

# Will Satisfied Visitors Always Revisit and Recommend? Evidence from Kakum National Park - Ghana

## Abstract

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This study aims to ascertain Visitors' satisfaction with services and post-visit behavioural intentions with the Kakum National Park of Ghana and to explore the relationship between the satisfaction dimensions and visitors' post-visit behavioural intentions. Quantitative methods were used for analysis using the responses of 367 sampled visitors with the aid of questionnaires. The study found that visitors' overall satisfaction and future intentions about the attraction are positive. Irrespective of a positive satisfaction with the attraction, visitors were uncertain about their satisfaction with the prices of services at the attraction. Moreover, visitors suggested that they would not revisit but would recommend the attraction to other patrons. A statistically significant association existed between some dimensions of satisfaction (Tangibles, Price, Reliability, Assurance, and Empathy) and post-visit behavioural intention of visitors at the Kakum National Park at  $p \leq 0.05$ . It is recommended that the price of services at the attraction should be reviewed to balance services at the attraction and managers of KNP should also put up measures to diversify and rejuvenate the attraction to influence the revisit intentions of visitors who visit the attraction.

**Keywords:** Nature-based tourism, attraction, Kakum National Park, satisfaction, post-visit behavioural intention

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## Introduction

Tourism continues to experience expansion and diversification and has become one of the largest and fastest-growing economic sectors in the world (de Paula et al., 2021). It is a major contributor to GDP and employment in many economies of the world (World Travel Tourism Council, 2015). Tourism is described as the activities of persons travelling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes (Roman et al., 2020). According to Imbeah (2020) and Imbeah et al. (2020), the top tourist destinations in Africa are Kenya, Zimbabwe, South Africa, Mauritius and Ghana. Moreover, the tourism literature suggests that Ghana is the most popular tourist destination in West Africa, ahead of its neighbours (Ghana Tourism Authority, 2010; Imbeah et al., 2020; Peil, 2018; Preko, 2020). Along with lodging and transportation, tourist attractions are regarded as one of the three essential components of tourism (Biswas et al., 2020). Bi et al. (2020) believe that tourism would not be necessary without attraction. According to Więckowski (2021), there would be minimal requirement for other connected services in the tourism industry, and tourism could not exist without developed attractions. Ghana is favoured with a wealth of travel destinations, including national parks, one of which is the Kakum National Park. Kakum National Park (KNP) is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Ghana, according to Poku & Boakye (2020). As one of Ghana's most famous landmarks, it was built in the early 1990s and is the most well-known national park of its kind (Agyeman et al., 2019; Agyeman & Antwi-Bosiako, 2022; Poku & Boakye, 2019). Ever since its establishment, the park has produced income for the state and jobs for the surrounding community (Forson, 2022). As per Ismail & Rohman (2019), attractions are crucial for enhancing visitors' overall satisfaction as they not only shape the tourism product but also gauge the overall performance of the destination (Čulić et al., 2021).

Visitor happiness is essential to ensure the attraction and destination continue to flourish and survive (Padrón-Ávila et al., 2022; Widjaja et al., 2020). Understanding visitor satisfaction with the attraction is crucial because it affects post-visit behavioural intentions. This is further highlighted by the recent decline in visitor numbers to the Kakum National Park (arrivals dropped from 184,901 in 2012 to 174,621 in 2014 to 141,399 in 2016, to 127,752 in 2018 and 54,514 in 2020 (GTA, 2022). Furthermore, the tourism industry must investigate visitor satisfaction because it is thought to be one of the main objectives and a sign of a well-managed tourist location. The relationship between expectations and experiences is the definition of satisfaction, according to Shaykh-Baygloo (2021). It may also relate to a person's feelings of contentment or discontent depending on how well users believe a product meets their needs compared to their initial expectations (Alhassan & Kidido, 2023). According to Otsuka et al. (2023) and Berhanu et al. (2020), if a visitor's expectations are fulfilled, they are likely to perceive their experience as pleasant. Conversely, if these expectations are not satisfied, there is likely to be dissatisfaction. According to Faerber et al. (2021) and Lim et al. (2020), visitor satisfaction can boost visitor loyalty, lower price elasticity, lower exchange costs, and raise the likelihood of attracting new guests. Consequently, it is important to research visitor satisfaction at attractions because it has far-reaching implications. This is much so because destinations can be considered as a product which can be resold or revisited and recommended to others (Wantara & Irawati, 2021). Nguyen Viet et al. (2020), suggested satisfaction as both a predictor and a moderator variable of revisit intentions. Therefore, to encourage revisits, managers can evaluate the goods and services provided at the destination (Govindarajo & Khen, 2020), enhance services (Woyo



