

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ECOTOURISTS' MOTIVATIONS IN A COASTAL NATIONAL PARK FROM ECUADOR

Mauricio CARVACHE-FRANCO*

Universidad Espíritu Santo-Ecuador, Samborondón, Km. 2.5 Vía a Samborondón, Ecuador, e-mail: mauricio2714@hotmail.com

Orly CARVACHE-FRANCO

Universidad Católica de Santiago de Guayaquil, Facultad de Especialidades Empresariales, Guayaquil, Km 1.5 Av.
Carlos Julio Arosemena, Ecuador, e-mail: orly.carvache@cu.ucsg.edu.ec

Wilmer CARVACHE-FRANCO

Escuela Superior Politécnica del Litoral, ESPOL, Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Humanísticas,
Campus Gustavo Galindo Km 30.5 Vía Perimetral, Guayaquil, Ecuador, e-mail: wcarvach@espol.edu.ec

César VILLAGÓMEZ-BUELE

Universidad de Guayaquil, Facultad de Ingeniería Química, Cda. Universitaria Av. Delta y Av.
Kennedy, Guayaquil, Ecuador, e-mail: cesar.villagomez@ug.edu.ec

Andrea SALTOS-LAYANA

Universidad Tecnológica Empresarial de Guayaquil, UTEG, Facultad Online, Urdesa Central,
Guayacanes 520 y la Quinta, Guayaquil, Ecuador, e-mail: andrea.saltos.layana@gmail.com

Citation: Carvache-Franco, M., Carvache-Franco, O., Carvache-Franco, W., Villagómez-Buele, C., Saltos-Layana, A. (2020). SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC ASPECTS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP WITH THE ECOTOURISTS' MOTIVATIONS IN A COASTAL NATIONAL PARK FROM ECUADOR. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 31(3), 1075–1082. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.31320-543>

Abstract: The following study analyzes the sociodemographic characteristics along with the motivations of ecotourists. The study was carried out in situ at the Machalilla National Park in Ecuador. A questionnaire was used and statistical techniques, such as Spearman's Correlation Coefficient, were employed; the results obtained contribute to the academic literature. Ecotourists are men and women whose main motivations are related to novelty, escape from the routine, and nature. Among the relationships of motivations and profile variables, older ecotourists have greater motivations for novelty and knowledge. The lower the level of education of tourists, the greater was their motivation for self-development and prestige/impression. Also, the lower the income levels of tourists, the greater their motivation for self-development and knowledge.

Key words: Ecotourism, nature, profile, sociodemography, motivation, Ecuador

* * * * *

INTRODUCTION

Tourism is an important source of local economic growth, which implies that knowing the tastes, preferences, and travel habits of tourists are truly relevant issues, to incorporate as technical criteria in the planning of public and private investment, and in the creation, innovation, or specialization of tourist products. Ecotourism can connect travelers to nature and help them develop stronger bonds with the natural world (Olmsted et al., 2020). Global conventions and reports emphasize the need to transform our relationship with nature if we are to sustain the ecosystem services and benefits we currently enjoy (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2019). Ecotourism is considered a sustainable mode of tourism that provides a solution to two major issues: poverty and biodiversity degradation (Cabral and Dhar, 2020). In this way, nature-based tourism in protected areas is an easily experienced ecosystem service that humans enjoy, but it acts as tourism pressures on ecosystem (Chun et al., 2020). Increasing environmental awareness broadens the perceived value of protected areas and ecological conservation, which in turn significantly contributes to the long-term development of ecotourism (Castellanos et al., 2016).

Ecuador is the second country in Latin America with the largest territory dedicated to the protection of its ecosystems, having 33.26% of its territory under conservation or environmental management (Ministry of Environment, 2016). Generally speaking, ecotourism models are increasingly recognized as a way to promote not only local livelihoods and culture but also environmental conservation as well (Kirkby et al., 2011). So far, little research has been done on the sociodemographic profile and motivations of people who visit National Parks in Ecuador, however, some global studies focus on this subject (Gundersen et al., 2015; Bhalla and Bhattacharya, 2019; Van der Merwe and Saayman, 2008).

The Machalilla National Park located in Ecuador is a protected area with natural and cultural attractions suitable for ecotourism, the park possesses both land and marine territory. Among its main attractions, several activities can be mentioned, such as sighting humpback whales, visiting the community of Agua Blanca, doing water sports like sailing, walking on ecological trails, and doing flora and fauna sightings. So far, no studies have been carried out analyzing the profile of the ecotourist and its sociodemographic aspects in the Machalilla National Park. Contributing with the results of this research to bridging the gap in the literature and to the creation of plans to benefit the sustainable development of a protected area. This study aims to analyze the relationship of sociodemographic and visiting aspects with the motivations of the tourist as this issue is crucial for the sustainability of a National Park. This information will serve as a bridge to understand the implications of the sociodemographic characteristics to facilitate the elaboration of development plans. Moreover, the results of the investigation will serve to improve the efficiency of the operation of the visitor management component of the ecotourism industry in Ecuador (Lee and Abrahams, 2018).

