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Green golf tourism: the golfer's perspective

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Abstract

The beautiful settings found on a golf course hide the true impact it have on the environment. It was important to establish whether golf tourists prefer a golf course and destination that sustain the environment over those that did not and whether they were willing to sacrifice some aspects of the game that traditionally made golf enjoyable in order to protect the environment.

The population of this study was the members of and visitors to George Golf Club and Pinnacle Point in Mossel Bay. A questionnaire was used to personally interview 277 respondents by means of the simple random sampling approach. Results indicated that respondents' considered price an important factor when choosing a golf course and destination. Unfortunately, no conscious decision was made to select a golf course and destination that was environmentally friendly. Respondents clearly indicated that a golf course should be designed to conserve the environment, but they would not pay more to play on an eco-friendly golf course.

The results implied that "green" golf is misrepresented and misunderstood in South Africa. Respondents associated "green" as an expensive lifestyle that only a few could afford. Golf tourists should know that "green" golf tourism could lead to a sustainable and responsible lifestyle.

Key phrases

environment; golf; golf course; golf tourism; golf tourists; green tourism; sustainable

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Key focus

Golf has grown exceedingly during the past three decades. It is one of the leading sports in the world in terms of total economic expenditure (Wheeler & Nauright 2006:427). The National Department of Tourism (NDT) estimates that the South African golf industry

generates R29.2 billion annually, with a multiplier effect of R58.4 billion and creates more than 50 000 jobs (George 2015:438). Golf tourism is a rapidly expanding special interest activity linked to tourism. Globally, golf tourism is considered a major tourism activity both as a direct form of special interest travel and as an adjunct to other forms of travel (Hall 1992:144). If a golfer were to drive 100 km to a golf course for the weekend, the game of golf would be part of tourism and the golfer would be on a trip (George 2015:7).

Golf tourism has been valued at US$ 20 billion with over 60 million golf tourists travelling the world to play on some of the estimated 32 000 golf courses in more than 100 countries (Hudson & Hudson 2014:vii). It can therefore be said that golf tourism is interrelated and interconnected to other forms of tourism and thus generating income for other tourist facilities.

However, in the last decade, there have been increasing public concerns about the negative environmental impact of golf courses. Golf courses have long been targeted by environmentalists because of their chemically enhanced lawns, over-consumption of water, brush and filling in of natural wetlands and the removal of problematic trees. It is important that the impacts of golf are understood by both the golf course management and golf tourists so that eco-friendly practices can be implemented at golf courses to ensure the sustainability of golf tourism (Priestley 2006:173).

1.2 Background

This study was conducted in two phases. Phase 1 evaluated the attitudes and preferences of golf tourists towards golf tourism and golf courses that are environmentally friendly. Although the respondents to this study did specify whether they were a current member at the club or a visitor, it was decided that the term golf tourist will be used to describe the population of this study since golf course members also become golf tourists when travelling to another golfing destination. Phase 2 investigated whether any adaptation methods have been implemented by golf course management to reduce the environmental damage by golf courses. This article will report on phase 1 of the study.

1.3 Trends

Although there has not been much research done on the possible future preference of golf tourists, the tourism industry already shows a sturdy movement towards environmentally friendly products and services. Approximately a third of tourists is starting to prefer some form of environmentally friendly tourism and is prepared to pay for these experiences.

Research shows that global spending on environmentally friendly forms of tourism increased about six times more than the industry-wide rate of growth (Prokosch 2011:Internet).

1.4 Objectives

Golf tourism may lead the industry into greener pastures by becoming the initiator of green golf tourism. Two objectives of the study will be reported in this article: whether golf tourists are prepared to pay more to play on environmentally sustainable golf courses whilst sacrificing some of their traditional golfing preferences in order to enhance the sustainability of these golf courses as well as their general environmental practices while participating in golf.

1.5 Contribution to field

Golf is not just a supplemental tourism activity, but is in itself a primary driver of incremental tourism. The aim of this study was to demonstrate the contribution that green golf tourism can have on the South Africa's tourism industry (Baumann 2009:Internet) by creating awareness amongst golf tourists to reassess their traditional golfing preferences by choosing to play on golf courses that is environmentally friendly so that they can have a positive impact on responsible and sustainable golf tourism to ensure a viable and profitable tourism sector as well as a well-maintained environment. Sustainable golf and golf tourism can offer investment and employment, a healthy activity for all ages, local access to and protection of green space, while protecting biodiversity and sequestering carbon (Sustainable Golf Development 2013:Internet).

2. OPPORTUNITY INVESTIGATED

The purpose of the literature study was to research the attitudes of golf tourists towards environmentally friendly golf courses and destinations and whether they are prepared to pay more to play on an environmentally sustainable golf course whilst sacrificing some of their traditional golfing preferences in order to promote sustainability as well as their general environmental practices while participating in the sport.

Golf is a relatively expensive sport and hobby (Hudson & Hudson 2014:28). Golfing expenses range from golf club fees, golf equipment and correct golf attire to name a few. Therefore, golf mainly attracts wealthy tourists who spend large amounts of money on leisure and sports such as golf. A golf tourist tends to be even older and wealthier than the

average golfer (Hudson & Hudson 2014:28). Golf tourists are estimated to spend 120% more per day in their destination than a general leisure tourist (Capel 2014:Internet).

The average golf tourist spends three to four days or a week on a short-haul, and seven, ten or fourteen days on a long-haul golf holiday, whereby, on average, 40% of golf club members play once a week at their home course and away as a visitor once a month (Bruyns 2009:19). Golf tourism has been identified as a means to boost tourism as interest in sport tourism has been growing since the successful hosting of the 2010 FIFA World Cup (Hedley 2013:Internet).