& Slabbert, 2020), and compare destinations based on performance (Faerber et al., 2021). Therefore, to achieve the goal of the study, three questions were asked: 1) to what extent are visitors satisfied with service dimensions at the KNP? 2) What are visitors' post-visit behavioural intentions at KNP? 3) To what extent will satisfied visitors recommend and/or revisit KNP?

### **Post-visit behavioural intentions of visitors**

Post-visit behavioural intention reveals consumers' plans to return, suggest goods or services from the same vendor, and tell their friends about their positive experiences (Rita et al., 2019; Weru, 2021). In the words of Khairi & Darmawan (2021), tourism destinations can be thought of as products that can be resold and revisited. Rini & Sembiring (2020) further posit that post-visit behavioural intentions have been widely used to forecast customers' future behaviour. Hence, can be used to predict whether or not customers will be a reliable source of revenue for the business and remain a long-term client (Li et al., 2020). Due to the higher cost of attracting new visitors compared to retaining existing ones, many tourist locations mostly rely on return business (Bayih & Singh, 2020; Matolo, et al., 2021). The number of prior visits, the general level of satisfaction with a certain destination, and the destination's perceived performance could all contribute to post-visit behavioural intentions (Liao et al., 2021; Wantara & Irawati, 2021). Service quality, perceived pricing, customer value, and perceptions of business performance were identified by Situmorang et al. (2020) as factors of customer satisfaction, which is then utilised to explain revisit intentions. Furthermore, Bigne et al. (2001) propose that tourism image and destination quality attributes impact intentions to return and suggest to others. Um et al. (2006) indicated that satisfaction is a moderator as well as a predictor of revisit intentions in a model they provided. To encourage revisits, managers can use satisfaction surveys to evaluate the goods and services provided at the destination (Bramwell, 1998; Noe & Uysal, 1997; Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991; Schofield, 2000), enhance services (Fornell, 1992), and compare destinations based on performance (Dhurup & Mokoena, 2017; Kotler, 1994).

