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The Relationship Between Domestic and International Tourism in Zimbabwe: A Case Study Of The Victoria Falls and Hwange National Parks and Lake Kariba

ROBIN HEATH *

Within Zimbabwe, certain venues are the prime destinations for both foreign and domestic tourists. Heavy use is likely to lead to congestion and dissatisfaction amongst both groups. This paper analyses the similarities and differences between local and foreign visitors to the major resort areas and determines whether both groups are seeking similar facilities and experiences. Finally, it assesses whether the Zimbabwe tourist industry should be catering for two different markets.

Victoria Falls National Park, a major international tourist destination, is contrasted with Lake Kariba which is the prime venue for domestic tourism. Hwange National Park, which draws foreign and local visitors in almost equal numbers, is also examined.

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A recent survey of the use of outdoor recreational areas in Zimbabwe (Heath, 1986) has indicated that certain resort areas are prime destinations for both domestic and foreign tourists. With the present rapidly increasing numbers of foreign visitors to Zimbabwe (Figure 1), this could lead to a conflict of interest between domestic and international tourism. During the early 1970's, at the peak of tourism in Rhodesia, heavy use of the prime resort areas led to considerable congestion and dissatisfaction, particularly amongst domestic visitors. During the coming decade congestion "is likely to become more serious than it was between 1972 and 1974, suggesting the need for Zimbabwe to evolve a long term tourist strategy. This should aim to satisfy growing local demand, while still permitting the country to reap the potential benefits from a vigorous international tourist industry" (Child and Heath, 1988, pp. 48-49).

The question arises as to whether domestic and foreign tourists in Zimbabwe are similar in socio-economic composition and are seeking similar recreational facilities and experiences. During the early years of tourist development, with a limited domestic market, differences between the two groups were not substantial. However, since Zimbabwean independence in 1980, the potential domestic market is showing signs of increasing and may be changing its nature and requirements (Child and Heath, 1988). Under these circumstances, existing tourist resorts may fail to satisfy the needs of either market

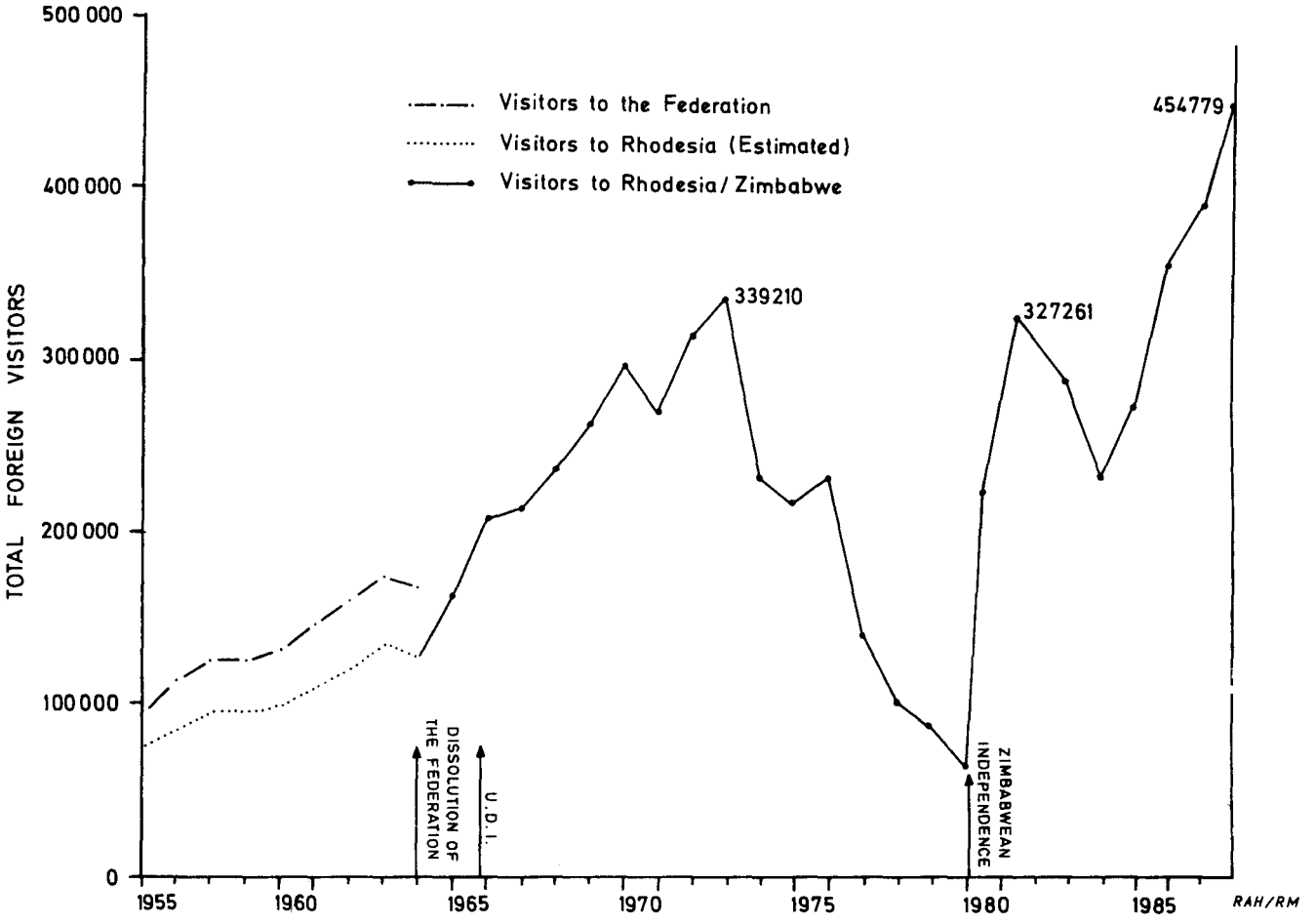
During 1985 a brief survey was undertaken of visitors to the major resort areas, in an attempt to ascertain the relative proportions of foreign and domestic tourists, together with their overall satisfaction with the resorts. This paper analyses the similarities and differences between local and foreign visitors to the three prime tourist destinations in Zimbabwe and determines whether both groups are seeking similar facilities and recreational experiences. Victoria Falls National Park, a major international tourist destination, is contrasted with Lake Kariba, the prime destination for the domestic market. Hwange National Park, which attracts both foreign and local visitors in more equal numbers, is also examined. Finally, the paper assesses whether the Zimbabwean tourist industry needs to evolve a strategy which caters for two different market.

