

**INFLUENCE OF SAFETY ON TOURISM DESTINATION CHOICE: A CASE STUDY OF QUEEN
ELIZABETH NATIONAL PARK, QENP SUBMITTED**

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the impact of safety on tourists' destination choices, focusing on Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) in Uganda. The objectives included assessing the role of destination image and familiarity, current safety measures, and the relationship between safety and destination choice. Using a mixed-method approach, the study sampled 91 tourists, park officials, and local community members through random and purposive sampling. Results indicated that destination image ($\beta = 0.492$, $p = 0.000$) and safety ($\beta = 0.455$, $p = 0.000$) significantly influenced destination choice, while familiarity ($\beta = 0.051$, $p = 0.601$) did not. The findings highlight the importance of a positive destination image and effective safety measures in attracting tourists. Recommendations include enhancing destination image through strategic branding, investing in safety infrastructure, promoting sustainable tourism, and encouraging cultural interactions to enrich tourist experiences and foster loyalty.

DECLARATION

I, **Akankunda Daphine** hereby declare that this is my original work, is not plagiarized and has not been submitted any other institution for any award.

.....

Signature

...../...../.....

Date

APPROVAL

This is to declare that this dissertation has been submitted for examination with my approval as a university supervisor.

.....

...../...../.....

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Date

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DEDICATION

I hereby dedicate this report to the Almighty God, my parents, relatives and friends for the support they have given to me during my academic journey; spiritually, financially and emotionally to make it a success. May the almighty God bless you abundantly.

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Firstly, I thank the almighty God who enabled me to finish this work and my academics, glory is back to him.

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LIST OF ACROYNMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

QENP: Queen Elizabeth National Park

UNWTO: World Tourism Organization

IATA: International Air Transport Association

NGOs: Non-Governmental Organizations

UTB: Uganda Tourism Board

UWA: Uganda Wildlife Authority

UTS: University of Technology Sydney

UGBS: University of Ghana Business School

UCC: Uganda Communications Commission

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the back ground of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives of the study, questions of research, scope of the study, significance of study and conceptual framework.

1.2 Background to the study

According to Cooper et al. (2005) a destination can be defined as “a place to which people travel and which they do not inhabit but which they use for a range of leisure or tourism-related activities.” They acknowledge that destinations are not permanent residences but rather places that individuals travel to temporarily to engage in leisure pursuits. This definition underscores the notion that destinations cater to a diverse range of activities and experiences sought by tourists, reflecting the multifaceted nature of tourism destinations. Hall's definition focuses on the experiential aspect of destinations, highlighting that visitors engage in a set of experiences within a physical space. It suggests that destinations encompass not only attractions and amenities but also the activities that visitors participate in during their visit. By mentioning the limited duration of visits, this definition recognizes that tourism experiences within destinations are often temporary and time-bound (Hall, 2008). Goeldner and Ritchie (2009) study emphasizes the geographical aspect of a destination, referring to it as a specific area consisting of tourism-related businesses and attractions. It underscores the idea that destinations are not only defined by their physical location but also by the range of tourism-related offerings they provide. By mentioning the clustering of tourism businesses and attractions, this definition highlights the interconnectedness and interdependence of different entities within a destination.

Destination choice can be referred to as a complex decision-making process involving the evaluation of alternative destinations based on tourists' preferences, perceptions, and constraints. This definition underscores the complexity of destination choice, suggesting that it entails assessing multiple factors and trade-offs before making a decision (Beerli and Martin (2019); Wang et al., 2020). Destination choice covers multifaceted processes involving the

evaluation of destination attributes, risk perceptions, and emotional responses, leading to the selection of a preferred destination. The importance of emotional and perceptual factors in destination choice, suggest that tourists' feelings and perceptions play a significant role in decision-making (Lepp et al., 2022). Tourist destination choice will highly depend on a number of factors and these can be social, cultural, personal and psychological factors, the number of tourists' attractions, available amenities, price, human resources and various types of tourism destinations (Mim et al., 2022). It is imperative for both institutions and companies to understand factors influencing tourists' choices of destination. Destination, beyond being a mere product, embodies a subjective perception shaped by diverse factors, as highlighted by Buhalis (2000). These factors encompass social, cultural, personal, and psychological dimensions, along with considerations such as the array of tourist attractions, available amenities, pricing, human resources, and the diversity of destination types.

Tourists face the challenge of assessing the various attributes of potential destinations and determining which ones align with their preferences and needs. This can be particularly daunting given the abundance of information available and the subjective nature of perceptions. Concerns about personal safety and security can significantly influence destination choice (Bieger et al., 2016). According to Bieger et al., (2016) study destinations offering diverse cultural experiences, historical sites, and authentic traditions may appeal to tourists interested in cultural immersion. Accessibility, transportation networks, accommodation options, and amenities play a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions of a destination's convenience and comfort. Destination image is shaped by perceptions, stereotypes, and promotional efforts, which may not always align with the reality experienced by tourists. Conflicting or inaccurate destination images can lead to mismatched expectations and dissatisfaction among visitors. The way a destination is positioned and marketed influences its perceived image and differentiation from competitors (Pike, 2015). According to Stepchenkova & Zhan (2015) study recommendations from friends, family, and online reviews play a significant role in shaping destination image and influencing travellers' decisions. The tourism industry of the 21st Century faces risky events represented by various types of crises such as natural disasters, terrorism, danger of pandemics, political and economic uncertainties which impose a risk to health and safety for potential tourists (Estevao & Costa, 2020).

In Ugandan's economy, (UNWTO, 2019) explains that international tourism fell by 80% in July and August 2020 compared to 2019, in late October they estimated a fall in international arrivals of around 70% for 2020, more so, the International Air Transport Association (IATA) reported a 99% drop in international air travels with the rebound only expected to start in the third quarter of 2021. In 2022, Uganda's tourism industry was hit by effects of Ebola which forced many tourists to cancel their trips to Uganda (Halima Athumani, 2022). On 12th June 2023, UK issued a terror alert on Uganda advising all its citizens to be careful within Uganda and if possible, should reconsider when choosing a destination (Ajuna., 2023). Irvine and Anderson (2006) found that risk perception influences tourists' behavior to avoid or cancel their travelling plans. In general, tourists make their travel decisions based on perceptions rather than reality (Roehl & Fesenmaier, 1992). As tourists will not be willing to risk themselves in a dangerous situation, they tend to use the perception as a pre-emptive decision to avoid any uncertainties. Besides attractive products offering, a destination would need to ensure that their visitors will have a safe and secure stay.

Destination safety is one of the important factors that tourists consider when making travel decisions especially when making overseas places that are unfamiliar to them (Reisinger & Mavondo, 2005). Destination safety in the context of tourism refers to the overall state of security and well-being for visitors within a specific travel location. It encompasses various aspects such as physical safety from crime, terrorism, natural disasters, and accidents, as well as the provision of essential services, infrastructure, and healthcare facilities to ensure visitors' welfare (Dolnicar & Grun, 2013). Additionally, destination safety involves the perception of security, including tourists' feelings of comfort, trust, and confidence in their surroundings. This perception can be influenced by factors such as the destination's reputation, the effectiveness of law enforcement, the presence of safety measures, and the prevalence of risks. Ensuring destination safety is crucial for attracting and retaining tourists, as it directly impacts their decision-making process and overall experience (World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), 2018).

Safety stands as a fundamental pillar in the development of any tourism destination. The inherent anxiety associated with travel, particularly concerning safety, arises from the relative lack of familiarity with the destination compared to one's own country. Concerns about physical harm, ranging from crime and terrorism to road accidents, weigh heavily on the minds of

tourists and locals alike. The fragility of the tourism industry hinges on various factors, including economic stability, political conditions, and, notably, assurances of safety and security. The perception of a destination as unsafe can profoundly impact its image and deter potential visitors. According to Min et al. (2022), the character of the physical environment, the likelihood of criminal and the likelihood of a tourist being attacked contribute to the tourist's sense of safety, more so, all tourist sites, including transportation routes, zoos, parks, restaurants, rest rooms, hotels, malls, and religious places, require a high level of safety for visitors. If the safety image of the destination in tourist-generating regions is tarnished by media attention, it will have an impact on both tourism and economy (Liliana, 2011).

The Safety of tourists who visit QENP located in the western part of Uganda has brought about a number of concerns especially after the killings of the 41 children in Kasese district on 16th June, 2023 (Bagala., A. 2023). Therefore the, problem of declining tourist visits to QENP could be aligned with different factors including safety and security influencing tourists' destination choice. There is no evidence of such study in Uganda which presents a knowledge gap and thus there is a need to conduct such study on influence of safety on tourists' destination choice in Uganda a case of Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP).

1.3 Problem statement

Tourism plays a pivotal role in the economic development of nations, and the choice of a tourist destination is significantly influenced by safety considerations. In the case of Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) in Uganda, understanding the influence of safety on tourist destination choice is crucial for the sustainable development of the tourism sector (Karl & Schmude, 2017). Safety is a key aspect for the success of tourism in every destination. which highly affects tourists' intentions to travel (Ding & Wu, 2022). Destinations can only attract tourists when they are safe and do not imply any risk to their health and safety, Marine-Roig, & Huertas, 2020).

The Ugandan government, through agencies like the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) and Uganda Tourism Board (UTB), has implemented various measures to enhance safety in tourist destinations, including QENP. For example, in 2019, UWA's Annual Report outlined efforts to strengthen security measures in national parks, additionally, the Uganda Tourism Board's Tourism Development Strategy (2018) highlighted initiatives aimed at enhancing the overall

tourist experience, but the specific impact of these measures on safety perceptions remains understudied. Lepp, Gibson, and Tan (2022) have emphasized the importance of public awareness campaigns to educate both tourists and locals about safety measures and potential risks in tourist destinations. Government bodies such as the Uganda Tourism Board (UTB) and NGOs like the Uganda Wildlife Authority (UWA) have implemented training programs for tourism stakeholders, including tour guides, park rangers, and hospitality staff. This training, as suggested by Stepchenkova and Zhan (2015), aims to equip them with the necessary skills to handle emergencies and ensure the safety of tourists during their visits.