Golf tourists know exactly what they want and pursue a golfing experience with quality golf tourism offerings. These offerings include the attractiveness, degree of difficulty, price and accessibility of the golf course (Butler 2006:168). A report by KPMG, Golf Travel Insights 2012, has revealed that golf tourists are becoming more price sensitive (Hotelier Middle East Staff 2012:Internet). Golf tourists rated the quality of the course and the price of the package as the most important factors when choosing a golfing holiday destination. These were closely followed by the accessibility of the destination due to the costs associated with travel (Hotelier Middle East Staff 2012:Internet).

Although previous studies have been done, such as the golf tourist' opinions about the impact of a golfing destinations and tourism along the Garden Route in 2006 (Van Zyl 2006:93) not much research has been done about the attitudes, knowledge and preferences of golf tourists toward green golf tourism in South Africa and whether golf tourists will pay more to play on an environmentally sustainable golf course. Therefore, the value of this study is further emphasised. This preference might influence the golf tourism industry positively, both environmentally and economically.

During the last decade, there have been increasing public concerns about the negative environmental impact of golf courses (Hudson & Hudson 2014:238). When it comes to the trends and behaviour of golf tourists towards the greening of golf, there are some interesting developments. Barton (2008:Internet) suggests that if one would have asked golf tourists 20 years ago if they would consider playing on a golf course that is less-manicured, they would have said no. If one asked golf tourists today, explaining that a 'not all green golf course' is saving millions of litres of water, they would probably say yes.

It is time to realise that the movement towards the greening of golf tourism is not just a fad anymore, but is becoming a trend that needs to be investigated further. It is estimated that

by 2020 most new courses will start by phasing out negative impacts on the environment and designing courses sustainably while educating golf tourists on environmental best practices in order to reinforce sustainable management (HSBC Report 2012:Internet). The greening of tourism operations, such as golf courses, can justifiably open up new possibilities and experiences for the broad spectrum of discerning markets and tourists so that they can enjoy a holiday of their choice with a clear conscience.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The method of research used is discussed under the following headings: materials; setting; design; procedure; and analysing.

3.1 Materials

A questionnaire was used to personally interview respondents. The questionnaire included the demographic profile, golf members' and tourists understanding of 'green' golf tourism and their preferences towards 'green' golf tourism. The questionnaire made provision for differentiation between members or visitors to the golf course. A pilot study was conducted at Bloemfontein Golf Course to evaluate the interpretation and appropriateness of questions and time required to complete the questionnaire. This identified aspects of the questionnaire that needed adjustment. Seven members of Bloemfontein Golf Club were interviewed during the pilot study to test the standard and understanding of the questionnaire.

3.2 Setting

George Golf Club and Pinnacle Point, both located along the Garden Route, were identified as the location of the field study. These golf courses were chosen from a top twenty golf course list supplied by Golf Direct (Golf Direct 2015:Internet).

3.3 Design

The population of the study was members and visitors that participated in golf tourism along the Garden Route. The Garden Route was chosen for the location of this study because it is regarded as one of the top ten attractions of South Africa (South African Tourism 2015:Internet). Four of the top twenty golf courses located along the Garden Route, namely George Golf Club and Fancourt in George, Simola in Knysna and Pinnacle Point in Mossel Bay are situated along the Garden Route. Permission for the research could only be obtained from two of the identified golf courses namely George Golf Club in George and Pinnacle Point in Mossel Bay.

In 2007, Pinnacle Point was surrounded by controversy when it was blamed for incorrect effluent treatment and recycling of water that reacted negatively with the environment. The condition of its fairways and mansions came at a price to South Africa's natural heritage and archaeological resources (Westwood 2008:Internet). Therefore, the inclusion of Pinnacle Point in this study could be of great value when investigating the impact of golf courses on the environment and the 'green' preferences of the members and visitors.

The questionnaire was planned and designed with the guidance of a qualified statistician (Anderson 1998:170) and included the demographic profile, tourists' understanding of 'green' golf tourism and their preferences towards 'green' golf tourism.

The questionnaire made provision for differentiation between members or visitors to the golf course. A pilot study was conducted at Bloemfontein Golf Course to evaluate the interpretation and appropriateness of questions and time required to complete the questionnaire. This identified aspects of the questionnaire that needed adjustment.

3.4 Procedure

The simple random sampling approach was used to select respondents for the questionnaires. This research approach gave each member of the population an equal chance of being selected (McMillan 2008:113). The random sampling was the key process. If a respondent refused to participate, the research approach continued to the next respondent. This ensured that the random selection of respondents was not compromised.

During the actual data collection a total of 277 questionnaires were completed by golf members and visitors which resulted in 135 questionnaires being completed at George Golf Club and 142 at Pinnacle Point. The questionnaires were completed by the researcher assisted by two selected fieldworkers. Quantitative and qualitative (mixed methods) research approach was used to gather information.

3.5 Analysing

The processing of all data was done using Microsoft Excel and STATISTICA. Both programs were used for descriptive and statistical results. A variety of statistical comparisons, plots and summaries were used in order to properly compare and index all relevant data needed to draft the indices that were listed as objectives (Raosoft 2010:Internet).

4. FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

The following is an extract of the research findings that focussed on the overall preferences and attitudes that the respondents had towards environmentally friendly golf courses and destinations.

