

Shahin (2006) defines the concept customer service as the manner in which marketers deal with their customers. There are four major components of customer service: customer relations, delivery, repair services and warranties. Most aspects of customer service can be placed in the last of these categories. Like branding and packaging, customer service is a crucial element of overall product strategy. It is as important to service marketers as it is to goods marketers and is a major enhancer of competitiveness. For the purposes of this research, the definition will be extended to include the interaction of all the factors that affect the process of making services available to the visitors.

Scanlan (2000:491) observed that the reasons why customers switched to competitors were associated with dissatisfying service experiences during the service encounter. Indeed, problems experienced in the service encounter are a major cause of customer dissatisfaction and defection. Therefore, creating a positive service encounter is the essence of customer loyalty, retention and long-term relationships. Bitner and Booms cited by Scanlan (2000:493) concluded that the quality of service provided by the service provider could be the deciding factor on which the customers make decisions on the return visit and is an influencing factor in the customers' decision to form and maintain long-term relationship with the organization.

3.2.2 Service quality

According to Shahin (2006) the concept service quality has aroused considerable interest and debate in the research literature because of the difficulties in both defining it and measuring it with no overall consensus emerging on either. There are a number of

different “definitions” as to what is meant by service quality. One that is commonly used defines service quality as the extent to which a service meets customers’ needs or expectations. However, for the purpose of this research, service quality refers to the discrepancy between customers’ expectations and perceptions, *i.e.* the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service. If the expectation is greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs.

George (2001:277) contends that service quality is the delivery of excellent or superior service relative to consumer expectations. Perceived quality is best modelled as the gap between customers’ expectations concerning the product or service and their perception concerning the product or service. When expectations are greater than perceptions, perceived quality is poor. When expectations are lower than perceptions, perceived quality is good. When expectations and perceptions match, perceived quality is acceptable.

3.2.3 Characteristics of a service offering

George (2001:19) observes that the marketers of service offerings need to be concerned with four basic characteristics that make the marketing of services offerings different from the marketing of manufactured products *i.e.* intangibility, variability, inseparability, and perishability.

- **Intangibility** indicates something which cannot be seen, touched, felt, heard, or smelled before being bought. Service offerings cannot be inspected or tested in advance and they cannot be brought to the consumer; they are intangible. Since service offerings can’t be evaluated or tested beforehand, consumers tend to rely on ‘word-of-mouth’ from other people’s experiences. Alternatively they look to tangible elements in the offering itself such as cleanliness of a restaurant or the appearance of the employees’ uniforms.

So it seems offerings such as a holiday and virtually all tourism and hospitality offerings are intangible. Similarly, a fundamental part of the hospitality and tourism offerings lies in how it is delivered to the consumer, which also cannot be experienced beforehand (George, 2001:20). Therefore the marketers of the service offerings have the task of promoting the intangible benefits of the tourism and hospitality offering, such as education, entertainment or superior customer service. Secondly, there is need to 'tangibilise' the service offering by managing the 'physical evidence' that accompanies the services, such as staff appearance and buildings/facilities in order to enhance customer satisfaction.

- **Inseparability** in the context of tourism and hospitality is defined as instances where a service and provision occur at the same time with both provider and consumer involved in the process of delivery. The tourism and hospitality offerings are sold, produced and consumed at the same time (George, 2001:20). Therefore, the way the offering is delivered is crucial. In order to ensure improved customer service there is a need for stricter selection and training of service provider's personnel.
- **Variability** indicates a service performance that is unique to each consumer. Tourism and hospitality offerings always vary because humans produce them. The service providers delivering a restaurant meal are part of the offering and they cannot provide exactly the same levels of service as their colleagues. Even from the same provider, a guest may receive outstanding service one day and average service another day (George 2001:21). Similarly, no two consumers are precisely the same – they have different demands, expectations, tastes, moods, perceptions and emotions. Consequently, the tourism and hospitality offerings and experiences vary according to a given situation. Due to service heterogeneity it is impossible to deliver an identical service each time. Nor can one control quality (Piercy, 2002:239). To ensure excellent service delivery, standardization, managing variability, strict quality control measures, development of customer care programmes and systems are essential.

- **Perishability** describes offerings that cannot be saved, stored, resold or returned. The tourism and hospitality offering can neither be saved, stored nor returned. They are perishable. A hotel room not sold today cannot be sold tomorrow. If it is not booked that day, the revenue from that room is lost and can't be recovered (George, 2001:21). Perishability of the hospitality industry affects the bottom line therefore it is essential for the customer service to be impeccable to lead to customer retention by the service offering. Because of the perishable nature of tourism and hospitality offerings, they are often discounted, especially at the last hour. This implies that it is imperative to manage demand and supply effectively, e.g. through differential pricing and development of complementary services.

3.2.4 Significance of quality customer service

The positive relationship between perceived quality and profitability is documented empirically. In the long run the most important single factor affecting a business unit's performance is the quality of its products and services, relative to those of customers. A quality edge boosts performance in two ways:

- In the short run, superior quality yields increased profits via premium prices.
- In the longer term, superior and/or improving relative quality is the most effective way for a business to grow. Quality leads to both market expansion and gains in market share.

One can, therefore, conclude that improving service in the eyes of customers dividends. When service improvements lead to perceived service improvement, quality becomes a profit strategy and it should add value to customer service.

Kotler and Armstrong (2004:302) state that, in their experience, one of the major ways a service firm can differentiate itself is by delivering consistently higher quality than its competitors. They also observed that customer retention is perhaps the best measure of quality. It is evident that a service firm's ability to hang on to its customers depends on how consistently it offers value to them.

Customers (guests) expect excellent services and facilities. As a result, consumer confidence is boosted by quality customer service, more so when it becomes part of the features that set the service provider from other competing service providers. Therefore, it is evident that differentiation through superior service for a reasonable price is a key strategy in the service industry.

Shahin (2006) states that managers in the service sector are under increasing pressure to demonstrate that their services are customer-focused and that continuous performance improvement is being delivered. Given the financial and resources constraints under which service organisations must manage, it is essential that customer expectations are properly understood and measured and that, from the customer's perspective, any gaps in service quality are identified. This information then assists a manager in identifying cost effective ways of closing service quality gaps and prioritizing which gaps to focus on, which is a critical decision given scarce resources.

George (2001:277) observes that there is a growing realization that high quality goods and services can give an organisation considerable competitive advantage. Good quality generates satisfied customers. Some operations managers believe that quality customer service is the one most single factor affecting an organisation's performance relative to its competitors. To reduce uncertainty, buyers look for "signals" of service quality. They draw conclusions about quality from the place, people, price, equipment and communications they can see. Therefore, the service provider's task is to add tangibles to their intangible offers.

The quality of service provided to business customers has a major effect on customer "defections" – customers who will not want to come back. Service strategists point out that customers' defections have a powerful impact on the bottom line (Hutt & Speh 2001:339). As a company's relationship with a customer lengthens, profits rise.

Levitt cited by Lynch (2000: 139) argued that the main reason some organisations were in decline was because they had become so heavily product oriented, and were not

sufficiently customer oriented. As a result, they narrowed their customer base so narrowly. This implies that customer orientation should emphasize the need for customer profile so that the services, goods and facilities provided could be better tailored to their needs. Secondly, it also allows for developing strategies that identify customers and competitors.

It is often no longer sufficient to sell a product or to deliver a service on one occasion. In order to compete in the market, it has become essential to offer superior service. Consequently, considerable emphasis has been laid on the customer service as perceived by the customers (Lynch 2000:140). Evidently, excellent customer service provides real advantages in corporate strategy. Particularly it is its strength in enhancing customer satisfaction and retention, and in creating sustainable competitive advantage. Therefore, excellent customer service is a key success factor in the tourism and hospitality industry. It translates into customer retention and acquisition of new ones.

Thompson *et al* (2005:373) states that a culture built around such business principles as pleasing customers, fair treatment, operating excellence and employee empowerment promotes employee behaviours that facilitate the execution of strategies keyed to high product quality and superior customer service. Most importantly, improved customer service will lead to customer satisfaction and loyalty.

