

# An analysis of the visitors at the ASP World Tour Billabong Surfing Festival in Jeffrey's Bay, South Africa

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## Introduction

Jeffrey's Bay is located on the East Coast of South Africa, approximately 60 kilometres from Port Elizabeth which is the fifth largest city in South Africa (Figure 1). Jeffrey's Bay has a population of 15,000 and thus it is largely a rural settlement. Despite its rural setting, it is the only surf spot in the world that boasts with one of the best right hand point break waves in the world. It is this uniqueness that has made Jeffrey's Bay one of the most popular surfing destinations in the world.

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the profile of visitors (spectators) to the 2011 ASP World Tour-Billabong Pro Surfing competition in Jeffrey's Bay, South Africa. To date, no empirical study has been done of this event and little is known about the visitors to this event. Since this is a major sporting event on the international surfing calendar since 1981 and attracts surfers from all over the world, it is imperative that this event is further explored in terms of the significance of the visitors at this event.

## The South African policy frameworks

Within the South African context, the White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism of 1996 emphasizes the development of products and activities, such as sport tourism and cultural activities, as this will broaden the tourism product base. This broadening of the tourism product base, should also contribute towards diversifying the tourism product. In doing so, it should speak to a wider audience base (visitors) as it presents a multitude of visitor experiences that could be constructed.

In the National Tourism Sector Strategy of 2011 reference is made of Business and Events Tourism. However the arranging of sport events, or festivals are not necessarily linked to the responsibility of provincial and local government. Such events, like the ASP World Tour-Billabong Pro Surfing competition in Jeffrey's Bay is the initiative of sporting bodies, with assistance from event management organizations and assistance from sponsors, which could be private sector, or public sector (government) sponsors. This would exclude mega-events where all tiers government would become involved, from the outset.

The Tourism Master Plan of the Eastern Cape Province recognises the Billabong Pro Surfing Festival as an established festival in the Province and a draw card for tourists to the region. It further argues that this event and many of the lesser known events are critical drivers to address seasonality in the Province. Since many of these event are hosted during the off-peak season, it does have a positive impact on addressing seasonality. However, very little insight into the event in terms of the tourists are provided, and it is not known what the collective impact of all the events are as there is no coordinated approach to determining the eco-

nomie, social and environmental impacts of all the events in the Province.

## The uniqueness and segmentation

According to Getz (2008), it is the uniqueness of the experience which attracts visitors. Thus each event has its own unique appeal which will speak to the visitors, based on the media activities that are engaged by the festival organizers.

Segmenting or profiling visitors is an important aspect of identifying who the visitors are. This will allow festival organizers the opportunity to determine who the customers are, which in turn will better assist with adopting specific marketing strategies to attract the type of visitors that is desired.

## Methodology

In order to address the main problem and objectives of the study, a quantitative approach was followed. The objectives to be addressed in this study:

- To determine the predominant gender of the visitors to the festival.
- To ascertain the age profiles of the visitors
- To calculate the average spend per visitor
- To determine the origin of the visitors and the mode or transportation used to an from the festival.
- To ascertain the length of stay at the festival and the accommodation preferences of the visitors to the festival
- To investigate the primary reason as why the festival is attended.

To obtain the required information about visitors to the Billabong surfing festival, a questionnaire was designed. Four fieldworkers randomly selected respondents during the period that the festival period when the surfing condition allowed for surfing. Great care was taken not to sample the same respondent on a different day and if a respondent had already provided information on a different day, or to another fieldworker, even though each field worker was restricted to a defined zone, then the respondent was automatically excluded.

The fieldwork took place during the second week of July 2011 when 'surf was up'. During this period that the festival took place, 350 questionnaires were completed. Of this number, 295 were satisfactorily completed and MS Excel was used for the analysis of the result.

## Results and discussion

The results of the survey revealed that females (55%) were the most dominant gender represented at the event. This was rather unusual as surfing in South Africa is a male do-



Figure 1. The location of Jeffrey's Bay

minated sport. However, it could be that females were attracted to the event by the predominantly male surfers.

The largest proportion of visitors was between the ages of 21–30. This is in line with Standeven and De Knop (1999) who indicated sport tourists are primarily between the ages of 15–34 years of age. In this instance, the visitors share a similar age profile.

Twenty five percent of the respondents were spending between R51–R100 per day, whilst at the festival. This figure excludes any monies paid to accommodation and refers mainly to money spent on food on drink.

As was expected, most (65%) of the South African visitors were from the Eastern Cape Province, and therefore made use of the motorcar as the primary means of transportation. The international visitors were primarily from the United States of America (19%), France (15%) and Australia (12%). In most of these countries, surfing is a popular activity.

The duration of stay of most of the visitors was between 0–2 days, and those who stayed overnight, preferred staying at backpacker lodges in Jeffrey's Bay. There are at least

four backpacker lodges in Jeffrey's Bay, as well as a flash-backer. These types lodges are popular amongs the surfers and younger visitors, as they cater primarily for this type of market.

What was quite noteworthy was the fact that the visitors were all keen on watching the surfing. It could be that a sizeable proportion of the visitors were also keen surfers and, or had come to support a particular surfer who they either admire for his surfing abilities, or

## Conclusion

The profiling of visitors to a surfing event is necessary for planning and marketing purposes, as it is useful to know who the target market is. In this instance, the event organizers can use information to further enhance the event, and the at the same time address the challenges identified by the visitors.

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