The Resort Areas

The three resort areas discussed in this paper are all located in peripheral positions in the north-west of Zimbabwe (Figure 2). All the three are accessible by air and are the destinations in a package tour operated by Air Zimbabwe. Visitors, taking advantage of this

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FIGURE 1: ZIMBABWE FOREIGN VISITORS 1955 - 1987

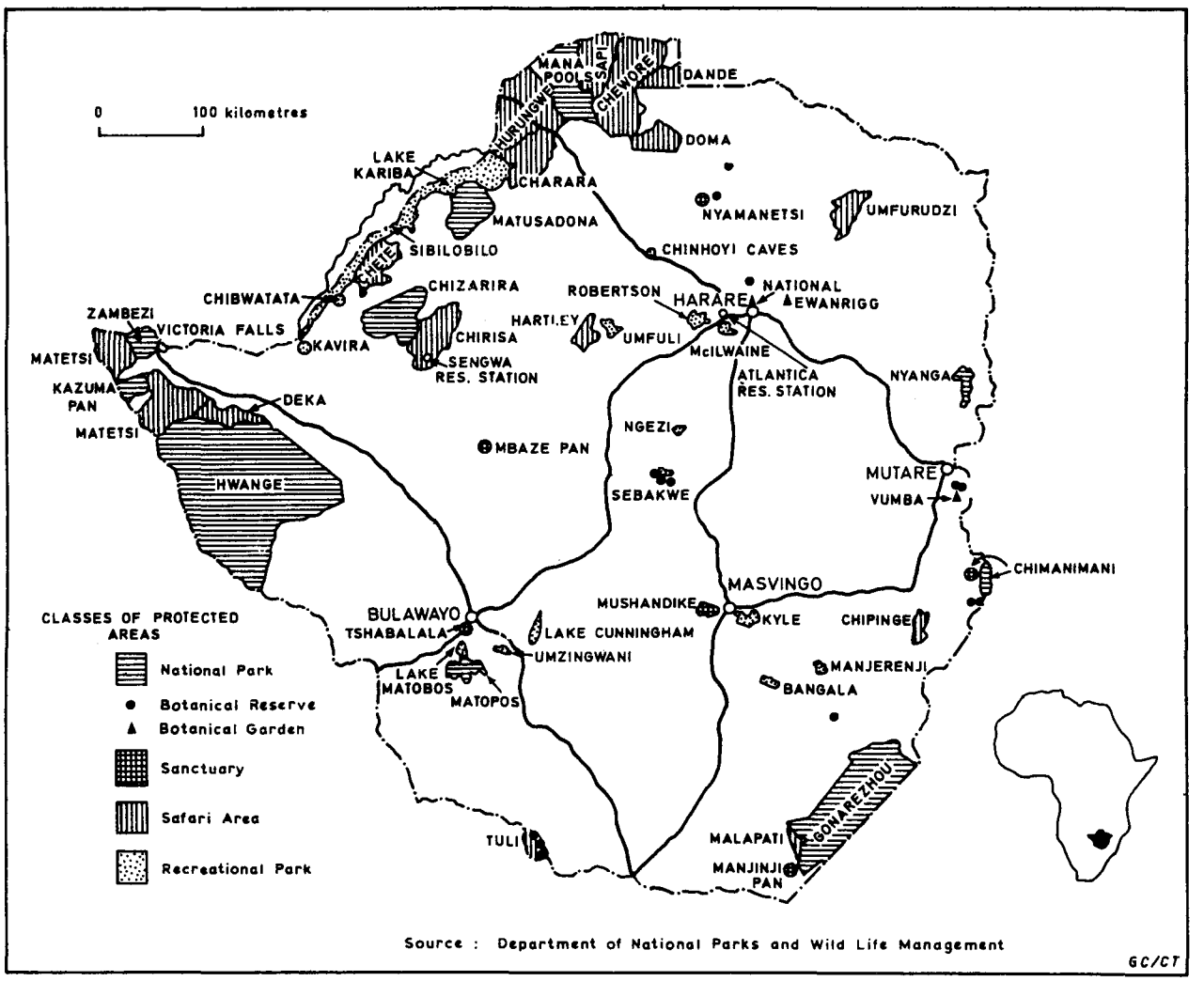


package, frequently visit two or all three of the destinations on the same holiday. In addition, all the three resorts have good road communication and Victoria Falls and Hwange are linked with Bulawayo by rail.