To establish a clear understanding of the preference and attitude of golf tourists towards sustainability it is necessary to report on the profile of the respondents, their destination preferences, their golf course preferences, their price sensitivity and their general environmentally friendly practises as well as the practical implications that this can have on the future of the golf tourism industry.

4.1 Profile of respondents

It is important to take into consideration the influence demographic factors such as marital status, age and income may have in the decision-making process of the respondents. Information about the profile of respondents allows research findings to be studied at face value. It reveals and measures the strength of the target group's opinion, attitude and behaviour with regard to the research subject (Penwarden 2014:Internet).

The majority of the respondents (65%) were visitors and not club members of the golf courses. Only 5% of these visitors came from international destinations whilst 95% were South African. Club members of the respective golf courses representing both nationals and visitors to South Africa represented 35% of the respondents. The higher number of respondents being visitors rather than club members may be explained by the fact that research was conducted during the December holiday season. Traditionally December is high season in South Africa.

Comparing the member/visitor ratio of both George Golf Club and Pinnacle Point, results indicated that the majority of the respondents for both golf courses were visitors. The specific location of the golf course along the Garden Route (inland or coastal) therefore had no impact on this ratio.

Table 1 indicates the member/visitor ratio of both George Golf Club and Pinnacle Point.

Overall (members and visitors), results indicate that the majority of the respondents (95%) originated from South Africa (SA) whilst only 5% (n = 15) of the respondents were international visitors to SA. The overseas respondents were from destinations such as Brazil

(12%), Canada (7%), France (7%), Germany (20%), Norway (7%), Sweden (20%), Switzerland (7%) and the United Kingdom (20%).

TABLE 1: Member / visitor ratios at golf courses

George Golf Club		Pinnacle Point	
Members	**Visitors**	**Members**	**Visitors**
34%	66%	35%	65%

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

The majority of the domestic respondents originated from the Western Cape (54%) and Gauteng (29%) with Limpopo representing the smallest number of respondents (Figure 1). A possible reason for the large number of respondents from the Western Cape may be justified by their proximity to the geographical locations of the golf courses.

Figure 2 indicates the geographical spread of domestic respondents.

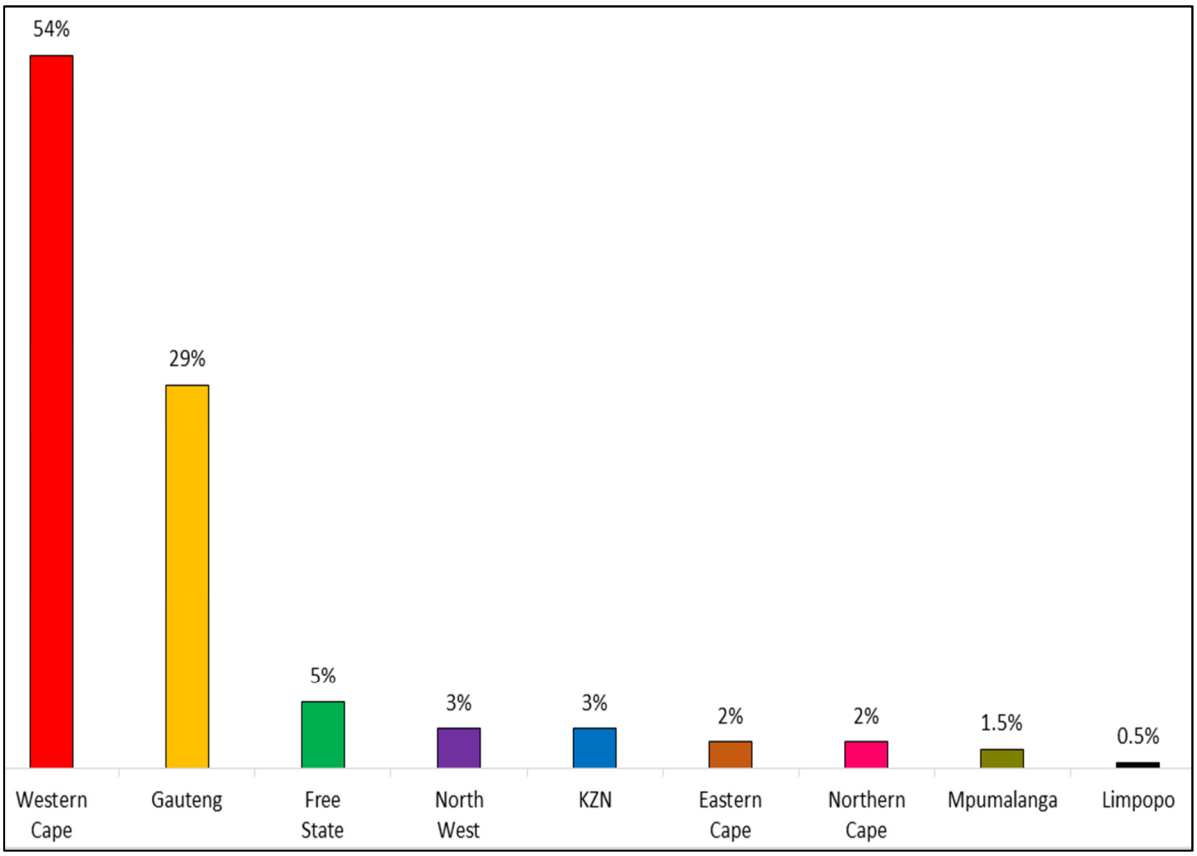


FIGURE 1: Geographic spread of domestic respondents

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

The demographic profile of respondents is represented by a majority of 84% males with an average age of 43 years. The average age of female respondents (16%) is 42 years. The majority of respondents' home language is Afrikaans (68%) followed by English (27%) whilst the home languages of the remaining 5% are German, Norwegian, Portuguese or Swedish. Substantial percentages (66%) of the respondents are married. The dominating race of respondents is white (96%) whilst the remaining 4% consisted of Indian and Coloured respondents with zero African respondents.