### **Relationship between visitor satisfaction dimensions and post-visit behavioural intentions**

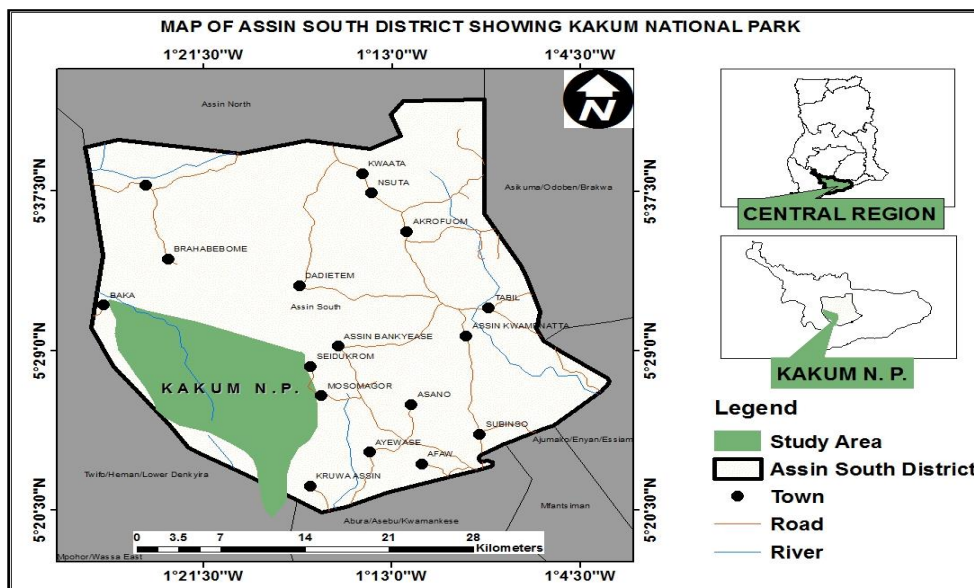
Several studies have been conducted to look at the relationship between visitor satisfaction and post-visit behavioural intentions. Baker & Crompton (2000), Baron & Kenny (1986) and Thrane (2002) reported a significant direct relationship between satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Prayag et al. (2017) found positive relationships between tourists' perceptions and overall satisfaction, the likelihood of returning and making a recommendation. Similarly, Rahadhini et al. (2021) analysed and assessed the influence of perceived value on consumer behavioural intention to consume culinary in Indonesia with satisfaction and trust as mediation variables and established that perceived value has a positive and significant effect on tourist behavioural intention. A similar conclusion was reached by Canny (2013), who found that the results on the relationship between tourists' satisfaction and behavioural intention, were significant. Meng et al. (2011) also conducted a study on the relationships between cruise image, perceived value, satisfaction, and post-visit behavioural intentions among Taiwanese tourists. The results showed tourists' perceived value and satisfaction were found to play a significant role in post-visit behavioural intentions. Prebensen (2004) also showed that tourists' satisfaction had a positive effect on tourists' intention to re-buy a charter tour but the explained variance was low. However, satisfaction with the destination did not significantly influence the intention to re-buy. From the above, it can be argued that the evidence on the relationship between satisfaction and behavioural intentions is positive.

### **Theoretical framework**

The social exchange theory (SET) serves as the spine of this study to explore the relationship between constructs (satisfaction and post-visit behavioural intentions) of visitors to the KNP. The theory suggests an intentional exchange exists between relationships where parties enjoy value. The theory further suggests that establishing a relationship depends on a subjective cost-benefit analysis and evaluating other alternatives. This implies that the parties in the relationship will evaluate the relationship's future based on the value still to be enjoyed by the other party. In this current study, visitors to the KNP will evaluate their satisfaction based on the value they get from the satisfaction dimensions of services (tangibles, price, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy) through their interactions with staff and management at the destination and at the same time the value they stand to enjoy in future from their interaction with services at the destination before arriving at a future decision as to whether they want to re-engage in a relationship with the KNP again (thus: Revisit the destination and recommend to families and friends). When visitors admit that they have enjoyed values based on the cost-benefit evaluation and therefore are satisfied with the attraction, it is likely to positively influence a future relationship (thus, Revisit the destination and recommend it to families and friends), and when visitors realise the cost from the evaluation of the relationship, they are likely to do otherwise.

### **Study area**

The Kakum National Park (KNP) is situated in Ghana's Central region, whose major city is Cape Coast. Due to the region's abundance of tourist attractions and services, Cape Coast is referred to as Ghana's tourism hub (Richmond & Cornelius, 2021). KNP is one of the several protected areas in the country that has been developed for tourism. It is adjacent to the little town called Abrafo Odumasi. The parks' main attractions include the canopy walkway, bird watching, nature walk, and tree houses for overnight camping (Ghana Heritage and Conservation Trust, 2015). According to Eshun & Tichaawa (2021) and Yiadom (2015), the KNP is not only the best and most popular attraction in Ghana among the national parks, but it is also the nation's signature attraction due to its distinctive ecotourism features (canopy walkway and rainforest), which draw more tourists to the Central region and Ghana as a whole. Looking at the recent declining nature of visitors to the KNP is presented in the background, hence the need for the current study.



