5
OVERTOURISM IN PETRA PROTECTED AREA
Tour guides’ perspectives

Areej Shabib Aloudat

Introduction
Tourism has become an attractive planning and management tool for the economy of countries. Its direct benefits, mainly, employment, the generation of revenues and foreign exchange, are viewed as an alternative for the economic development of tourism destinations with many countries trying to tap into it—Jordan being one of them (Shdeifat, Mohsen, Mustafa, Al-Ali, & Al-Mhaisen, 2006).

Ecotourism is one of the fastest-growing forms of tourism (Bayrama et al., 2017) and its success, as with all kinds of tourism, is based around its growth, intuitively, with tourism destination agencies exerting many efforts to increase tourist flows for the purpose of elevating the economic benefits. Accordingly, overtourism (OT) is a result of the success of these agencies. However, tourism benefits have the potential to cause negative impacts. The resultant overcrowding may cause direct environmental, infrastructural, and cultural damage to a number of destinations, and indirect impacts on local residents’ lives based on pollution, increased prices, traffic congestion, and economic leakages. Overtourism, or overcrowding, occurs from high-use levels of visitors leading to effects on residents, tourists, and resources. These causes and effects all bring about concerns with OT that is fast becoming one of the most hotly debated issues, especially in ecotourism which relies on protected areas (PAs). It is important to address the issue of OT in PAs and highlight any inappropriate or poorly management tourism that may cause negative impacts on PAs biodiversity, landscapes, and resources base (Leung, Spenceley, Hvenegaard, & Buckley, 2018).

This chapter explores the phenomena of OT in PAs from the perspectives of tour guides. The focus on tour guides as respondents in this study is because this group is an important part of the communication and interpretation of values and cultural [and natural] heritage resources in PAs (Eagles, McCool, & Haynes, 2002). Undoubtedly, tour guides are the main providers and mediators of such interpretation. Their interpretation covers the environment with its physical location (the surroundings), and its related aspects including emotional, sensory, mental, and cultural aspects (Schaller, 2016).

Aim and scope of the research
The research focuses on Jordanian tour guides and seeks to explore how they perceive OT in Petra Archeological Park (PAP), which is a UNESCO world heritage site, the best-known and
most-visited attraction in the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The aim of this research, therefore, is to increase the understanding of the concept of OT in PAs from the perceptive of tour guides who are regarded as a main and maybe sole direct, day-to-day service providers, yet, are often considered a marginalised group within the tourism industry (Aloudat, 2017). The study also explores the strategies and techniques that tour guides employ to safeguard PAs and control visitor behaviour. Multiple journeys were taken to the Petra site to listen to tour guides talk about their field experience on OT.

Petra Archeological Park (PAP) has been a UNESCO World Heritage site since 1985, and was selected as one of the New Seven Wonders of the world in 2007. Its landscape and biodiversity combined with a very rich culture heritage makes the site the most frequented by foreign visitors to Jordan. The rock-cut façades are the iconic monuments of Petra. Of these, the most famous is the so-called Treasury (or Khazneh). Petra is characterised by its entrance, which is the outer Siq (path) with a length of 1200 m, which is one the most severely impacted parts of the site from random climbing by tourists, erosion of the sandstone cliffs, in addition to the dusts caused by the horses and chariots used by tourists (Moustafa & Balaawi, 2013).

It was only in 2017 that Petra joined The National Network for Natural Reserves in Jordan and declared as a natural PA in parallel to its status as an archeological PA. The ecological importance of Petra is based on the four different biogeographical zones that it spans according to the distribution of plants: Mediterranean and Irano–Turmanian at higher elevations, and Saharo–Arabian and the Afro–tropical penetration zone at medium to low altitudes (The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, 2018).

The distinctive biodiversity that Petra abounds in includes unique plants, shrubs and animals, in addition to its geological and natural characteristics. At least 25 flora species of Petra are considered endemic to Jordan and to the Eastern Mediterranean region and more than 23 species are considered endangered at both national and regional levels, including tree species (The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, 2018).