The highest level of education of the respondents was evaluated against the following criteria: secondary education; an under-graduate qualification; honours/professional qualification; master's degree; doctoral degree. In terms of level of education, 39% of respondents indicated that they had formal post school education, earning an average salary of between R250 000 and R500 000 per annum. Research indicates that respondents are generally sensitive towards declaring their income (Malhotra 2006:Internet) and as suggested, broad salary categories were used to obtain such information.

A typical profile representing the averages of the various demographic variables is depicted in Table 2.

TABLE 2: Typical profile of respondents

Gender	Male	84%
Age	43 years	Average
Language	Afrikaans	68%
Marital status	Married	66%
Occupation	Professional occupation	46%
Race	White	96%
Level of education	Honours / professional degree	39%
Income	R 250 000 – R 500 000	30%

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

4.2 Destination preferences

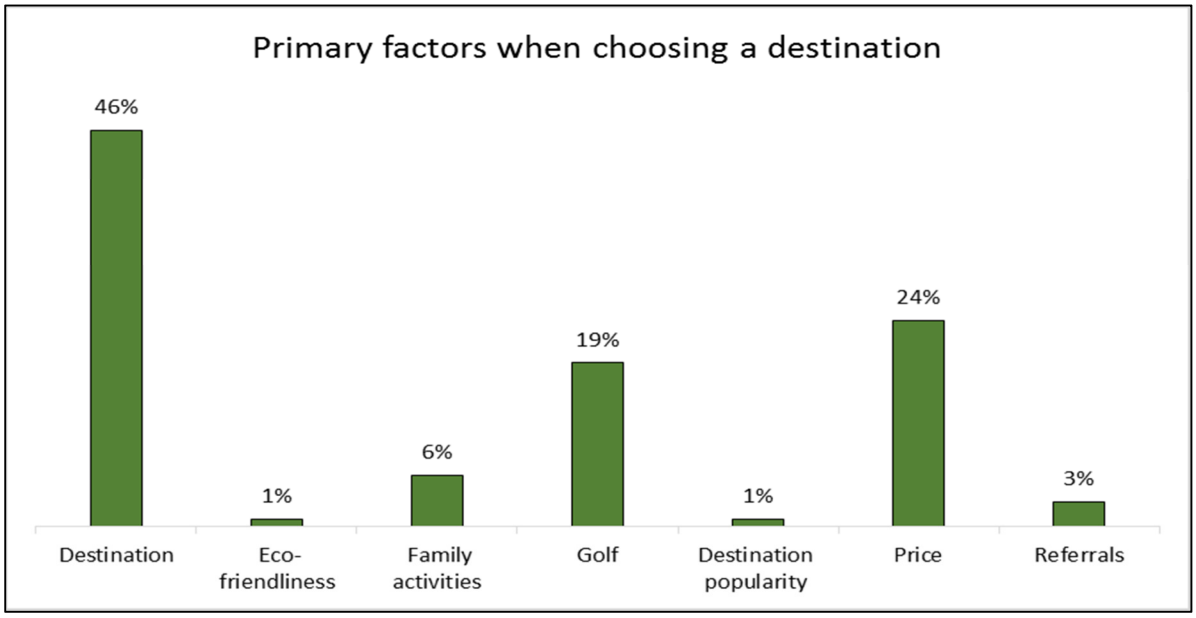
Respondents identified factors considered to be important when choosing a holiday/golfing destination. These factors have a direct link towards the attitude that golf tourists have towards the environment and their impact on it. It can be said that there is a direct correlation between respondents' holiday/destination preferences and golf course preferences. A

majority of respondents' identified the destination itself as an important primary factor and price as secondary factor.

When compared, price features as an important factor in both graphs (24% and 29% respectively) whilst participating in a golfing activity (19% and 27% respectively) is also considered as important in both. The concept and awareness of the eco-friendliness of the destination have clearly not been rooted in respondents as results reflect a poor rating in terms of the importance thereof, both as a primary and secondary factor for destination choice. Family activities also featured as an important secondary factor (18%) that may be justified by the fact that 66% of the respondents are married, while the average age is 43 years of age. Figure 2 illustrates the primary and secondary factors.

From these results it is clear that price is deeply rooted in the decision making process of the golfer when choosing a holiday / golfing destination. Price is considered more important than the golfing facilities and eco-friendliness of the destination.

Respondents were also asked to indicate their environmental consciousness at the destination. Responses were rather neutral when eco-friendly holiday decisions were made. Golf is played in an outdoor environment and 98% of respondents confirmed their preference for outdoor destinations. However, the eco-friendliness of such a destination is only important to 21% of such respondents. Again, this is a clear indication that the importance and link between the environment and eco-friendly practices is not known or supported by respondents. A clean, green environment may be seen by respondents as a given rather than something in which the respondent plays a role or can influence.