The Victoria Falls National Park and the associated **Zambezi National Park** comprise a tourist attraction of world renown. The 1,708 metre = wide Victoria Falls, with its drop of 104 metres, is cited as one of the wonders of the world (Phillipson, 1975). At peak flood water passes over the falls at the rate of about 700,000 cubic metres per minute, forming one of the biggest curtains of falling water in the world. The river exits from the chasm through a narrow gorge, only 60 metres wide at its narrowest point. Downstream from the falls, a series of gorges runs for approximately 100 kilometres, dropping some 260 metres and creating a series of rapids. Associated with the Victoria Falls is the Zambezi National Park, extending for 40 kilometres along the banks of the Zambezi river upstream from the falls. This park is a fine gameviewing area, containing large mammals such as elephant, hippopotamus, giraffe, buffalo, lion, leopard and a variety of antelope, as well as numerous smaller species and a wide variety of birds

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FIGURE 2: THE PARKS AND WILDLIFE ESTATE, ZIMBABWE



(Pitman, 1985, 1987). Recently, the Victoria Falls area was declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

Accommodation ranges from several hotels, some of which are of an international standard, through to National Parks chalets and bush camps, located along the edge of the river upstream from the falls, and cottages and camping sites administered by the Town Council and located within the town. As the premier tourist resort in Zimbabwe, the settlement at Victoria Falls grew rapidly after U.D.I. in 1965 and, today, offers a range of tourist oriented attractions such as local air flights over the falls, cruises on the Zambezi river, tours into the National park, a craft village and traditional dancing displays, a crocodile ranch, curio shops, a casino, conducted tours around the falls, canoeing and white water rafting, as well as opportunities for more individualistic activities such as sightseeing, gameviewing, walking, picnicking and fishing.

Hwange National Park, with an area of more than 12,500 sq. kilometres, is approximately the size of Northern Ireland and is Zimbabwe's largest national park. Located in the north-west of the country, in harsh and sandy terrain, Hwange is really an extension of the

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Kalahari semi-desert of Botswana (Pitman, 1987). With the aid of pumps, underground water has been brought to the surface to create artificial 'pans' which provide the water to support a large wildlife population throughout the year. Hwange is justifiably renowned for its wild animals and contains 35 species of large mammals, including some 12-13,000 elephants; 13,000 buffaloes; nearly 3,000 sables; 2,000 giraffes; 2,000 wildbeast; 1,700 zebra; 150 black rhinos; 200 white rhinos and unknown numbers of impala, eland, warthog, lion, leopard, cheetah and a variety of other animals. Hwange also contains the most diverse bird population in Zimbabwe, with more than 400 species in the park (Pitman, 1987).

A range of accommodation is available, both within and adjacent to the park. National Parks camps are located at Main Camp, in the south, and at Sinamatella and Robins camps in the north. In these camps, fully equipped chalets and lodges are available at a very low cost. Camping and caravanning facilities are also provided. Adjacent to the park, in the south, lies the Hwange Safari Lodge (one of the Southern Sun group of hotels) which has its own private wildlife estate staffed with professional full-time guides. A photo-safari company, 'Touch the Wild' also operates full-time, offering tented camps in the heart of the park as well as tree-lodges at Sikume, just outside the park boundaries.

Hwange National Park is, above all else, a gameviewing area and, unlike Victoria Falls, little else has been provided for the entertainment and amusement of tourists.

Lake Kariba was formed by the impoundment of the Zambezi river and, at the time of its completion, was the word's biggest man-made lake, covering an area of over 5,690 sq. kilometres. It extends for 290 kilometres and is up to 32 kilometres wide. When full, the lake contains more than 803,000 million litres of water (Pitman, 1985). Originally built solely to provide electricity for Zimbabwe and Zambia, Lake Kariba has become an important recreational area and a destination for both foreign and domestic tourists. The lake comprises Zimbabwe's largest National Recreational Park, while along the lake shores lie the Matusadona National Park and the Charara and Chete Safari Areas. Most of the islands in the lake are also protected. The town of Kariba, located near the dam wall, offers good hotel accommodation as well as camping and caravanning facilities and a limited number of privately owned cottages available for hire. Along the shores of the lake, accommodation varies from small, rustic campsites to National Park lodges and chalets, privately managed bush camps and luxury hotels.

Kariba provides a variety of attractions for the tourist. Tour companies offer gameviewing and photographic safaris by boat, by vehicle or on foot. The islands in the lake and the Matusadona National Park are ideal gameviewing venues. Elephant, buffalo, impala and hippo are plentiful and lion and black rhino are often sighted. Fishing, particularly for tiger fish (one of the more sporting of the world's game fish) and for bream and chesa, is a popular activity, both from the bank and from boats. Other activities centre around water sports such as sailing, scuba diving and water skiing. A local crocodile farm is a significant attraction, as is the casino.

