

# Comparison of local and foreign visitor`s choices in two national parks in Latvia

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## Introduction

The park managers should be aware of the needs of their visitors so that they are satisfied with their experience during the visit. The park managers should balance the needs of nature preservation and interests of visitors in order to ensure preservation of nature values for the next generations because every visit leaves some kind of impact on the visited territory. The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas (ECSTPA) is of good assistance in retaining this concept in practical management.

The goal of the present article is to show needs of local and foreign visitors and assessment of their visits in two national parks (NP) in Latvia. One of them, the Kemeru National Park (KNP), has earned (2012) the certificate of ECSTPA.

## Study areas and methods



Gauja national park (1973)



Kemeru national park (1997)

GNP - Latvia's oldest national park and has ambitious goals to become the most visited destination outside Riga in 2018.

Visitors' survey was conducted between June and October 2015 in Latvian and English

KNP - main value is bogs and wetlands. The previous visitors' survey was conducted in 2012 as a part of preparation task for the ECSTPA.

Visitors' survey was conducted between July and November 2015 in the Latvian, English and Russian language

The basic method of the research was survey, but because of the large number of questions it could be interpreted as a structured interview – a qualitative method. Respondents were surveyed in different locations of the KNP, GNP objects, transport hubs, choosing different days of the week, weather conditions, times of the day and special public events.

## Results

Table 1. Comparative review of study results.

Indicators	Foreign visitors in KNP	Local visitors in KNP	Foreign visitors in GNP	Local visitors in GNP
Number of respondents	32	194	42	105
Net Promoter Score	10 (moda) 8 (median)	8 (moda) 9 (median)	8 (moda) 8 (median)	8 (moda) 8 (median)
The length of visiting park (%)				
Up to 1 hour	6.3	6.0	2.4	2.9
2-4 hours	56.3	70.0	50.0	41.0
Full day	28.1	16.0	33.4	45.7
2 or more days	9.3	8.0	14.2	10.4
Significance of ECSTPA certificate, %	18.8	22.6	n/a	n/a
Significance of the Natura 2000 label, protected area	28.1	21.6	64.3	n/a
Mode of transport (%)				
Car		79		68.6
Train		7		3.8
Public bus		2		8.6
Tourism company coach, rented bus		9		11.4
Bicycle		2		3.8
On foot		1		4

## Conclusions

The visitors' survey shows that determined activities of the NP have brought results because many residents chose to visit NP, and the repeated visitors mostly said that cleanliness and infrastructure in the KNP has improved.

It is important for visitors that their basic needs for food and toilets are met, and work should be continued to improve these aspects. At the same time, the infrastructure development density and increase of the number of visitors to the already crowded objects should be revised, creating ways to divert visitors to less popular objects. One of the unresolved problems is accessibility of territory of both NP and links between objects by public transport.

Visitors' largest expenses include travel expenses, catering and entrance fees. As the GNP has more catering service providers and sites with entrance fees than the KNP then visitors' expenses are larger in the GNP.

There are no sharp differences in the opinions of foreign tourists and local residents, with the only exception being that foreign tourists more often name the significant role of intact nature.

