



Tourists' Perceptions of the Image of the Peneda-Gerês National Park

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Abstract

The image of a destination has been one of the most relevant concepts in tourism research, as it is considered one of the most important variables for market segmentation. Furthermore, image is a construct that influences, considerably, the preference, motivation and behaviour of individuals during the process of choosing a tourist destination. It is therefore important to understand which attributes tourists highlight in tourist destinations. The aim of this study is to understand which attributes (functional and psychological) of the image that tourists most identified in a particular tourist destination. The study method applied was the quantitative methodology, and data collection was carried out through the use of a questionnaire survey. The territory under analysis was the Peneda-Gerês, the only Portuguese national park which has registered a high growth in visitors, as a result of its projection and notoriety. According to the information gathered, of the functional attributes the natural landscape stood out, while the infrastructures, accommodation and restaurants stood out. Of the psychological attributes, the one that stood out the most was hospitality and welcome. Only the events and entertainment were the least considered attribute, given that most of the sample considered rest and contact with nature as the main reasons to visit this destination, and fun was the third most referenced reason. This study considers that the various stakeholders should seek to improve these attributes because although most visitors had good expectations, the degree of satisfaction does not demonstrate that this protected area can stand out from other competing destinations.

Keywords

Destination image • Functional attributes • Psychological attributes • Peneda-Gerês National Park

1 Introduction

Tourist destinations are becoming an increasingly competitive and expanding market. Currently, there is a wide range of tourist destinations, some with more specific characteristics, for a particular type of tourist, others more general to be able to reach a wider range of people. However, all these destinations multiply in advertising and promotions in order to attract new tourists to maintain market share and/or increase it. For a destination to stand out from other competing destinations, it must try to stand out for its uniqueness in order to position itself positively in the minds of consumers. It is therefore important that tourists have a distinctive and attractive perception of the destination (Martins et al., 2021a, 2021b).

The image of a destination is a fundamental variable in the process of selecting a tourist destination. However, it is difficult for destinations to gain that uniqueness, because tourists are increasingly informed and demanding and nurture high expectations about the attributes and experiences they will find in the destinations they decide to visit (Silva & Correia, 2017).

The image of a destination is therefore important since it affects consumer behaviour in the choice of the holiday destination and post-trip. The tourist, when seeking information about the next holiday destination, can be influenced by the image of the destination that is projected to him, being more likely to choose the destination that has projected a positive and appealing image. Due to technological advancement, very well used in tourism, people have at their disposal (often a click away) a volume of information available through various media (touristic guides, travel

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agencies, television, internet and others). This allows individuals to perceive and create an image of the destination, previously to the visit, and that often conditions their behaviour and choice options (Chi & Qu, 2008; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

After the stay in that destination, after experiencing it, the tourist will (re)build the image of the destination. The comparison that the tourist will make between the two images (the projected initially, by the information he collected, and the one that remains after his experience at the destination) is a factor that will influence his level of satisfaction, the desire to return to that destination, as well as the positive or negative way he tells his experience to others, interfering, in turn, in the formation of their images (Martins, 2022a).

Some researchers have tried to measure the image of tourist destinations based on functional and psychological attributes and concluded that the receptivity of the inhabitants, the landscapes and the environment were the most mentioned attributes (Gallarza et al., 2002). It is therefore our intention to understand which attributes of the destination image are most highlighted by tourists in a particular tourist destination. The chosen territory was the Peneda-Gerês, the only Portuguese national park and which has attracted many tourists, due to its notoriety and brand image that has been consolidated both nationally and internationally.

Methodologically, we tried to answer the research question about which image attributes tourists most identify in the PGNP, based on a questionnaire survey carried out to people who stayed overnight in this tourist destination, in a pre-pandemic period. The sample was considered representative with a total of 507 respondents.

This article is organised into five chapters. After the introduction, the second chapter includes a literature review on the concept of image and its importance, focusing on the issue of attributes. Chapter three presents the study's methodological framework, characterising the procedures in terms of sample analysis and data collection. Chapter four presents the results. Finally, in the conclusion, the main inferences and recommendations of the study are presented.