3.2.5 Barriers to service quality

Parasuraman *et al* (1987) cited by Swarbrooke (2000:116) suggests that there are four barriers to service quality, all of which are the fault of the service provider, and all of which will affect the customer's perception of the service experience. These barriers mean that there is a mismatch between what the customers expected and what they perceived to be actually delivered. The barriers are:

- i. Misconceptions: management misunderstands what customers' want and thus delivers an inappropriate or incomplete product.
- ii. Inadequate resources: if the service provider is trying to cut costs or doesn't have the necessary resources, for example, the customers might suffer.
- iii. Inadequate delivery: lack of training or poor recruitment might lead to staff with poor knowledge or with no real interest in the customers.
- iv. Exaggerated promises: a service provider desperate to gain customers might be economical with the truth. Expectations are raised that simply cannot be fulfilled. The true picture emerges as the service is being consumed. The customer's perception of service quality is therefore bound to suffer.

3.2.6 Managing customer service

One of the major ways a service firm can differentiate itself is by delivering consistently higher quality than its competitors do. Many companies find that outstanding service quality can give them a potent competitive advantage that leads to superior sales and profit performance. The main objective of customer service management should be to either meet or exceed the customer's expectations. This emphasizes the need to invest in the development of streamlined and efficient service delivery systems aimed at ensuring that customers receive consistently high quality service in every service encounter.

The traditional '4Ps' marketing approaches work well for goods, but additional elements require attention in service businesses (Kotler 2003:450; Dibb & Simkin 2001:282). Boom and Bitner cited by Kotler (2003:450) suggest 3 additional 'Ps' to produce the '7Ps' of service marketing: people, processes and physical evidence.

- **People:** People are particularly vital in tourism and hospitality which are often described as a 'people industry' (George, 2001:274). People in the tourism and hospitality industry are all human actors who play a part in service delivery and thus influence the buyer's perception in the service environment. Evidently, people are an essential element in both the production and delivery of all tourism and hospitality services. In addition, people are becoming a way companies differentiate themselves to gain competitive advantage in the marketplace.

Therefore, the success of a service provider's marketing activities is closely linked to the selection, training and motivation management of people.

- **Physical evidence:** The tourism and hospitality industry, the physical environment in which an offer is delivered is often very important. It is where the consumer and the company interact. Tourism offerings are intangible and as they are produced they are consumed at the same time, they are inseparable. Consumers therefore look for tangible evidence to evaluate the offering before purchasing. They also use physical evidence to assess their contentment with the offering during and after consumption. The tourism and hospitality marketer's role is to provide physical evidence or tangible cues of the service provided.
- **Process:** Processes are all the procedures, mechanisms and routines by which a tourism and hospitality offering is created and delivered to a customer. A service is performed rather than a tangible item being handed over. The consumer receives benefits derived from the offering e.g. pleasure from visiting a holiday destination (George, 2001:281) Consequently, the performing process – the way in which the tourism and hospitality service is created and delivered – is a crucial part of the offering. Marketers should therefore pay attention to processes and the manner in which consumer-contact (front-line) employees interact with consumers during this process to enhance customer satisfaction.

All three of these extended marketing mix components are present in every service encounter a consumer has with a tourism and hospitality offering. They are crucially

important in managing service quality and creating customer satisfaction. In addition, holiday destinations can gain competitive advantage by excelling in one or all of the components, such as promoting the quality of service delivery, adding tangible features, or managing an efficiently run service operation.

In today's competitive business environment, companies in all industries have been forced to realize the importance of customer care. The research questionnaire is designed to evaluate whether the extended marketing mixture (namely People, Processes and Physical evidence) as well as the other customer care components are enhancing customer satisfaction and retention at Mkambati Nature Reserve.

Evidently, service marketing requires not only external marketing but also internal and interactive marketing. Research by Parasuman et al, as cited by Kotler (2003:455), identified five determinants of service quality. These are, presented in their order of importance: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles.

Despite the attempts made to ensure excellent customer service, there may be short falls in service delivery. This requires an efficient service recovery plan to address the shortfall as fast as possible. A good service recovery plan can result in customer retention and loyalty. Therefore, management should take steps not only to provide good service every time, but also to recover from service mistakes when they occur. The steps recommended include:

- To empower frontline service employees – to give them the authority, responsibility, and incentives to recognize, care about, and tend to the customers.
- Hard-headed analysis and intense commitment to helping customers.
- Take great care to hire the right service people, train them well and reward them for going out of their way to serve customers.

To succeed, service marketers must create competitive differentiation, offer high service quality and find ways to increase service productivity (Kotler and Armstrong 2004:307). Therefore, since quality is indeed so important to any organisation's performance a key

task of the operations function is to ensure that it provides excellent services to both its internal and external customers. Secondly, to be successful in a service industry, services have to be reliable, flexible, easy to use and easy to access. Consequently, there is a need to continuously seek to add value to services to fill the ever-changing customer needs by offering a variety of pre- and post-trade services to enhance the user experience.

In fast-paced markets in-depth expertise, speed, agility, innovativeness, opportunism, reliability and resource flexibility are critical organisational capabilities. Action-packed competition demands that a company has quick reaction times and flexible, adaptive resources (Thompson *et al* 2000: 210). Because services are produced and consumed simultaneously, the provider can customize the service. If it is done well, it can lead to giving the customer what he or she wants to a far greater extent than is the case with most products. Thus there are in services the opportunity for service customization *i.e.* to create something unique for each customer.

3.3 CUSTOMER SERVICE MEASUREMENT

Leading firms carefully measure and monitor customer loyalty because it is linked to customer loyalty and, in turn, to long-term profitability (Hutt and Speh 2001:339). The importance of customer service measurement cannot be underestimated. Measurement allows for comparisons before and after changes, for the location of quality related problems and for the establishment of clear standards for service delivery (Shahin: 2006). Berry, Parasuraman and Zeithaml (as quoted by George 2001:278) have developed a criterion for assessing service quality using a survey mechanism called the SERVQUAL model for collecting data relating to customer perceptions.

3.3.1 The SERVQUAL model

Given the importance of customer care in the tourism and leisure industry, it is important that the quality of offerings (especially service delivery) is controlled and measured regularly. Customer service can be monitored with the SERVQUAL model and the quality gap model. The model has five generic dimensions referred to as dimensions of service quality. A discussion of the five dimensions model follows below.

Saayman (2002:72) contends that the conceptualization of service qualities and the services marketing literature has resulted in the enumeration of five important service dimensions which can equally be employed in the production and distribution of tourism services. In addition, Zeithaml and Bitner (as quoted by George, 2001:278) indicate that the five most important elements a customer expects from a quality service are reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility. These are presented in table 3.1 below.

TABLE 3.1: THE DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY

Dimension	Description
Reliability	Ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately
Responsiveness	Willingness to help customers and provide prompt service
Assurance	Inspiring trust and confidence
Tangibles	Representing the service physically (physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel)
Empathy	Caring, individualized attention that the firm provides to the customers

Source: Adapted from Hutt & Speh (2001: 338)

- **Reliability** involves consistency of the service and dependability. It means that the company's employees should perform the desired service correctly the first time. It also means the company honours its promises, such as accuracy in charging, performing a service at a designated time, etc.

- **Responsiveness** means that the service is delivered promptly and that the staff are willing and ready to serve and help the visitors. Examples of responsiveness include responding to requests promptly and dealing with consumer problems and queries promptly.
- **Assurance** refers to the employees' knowledge and courtesy, the assurance that the employees have the ability to convey trust and confidence. For example, a hotel staff dealing with a guest's financial and personal security must be trusted by that guest.
- **Empathy** relates to guests being given caring, individual attention. Employees need to treat the visitors as individuals, by using their names, knowing their preferences and interests, and offering them customised services.
- **Tangibility** refers to the physical aspects of the service, such as hotel bedrooms, and facilities, the presentation of staff uniforms, as well as the physical representation of the company in items like the brochures and frequent guest cards.

Customer service measurement in the tourism and hospitality industry has unique aspects. The expectations of the visitors at the holiday destinations are high because they visit for holidays. Customer service is directed at them i.e. being fed, accommodated, entertained, etc. They also expect excellent facilities and services, i.e. 'a feeling of home away from home'. The visitors need the best from all five dimensions to experience a pleasant and memorable holiday, and customer satisfaction. This customer service measurement survey will use the SERVQUAL model to evaluate Mkambati Nature Reserve's level of customer service and to determine whether the visitors are satisfied with the service they receive.