Despite the importance of safety, there is a noticeable research gap in comprehensively exploring the dynamics of safety and its impact on tourism in QENP (Wanyama, 2022). In 2015, Smith and Johnson conducted a case study titled "Wildlife Conservation and Tourism: A Case Study of Queen Elizabeth National Park," focusing on ecological aspects but not extensively addressing safety dynamics. In 2017, Doe et al. presented a global perspective on "Tourist Safety in National Parks," providing insights into safety considerations but lacking a specific focus on QENP.

While there have been studies on risk perception and travel decisions (Irvine & Anderson, 2006), there is a need for more comprehensive risk assessments specific to tourist destinations in Uganda. Jamal & Budke (2017) provides that there is often a lack of well-coordinated emergency response plans in place. Government bodies and NGOs should work together to develop and implement robust emergency response plans tailored to different tourist destinations, ensuring timely and effective assistance in case of emergencies. Government agencies and NGOs could collaborate to conduct thorough risk assessments to identify potential hazards and vulnerabilities, allowing for targeted mitigation strategies. While infrastructure development has been emphasized (Bieger, Laesser, & Wittmer, 2016), remote tourist destinations in Uganda still lack adequate infrastructure, posing safety risks for tourists. Further investment in infrastructure, such as roads, telecommunications, and medical facilities, particularly in remote areas, is essential to improve accessibility and emergency response capabilities.

The continuous existence of unsafe factors around QENP for example the kidnap of a tourist and her driver on April 2, 2019, ethnic clashes especially between the Bakonzo and other tribes which lead to the death of 100 people (Daily Monitor e-paper September, 2020), floods that

have affected Kasese 8 times since 2013 (Ministry of Water and Environment report, 2022) are most likely to lead to a stagnant number of visitors choosing to visit this place. Therefore, a need to investigate the influence of safety on tourist destination choice while considering Queen Elizabeth national park as a case study.

1.4 Objectives of the study

1.4.1 Major objective

The purpose of the study was to examine the influence of safety on tourist destination choice a case of Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP).

1.4.2 Specific objectives

- (i) To examine the factors (destination image and familiarity) that influence tourist destination choice
- (ii) To examine the current safety measures at the tourist destination.
- (iii) To establish the relationship between safety and tourist destination choice.

1.5 Research questions

- a) What are other factors that influence tourist destination choice?
- b) What are the current safety measures at the tourist destination?
- c) What is the relationship between safety and tourist destination choice, QENP?

1.6 Significance of the study.

The management of Queen Elizabeth National Park and other tourist destinations are hoped to benefit from the findings of the study as they make policies concerning tourists' destination choice since they will understand different safety measures and other key factors that influence tourists' destination choices.

The study findings will act as stepping stone for future researchers and academicians interested in pursuing a similar as it will suggests areas of further research.

The findings on practices and recommendations of the study are hoped to add onto the theory of safety on tourists' destination choice in Uganda.

1.7 Scope of the study

The study focused on the influence of safety on tourist destination choice at Queen Elizabeth National Park.

Queen Elizabeth National Park is located in southwestern Uganda, covering parts of the districts of Kasese, Kamwenge, Bushenyi, and Rukungiri. It is situated approximately 376 kilometres (234 miles) by road from the capital city, Kampala. The park spans an area of about 1,978 square kilometres (764 square miles) and is one of Uganda's most popular and diverse protected areas, known for its wide range of wildlife, including elephants, lions, hippos, and various bird species

The study was carried out for a period of 5 months that is from March 2024 to July 2024. This time was long enough to enable the researcher to come up with research proposal, collect data and prepare the research report.

1.8 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework shows the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variables as shown below.

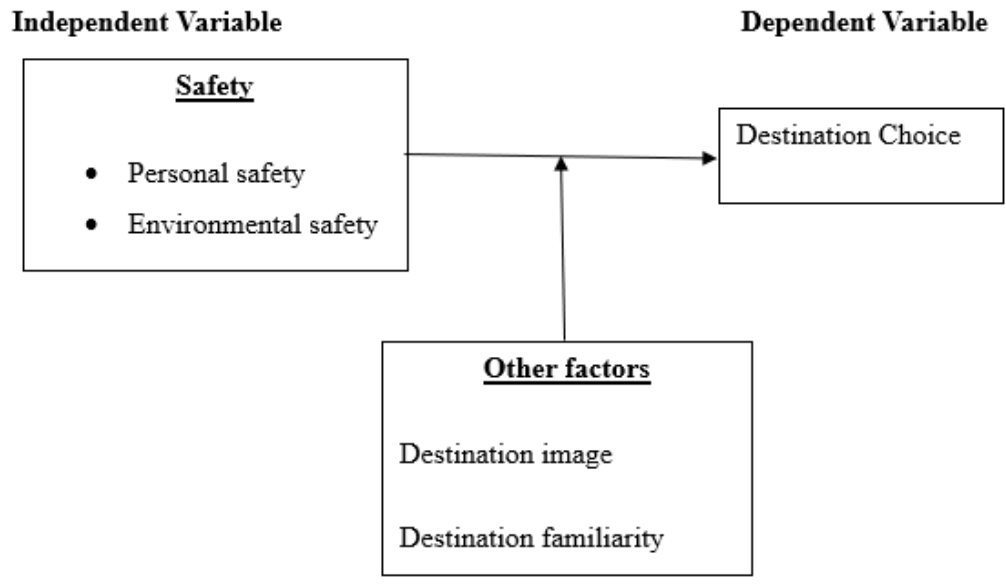


Figure 1.1: Conceptual Framework

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

The literature review in this Chapter provides a comprehensive examination of key terms and concepts related to the influence of safety on tourist destination choice. It explores the existing body of knowledge and research relevant to the study. The literature review is structured to address each of the research objectives and systematically explore the research findings, theories and scholarly works related to key terms and concepts.

2.1 Destination choice

Destination choice is a multifaceted concept that has been explored by various authors from different angles. The complexity of decision-making associated with the selection of a holiday destination has led these numerous studies, which rely on different theories about consumer decision-making. (Masiero & Qiu, 2018). According to Pizam and Mansfeld (2015) destination choice is a process by which individuals select a place to visit as a leisure destination considering a set of alternatives and based on personal and interpersonal factors, Choi & Chu (2018) focused on the information aspect describing destination choice as the outcome of an information search process involving various information sources which influences an individual's travel decision. Destination choice refers to narrowing down the number of destinations and making a final decision by potential tourists. Before choosing a holiday destination, people gather information and assess the pros and disadvantages of each (Crompton, 2021).

The choice of destination is impacted by internal and external factors (motivation, personality, travel costs, accessibility, and the surrounding environment) and because each site has its own demand type, destination marketers must consider visitor motivations when recommending destinations. Marketers must also consider the motives of new tourists as well as current tourists' objectives and needs. The impact of factors such as basic tourist personality traits (Lepp & Gibson, 2018), distance from or cost of a site, and climate information on destination selection has been explored (Bigano et al., 2016). While these studies examine how a

destination's qualities affect visitors' intentions to visit, return, or never return, the importance of a visitor's choice of location within a specific area is often disregarded.

Familiarity should be studied more closely when it comes to destination sub-choices. Among the different literature of choice and behavior of tourists, it is also well-recognized that distinctive patterns are observed among different types of tourists. In particular, leisure tourists, in contrast to business and visiting friends and relative travelers, are considered to have more flexibility in their choices and spend the most. (Masiero & Qiu, 2018). Tourists' choices, according to Dellaert et al. (2018), are multi-faceted and change over time. Brau (2018) found that fair access to key attractions and environmental quality were the most important criteria in attracting tourists. Segumpan et al., (2017) evaluated a city's family tourism activities and according to their research, the most critical elements that families consider when determining whether to travel domestically or internationally are cost, safety, and the chance to travel together.

2.2 Theoretical Review

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). Developed by Ajzen in 1991, TPB posits that behavioral intentions are influenced by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the context of tourist destination choice, attitudes towards safety, subjective norms regarding safety recommendations from peers or authorities, and perceived control over safety-related risks may shape tourists' intentions to visit a destination (Ajzen, 1991). In the study by Chen and Chen (2010), the results have shown that tourists who perceived safety positively were more likely to express intentions to visit a destination like Queen Elizabeth National Park. Additionally, those who perceived safety norms from peers or authorities as favourable, and felt they had control over safety concerns, were also more inclined to choose the destination.

Push-Pull Theory. The push-pull theory, initially proposed by Dann in 1977 and later refined by Uysal and Jurowski in 1994, suggests that tourists are pushed from their origin by factors such as dissatisfaction or boredom and pulled towards destinations by attractions and amenities. Safety concerns can act as both push and pull factors. Perceptions of safety at a destination may push tourists away from unsafe areas while safety assurances may pull them towards safer destinations (Dann, 1977; Uysal and Jurowski, 1994). Research by Gursoy et al. (2002) found that tourists were pushed away from destinations with perceived safety risks, such as areas

known for civil unrest or high crime rates. Conversely, Huan et al. (2005) found that effective safety measures implemented by destinations increased their attractiveness, pulling tourists towards them despite potential safety concerns.

Destination Image Theory. Destination image theory, proposed by Baloglu and McCleary in 1999, posits that tourists' perceptions of a destination are shaped by various factors including marketing, word-of-mouth, and personal experiences. Safety perceptions significantly contribute to destination image formation. Positive safety perceptions enhance destination attractiveness, while negative perceptions deter tourists from choosing a destination (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999). Hypothetically, Beerli and Martin (2004) might find that destinations with positive safety perceptions among tourists had more favourable destination images, leading to increased tourist interest and visitation. Similarly, Echtner and Ritchie (2003) showed that safety-related imagery played a crucial role in shaping tourists' perceptions of destinations.

2.3 Relationship between Safety and Tourist Destination Choice

All tourist sites, including transportation routes, zoos, parks, restaurants, rest rooms, hotels, malls, and religious places, require a high level of safety for visitors (Abraham & Mansfel, 2018). The number of tourists and the amount of money they bring in will fall if any civil upheaval culminates in violence is reported in the media. It doesn't matter if you call it safety or security; they're both critical to the tourism sector. Other factors that contribute to a tourist's sense of safety include the character of the physical environment, the likelihood of criminal behavior (such as pickpocketing or theft), and the likelihood of a tourist being attacked. If the safety image of the destination in tourist-generating regions is tarnished by media attention, it will have an impact on tourism, which in turn will have an impact on the economy (Tarlow, 2014). The intersection of safety, security, reputation, and economic viability is where certainty in tourism is found and the goal of ensuring certainty is to lessen the likelihood of a negative occurrence occurring. Crime, terrorism, food safety, health difficulties, and natural catastrophes are the five key factors affecting the tourism business in this new era (Mohd & Masron, 2014).