2 Literature Review

The image associated with the tourist destination has its genesis in the work carried out by Hunt in 1975. Destination image is highly valued by both academics and the tourism industry; this is because the degree of consumer involvement is higher in tourism than in other services (Tavitiyaman et al., 2021).

The concept of destination image has been identified in the tourism marketing literature and has been widely studied. However, the numerous definitions of the concept “image of tourist destinations” used in several studies and empirical work are considered unclear, without a very solid conceptual structure varying from researcher to researcher (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Lv et al., 2020) (Table 1).

However, it is commonly accepted the idea of “global impression”. In this context, Crompton's definition (1979) is the most widely accepted in the scientific community since it is “the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that tourists have about a particular destination” (Crompton, 1979) (Table 1), based on the idea that it is something constructed by the consumer. However, there are also authors who

Table 1 Definitions of image of a destination and respective authors

Image–definitions	Authors
“Compilation of beliefs and impressions based on information processing from a variety of sources over time resulting in an internally accepted mental construct”	MacKay and Fesenmaier (1997, p. 538)
“Perceptions or impressions of a destination engaged in by tourists in relation to the expected benefit or consumption values, including functional, social, emotional, behavioural benefits of a destination. These perceptions or impressions lead to the decision to visit a country as a holiday destination”	Tapachai and Waryszak (2000, p. 37)
Image is the set of expectations and perceptions that a potential traveller has of a destination	Buhalis (2000)
It is formed from the interaction of the destination's characteristics and the observer's characteristics and may contain both cognitive and affective components. The combination of these two components results in the formation of a global image	Baloglu and McCleary (1999)
“Impression, visual or mental, of a place or product experienced by the general public”	Milman and Pizam (1995, p. 21)
“The sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has about a destination”	Crompton (1979, p. 18)

Source Elaborated by the authors

support the idea that the image can be built by the destination (as a way of promoting the place), constructed and projected to attract the consumer/tourist, being this projection created by the destination that will influence the tourist behaviour, namely, in the decision of choosing the place to visit (Govers & Go, 2004).

Although most authors agree about the holistic nature of the image, that is, that the destination image is a global and multidimensional impression, there is still no consensus about the dimensions that form this global impression (Bigné Alcañiz et al., 2009; del Bosque & San Martín, 2008; Echtner & Ritchie, 1991; Luque-Martínez et al., 2007; Tavitiyaman et al., 2021).

Echtner and Ritchie (1991) consider that only the “impressions” or “perceptions” of a place are very vague and that it is relevant and enhanced to know which elements make up the destination image. These authors have created a referential model that supports empirical research on the image of tourist destinations. In the perspective of Echtner and Ritchie (1991), the elements that compose the destination image are visible in three dimensions: functional-psychological, common-unique and attribute-holistic (Fig. 1).

According to these authors, destination image, considering the holistic attribute dimension can be defined by the individual's perception of the attributes of the destination (e.g. warm climate and low prices), but also by the holistic impression, the overall mental image that the same individual forms about the destination (e.g. general physical characteristics such as mountainous or city). The functional-psychological dimension highlights the more functional/tangible characteristics such as climate, accommodation and attractions; and more psychological/abstract characteristics such as the atmosphere of the place, tranquillity, hospitality and reputation. This dimension is related to the previous dimension in that destination attributes and holistic impression have both functional characteristics and psychological characteristics. The common-unique

dimension is related to the common characteristics of a given place in relation to others and those that cannot be found anywhere else but, in that place, which are specific to it. This dimension is related to the two previous ones: destination image may vary from more common characteristics (functional or psychological) to more unique characteristics (functional or psychological) (Echtner & Ritchie, 1991).

Several authors affirm that the image of the tourist destination is a reflection of the rational and emotional interpretation of the consumer and, consequently, the result of two evaluations: (a) one of cognitive nature, linked to aspects of attributes and functional characteristics that the individual has about the object observed; (b) another of affective nature, associated with holistic images and psychological aspects that translate the feelings and emotions perceived by the individual when confronted with the object (White, 2004).