Being a natural PA might preserve the city’s biodiversity, much of which has been endangered due to decades of focusing on the historical and archaeological features of the city, at the expense of its ecosystem (Ministry of Environment, 2017). Different approaches to preserve Petra Protected Area (PPA) have included enhancing interpretation methods such as the use of signs and brochures to spread the environmental awareness, in addition to restricting duration and group size (Moustafa & Balaawi, 2013). Different leading initiatives are being taken to sustain environmental practices, especially in the tourism sector. This is manifested by the establishment of the Tourism Green Unit (TGU) with the aim of encouraging more eco-friendly actions, behaviours, and work practices that are in sync with environment and natural assets of Jordan (United Nations Development Programme, 2020).

**Literature review**

Ecotourism has been defined as traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific object of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural aspects (Weaver, 2005, p. 19). Another definitions focus on the benefits that ecotourism strives to achieve including economic development and political empowerment of local community, and fostering respect for different cultures (Honey, 2008, p. 33). Ecotourism typically occurs in natural areas, and should contribute to the conservation of such areas (Fennell, 2007, p. 2). The International Ecotourism Society, TIES (2015) defined it as responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment, sustains the wellbeing of the local people, and involves interpretation...
and education. It involves both the natural environment and the social and natural aspects of local people. Managed ecotourism ensures the balance between the needs of economy, society, and the needs of conserving the ecological system of a destination. Other definitions of ecotourism highlight how management approaches should integrate natural, biological, social, and cultural components of an environment for the purpose of sustainability (Keitumetse, 2008).

**Overtourism**

Overtourism is a new term in tourism studies. In 2018, the Oxford English Dictionary made “overtourism,” one of its words of the year. It is defined as an excessive number of visitors heading to famous locations, damaging the environment and having a detrimental impact on resident’s lives (CNN Travel, 2019). OT is fast becoming one of the most hotly debated issues in the modern age of travel and tourism industry (Koens et al., 2018). The sharp rise in international tourists has resulted from a number of factors, including cheap air fares offered by budget airlines, rising incomes, social media’s marketing, and the widespread popularity of rental platforms such as Airbnb (Koens et al., 2018). Thus, more travellers are descending on places that can no longer cope with their own popularity, contributing to the OT phenomenon.

The term ‘Trexit’ (tourist and exit) expresses the actions that destination agencies introduce to face OT by reducing or even stopping tourists from visiting popular destinations and attractions (Seraphin, Sheeran, & Pilato, 2018). Accordingly, some countries put severe measures in place to regulate tourism in specific ‘over-touristed’ sites such as India, Netherlands, and Iceland (CNN Travel, 2019). For example, the Netherlands Tourist Board is engaged in destination management rather than destination promotion in its Perspectives 2030 Report. In Iceland, entry fees to national parks are being charged, while in India visits to the Taj Mahal are limited to three hours as a method for regulating numbers.

However, many destination agencies are powerless to control tourist flows as air travel and seaports are operated by air companies and cruise companies (Dodds & Butler, 2019). Accordingly, factors responsible for the growth of OT may increase rather than decrease unless serious action is taken (ibid). Optimistically speaking, one might suggest that COVID-19’s dramatic results could be seen as a natural force approach allowing nature to recover in PAs.

Areas set aside to protect nature have a long history (Eagles et al., 2002). In India, for example, protected areas were established to safeguard natural resources over two millennia ago (Holdgate, 1999), while in Europe, hunting grounds were protected for rich and powerful people 1000 years ago (Eagles et al., 2002). These sites became open for public use and it was the first nucleus of community involvement in tourism (ibid). Nowadays, there are over 236,200 PAs according to the 12th and final update of the (International Union for the Conservation of Nature [IUCN], 2020). However, PAs are established and managed for a variety of purposes, which makes it difficult to identify one definition that encompasses all diverged managerial objectives. One definition by IUCN is: ‘A PA is a clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values’ (IUCN, 2008).

