



## CASE STUDY OF INTERNATIONAL VISITOR EXPERIENCE LEVEL IN URBAN DESTINATIONS IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

The **purpose** of this research was to examine empirically the international visitor experiences while in urban destinations Nairobi County, Kenya.

**Methodology:** The research hypothesis was constructed based on previous theoretical and empirical studies. A survey was conducted on 231 departing visitors to collect primary data from January to June 2017. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to measure the linear correlation between international visitor experiences and urban destinations.

**Main findings:** The results found out that visitor experience levels have direct positive influence on visitors' visitation to Nairobi's urban tourist attractions and thus directly influenced their return intention through their destination satisfaction process.

**Implications:** Destination managers and tourism organizations particularly service organizations need to take into account of the satisfaction levels and the level of experience of urban visitors to enhance their revisits.

**Novelty:** The findings of this research have provided to the understanding of valuable practical information about visitors experiences while in urban destinations. This information could be used in promotional strategies, product development, and urban planning frameworks should be geared to meet destination demand and sustainable urban tourism development.

**Keywords:** *Visitor experience, urban destinations, international visitors, Nairobi*

### INTRODUCTION

Tourism has experienced continued growth and development, over the last six decades which is one of the major and fastest growing economic sectors in the world ([WTO, 2012](#)). New dynamic forms of tourism have surfaced, challenging the dominant traditional ones such as wildlife and leisure tourism. New dynamic forms of tourism include urban tourism sometimes referred to as city tourism. Cities are continuously developing and in a constant state of change which provides its visitors the experiences and products they expect. Due to the dynamic needs and expectations of city visitors, urban products and experiences are also continually changing in order to adjust to an increasing demand ([WTO, 2012](#)).

Travelling is a significant element in visitors' lives since they want to vacation and experience other distinctive cities in cities. Thus, according to Karski ([1990](#)) "Towns and cities have been the melting pots of national culture, art, music, literature and of course magnificent architecture and urban design. Cities have the concentration, variety and quality of these activities and attribute which create attractions while putting certain towns and cities on the tourism map".

Today it is also more intricate to differentiate residents from visitors in urban destinations. Residents consume similar activities specifically 'The new urban culture' as visitors do ([Judd, 1995; 2003](#) p.32). On the other hand, many visitors tour the city for other reasons or for a combination of reasons such as business or leisure for example those visiting a destination for business but want to mix with leisure

Urban tourism has been there for centuries, but as a field of academic inquiry, it is reasonably new and, has been neglected by academicians ([Ashworth, 1989; Evans, 2000; Gilbert & Clark, 1997; Law, 1993; 2002; Mbaiwa, Toteng, & Moswete, 2007](#)). Despite this neglect by academicians, urban tourism has since the 1990s not evolved much and has gradually become acknowledged as a distinct and significant field of study in T&T ([Ashworth, 1989; Gilbert & Clark, 1997; Law, 1993; Rogerson, 2002](#)). Dating back to the 1960s, research on urban tourism was irregular and limited in scale and conducted by geographers ([Pearce, 2005](#)). The neglect in urban tourism has been because tourist activities in a city are wholly integrated into other urban behavioral, functional and physical patterns ([Gilbert & Clark, 1997; Tunbridge & Ashworth, 1992](#)). [Pearce \(2005\)](#) argues that urban tourism research has been delayed due to the complexity that has necessitated it to be disentangled from other urban functions.

The tourist experience within a city has to be critically checked since some visitors will be motivated in touring iconic attractions while others will be searching for an entertaining and educational experience, and the frequent visitors will no longer be seeking familiar sites but rather seek escapist sites ([WTO, 2012](#)). The experiences between city visitors and residents are steadily breaking which contributes in regeneration and shaping certain urban centers and peripherals within the city and the overall urban change.

To address this disparity this study aimed at an understanding of international visitors experiences while in urban destinations by scrutinizing key attributes they sought while in urban destinations, as well as finding out how these attributes are important to their urban experiences.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

**Visitor Experiences:** According to [Jafari \(2000\)](#), “experience is an internal position of a person that is brought about by a situation which is individually encountered, undergone or lived in the course of life.” Visitors’ experiences are exclusive since they take place in the course of a trip, and particularly during sightseeing visits.