The perception of the destination image that the consumer has, regardless of its cognitive, affective or even mixed nature, plays a relevant role in the choice options by tourists. The more positive the perception of the destination image, the more preferred the destination will tend to be and the more likely it will be revisited, with a positive impact on consumer satisfaction (Al-Ansi & Han, 2019; Kastenholz, 2012; Zhang et al., 2018).

According to Kastenholz (2012), an image is designed by obtaining and processing information. The image generation is adjacent to the perception process, therefore, behaviour can be considered as an effect of the perceived image, and repetitive behaviour can be a consequence of a strong image. Thus, favourable destination images found on repeated visits are more likely due to prior positive experiences. This can lead to destination loyalty and the accumulation of positive images which the author has termed a positive vicious circle or virtuous circle (Fig. 2).

In this vicious circle, we believe that a positive experience, associated with a tourist destination, can influence

Fig. 1 Dimensions of destination image. *Source* Echtner and Ritchie (1991)

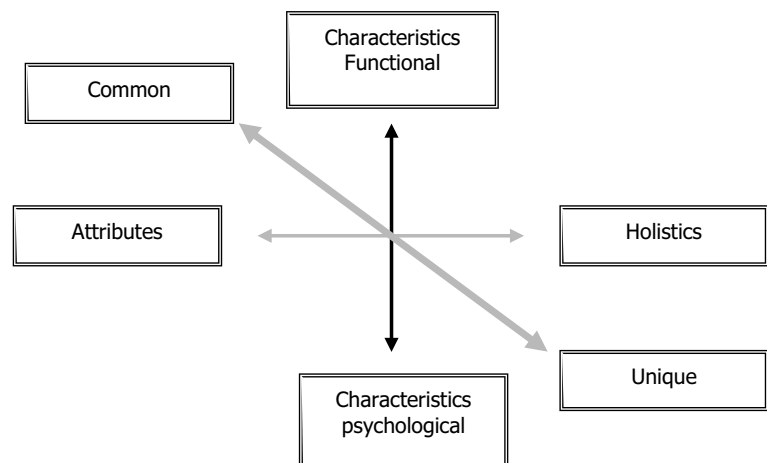




Fig. 2 Positive vicious circle/virtuous circle of destination image. Source Kastenholz (2012, p. 141)

future decisions, namely, revisit. As such, the image of tourist destinations is important in the organisation of a successful marketing strategy, to the extent that the perceived image influences both the behaviour and the decision-making process, and also has a relationship with the levels of satisfaction obtained regarding the tourist experience (Chi & Qu, 2008; Martins et al., 2021a, 2021b, 2023).

In relation to the tourism phenomenon, each tourist destination must develop a marketing policy, creating its brand image and being considered a product offering. According to Boo et al. (2009), destinations compete mainly on the basis of their perceived images relative to the images of their competitors in the market world. In this sense, it is necessary that a set of marketing strategies are developed in order to ensure a solid position in the competitive market with regard to attracting tourists (Beerli & Martín, 2004).

According to Buhalis (2000, p. 8), consumers have certain consumption patterns, appreciate the qualities of a destination and, as a result, if they are left with a positive impression associated with a strong degree of satisfaction, “they tend to visit certain destinations more regularly and frequently, increasing their degree of loyalty and showing willingness to pay higher prices in order to enjoy their preferred destinations”.

According to Chen and Tsai (2007), attracting tourists to a destination, getting them to revisit that destination and getting them to recommend it to others are fundamental to the successful tourism development of that destination. Therefore, the branding of a tourist destination is the key piece because it is, according to the image of that destination, from there that consumers make their choices (Tan & Wu, 2016).