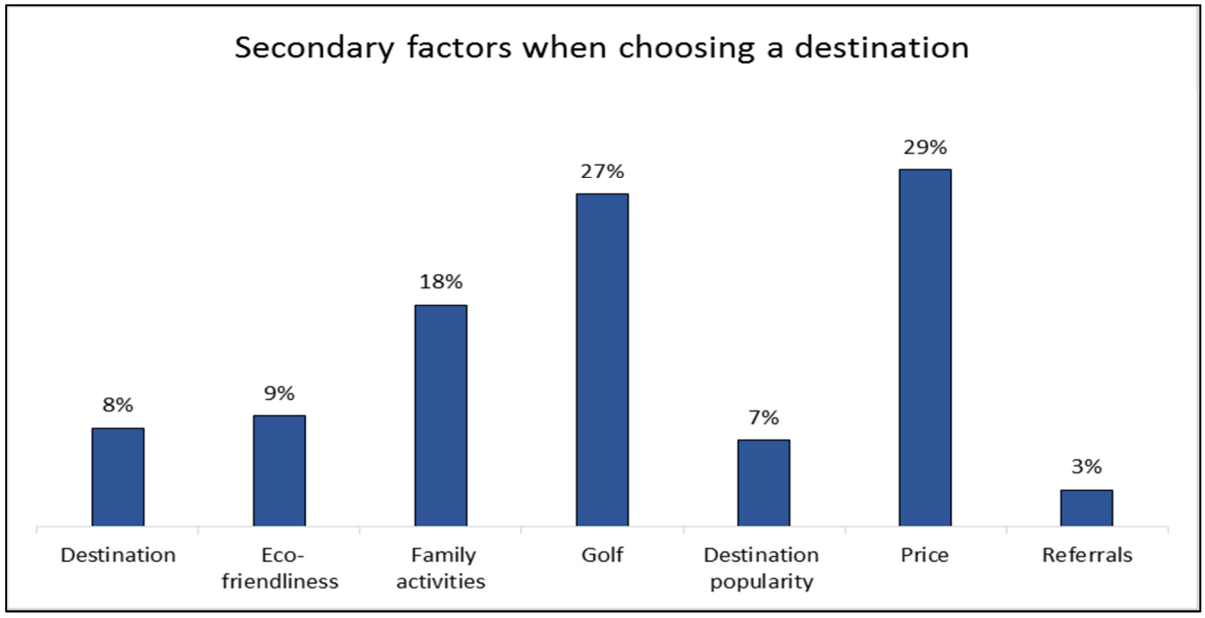


FIGURE 2: Primary and secondary factors when choosing a destination

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

It is important to take into consideration the influence demographic factors such as marital status, age and income may have in a holiday decision-making process.

Such results are tabulated in Table 3.

Results therefore indicate that the stage of the life cycle at which respondents find themselves has an influence on their consciousness towards the environment. The older, more educated and the higher their income, the more eco-friendly respondents become.

4.3 Golf course preferences of golf tourists

Playing golf forms an integral part of respondents' activities and motivations. Responses varied when respondents had to indicate important factors they consider before selecting a golf course.

Figure 3 indicates the most important factors when selecting a golf course.

4.4 Price sensitivity of golf tourists

Research results indicated that price was identified as an important primary and secondary fact for consideration. Sixty one per cent of the respondents agreed that they would rather choose to play on an environmentally friendly golf course than one that is not

environmentally friendly. When the respondents were asked whether their choice of a golf course would be influenced if it was certified as an eco-friendly course, 56% agreed. The majority of the respondents (65%) indicated that they would however not pay more to play on an eco-friendly golf course. Respondents felt that it should be the financial responsibility of the golf course to ensure the eco-friendliness of the golf course and that this should not influence a golfer financially. Perceptions of respondents towards the environment clearly indicate that golf tourists agree that the golf course should be designed to conserve the environment.

TABLE 3: Factors determining selection of eco-friendly holiday/golf destination

		Choose a destination based on its eco-friendliness	
		Yes	**No**
Marital status	Single	20%	80%
	Married	21%	79%
Age	≤ = 25 years	12%	88%
	26 – 50 years	21%	79%
	51+ years	24%	76%
Income	Below R250k	21%	79%
	R250k – R500k	21%	79%
	R500k – R1m	18%	82%
	R1m or more	24%	76%
Educational level	Secondary	18%	82%
	Under graduate	20%	80%
	Honours/Professional	21%	79%
	Masters	24%	76%
	Doctoral	29%	71%

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

Quality of the golf course (94%) was identified as the most important single factor. Price, past experiences, natural surroundings and membership fees were also considered to be important and featured in the above 70% category. Other factors such as attractions in the area (67%), number of golf courses in the area (63%), eco-friendliness of the golf course (61%), weather (58%), location (57%), golf packages (56%), shopping facilities in the area (42%) and the proximity to airports (40%) attracted lower ratings.