* Corresponding author

LITERATURE REVIEW

Ecotourism, as part of sustainable tourism (Cater and Cater, 2015), has remained an important field for academic research since its inception, has been around in one form or another for about 30 years (McKercher, 2010; Weaver and Lawton, 2007). Many destinations and regions continue to develop and commercialize ecological and nature-related products in response to the growing demand for tourism products based on the environment (Castellanos et al., 2016; Walter, 2013). To develop a sustainable tourism, alternative models of this activity such as ecotourism, are increasingly being recognized as a way to promote not only local livelihoods and culture but also environmental conservation (Carvache-Franco et al., 2020; Kirkby et al., 2011). National parks are also important destinations for ecological and recreational tourism because they have almost unaltered environments and often with unique natural forms. In countries where the level of economic development is not satisfactory, one way of developing the tourism activity is by creating national parks (Bimonte and Punzo, 2016).

Motivation is considered as one of the most important variables to explain the behavior of a tourist during and after the trip. The results obtained in a study performed by Ma et al. (2018) on Chinese tourists visiting two protected areas in the Guangdong province, identified three motivational factors: Relaxation and exploration of nature, search for news, and social influence. Along these lines, Kamri and Radam (2013) carried out a survey to identify the reasons for visiting the Bako National Park, the results showed four aspects: challenge excursion, social trip, nature tour, and getaway. Wildlife tourism experiences and their overall satisfaction were the subjects of a study realized by Mutanga et al. (2017) where four push factors, to visit national parks in Zimbabwe, were identified. These factors were, recreation, the pursuit of knowledge, appreciate wildlife, and feel close to nature. Additionally, six pull factors were pinpointed as well, the abundance of wildlife, availability of different animal species, availability of different plant species, nature, beautiful scenery, and tranquility.

Ma et al. (2018) used the sociodemographic characteristics, motivation, and satisfaction to predict visit patterns and trip behaviors. Their findings demonstrated that the educational level is negatively correlated to tourist satisfaction, and motivation was also not correlated to social influence. Furthermore, they found that age is positively correlated to the feeling of relaxation and exploration of nature. In another study, Newton et al. (2018) examined the preferences of visitors to national parks related to the transportation attributes such as: waiting time at the entrance, parking availability, transit speed, and transit volume. Their results showed that there are significant differences between the choice of means of transportation and age.

The sociodemographic characteristics of tourists, such as age, level of education, and income, could be good predictors of their motivations since the association between these factors and motivation has been reported in previous findings. Regarding age, research has found that older people tend to be more motivated by "novelty" (Jönsson and Devonish, 2008). However, among the findings and observations of the study carried out by Luo and Deng (2008) on Chinese tourists, there was a negative correlation between age and the motivation for seeking novelty, indicating that younger tourists tend to look for more novelties. Along these lines, Kim et al. (2008) also suggested that young people are more motivated by the search for novelty than older people. For Carvache-Franco et al. (2018), the internet is the main information media that ecotourists use to find data about a protected area, followed by friends and acquaintances.

Regarding the level of education of tourists, Jensen (2015) suggested that the more educated visitors were more motivated by "relax and escape", "seek knowledge", and "socialization", while the less educated people were more associated with the factors of "prestige/impression" and "novelty". In this same income-related study, tourists in the highest-income groups rated "appreciation of nature" and "escape and relaxation" as a more important preference, while those in low-income groups showed a greater preference for the "search for knowledge". There are certain correlations between the variables sociodemographic and visitation, and the level of satisfaction. The study by Ozdemir et al. (2012) on tourist profiles and satisfaction in Turkey demonstrated that the tourists' characteristics of being a woman, elderly, highly educated, and with a low level of income were correlated with a higher level of satisfaction. Tsiotsou and Vasioti's (2006) study of demography and satisfaction with tourism services in Greece also supported the finding that older people with higher education levels tend to be more satisfied with their travel experiences. Barros and Machado (2010) reported that older, male and more educated visitors would probably have longer stays.

The research performed by Tepavčević et al. (2019) shows that the reasons for visiting and the limitations are different, depending on the sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents; they also indicated that the sociodemographic characteristics influence the reasons for the visit. This study partially confirmed the findings obtained by Ma et al. (2018), who used other variables but concluded that the sociodemographic characteristics have a significant impact on motivation to visit national parks.

Many sociodemographic profiles of people visiting national parks may be similar, however, it is considered appropriate to segment tourists from every park based on their preferences and motivations which is important for improved destination planning and management (Munien et al., 2019). This assertion is supported by Kim and Weiler (2013), who suggest that tourism managers should identify the differences between subgroups of tourists to nature-based destinations. Not only based on demographics and environmental attitudes, but also on their responses to visitor management approaches, for the correct interpretation of their wishes and preferences. These differences claim Kim and Weiler (2013), allow the destination to better adapt their communication messages, which should be informative, educational, and persuasive. Until now, the literature has not generalized concrete results on the relationship of sociodemographic aspects and their influence on other variables such as travel characteristics and motivations.