To make an analysis of the image of a destination it is therefore necessary to identify its attributes, which, according to Echtner and Ritchie (1991), can be distributed in attributes with more functional characteristics until typically psychological attributes. There are several studies that use lists of attributes to assess the image of a destination (Beerli & Martín, 2004; Gallarza et al., 2002; Kastenholz, 2012; Li et al., 2022; Pike, 2002; Tapachai & Waryszak, 2000).

According to Neves (2012), the attributes have not registered substantive changes, being a curious salience when it is verified that these are studies carried out by various authors based on distinct tourist destinations, regions countries or territories, and in equally distinct temporal periods (Table 2).

3 Methodology

With this study, we seek to understand the perceptions of the image of tourists who visit a tourist destination with specific characteristics, a protected area. The destination chosen was the PGNP, the only national park in Portugal. After an analysis of the articles by Echtner and Ritchie (1991), Kastenholz (2012), Gallarza et al. (2002) and Beerli and Martín (2004) who made an exhaustive analysis of attributes used in a set of vast articles, we chose to define a set of attributes that fit our object of study, the PGNP. In the present work, we will adopt the approach that destination image is formed from the interaction of destination characteristics and observer characteristics and may contain both functional and psychological attributes, with the combination of these two components resulting in the formation of a global image (Baloglu & McCleary, 1999) (Table 3).

Through the existing literature, we chose to identify which attributes would most fit the chosen tourist destination. In methodological terms, we sought to answer the following research question: “What are the attributes (physical and psychological) of the image that tourists most highlight in a tourist destination such as the PGNP?”.

The method of study was the quantitative methodology. The target population was the tourists who stayed overnight in the PGNP, and the technique chosen was the questionnaire survey, made available in four languages (Portuguese, English, French and Spanish) in order to capture the opinion of national and foreign tourists who visited this tourist destination. The measurement of the constructs was done through an attitude interval scale in Likert interval format expanded to 7 points ranging from 1 = Strongly disagree to 7 = Strongly agree, where 4 = Neither agree nor disagree. Qualitative variables (nominal and ordinal) were also used namely to obtain information about the tourist and his stay.

The sample is considered significant (McDaniel & Gates, 2004) totalling 507 respondents. Being the target audience the tourists who stay overnight in the accommodation units

Table 2 Most used attributes in the evaluation of the image of tourist destinations

Author/date	Tourist destination	Attributes of the tourist destination image analysed
Prayag (2010)	Cape Town, South Africa	Quality of public transport and local infrastructure; information available at the destination; accessibility; appealing gastronomy and quality of service; activities and entertainment; climate and landscape; cultural and natural attractions
Vengesayi et al. (2009)	Zimbabwe	Historical and cultural attractions; natural attractions and recreational facilities; shopping and accessibility of attractions; touring, sports, events and outdoor activity offer
Shani et al. (2009)	South America	Natural and scenic beauty; protected landscapes and wildlife areas; places of historical and archaeological interest; experiences and personal enrichment
McCartney et al. (2008)	Macau	Gaming opportunities; nightlife/adult oriented; political stability; urban destination; cleanliness and preserved environment; unique architecture
Prebežac & Mikulić (2008)	Hawaii and Croatia	Natural beauty and landscape; adequate transport; price of transport
Woomi (2008)	New York, USA	Shopping, restaurant and entertainment; safety and hospitality; history and culture
Chi and Qu (2008)	Arkansas, USA	Natural attractions, entertainment; infrastructure, accessibility; shopping, restaurants and events; environment
James (2006)	Australia	Events, people and places; nature, art and culture; heritage and history; accommodation, thematic routes and information material

Source Neves (2012), with adaptations by the authors

Table 3 Attributes applied in the present research

Functional attributes	Psychological attributes
Activities: Outdoor activities (e.g. hiking) Entertainment activities and/or events	Gastronomy
Natural landscape	Hospitality and reception
Heritage: Historical attractions	Safety
Price	
Tourist infrastructures and/or facilities: Accessibility (to get to the park) Accessibilities (travelling in the park) Signs in the Park Infrastructures (walkways/public places/WC's) Accommodation (e.g. hotels, camping parks) Restoration (e.g. restaurants, cafés) Tourist information (tourist offices) Local Interpretation Centres Tourist entertainment agents	

Source Elaborated by the authors

within the limits of the PGNP, the sample is of the non-probabilistic type by convenience. To carry out the empirical study, the collaboration of the receptionists of the local accommodation units and tourist resorts was requested in order to deliver the questionnaire.