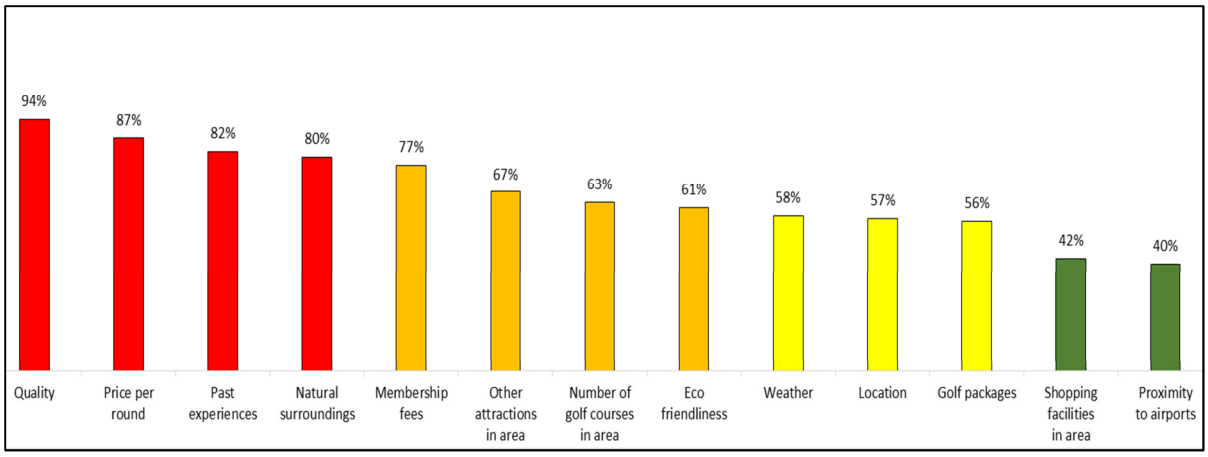


FIGURE 3: Important variables in golf course selection

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

However, when it comes to factors such as the grass and conditions on the golf course, respondents were not convinced that the environment is more important than green, well-manicured grass. This is further emphasised by the fact that 74% of the respondents indicated that they do not consider the effect on the environment when selecting a golf course. This contradiction makes it clear that respondents who prefer environmentally friendly golf courses do not consistently follow the same trend when considering their environment when selecting a golf course.

This becomes clear from the findings tabulated in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Perception towards golf course environment

Statements	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Prefer a golf course designed to conserve the environment	63%	31%	6%
Course should use only enough water to keep grass alive	56%	25%	19%
Golfers must be willing to play on brown grass during low rainfall periods	47%	20%	33%
Willing to play golf under less-manicured conditions	43%	28%	29%
Consider my effect on the environment before selecting a golf course	26%	0%	74%

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

Comparing results of Figure 3 and Table 4 makes it clear that respondents wish to play on an eco-friendly golf course without paying a higher price for this necessity. Regarding price

sensitivity, Figure 4 confirms that a majority of the respondents (65%) are not willing to pay more to play on an eco-friendly golf course. Of the 35% that indicated that they are willing to pay more to play on an eco-friendly golf course, 73% responded that they are not willing to play on a course that is harmful to the environment and a low percentage of 27% indicted that they would be willing to play on a course that is harmful to the environment.

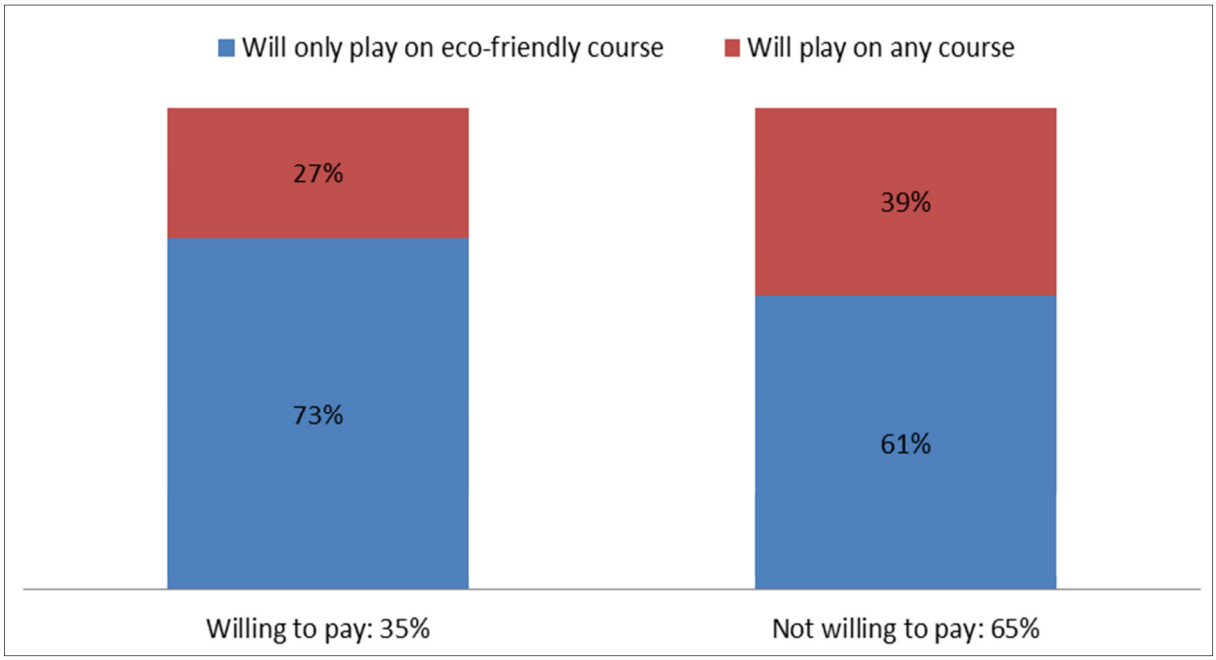


FIGURE 4: Payment to play on an eco-friendly golf course

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

Of the 65% that are not willing to pay more to play on an eco-friendly golf course, 61% stated that they are not willing to play on a course that is harmful to the environment and a mere 39% suggested that they are willing to play on a course that is harmful to the environment. Irrespective of the financial implication, the majority of respondents were not willing to play on golf courses that are harmful to the environment.

Another interesting discovery was the fact that 93% of the respondents who indicated that they were in some degree environmentally conscious were not willing to pay more to play on an eco-friendly golf course. This might be a further indication that respondents favour eco-friendliness but are not willing to pay for it.

The willingness of respondents to pay more to play on an eco-friendly golf course was tested by means of a Chi-square test and resulted in a p-value of 0.0655 as reflected in Table 5.