The quality of any tourist experience is primarily related to the value, quality, and quantity of the service offer. The new tourist searches for information at the destination site and plans their experience during the trip. The urban tourist is characterized by a variety of motivations, in that they make use of a significant amount of resources and urban services, many of which are targeted simultaneously by both international and local tourists. According to [Bock \(2015\)](#) visitors, mainly frequent tourist popular places and officially selected tourist attractions, where they are gradually seeking for more ‘genuine and local experiences,’ while discovering normal but dynamic and varied neighborhoods and visiting restaurants, coffee shops and markets that beforehand were entirely commonly used by locals. As such, it is clear that the boundaries between tourist cities and non-tourist cities are increasingly unclear since there is an almost natural integration of tourism consumption and local consumption. Tourist travel to cities is reinforced by accessibility to information while traveling; visitors are progressively looking for, additional genuine experiences. Urban tourists are also looking for ways to understand urban areas as locals do, further visitors want to reside and feel like a local for the length of their tour ([Bock, 2015](#)).

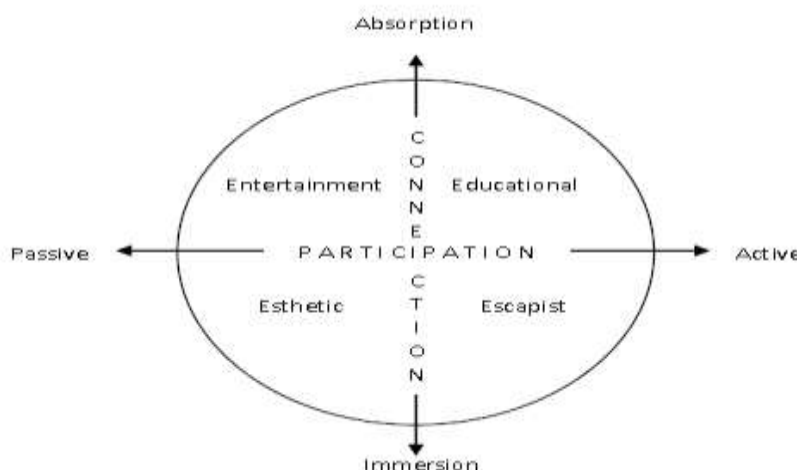
Visitors tend to search for experiences that are fulfilling, enjoyable and interesting. The flow state of a visitor is a favorable condition of inherent motivation. The flow is characterized by the following a) paying attention to current tourism activity, b) complete commitment of one’s consciousness and using one’s ability and talent to the fullest, c) self-consciousness on the sense of time while in urban destination, d) prevalence of desired experiences ([Beck & Cable, 1998](#); [Prentice, Witt, & Hamer, 1998](#)).

[Eckblad \(1981\)](#) notes that most favorable experience depends on the process of absorbing and understanding received information into existing “cognitive schemas” as a result of the emergence of the emotional circumstances in individuals. [Vitterso, Vorkinn, Vistad, & Vagland \(2000\)](#) expounded on [Eckblad \(1981\)](#) work stating that the structure of cognitive schemas is as a result of absorption of new information and experiences. As long as the pragmatic information remains within tolerable limits it’s likely to be absorbed into the existing schemas. If a visitor’s opinion of the destination agrees to exist cognitive schemas, the method of adsorption continues without any opposition.

[Eckblad, \(1981\)](#) argued that when absorption of resistance is minimal, individual visitors are likely to experience the sensations of dullness, but the resistance is on the rise, the dullness decreases, and the experience move towards being comfortable and pleasant. However, if the resistance is still on the rise, the visitors experience shifts to being more relaxed and appealing. The author further argues that with yet additional amount of resistance absorption, a sensation of curiosity emerges. Yet still, if the resistance proves too strong, the overriding emotion of frustration and annoyance emerges ([Vitterso et al., 2000](#)).

[Pine and Gilmore \(1999\)](#), proposed the model of experience. The model is a complete range of experiences as exemplified in a two-dimensional space which could be active or passive. The first breadth illustrates participation, which is either active or passive while the second breadth illustrates the connection, which varies from immersion to absorption (Fig. 1).

The first element of the experience realm mirrors the intensity of visitor actions, and the importance can vary from less or intense passive to exceedingly active. Passive involvement is usually found in visitors of prearranged guided sightseeing, their behavior may perhaps be entirely passive (not indulging in any activities, spending a great amount of time in a relaxed atmosphere than in an exhibition location). At the same time their emotional commitment narrow to not inquiring, nor participating in any discussion about the destination. On the other hand, active visitors’ take part in setting up and preparation of the visiting the attractions destination, take to mean of the attraction, conversing, obtaining new expertise and reinforcing on the experiences ([Pine & Gilmore, 1999](#)).