The empirical study was based on fieldwork, which was carried out during the months of June to October (being the

most representative). The questionnaire was filled in by the respondent. After data collection, the questionnaires were coded and validated.

Statistical analysis was performed in SPSS. Continuous variables were described as means (M) and standard deviations (SD). Absolute (n) and relative (%) frequencies were calculated for categorical variables.

4 Analysis and Discussion of Results

Once the data from the sample questionnaires ($N = 507$) were entered into SPSS Statistics software (version 27), it was possible to perform a descriptive analysis of them, seeking to characterise the attributes both physical and psychological that the sample considered most relevant. The data revealed that the sample was made up mostly of male tourists (51.1%), married (58.8%), between the ages of 26–35 (30%) and 36–45 (24.9%), with a predominance of university graduates (38.9%). They are also mainly national tourists (85.8%) and repeat tourists (71%), as it is already recurrent to visit the PGNP. However, considering the sample, it is not very usual for the respondent to frequent protected areas (only 40.4% stated that they had visited protected areas).

We then sought to characterise the image with which tourists were left of the PGNP in its most diverse attributes. For the measurement, the respondents had to, on a Likert scale with seven points, rate the attributes referring to the PGNP, where 1 meant much worse than expected, 7 much better than expected and 4 neither good nor bad. However, regarding those attributes that the respondents were not aware of or did not want to answer, they could leave that indication. For this analysis, measures of central tendency (mean, median, mode and percentiles) and measures of dispersion (standard deviation) were calculated and used.

In what concerns the most functional attributes, we tried to divide them: on one side the natural landscape, the heritage and the developed activities and, on the other side, the set of infrastructures/touristic facilities.

As it is possible to observe in Table 4, in terms of average, the item that presents the highest average, standing above the value six (very good), was the natural landscape. This indication corroborates some research (Akgiş İlhan et al., 2022; Chi & Qu, 2008; Shani et al., 2009). In addition, further research indicates that the natural offer, such as landscapes, represents one of Portugal's strengths (Martins, 2022b; Tourism of Portugal, 2017). All the remaining attributes ranked at value 5 (good) except for the item activities: events and entertainment.

In addition to the average, we sought to analyse the median of the items observed, since the median is the value that separates the larger and smaller half of a sample. It was an option to use the median, since the advantage of the median over the mean is that the median can give a better idea of a typical value because it is not so distorted by extremely high or low values.

Thus, comparing the average of these items with the medians, it was possible to observe that, in most items, the median is higher than the average (i.e. most of the sample gave better ratings compared to the mean terms), in the items of activities, both outdoor activities and entertainment activities. The opposite occurs in the remaining items, meaning that most of the sample is below average (Table 4).

In regard to the functional attributes related with the infrastructures, it is possible to observe that in terms of average four items are above the value five (good), namely, the accommodation (5.85), the restaurants (5.59), the tourist animation agents (5.16) and the accessibilities until reaching the park (5.00). These data corroborate other research that highlights the accommodation (Liu & Jo, 2020), restoration (Ganzaroli et al., 2017) and tour operators (Romero et al., 2020). The items that stood out the most were accommodation and restaurants. In fact, the region is known for having a great offer in terms of accommodation (Martins et al., 2021a, 2021b; Martins, 2022a), as well as in what concerns restaurants. The items that had the lowest averages, between points 4 (neither good nor bad) and five (good), were the items regarding the infrastructures (walks, public places and sanitary facilities) with an average of 4.65; followed by the item regarding the interpretative centres (4.79); item about the signage within the park (4.81); and the item about the tourism offices and their information (4.94). In terms of median and mode, only the accommodation and restaurant items are placed at value six, while all other items are placed at value five.