STUDY AREA

The Machalilla National Park is the main conservation area in the province of Manabí and it is part of the Natural Heritage of the Ecuadorian State (Manabí Provincial Government., 2015). It is located in the central-western area of the Coastal Region of Ecuador, in the southwest of the province of Manabí. The cantons involved in the park area are Jipijapa, Puerto López, and Montecristi.

According to the data supplied by the Ministry of the Environment (2015), Machalilla is a National Park that contains evidence of the ancient inhabitants of Manabí. Archaeological sites of various cultures are located within the National Park and in the surrounding areas. There are indications of the existence of the Valdivia culture which populated the region more than 5,000 years ago, or the Manteño-Huancavilca culture, who were inhabitants of the area around 500 years ago. Additionally, the National Park protects a great strip that goes from the top of the coastal mountain range of Chongón-Colonche to the marine environments that surround the Plata Island.

The Machalilla National Park is the only marine protected area in the Ecuadorian mainland, where the only coral reefs on the Ecuadorian coast are also found. It also has the greatest biodiversity in the coastal area and serves as a transit route for migratory fish. The fauna is composed of 81 species of mammals, 270 types of birds, and 143 species of fish. Its main attraction, with great demand of national and international tourists, is the sighting of humpback whales, which occurs from July to September of each year (Figure 1).

The Ministry of the Environment (2015) mentions that among the main destinations and the tourist activities that take place within the Machalilla National Park are: a) Frailes Beach, located in López Port, considered one of the few beaches that still maintains its natural characteristics; b) The Plata Island is located 40 kilometers east of López Port. In this island tourists can watch birds and contemplate the cliffs of the island whose flora and fauna resemble that of the Galapagos Islands. In the surroundings of the Plata Island visitors can go snorkeling and observe the marine biodiversity. Several marine sports can be done here; c) Salango Beach, located 30 minutes from López Port, offers the opportunity to see the coral reef and enjoy the experience of surface diving or snorkeling. The gentle surf of this beach is ideal for water sports. Across from the beach is the islet of Salango where travelers can enjoy a spectacular view of native birds and exotic flora, typical of the marine environment; d) The Agua Blanca Commune, located 5 kilometers north of López Port, maintains an archaeological museum with pieces of the Manteño-Huancavilca culture. The famous stone chairs, also known as the chairs of power, have been found in this area, which has led archaeologists to consider that one of their ceremonial civic centers functioned there. There is a large pool of sulfurous waters in the community, the mud at the bottom of the pool offers magnificent relaxing properties.