**Figure 1: Map of Kakum National Park**  
 Source: Cartographic and Remote Sensing Unit, UCC (2021)

### Research methods

This study draws data on the influence of visitor satisfaction dimensions on the post-visit behavioural intention of visitors. This study adopted a quantitative approach and a cross-sectional field survey. The study participants were visitors to the Kakum National Park of Ghana. It has been established that the satisfaction of visitors may, to a large extent, likely influence visitors to revisit and make a recommendation of the product or service to others even though several other factors can shape the post-visit behaviour of visitors. A non-probability sampling method, specifically a convenient sampling technique, was employed to sample respondents who visited the Kakum National Park from March to April 2019. This technique was appropriate due to the unavailability of the sampling frame at the time of data collection which would have allowed the use of probability sampling techniques that complement the quantitative research approach. Irrespective of the unavailability of the sampling frame, the data collection procedure was randomised. Permission was sought from the Ghana Heritage Conservation Trust (GHCT) and Wildlife Division of Ghana, which are the sole managers of the KNP, by the use of introductory letters to conduct the study. The researchers stood at vantage points at the KNP and invited visitors who had completed their tour and were willing to participate in the study. Visitors were informed about the nature and purpose of the study and were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity. Each research instrument took about 10 to 15 minutes to be completed.

Self-administered questionnaires which comprised close-ended questions were used for data collection. The instrument for data collection was adopted from (Akama & Kieti 2003; Frochot, 2003), consisting of six service dimensions namely; Tangibles (8 items), Price (3 items), Reliability (4 items), Responsiveness (6 items), Assurance (4 items) and Empathy (3 items) for measuring visitors satisfaction experience at the KNP and post-visit behavioural intention (2 items). The questionnaire for this study consisted of two (2) sections. Respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, as well as their satisfaction dimensions and post-visit behavioural intentions to KNP. The 5-point Likert scale initially used to measure satisfaction and post-visit behavioural intentions was collapsed to a 3-point Likert scale ranging from 1=Disagree, 2=neither agree nor disagree and 3= Agree. According to Hair et al. (2010), this exercise does not lead to any information loss but rather enriches the understanding of the results by conveying a clearer meaning to the results. A total of 400 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents. Among the questionnaires retrieved, 367 were found to be useful for analysis, representing a 91.75% response rate. Data from the study were processed with SPSS (Version 20) software.

### Results

#### Profile of respondents

According to survey data, the bulk of respondents were unmarried males between the ages of 21 and 29. Furthermore, Christians with college degrees were the majority religious group among the respondents. Finally, the majority of the respondents were employed, and most of them were African.

#### Visitor satisfaction

Table 1 presents the various dimensions of satisfaction expressed by visitors at the Kakum National Park, Ghana. The table shows that visitors were generally satisfied with the dimensions of services provided by management and staff at the Kakum National Park, with an overall average mean of 2.55. Dimensionally, visitors' view of the physical evidence (Tangibles) of the Kakum National Park was satisfactory, with a mean of 2.53. They perceived the attraction to be clean, had clear signage, and



staff appeared neatly dressed. This finding corroborates that of (Donici & Dumitras, 2024), who opined that a pristine environment remains the main satisfaction attribute for nature-based tourists' attractions. The evidence in Table 1 also showed that the visitors were uncertain about the value for money and, as such, exhibited a mix of feelings about their satisfaction regarding the price dimension of the attraction at  $M=2.14$ . The implication could be that the attraction charged higher fees and provided fewer services. It could also be that the charges were reasonable, but visitors did not meet their expectations at the attraction. Furthermore, visitors were satisfied with management's ability to provide and perform to their expectations (reliability) as promised ( $M=2.69$ ). This simply means that staff were well informed and as well delivered services to meet visitors' expectations at the Kakum National Park. Regarding visitors' satisfaction with how management and employees were responsive to their needs at the KNP, the table shows that they were highly responsive, with a mean of 2.67. Further, the means of 2.61 and 2.68 were recorded for the assurance and empathy dimensions of the attraction, respectively, indicating that visitors were as well satisfied with these two satisfaction attributes of the KNP.