According to research by Eitzinger & Wiedemann (2019), tourists are exposed to varying degrees of risk, and their choice of location is not solely determined by price or image of the area, but also by their own level of personal safety and security. The threat to safety is a strong

deterrent to taking a vacation, but this can change from one geographical region to another while the perception of risk is of high importance in the choice process, previous travel experience also has a strong influence on choosing a vacation destination (Jonas et al., 2011). Xie et al. (2021) reported that the perceived safety of tourists influenced their travel intentions which indicates that safety is a crucial factor of tourism, more so, personal safety of visitors and the safety of their property including their ability to orient themselves in an unfamiliar environment and social conventions have a strong influence on tourist destination choice. Media reports and social media can have a significant impact on safety perceptions, negative news or viral incidents can discourage tourists (Smith & Chen, 2021).

Vassell et al. (2019) studied the impact of safety on destination choice and found out that safety is a critical factor influencing travelers' decisions, tourists often prefer destinations perceived as safe and any concerns related to personal safety can deter them from choosing a particular location which aligns with the idea that tourists prioritize their well-being when making travel decisions. Tarlow (2016) emphasized the importance of safety perceptions in travel decision-making. He urged that tourists' subjective perceptions of safety significantly shape their destination choices. The perception of safety can be influenced by various factors such as social media reports, official travel advisories and previous experiences and this highlights that travelers' perceptions and feelings of safety play a central role in their destination choices. Faulker & Vikulov (2021) discussed the role of destination safety measures and they argued that destinations that implement effective safety measures such as visible security well-lit areas and responsive law enforcement tend to attract safety-conscious travelers. This indicates that destinations can influence their appeal by prioritizing safety and providing reassurances to potential tourists.

Hall & O'Sullivan (2013) explored the relationship between safety and destination competitiveness and found out that safety is a fundamental component of a destination's competitiveness in the global tourism market. Safer destinations tend to be more attractive and competitive, attracting a large share of tourists and boosting their tourism industry. Kim & Prideaux (2017) investigated the role of crisis management in maintaining destination reputation and they argued that destinations that effectively manage crises such as natural disasters or security incidents can mitigate the impact on their reputation and continue to be attractive to tourists which demonstrates that not only safety but also how destinations handle

safety-related crises can impact travelers' choices. Ivanov & Ivanov (2021) analyzed travel intentions of tourists in the post-pandemic period on the example of Bulgaria. Findings indicated reliable health system, hygiene as well as disinfection being the most relevant factors in the decision-making process of tourists.

In the research community, concentration is mainly focused on safety concerns such as natural disasters, health epidemics, political instability, war, terrorism, crime or cultural differences all refer to risk which is the opposite perspective of safety and following above facts Nazir et al. (2021) found that perceived risks negatively affect destination image and tourists' behavioral intentions. Parrey et al. (2019) examined the image of the destination given the identified sources of risk and considered sociocultural concerns to be the main source of risk perceived by domestic tourists, tourists with high level of perceived risk tend to have a less positive destination image, overall satisfaction and behavioral intention than tourists with a low perceived risk.

2.4 Current Safety Measures at the Tourist Destination

Despite tourism's economic successes, many people believe that the industry is safety/security dependent and highly sensitive to any form of violence including acts of: terrorism, crime, and/or war. Any form of harm to a tourist can adversely affect the entire industry (Tarlow & Santana 2012). Safety at tourist destinations play a vital role in shaping travelers' choices and overall experiences (Ghazi, 2012). Travelers prioritize destinations that are perceived as safe, making safety measures a crucial factor for both the tourism industry and individual tourists when making destination choices. These safety measures include;

Surveillance and security personnel. Destinations often employ security personnel who are visible to tourists such as patrolling police officers or security guards (Tarlow, 2016). Surveillance systems including CCTV cameras are strategically placed in public areas to monitor activities (Nash, 2014).

Emergency response plans. Many tourist destinations develop comprehensive emergency response plans to address various scenarios, from natural disasters to medical emergencies (Faulkner & Vikulov, 2021).

Public awareness and education. Tourist destinations provide safety information to visitors through brochures, websites, and information centers to ensure travelers are aware of local safety guidelines and emergency procedures (Hall, 2018). Some destinations use mobile apps to deliver real-time safety information to tourists during their visit (Smith & Chen, 2021).

Transportation safety. Ensuring the safety of transportation is paramount with regular maintenance adherence to safety regulations and trained drivers (Uysal & Cobanoglu, 2015). Some destinations have implemented vehicle tracking systems to monitor and improve transportation safety (Kim & Prideaux, 2017).

Health and sanitation measures. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, many destinations have implemented health and sanitation measures including mask mandates, social distancing guidelines and vaccination requirements (World Health Organization, 2021). Health checkpoints and testing facilities have been established at entry points to ensure visitors' health and safety (Smith, 2015).

2.5 Other factors that influence tourist destination choice

Destination choice is a multifaceted process influenced by a wide array of factors, including personal motivations, information sources, sociodemographic characteristics, and mental image of a destination. Understanding these factors is crucial for the travel industry and destination marketers to effectively target and cater to travelers' preferences and needs. Factors that influence tourist destination choice include;

2.5.1 Destination familiarity

The process of making a travel decision is dangerous and uncertain. Travelers seek ways to lessen the risks associated with the destinations they choose for their vacations in the same way that consumers do when making product purchase decisions, where the perception of purchase risk causes caution or risk aversion and leads to various risk-handling activities intended to reduce choice uncertainty (Campbell & Goodstein, 2018). According to the research of Chen & Lin (2021), tourists feel more secure in places they are familiar with, while places they are unfamiliar with may be seen as more dangerous. This is so because familiarity reduces the impression of risk and so increases the confidence of passengers in their destination decision

Lepp & Gibson (2017) argued that risk perceptions and decisions can be influenced by familiarity, which has been found in both the product selection and tourist literatures while people's mental imagery and desire to travel to a place improve when they have a high level of familiarity with the location. Consumer research demonstrates that product familiarity reduces risk and increases the likelihood that a new product or brand would be chosen over an existing one, more so, familiarity with tourist destinations is also an essential factor in influencing tourist travel inclinations and the risk perceptions of tourists (Heilman et al., 2020). Through previous travels or information about a destination, familiarity can be improved and this may explain why long-haul travelers may have a higher sense of risk due to a lack of prior travel experience and knowledge about a destination, but short-haul passengers may have a lower impression of risk. In addition, long-haul travel often has larger financial risks (costs) than short-haul travel. Long-haul travelers must be familiar with a location since the dangers connected with long-haul travel tend to be higher than those associated with short-haul trips (Baloglu, 2021).

2.5.2 Destination image

According to Jalilvand et al. (2022), a person's overall impression of a location is referred to as "destination image". They continued and reported that the information source (stimulus/pull factors) indirectly affects tourists' opinions toward the destination through the image of the place. Destination image can also be defined as "the overall perception of the destination that is formed by processing information from various sources over time" for example, (Assael, 2021). The image of a destination has long been a focus of marketing scholarship in tourism and according to research conducted by Song et al., (2017) among golf tourists in Hainan Area, China, the perception of a tourist location has a considerable impact on the likelihood that those tourists will return.

According to Kim et al., (2018), both high- and low-spending tourists' intentions to return to Crete were positively correlated with the destination's image. It was found that travelers who had a favorable overall impression of the destination were more likely to return and suggest the place they had visited to others and this suggests that if a tourist's spot's reputation as a destination is tarnished in any way, it will influence their desire to return there. Similarly, a study of Iranian tourists found that the country's image as a sports tourism destination increases people's desire to return (Allameh et al., 2015).

In the field of tourism, Baloglu & McCleary (2019) found that stimuli and personal variables had a beneficial impact on the perception of a location. As a result, tourists' perceptions of the destination have a considerable impact on their attitude toward the place (Kim and Stepchenkova, 2015). consumer attitude formation has been studied by Zhou & Bao (2002), who identified perception as an important mediator between the relationship between motivation and attitude. It's essential that the product had a good effect on visitors' decision-making process (Hossain & Khan, 2018).

2.5.3 Destination attributes

Holloway et al. (2019) use destination as a synonym for attraction, however acknowledging that the term of tourist attraction is not clear: any site that addresses to people reasonably to stimulate them to travel and visit it should be evaluated as a tourist attraction and argues that it is hard to define the boundaries of destination. Blasco et al., (2016) reported that destinations are well-defined geographical areas and this view states that a destination is a uniquely complex product or even a portfolio of products and services comprising an area's climate, infrastructure and superstructure as well as natural and cultural attributes and in customer-oriented studies, destination is a service environment facilitating the experience. He continues and provides and defined a destination as a place where a tourist can rest, walk, spend his time in nature, see historical monuments, attend festivals, events, taste local cuisine and be part of unique features of a destination.

Destination contains a number of key elements that attract visitors and meet their needs upon arrival and these elements are defined and categorized by many authors; Baloglu & McCleary (2019) provide insights into how destination attributes, including safety, cultural attractions, and natural beauty, influence tourists' choices. They state that these are only core elements in a successful destination whose achievement in attracting tourists will rely on upon the quality of those crucial advantages that they offer them.

Buhalis (2020) suggests six important components of a destination, which include: attractions, accessibility, amenities, available packages, activities and ancillary services that tourists rely on to choose a destination. According to Moutinho (2015), these attributes are: cost, attractions, amenities, travel opportunities, travel arrangements and travel information. all of these

elements and attributes have the same purposes, but in a slightly different manner, which is to make destination suitable and available for tourists.

2.6 Research gap

While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the influence of safety on tourist destination choice, several research gaps persist. Firstly, there is a need for more empirical studies focusing specifically on the safety perceptions of tourists in the context of specific destinations, such as Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP). While some studies have examined safety perceptions in general tourism contexts, few have delved into the nuances of safety concerns within specific destinations, particularly those in developing countries like Uganda. Understanding tourists' perceptions of safety within QENP is essential for destination managers to develop targeted strategies to address safety concerns and enhance visitor experiences.