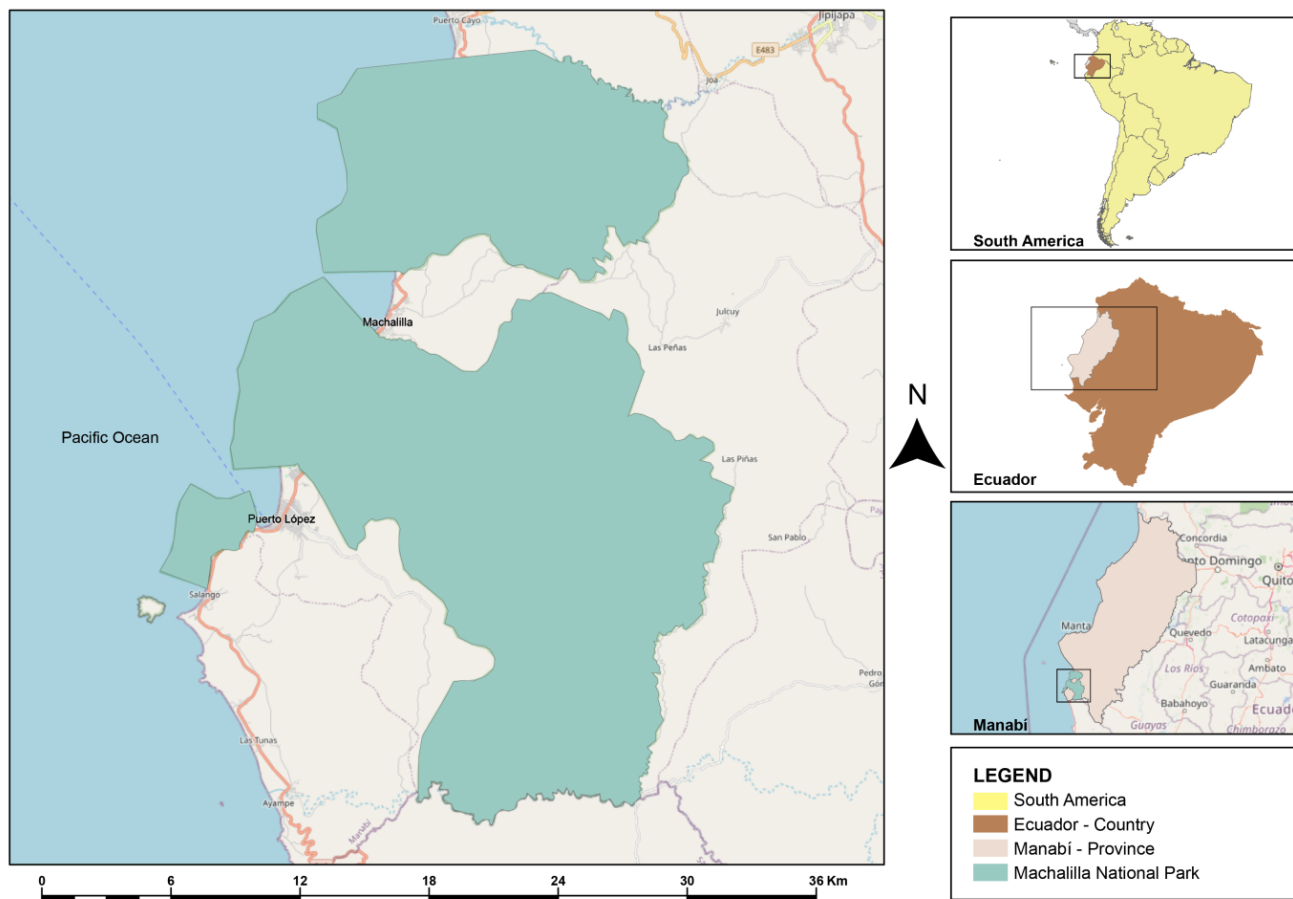


Figure 1. Geographical location of the Machalilla National Park, Ecuador

METHODOLOGY

For this investigation, a questionnaire was prepared based on several previous studies (Jensen, 2015; Kamri and Radam, 2013; Ma et al., 2018; Mutanga et al., 2017). The instrument consisted of two sections. In the first section, sociodemographic information, such as nationality, origin, gender, age, level of education, professional activity, and characteristics of the trip, company organizing the trip, length of stay, and expenditure on their stay, were collected. In the second section, the motivations, preferences, and tourist satisfaction were addressed. The questionnaire was designed with closed-ended questions and a five-point Likert scale to obtain reliable results.

The surveys were conducted on-site during August and September 2018. The interviewers, who were students from the University of Guayaquil (Ecuador), received training from the authors of this study. The data was collected, in the Machalilla National Park, during the moments in which the tourists carried out recreational activities or were resting. The tourists surveyed were adults, both nationals and foreigners who visited the studied ecotourism destination.

The statistical data collected was organized, tabulated, and analyzed using the SPSS version 22 software. The sample was composed of 386 valid surveys, and the infinite population was used. With the sample reached, the study was performed with a +/- 5% margin of error, a confidence level of 95%, and a variability of 50%. (Table1).

Table 1. Research methodology

Population	National and foreign visitors
Geographic area	Machalilla National Park (Ecuador)
Period of completion	August to September 2018
Procedure	Simple random sampling
Confidence level	95%
Margin of error	+/- 5%
Valid questionnaires	386

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For a better understanding, the results of the study have been divided into several sections to analyze the sociodemographic aspects of the ecotourists and their relationship with motivations.

Sociodemographic aspects

The aspects of the tourists' profile and the characteristics of the ecotourist trip are shown in Table 2. 75.6% of respondents claimed to be national tourists and 24.4% to be foreign. The majority of the people interviewed said they are from South America (85.8%) followed by those from a European origin (10.9%). 59% of tourists were female and 41% male. The largest age group was made up by the 20 to 29 years of age with 42%, followed by the 30 to 39 years of age group with 28.2% and the group ranging from 40 to 49 amounted to 13 % of the sample, indicating that their ages were generally between 20 and 39, so they were young adults. The visitors' level of training was mainly university education (61.9%), followed by the group with secondary education (21.85), which establishes a good educational level among ecotourists.

Regarding their professional activity, the majority group was composed of private employees (28.5%), followed by students (24.9%) and public employees (14.2%), so there is a variety of productive activities in their profiles. The ecotourists surveyed mostly traveled with their family (56%), with their friends (28.2%), and with a partner (10.9%), which means that they generally visited the protected areas in the company of other people. The daily expenditure in this National Park was mainly less than \$ 30 which is 23.8% of the sample, followed by the \$ 30 to \$ 40 range with a percentage of 23.6, establishing this as the average spending by ecotourists per day. As for the visitors' monthly income, 36% of interviewed tourists asserted to have an income of less than \$ 500, followed by 28.2% who affirmed to receive a wage in the \$ 501 and \$ 1,000 range. It was also found that 5.4% earn above \$ 3,000, so their incomes were varied (Table 2).