**Figure 1: The four realms of an experience (Source: [Pine & Gilmore, \(1999\)](#))**

The second attribute illustrates the connection that binds the visitors with urban environments, festivals, and events in urban destinations. These urban attributes vary from a state of intense attention, or assimilation, of a tourist's interest, for example, during a staging of a presentation in an event or festival. On the other hand, there is the state of fascination in a material or virtual reality such as participating in a captivating dance on a cultural center, being in the center of actions during a historical expedition, taking part in a folk song/music tutorial or a lesson of folk dance).

The combination of these two attributes characterizes the four realms of a visitor's experience: educational, escapist, entertainment and aesthetic. To increase educational experiences, visitors ought to be passively involved while visiting the attractions or be involved in an activity, which should actively involve tourists mentally (e.g., active or interactive learning). Escapist experiences are generated by lively participation in an engrossed environment. Such environments include cities nightlife, theme parks, national parks, diverse museums, conservation environments and heritage educational centers. Entertainment experiences are a consequence of passive assimilation of external stimulus that is perceived by visitors minds (e.g., when participating in a historical tour or active participation in a cultural dance at an attraction). External stimuli set off responses of amusement or happiness or photography or even video shooting. The fourth realm includes aesthetic experiences, which happens when tourists' are passive toward an activity or surroundings rather than being engrossed in its offerings. Such kind of experiences is found in tourists indulging visiting traditional museums attractions and art galleries or appreciative other items of cultural and natural tradition, even without the slightest understanding of the attractions in-depth. visitors attractions should be engaged in all the four realms to produce the most exciting and valuable experiences.

**Urban tourism satisfaction and visitor experience:** The intensity of visitor satisfaction, in particular, the knowledge and understanding attained by visiting different urban attractions constitute the final creation of visitor experience ([Nowacki, 2013](#)). Therefore experience and satisfaction are the main motivations why tourists visit a variety of attractions. Experiences and satisfaction also determine the quality of the holiday, as well as of the destination quality ([Nowacki, 2013](#)). Accordingly, to [Hall and McArthur \(1993\)](#), tourist satisfaction should be an integral part of attraction management, especially in the urban destination such as Nairobi. Accordingly, [Nowacki \(2013\)](#) argue that "Customer satisfaction is a measure of how an organization's or total destination product performs a set of customer requirements." Thus, satisfaction is the result of comparing customer expectations with the actual perception of destination product attributes. To [Crompton & Love, \(1995\)](#) satisfaction takes place when the expectations are met or exceeded. [Pearce \(2005\)](#) notes that satisfaction tends to be viewed as the approval and perception resulting after a meticulous experience while Crompton & Love (1995) view satisfaction as the arousing emotional status arising as a consequence of indulging in a tourism product.

The nature of approval from consuming urban destinations is essentially different from that resultant from visiting of other tourism attractions ([Nowacki, 2013](#); [Ashworth & Page, 2011](#); [Page & Hall, 2003](#)). [Pearce \(2005\)](#) argues that visitors approve destination tourism products fundamentally for their symbolical and emotional value, attributed to an attraction. Thus, visitors approve an attraction as a totality (destination) relatively than a total of all its elements. Due to the aforementioned, different authors note that the assessment of satisfaction arising from visitors interaction with destination attractions ought to be assessed with indicators that take into account the whole tourist experience than individual attraction attributes ([Williams,](#)

Patterson, Roggenbuck, & Watson, 1992; Vitterso, Vorkinn, Vistad, & Vagland, 2000). Therefore visitor happiness may concern the expectations and the excellence of experience derived from overall visitor attractions.

## METHODOLOGY

**Study area:** The study was carried out in Nairobi urban area which is within Nairobi County, Kenya. Nairobi County is endowed as a capital city of Kenya with several attractions including but not limited to Parks, Orphanages, forests with the support of a well-distributed superstructure and infrastructure. The opportunities in Nairobi surround the superstructure and infrastructure development in and around the city. For example, the development of the Standard Gauge Railway (SGR) and the hotel's investments streaming such as the Marriott group which intends to open a luxury hotel in Westlands.