TABLE 5: Chi-square to test willingness to pay

	Value	p-value
Chi-square statistic	3.391815	0.0655

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

A p-value less than 0.1 means that there is certain associations between the willingness to pay more to play on an eco-friendly golf course and the decision to play on a golf course that has no concern for the environment. The willingness to pay more to play on an eco-friendly golf course differs between those who play on a golf course that has concern for the environment and those who choose not to play on a golf course that has no concern for the environment.

It seems that even though respondents are not willing to pay more to play on eco-friendly golf courses, they are still hesitant to play on golf courses that are harmful to the environment. This statement indicates mixed feelings about the possible preference of golf tourists towards a sustainable and responsible golfing industry. When looking at the value of environmentally friendly golf and golf tourists and the perceived need thereof, only 44% of respondents indicated that an eco-friendly golf course will contribute to the sustainability of the environment, whereby 64% agreed that golf is an environmentally friendly sport.

Fifty eight per cent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that environmentally friendly golf courses will improve the image of golf. Of the respondents who indicated that an eco-friendly golf course would contribute to the sustainability of the environment, 57% agreed that an eco-friendly golf course is higher in standard than one that is not eco-friendly, while 38% agreed that an eco-friendly golf course would enhance the quality of their game**.**

4.4 General environmentally friendly practises of golf tourists

After researching the environmentally friendly practices and preferences of the respondents while participating in golf, it was necessary to test the overall environmental friendliness of the respondents in general. The Cronbach alpha coefficient was used to formulate variables to measure constructs such as the environmental friendliness of golf tourists. It is important that there should be a high degree of similarity amongst the constructs since one common construct/factor is measured. If the items strongly correlate with each other, their internal consistency will be high and the alpha coefficient will be close to one.

The generally accepted guidelines for the interpretation of the Cronbach alpha coefficient by researchers are 0.90 (high reliability); 0.8 (moderate reliability); 0.7 (low reliability). Table 6 reflects the Cronbach alpha results for the environmentally friendly practices of golf tourists.

TABLE 6: Golf tourists and environmentally friendly practises

Component	Amount of questions on questionnaire	Cronbach's alpha
Golfers supporting environmentally friendly practices	20	0.811
Golf preferences linked to environmental consciousness	30	0.820
Eco-friendly / green lifestyle of golfers	34	0.876
Environmental consciousness of golfers	23	0.801
Golfers knowledge of "green" golf	14	0.820

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

After testing the data with the Cronbach alpha coefficient various interpretations could be made. The table indicates the number of questions that was compared to determine continuity in the respondents' feedback. For example, there are 14 questions in the questionnaire that relate to the golf tourists' knowledge of 'green' golf. After the responses to each of these questions were monitored, it was found that there is a 0.8 and higher level of reliability.

This indicates that the questions strongly correlated with each other and that their internal consistency was high. Results in the table indicate evidence of reliability between respondents and their effort to become environmentally friendly.

Respondents may not be familiar with the term 'green golf' but intentions are to be environmentally friendly. The influence of demographic factors such as marital status, age and income were further analysed. The value for 'conscious' in Table 7 includes respondents' responses listed as eco-activists, very environmentally conscious or slightly environmentally conscious**.**

Married respondents show an increased level of environmental consciousness compared to their single counterparts. Environmental consciousness increases with age and levels of education. Levels of income show a similar pattern except for respondents in the R1 million and more per annum income level that shows a slight decline in environmental consciousness.

TABLE 7: Factors determining environmental consciousness

		Level of environmental consciousness		
		Conscious	**Indifferent**	**Not conscious**
Marital status	Single	91%	4%	5%
	Married	97%	2%	1%
Age	≤ 25 years	88%	2%	10%
	26 – 50 years	95%	4%	1%
	51+ years	100%	0%	0%
Income	Below R250k	93%	4%	5%
	R250k – R500k	96%	3%	1%
	R500k – R1m	99%	0%	1%
	R1m or more	95%	5%	0%
Educational level	Secondary	93%	3%	4%
	Under graduate	95%	2%	3%
	Honours/Professional	97%	2%	1%
	Masters	97%	3%	0%
	Doctoral	100%	0%	0%

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

The significance of this conclusion is tested in Table 8 where the relationships between all the variables of environmental consciousness with the profile characteristics are compared. The Fisher exact test was used for such a comparison.

TABLE 8: Fisher exact test: demographics vs. environmental consciousness

Variable	Marital status	Age	Income	Education	Language
Degree of environmental consciousness	0.048	≤0.0001	0.626	0.269	0.039
Care about buying environmental friendly products	0.009	≤0.0001	0.255	0.187	0.538
Looking after and respecting the environment, nature and land	0.078	0.073	0.789	0.657	0.346

Source: Author's compilation from data analysis

The Fisher exact test is an alternative to the Pearson chi-squared test and is used to examine the relationship or association between two nominal variables. The values given below are the p-values of this test. If the p-value is less than 0.1, the conclusion may be made that there is an association between the two variables and therefore the variables are dependent on each other. From the test results indicated in Table 8, it is clear that marital status and age were the only two profile characteristics that had a significant influence on the environmental consciousness of the golf tourists.

4.5 Practical implications

The research findings indicated that most of the respondents (65%) were visitors to both George Golf Club and Pinnacle Point and that domestic respondents mainly originated from the Western Cape and Gauteng. Results further indicated that the majority of the international respondents came from Europe. These results correlate with the 2014 South African Tourism Annual Report (South African Tourism 2014:6) which identifies Europe as the major source of incoming international tourists in the country.