**Table 1: Visitors' Satisfaction with the Kakum National Park (N=367)**

Dimensions	%(Agreement)	Mean	Std. deviation
Tangibles	68.3	2.53	0.71
Price	44.3	2.14	0.85
Reliability	77.1	2.69	0.52
Responsiveness	77.6	2.67	0.65
Assurance	70.3	2.61	0.65
Empathy	77.0	2.68	0.63
Overall satisfaction	69.1	2.55	0.62

Note Scale: 1.0- 1.49= Disagree, 1.50 – 2.49= Neutral, 2.50 – 3.0= Agree

### Post-visit behavioural intentions of visitors

The evidence in Table 2 indicates that visitors to the KNP had a positive post-visit behavioural intention about the services experienced at the attraction, with a mean of  $M=2.63$ , representing almost 76%, while 24% had a negative post-visit behavioural intention. Specifically, visitors agreed that they would recommend the attraction to friends and relatives, with a mean of  $M=2.77$ , but were uncertain as to whether they would revisit the attraction again or not, with a mean of  $M=2.48$ .

**Table 2: Post-visit Behavioural Intentions of Visitors (N=367)**

Post-visit Behavioural Intentions	% Agreement	Mean	Std. Deviation
I will recommend this attraction to friends and relatives	85.6	2.77	0.58
I will revisit the attraction again	65.9	2.48	0.77
Overall Score	75.8	2.63	0.68

Note. Scale: 1.0- 1.49= Disagree, 1.50 – 2.49= Neutral, 2.50 – 3.0= Agree

### Relationship between visitor satisfaction dimensions and post-visit behavioural intentions

It is interesting to observe from Table 3 that, there is a significant relationship between tangibles and post-visit behavioural intentions of visitors ( $\chi^2=8.562, p=0.003$ ) at the Kakum National Park. Among the visitors who were satisfied with the tangible dimensions of the attraction, the table reveals that the majority (89.0%) had a positive post-visit behavioural intention, while 11.0% had a negative post-visit behavioural intention. Also (3.0%) who were dissatisfied had a positive post-visit behavioural intention, while 97% showed a negative post-visit behavioural intention towards the attraction. It can thus be said that for a visitor or group of visitors to be willing to visit or recommend the attraction to others depends to a large extent on the tangibles of the destination.

**Table 3: Relationship between visitor satisfaction dimensions and post-visit behavioural intentions (N=367)**

Satisfaction dimensions		Post-visit behavioural intentions		(p-value)
		Positive (%)	Negative (%)	
Tangibles	Satisfied	89.0	11.0	0.003*
	Dissatisfied	3.0	97.0	
Price	Satisfied	43.0	57.0	0.000*
	Dissatisfied	0.0	100.0	
Reliability	Satisfied	91.0	9.0	0.006*
	Dissatisfied	2.0	98.0	
Responsiveness	Satisfied	91.0	9.0	0.093
	Dissatisfied	95.0	5.0	
Assurance	Satisfied	92.0	8.0	0.038*
	Dissatisfied	3.0	97.0	
Empathy	Satisfied	90.0	10.0	0.006*
	Dissatisfied	2.0	98.0	