Secondly, existing research has predominantly focused on tourists' perceptions of safety as a unidimensional construct, overlooking the multidimensional nature of safety concerns. Safety encompasses various dimensions, including personal safety, health safety, and environmental safety, each of which may influence tourists' destination choices differently. There is a need for studies that adopt a multidimensional approach to assess tourists' perceptions of safety comprehensively. By examining the relative importance of different safety dimensions and their impact on destination choice, researchers can provide more nuanced insights into the role of safety in shaping tourists' behavior. Such insights are crucial for destination managers to develop targeted safety interventions that address tourists' diverse safety concerns effectively.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This section covers the research design, study population, sample size determination, sampling techniques, data collection methods, data collection instruments, pre-testing (validity and reliability), ethical consideration, data presentation and analysis and limitation of study.

3.1 Research Design

The research design for this study was a mixed-method approach. This approach combines both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive understanding of the influence of safety on tourist destination choice at QENP.

The researcher used a quantitative approach whereby numerical data was collected and analyzed using statistical methods. The study also adopted a qualitative research approach so that more detailed information is obtained from the respondents. Qualitative method allows probing during data collection and hence solicitation of detailed data for supporting quantitative results to arrive at more informed results.

3.2 Target Population

According to Stratton (2021), a population is a complete set of the entire group or individuals with a common observable characteristic. The study population for this study includes tourists during their visits to the park, park management officials and local community members of Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) in Uganda. This diverse population helped in understanding the various perspectives on safety and its influence on tourist destination choice.

3.3 Data Sources

A combination of both primary and secondary data were employed in this study. The primary data was gathered through use of a well-structured and a detailed self-administered

questionnaire. Primary sources provide firsthand information that is more reliable in making deductions from the study (Salkind, 2012).

Secondary data was collected from textbooks, research papers, journals and dissertations with information related to the purpose of this study. Secondary data sources provide support to statistical data and literature in regard to the the problem that is under investigation (Panchenko & Samovilova, 2020).

3.4 Sample size Determination

According to Mooney (2019), a sample size is defined as a subset of a particular selected population. The sample size will be determined using (Krejcie & Morgan’s, 1970) Table. The table below shows how a sample 91 respondents was drawn from the three categories.

Table 3.1: Sample size determination

Category	Population, (N)	Sample size (S)
Tourists	95	76
Local community leaders	10	10
Park officials	05	05
Total	N=110	S=91

3.5 Sampling Techniques

A purposive sampling method was used to select participants for the study. Tourists were approached during their visits to QENP, and those willing to participate in the survey were included. For qualitative data, participants were selected based on their relevance to the study, including tourists, park officials, and local community members. This technique was considered since it is less costly and saves time; it enables the researcher to acquire an in-depth understanding of the problem and to gain richer, useful and focused information (Thomas, 2020).

For quantitative data, simple random sampling method was used to select participants for the study. It is a type of probability sampling in which the researcher randomly selects a subset of participants from a population. Each member of the population has an equal chance of being selected. Data is then collected from as large a percentage as possible of this random subset

(Thomas, 2020). This sampling technique was used because it ensures that every member has an equal chance of being recruited into the sample and also eliminates bias in data collection.

3.6 Data collection Methods

Data was collected using both interview method and questionnaire method.

3.6.1 Questionnaire Method

This method was used to collect quantitative data. Questionnaires are a list of questions either open-ended or close-ended for which the respondents give answers (Muhammad & Kabir, 2018). Questionnaire method allows the consistent collection of quantitative data for better analysis, are inexpensive to design and administer and consume less time to administer. These were distributed to tourists, community local leaders and park management officials to assess the influence of safety on tourist destination choice at Queen Elizabeth National Park.

3.6.2 Interview method

In-depth interviews and key informant interview were used to collect qualitative data. An interview may be structured (where you ask clearly defined questions) or unstructured, where you allow some of your questioning to be led by the responses of the interviewee (Osang, 2013). Interviews were used by the study because they enable the study to get in depth information especially from people in high superiority positions and also allow further probing and giving clarity when questions cannot easily be understood by the interviewee. Participants included local leaders and park management officials who provided data on experiences related to influence of safety on tourist destination choice at Queen Elizabeth National Park.

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

3.7.1 Self-administered Questionnaire

Quantitative Data was collected using questionnaires. The questionnaires include a mix of closed-ended questions with predefined response options and open-ended questions to encourage participants to provide detailed responses. The questionnaire comprised of closed questions structured in nature whose variables were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (5

strongly Agree, 4 Agree, 3 Not sure, 2 Disagree and 1 strongly Disagree) in order to gather the different perceptions and views of the respondents to answer the questionnaire.

3.7.2 Interview Guide

Qualitative data was collected using interview guide. The interview guide consisted of a set of open-ended questions designed to explore specific topics related to tourist safety and destination choice perspectives. The guide was flexible to allow for probing follow-up questions based on interviewees' responses.

3.8 Validity and Reliability of Research Instrument

3.8.1 Validity of the instrument

The content validity index enabled the researcher to measure the degree to which the question items reflected in the specific areas are covered. Content validity is the degree to which a test or assessment instrument evaluates all aspects of the topic, construct, or behavior that it is designed to measure.

According to Chetwynd (2022) any content validity index (CVI) that is greater than 0.7 means that the instrument is valid for research purposes. The researcher employed the following formula for validity test. Content validity index (CVI) for the overall instrument was calculated using the formula:

$$\text{CVI} = \frac{\text{Number of items regarded relevant}}{\text{Total number of items}}$$

3.8.2 Reliability of research Instrument

Reliability refers to the likelihood of getting the same results over and over again if a measure is repeated in the same circumstances (Chetwynd, 2022). Reliability ensures that measures are free from error so that they give same results when repeated measurements are made under constant conditions. The researcher checked the questionnaires to ensure that all the questions are answered appropriately. The pre-test contributes to the credibility, dependability and trustworthiness of the questionnaires. The findings from the test were coded in the SPSS, a

computer package to test for reliability at the Cronbach's alpha coefficient so as to assess the internal consistency above 0.70.

3.9 Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained in the reporting of findings. Approval from relevant authorities and ethical review boards was sought.

3.10 Data Presentation and Analysis

3.10.1 Data Presentation

Data collected from the field was tabulated, sorted, edited, classified and coded into a coding sheet. The cleaned data was summarized and converted into frequencies and percentages using the category system. The data analyzed was presented using frequency distribution tables for easy interpretation. Pearson's Correlation Coefficients was run to establish the relationship among the study variables as set in the objectives

3.10.2 Quantitative Data Analysis

The researcher used Statistical Package for Social Scientists to (SPSS) to analyze the data collected. Descriptive statistics, such as means and frequencies, were used to summarize safety perceptions and other factors influencing destination choice. Inferential statistics, such as regression analysis, were employed to identify the relationships between safety and destination choice factors.

3.10.3 Qualitative Data Analysis

Qualitative data was analysed using thematic analysis. Transcripts from interviews and focus group discussions were coded, and themes related to safety, decision-making were identified. These themes were used to provide a rich narrative and context for the study.

3.11 Limitation of the study

Inadequate time frame due to the fact that the researcher had to finish the study within the specified period offered by the university. This was solved through making timely editing of the work as desired by the supervisor.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the analysis, presentation, and interpretation of the data collected from the study on the influence of safety on tourist destination choice at Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP). The results are based on responses from the distributed questionnaires and key informant interviews.

4.1 Response rate

Table 4.2 Results on response rate

Response rate	Frequency	Percentage
Returned questionnaires	89	97.8
Not returned questionnaires	2	2.2
Total	91	100.0

The response rate for the study was exceptionally high, with 97.8% of the distributed questionnaires returned. The negligible percentage of unreturned questionnaires (2.2%) is unlikely to affect the overall results or conclusions significantly. The implications of this high response rate are that the study's findings can be considered robust and reflective of the broader population's views on the influence of safety on their choice of Queen Elizabeth National Park as a tourist destination.

4.2 Background information

4.2.1 Findings on sex of the respondent

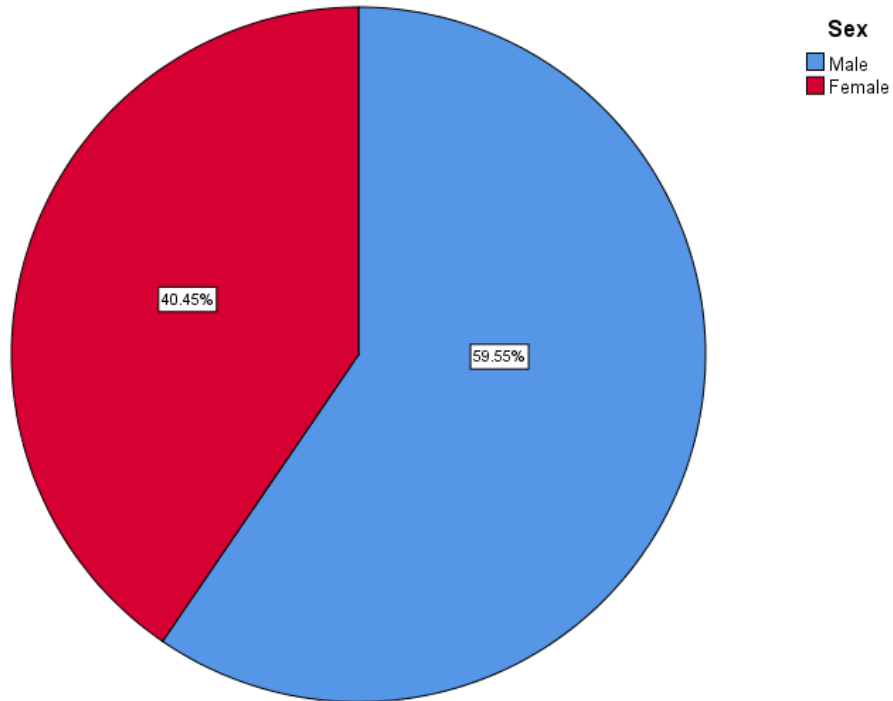


Figure 4.2: Results on sex of the respondent

The pie chart shows that 59.55% of respondents are male and 40.45% are female, indicating a higher proportion of male respondents. This gender distribution suggests that men are either more inclined to visit Queen Elizabeth National Park or more likely to participate in the survey.