Further, the award of eight Nairobi town hotels a 5-star rating, nine hotels with 4-star rating, five hotels with a 3-star rating and seven hotels with 2-star rating will also boost the conference and business products. The 29 hotels with a star rating between 2 to 5, has a total bed capacity of 4,919 (Tourism Regulatory Authority, 2016). But, according to NCC (2018), the 5-star hotels and eight 4-star hotels have a combined bed capacity of 5,700 beds on top of over 122 unclassified hotels. The county is also home to the largest skating ice rink in East Africa at the Panari Hotel's sky center covering 15,000 square feet and accommodating 200 people.

According to KNBS (2017), the occupancy rate of Nairobi-high class registered a growth of 6.0 percent from 1,015 thousand in 2015 to 1,076 thousand in 2016. Nairobi other hotels also registered a growth of 18 percent from 378 thousand in 2015 to 444.1 thousand in 2016. The growth was attributed to the number of conferences that were held in the city in 2016 such as TICAD IV, UNCTAD, ICT4D (Information and Communications Technologies for Development) and EAOGS (East Africa Oil and Gas Summit & Exhibition).

According to KIPPRA (2017), the ranking of JKIA as a category one airport provides an opportunity that needs to be fully exploited. The granting of this status means that since the majority of the respondents at 29 % were from the USA more visitors from the USA will access Kenya directly. In addition, more USA visitors are likely to wooed by the direct flights contributing to more visitors consuming the urban tourism product.

In addition, the city receives much coverage due to the government initiative to market it as a business and conference destination. Many studies in Kenya have looked at different attractions in destinations and specifically Nairobi. However, those studies have not given urban destination a keen look on how urban attributes interact to create a satisfying, and remarkable experience. The current study sought to find out while informing stakeholders and tourism planners on how urban attributes interact.

**Study population:** The study comprised of 231 departing visitors leaving via JKIA as they are deemed to have had an experience of urban attractions. According to KIPPRA (2017), the ranking of JKIA as a category one airport provides an opportunity that needs to be fully exploited. Besides, Nairobi is home to a majority of different attraction while 20% of tourism activates are dominant in the region (KIPPRA, 2009). Further KIPPRA (2017) reckons that for the country to address the mismatch between arrivals and revenues there is need re-look at the packaging of tourism products to explore the untapped product diversity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Results and discussion:** Majority of the interviewed respondents were within the age bracket of 36-55 years, indicating that the destination was preferred by middle aged people. Respondents were asked on their employment status, 54% were employed while 51 of the respondents were retired and 14 of them students.

**Table 1: Demographic information**

		Total	%
Age	12-35	80	35
	36-55	90	40
	56-70	44	19
	71 and above	17	7
		231	100
Employment status	Employed	125	54
	Self Employed	39	17
	Unemployed	2	1
	Retired	51	22

	student	14	6
		231	100
Visitation frequency	<1	112	48
	1-5	75	32
	6-10	19	8
	11 and above	25	11
		231	100
Average Number of Nights while in Nairobi	1-10	177	77
	11-20	36	16
	21 and above	18	8
		231	100
The Cost of the destination	Within what was planned	173	75
	Higher than planned	45	19
	Lower than planned	13	6
		231	100

Visitors were requested to indicate their frequency in the destination, majority 48% indicated that it was their first time to be in the destination, while 75 respondents indicated they have been to Nairobi between 1 to 5 times in the past. [KNBS \(2018\)](#) shows that the average number of nights while in Kenya was 13 days, the study sought to find out the average number of days while in Nairobi. The majority of visitors were in Nairobi between 1-10 days (77%), while 8% stayed for more than 21 days. The research also sought to find out from the visitors the cost of the destination, 75% indicated that the cost was within what they had planned while 6% felt that the cost was lower than what they had planned.

**Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis of Variables:** The study used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences software to analyze data. First, Reliability Test and Factor Analysis were carried out to identify the associations between the research variables while ensuring their reliability and validity. Consequently, Pearson correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationships among variables, and then conclude on the research hypothesis.