The demographic profiles of respondents were dominated by white males (84%) with either an honours or professional degree. This sport attracts a specific group of people due to the fact that golf is a relatively expensive sport and hobby (Hudson & Hudson 2010:28) and requires discipline and a certain level of maturity. This level of maturity became evident when research findings indicated that on average the respondents are 43 year old professionals earning between R250 000 – R500 000 per annum. It becomes important that when a concept such as 'green' golf tourism is marketed to its possible audience, the profile of the target market is clear in order to be able to satisfy their specific needs and direct marketing efforts directly at this market.

Destination and price were identified as the two most important considerations when choosing a destination. Although the profile of respondents indicated that the majority earned a good income, price still remained an important factor. Results also indicated that golf tourists are very aware of the price of their holiday / golf destination and golf activities. They associate "green" with high prices. Numerous tourists are under the impression that travelling 'green' means that it is more expensive, that they have to stay in primitive accommodation such as tents, make use of old fashioned forms of transport such as bicycles, visit only natural areas such as forests and that only young people can participate in 'green' tourism (Green Motion Travel 2009:Internet).

Quality of the golf course, past experiences and the natural surroundings of a golf course remain important preferences for golf tourists when choosing a golf course to play on. Eco-friendliness has not been found to be important when it comes to selecting a destination. Results show that the respondents may be environmentally conscious at home but they do not consistently follow the same trend in choosing a holiday / golf destination that is environmentally friendly. golf tourists' must realise that the natural environment and the quality of a golf course cannot be separated. This might make it easier for them to choose eco-friendly golf courses that could lead to an increase in the excellence of both the golf course and the natural environment.

5. CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH

Golf is a primary driver of incremental tourism. The National Department of Tourism estimates the South African golf industry generates total revenue of R29.2 billion annually and creates more than 50 000 jobs. The overall worth of the industry could be around R58.4 billion (Capel 2014:Internet). However, it also has the potential to fuel environmental damage (Pleumarom 2007:Internet). Golf tourists should take a second look at the environmental friendliness of the game. Golf may lead the tourism industry into greener pastures by becoming the initiator of green golf tourism.

Therefore, this study profess the use 'green' golf tourism as a tool to contribute to the global mandate of a greener environment and towards the vision of the National Department of Tourism to increase both domestic tourism and international tourism while taking care of the future of the environment. South Africa is known for its natural beauty, wildlife and favourable climatic conditions. The time is here to showcase the world-class golfing facilities that embrace the 'green' trend in order to protect the most valuable resource – Earth.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Western Cape, particularly the Garden Route, is one of the most popular golfing destinations in South Africa. Developing 'green' golf tourism in this province will directly impact on one of the largest components of this niche market and indirectly on other golf courses in South Africa. It is suggested that golf courses along the Garden Route focus on becoming eco-friendly which will provide an ideal competitive advantage. With a global environmental outlook, golf tourism may then be used as a marketing tool which will further enhance the popularity of these destinations on international level.

As the market for 'green' golf tourism proves to be a more mature one in terms of age, the advantage of an older market may be that it is more settled and sustainable due to their relatively high income levels, their advanced positions they have reached in their professional occupations, and the possibility of interest in golf. This interest could be passed on to a younger generation that might be open to new ideas and innovations such as 'green' golf tourism. This could allow for a new generation of golf tourists that grow up with the idea of developing a preference for environmentally friendly golf courses and practices. Establishing the concept of 'green' golf tourism among current golf tourists might cultivate a new generation golfer that in future will see this concept as the norm when it comes to selecting golf courses and destinations.

Hudson and Hudson (2014:28) confirm that more females are entering the game of golf and points out that women are more likely than men to select environmentally friendly product offerings. A large proportion (76%) of the female respondents is married. Married women have been known to play an important role in the decision-making process of holiday destinations (Green Retail Decisions 2011:Internet). It is recommended that targeting women in 'green' golf tourism marketing campaigns may thus be an effective method to further stimulate this market. The female golfer creates the opportunity to expand the market. Empirical results signal that women were slightly more environmentally conscious than men and may therefore influence the family to follow suit.

Golf course management should investigate ways of converting to greener business principles which would, in the long run, lead to financial benefits. Such eco-improvements should not impact the golf tourist financially, but must save the golf course management money. Golf tourists should be educated that 'green' does not necessarily mean higher prices. Golf tourists should be taught that 'green' golf and eco-friendly practices at golf courses do not necessarily lead to increased course fees. Such improvements and practices may lead to the benefit of the golfer, golf course and the environment. Saving water and electricity may decrease operational costs at the golf course that could in turn be re-invested in the golf course leading to (financial) benefits for all.

When golf tourists realise that the natural environment and the quality of a golf course cannot be separated, it might be easier for them to prefer eco-friendly golf courses, which could lead to an increase in the excellence of both the golf course and the natural environment. Golf course management may contribute to raising awareness and understanding by communicating it to golf tourists. It is therefore recommended that golf

course management investigate how the golf course and its operations can be altered by using environmentally friendly substitutes.

7. CONCLUSION

Green golf tourism provides a unique opportunity to combine an environmentally friendly lifestyle with the enjoyment of playing golf. Tourists are already choosing greener options while travelling, such as eco-friendly accommodation, restaurants and transportation. Why not when choosing a golf destination? The fact that a majority of golf tourists are high spenders who go on holiday twice a year for longer periods of time makes this an appealing niche market that could yield various advantages such as an increase in tourist numbers, job creation and an increase in the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

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