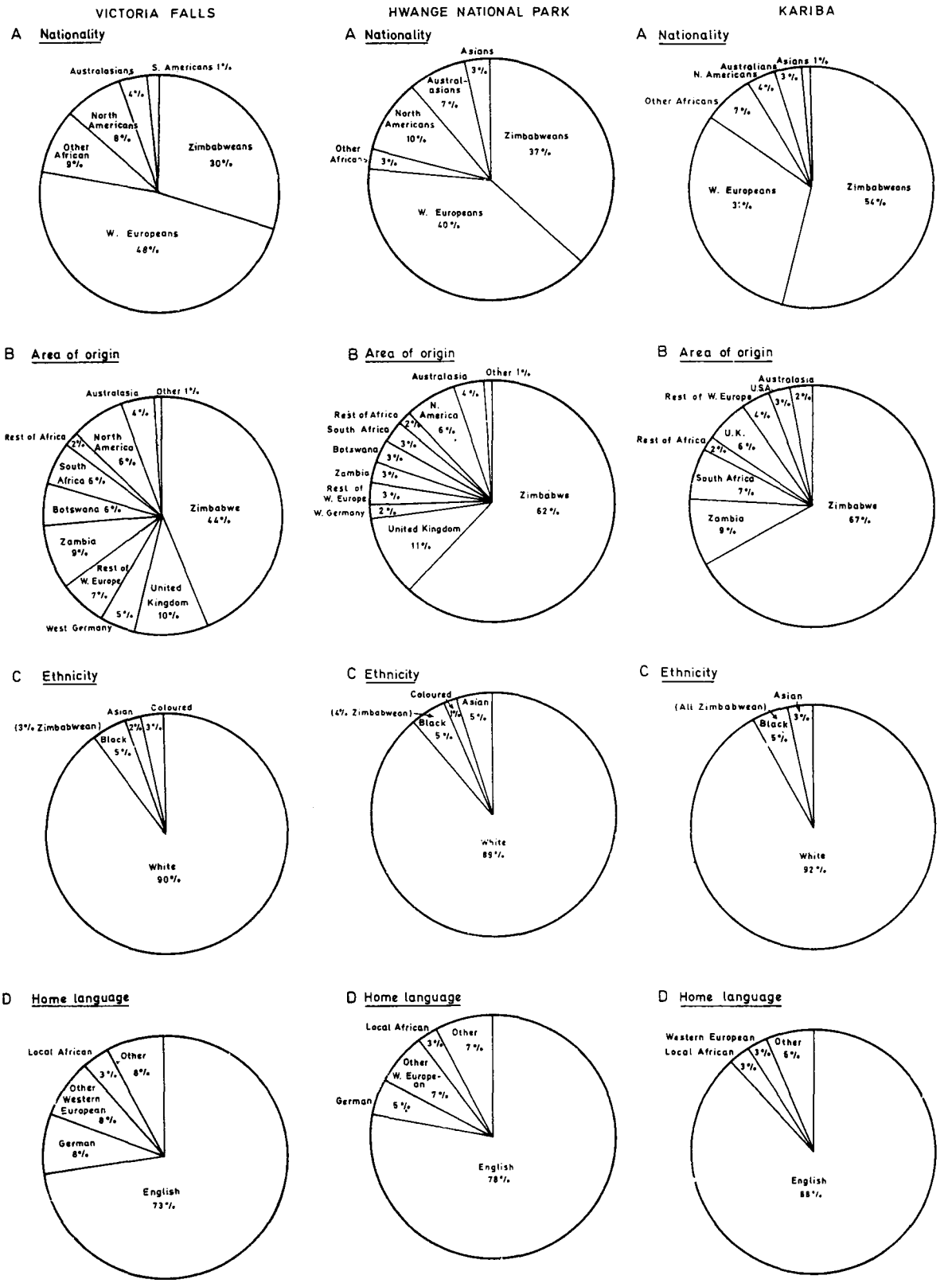
The Survey Results

Approximately 100,000-125,000 tourists visit Victoria Falls each year, while Hwange National Park attracts about 16,000-20,000. No figure exists for the number of visitors to Kariba each year, but there would certainly be considerably more than those visiting Hwange. During 1985, some 300 face-to-face group interviews, representing approximately 1,100-1,200 visitors, were conducted in each of the resorts. Of these interviews, 75% were undertaken during peak holiday periods and 25% during the off-season. Interviews were stratified according to the accommodation type being utilised.

In terms of nationality, Zimbabweans comprised a minority of the sample except in the case of Kariba (Figure 3A). Zimbabwean destinations used to be extremely popular with South African visitors but, since independence, these numbers have dwindled markedly and South African tourists are no longer significant. Amongst the foreign visitors, those with western European nationalities dominated, followed by North Americans and those from other African countries. However, when asked to indicate their home addresses, the number of people originating from Zimbabwe increased markedly (Figure 3B). This, presumably, reflects both the large number of expatriates at present working in Zimbabwe as well as those people permanently resident in the country who retained their British nationalities after independence. For the purpose of this analysis, only those people originating from outside Zimbabwe (some 42% of the total interviewed) will be considered foreign tourists, although many of the

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FIGURE 3: NATIONALITY, AREA OF ORIGIN ETHNICITY AND HOME LANGUAGE OF VISITORS TO THE STUDY AREAS



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expatriates resident in the country would be expected to have similar interests and aspirations to those of the foreign visitors. Figures 3A and 3B indicate that, in terms of both nationality and area of origin, Kariba is the prime destination for domestic tourists while Victoria Falls is more popular with foreign visitors. Hwange National Park appears to have a large component of non-Zimbabwean visitors resident in Zimbabwe.

An analysis of the ethnicity of visitors (Figure 3C) indicated that, on average, 90% were white and only 5% were black. Of the limited number of black visitors, not all were domestic tourists except in the case of Kariba. This suggests that the vast majority of the local population does not, at present, utilise the major resort areas and reinforces similar findings in the national survey (Child and Heath, 1988). English was the dominant home language in all cases (Figure 3D), but a significant number of foreign visitors to Victoria Falls and Hwange National Park spoke German. Only very small percentages of other languages were spoken.