**Table 2: Mean, Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis of Visitors Experiences in Nairobi**

Variables	$\bar{x}$	Factor loading	Cronbach's Alpha
<b>Visitor experiences</b>			<b>.764</b>
Making a booking at Nairobi was easy	4.08	.931	
The prices of the additional offer at Nairobi (i.e. prices of food and drink, prices of souvenirs, prices of handcrafted products, prices of excursions, prices of beauty and relaxing programs) are very favourable.	3.55	.805	
The price of B&B/half board/full board in Nairobi is reasonable	3.68	.751	
<b>Feeling of Comprehension and Value</b>			<b>.723</b>
I have gained a lot of new knowledge and experiences while in Nairobi.	4.14	.795	
Staying in Nairobi is worth every penny paid.	3.87	.791	
Overall, staying in Nairobi has been very valuable	4.17	.768	

Table II illustrates the result of visitor experience levels while in Nairobi urban destination. The variables were grouped into 2 (visitor experiences while in Nairobi and the feeling of Comprehension and Value while in Nairobi). All of the factor loadings in the variable met the minimum prerequisite (0.40), ranging between 0.751 to 0.931 ([Hair et al 2010](#)). The Cronbach's alpha values used to approximate the internal reliability between variables in each factor were .723 and .764. According to [Pallant \(2007\)](#), the Cronbach's coefficient alpha values higher than .60 are considered adequate, while the more adequate value should go beyond .70.

**Visitor experience:** The six statements indicate respondents' opinions about the surveyed visitor experience in the urban destination in a descending order (Table II). The overall feeling and comprehension of the value of the respondents' urban destination element are relatively positive. All the six items, were above the mean of 3.50 indicating that respondents agreed with urban destination attraction overall experience. Respondents rated highly the attribute about staying in Nairobi has been very valuable to me ( $\bar{x} = 4.17$ ) indicating that majority of the respondents in urban destinations considered staying in Nairobi and the value and satisfaction it offers. While the lowest rated statements in the attribute was on the prices of additional offer at Nairobi (i.e. prices of food and drink, prices of souvenirs, prices of handcrafted products, prices of excursions, prices of



beauty and relaxing programs) are not very favourable' with a mean of ( $\bar{x} = 3.55$ ), showing that visitors were very keen on the price of additional items they buy while in Nairobi. The price of additional items such as souvenirs, and handcrafted products was key as they act as a reminder of the experiences they got while on vacation.

Results from visitor experience could imply that Nairobi urban destination managers need to look at the product offer on additional offers such as prices of food, prices of souvenirs, the price of handcrafted products, prices of excursion and prices of beauty and relaxing programs. Visitors opinions could be accessed through exit questionnaires as they help shape the post experiences as well as improvement of tourism products.

Some of the respondents reasoned that the destination very expensive since it was at par with acclaimed international destinations such as Paris and New York regarding pricing of hotel accommodations. They argued, Nairobi destination ought to compete with other destinations in Africa such as Johannesburg, Cape Town in South Africa and Casablanca in Morocco. This, according to them would not only make Nairobi destination more competitive but it would compete for the same type of clients visiting top urban destinations in Africa such as Casablanca and Johannesburg destination. [MasterCard \(2016\)](#) in their report on global destination city index, placed Johannesburg as the top city receiving over 3.6 million overnight visitors in 2016 followed by Cape Town with 1.4 million visitors. Casablanca was the third city in Africa with over 1.1 million, but as the highest in the growth of over 14.5% during 2015 to 2016 period. Nairobi is the 12<sup>th</sup> visited city in Africa with a 12.3% growth during 2015 to 2016 period and receiving 323,859 thousand overnight visitors ([MasterCard, 2016](#)). Urban visitors felt that the destination was indeed valuable, and the experiences were immense but were equally expensive because of additional offers. However, a majority of the respondents felt that making a booking at Nairobi destination was very easy.

[Ashworth \(1989; 2010\)](#) was the first author to categorize the city as an important area for tourist activity. [Hayllar and Griffin \(2005\)](#) deployed a phenomenological method to discovering visitors' experiences in the rocks area in Sydney and afterward in the nearby Darling Harbour ([Griffin, Hayllar, & King, 2006](#)). They later engaged a customized, semi-structured interview method, based on phenomenology but more simplified and more decisive, in areas outside Australian cities ([Edwards, Griffin, & Hayllar, 2007](#)). All these interrelated studies concluded that a unique sense of place was key to the tourist experience, but this was initiated from different diverse destination attributes in different localities.

In a similar study conducted of two distinct areas in London cities, [Maitland \(2007\)](#) underpinned the significance of uniqueness of a destination and undeniably argued that the successive production of quality tourism products would lead to naturally and intrinsically unattractive tourist environment. Accordingly to [Hayllar, Griffin & Edwards \(2008\)](#) the diversity of a city provides opportunities for a range of visitors' experience: youthful generation may be attracted to the nightlife, major sporting events, and entertainment while better-educated and older groups may be drawn by the cultural heritage of a city. To many, the experience of being in a city and not specific attractions are the main tourist appeal. Such experiences include the dazzling lightings, the accessibility, and movement while in towns, the ambiance within a city.