Zeithmal *et al* (as quoted by Hutt and Speh, 2001:338) identified 10 *Dimensions of Service Quality*, which between them cover the whole service experience from the customer's point of view. These are:

- i. **Access** involves the accessibility of the product. It specifically includes accessibility of communication, waiting time to receive service and the facility should be accessible in terms of infrastructure and signage.
- ii. **Reliability** involves consistency of performance and dependability. It means that the reserve performs the service right the first time. It also means that the resort honours its promises. Specifically, it involves accuracy in billing, accuracy in record keeping and performing the service at the designated time.
- iii. **Credibility** involves trustworthiness, believability and honesty. It involves having the customers best interests at heart. Contributing to credibility are the staff, company name, company reputation and the way tourists are treated.
- iv. **Security** is the freedom from danger, risk, or doubt. It involves physical security and confidentiality.
- v. **Understanding / knowing** the customer involves making the effort to understand the customers needs. It requires knowing different cultures, learning the tourist's specific requirements, providing individualized attention and recognizing a regular guest.
- vi. **Responsiveness** concerns the willingness and readiness of employees to provide service. It involves timeliness or promptness of service i.e. mailing information immediately, getting back to customers as soon as possible and setting up appointments as soon as possible.
- vii. **Courtesy** involves politeness, respect, consideration, and friendliness of personnel. It includes special treatment of all tourists, staff must be friendly and polite, have a clean, and neat appearance and should be informed about different cultures.
- viii. **Competence** means possession of the required skills and knowledge to perform the service. It involves properly trained and capable, and well-informed staff.
- ix. **Tangibles** include the physical component of the service i.e. the décor, physical facilities and appearance of staff.

- x. **Communication** means the way a message is sent and received. It involves being friendly and polite, being able to communicate effectively with different cultures and assuring the tourist that a problem will be handled as swiftly as possible.

Hutt & Speh (2001:338) observed that among these dimensions, reliability – delivery on promises – is most important to the customers. High-quality service performance is also shaped by the way in which the frontline personnel provide the service. To the customer, service quality represents a responsive employee, one who inspires confidence and adapts to unique needs and preferences of the customer.

3.3.2 Model of service quality gaps

The Gap model is one of the best-received and most heuristically valuable contributions to the services literature (Shahin, 2006). The model identifies seven key discrepancies or gaps relating to managerial perceptions of service quality, and tasks associated with service delivery to customers. The three most important gaps, which are more associated with the external customers are Gap1, Gap 5 and Gap 6. The gaps are:

- Gap 1: Customers' expectations versus management perceptions: as a result of lack of a marketing research orientation, inadequate upward communication and too many layers of management.
- Gap 2: Management perceptions versus service specifications: as a result of inadequate commitment to service quality, a perception of unfeasibility, inadequate task standardization and an absence of goal setting.
- Gap 3: Service specifications versus service delivery: as a result of role ambiguity and conflict, poor employee-job fit and poor technology-job fit, inappropriate supervisory control systems, lack of control and lack of teamwork.
- Gap 4: Service delivery versus external communication: as a result of inadequate horizontal communication and propensity to over-promise.
- Gap 5: The discrepancy between customer expectations and their perceptions of service delivered: as a result of influence exerted from the customer side and the

shortfalls (gaps) on the part of the service provider. In this case, customer expectations are influenced by the extent of personal needs, word of mouth recommendations and past experiences.

- Gap 6: The discrepancy between customer expectations and employees' perceptions: as a result of the differences in the understanding of customer expectations by the frontline service providers.
- Gap7: The discrepancy between employee's perceptions and management perceptions: as a result of the differences in the understanding of customer expectations between managers and service providers.

Shahin (2006) contends that the first six gaps (Gap1, Gap2, Gap3, Gap 4, Gap 6, and Gap7) are identified as functions of the way in which service is delivered, whereas Gap5 pertains to the customer and as such is considered to be the true measure of service quality.

The SERVQUAL approach is the most common tool for measuring service quality. The gap on which it has influence is Gap5. The SERVQUAL instrument has been used in many different studies since it was developed and tested. It contains two sections:

- i. An expectations section containing 22 statements to ascertain the general expectations of customers concerning a service, and
- ii. A perceptions section containing a matching set of 22 statements to measure customers' assessments of a specific firm within the service category.

Asuboteng et al cited by Shahin (2006) concluded that until a better but equally simple model emerges, SERVQUAL predominates as a quality service measure. This explains why it has been extensively applied to compare customers' expectations before a service encounter and their perception of the actual service delivered.

3.4 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on customer service and customer service measurement. A literature review has been undertaken to get insight into these concepts. Customer service involves four major components: customer relations, delivery, repair services and warranties.

Service quality is described as the extent to which a service meets customers' needs or expectations. The definition can be broadened to refer to a discrepancy between customers' expectations and perceptions. If the expectation is greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs. There are four barriers to service quality, all of which are the fault of the service provider, and all of which will affect the customer's perception of the service experience. These are misconceptions, inadequate resources, inadequate delivery and exaggerated promises.

The additional "3Ps" require attention in customer service management because they lead to service excellence if managed well. These are people, processes and physical evidence.

The SERVQUAL model is identified as the most reliable and trusted measure of customer service to date. It measures almost all aspects of customer service using five generic dimensions of service quality, i.e. reliability, responsiveness, assurance, tangibles and empathy. In the tourism and hospitality industry, these dimensions can be expanded to reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding and tangibles.

The Gaps model, alluded to, identifies seven key discrepancies relating to managerial perceptions of service quality, and tasks associated with service delivery to customers. The model is an important determinant of the gap between expected and perceived quality.

In chapter four a description of the research methodology is given. This is followed by a detailed presentation of the research results. These will be used to evaluate the level of customer service at Mkambati Nature Reserve and to make recommendations to improve customer service.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND RESULTS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In chapter three a literature review of customer service was undertaken. It is evident that excellent customer service is of crucial importance to both customers and service providers. Consequently, organisations are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of improved customer service in gaining competitive advantage. This is a clear illustration of the significance of customer service in the tourism industry.

This chapter presents the relevant data collected by means of the research questionnaire during an empirical study of the customer service experience at Mkambati Nature Reserve during the third quarter of 2006. The research findings are used to evaluate the effectiveness of the current customer service strategy at the reserve. A profile of the tourists will be given along with the descriptive statistics from the survey. Then the analysis of the data and the findings as they relate to the hypothesis will be discussed.

To begin with, the research methodology is explained. The following methods have been employed:

- Literature survey - an overview of the relevant academic texts on current trends and customer service in the tourism and leisure market.
- Empirical research in the form of primary data collection by means of questionnaires that were completed by guests (including the visitors at the caravan park).

Both qualitative and quantitative analysis of data was used to analyse the data. In addition, the principal classification of service dimensions in the SERVQUAL model is also used to further analyse the data and classify the data from the questionnaire.

4.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.2.1 Sample selection

The population of the research study consists of the residents and tourists in South Africa. Therefore, the sample frame is drawn from that population. The sample frame consists of visitors who visited the reserve during the third quarter of 2006. For convenience sake the random sample was limited to 300 visitors. For the visitors to stand an equal chance of being selected for the research the respondents for the research project were selected by using simple random sampling techniques.

4.2.2 Research method

The questionnaires were distributed to the guests at the reception on arrival and they were collected as they checked out.

A total of 300 questionnaires were issued to the randomly selected guests. They completed the questionnaires without identifying themselves in the process. The personal data required in the questionnaire was of a non-identifying nature. All the questionnaires were completed by the respondents in their own time and privacy. Help was, however, available at reception on request if a respondent needed it. This assisted in the process to collect data of acceptable quality.

The questionnaire included a rating of the level of service satisfaction and the different functional areas. The respondents were asked to indicate which functional area appealed to them most. These were ranked from 1 to 5 on a 5-point Likert-type scale (with 1 being the most highly ranked functional activity). The computer software Microsoft Excel and the statistical software Statistica have been used in data analysis.

From the structured questionnaire, the analyses not only evaluated the functional areas (see Appendix C: Questionnaire for details), but also made use of the five dimensions of

service quality as per the SERVQUAL model. As a result, the responses in the questionnaire (section B) were grouped according to their respective dimensions. Using the mean values, the data were used to evaluate Mkambati Nature Reserve's performance also along the SERVQUAL service dimensions.

4.3 RESULTS

A total of 270 complete questionnaires were received back. This represents a response rate of 90%. All these questionnaires were used in the analysis. Although some of the questionnaires were not fully completed, all of them contained useful data, and as such, it was not necessary to discard any of it. This chapter presents the results of the empirical research.

The analysis of the data consisted of four stages. These stages are:

- Demographic analysis and profiling of respondents;
- Customer service measurement according to functional areas; and
- Classifying the service quality criteria into the five SERVQUAL dimensions.