The age-sex composition of visitors showed differences between domestic and foreign tourists (Figure 4). Domestic parties tended to have more children in the '15 years and less' category and, with the exception of Victoria Falls, more people in the '61 years and over' category. Domestic tourists appeared to use the resort areas for family holidays, particularly in the case of Hwange National Park, although Kariba attracted a large number of young adults in the '21-30 years' category. In both groups there was dearth of young people in the '16-20 years' category. With the exception of Victoria Falls, foreign tourists tended to be younger than domestic tourists and a large number in all three resort areas fell within the '21-30 years' category. This was especially noticeable at Kariba. There were generally more males than females amongst the adult age groups, particularly amongst the foreign visitors and most noticeably at Kariba. Zimbabwe would appear to be seen by foreign tourists as a destination for the young and adventurous.

When the socio-economic characteristics of occupation, education and income were assessed, both groups were predominantly drawn from the professional/technical and administration/management occupational groups, were well educated and fell into the highest income categories. Foreign visitors were generally of a slightly higher socio-economic status than were the locals. These differences were slightly less significant at Hwange National Park, where the opportunities afforded for gameviewing seem to attract similar types of people, and most marked at Kariba. At Kariba, domestic tourists were also characterised by a higher proportion of farmers than were found at either Victoria Falls or Hwange National Park.

The majority of all visitors travelled in groups of four or less but domestic tourists tended to travel in slightly larger groups than did foreign visitors, reflecting the family nature of their holidays. Foreign visitors travelled mainly in pairs.

At Victoria Falls, about the same percentage of both groups utilised hotel accommodation (61% and 64%) but a larger proportion of domestic visitors used the cheaper hotels. In addition, the National Parks chalet accommodation was more frequently occupied by domestic tourists while the Town Council camping ground and cottages were more popular with foreign visitors. There was substantial preference (60%) expressed by domestic tourists for the National Parks chalets, while foreign visitors tended to prefer the hotels. The majority in both groups (62%) were not particularly interested in camping at Victoria Falls.

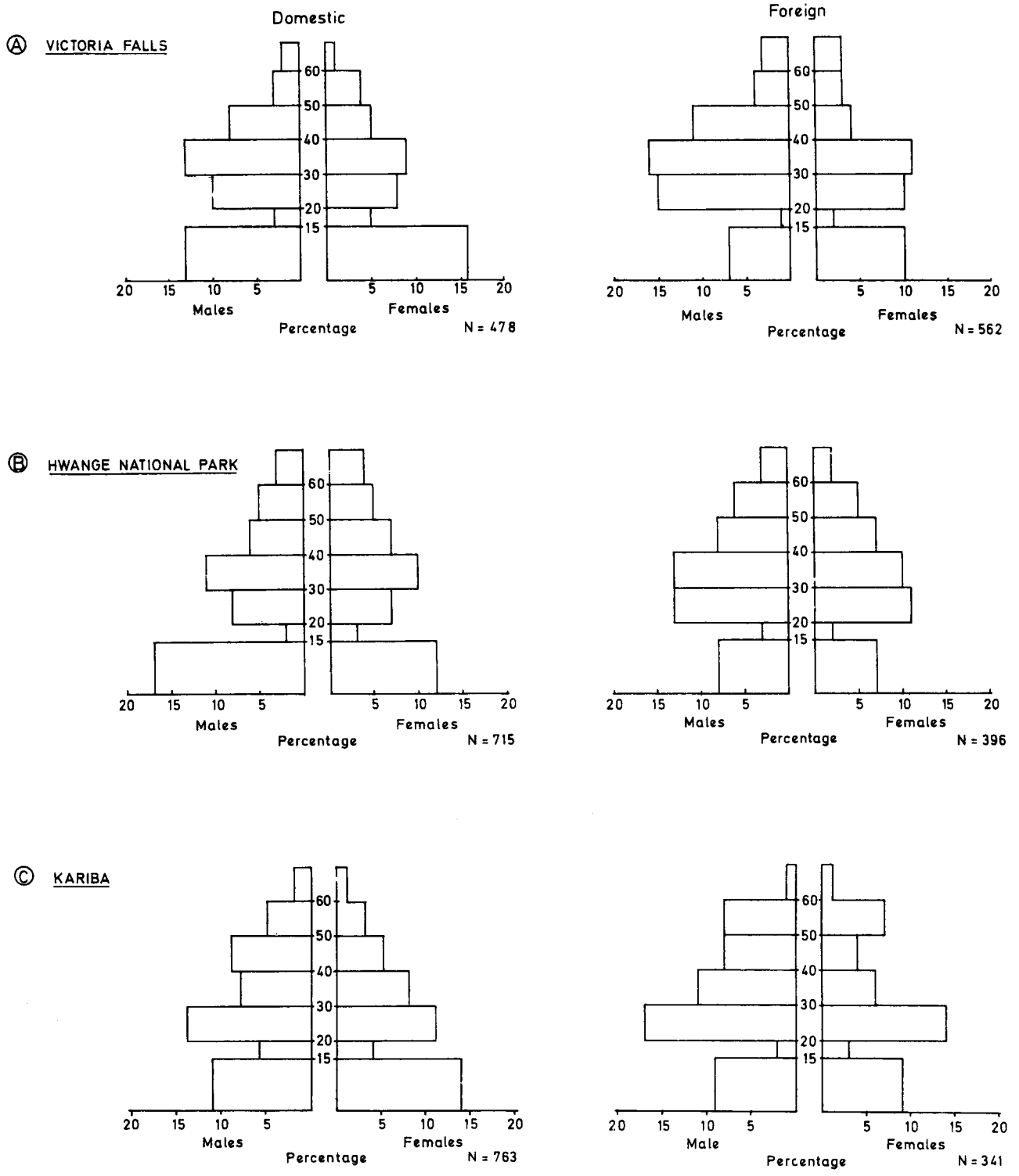
At Hwange National Park, rather more domestic tourists (81%) utilised National Parks accommodation than did foreign visitors (65%), but the foreign visitor figure is still surprisingly high given the fact that private transport is essential if one is to make use of National Parks facilities. Both foreign and domestic visitors expressed a preference for National Parks accommodation as opposed to hotels and a slight majority in both groups stated that they would prefer to camp or caravan in the park. It would appear that people attracted to an area solely for the purpose of game viewing enjoy 'getting back to nature'.