Nairobi is still and has always been the safari capital of Africa, it has also become one of Africa's largest, and most interesting cities. The city has not lost its sense of the past, with excellent museums and the historical home of Karen Blixen. The city has the great plain wilderness that surrounds with diverse biodiversity that is Nairobi National Park. The city has diverse budding leisure activities surrounding it such as cliffs and forests. Further, the city has diverse accommodation facilities for visitors to choose from ranging from the luxurious five star to the unrated hotels. The city is also ripe for the bleisure market due to the existence of business facilities such as conference rooms and recreation & leisure facilities that are within visitors reach.

**Relationship between urban visitor experiences in urban destinations:** Based on visitor experience, the hypothesis posited that visitor experience would have no association in urban destinations. Correlation results revealed a weak significant positive correlation ( $r (231) = 0.29, p < 0.01$ ). Results also revealed  $p$ -value less than 0.05, and thus, the hypothesis was rejected. The rejection implies that there was a significant relationship between urban visitors experiences while in urban destinations, thus when development of urban destination is on the increases urban visitor experience increases.

This implied that visitor experience factors such as making a booking; the price of B&B/half board/full board; the prices of additional offer at Nairobi (prices of food and drink, prices of souvenirs, prices of handcrafted products, prices of excursions, prices of beauty and relaxing programs); the value of Nairobi, new knowledge and experiences while in Nairobi would affect tourism urban development. This is because, Nairobi urban destination offers opportunities for high end, special and unique events that are of high quality. These unique opportunities not only influence the length of stay but the attraction visited with direct significance on the expenditure levels. In addition, Nairobi is one of the most vibrant cities in Africa and has breathtaking places any visitor could enjoy visiting, in that Nairobi roars its beauty in stylish and clearly identifiable sophistication, from the natural wildlife habitats to the prominent skyscrapers. To understand visitors experiences while in

Nairobi destination a closer and a keen focus was taken on the key attributes of the destination and how these contribute to the quality of experience. The top key attributes rated positively by visitors included wellness offer, conference offer, friendliness of local community, nightlife and entertainment to include casino and gambling, climatic conditions and sports facilities.

Other studies that have found similar results include, [Miller, Merrilees & Coghlan \(2015\)](#) who reported visitor experience is critical when it comes to urban tourism development. According to [Griffin & Hayllar \(2008\)](#) experience represent beyond the level of enjoyment, the visitor obtains a much stronger attachment to the place. While to [Mansfeldt, Vestager & Iversen \(2008\)](#) most visitors are often very satisfied with the cultures they experience while in city centers. The city is the second most enjoyable constituent after culture; while places of interest that the visitors visited came in on a third place.

From the findings, visitors visiting Nairobi urban destination were satisfied due to several factors. Such factors could have been as a result of the proximity of attractions. These attractions are within a radius of 20 kilometers from the CBD. Interestingly, the climate conditions in destination cities perform better than the experiences they paid for such as a tour to the amusement park, a visit to a cultural stage performance among others. According to [Omwenga, \(2011\)](#) Nairobi has a warm highland climate found within the tropics and with daily average temperatures ranging from 29° C in the winter season to 24° C during the other seasons of the year. The climatic condition in Nairobi was very pleasing thus improving drastically the experience while in urban destinations.

## CONCLUSION

The researcher asked visitors about their experience and how they felt while in Nairobi destination. They were requested to rate six attributes associated with urban visitor experience. Visitors rated these attributes above average showing that visitors experience while at the destination was excellent. Majority of the visitors attributed the destination to be of value to them due to the new experiences they got. The second rated attribute was on the new knowledge they got while at the destination. However, the last rated attribute was on the price of additional services while in Nairobi for example, prices of handicrafts, excursions, and spa & wellness programs. Visitors felt that these were priced equally to developed countries cities such as New York and Paris. Despite this, most visitors felt that Nairobi destination was worth every penny paid. When the researcher asked visitors about the cost of the destination in destination choice attributes 75% said the expenses were within the planned budget, only 25% said the cost was either higher or lower than planned.

Despite visitors comments, Correlation results on urban visitor experience while in urban revealed a weak significant positive correlation ( $r = 0.29$ ). The weak significant positive correlation implied that when an international visitor experience is on the increase urban destinations attractiveness is also on the increase. Thus, urban tourism development increases visitors' experiences and satisfaction levels.

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