4.2.2 Findings on age group of the respondent

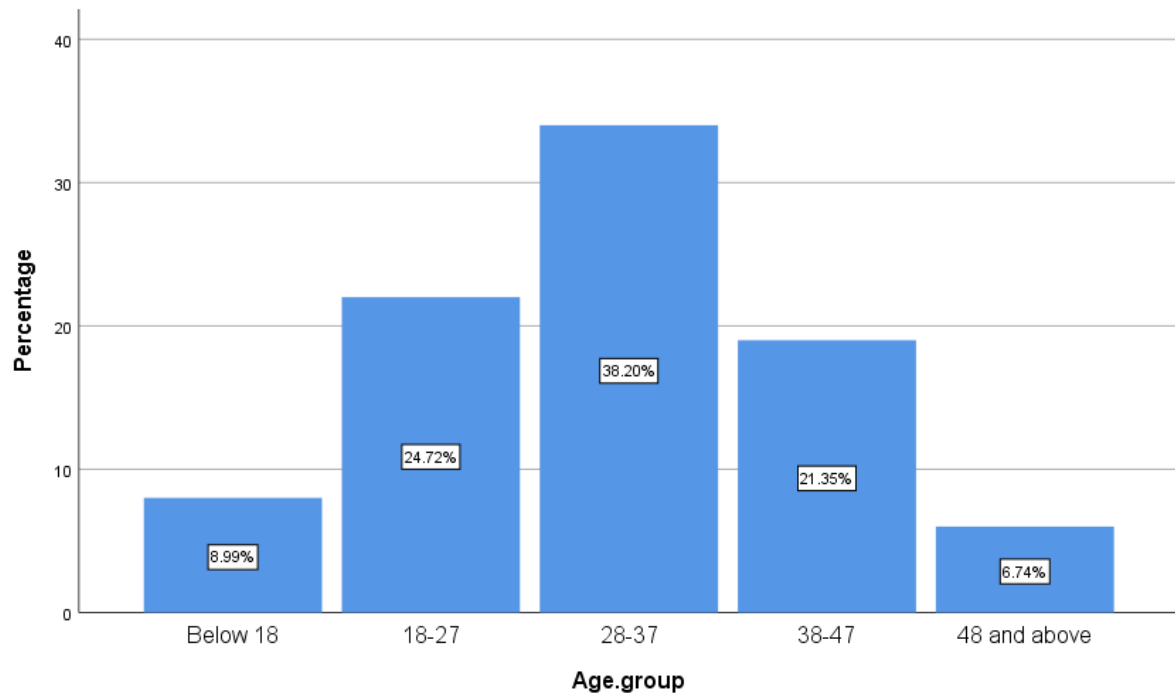


Figure 4.3: Results on age group of the respondent

The bar graph shows that the majority of respondents (38.20%) are aged 28-37, followed by 24.72% aged 18-27, and 21.35% aged 38-47, with smaller percentages for those below 18 (8.99%) and 48 and above (6.74%). This indicates that Queen Elizabeth National Park predominantly attracts young to middle-aged adults. The lower engagement from the youngest and oldest groups may reflect different travel preferences or constraints

4.2.3 Findings on where the respondent first heard about QENP

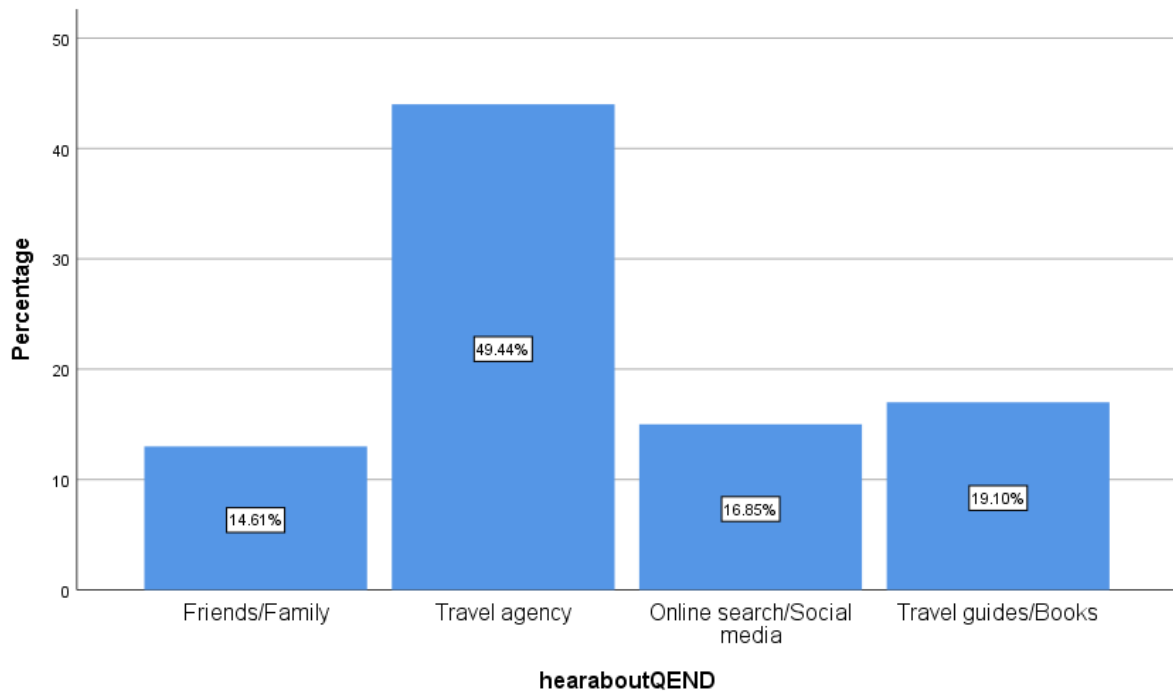


Figure 4.4: Results on where respondents first heard about QENP

The data on how respondents first heard about Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) reveals that 49.4% learned about the park through travel agencies, 19.1% through travel guides/books, 16.9% via online searches or social media, and 14.6% from friends or family. This indicates that travel agencies play a dominant role in informing potential visitors about QENP, highlighting their importance in the park's marketing strategy. The significant percentage of visitors who learned about the park through travel guides and books suggests that traditional media still holds value.

4.2.4 Findings on respondents` travel type

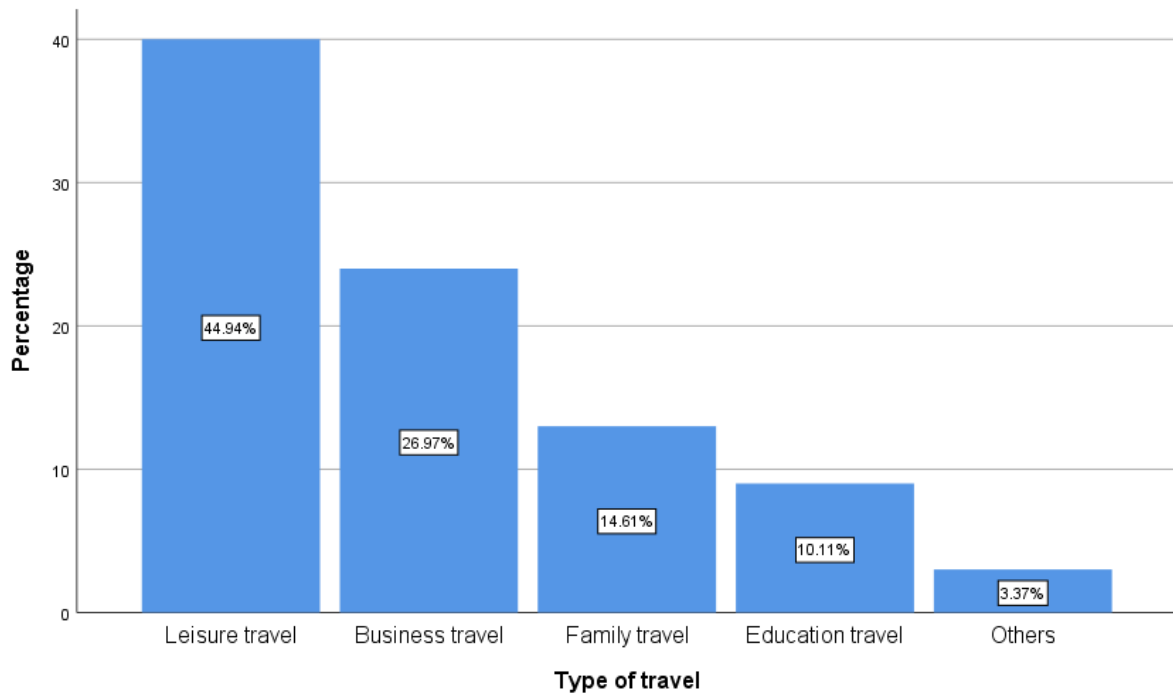


Figure 4.5: Results on type of travel

The data on the type of travel shows that the majority of respondents (44.9%) visit Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) for leisure travel, followed by 27.0% for business travel, 14.6% for family travel, 10.1% for education travel, and 3.4% for other purposes. This indicates that QENP is primarily a leisure destination, attracting tourists who seek relaxation and recreational activities. The significant proportion of business travelers suggests the park also hosts conferences, corporate retreats, or other work-related events