Most people interviewed at Kariba were staying in hotels and there was little difference in the proportion of each group staying in the different hotels, apart from the Karibbea Bay hotel with its casino, which appeared to attract more domestic visitors than foreigners. The Town Council camping site also appeared more popular with local people than with foreign visitors. There was a strong demand for National Parks type accommodation (which is not provided near the town) from 63% of domestic tourists and 58% of the foreign visitors.

In all three resort areas there was high level of satisfaction, amongst both groups of tourists. with the quality of the accommodation provided and more than 90% of all visitors considered that the prices charged were reasonable.

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FIGURE 4: THE AGE - SEX COMPOSITION OF VISITORS TO THE STUDY AREA



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Amongst domestic visitors, 52% spent only two to three days at Victoria Falls and most saw their visit as a minor holiday or a weekend trip. In contrast, foreign visitors tended to stay slightly longer (three to four days) and 44% saw their visit to Victoria Falls as comprising a major holiday, with a further 44% classifying it as a minor holiday. A similar pattern was evident at Hwange National Park, but at Kariba the position was reversed with domestic visitors generally spending more time at the resort than foreign tourists. Both groups tended to see visits to Kariba as comprising a minor holiday. In addition, Kariba was seen by both groups of tourists as a staging post for visits to other parts of the lake, with 40% of visitors to other lake resorts spending at least one night in Kariba and 34% spending a couple of days there.

For 58% of the foreign tourists, this was their first visit to Victoria Falls, with a further 36% stating that they had visited the falls occasionally. Domestic visitors were generally more familiar with the resort, with only 23% visiting it for the first time. Hwange National Park was less well known by both groups with 77% of foreign and 31% of domestic tourists stating that they were visiting the park for the first time. Kariba appears to be a resort which attracts return visits. Only 52% of foreign and 16% of domestic tourists were visiting the area for the first time. In all three resort areas, a substantial majority of first-time visitors indicated that they would like to return in the future.

The car was the major mode of transport used by both groups, except in the case of Victoria Falls where foreign visitors utilised car and aeroplane in almost equal numbers. The train service to Hwange and Victoria Falls was universally unpopular, although less so with foreign visitors who showed some interest in the steam locomotives still being used on this stretch of line. For foreign tourists, speed was the major factor governing their choice of transport, while domestic tourists ranked highly the freedom and convenience of having their own vehicles at hand. Generally, both groups were highly satisfied with the mode of transport they had utilised.