As previously stated, the purpose of this CSM survey is to examine the notion that excellent customer service is an important factor in customer satisfaction and loyalty. Furthermore, in the survey a question is posed as to whether improved customer service can lead to improved customer satisfaction, retention and acquisition. While the research proposition provides a theoretical basis for carrying out the study:

“The customers are satisfied by the level of customer service received at Mkambati Nature Reserve”.

At the end of the survey we shall either accept or reject the research proposition depending on the research findings.

4.3.1 Demographic profile

Analysis of the demographic data reveals that the majority, 62.4% of the respondents in the survey are male and 66.6% of them are married. A total of 74.9% are between 26 and 65 years old, while 59.2% of the respondents are employed. Some of the other important findings are presented below.

4.3.1.1 Income distribution of the respondents

TABLE 4.1: INCOME DISTRIBUTION OF THE RESPONDENTS

Income	Frequency	% Guests	Cum % Guests
0 - 50 000	20	7.4	7.4
50 001 - 100 000	90	33.3	41.7
100 001 - 150 000	70	25.9	67.6
150 001 - 200 000	30	11.1	78.7
200 001 - 250 000	10	3.7	82.4
250 001 - 300 000	30	11.1	93.5
300 001 - 350 000	10	3.7	96.2
350 001 - 400 000	10	3.7	100

n=270

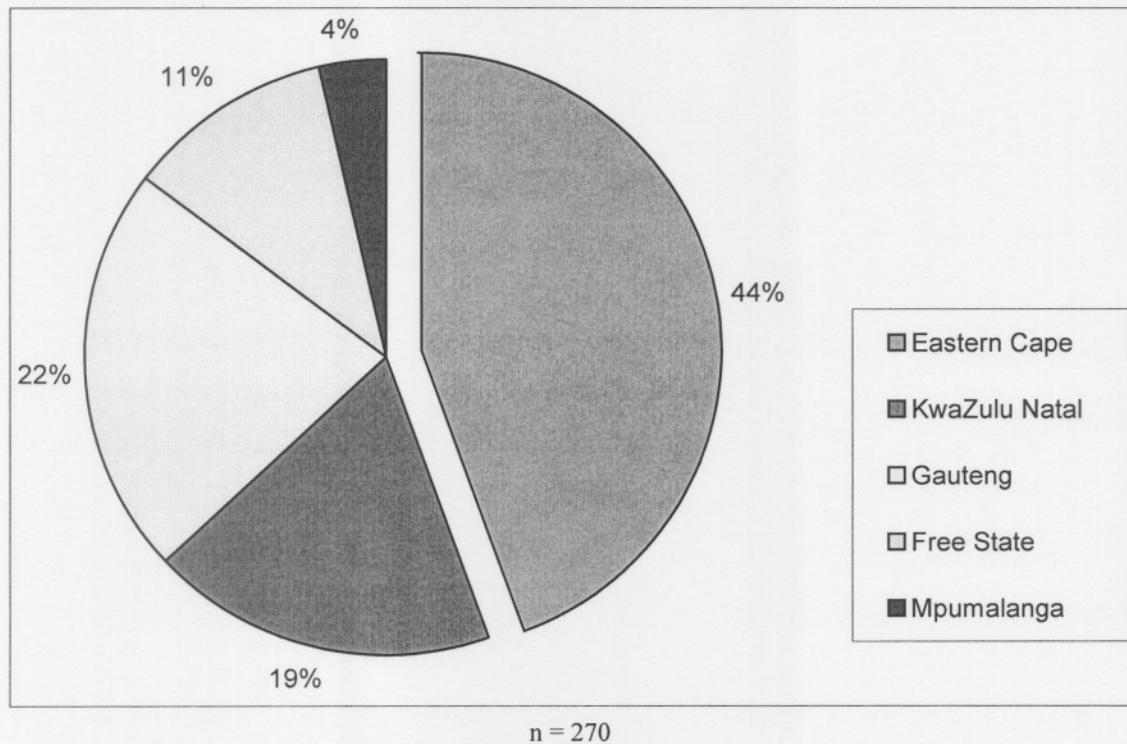
Table 4.1 illustrates the income distribution of the respondents. It emerged that the annual income of the respondents ranges between R0 to R400 000. Of the 270 respondents, 90 (33.3%) of them earn between R50 000 and R100 000. The highest income bracket (R350 000 to R400 000) registered only 10 (3.7%) of the respondents. Managements challenge is to attract the lucrative high income group for increased profits. Evidently, the majority of the visitors (59.2%) earn between R50 000 and R150 000. It is important to target the higher income group for increased profitability because this group has more disposable income and therefore are more financially empowered.

4.3.1.2 Source of visitors

An analysis of the data in figure 4.2 shows that the primary source of visitors to Mkambati Nature Reserve is the Eastern Cape with 44% of the respondents. This is not

surprising since the reserve is located in this province. It also shows an improvement in intra-provincial tourism and a change in the source of tourists. This is contrary to the previous studies where KwaZulu Natal was the leading source of tourists. Gauteng province lies in the second spot with 22%, followed by KwaZulu Natal (19%), Free State (11%) and Mpumalanga (4%), in that order.

FIGURE 4.2: SOURCE OF VISITORS



It is evident that the percentage of visitors from KwaZulu Natal has decreased drastically from 30% to 19% as compared with the previous research findings. This could be as a result of the increasing popularity of KwaZulu Natal itself as a tourist destination, as well as the fact that numerous tourism developments such as Ushaka marine world, historic routes, battlefields, game farms and nature reserves to name but a few, have been undertaken in KwaZulu Natal. On the positive side, Gauteng has recorded an increase in the percentage of visitors from 20% to 22%. These changes have important implications regarding market segmentation and customer service strategies. They also present a high potential for increased profitability.

4.3.1.3 Purpose of visit

Table 4.2 provides data on the purpose of tourists' visit to Mkambati Nature Reserve. An analysis of the data suggests that the primary motive for visiting the reserve is for holiday purposes. This group comprises 95.2%. Of the 270 respondents only 4.8% of the visitors represented researchers. It is important to emphasize that these findings are based on a two months' study. Different seasons may reveal different sources of visitors due to the heterogeneous nature of the tourism industry.

TABLE 4.2: PURPOSE OF VISIT

Purpose	Guests %
Holiday	95.2
Research	4.8
Total	100

n = 270

The holidaymakers comprise mainly families consisting of an average of three members per party. This emphasizes the significance of targeting families and providing facilities suitable for them. The 4.8% research respondents comprised of 13 researchers (students) visiting in two parties of ten and three visitors. Given the wide publicity of word-of-mouth as a source of information to new visitors, these big parties are also important because a good experience will result in increased publicity within the scientific market. As a result, frequent visits by academia and other researchers may lead to the development of a secondary market. Although this group falls in the income bracket of below R50,000, many of them are students depending on sponsorships or bursaries.

4.3.1.4 Sources of information

The study revealed that the majority of the visitors who visited Mkambati Nature Reserve got their information from experience gained from previous visits and 'word-of-mouth' sources. The sources of information revealed by the study are shown in table 4.3.

TABLE 4.3: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Sources of Information	%
Personal experience from previous visits	36
Word-of-mouth	32
Radio	15
Magazine	10
Internet – other computer-accessed information	5
Newspaper	2

n =270

These results reflect the intangible nature of a service industry such as tourism where the consumers of such services rely heavily on the advice of friends and relatives when making a decision to ‘purchase’. This explains why experience from previous visits and word-of-mouth are the leading sources of information for the tourists and therefore emphasises the importance of excellent service experience in the hospitality industry to enhance positive publicity.

4.3.3 Customer service level

4.3.3.1 Customer service rating

Table 4.4 shows the mean scores for each functional area identified in the questionnaire. Using a Likert scale, a score of 1 represents not at all, 2 (to a lesser extent), 3 (to some extent), 4 (to a great extent) and 5 (to a very great extent). The total score for each area is 30 points and an overall score of 220 points. A rating between 6 and 12 indicates low satisfaction, 13 to 23 (moderate satisfaction) and 24 to 30 (high satisfaction).

The table also shows the mean scores for the factors under each functional area to arrive at the total mean for each functional area. Evidently, the highest performing area is reservations (4.2), followed by the cultural village (4.0), departure (3.8) and the

restaurant and bar (3.0). The other functional areas did not fare well with arrival at 2.7, game drive (2.5), beach activities at (2.3) and accommodation (2.0). (see table 4.4).