Regarding psychological attributes, the one that stands out most positively in terms of average is hospitality and friendliness, standing above value six (very good) (6.02) (Table 6). This indication corroborates Portugal's strategic

Table 4 Average, median, mode, standard deviation and percentiles of the image of the PGNP perceived by respondents—functional attributes—part I

Items		Landscape	Price	Heritage: historical attractions	Activities: outdoors	Activities: events and entertainment
N	Valid	499	462	447	437	407
	No answer	8	45	60	70	100
Average		6.26	5.04	5.39	5.69	4.76
Median		6	5	5	6	5
Mode		6	5	5	6	4
Standard deviation		0.76	1.04	1.02	1.03	1.25

Source Elaborated by the authors

plan and other studies when they state that the hospitality and friendliness of the local population represent some of Portugal's strengths, as they are considered the touch points with the best performance, both in terms of satisfaction and compliance with expectations (Turism of Portugal, 2017).

It is important to mention that the remaining psychological attributes also scored highly, above value five: safety (5.32) and gastronomy (5.57) (Table 6) corroborating the study of Bertan (2020).

In addition to the average and median, we tried to identify the mode in the answers of the respondents. Regarding the mode, only the events and entertainment item is in point 4 of the Likert scale (neither good nor bad). The items natural landscape, accommodation, catering, gastronomy, hospitality and welcome, outdoor activities and safety had good acceptance, with the majority considering them to be in point six (very good) on the Likert scale. The mode of the remaining items was found at point five (good) on the Likert scale (Tables 4, 5 and 6).

Given that the standard deviation is a measure of dispersion around the population mean of a variable, we also analysed this measure. The standard deviation, in all items, does not show large discrepancies, thus presenting a low standard deviation, since part of the data tends to be close to the average or expected value and, therefore, is not very dispersed throughout the Likert scale, ranging between 0.76 (natural landscape item) and 1.29 (tourist information/tourism offices item).

It should be noted that the items interpretative centres, events and entertainment and tourist entertainment agents were those attributes that tourists did not respond to (they had a high number of unanswered questions—more than one hundred), probably due to the tourists' lack of knowledge, because it was not used or simply because they did not want to answer.

In the impossibility of covering the various attributes of the PGNP image, and according to several authors such as Echtner and Ritchie (1991), Gallarza et al. (2002),

Table 5 Average, median, mode, standard deviation and percentiles of the image of the PGNP perceived by respondents—functional attributes—tourist infrastructures and/or facilities

Items*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
N	Valid	499	497	485	475	491	479	432	384	335
	No answer	8	10	22	32	16	28	75	123	172
Average	5.00	4.86	4.81	4.65	5.85	5.49	4.94	4.79	5.16	
Median	5	5	5	5	6	6	5	5	5	
Mode	5	5	5	5	6	6	5	5	5	
Standard deviation	1.09	1.11	1.27	1.26	0.91	1.04	1.29	1.12	1.28	

1. Accessibility (to get to the park)
2. Accessibilities (travelling in the park)
3. Signs in the park
4. Infrastructures
5. Accommodation
6. Restoration
7. Tourist information
8. Local interpretation centres
9. Tourist entertainment agents

Source Elaborated by the authors

Table 6 Average, median, mode, standard deviation and percentiles of the image of the PGNP perceived by respondents—psychological attributes

Items*	Gastronomy	Hospitality and reception	Safety
N	Valid	471	485
	No answer	36	22
Average	36	6.02	5.32
Median	5.57	6	5
Mode	6	6	6
Standard deviation	6	0.93	1.2

Source Elaborated by the authors

Kastenholz (2012) and Beerli and Martín (2004), respondents had the opportunity to add another attribute that contributed to the image that was left of the PGNP and proceed to rate it on a seven-point Likert scale. Thus, as it is possible to observe, of the eleven respondents who used this field, the maintenance, the cleanliness of the streets and the cleanliness of the tourist attraction points, the reduced number of rubbish bins, as well as the quality of the park maps were identified as aspects much worse than expected.