Table 2. Sociodemographic aspects and characteristics of the trip

Sociodemography	Category	N = 386	%
Origin	National	292	75.6
	Foreign	94	24.4
Origin by continent	North America	8	2.1
	Europe	42	10.9
	South America	331	85.8
	Asia	2	0.8
	Rest of the world	5	0.5
Gender	Male	158	41
	Female	227	59
Age	< 20	26	6.7
	20 to 29 years old	162	42
	30 to 39 years old	109	28.2
	40 to 49 years old	50	13
	50 to 59 years old	29	7.5
	> 59 years old	10	2.6
Education level	Primary	6	1.6
	Secondary	84	21.8
	University	239	61.9
	Postgraduate / Master / PhD	57	14.8
Professional activity	Student	96	24.9
	Researcher / Scientist	16	4.1
	Entrepreneur / Business owner	33	8.5
	Private employee	110	28.5
	Public employee	55	14.2
	Housework	16	4.1
	Unemployed	10	2.6
	Retired	8	2.1
	Informal worker	10	2.6
Who you visit with	Alone	15	3.9
	With family	216	56
	With friends	109	28.2
	With a partner	42	10.9
Monthly income	< \$ 500	139	36.0
	\$ 501- \$ 1,000	109	28.2
	\$ 1,001 - \$ 1,500	53	13.7
	\$ 1,501 - \$ 2,000	40	10.4
	\$ 2,001 - \$ 2,500	15	3.9
	\$ 2,501 - \$ 3,000	9	2.3
	> \$ 3,000	21	5.4
Daily expenditure	< \$ 30	92	23.8
	\$ 30.1- \$ 40	91	23.6
	\$ 40.1- \$ 50	72	18.7
	\$ 50.1- \$ 60	40	10.4
	\$ 60.1- \$ 70	36	9.3
	> \$ 70	55	14.2

To obtain data regarding the sources of information visitors consulted before visiting the Machalilla National Park, a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (1 being not at all important and 5 being very important) was used. The results show that the main information media used by ecotourists was the Internet with a mean of 3.98, followed by social networks with 3.85, and friends and acquaintances with 3.57, results which are similar to those obtained by Carvache-Franco et al. (2018) (Table 3).

Table 3. Information sources

Variables	N	Minimum	Maximum	Means	Standard Desv.
Internet	386	1	5	3.98	1.296
Social networks	386	1	5	3.85	1.415
Friends and acquaintances	386	1	5	3.57	1.411
Official sources of tourist information	386	1	5	3.02	1.508
Communication media specialized in tourism	386	1	5	2.97	1.496
Advertising	386	1	5	2.9	1.543
Travel guides	386	1	5	2.78	1.488
Information on suppliers and intermediaries	386	1	5	2.76	1.443
Opinion leaders	386	1	5	2.75	2.251
Trade shows	386	1	5	2.62	1.535
Documentaries	386	1	5	2.58	1.456
Movies and TV series	386	1	5	2.43	2.143
Books	386	1	5	2.35	1.371

Motivations

A 5-point Likert scale (where 1 is a little and 5 is a lot) was used to analyze the motivations ecotourists presented to visit this protected area.

Table 4. Motivations of the ecotourist

Motivations	N	Minimum	Maximum	Means	Standard Desv.
To have fun	386	1	5	4.48	0.797
To experience new things	386	1	5	4.34	0.912
To escape the routine	386	1	5	4.33	1.020
To better appreciate nature	386	1	5	4.31	0.909
To obtain good memories	386	1	5	4.29	0.992
To get away from daily stress	386	1	5	4.25	1.108
To be close to nature	386	1	6	4.23	1.015
To explore the unknown	384	1	5	4.22	1.000
To feel harmony and inner peace	386	1	5	3.93	1.254
To avoid interpersonal stress	386	1	5	3.92	1.333
To experience different cultures	386	1	5	3.9	1.147
To be away from crowds	386	1	5	3.84	1.307
To develop my personal interests	386	1	5	3.74	1.278
To meet new people	386	1	5	3.68	1.267
To know the destination	386	1	5	3.67	1.426
To strengthen the relationship with my family	386	1	6	3.59	1.466
To unite the interest of the people	386	1	5	3.53	1.409
To obtain a sense of self-realization	386	1	5	3.53	1.321
To obtain a new perspective on life	386	1	5	3.51	1.331
To meet the inhabitants of the place	386	1	5	3.5	1.312
To have the opportunity to get to know me better	386	1	5	3.46	1.339
To meet people with similar interests	386	1	15	3.42	1.415
To have a sense of self-confidence	386	1	5	3.38	1.402
To think about the good times I have had in the past	386	1	5	3.36	1.406
To understand more about myself	386	1	5	3.36	1.344
To be independent	386	1	5	3.29	1.421
To contact family friends who live elsewhere	386	1	5	3.28	1.511
To find out what I am capable of	386	1	5	3.25	1.394
To follow current events	385	1	5	3.22	1.476
To reflect on memories from the past	386	1	5	3.15	1.524
To join the social discussion	386	1	5	3.12	1.438
To feel that I belong	385	1	5	3.1	1.475
To remember the times with parents	386	1	5	3.07	1.516
To be with others if I need them	386	1	5	3.04	1.373