It is important to note that accommodation is the core function of the reserve yet it has the lowest score. This indicates serious shortfalls in the quality of rooms, convenience of the hotel rooms, efficiency of room service, the desired facilities, cleanliness and size of the rooms. With the average score of 2 each for these variables, the implication is that the visitors are less satisfied with accommodation. Whereas the respondents in the lodge and cottages had fairly higher ratings for accommodation, those in the rondavels and caravan park showed less satisfaction with the service they received.

Table 4.4 shows that accommodation as rated on the quality of rooms, convenience of the rooms, desired facilities, size and cleanliness of the rooms resulted in low customer satisfaction. Since the caravan park accommodates more visitors, it accounts for the low average rating. Therefore, one can infer that the research proposition (H_4) is rejected as the visitors are not satisfied with the level of service received with accommodation. Clearly, accommodation will negatively affect reliability and responsiveness both key dimensions in the service industry.

The level of customer service at the restaurant and bar was measured on customer service, quality of food, physical appearance, cleanliness of the waiters, friendliness of bar attendants and the speed at which the orders are delivered. With a mean score of 3.0 the restaurant and bar resulted in moderate satisfaction. This points to shortfalls in customer service at the restaurant and bar.

TABLE 4.4: MEAN SCORE OF SERVICE SATISFACTION FOR EACH FUNCTIONAL AREA

FUNCTIONAL AREA	MEAN SCORE
B1 Reservations (R)	
Response to your reservation call	4
Competence of reservation staff	4
The time it took to finalise your reservation	4
Friendliness of staff.	5
Staff responsiveness	4
Helpfulness of the staff	4
Mean Score	4.2

B2 Arrival (A)	
Welcome and orientation on arrival	3
Helpfulness of staff	3
Friendliness of front-end staff	3
Time taken to show your room	3
Reservation arrangements as promised	2
Facilities requested on reservation	2
Mean Score	2.7

B3 Accommodation (ACC)	
Quality of rooms	2
Convenience of Hotel rooms	2
Efficiency of room service	2
The desired facilities	2
Cleanliness of the rooms	2
Size of the rooms	2
Mean Score	2.0

FUNCTIONAL AREA	MEAN SCORE
B4 Game drives (GD)	
Game viewing experience	2
Knowledge of game staff	3
Friendliness of the game staff	3
The number of game animals seen	2
The conditions and comfort of the vehicles	3
Safety measures	2
Mean Score	2.5

B5 Beach activities (BA)	
Visibility of the life savers	2
Safety of the beaches	2
Fishing facilities	3
Condition of the boats	2
Conditions of the changing rooms	3
Cleanliness	2
Mean Score	2.3

B6 Restaurant and bar (B&B)	
Customer service	3
The quality of the food	3
Physical appearance of the restaurant and bar	3
Cleanliness of the waiters (waitresses)	3
Friendliness of the bar attendants	3
Speed at which orders are delivered	3
Mean Score	3.0

B7 Cultural Village (CV)	
Quality of the music	4
Tribal dance	4
Arts and crafts	4
Educational value of the village	4
Mean Score	4.0

B8 Departure (D)	
Security check	3
Convenience of check-out time	4
Speed of check-out process	4
Staff helpfulness on check-out	4
Mean Score	3.8

Regarding the analysis, it is clear that Mkambati Nature Reserve is lacking in service in a number of functional areas. Reservations (B1), the Cultural village (B7) and Departure (B8) reflected satisfactory service levels. Regarding the other functional areas, only the Restaurant shows a fairly average level of satisfaction (score = 3), while the other functional areas clearly show that unsatisfactory levels of customer service are prevalent.

Attention is also drawn to security at Mkambati Nature Reserve. In Game drives (B4) and Beach activities (B5), safety measures and safety of the beaches respectively received an unsatisfactory score of 2 each on the 5-point Likert scale. This means that the visitors are concerned about security, i.e. personal security and other risks, and measures should be put in place to improve security at the resort. In addition, a core function of a nature reserve is that visitors are able to enjoy nature and view game. In this light, the visitors' rating of 2 for the criterion relating to game viewing, is a serious problem that should be addressed without delay. Firstly, it must be determined if there is limited game available to view, and if so, stocks will have to be adjusted. Alternatively, if ample game is resident in the park, the problem of accessibility should be addressed. Clearly, a game reserve without game is hardly worth visiting, and this is a core functional area needing immediate action. It is thus not surprising that the visitors also rate the game drive experience at an unsatisfactory score of 2.

Concerning the other core functionality of the leisure industry, namely to relax and rest, it is evident from the functional area of Accommodation that visitors are not happy with the accommodation facilities and service (scoring a 2 throughout). As a result, the facilities need to be upgraded or revamped to suit customer needs. Mkambati Nature Reserve would not be able to compete in the market if the core functionality of accommodation is not addressed.

Table 4.5 provides a summary level of customer service at Mkambati Nature Reserve as perceived by the respondents. The mean score for each functional area is shown in the table. A mean service quality score for Mkambati Nature Reserve is also calculated and

compared to the score from each area. The gap calculated the deviation of each functional area and the service quality score for Mkambati Nature Reserve.

The table reaffirms that the highest performer is Reservations followed by the Cultural village and then Departure. Evidently, the worst performers are Accommodation (-0.7), Game drives (-0.4) and Beach activities (-0.2), in that order. Mkambati Nature Reserve also observes that the mean score of customer service recorded is 2.7 out of a possible 5, which reflects a fairly unsatisfactory score. This implies that the visitors experienced low to moderate satisfaction with customer service, while only two functional areas are highly satisfactory, namely the Reservations and Cultural village. Overall, the service levels are not satisfactory.

TABLE 4.5: SUMMARY RATING OF CUSTOMER SERVICE SATISFACTION

FUNCTIONAL AREA	MEAN SCORE	MNR: MEAN SCORE	GAP
Reservations	4.2	2.7	1.5
Arrival	2.7	2.7	0
Accommodation	2.0	2.7	-0.7
Game drive	2.5	2.7	-0.2
Beach activities	2.3	2.7	-0.4
Restaurant and bar	3.0	2.7	0.3
Cultural village	4.0	2.7	1.3
Departure	3.8	2.7	1.1
Mean Score	2.7		

Finally, average levels of customer service indicate that there is moderate satisfaction. It is, firstly, important for management to prioritise the results from the research and to address the problem areas in their order of priority. Secondly, the ratings shed light on the research propositions, namely that the customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive at the resort. It is evident that the customers are unsatisfied, moderately satisfied, and delighted with the level of customer service, depending on the different functional areas.

4.3.3.2 Performance along the SERVQUAL Dimensions

Table 4.6 shows Mkambati Nature Reserve's performance along the SERVQUAL dimensions. Consistent with the findings of the literature review the questions in the questionnaire related to the five dimensions of service quality i.e. reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles, have been classified and applied in the SERVQUAL application setting. (As SERVQUAL scores are presented in index values, the Likert scale is translated to index scores. It would thus mean that a Likert scale score of 3 would be translated to a score of 0.60 in the SERVQUAL index). It is further important to note that this research made use of the service dimensions as specified by SERVQUAL, and not the full SERVQUAL MODEL itself. As such, no gap analysis was performed.

Reliability (the ability to perform services dependably and accurately) received a mean score of 3 out of 5. This translates into 0.60 of the total score. Considering the importance of reliability as a measure of service quality 0.60 represents moderate customer satisfaction. Given the intense competition in the tourism and leisure industry, this should be a worrying situation and calls for urgent attention.

Responsiveness (willingness to help customers and prompt service) has a mean score of 3.5 on the Likert scale, thus representing an index value of 0.70. This represents high performance along the SERVQUAL service dimensions.

Assurance has an index value of 0.60 representing moderate satisfaction. Although assurance rates moderately, room for improvement of customer service is evident, and Mkambati Nature Reserve needs to focus also on this service dimension in their quest to improve customer satisfaction.

Empathy (caring attention Mkambati Nature Reserve provides to the visitors) has a mean score of 0.60. This also presents a moderate level of satisfaction and room for service improvement.

Tangibles (the physical facilities, equipments and cleanliness of personnel) returned (as expected – see Tables 4.4 & 4.5) an unsatisfactory level of satisfaction of 0.513. This is disturbing as the tangibles normally create the first impression of customer service. Therefore, there is a need for measures to improve the tangibles in order to narrow the gap between customer expectations and perceptions.