4.2.5 Findings on respondents` number of visits to QENP

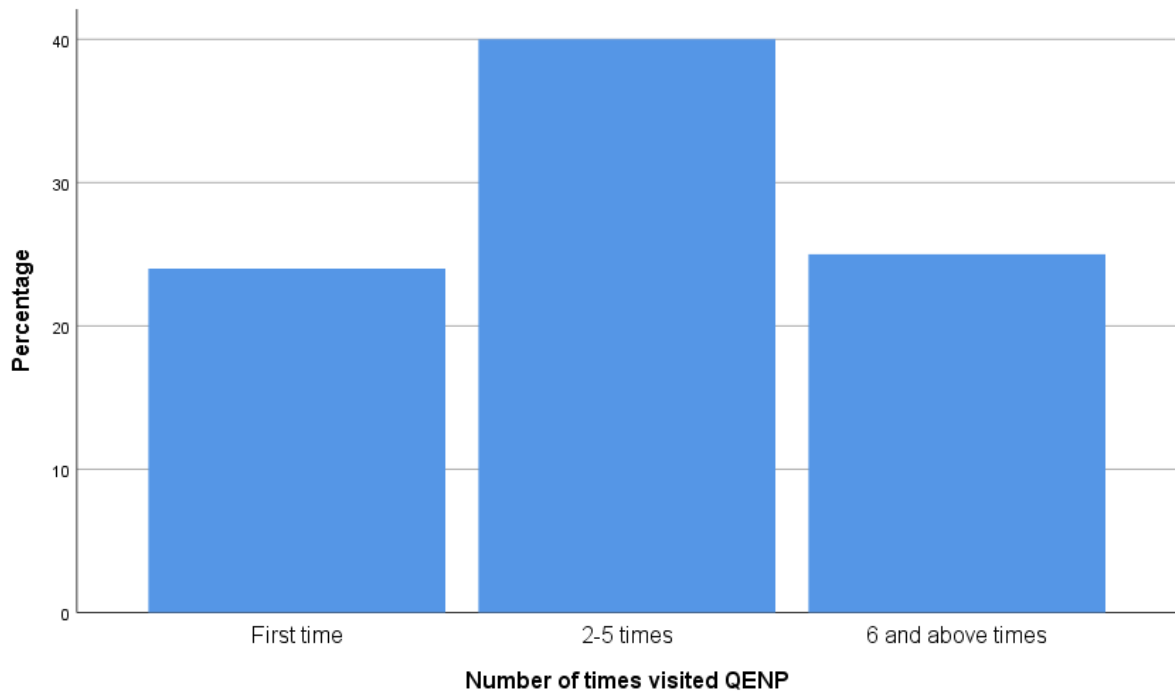


Figure 4.6: Results on number of times respondents have visited QENP

The data on the number of times respondents have visited Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) shows that 27.0% are first-time visitors, 44.9% have visited 2-5 times, and 28.1% have visited 6 or more times. This indicates that a significant portion of visitors are repeat visitors, with nearly three-quarters of respondents having visited the park more than once. The high percentage of repeat visitors suggests a strong satisfaction with the park's offerings and experiences, which is a positive indicator of the park's ability to meet or exceed visitor expectations.

4.3 Influence of destination familiarity on tourist destination choice

Table 4.3: Results on influence of destination familiarity on tourist destination choice

Statements on influence of destination familiarity on tourist destination choice	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am familiar with Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP).	1	5	3.43	.916
I have gathered a lot of information about QENP before my visit.	1	5	3.30	1.016
I feel confident about navigating QENP due to my familiarity.	1	5	3.66	1.215
Familiarity with QENP influenced my decision to visit.	1	5	3.67	1.126
I prefer visiting familiar destinations like QENP.	1	5	3.60	1.222
I rely on past experiences when choosing a destination like QENP.	1	5	3.17	1.316
Word-of-mouth from friends/family familiar with QENP influenced my choice.	1	5	3.55	1.197
Word-of-mouth from friends/family familiar with QENP influenced my choice.	1	5	3.69	1.093
Average	1	5	3.49	1.152

The results from Table 4.3 indicate that familiarity with Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) significantly influences tourists' destination choices, with an overall average mean score of 3.49 and a standard deviation of 1.152 across the statements. Respondents reported a moderate level of familiarity with QENP (mean = 3.43, std. dev. = 0.916), which suggests that prior knowledge about the park is fairly common among visitors. The information gathered before visiting was also considerable (mean = 3.30, std. dev. = 1.016), highlighting the role of pre-visit research. Confidence in navigating QENP due to familiarity was relatively high (mean = 3.66, std. dev. = 1.215), indicating that familiarity helps tourists feel more secure and comfortable. The influence of familiarity on the decision to visit was similarly strong (mean = 3.67, std. dev. = 1.126), emphasizing its importance in the decision-making process. The preference for familiar destinations (mean = 3.60, std. dev. = 1.222) and reliance on past experiences (mean = 3.17, std. dev. = 1.316) suggest that tourists often choose destinations they

know well. Moreover, word-of-mouth from friends and family who are familiar with QENP had a notable impact (mean = 3.55, std. dev. = 1.197), with direct recommendations being particularly influential (mean = 3.69, std. dev. = 1.093). These findings indicate that enhancing tourists' familiarity with QENP through effective marketing and leveraging positive word-of-mouth can significantly influence their decision to visit, promoting both initial and repeat visits by fostering a sense of confidence and security among potential tourists.

4.4 Influence of destination image on tourist destination choice

Table 4.4: Results on influence of destination image on tourist destination choice

Statements about influence of destination image on tourist destination choice	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
QENP has a positive image as a tourist destination.	1	5	3.62	1.153
The natural beauty of QENP influenced my decision to visit.	1	5	3.06	1.101
QENP is known for its rich wildlife diversity.	1	5	3.66	1.167
The reputation of QENP influenced my decision to visit.	1	5	3.40	.974
Positive reviews about QENP influenced my visit.	1	5	3.50	.947
Media portrayal of QENP impacted my destination choice.	1	5	3.79	1.113
QENP is perceived as a safe destination.	1	5	4.12	1.053
The cultural attractions at QENP influenced my decision to visit.	1	5	3.75	1.141
Average	1	5	3.57	1.073

The results from Table 4.4 reveal that the destination image of Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) significantly influences tourists' destination choices, with an overall average mean score of 3.57 and a standard deviation of 1.073. Respondents reported a positive perception of QENP as a tourist destination (mean = 3.62, std. dev. = 1.153), suggesting that the park is generally viewed favorably. The park's natural beauty, while somewhat less influential (mean = 3.06, std. dev. = 1.101), still plays a role in the decision-making process. The rich wildlife diversity of QENP was highly rated (mean = 3.66, std. dev. = 1.167), indicating that the variety of wildlife is a significant draw for visitors. The park's reputation also influenced the decision to visit (mean = 3.40, std. dev. = 0.974), highlighting the importance of the park's overall image

and reputation. Positive reviews (mean = 3.50, std. dev. = 0.947) and media portrayals (mean = 3.79, std. dev. = 1.113) further shaped tourists' perceptions, emphasizing the impact of external opinions and media on destination choice. Notably, QENP's perception as a safe destination received the highest rating (mean = 4.12, std. dev. = 1.053), underscoring the critical importance of safety in attracting tourists. Cultural attractions at QENP also positively influenced the decision to visit (mean = 3.75, std. dev. = 1.141), indicating that cultural experiences are a valued aspect of the park. These findings suggest that enhancing QENP's positive image through targeted marketing strategies that emphasize safety, natural beauty, wildlife diversity, and cultural attractions can significantly boost its appeal and attract more visitors.

4.5 Current safety measures at a tourist destination

This section examines tourists' perceptions of the safety measures in place at Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP). It analyzes various aspects such as security personnel visibility, emergency services, staff training, and communication of safety protocols. The findings provide insights into the effectiveness of these measures and areas needing improvement.

Table 4.5: Current safety measures at a tourist destination

Statements about current safety measures at a tourist destination	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
QENP has visible security personnel.	1	5	3.66	1.167
There are clear safety instructions at QENP.	1	5	3.51	1.332
Emergency services are readily available at QENP.	1	5	3.69	1.202
The park staff are well-trained in safety protocols.	1	5	3.61	1.202
Safety measures at QENP are well-communicated to visitors.	1	5	3.84	1.137
There are sufficient warning signs for potential dangers at QENP.	1	5	3.88	.951
Health facilities are accessible at QENP.	1	5	3.11	1.122
I feel safe from wildlife threats due to the safety measures at QENP.	1	5	3.84	1.167
Average	1	5	3.62	1.161

The results presented in Table 4.5 illustrate tourists' perceptions of current safety measures at Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP), with an overall average mean score of 3.62 and a standard deviation of 1.161. Respondents expressed moderate to high levels of satisfaction with the safety measures in place. The visibility of security personnel (mean = 3.66, std. dev. = 1.167) reassures visitors of their safety, indicating the importance of a visible security presence in fostering a sense of security. Clear safety instructions (mean = 3.51, std. dev. = 1.332) help visitors navigate potential risks, suggesting that well-communicated guidelines are essential for safety. The availability of emergency services (mean = 3.69, std. dev. = 1.202) and well-trained park staff (mean = 3.61, std. dev. = 1.202) further enhance visitors' confidence in their safety, highlighting the need for accessible emergency services and competent staff. The effective communication of safety measures (mean = 3.84, std. dev. = 1.137) and the presence of sufficient warning signs for potential dangers (mean = 3.88, std. dev. = 0.951) are particularly significant in making tourists feel secure, indicating that clear communication and visible warnings are critical. However, the accessibility of health facilities received a lower rating (mean = 3.11, std. dev. = 1.122), indicating a potential area for improvement in ensuring that medical facilities are readily available. Additionally, feeling safe from wildlife threats due to existing safety measures scored high (mean = 3.84, std. dev. = 1.167), underscoring the effectiveness of these measures in mitigating specific risks. Overall, these findings highlight the critical role of comprehensive and well-communicated safety measures in enhancing tourists' confidence and enjoyment of their visit to QENP, suggesting that continued focus on improving health facility access could further bolster visitor satisfaction.

4.6 Influence of destination safety on tourist destination choice

This section examines how perceptions of safety impact tourists' decisions to visit Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP). The analysis focuses on various aspects of safety, including the presence of safety personnel, emergency services, and the park's overall safety reputation. Understanding these factors helps in evaluating the role of safety in shaping tourists' destination choices.

Table 4.6: Results on influence of destination safety on tourist destination choice

Statements about influence of destination safety on tourist destination choice	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Safety is a key factor in my decision to visit QENP.	1	5	3.39	1.183
I feel safe traveling to QENP due to its safety measures.	1	5	3.79	1.113
The safety reputation of QENP influenced my choice to visit.	1	5	3.76	1.034
I prioritize destinations with strong safety records like QENP.	1	5	3.74	1.143
The presence of safety personnel at QENP affects my decision to visit.	2	5	3.92	.980
Clear safety instructions at QENP enhance my willingness to visit.	1	5	3.45	.977
Knowing emergency services are available at QENP impacts my decision to go there.	2	5	3.92	.856
I would not visit QENP if I perceived it as unsafe.	1	5	4.13	.907
Average	1	5	3.68	1.073

The findings presented in Table 4.6 reveal that safety significantly influences tourists' destination choices at Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP), with an overall average mean score of 3.68 and a standard deviation of 1.073. Respondents indicated that safety is a key factor in their decision to visit QENP (mean = 3.39, std. dev. = 1.183), suggesting that perceptions of safety are crucial in attracting visitors. The feeling of safety due to QENP's safety measures (mean = 3.79, std. dev. = 1.113) and the park's safety reputation (mean = 3.76, std. dev. = 1.034) both play substantial roles in influencing tourists' decisions, indicating that a strong safety reputation is vital for maintaining and increasing visitor numbers. Tourists prioritize destinations with strong safety records like QENP (mean = 3.74, std. dev. = 1.143), emphasizing the importance of a solid safety record in destination marketing. The presence of safety personnel at QENP (mean = 3.92, std. dev. = 0.980) and the availability of emergency services (mean = 3.92, std. dev. = 0.856) are particularly influential, highlighting the need for visible and accessible safety measures. Clear safety instructions at QENP (mean = 3.45, std.

dev. = 0.977) also enhance tourists' willingness to visit, underscoring the importance of effective communication of safety protocols. The high score for not visiting QENP if perceived as unsafe (mean = 4.13, std. dev. = 0.907) indicates that safety perceptions can significantly deter potential visitors. Overall, these findings suggest that robust and visible safety measures, a strong safety reputation, and effective communication of safety protocols are critical in attracting and retaining tourists at QENP.