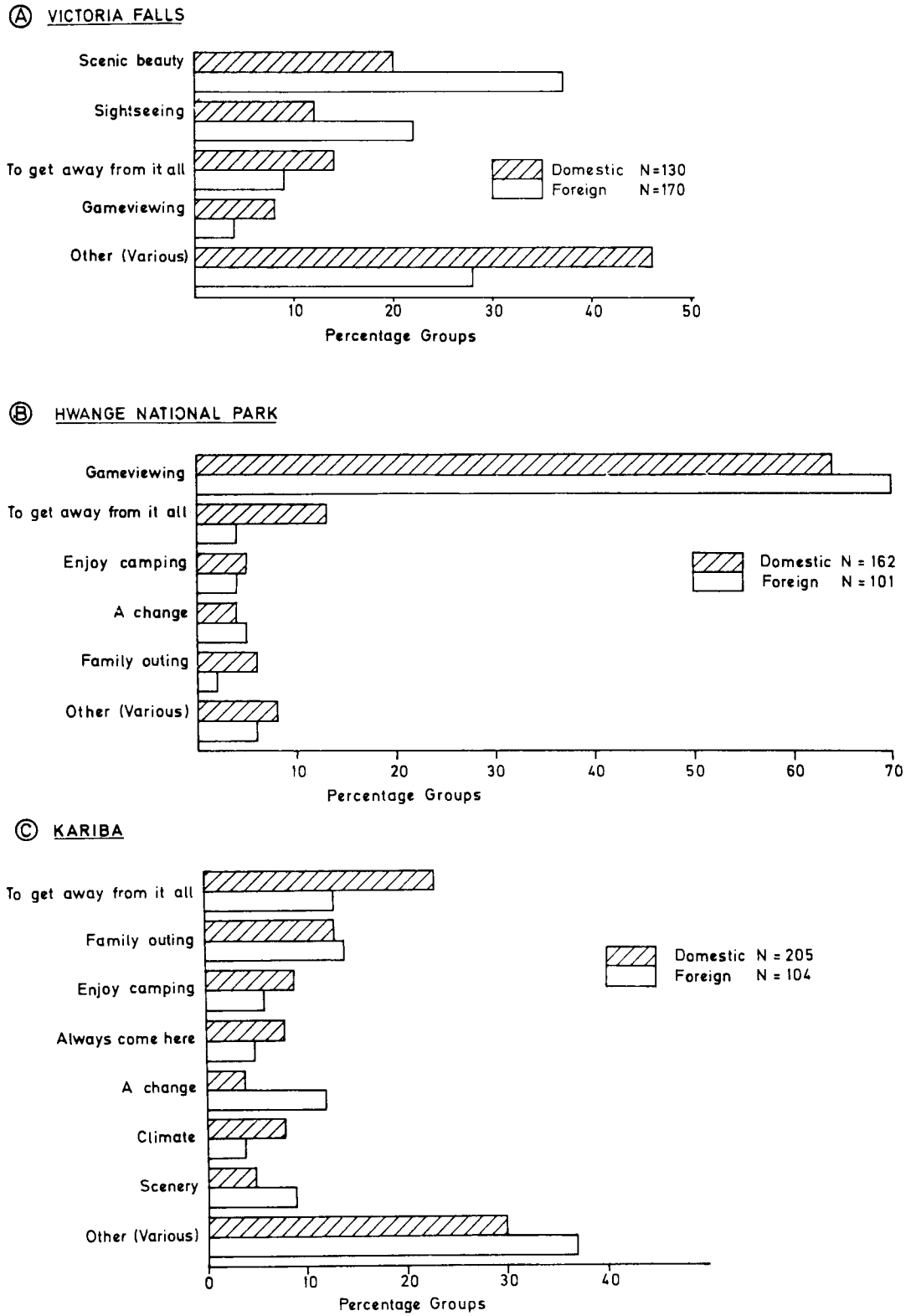
Reasons for visiting the resort areas were similar for both groups (Figure 5). At Victoria Falls, the particular beauty of the scenery, sightseeing and gameviewing were cited as the major reasons, with a significant component ranking the ability to relax and 'to get away from it all' as a further important attraction. Sightseeing, gameviewing, walking, photography and relaxing were the major activities undertaken by both groups (Figure 6). Reasons for visiting Hwange National Park were even more consistent between both groups than they were at Victoria Falls, with the opportunities for gameviewing dominating although domestic tourists, in particular, cited other reasons such as 'to get away from it all' and 'an ideal family holiday'. Apart from gameviewing, photography, sightseeing and birdwatching were favoured activities with both groups. Reasons for visiting Kariba were many and varied, with the statement 'to get away from it all' being dominant amongst domestic visitors but also important with foreigners. Interestingly, gameviewing opportunities were not considered an important reason, although gameviewing featured fairly high on the list of major activities undertaken, following relaxing, swimming and boat fishing in popularity.

There was little variation in levels of satisfaction, with over 90% in both groups expressing themselves as satisfied with all aspects of the management of the resorts and feeling that they had received value for money. When asked to comment on the desirability of certain improvements, the lack of photographic film and the need for information and interpretative materials were highlighted by both groups, in all the three resorts. In addition, at Victoria Falls, domestic tourists complained about the lack of medical facilities. The foreign visitors, perhaps fortunately, seemed unaware of this fact. At Hwange National Park, both groups pointed out the necessity for having some sort of motor repair facility and available petrol. Other felt needs in the park were for a restaurant and shop (which have since been provided), a swimming pool and a children's playground. There was little difference in the proportions of domestic and foreign visitors making these suggestions. Generally, there were few suggestions for improvements in Kariba.

When a long list of suggested additional facilities was considered for each resort, there was again little difference between the responses of domestic and foreign tourists. At Victoria Falls, both groups would like to see greater development of the Zambezi National Park, with the introduction of hides and platforms, guided tours and gameviewing vehicles, exclusive walking and birdwatching areas, and the establishment of an arboretum. Other popular suggestions with over 70% of both groups were those of various guided tours within the falls area and the creation of a museum or first class interpretative centre.

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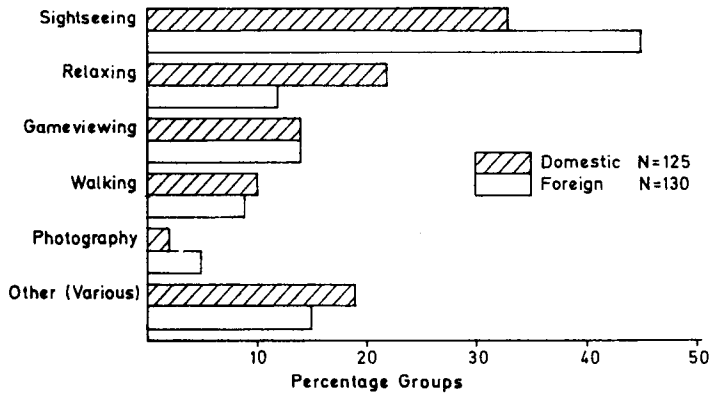
FIGURE 5 REASONS FOR VISITING THE STUDY AREAS