As shown in Table 4, the main motivations of tourists are to have fun (with a score of 4.48), to experience new things (with a score of 4.34), to escape from the routine (with a score of 4.33) and for appreciating nature better (with a score of 4.31). These results are similar to those reported by Ma et al. (2018) who identified three motivating factors, Relaxation and exploration of nature, Search for news, and Social influence.

Relationship between age and motivations

Spearman's Correlation Coefficient was used to find associations between age and motivations.

Table 5. Relationship between age and motivations (Spearman's Correlation Coefficient)

Motivational variable	Coefficient	Sig.
To meet local people	0.138	0.006
To know the destination	0.105	0.039
To follow current events	0.104	0.042
To meet new people	0.102	0.046

As shown in Table 5, the variables that presented a correlation with age are to meet local people (coefficient = 0.138), to know the destination (coefficient = 0.105), to follow current events (coefficient = 0.104) and to meet new people (coefficient = 0.102). All these variables are related to novelty and knowledge. Therefore, the greater motivation in older tourists is to get to know the inhabitants of the place, to know the destination, to follow current events, and to meet new people. In other words, the older the tourists, the greater their motivation is for novelty and knowledge in this protected area. Similar results were reported by Jönsson and Devonish (2008) who mentioned that older people tend to be more motivated by "novelty".

Relationship of education level and motivations

To find the associations between the level of education and motivations, the Spearman's Correlation Coefficient was used.

According to Table 6, the variables that had the highest negative correlation with the level of education of the tourists were, to reflect on the memories from the past (correlation = -0.153), to obtain a new perspective of life (correlation = -0.140), to have a sense of self-confidence (correlation = -0.128), and to understand more about myself (correlation = -0.116). All these motivational variables are related to self-development and prestige/impression. Therefore, the lower the level of education of tourists, the greater was their motivation for self-development and prestige/impression. On the contrary, the higher the level of education of tourists, the lower was their motivation for self-development and prestige/impression. These results concur with the outcomes from Jensen (2015), who asserted that less educated people were more associated with the "prestige/impression" and "novelty" factors.

Table 6. Relationship between education level and motivations (Spearman's Correlation Coefficient)

Motivational variables	Coefficient	Sig.
To reflect on memories from the past	-0.153	0.003
To obtain a new perspective on life	-0.140	0.006
To have a sense of self-confidence	-0.128	0.012
To understand me more	-0.116	0.022
To feel that I belong	-0.117	0.117
To be away from the crowds of people	-0.117	0.021
To have the opportunity to know me better	-0.115	0.023
To remember the times with parents	-0.105	0.039
To follow current events	-0.102	0.045
To know what I am capable of	-0.101	0.048
To feel harmony and inner peace	-0.101	0.047

Relationship between income level and motivations

Spearman's Correlation Coefficient was used to find the associations between income level and motivations.

Table 7. Relation between income level and motivations (Spearman's Correlation Coefficient)

Motivational variables	Coefficient	Sig.
To have the opportunity to know me better	-0.121	0.017
To understand myself more	-0.151	0.003
To obtain a new perspective of life	-0.211	0.000
To think about the good times I have had in the past	-0.155	0.002
To know what I am capable of	-0.154	0.002
To have a sense of self-confidence	-0.163	0.001
To feel harmony and inner peace	-0.108	0.034
To remember the times with the parents	-0.116	0.022
To contact family and friends living in other places	-0.125	0.014
To feel that I belong	-0.113	0.027
To reflect on the memories from the past	-0.119	0.019

According to Table 7, the variables that were found to be more negatively correlated with the tourists' income level, to have the opportunity to get to know me better (correlation = -0.121), to understand myself more (correlation = -0.151), to get a new perspective on life (correlation = -0.211) and to think about the good times I've had in the past (correlation = -0.155). All these motivational variables are related to self-development and knowledge. It can then be concluded that the lower the income level of tourists, the greater their motivation for self-development and knowledge. On the contrary, the higher the income level of tourists, the lower was their motivation for self-development and knowledge. Results that are consistent with what Jensen (2015) reported saying that low-income tourists demonstrated a greater motivation for the "search for knowledge".