The IUCN has developed a six-category system based on the purpose of the management of PA as: 1) Scientific Reserve/Strict Nature Reserve; 2) National Park; 3) Natural Monument/Natural Landmark; 4) Nature Conservation Reserve/Managed Nature Reserve/Wildlife Sanctuary; 5) Protected Landscape or Seascape; 6) Managed Resource Protected Area (International Union for the Conservation of Nature, 1985), with many PAs fitting under
categories five and six. Petra is a protected landscape that contains a resource with high historical, architectural, and archeological significance, describing the core testimony of human settlement in Jordan. Well-managed tourism in Petra can assist, therefore, not only in preserving nature but also in protecting and restoring cultural resource as well.

However, PAs are increasingly under pressure from several factors: demands for ‘multiple use’ parks allowing extractive industries; demand of lobby groups seeking access for a range of recreational activities; four-wheel driving, horse riding, hunting, fishing; and the aspirations of indigenous groups for title and management of parks (Neil and Wearing, 1999, p. 39). Tourism activities result in a variety of negative impacts on critical environments of PAs such as: trail creation, crowding, overdevelopment, impacts on vegetation, soil compactions or erosion, taking souvenirs, user conflicts, and damage of archeological sites (Cole et al., 1987; McNeely & Thorsell, 1989; Dowling, 1993; Buckley & Pannell, 1990; Wight, 1996) (cited in Eagles et al., 2002). Yet, the literature on PAs also identifies successes in protecting biodiversity from external threats (Holland, 2012); yet, this success, as Gaston, Jackson, Aantu-Satuzar, and Cruz Pinon (2008) argue, varies and depends on the types and levels of management regimes applied in different PAs.

The role of the tour guides

The literature on tour guides indicates that they are performers who carry out significant roles in tourism (Weaver, 2001; Weiler & Ham, 2001; Weiler & Black, 2015; Aloudat, 2017). In fact, tour guides accomplish multiple, infinite, and overlapped roles. Among the first to study the roles of tour guides were Holloway (1981), Cohen (1985), and Pond (1993), all of whom identified tour guides as information givers, ambassadors, public relation representatives, and mediators. In a seminal study that categorised the roles of tour guides but from their perceptions and found how they see their worldview, the tour guides perceived their roles to fit under four main roles namely: ambassadorial, managerial, promotional, and mediating (Aloudat, 2017). These inseparable roles often cause pressure and worry for tour guides and ‘tour guides may be the most maligned people in the world of travel’ (Prakash, Chowdhary, & Sunayana, 2011, p. 66). The complexity in tour guides’ roles and features such as tour cancellations, extended tours, irregular work, delays, long working hours, and irregularity of employment and seasonality make this job a stressful and demanded career job (Aloudat, 2017). Another new study has examined the role of tour guides as facilitators of spiritual tourism (Parsons, Houge Mackenzie, & Filep, 2019). The study revealed that tour guides act as brokers to spiritual tourist through facilitating physical access to sites and facilitating encounters, and understanding, empathy, and self-development. In terms of examining the occupational commitments of tour guides, a study found a strong positive relationship between burnout and economic anxiety levels (Yetgina & Benligiray, 2019).

Tour guiding in ecotourism has been researched from different scholars (Weiler & Ham, 2001; Weiler & Ham, 2002; Christie & Mason, 2003; Skanavis, Sakellari, & Petreniti, 2005; Tripathi, 2016). Tour guiding is identified as an effective tool to achieve the purpose of ecotourism which is to engage tourists in low impact, non-consumptive, and locally oriented environments in order to maintain species and habitats (Tripathi, 2016, p. 27). Thus, tour guides are the supporters and, most importantly, the implementers of ecotourism goals in the field.