\*Significant at  $p \leq 0.05$

Moreover, table 3 indicates a significant relationship exists between price and post-visit behavioural intentions at ( $\chi^2=144.442, p=0.000$ ). Surprisingly (43.0%) of visitors who were satisfied with the price dimension of the KNP had a positive post-visit behavioural intention, while the majority (57%) who were satisfied had a negative post-visit behavioural intention. Not surprisingly, all (100%) who were dissatisfied with the price dimension agreed that they would not revisit and recommend the facility to others. Ideally, visitors are expected to return or recommend the facility to others if they believe the service price is affordable. This has been manifested in the finding, thus indicating the role price plays in the post-visit behavioural intentions of visitors. The reliability of service provided at the facility also has a significant relationship with post-visit behavioural intentions of visitors ( $\chi^2=7.597, p=0.006$ ). Ideally, (91%) of visitors who indicated their satisfaction with reliability had a



positive post-behavioural intention, and the remaining only (8%) were satisfied, indicating a negative intention about the attraction. Conversely, 80% who were also dissatisfied with the reliability dimension of the attraction had a negative post-visit behavioural intention. Thus, the way and manner staff of the facility interact with visitors will determine whether or not a visitor will return to or recommend the facility to others. In contrast, there was no significant relationship between responsiveness and post-visit behavioural intentions of visitors ( $\chi^2=2.830$ ,  $p=0.093$ ). With ( $\chi^2=4.571$ ,  $p=0.038$ ), assurance also recorded a significant relationship with the post-visit behavioural intentions of visitors. Finally, it can also be seen that there is a significant relationship between empathy and post-visit behavioural intentions of visitors at the Kakum National Park.

## Discussions

While the likelihood of returning and recommending an attraction to others is generally positively connected with visitor satisfaction, this relationship might not imply that all satisfied visitors will always do so. Several factors influence the complex link between satisfaction dimensions and post-visit behavioural intentions and hence, is critical to be explored. The research aims to identify visitors' satisfaction and post-visit behavioural intentions and establish whether the nexus between the two variables is always so with visitors to the Kakum National Park. The results revealed that visitors to KNP were satisfied with the tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy dimensions of the KNP except for the price. Visitors frequently cannot accurately gauge the quality of services regarding tangibles since they are intangible. As a result, visitors see the service environment as a substantial proxy for quality. The presence of the physical surroundings and additional sensory aspects encountered by visitors at the service delivery venues are recognised as service environments, or physical evidence, in the service industry, which induces their satisfaction. According to Othman et al. (2020), because physical evidence has an impact on customers' satisfaction, service businesses must appropriately handle it. The physical evidence consists of all aspects of the attraction, including the ambience and experiences. It can, therefore, be stated that to ensure the satisfaction of visitors at the KNP, managers of the attraction must be critical of the park and its surroundings, including a clean and serene environment to convey service quality and value.

Also, to ensure tourist satisfaction at attractions, the reliability aspect of service is essential. Visitors at KNP were satisfied with the attraction's promises. According to Reinita Andriyani & Arie Yudhistira (2023), a destination's ability to deliver on its promises, as well as its staff's professionalism and ability to elicit trust, is referred to as its reliability. Visitors are more likely to have favourable experiences and higher levels of satisfaction when attractions consistently deliver on their promises, give dependable services, assure safety and security, provide correct information, and handle difficulties skillfully. Hence, findings from the study corroborate with the above assertion at the KNP. More so, visitors' satisfaction with responsiveness at the KNP is similar to Packard & Berger (2021), who posited that visitors place a high value on their time and, as such, when making a decision, they always take into account delivery times and the quality of service they receive from their employees. This implies that the staff of the KNP always walk their talk regarding the services they provide to their visitors. Also, visitors to KNP agreed that they were satisfied with the assurance dimension of the attraction. This shows that management and employees were courteous and knowledgeable and could extend confidence and trust to visitors, which corroborates with the suggestion of Pakurár et al. (2019) that assurance indicates the attitudes of the employees and their behaviour and the staff's ability to provide friendly, confidential, courteous, and competent services to customers. Hence, management and employees' ability to exhibit the above characteristics towards visitors ensured their satisfaction at KNP. Lastly, it came out that the staff of the KNP showed empathy towards visitors by establishing an emotional connection with them, comprehending their wants and requirements, and reacting to them with sincere concern and care. Ogunyemi (2022) confirmed this notion and alluded that, in a sector where guest experiences are paramount, management should prioritise empathy by creating an atmosphere where visitors feel appreciated, respected, and genuinely welcomed. The post-visit behavioural intentions of visitors to the KNP indicated that they would recommend the attraction to friends and relatives. However, visitors' uncertainty about revisiting the destination calls for a probe by management to unearth the hindrance and craft strategies to influence satisfied visitors to revisit the KNP. This is because Bayih & Singh (2020) propose that many tourist destinations rely majorly on repeat visitation. After all, attracting new visitors is more expensive than retaining repeat visitors.