CONCLUSION

National parks located in coastal areas offer a variety of ecotourism activities, both terrestrial and marine. Ecotourists search for nature and culture in a national park with their family and friends. Due to these conditions, it is important to establish the sociodemographic characteristics of ecotourists to understand their motivations and develop management policies that preserve the environment of these destinations. Among the sociodemographic aspects of ecotourists who visit a coastal National Park, it can be mentioned that they are found to be men and women, generally young adults, with a good educational level, a varied professional activity, and they generally travel accompanied by their family, friends, or a partner. They have a daily expenditure of between \$ 30 and \$ 50 a day. Besides, they have several incomes, mostly between \$ 500 and \$ 1,000 a month. Furthermore, they obtain their information about protected areas through the internet, social networks, and friends and acquaintances.

The main motivations of ecotourists are related to novelty, escape from the routine and, nature. Among the relationships of motivations and profile variables in ecotourism destinations, it is noted that older tourists have greater motivations for novelty and

knowledge. In contrast, less educated tourists have higher motivations related to self-development and prestige/impression. On the other hand, tourists with low-income levels have greater motivations for self-development and knowledge.

Regarding the theoretical implications, this study contributes to the literature with the findings that indicate the existence of three motivating factors: relaxation and exploration of nature, search for news, and social influence, similar to what was reported by Ma et al. (2018). Older people are often more motivated by "novelty", similar to what Jönsson and Devonish (2008) concluded. Less educated people were more associated with "prestige/impression" and "novelty" factors; and low-income tourists were more motivated by the "search for knowledge", results which are analogous to Jensen's (2015).

As practical implications, this work serves for tourism-related institutions to have information on the profile and motivations of ecotourists. In this way, efficient marketing policies and plans can be planned focusing on improving the sustainability of the destination and the care of the natural area, bringing benefits to the destination, the community, and the tourist. Finally, the main limitation of the present study was the timing in which the sample was taken because the demand may vary. As a future line of research, it would be interesting to carry out a study of the economic impact of the ecotourist in a coastal national park concerning environmental care.

REFERENCES

- Barros, C.P., & Machado, L.P. (2010). The length of stay in tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 37(3), 692-706. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2009.12.005>
- Bhalla, P., & Bhattacharya, P. (2019). Visitors' satisfaction from ecotourism in the protected area of the Indian Himalayan Region using importance-performance analysis. *Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science*, 29(2), 162-179. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2019.1577157>
- Bimonte, S., & Punzo, L.F. (2016). Tourist development and host-guest interaction: An economic exchange theory. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 58, 128-139. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2016.03.004>
- Cabral, C., & Dhar, R.L. (2020). Ecotourism research in India: From an integrative literature review to a future research framework. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 19(1), 23-49. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14724049.2019.1625359>
- Carvache-Franco, M., Carvache-Franco, O., & Carvache-Franco, W. (2020). Exploring the Satisfaction of Ecotourism in Protected Natural Areas. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 29 (2), 672-683. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.29223-498>
- Carvache-Franco, M., Carvache-Franco, O., Solis-Radiilla, M.M., & Carvache-Franco, W. (2019). The perceived value and profile of protected areas visitors: A case study of the Guayas province, Ecuador. *Geographica Pannonica*, 23(2), 135-147. <https://doi.org/10.5937/gp23-20582>
- Castellanos-Verdugo, M., Vega-Vázquez, M., Oviedo-García, M.Á., & Orgaz-Agüera, F. (2016). The relevance of psychological factors in the ecotourist experience satisfaction through ecotourist site perceived value. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 124, 226-235. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2016.02.126>
- Cater, C., & Cater, E. (2015). *Ecotourism*. In J. D. Wright (Ed.), *International encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences* (pp. 105-109). eBook, Elsevier Publishing.
- Chun, J., Kim, C.K., Kim, G.S., Jeong, J., & Lee, W.K. (2020). Social big data informs spatially explicit management options for national parks with high tourism pressures. *Tourism Management*, 81, 104136. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2020.104136>
- Gundersen, V., Mehmetoglu, M., Vistad, O.I., & Andersen, O. (2015). Linking visitor motivation with attitude towards management restrictions on use in a national park. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*, 9, 77-86. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2015.04.004>
- Jensen, J. M. (2015). The relationship between socio-demographic variables, travel motivations and subsequent choice of vacation. *Advances in Economics and Business*, 3(8), 322-328. <https://doi.org/10.13189/aeb.2015.030804>
- Jönsson, C., & Devonish, D. (2008). Does nationality, gender, and age affect travel motivation? A case of visitors to the Caribbean island of Barbados. *Journal of Travel & Tourism Marketing*, 25(3-4), 398-408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10548400802508499>
- Kamri, T., & Radam, A. (2013). Visitors' Visiting Motivation: Bako National Park, Sarawak. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 101(8), 495-505. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.07.223>
- Kim, A.K.J., & Weiler, B. (2013). Visitors' attitudes towards responsible fossil collecting behaviour: An environmental attitude-based segmentation approach. *Tourism Management*, 36, 602-612. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2012.08.005>
- Kim, S.S., Kim, M., Park, J., & Guo, Y. (2008). Cave tourism: Tourists' characteristics, motivations to visit, and the segmentation of their behavior. *Asia Pacific Journal of Tourism Research*, 13(3), 299-318. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10941660802280448>
- Kirkby, C.A., Giudice, R., Day, B., Turner, K., Soares-Filho, B.S., Oliveira-Rodrigues, H., & Yu, D.W. (2011). Closing the ecotourism-conservation loop in the Peruvian Amazon. *Environmental Conservation*, 38(1), 6-17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0376892911000099>
- Lee, A.K.Y., & Abrahams, R.A. (2018). Naturalizing people, ethnicizing landscape: Promoting tourism in China's rural periphery. *Asian Geographer*, 35(2), 177-196. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10225706.2018.1505646>
- Luo, Y., & Deng, J. (2008). The New Environmental Paradigm and nature-based tourism motivation. *Journal of Travel Research*, 46(4), 392-402. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287507308331>
- Ma, A., Chow, A., Cheung, L., Lee, K., & Liu, S. (2018). Impacts of Tourists' Sociodemographic Characteristics on the Travel Motivation and Satisfaction: The Case of Protected Areas in South China. *Sustainability*, 10(10), 3388. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su10103388>
- McKercher, B. (2010). Academia and the evolution of ecotourism. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 35(1), 15-26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2010.11081615>
- Munien, S., Gumede, A., Gounden, R., Bob, U., Gounden, D., & Perry, N.S. (2019). Profile of visitors to coastal and marine tourism locations in Cape Town, South Africa. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 27(4), 1134-1147. <https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.27402-421>
- Mutanga, C.N., Vengesayi, S., Chikuta, O., Muboko, N., & Gandiwa, E. (2017). Travel motivation and tourist satisfaction with wildlife tourism experiences in Gonarezhou and Matusadona National Parks, Zimbabwe. *Journal of outdoor recreation and tourism*, 20, 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2017.08.001>
- Newton, J.N., Newman, P., Taff, B.D., Shr, Y.H., Monz, C., & D'Antonio, A. (2018). If I can find a parking spot: A stated choice approach to Grand Teton National Park visitors' transportation preferences. *Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism*. Advance online Publication. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jort.2018.04.001>
- Olmsted, P., Honey-Rosés, J., Satterfield, T., & Chan, K.M. (2020). Leveraging support for conservation from ecotourists: can relational values play a role?. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 28(3), 497-514. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669582.2019.1683184>
- Ozdemir, B., Aksu, A., Ehtiyar, R., Çizel, B., Çizel, R.B., & İçigen, E.T. (2012). Relationships among tourist profile, satisfaction and destination loyalty: Examining empirical evidences in Antalya region of Turkey. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing & Management*, 21(5), 506-540. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19368623.2012.626749>