Interpretation is a main role for tour guides and it has been argued that the role of tour guides as interpreters is the most predominante role that the tour guides play (Black & Weiler, 2005; Black & Ham, 2005). It is a crucial factor in protecting tourism assets as it reveals the significance of the visited places and to stimulate sustainable behaviour (Black & Ham, 2005). Interpretation has been identified as the process of transforming heritage into language.
(Howard, 2003), as the heart of ecotourism (Weiler & Ham, 2002), and a direct way of enhancing the experience and the understanding of the site (Kong, 2014). Accordingly, tour guides have been regarded as stimulators of positive behaviour toward the environment. Through interpretation, tour guides can elevate the understanding and appreciation of resources (Eagles et al., 2002). As interpreters, tour guides are often the main awareness and educational source for visitors to natural and cultural PAs (Skanavis & Giannoulis, 2010). They are the motivator of environmentally responsible behaviour and conservation values, and specialist information givers (Black & Weiler, 2005; Black & Ham, 2005). At a deeper level, tour guides are seen as main factors that direct the tourist to or away from sustainable practices, thus, they contribute to the success or failure of an ecotourism venture (Pond, 1993 as cited in Christie & Mason, 2003; Weiler & Ham, 2002; Christie & Mason, 2003; Black & Ham, 2005; Imon, 2013). As such, they act as conservators of the natural resources of the destination. Interpretation is an approach to communicate environmental messages in PAs where natural and cultural resources are predominating such as national parks, national forests, museums, zoos, aquariums, and botanical gardens (Ham, 1992).

Well-trained guides, using high-quality performances, maximise the value of the ecotourists’ experience and, therefore, help in achieving the conservation goals of ecotourism (Steward et al., 1998, cited in Christie & Mason, 2003; Black, Ham, & Weiler, 2001; Weiler & Ham, 2002). Advancing the education and training of tour guides is an important tool to improve the quality of ecotourism experience. Skanavis and Giannoulis (2010) have developed a model for environmental interpreter guides in PAs in Greece. They urge local people to train themselves as interpretive tour guides to achieve not only ecological sustainability but also economic sustainability (Skanavis & Giannoulis, 2010).

Good quality guiding stimulates the visitor to be committed to the visited place (Aloudat, 2017) and to behave in a responsible and sustainable way (Weiler & Kim, 2011; Poudel & Nyaupane, 2013) as they enhance the sustainable behaviour of visitors (Alazaizeh, Jamaliah, Mgonja, & Ababneh, 2019).

The literature on tour guides has also focused on revealing the roles and importance of tour guides in the tourism industry. Most of the literature has taken an instrumental approach to investigate tour guiding with a professional and functioning focus (Holloway, 1981; Cohen, 1985; Pond, 1993; Weiler & Ham, 2002; Christie & Mason, 2003; Salazar, 2005; Macdonald, 2006; Jennings & Weiler, 2006; Scherle & Nonnenmann, 2008) and very few studies have considered the situational features of tour guiding particularly from the tour guides’ perspective (Salazar, 2005; Aloudat, 2017). More specifically, few studies have referred to them as key informants on tourism issues despite their close, deep, and long contacts with tourists. Tour guides’ daily contact with tourists make them a valuable source of information related to different tourism issues including the performance of tourism destination, and tourist behaviour (Aloudat, 2013). Accordingly, their perceptions may be regarded as an informative source on the performance of a destination and their knowledge may be utilised by tourism agencies to gain valuable and up-to-date feedback on the tourism performance of a given destination (Aloudat, 2017). Thus, their input on OT is worthy of exploration especially in sensitive areas such as PAs where the behaviour of tourists is important to monitor and control.

**Methodology**

The research enquiry used a qualitative approach. The data was collected from tour guides joining tourists in PPA, and semi-structured interviews took place with 12 tour guides. The participants were all Jordanian tour guides and members of the Jordanian Tour Guides...
Association (JTGA), which is the professional association representing and registering all tour guides in Jordan. There are around 200 on-site guides in addition to 1180 national guides.