4.7 Tourist destination choice

Table 4.7: Results on tourist destination choice

Statements on tourist destination choice	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
I chose to visit QENP because of its unique wildlife.	1	5	4.11	.885
The natural beauty of QENP influenced my decision to visit.	1	5	3.79	1.113
Positive reviews and recommendations influenced my decision to visit QENP.	1	5	4.12	1.053
The cultural attractions at QENP were a significant factor in my choice to visit	1	5	3.75	1.141
Accessibility and ease of travel to QENP influenced my decision.	1	5	3.84	1.127
The overall reputation of QENP as a tourist destination influenced my choice.	1	5	4.30	.982
Availability of accommodation and other facilities at QENP influenced my decision to visit.	1	5	3.66	1.167
Safety and security at QENP were key factors in my decision to visit.	1	5	3.51	1.332
Average	1	5	3.96	0.837

The results from Table 4.7 provide insights into the factors influencing tourists' decisions to visit Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP). Participants rated their reasons on a scale from 1 to 5, with higher scores reflecting stronger influence. Factors such as QENP's unique wildlife

(Mean = 4.11, Std. Deviation = 0.885) and positive reviews (Mean = 4.12, Std. Deviation = 1.053) received high mean scores, indicating substantial attractiveness to visitors. The park's overall reputation as a tourist destination also had a strong influence (Mean = 4.30, Std. Deviation = 0.982). The natural beauty of QENP (Mean = 3.79, Std. Deviation = 1.113) and ease of accessibility (Mean = 3.84, Std. Deviation = 1.127) were also significant factors but to a slightly lesser extent. Cultural attractions (Mean = 3.75, Std. Deviation = 1.141), availability of accommodation and facilities (Mean = 3.66, Std. Deviation = 1.167), and considerations of safety and security (Mean = 3.51, Std. Deviation = 1.332) received moderate ratings, indicating their role in influencing decisions was less pronounced compared to wildlife and reputation. The relatively low standard deviations across these factors suggest that perceptions among respondents were generally consistent, highlighting the stability of these influences on tourist decision-making.

4.8 Relationship between Tourist destination familiarity, destination image and safety with tourist destination choice

This section explores the relationship between tourist destination familiarity, destination image, destination safety, and their impact on destination choice. The Pearson correlations reveal significant associations between destination image and safety with tourist choices, highlighting their importance in influencing travel decisions

Table 4.8: Pearson correlation coefficient

		Destination Familiarity	Destination Image	Destination Safety
Destination choice	Pearson Correlation	0.248**	0.519**	0.531**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.019	0.000	0.000
	N	89	89	89
**Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)				

At a 95% level of confidence, the correlation analysis reveals significant relationships between tourist destination familiarity, destination image, destination safety, and tourist destination choice. Firstly, destination familiarity exhibits a positive but moderately weak correlation ($r = 0.248$, $p = 0.019$) with destination choice, indicating that as tourists become more familiar with

a destination, they are somewhat more likely to choose it as their destination. Secondly, destination image displays a stronger and highly significant positive correlation ($r = 0.519$, $p = 0.000$) with destination choice, suggesting that a positive perception of a destination's image significantly influences tourists' decision-making processes. Lastly, destination safety shows a similarly strong and highly significant positive correlation ($r = 0.531$, $p = 0.000$) with destination choice, implying that safety considerations play a crucial role in tourists' destination selection. These findings indicate that while familiarity with a destination may contribute to the decision-making process, it is the perceived destination image and safety that have the most substantial impact. Therefore, destination managers should focus on enhancing and promoting positive destination images and safety measures to attract and retain tourists, ultimately fostering sustainable tourism growth in the region.

4.9 Overall influence of tourist destination familiarity, destination image and safety on tourist destination choice

This subsection analyzes the overall influence of tourist destination familiarity, destination image, and destination safety on tourist destination choice using a regression model.

Table 4.9: Linear regression model

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error		
1	(Constant)	.216	.505	.428	.670
	Destination Familiarity	.051	.098	.524	.601
	Destination Image	.492	.129	3.800	.000
	Destination safety	.455	.101	4.521	.000
	Dependent Variable: Destination choice				
2	R-squared, R²	0.413			
	F-Statistic	19.683			
	Overall significance	0.000			
	N	89			

The regression model provides insights into the overall influence of tourist destination familiarity, destination image, and safety on tourist destination choice. The model's overall significance, with an F-statistic of 19.683 and a p-value of 0.000, indicates that the model is

statistically significant in predicting destination choice. Additionally, the model's R-squared value of 0.413 suggests that approximately 41.3% of the variance in destination choice can be explained by the combined influence of destination familiarity, destination image, and destination safety.

When examining the coefficients, destination image ($\beta = 0.492$, $p = 0.000$) and destination safety ($\beta = 0.455$, $p = 0.000$) emerge as significant predictors of destination choice, with positive coefficients indicating that higher levels of perceived destination image and safety are associated with a greater likelihood of choosing the destination. For every one-unit increase in the perception of destination image, there is a corresponding increase of approximately 0.492 units in the likelihood of choosing the destination. Similarly, for every one-unit increase in the perception of destination safety, there is a corresponding increase of approximately 0.455 units in the likelihood of choosing the destination. This indicates that destination image and destination safety have a significant and positive impact on tourist destination choice.

Meanwhile, destination familiarity ($\beta = 0.051$, $p = 0.601$) does not reach statistical significance since $P=0.601 > 0.05$, suggesting that its impact on destination choice is not as pronounced in this model.

Overall, these results underscore the critical importance of destination image and safety in influencing tourists' destination choices. Destination managers should focus on enhancing and promoting positive destination images and safety measures to attract and retain tourists effectively, as these factors play a substantial role in tourists' decision-making processes.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND STUDY RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the discussion focuses on synthesizing the findings of the study in relation to the objectives outlined in Chapter One and the existing literature. The study aimed to explore factors influencing tourist destination choice, particularly focusing on destination familiarity, destination image, current safety measures, and the influence of destination safety perceptions. This discussion provides an in-depth analysis of these findings, drawing comparisons with relevant scholarly works to highlight areas of agreement, disagreement, and potential implications for destination management.

5.1 Discussion of findings

5.1.1 Influence of destination familiarity on tourist destination choice

Destination familiarity significantly influences tourist destination choices and resonates with findings from previous studies. According to Lepp and Gibson (2018), familiarity with a destination plays a crucial role in reducing perceived risk and uncertainty among tourists, thereby increasing their likelihood to choose familiar destinations over unfamiliar ones. This aligns with our findings, where respondents who indicated higher levels of familiarity with Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) also expressed stronger intentions to visit or revisit the destination.

However, contrary to expectations, some respondents cited novelty and the allure of exploring new places as reasons for choosing unfamiliar destinations (Masiero & Qiu, 2018). This suggests a nuanced decision-making process where familiarity acts as a comforting factor for risk-averse tourists while novelty attracts more adventurous travelers. Our study underscores the importance of destination marketers maintaining a balance between promoting familiarity to reassure risk-averse tourists and highlighting unique experiences to attract adventurous travelers seeking novelty. Pearce (1982) suggests that some tourists are drawn to unfamiliar destinations for the novelty they offer, highlighting the complexity of tourist decision-making

where familiarity provides security while novelty attracts adventurous travelers seeking new experiences.

5.1.2 Influence of destination image on tourist destination choice

Destination image plays a pivotal role in shaping tourist preferences, as supported by recent research by Baloglu and McCleary (2019). They emphasize that a positive destination image enhances attractiveness and visitor intentions to visit. Our findings regarding QENP align with this perspective, where respondents positively perceived the park's wildlife diversity, natural beauty, and conservation efforts, thereby increasing their likelihood to visit.

Contrary, Beerli and Martin (2004) found that negative destination images, especially related to safety concerns, deter tourists from choosing certain destinations, emphasizing the importance of managing and promoting a positive image. Echtner and Ritchie (2003) argue that concerns about negative aspects such as safety issues could deter potential visitors. Managing and promoting a positive destination image while addressing perceived negatives are crucial for sustaining visitor interest and satisfaction.

5.1.3 Current safety measures at a tourist destination

Evaluation of safety measures at QENP resonates with findings from Tarlow and Santana (2012). They highlight the importance of visible security personnel and effective communication of safety protocols in enhancing visitor perceptions of safety. Our study found positive responses regarding these aspects at QENP, yet concerns were raised about the accessibility of health facilities. Faulkner and Vikulov (2021) emphasize that destination managers must prioritize improvements in healthcare infrastructure to meet tourist expectations and ensure comprehensive safety measures. This feedback underscores the need for destination managers to continuously enhance safety strategies and address visitor concerns to maintain a secure environment and attract tourists. This aligns with the current study's findings, suggesting that visible safety measures such as hygiene protocols and emergency response plans contribute not only to visitor reassurance but also to positive destination image and overall visitor satisfaction (Eitzinger & Wiedemann, 2019)

5.1.4 Influence of destination safety on tourist destination choice

The model coefficients indicate that destination safety as a statistically significant positive influence on tourist destination choice. This aligns with existing literature suggesting that perceptions of safety play a crucial role in tourists' decision-making processes. Vassell et al. (2019) emphasize that tourists prioritize destinations perceived as safe, with concerns about personal safety and crime rates significantly impacting their travel decisions. Similarly, Tarlow and Santana (2012) argue that destinations perceived as safe are more likely to attract tourists and sustain tourism growth over time. These findings underscore the importance of effective safety management in enhancing a destination's appeal and competitiveness in the tourism market.