- Tepavčević, J., Miljanić, U., Bradić, M., & Janićević, S. (2019). Impact of London residents' sociodemographic characteristics on the motives for visiting national parks. *Journal of the Geographical Institute "Jovan Cvijic", SASA*, 69(2), 135-146. <https://doi.org/10.2298/IJGI1902135T>
- Tsiotsou, R., & Vasioti, E. (2006). Using demographics and leisure activities to predict satisfaction with tourism services in Greece. *Journal of Hospitality & Leisure Marketing*, 14(2), 69-82. https://doi.org/10.1300/J150v14n02_05
- Van der Merwe, P., & Saayman, M. (2008). Travel Motivations of Tourists Visiting Kruger National Park. *African Protected Area Conservation and Science*, 50(1), 154-159. <https://doi.org/10.4102/koedoe.v50i1.140>
- Walter, P.G. (2013). Theorising visitor learning in ecotourism. *Journal of Ecotourism*, 12(1), 15-32. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14724049.2012.742093>
- Weaver, D.B., & Lawton, L.J. (2007). Twenty years on: The state of contemporary ecotourism research. *Tourism Management*, 28(5), 1168-1179. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2007.03.004>
- *** Convention on Biological Diversity. (2019). Post 2020 Global Biodiversity Framework: Discussion Paper. www.cbd.int
- *** Manabí Provincial Government. (2015) Development and territorial planning plan with special emphasis on Heritage of Natural Areas of Ecuador (PANE).
- *** Ministry of the Environment (2015). National System of Protected Areas of Ecuador (SNAP), Machalilla National Park. <http://areasprotegidas.ambiente.gob.ec/es/areas-protegidas/parque-nacional-machalilla>
- *** Ministry of the Environment (2016). Protected areas of Ecuador strategic partner for development. <http://suia.ambiente.gob.ec/documents/10179/346525/Areas+Protegidas+del+Ecuador.pdf/390b099f-6f57-4d38-bf17-cea3a138caf5>

Article history:

Received: 08.06.2020

Revised: 14.08.2020

Accepted: 07.08.2020

Available online: 11.09.2020