

# Kruger National Park Bush Braai experiences – critical success factors, visitor preferences and willingness to pay

*Liandi Slabbert, Visitor Services, South African National Parks, South Africa,  
liandi.slabbert@sanparks.org*

*Kevin Moore, Visitor Services, South African National Parks, South Africa,  
kevin.moore@sanparks.org*

---

## Introduction

### *Diversification of experiential products in Kruger National Park*

As part of its Responsible Tourism Strategy, the South African National Parks (SANParks) acknowledges a need for the evolution of its product and experiential offerings in order to remain relevant in a highly competitive tourism market, which in turn supports the sustainability of its conservation mandate (SANParks, 2011). During peak months of the year, most rest camps in the Southern section of the Kruger National Park (KNP) are fully occupied, leaving little opportunity for revenue growth from this product category.

### *The Bush Braai experience*

The Bush Braai, popular as a bush dinner experience for conference goers and other groups of tourists staying inside the KNP, has been available for a number of years from rest camps within the KNP. A typical Bush Braai experience involves a guided game drive in an open safari vehicle (OSV), to a remote setting in the African bush where guests are greeted by lanterns, fires and the distant sounds of animals calling. Visitors are treated to local cuisine, involving a braai (the South African term for grilling meat over an open fire) made up of a variety of game meat, supplemented with side dishes such as vegetables and salads and rounded off with deserts and coffee or tea. Guests are accompanied by guides who lead interpretive discussions and answers questions from guests. Armed rangers ensure the guests' safety from wildlife throughout the entire experience (SANParks, 2018).

A need was identified by SANParks to extend the product offering to visitors staying at accommodation facilities outside the Park, essentially allowing this market segment access to the Park after gate closing times for an enriched experience involving a game drive and dinner in the bush. At the time of the research, future plans involved operating such a service from three gates in the south of the Park: Crocodile Bridge, Phabeni and Phalaborwa. A strong and clear market orientation is needed to advance consumer acceptance of a product perceived as 'new' by some tourists (Kirca, Jayachandran & Bearden, 2005), which lead the management of SANParks to request research to gauge visitors' perceptions of an ideal Bush Braai experience to aid the product development and strengthen the existing product offerings run from the rest camps in the Park.

## Methods

Primary data was collected through a quantitative research approach involving internet-administered questionnaires distributed in February and March 2016 to three target populations: A) Visitors to the KNP who stayed at the Crocodile Bridge and Pretoriuskop rest camps during the preceding 12 months; B) privately owned OSV operators who bring guests

from other tourist establishments to the Park for guided game drive experiences during daytime hours and C) tourists staying at accommodation establishments bordering the Park.

Three different questionnaires were developed for each population, with the core aspects measured being:

- Level of interest in the product;
- Perceived key determinants at play towards first purchase motivations, customer satisfaction and repeat purchase;
- Expectations and preferences towards the experience;
- Willingness to pay (WTP) and
- Potential inhibitors towards acceptance of a Bush Braai product.

An introductory letter explaining the purpose of the study together with the link to the online questionnaire was emailed to visitors of the KNP, OSV operators and managers of tourist accommodation establishments. A total of 496 complete responses were received from KNP visitors while 29 out of the 108 OSV operators responded. Obtaining responses from tourists staying outside the Park proved to be difficult as the majority of tourist establishments either did not have a mailing list of clients or were unwilling to forward the request to clients. Subsequently, data from the 13 responses received from population C were excluded from the results.

## Results and conclusion

Slightly less than half of KNP respondents (48%) said they would very likely book a Bush Braai on their next trip to the KNP with another 34% indicating they might be persuaded through the right product and marketing message. A strong 76% of OSV respondents on the other hand said they would very likely sell the product to their guests.

The majority of KNP respondents reportedly would opt for an informal (80%), relaxed and affordable (63%) experience that can be enjoyed by the whole family with a long sunset drive to the location (56%) and traditional South African braai food (48%) served on an arrangement of small intimate tables for up to four people (47%). For this, the majority of respondents were willing to pay in the region of €14 – €29 per person.

OSV respondents on the other hand, entertained the concept of an affordable (45%) and informal (72%) experience and a slightly more expensive option in the region of €21 – €43 per person which would include more comfort and quality (41%) and traditional South African food (48%) for their guests. This indicated that guests of the OSV operators represent a market with differing needs.

The factors identified by KNP visitors as critical for a pleasurable Bush Braai experience, listed in order of importance, were: Having a memorable wildlife experience, being in a beautiful setting, experiencing quality guiding and good quality food. Comfort was perceived as being less important among KNP visitors.

In an open-ended question, all respondents were asked to describe what their ideal Bush Braai experience would be made up of. The results from a thematic analysis (Table 1) illustrate there is a fair amount of agreement between what KNP visitors and OSV operators expect from the product. The table below describes the phrases most often mentioned by respondents from the two groups, categorized according to themes.

| Theme                                 | KNP visitors   | OSV operators  |
|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| Ideal location                        | Overlooking a dam; near a waterhole; on a sandy riverbank; in a dry riverbed; on top of a mountain.                              | At a remote waterhole; in a dry riverbed; true wilderness; overlooking a river; atop a hill.                                     |
| Sights, sounds, smells and atmosphere | Listening to the nightlife; tranquility; watching the sunset; under the stars; roar of a lion; smell of braai meat on the grill. | Calls of the wild.   |
| Culinary requirements                 | No fancy food; good red wine; wors (sausage), chops and steak; pap & salads; ice for drinks; coffee & dessert.                   | Traditional South African food; braai meat; welcome drink; pap & sauce; buffet style; milk tart (traditional dessert); cash bar. |
| Preferred lighting                    | Camp fire ambiance; lanterns; dim light; light and crackle of a bonfire; candlelit; fire torches.                                | Camp fire; oil lamps; lanterns.  |
| Interpretative requirements           | Guides sharing memorable stories about their experiences in parks; knowledgeable guide.  | Good storytelling.   |
| Facilities                            | Ablutions and a place to wash hands.   |  |
| Other requirements                    | No rowdy guests.   | Crisp white linen with animal print overlays; safety & security of guests.   |

Table 1 Elements of an ideal Bush Braai experience as perceived by KNP visitors and OSV operators

The results indicate wildlife watching plays an integral role in activity offerings in the KNP and that both the current market of overnight visitors to the KNP and guests of OSV operators could be considered target markets for the Bush Braai products. For the OSV market however, the product would need to be operated somewhat differently than the traditional market.

The findings from the study equipped management with an initial indication of the viability of the product and insights into the preferences and expectations of a Bush Braai experience.

## References

- Kirca, A.H., Jayachandran, S. & Bearden, W.O., 2005. Market Orientation: A meta-analytic review and assessment of its antecedents and impact on performance. *Journal of Marketing*, 69(April):24-41.
- SANParks, 2018. *Kruger National Park - Bush Braais & Bush Breakfasts* [Online] Available from: <https://www.sanparks.org/parks/kruger/tourism/activities/braais.php>. [Accessed: 2018-03-28].
- SANParks, 2011. *SANParks Responsible Tourism Strategy 2012 – 2022*. Pretoria: South African National Parks.
- Grunert, K.G & Van Trijp, H.C.M, 2014. Consumer-Oriented New Product Development. In N. K. van Alfen (Ed.). *Encyclopedia of agriculture and food systems*, 2:375-386.