

The Potentials of rural Tourism in the Communities Around Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park, South Africa: Managerial Perspective

NELISILE ZANELE NELI, NOMFUNDO S. MZIMELA & IKECHUKWU O. EZEUDUJI

University of Zululand

Contacting author: mgabhinz@gmail.com

Keywords | Rural tourism resources, rural tourism capabilities, rural tourism strategies, rural tourism activities, South Africa

Objectives | The focus of this study was to assess the potential for rural tourism development in the areas surrounding South Africa's Hluhluwe iMfolozi Park (HiP) in KwaZulu-Natal. The objectives were to determine whether the host communities surrounding HiP have the necessary and sufficient resources for rural tourism. The study also investigated whether the host communities surrounding HiP have the essential knowledge and capabilities to participate in rural tourism.

Methodology | The explorative and interpretive paradigms served as the foundation for the qualitative research approach it used. Semi-structured interviews with the participants were conducted using interview guides. Twenty (20) semi-structured interviews were performed with members of the HiP management team and owners/managers of local tourism businesses. The data gathered was analysed by researchers using content analysis. To ascertain the potential for the development of rural tourism in HiP and the adjacent areas, a SWOT analysis was carried out.

Main Results and Contributions | The successful development of rural tourism in the area was recognised to depend on the development of human resources. The area's infrastructure development, which is a crucial physical resource for any tourism development, was also highlighted. The findings suggest that locals lacked the specialised expertise and professional requirements necessary for starting their own businesses. The findings further demonstrated that hiring locals is challenging for tourism business managers because these individuals lack the necessary expertise, qualifications, and work experience. As a result, management emphasised the value of educating and preparing local residents for the tourism industry. This study has considerable significance because it gave guidance to the nearby communities of HiP on how to enhance rural tourism for their own socioeconomic benefits; as a result, the study may help to increase employment, which will subsequently help to reduce poverty.

Limitations | The study concentrated on gaining access to people and organisations; access was limited, and only a few people were interviewed; many of them, despite being sampled, were

unwilling to participate further in the research. As a result, the sample size was limited. A bigger sample size would most likely produce more detailed data.

Conclusions | Numerous strengths and opportunities were found in the study that may be used as a foundation for developing rural tourism; however, managing weaknesses and threats is crucial for success. The study emphasises that the successful growth of rural tourism in the area would depend on the development of human resources. The improvement of the local infrastructure, a crucial physical resource for any tourism development, was also highlighted. In order to boost rural tourism, the study suggests leadership commitment and capacity building. According to the study, many other positive impulses may be seen in the fields of rural housing development, cooperatives, training centres, and developing relationships with educational institutions and other rural tourism stakeholders. Organising local events and rural exhibitions where local residents can showcase their abilities to tourists, as well as offering new sorts of rural tourism products, may also aid in developing viable rural tourism.

References

- Booyens, I. (2020). Education and skills in tourism: Implications for youth employment in South Africa. *Development Southern Africa*, 37(5), 825-839. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0376835X.2020.1725447>
- Ezeuduji, I.O., & Mgabhi, N.Z. (2022). Rural tourism development around a protected area in South Africa: Resident perspective. Conference paper presented at the TMS Algarve 2022, with the theme "Sustainability Challenges in Tourism, Hospitality and Management". Hosted by Universidade do Algarve, Olhão, Portugal, 16-19 November 2022. ISBN: 978-989-9127-13-5, p. 82. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34623/eryw-0423>
- Purnomo, S., Rahayu, E. S., Riani, A. L., Suminah, S., & Udin, U. (2020). Empowerment model for sustainable tourism village in an emerging country. *The Journal of Asian Finance, Economics and Business*, 7(2), 261-270. <https://doi.org/10.13106/jafeb.2020.vol7.no2.261>
- Puška, A., Stojanović, I., & Maksimović, A. (2019). Evaluation of sustainable rural tourism potential in Brcko district of Bosnia and Herzegovina using multi-criteria analysis. *Operational Research in Engineering Sciences: Theory and Applications*, 2(2), 40-54. <https://doi.org/10.31181/oresta190261p>
- Rahmani, M., Hajari, B., Karimian, T., & Hajilo, M. (2013). Rural tourism development strategies using SWOT analysis: Case study. *Life Science Journal*, 10(4), 395-403. <http://www.lifesciencesite.com/>
- Rogerson, C. M., & Rogerson, J. M. (2019). Tourism, local economic development and inclusion: evidence from Overstrand Local Municipality, South Africa. *Geo Journal of Tourism and Geosites*, 25(2), 293-308. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.25202-360>
- Zhang, X. (2012). Research on the development strategies of rural tourism in Suzhou based on SWOT analysis. *Energy Procedia*, 16, 1295-1299. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.egypro.2012.01.207>