The interviews took three months from November 2019 to January 2020. The time of interviews varied from 25 minutes to 70 minutes. The participants shared their experiences and perceptions of aspects of OT in PPA. The interviews provided information about the views on and the experience of tour guides in OT, and operational strategies they follow to deal with OT. The sample strategy started as a purposive. Two interviews were with two tour guides known to the researcher thereafter the snowballing technique was used. The later strategy was suitable in finding informants from tour guides to participate in the research given the fact that the data collection was during a peak season before the interruption by COVID-19. All interviews were recorded after getting the permission of the interviewees, and all participants remained anonymous in this study. After recording, the interviews were transcribed and then translated to English. Quotes used in the text are retrieved from these transcripts.

The themes and main topics of the interviews consisted of first, the interviewee’s socio-demographic profile (age, gender, years of work experience, foreign language spoken), and second, emergent themes relating to tour guides’ perceptions on OT in PPA. The analysis was based on open and axial coding. The findings of the interviews were categorised into three themes namely tour guides’ perspectives on OT; tourists’ behaviour and attitude changes; and tour guides’ strategies, techniques, and future solutions. The following table represents the main characteristics of the respondents of this study (Table 5.1).

It came as no surprise that the majority of participants were male guides and only one female guide was interviewed. In Jordan, there is a big disparity in the numbers of tour guides in terms of gender. Currently, out of the total number of government-approved tour guides listed in the JTGA, there are 65 female guides in the list and 1113 males (Ministry of Tourism and Antiquities, 2019).

## Findings

The data provided rich insights into how the tour guides in this study perceive overtourism in PAs and how they perceive their role in this phenomena. Overall, three key thematic areas emerged that are discussed in this section of the chapter with quotations from the tour guides illustrating the key issues. The three key themes are as below:

### Table 5.1 Demographic variables of the tour guides

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of work experience</th>
<th>Foreign language spoken</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guide 1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>English/French/Indonesian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 2</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>French</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 3</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 4</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 5</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>German</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 7</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 9</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>French/English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>English/Dutch</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guide 12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>German/English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tour guides’ perspectives on overtourism

The phenomenon of OT has existed for a long time in tourism destinations. Scholars have identified OT through discussing the excessive numbers of visitors and the changes brought to tourism destinations including negative reactions by residents and changes and damages to cultural and natural resources. The tour guides found that OT is observed in PPA in the peak season mainly from April to October. They feel uncomfortable with high tourist numbers and, therefore, their activity as they escort tourists through the main entrance of PPA (The Siq)

... Petra is suffering especially in the peak ... when I find a lot of tourists I feel uncomfortable and this affects my performance ... (Guide 1)

Several participants expressed the aspects of OT in PPA as: crowding, stepping on the fragile rocks and plants, raising the voices, and pollution.

... negative activities like stepping on the plants and herbs, raising the voices, the pollution including water bottles, the pressure on the sewage and drainage services, the dung of horses and its smell, and even the tough way the carriage drivers treat the horses ... (Guide 4)

Some participants went even further to reveal that PPA is visited as a cultural and archeological site as a main motivation of tourists rather than a natural site. Thus, tourists are less respectful to the ecosystem of PPA. However, the participants asserted their role in making the tourists aware of the significance of Petra as a PA by interpreting the value of its ecosystem.

... unless the tour guides revealed the significance of the ecosystem of Petra because when visiting PPA they focus on it as a cultural and archeological place rather than a natural site ... (Guide 2)

While early PAs were established predominantly to protect and preserve the wildlife, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN; 2008) has more recently described PAs as ‘clearly defined geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values’ (Dudley, 2008, p. 8). This definition incorporated and emphasised the cultural value and the resource use of the PA making the concept of PA wide to include many aspects that may relate to the culture of the place, the local community and any resources regardless of its type. A guide expressed this idea as: ‘I always make the tourists aware of the local community, because the tourists may don’t know how they feel ... this is very sensitive ...’ (Guide 5).

Additionally, the tour guides identify their efforts in sustaining the benefits of the local community in the PA by explaining about tradition and customs of the community and by promoting their local products. ‘... I explain about customs and traditions ... I promote the products of the local’ (Guide 1).