However, while destination safety emerges as a significant factor in tourist decision-making, disagreements exist regarding its relative importance compared to other destination attributes. Kim and Prideaux (2017) argue that while safety is critical, factors such as destination attractiveness, cultural appeal, and accessibility also influence tourists' final destination choices. This implies that while safety measures can enhance a destination's competitiveness, they may not always be the sole determinant in tourists' decision-making process. Parrey et al. (2019) add nuance to this discussion by suggesting that different traveler segments may prioritize safety differently, with some willing to compromise on safety for unique cultural experiences or cost-effective travel options.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the study findings, the study concluded that the influence of destination familiarity on tourist destination choice appears to be minimal and non-significant. Despite the theoretical importance of familiarity in reducing perceived risk and uncertainty among tourists, the statistical analysis did not demonstrate a strong relationship between familiarity and destination choice. This suggests that while familiarity may play a role in shaping perceptions and initial interest in a destination, it does not significantly sway tourists' final decisions.

The study also concluded that destination image emerged as a robust predictor of tourist destination choice in the study. The findings underscored that positive perceptions of a destination's image significantly enhance its attractiveness to tourists. The study reinforces the

importance for destination marketers and managers to actively cultivate and manage a positive image through strategic branding, effective marketing campaigns, and enhancing visitor experiences. Continued efforts in this area are crucial for maintaining and strengthening a destination's competitive edge in the global tourism market.

Lastly, the study concluded that destination safety emerged as a critical determinant influencing tourists' destination choices. The study findings underscored that perceptions of safety encompassing personal, health, and environmental dimensions significantly impact tourists' decisions. Effective safety measures, including visible security protocols, health standards, and crisis management strategies, were found to enhance tourists' confidence and satisfaction.

Generally, this study provided insights into the multifaceted factors influencing tourist destination choice. While destination familiarity did not exhibit significant influence, destination image and safety emerged as pivotal determinants shaping tourists' decisions. Positive perceptions of destination image enhance attractiveness, while effective safety measures bolster confidence and satisfaction among visitors. These findings underscore the importance for destination stakeholders to prioritize branding efforts, manage perceptions of safety comprehensively, and tailor strategies to meet diverse tourist preferences.

5.3 Study recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several practical recommendations can be made to enhance destination attractiveness and competitiveness:

Destination managers should focus on enhancing and maintaining a positive destination image through strategic branding and effective marketing campaigns. This includes highlighting unique cultural, natural, and experiential attributes that resonate with target market segments. Regular monitoring of online reviews and social media sentiment can provide valuable insights into perceptions that can be leveraged to strengthen the destination's image.

Given the significant influence of destination safety on tourist choices, destinations should prioritize investments in safety infrastructure and communication. This includes implementing visible security measures, improving health and sanitation standards, and developing robust crisis management plans. Clear and transparent communication of safety measures through

various channels (websites, tourism apps, signage) is crucial to reassure potential visitors and enhance their confidence in choosing the destination.

Emphasizing sustainable tourism practices not only appeals to environmentally conscious travelers but also contributes to long-term destination viability. Destinations should integrate sustainable initiatives such as waste management, conservation efforts, and community engagement into their tourism development plans. Highlighting these efforts can enhance the destination's appeal and attract responsible tourists who prioritize sustainability.

Encouraging authentic cultural experiences and fostering interaction with local communities can enrich tourists' experiences and promote destination loyalty. Destination managers should collaborate with local stakeholders to develop cultural programs, festivals, and guided tours that showcase the destination's heritage and traditions. Providing opportunities for tourists to engage respectfully with local residents enhances cultural understanding and contributes to positive destination perceptions

5.3.2 Future recommendations of the study

To further advance knowledge in this field and address emerging trends, the following future recommendations are suggested:

Conduct longitudinal studies to explore how familiarity with destinations evolves over time and its impact on tourist decision-making. This includes examining how repeat visits and changing perceptions of destination familiarity influence travel choices across different demographic segments.

Investigate the role of emerging technologies (e.g., virtual reality, augmented reality) in shaping destination image and influencing tourist perceptions. Future research could explore how immersive experiences and digital platforms can be leveraged to enhance destination marketing strategies and attract tech-savvy travelers.

Given the evolving nature of safety concerns (e.g., health crises, natural disasters), future studies should adopt dynamic assessment methods to capture fluctuations in safety perceptions and their impact on tourist behavior. This includes real-time monitoring of safety-related data and traveler sentiment analysis to inform proactive safety management strategies.

Conduct cross-cultural studies to examine how safety perceptions vary among international tourists from different regions and cultural backgrounds. Understanding cultural differences in safety preferences and risk tolerance can guide tailored safety communication strategies and destination management approaches.

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APPENDIX:

Krejcie & Morgan's, 1970 Table

Table for Determining Sample Size from a Given Population					
N	S	N	S	N	S
10	10	220	140	1200	291
15	14	230	144	1300	297
20	19	240	148	1400	302
25	24	250	152	1500	306
30	28	260	155	1600	310
35	32	270	159	1700	313
40	36	280	162	1800	317
45	40	290	165	1900	320
50	44	300	169	2000	322
55	48	320	175	2200	327
60	52	340	181	2400	331
65	56	360	186	2600	335
70	59	380	191	2800	338
75	63	400	196	3000	341
80	66	420	201	3500	346
85	70	440	205	4000	351
90	73	460	210	4500	354
95	76	480	214	5000	357
100	80	500	217	6000	361
110	86	550	226	7000	364
120	92	600	234	8000	367
130	97	650	242	9000	368

Research questionnaire

Dear respondent,

Am **Akankunda Daphine** carrying out a study on the influence of safety on tourist destination choice a case of Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP) as a partial requirement for the award of Bachelor of Tourism and Hospitality Management at Uganda Christian University. You have been randomly selected to participate in this study as a respondent. Kindly provide the most appropriate information as indicated in the questionnaire based on your objective experiences. The information provided shall be used for academic purpose and will be kept with outmost confidentiality.

Note: Please feel free to provide information in the spaces provided and tick where applicable

Section 1: Background information

01	What is your gender?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Male2. Female
02	What is your age group in years	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Under 182. 18-273. 28-374. 38-475. 48 and above
03	How did you first hear about QENP?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Friends/Family2. Travel agency3. Online search/Social media4. Travel guides/Books
04	What type of travel best describes your visit to QENP?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Leisure travel2. Business travel3. Family travel4. Education travel5. Others
05	How many times have you visited Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP)?	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. First time2. 2-5 times3. 6 and above times

Section 2: Factors that influence Tourist destination choice

Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following observations on factors that influence tourist destination choice on a scale of (1) = strongly disagree, (2) = disagree, (3) = not sure (4) = agree (5) = strongly agree.

No	Statements on factors influencing tourist destination choice	1	2	3	4	5
Statements on Tourist Destination Familiarity						
1	I am familiar with Queen Elizabeth National Park (QENP).					
2	I have gathered a lot of information about QENP before my visit.					
3	I feel confident about navigating QENP due to my familiarity.					
4	Familiarity with QENP influenced my decision to visit.					
5	I prefer visiting familiar destinations like QENP.					
6	I rely on past experiences when choosing a destination like QENP.					
7	Word-of-mouth from friends/family familiar with QENP influenced my choice.					
8	Word-of-mouth from friends/family familiar with QENP influenced my choice.					
Statements on Tourist Destination image		1	2	3	4	5
1	QENP has a positive image as a tourist destination.					
2	The natural beauty of QENP influenced my decision to visit.					
3	QENP is known for its rich wildlife diversity.					
4	The reputation of QENP influenced my decision to visit.					
5	Positive reviews about QENP influenced my visit.					
6	Media portrayal of QENP impacted my destination choice.					
7	QENP is perceived as a safe destination.					
8	The cultural attractions at QENP influenced my decision to visit.					

Section 3: Current safety measures at a tourist destination

Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following observations on current safety measures at a tourist destination on a scale of (1) = strongly disagree, (2) = disagree, (3) = not sure (4) = agree (5) = strongly agree.

No	Statements on current safety measures at a tourist destination	1	2	3	4	5
1	QENP has visible security personnel.					
2	There are clear safety instructions at QENP.					
3	Emergency services are readily available at QENP.					
4	The park staff are well-trained in safety protocols.					
5	Safety measures at QENP are well-communicated to visitors.					
6	There are sufficient warning signs for potential dangers at QENP.					
7	Health facilities are accessible at QENP.					
8	I feel safe from wildlife threats due to the safety measures at QENP.					

Section 4: Influence of safety on tourist destination choice

Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following observations on influence of safety on tourist destination choice on a scale of (1) = strongly disagree, (2) = disagree, (3) = not sure (4) = agree (5) = strongly agree.

No	Statements on influence of safety on tourist destination choice	1	2	3	4	5
1	Safety is a key factor in my decision to visit QENP.					
2	I feel safe traveling to QENP due to its safety measures.					
3	The safety reputation of QENP influenced my choice to visit.					
4	I prioritize destinations with strong safety records like QENP.					
5	The presence of safety personnel at QENP affects my decision to visit.					
6	Clear safety instructions at QENP enhance my willingness to visit.					
7	Knowing emergency services are available at QENP impacts my decision to go there.					
8	I would not visit QENP if I perceived it as unsafe.					

Section 5: Tourist destination choice

Indicate the extent to which you agree with the following observations on tourist destination choice on a scale of (1) = strongly disagree, (2) = disagree, (3) = not sure (4) = agree (5) = strongly agree.

No	Statements on tourist destination choice	1	2	3	4	5
1	I chose to visit QENP because of its unique wildlife.					
2	The natural beauty of QENP influenced my decision to visit.					
3	Positive reviews and recommendations influenced my decision to visit QENP.					
4	The cultural attractions at QENP were a significant factor in my choice to visit					
5	Accessibility and ease of travel to QENP influenced my decision.					
6	The overall reputation of QENP as a tourist destination influenced my choice.					
7	Availability of accommodation and other facilities at QENP influenced my decision to visit.					
8	Safety and security at QENP were key factors in my decision to visit.					

THANK YOU