TABLE 4.6: MNR'S PERFORMANCE ALONG SERVQUAL SERVICE DIMENSIONS

Service dimensions	Mean value	SERVQUAL value
Reliability		
Competence of reservation staff (A)	4	
Time taken to show you your room (A)	3	
Reservation arrangement as promised (A)	2	
Game viewing experience (GD)	2	
The quality of food (R&B)	3	
Speed at which orders are delivered (R&B)	3	
Educational value of the cultural village (CV)	4	
Mean Score	3	0.60

TABLE 4.6: MNR'S PERFORMANCE ALONG SERVQUAL SERVICE DIMENSIONS (Continued)

Service dimensions	Mean value	SERVQUAL value
Responsiveness		
Response to your reservation call (R)	4	
Time it took to finalise your reservation (R)	4	
Staff responsiveness (R)	4	
Helpfulness of the staff (R)	4	
Helpfulness of the staff on arrival (A)	3	
Friendliness of front-end staff (A)	3	
Visibility of life savers (BA)	2	
Customer service (R&B)	3	
Speed of check-out process (D)	4	
Staff helpfulness on check-out (D)	4	
Mean	3.5	0.70

Assurance		
Friendliness of the staff (R)	4	
Welcome and orientation on arrival (A)	3	
Knowledge of game staff (GD)	3	
Friendliness of game staff (GD)	3	
Safety measures (GD)	2	
Safety of the beaches (BA)	2	
Friendliness of the bar attendants (R&B)	3	
Tribal dance (CV)	4	
Security check on departure (D)	3	
Mean	3	0.60

TABLE 4.6: MNR'S PERFORMANCE ALONG SERVQUAL SERVICE DIMENSIONS (Continued)

Service dimensions	Mean value	SERVQUAL value
Tangibles		
Facilities required on reservation (A)	2	
Quality of the rooms (ACC)	2	
Convenience of the rooms (ACC)	2	
The desired facilities (ACC)	2	
Cleanliness of the rooms (ACC)	2	
Size of the rooms (ACC)	2	
Number of game animals (GD)	2	
Conditions and comfort of the vehicles (GD)	3	
Fishing facilities (BA)	3	
Conditions of the boats (BA)	2	
Condition of the changing rooms (BA)	3	
Cleanliness of the beach (BA)	2	
Physical appearance of the restaurant and bar(R&B)	3	
Cleanliness of the waiters and waitresses (R&B)	3	
Quality of music (CV)	4	
Arts and crafts (CV)	4	
Mean	2.6	0.513

Empathy		
Efficiency of room service (ACC)	2	
Convenience of check-out time (D)	4	
Mean	3	0.60

Key: R = reservation, A = arrival, ACC = accommodation, GD = game drives, BA = beach activities, R&B = restaurant and bar, CV = cultural village and D = departure.

Table 4.7 gives a summary of Mkambati Nature Reserve's score along the SERVQUAL service dimensions by the 270 respondents. The mean score for all five dimensions is

0.603. This means that (with a calculated standard deviation of 0.059), Mkambati Nature Reserve’s performance along the SERVQUAL dimensions is moderate overall. However, the dimension of tangibility needs to be attended to. As mentioned, it is a core service dimension that is falling short, and it substantiates the findings from the analysis of the service quality of the functional areas. Table 4.7 provides a summary of the dimensions as well as showing the overall customer satisfaction value of the partial SERVQUAL analysis.

TABLE 4.7: THE SERVQUAL SERVICE DIMENSIONS

SERVQUAL dimensions	Scores
Reliability	0.60
Responsiveness	0.70
Assurance	0.60
Empathy	0.60
Tangibles	0.51
Average score	0.603
Standard deviation	0.059

From the tables above the results clearly show that tangibles have the most serious shortfall in customer service. There is a need to prioritise strategies that will narrow the gap between expectations and perception through improved customer service. These form part of the recommendations in chapter 5. It is also evident that the moderate scores indicate that the current strategies alluded to in chapter one, have not increased the levels of customer service. Therefore, there is room for customer service improvement if the visitors’ perception of service quality is to change.

4.3.3 Visitors’ perception of customer service

One of the research objectives in chapter one is to “evaluate the level of customer service at Mkambati Nature Reserve”. To get insight into the visitors’ perceptions of customer service levels, the respondents were asked to give their opinions about a number of aspects that reflected their perception of a holiday at Mkambati Nature Reserve. This was aimed at identifying where the gaps between service expectation and

perception were with regard to customer service. The results of the survey are given in table 4.8 below.

TABLE 4.8: EVALUATION OF A HOLIDAY AT MKAMBATI NATURE RESERVE

Criteria	Not at all %	Probably not %	Probably %	Definitely yes %
Would you say you enjoyed your stay (visit)?	0	20	75	5
Will you return for another visit?	1	15	80	4
Would you recommend this place to your friend?	2	40	54	4
Are you leaving well rested?	0	36	60	4
Did you find the guided tours educative?	5	40	50	5
Did you have a memorable experience?	2	50	45	3
Are you impressed by the reserve's service?	6	42	50	2
Mean percentage	2.3	34.7	59.1	3.9
Top- and Bottom box scores	37%		63%	

n = 270

The visitors were required to respond to seven questions and rate their response. All questions were rated on a 4-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 = *not at all* to 4 = *definitely yes*. All questions were rated such that a higher score indicated high satisfaction with the level of customer service. The findings are as follows:

- Responding to the question ‘Would you say that you enjoyed your stay?’ 20% of the respondents indicated probably not, 75% probably yes and 5% definitely yes. There was no score for not at all.
- To ‘Would you return for another visit?’ 1% of the visitors responded not at all, 15% probably not, 80% probably yes and 4% definitely yes.
- As to whether they would recommend Mkambati Nature Reserve to their friends, 2% of the visitors indicated not at all, 40% probably not, 54% probably yes and 4% definitely yes.
- Responding to the question “Are you leaving well rested?” 36% of the respondents indicated probably not, 60% probably yes, and 4% definitely yes.

- Whether they found the tours educative, 5% said not at all, 40% probably not, 50% probably yes and 5% definitely yes.
- Responding to whether they had a memorable experience, 2% indicated not at all, 50% probably not, 45% probably not and 3% definitely yes.
- As to whether they were impressed by the reserve's services, 6% indicated not at all, 42% probably not, 50% probably yes and 2% definitely yes.

Finally, when employing the Top- and Bottom Box analysis, it is clear that 37% of the respondents did not enjoy their visit. This is a very high percentage of unsatisfied customers, and they will probably not return. The analysis also exposes the ineffectiveness of the current customer service strategy in improving customer satisfaction. Seen in the light that most of the customers are being promoted by *Personal experience* (36%) and *Word-of-mouth* (32%) (see Table 4.3), it is crucial that these experiences be improved drastically and immediately.

4.4 IMPORTANT FUNCTIONAL AREAS

In addition to the service quality measurement, it is also important to determine how important each of the functional areas is. Table 4.8 provides the results of the important functional areas that are key attractions. These are the areas (activities) that the respondents indicated they engaged in whilst at the reserve. Game activities (92%) and beach activities (84%) seem to be connected to one another, as most of the respondents who ranked wildlife viewing highly, also included the importance of the beach activities.

It emerged that the game activities were the most popular, followed by the beach activities, restaurant and bar, cultural village, playgrounds and education facilities, in that order.

TABLE 4.8: IMPORTANT FUNCTIONAL AREAS

Functional area	% mentioning this as important
Game activities – wildlife viewing in the reserve	92
Beach activities – surfing, fishing, swimming and sunbathing	84
Restaurant and bar – meals and drinks	75
Cultural activities – cultural village, arts and crafts	69
Playgrounds for children – swimming pool and games	65
Education facilities – knowledgeable people	50

Given the purpose of visit alluded to earlier, it is no surprise that the holiday activities dominate in popularity. Its popularity gives an indication as to which areas should be prioritised to ensure customer satisfaction. This supports the reasoning that these two activities seriously needs to be upgraded (see Table 4.5 and discussion of unsatisfactory customer service levels). It is only the researchers and students that consider the education facilities important, yet they are a small fraction of the respondents thereby justifying their position at the bottom of the table.

4.5 GENERAL OPINION OF CUSTOMER SERVICE

To get more insight about the level of customer service at Mkambati Nature Reserve, the visitors were asked to give their own opinion about the service they received. It shows that the visitors experienced a moderate level of satisfaction with the service they received.