The car park was rated with a poor-quality attribute (point two of the interval scale). Regarding the attributes that scored 3 on the Likert scale (bad), respondents identified parking, medical support, and the toll payment for Mata da Albergaria (Table 7).

After a stay at a particular tourist destination, it is common for tourists to take an assessment of their holiday and evaluate certain aspects. Therefore, the respondents were asked to give their opinion about the overall image of the park, namely whether it met initial expectations. According to Table 8, it is possible to observe that the great majority

was quite satisfied (63.3%), as the image they had of the park corresponded to expectations (35.7% claimed to be very satisfied and 27.6% completely satisfied). Approximately 29.2% claimed to be satisfied with the image of the park, and 5.7% claimed to be neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. However, despite the small number, some tourists (1.8%) were not satisfied: 0.2% were very dissatisfied and 1.6% were dissatisfied, considering that it neither met nor exceeded their initial expectations.

Regarding the nine tourists (1.8%) who were unsatisfied with the image, they highlighted a number of situations, namely, the “feeling of abandonment and neglect by the entities that should promote and care for the park” (Q.29); “Lack of respect for nature by those who run and organize the park; Lack of signage; Lack of hygiene/garbage bins” (Q.238); “Lack of cleanliness of tourist attractions; Toll payment; There should be a monitor to explain the fauna and flora of Mata de Albergaria” (Q. 239); “Trail maintenance; Garbage bins; Information about the PGNP” (Q. 244); “PGNP should have more entertainment (Bars and pools)”

Table 7 Other attributes considered by respondents regarding the image of the PGNP

	Likert scale	Attributes	F
1.	Far worse than expected	Maintenance	1
		Cleaning-streets	1
		Cleanliness-tourist spots	1
		Waste bins	1
		Maps	1
2.	Very bad	Car park	1
3.	Bad	Medical services	1
		Car park	1
		Payment of tolls	1
4.	Neither good nor bad	–	–
5.	Good	–	–
6.	Very good	Silence	1
7.	Far better than expected	Waterfalls	1
Total			11

Source Elaborated by the authors

Table 8 Respondents' expectations regarding the image of the PGNP

Likert scale	f	%	
1. Completely unsatisfied	0	0	1.8
2. Very unsatisfied	1	0.2	
3. Unsatisfied	8	1.6	
4. Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	29	5.7	5.7
5. Satisfied	148	29.2	29.2
6. Very satisfied	181	35.7	
7. Completely satisfied	140	27.6	
Total	507	100	

Source Elaborated by the authors

(Q.142; Q. 314); “Garbage” (Q.72); “Lack of restoration infrastructures” (Q.295) and “Payment of tolls” (Q.254).

Trying to analyse the reasons/motives that led tourists to visit the PGNP with the image they had of the park after their stay, we crossed the data to draw some conclusions. Thus, as can be seen in Table 9, the majority was very satisfied with the image of the PGNP, falling within point six of the interval scale, e.g. rest-151; contact with nature-137; and entertainment-66.

However, we found that those who mentioned that one of the reasons for their visit was to visit monuments were completely satisfied with the park's image. On the other hand, for those who came to the park to do sports, the image was a little lower than expected, and most of them said they were satisfied with the image of the park (27/72) (Table 9).

We consider that the PGNP, despite being a territory with many tourist attractions, sport is not a very consistent and consolidated attraction. It should also be noted that there were respondents who were not satisfied with the image of the PGNP, namely those who mentioned reasons of rest and contact with nature (Table 9).

After identifying the three main reasons/motives for the respondents' visit (rest, contact with nature and entertainment), we sought to analyse how often repeat tourists (360–71% of the sample) usually visit the park.

Thus, through the analysis of Table 10, of those who revisit the PGNP ($n = 360$), the visitors who seek the park to rest (314/360), usually visit it at least once a year (109/314), followed by once in three years (70/314), several times a year (69/314) and less than once in three years (63/314).