Reflecting on the nexus between satisfaction and post-visit behavioural intention, several studies in the tourism literature have positive sentiments towards the relationship. Traditionally, it is assumed that every satisfied visitor is likely to re-visit and recommend a product and/or service (i.e., Attraction) to friends and families when they perceive satisfaction with the attraction. According to Chang et al. (2015), visitors generally incorporate their consumption experience and satisfaction in their future decision-making. As such, they try to reciprocate their satisfaction through certain loyal behaviours such as repeat visits or advocating the product within their social environment. Corroboratively, visitors to KNP were generally satisfied with the service dimensions at the attraction and exhibited a positive, loyal behavioural intention to recommend the attraction to friends and families. However, though visitors were satisfied with the services provided to them at KNP, they were unsure whether to revisit the destination. This finding concurs with the notion of Tengan et al. (2023) who posit that other factors, such as the lack of diversified tourism products at the destination, can deter a satisfied visitor from revisiting in the future. Hence, visitors who visit the destination could perceive that there is nothing new again at this destination to come back and experience. The KNP has several attractions for visitors to consume, but the canopy walk is often promoted as the flagship attraction at the KNP. This could have caused visitors uncertainty to revisit since they are not aware of the other attractions within the destination. To increase repeat visits to destinations, the activities at the attraction must be diversified. In furtherance, the few visitors who were dissatisfied with the responsiveness dimension of the KNP exhibited a reversal of the traditional conversion by holding a positive, loyal behavioural intention to recommend the attraction to friends and relatives. Linking the social



exchange theory to the current study, it is clear that the theory offers a framework for understanding the relationships that exist between the visitor and their satisfaction with services offered to them at the KNP. The notion highlights that the interaction is reciprocal and that both visitors and attractions want to maximise benefits by exchanging services and experiences. Hence, the satisfaction of visitors with services at the KNP becomes crucial in promoting favourable social interactions, which promotes repeat business, positive word-of-mouth, and the general prosperity of tourist destinations.

## Conclusions and recommendation

Visitor behavioural intention is a critical concept for the survival of the tourism industry. Hence, to sustain this, ensuring the satisfaction of the visitor is inevitable. The research aimed to identify visitors' satisfaction and post-visit behavioural intentions and establish whether the nexus between the two variables was always so with visitors to the Kakum National Park. An overall percentage of almost 70 and 76, respectively, indicate that visitors to KNP are generally satisfied with the services management and staff offer and hold a positive post-visit behavioural intention about the destination. However, they were not satisfied with the price dimension of services at the KNP and uncertain about their revisit intentions. Since most of the visitors were sure that they would recommend the attraction to others but were uncertain as to whether they would revisit and choose it among other alternatives, it is recommended that the management of KNP develop more facilities and diversify the activities and products at the attraction. Doing this will increase the length of stay of visitors since they will have more facilities and a large itinerary to enjoy at the destination, which might make them always willing to revisit hence, bringing more profit to the destination because the more visitors stay at the KNP, the more they spend.

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