Secondly, security as alluded to under assurance, i.e. security at the beaches and the reserve, arose as an issue of great concern for the visitors that could negatively affect the choice of the resort as a holiday destination. It will lead to customer defection to other holiday destinations.

The level of customer service with accommodation was also raised as an issue of grave concern. This is not surprising given the low rating for accommodation. The caravan park in particular needs urgent improvement.

4.6 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the empirical study at Mkambati Nature Reserve to evaluate its service levels. The findings are presented based on the questionnaire that was distributed and collected in the third quarter of 2006. A report of the findings from the survey is given. Particular attention is paid to the profile of the guests, customer service levels and the key attractions at Mkambati Nature Reserve. Consistent with the findings of the literature review, customer service is categorized into five dimensions of service quality i.e. reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. The SERVQUAL model has been used to determine the levels of customer service.

Therefore, the research results presented are related to the first three research objectives and the key attractions. The findings related to the last objective are presented in the next chapter. In the next chapter the conclusions and recommendations to this research are given.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter, the results from the empirical research were presented. During the course of this research project and following the results obtained, it became evident that the visitors' profile and how customers perceive the service received, can be employed to formulate an effective customer service strategy. The results also showed that to be competitive in the highly competitive leisure market, this strategy formulation emerged as a top priority task. The results obtained from the data have to be used for customer service improvement and to efficiently redesign the service delivery process, and assist in efficiently designing service delivery process.

This chapter discusses a summary of the findings and an interpretation of thereof. It also presents conclusions about the profile of the visitors, levels of customer service and key attractions. From the findings and conclusions, customer service management strategies are recommended to improve customer service and profitability at Mkambati Nature Reserve. The chapter also renders a verdict on the acceptance or rejection of the research propositions. The chapter then, ultimately, serves as the final chapter of the study.

5.2 CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this CSM survey is to examine the levels of customer service at Mkambati Nature Reserve. The SERVQUAL model as an analytical approach has been used to evaluate the visitors' perceptions of the service received along the five dimensions of customer service.

The research statements in the questionnaire required the respondents to rate the level of customer service. The average score for customer service reveals moderate satisfaction, indicating that the quality of service is below the highest expected level. Therefore, from this research study, the following conclusions are drawn:

- Mkambati Nature Reserve's current customer service strategy alluded to in chapter one have not resulted in improved customer satisfaction. If they are not redesigned they will lead to customer defections, loss of market share and reduced profitability.
- The visitors are satisfied with the level of service they receive at reservations, the cultural village and the departure functions.
- At the restaurant and bar there is moderate satisfaction as illustrated by a mean score of 3.0.
- Upon arrival, game drives and the beach facilities unsatisfactory service levels are experienced.
- With a mean score of 2.0, accommodation has the least service satisfaction. Thus its performance is regarded to be very unsatisfactory and falls far below the expectations of the visitors. Considering the strategic importance of accommodation in the hospitality industry, there is need upgrade this function.
- The service offerings are not meeting the customers' expectations. This could be because the marketing materials are over promising service delivery and therefore resulting in the failure of the service offering to meet customer expectations, misconceptions of customers' needs or inadequate delivery.
- Whereas the middle-income group leads in the number of tourists, holidaymakers include people from different socio-economic backgrounds i.e. low, middle and high-income groups.
- Parties consisting of families constitute a high percentage of guests. This indicates the need to improve packages and facilities to accommodate families.
- There is a change in the sources of tourists. The Eastern Cape leads as local province, followed by Gauteng and KwaZulu Natal. This reveals the growing increase in intra-provincial tourism.

- The primary motive for visiting Mkambati Nature Reserve is for holiday purposes – viewing wildlife and engaging in beach activities. What is worrying is the low mean score for game drives and beach activities.
- Game viewing experience, numbers of animals seen and safety measures have low mean scores accounting for the 2.3 overall mean score for the beach activities. Therefore we can conclude that despite the friendliness and knowledge of the game staff, game accessibility is not easy and/or the game numbers are low.
- Game activities are the most important tourist attractions, followed by the beach activities. Therefore, there is a need to improve these two areas to enhance reliability and responsiveness.
- Personal experience from previous visits is the most important source of information about holiday destinations. Other important sources of information are word-of-mouth, radio and magazines.
- Security was mentioned as a negative issue. A total of 45.1% of the respondents indicated that they had felt insecure at some point in time during their visit. Security has been noted as an important variable that can affect visitation and lead to visitor defection.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Mkambati Nature Reserves primary objective is to increase its market share through customer acquisition and retention. At the moment service expectations far exceed service perceptions possibly due to exaggerated promises. Since there is a clear relationship between customer service and customer satisfaction, and between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty, moderate service satisfaction will translate into customer defections. It is evident that there is need to improve the levels of customer service across all service dimensions. Consequently, the recommendations that follow are meant to achieve operational excellence and to improve customer satisfaction.

This research has provided insight into customer profile, customer service and how customers evaluate services quality: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. It has also emerged that high-quality service performance is shaped by the way in which the frontline service personnel provide the service. Given the research findings that the customers are moderately satisfied with the level of customer service, the recommendations made in this research report are meant to improve service quality, increase competitiveness, position the reserve as a world-class tourist destination and to influence the perception of service quality. The recommendations made include the following:

- **Use of information technology.** Management should use IT to improve responsiveness and reliability both key elements of customer service. Improved communication will enable the employees to be more responsive to the visitors in a service encounter. IT should also be used to reach and communicate with the regular visitors, potential visitors and the foreigner market. Management should launch a user-friendly website which will improve accessibility to the reserve and promote the uniqueness and service excellence at the reserve.
- **Develop organizational service standards – benchmarking.** Management should establish a baseline of measuring performance. The baseline (benchmark) will act as the target-operating norm of the resort. Examples of standards or benchmarks based on response time variables include time taken to finalise a reservation, queuing system designed to ensure that all visitors are served within an acceptable time, and response time to assist tourists. Benchmarking should take into account the standards against which competitors will operate and should reflect optimum service standards within the competitive environment. Studying best practice amongst non-competing organizations will also help in achieving the objective of being the best performer in the market place. Most importantly, the benchmarks should be adjusted overtime to reflect the achievements of increasingly higher standards through enhanced process quality and in response to new customer expectation levels.
- **Generating positive emotions in the service encounter.** Through focusing on the relational aspects of personalisation and social bonding, management may

move the services experience from a perception of “just satisfying” to “memorable and satisfying”. It is important to develop a culture built on strong positive emotions in order to enhance responsiveness.

- **Measure and manage customer satisfaction and service quality.** Regular measurement and monitoring of customer satisfaction and service quality should be given top priority. Such measurements are needed to track trends, to diagnose problems and to link other customer-focused strategies. Measurement should make use of the benchmarks laid down e.g. response time to room service and time it takes to finalise a reservation.
- **Prioritize accommodation improvement.** Management should aim for improved customer service and satisfaction at the accommodation facilities because this is core function of the resort. The quality of the rooms, convenience of the rooms, room service, desired facilities and cleanliness need urgent improvement if they are to register higher scores. This requires an understanding of customer expectations so that strategies can be built around meeting those expectations.
- **People.** The marketing and HR departments should make sure that the employees exhibit high levels of competence, caring attitude, assurance, reliability and responsiveness. The implementation of employee training and motivation programmes (prerequisites in the service industry) should greatly enhance employee performance and ultimately customer satisfaction.
- **Empowerment.** The HR department should develop responsive employees by empowering the frontline employees i.e. give them the responsibility, authority and incentive to take care of the visitors and help them in all service encounters.
- **Contact employees regularly and assess their service experiences.** Like the external customer, an internal customer too considers categories of attributes in judging the quality of the internal service. With the knowledge of the internal service quality dimensions, management will be able to judge how well they performed on each dimensions and identify the weaknesses to make improvements.
- **Process improvement.** The operations and marketing departments should develop different processes to deliver services including the customization of

services. Where possible, self-service facilities and a new trend of D.I.Y should be put in place so that the visitors can indulge in the wonders of the reserve on their own, with the reserve employees on standby to assist them.