Table 9 Motives for the stay presented by respondents distributed by expectations of the image of the PGNP post-visit

Expectations	Completely unsatisfied	Very unsatisfied	Unsatisfied	Neither satisfied nor unsatisfied	Satisfied	Very satisfied	Completely satisfied	Total
Motives	0	1	8	29	148	181	140	507
Rest	0	1	7	25	130	151	122	436
Contact with nature	0	0	7	20	109	137	115	388
Entertainment	0	0	3	10	32	66	53	164
Visit monuments	0	0	3	7	16	23	25	74
Sport	0	0	2	1	27	24	18	72
Gastronomy	0	0	1	6	14	26	24	71
Visit friends/relatives	0	0	0	2	5	12	4	23
Health	0	0	1	2	7	10	2	22
Other motive	0	0	0	0	3	4	1	8
Business	0	0	1	1	1	3	2	8
Religion	0	0	1	0	0	2	0	3

Source Elaborated by the authors

Table 10 Reasons for the stay presented by the respondents distributed by frequency of repetition ($n = 360$)

Motives	Frequency					Total
	1 time p/month	1 time p/year	Several times p/year	1 time in 3 years	Less than 1 in 3 years	
	14	324	224	182	182	926
Rest	3	109	69	70	63	314
Contact with nature	5	96	65	53	57	276
Entertainment	2	44	31	19	21	117
Visit monuments	1	18	20	11	13	63
Sport	1	18	18	10	5	52
Gastronomy	1	18	7	12	14	52
Visit friends/relatives	1	8	5	3	4	21
Health	0	8	5	4	2	19
Other motive	0	2	3	0	0	5
Business	0	2	0	0	2	4
Religion	0	1	1	0	1	3

Source Elaborated by the authors

Only a small number usually go to the park once a month to rest (3/314) (Table 10).

Regarding those who indicated contact with nature (276/360), the majority stated that they come mainly once a year (96/276), followed by several times a year (65/360), less than once in three years (57/276) and once in three years (53/276). A small number states that they come once a month to contact with nature (5/276) (Table 10).

With regard to entertainment, the data are similar to the previous ones: 44/117 stated that they come once a year, 31/117 several times a year, 21/117 less than once in three years, 19/360 stated once in three years; a not very significant number admitted to come once a month (2/117) (Table 10).

5 Conclusions

In this study, we sought to answer the research question about what are the main attributes that visitors highlight in a given territory with specific characteristics such as the PGNP. This research corroborates some studies conducted when they refer that the natural landscape is one of the most outstanding, namely Gallarza et al. (2002), Chi and Qu (2008), among others.

What attracts the most attention in PGNP are the functional attributes such as natural landscape, and outdoor activities. These features are unique to tourist destinations such as protected areas in general and the PGNP specifically (Martins et al., 2022; Martins, 2022a). The majority of the sample considered rest and contact with nature as the main reasons for visiting this destination, which denotes the uniqueness of this territory. It is therefore crucial to maintain and preserve this protected area in order to continue attracting and retaining tourists. In terms of infrastructures, the accommodation and restaurants stand out positively. This corroborates the existing literature, as this protected area has a well-consolidated set of infrastructures in terms of accommodation (Martins, 2022a), and is also a region that stands out for its typical and gastronomic dishes.

Of the psychological attributes, those that stood out the most were hospitality. Events and entertainment were the least identified attribute due to the specific characteristics of this tourist destination, which presupposes calmer experiences since the most stated reasons for staying are rest and contact with nature. This shows that the visitor profile of this protected area identifies more with nature and silence. However, we consider that managers and stakeholders of this protected area should try to improve these attributes, as although most visitors have a good image of the park, the percentage of satisfaction in terms of expectations (very or completely satisfied) is below 65%, which does not

demonstrate that this protected area can overcome other competing destinations.

As proposals for future research, it would be interesting to understand in other protected areas, with regard to accommodation and restaurant attributes, if the same attributes are referred to or if this is just a characteristic of the PGNP because there are many accommodations.

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