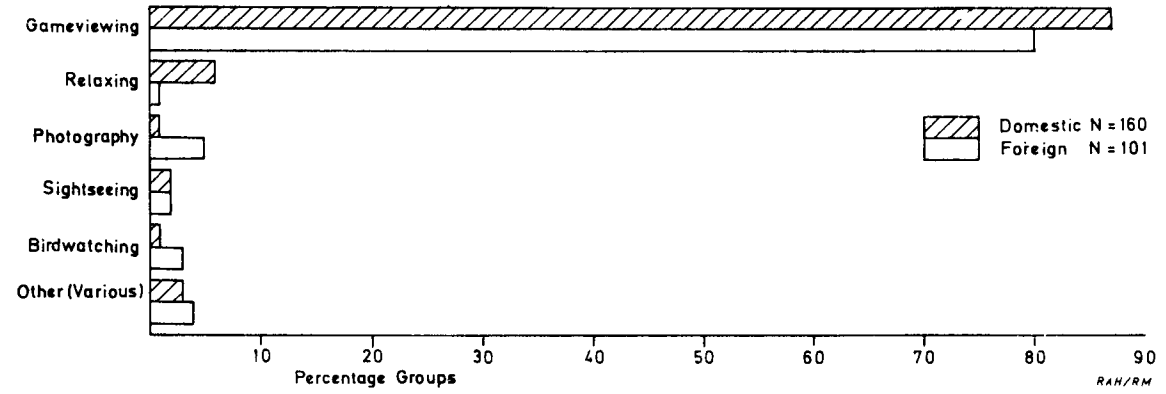
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FIGURE 6: MAJOR ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN IN THE STUDY AREA

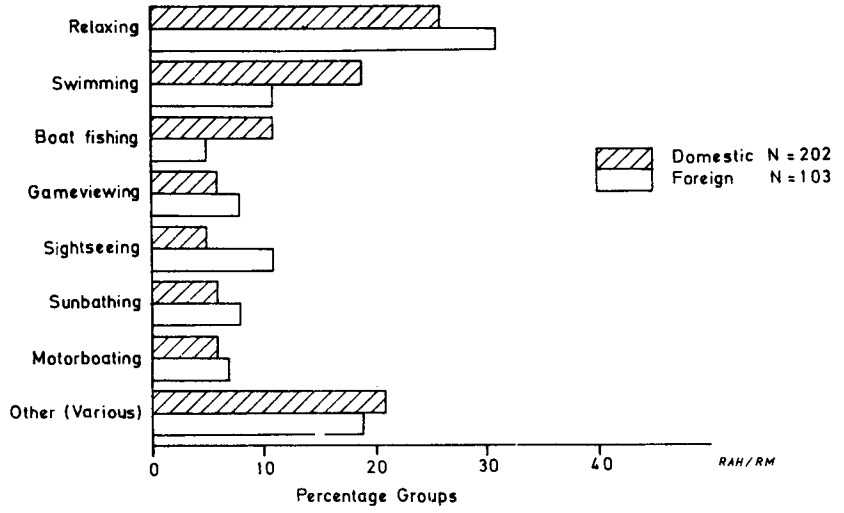
Ⓐ VICTORIA FALLS



Ⓑ HWANGE NATIONAL PARK



Ⓒ KARIBA



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There were fewer major suggestions for additional facilities at Hwange National Park than there were at Victoria Falls. Once again, there was overwhelming support from both groups for development of a specific type within the park, such as the provision of hides, guided walks and moonlight gameviewing. Domestic tourists, generally, felt more strongly about these issues than did foreign visitors. The idea of participating in overnight wilderness trails was popular with both groups.

Additional facilities advocated by both groups at Kariba included an increased variety of cruises on the lake and additional conducted tours. Domestic visitors were slightly more aware of the hazards of the lake and advocated the introduction of greater safety precautions.

When asked to list the activities in which they had actually participated, the responses from both groups were remarkably similar. However, informal activities such as picnicking and fishing were more popular with domestic than with foreign visitors, as were the casinos at Victoria Falls and Kariba.

Foreign tourists tended to rely more upon conducted tours and hotel entertainment but, overall, there was surprisingly little participation in many of the activities specifically organised for tourists at Victoria Falls and Kariba. At Kariba, domestic tourists participated in almost all activities to a greater extent than did foreign tourists, possibly because of the less formal nature of the facilities provided.

Discussion

Although Victoria Falls is primarily a foreign tourist destination while Hwange National Park and Kariba cater mainly to domestic tourists, the present similarity between the two groups in terms of socio-economic characteristics, recreational preferences and activities, and levels of satisfaction is marked in all three of the study areas. Any differences which do exist are relatively minor. Certainly, at the moment, Zimbabwe appears to be catering for a single market and to be providing, by and large, what is required by that market.

A factor which does give cause for concern, however, is the extremely limited number of black Zimbabweans at present using the major recreational areas. Comprising over 97% of the Zimbabwean population, in no case did they contribute more than 5% of the visitors to the resorts in this survey. Zimbabwean independence is only eight years old and it may well be that the burgeoning high and middle income groups are still establishing their financial positions, buying homes and educating children. Previous research amongst the citizens of Harare (Child and Heath, 1988) indicates that there is considerable interest amongst high and middle income black families in the idea of taking a holiday in one of the major resort areas. If even a small percentage of this potential market begins to utilise the major resorts, amenities and facilities will come under considerable pressure. Both Hwange National Park and Lake Kariba are large enough to enable additional destinations and facilities to be created but further pressure on the Victoria Falls area could be environmentally detrimental. The number of visitors the Victoria Falls has already approached the figure which the Department of National Parks and Wildlife Management estimates as being the maximum which the falls area can accommodate. A further increase could see the Victoria Falls in danger of being 'loved to death' as is happening with certain of the American National Parks, such as Yosemite in California.

Whether a new and increased Zimbabwean market will be satisfied with facilities such as those at present provided, or whether it will seek different experiences and facilities, remains to be seen. The limited number of black Zimbabweans currently using the facilities in the major recreational areas appear to be satisfied with what is being provided, but their numbers are so small that it is impossible to draw any firm conclusions from their responses. Continual monitoring of the domestic market will be necessary in order to obtain a clearer picture of what will be required in the coming years.

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