- **Service customisation.** There is in tourism the opportunity to create something new for each customer. Since the services in the tourism, leisure and hospitality industry are produced and consumed simultaneously. Management should customize the services e.g. the refreshments served, timing of refreshments, facilities for the disabled and families, etc. If customisation is done well, it will lead to greater customer satisfaction.
- **Ensure safe and educative game drives.** Game viewing is one of the most attractive activities at Mkambati Nature Reserve yet it received a mean score of 2.3 for customer satisfaction. Management needs to improve the knowledge of the staff through training and development and to acquire new vehicles for the game drives. Improved safety measures should be put in place by working with the local police and/or by contracting a private security company to guard the resort. Increased game variety and accessibility will enhance customer service and improve game viewing experience.
- **Improve game accessibility by improving the internal logistics.** A stock count of the animals is recommended so that if the numbers are low they should be sought from other reserves that have them in excess.
- **Improve beach facilities.** Since the beach activities are key attractions, the fishing facilities, boats changing rooms and general cleanliness of the beaches should be improved urgently to world-class facilities. Most importantly, management needs to improve the visibility of lifesavers by employing more staff and guards to improve safety at the beach since the safety of the beaches is an issue of utmost importance to the visitors.
- **Physical evidence.** The frontline employees should demonstrate high service quality through physical evidence and presentation, i.e. the facilities, look and style of dealing with the visitors should add value to customer service.
- **Co-operation with the community leaders.** Enhance co-operation with the local community, more especially in as far as the cultural activities are concern. It is

therefore important for management to engage in social responsibility programs to win the trust of the community. Co-operation by the community will enhance the performance and popularity of the cultural activities.

- **Co-operation with the local police.** To improve security - at the beaches and during game drives - one of the issues the respondents raised as major concern.

Effective implementation of the above recommendations aimed at improving the quality of customer service, facilities and processes should result in customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and retention, competitive advantage, and ultimately, sustainable profitability. Improved customer satisfaction will further bridge the gap between service expectation and perception.

5.4 ACCEPTANCE/REJECTION OF THE RESEACH PROPOSITIONS

From the results the acceptance or rejection of the research propositions can be made.

- H₀ Customers are satisfied with the *level of customer service received at the game reserve* – **PARTIALLY ACCEPTED**. The customers are satisfied with some of the functional areas, whilst being unsatisfied with others. (Acceptance and rejection of the propositions H₁ to H₈ would render a clearer picture).
- H₁ Customers are satisfied with the level of service received at *reservations* – **ACCEPTED**.
- H₂ Customers are satisfied with the level of service received at *arrival* - **REJECTED**
- H₃ Customers are satisfied with the level of service received at the *game drives* - **REJECTED**

- H₄ Customers are satisfied with the level of service received with *accommodation* - **REJECTED**
- H₅ Customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive at the *beach* - **REJECTED**
- H₆ Customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive at the *restaurant and bar* – **ACCEPTED** (just).
- H₇ Customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive at the *cultural village* - **ACCEPTED**
- H₈ Customers are satisfied with the level of service they receive at *departure* - **ACCEPTED**

Therefore, we accept the research propositions H₁, H₇ and H₈ pertaining to satisfaction at reservation, cultural village and departure. In the same vein, we partially accept H₆, satisfaction with restaurant and bar, but reject the propositions H₂, H₃, H₄ and H₅ related to arrival, game drives, beach activities, and accommodation.

5.5 SUMMARY

This chapter presented the conclusions and recommendations of this research project. The importance of excellent customer service (as a source of competitive advantage) cannot be emphasized enough. As a result, there is need to improve customer service and for regular CSM surveys to continuously monitor service levels and market trends. A close relationship between wildlife and beach activities as tourist attractions has also emerged. From the research it emerged from the study that the customers are satisfied, moderately satisfied and unsatisfied with the service levels amongst the different functional areas at the reserve. In addition, the dimension tangibility fails when doing the analysis on the service dimensions.

The research project is structured in five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the introduction to the study as well as Mkambati Nature Reserve. It highlights the problem statement and research propositions, while also defining the parameters of the research project. In Chapter 2 the tourism and leisure industry is covered, while Chapter 3 continues to perform a literature review of the service industry. Chapter 4 presents the research methodology and the results from the research. The final chapter draws conclusions, offers some recommendations, and reports on the acceptance or rejection of the research propositions. The chapter also summarises the study to provide a fitting end to the study.

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APPENDIX A:

MAP OF EASTERN CAPE AND MKAMBATI NATURE RESERVE.



Source: Microsoft Encarta Premium Suite 2004

APPENDIX B: COVER LETTER



Mkambati Nature Reserve

P.O Box 722

Lusikisiki

4820

27/06/2006

Dear Visitor

We are conducting a research to determine the profile of our guests and evaluate the quality of customer service as perceived by our guests. We hope to use the information to determine what appeals to them and put in place strategies to improve the quality of our service.

Kindly fill the attached questionnaire as honestly as possible and return it to the receptionist before you leave.

Thank you for your time and please call again.

Yours truly

F Sekajja
Researcher

I	Northern Cape	
J	Outside SA (specify country)	

10) What is the purpose of your visit? Holiday Study Research

Family Outing

11) How often do you go on holiday? Rarely Twice a year Seldom Often
Once a year

12) What time did you spend at the resort? Half a day Full day Weekend
A week More than 7 days Holiday

13) How did you know about Mkambati Nature Reserve? TV Radio Magazine
Newspaper Word of mouth

14) What is your home language? -----

B Rate your level of satisfaction with the quality of the following functional areas according to your experience. Use the rating scale below.

1-Not at all 2- To a less extent 3- To some extent 4- To a great extent 5- To a very great extent.

B1 Reservation					
Response to your reservation call	1	2	3	4	5
Competence of reservation staff	1	2	3	4	5
The time it took to finalise your reservation	1	2	3	4	5
Friendliness of the staff.	1	2	3	4	5
Staff responsiveness	1	2	3	4	5
Helpfulness of the staff	1	2	3	4	5
B2 Arrival					
Welcome and orientation on arrival	1	2	3	4	5
Helpfulness of staff	1	2	3	4	5
Friendliness of front-end staff	1	2	3	4	5
Time taken to show your room	1	2	3	4	5
Reservation arrangements as promised	1	2	3	4	5
Facilities requested on reservation	1	2	3	4	5
B3 Accommodation					
Quality of our rooms	1	2	3	4	5
Convenience of Hotel rooms	1	2	3	4	5
Efficiency of room service	1	2	3	4	5
The desired facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Cleanliness of the rooms	1	2	3	4	5
Size of the rooms	1	2	3	4	5
B4 Game drives					
Game viewing experience.	1	2	3	4	5
Knowledge of game staff	1	2	3	4	5
Friendliness of the game staff	1	2	3	4	5
The number of game animals seen	1	2	3	4	5
The conditions and comfort of the vehicles	1	2	3	4	5
Safety measures	1	2	3	4	5
B5 Beach activities.					
Visibility of the life savers	1	2	3	4	5
Safety of the beaches	1	2	3	4	5
Fishing facilities	1	2	3	4	5
Condition of the boats	1	2	3	4	5
Conditions of the changing rooms	1	2	3	4	5
Cleanliness	1	2	3	4	5
B6 Restaurant and bar.					
Customer service	1	2	3	4	5
The quality of the food	1	2	3	4	5
Physical appearance of the restaurant and bar	1	2	3	4	5
Cleanliness of the waiters (waitresses)	1	2	3	4	5

Friendliness of the bar attendants	1	2	3	4	5
Speed at which orders are delivered	1	2	3	4	5
B7 Cultural Village.					
Quality of the music	1	2	3	4	5
Tribal dance	1	2	3	4	5
Arts and crafts	1	2	3	4	5
Educational value of the village	1	2	3	4	5
B8 Departure.					
Security check	1	2	3	4	5
Convenience of check-out time	1	2	3	4	5
Speed of check-out process	1	2	3	4	5
Staff helpfulness on check-out	1	2	3	4	5

C Using your response in B (above), Mark with an X in the appropriate box to indicate your response to the following questions

1 – Not at all, 2 – Probably not, 3 – Probably, 4 – Definitely yes.

Would you say you enjoyed your stay (visit)?	1	2	3	4
Will you return for another visit?	1	2	3	4
Would you recommend this place to your friend?	1	2	3	4
Are you leaving well rested?	1	2	3	4
Did you find the guided tours educative?	1	2	3	4
Did you have a memorable experience?	1	2	3	4
Are you impressed by the reserve service?	1	2	3	4

D Rate the following facilities (activities) to help us determine which areas are the key tourist attractions. Rate them from 1 to 5, with 1 being the most attractive.

Activities	Rating
Game drive – Wildlife	
- Game variety	
Beach Activities - Fishing	
- Swimming	
Restaurant and bar	
Playgrounds for children	
Education facilities	
Cultural activities	

What is your opinion of customer service quality at the reserve?

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