The Siq and the Treasury are the main places to expose the OT effects in PPA. Of interest is how tour guides describe themselves as responsible about any negative behaviour of tourists. The same guide (Guide 1) with experience of 25 years continues as: ‘I try to find and manage the tour ... I feel guilty when I see any tourists do something wrong’ (Guide 1).
The tour guides noted a number of visible problems that traced to the lack of management effectiveness of PPA. Issues appears in the comments of most of the participants is related to the management approach in PPA. ‘well coordination should be between the different parts of the tourism … there are a lot of problems in managing PPA, this includes the number of visitors, time of visit, the horses used to transfer the tourists’ (Guide 7). Another guide said: ‘The management is ad hoc … no control on those who ride the horse carriages …’ (Guide 12).

According to the time of visits, almost all of the participants expressed that the managers of PPA should organise the visiting time slots to not go above the carrying capacity of the site: ‘a coordination between PPA and the tour operators in order to know the number of visitors estimated in a day … they may find a strategy that ensures not exceeding the carrying capacity of Petra’ (Guide 5).

Another guide found that the problem of OT is manifested in an observed way when the tourists who come in cruise ships enter Petra. ‘The problem is when the tourists of cruise ships visit the site …’ (Guide 4).

Tourists’ behaviour and changes in attitudes

Although tour guides see their main role as information providers they also acknowledge that their role is more than disseminating information or mediating between the place and the tourists. When asked about their role in affecting the tourist’s behaviour they asserted that the role of the tour guide comes with responsibility toward the PA. One guide said: ‘the tour guide is responsible about everything, you understand the value of every assets plants, herbs, birds, etc.’ (Guide 3).

The tour guides perceived their role as safe guardians of the PPA. They transfer different educational messages through their work not only for the tourist but also to other partners in the tourism process. ‘I am always keen to educate the tourists and the drivers’ (Guide 8). Another guide said: ‘I behave responsible in front of my clients…’ (Guide 1).

It is interesting to see how tour guides perceived their role toward other partners of the tourism process including the tourists and the drivers whom they influence their behaviour and attitudes. Several guides described their attitude as ideal.

Tour guides’ strategies, techniques, and future solutions

Tour guides in this study talked about their experience in minimising the effects of OT through various strategies and techniques. The most significant one is timing of the visits. The majority of tour guides found that OT may be solved by informing managers in PPA about the schedules of cruise ships as this will offer site management the opportunity to organise and control the numbers of visitors and the time of visits. Another suggestion is to manage the flow of groups in a stratified manner. ‘… to make a distance between each group, this will insure no crowding, no damages to the site …’ (Guide 9).

Another guide told:

you can’t tell the tourists that there is OT in Petra we can’t go there … they pay money and the tour operators can’t refuse any demand … so the only way to minimize the negative effects is to make more effective management. (Guide 7)

Another technique proposed by some of the participants to overcome OT is to manage the entrance and exit of the site. Some guides suggested to make two different ways and separate
the entrance from the exit. The tour guides even went further to mention that this approach will not only control the OT effects but will ensure the safety of the tourists. The majority of the participants talked about floods that happened in Petra last winter when they faced a safety problem. It was mentioned that flash floods hit the ancient city of Petra in 2018 which killed at least seven people and nearly 4000 tourists were forced to evacuate to safe areas and this was through the main entrance.

Another guide asserted the importance of some strategies that may help in minimising any anticipated negative impacts of OT. ‘… more information should be given to the tourists, the guides, and the drivers, about the site, it’s capacity, and the climate’ (Guide 10).

Safety was a focus to manage the PA, as the topography of Petra is considered as difficult terrain, thus, the tour guides proposed to establish an area for first aid uses. When any of the tourists get tired because of illness or any accident inside the site the way is too long to send him back to the entrance… (Guide 6).

The development of more infrastructure for world heritage site is challenging, as there are restrictions on what managers can add to the site without affecting its identity and authenticity. This development and managerial problem is revealed by some of the participants. However, of interest, other participants expressed that the problems also come from people working in the industry themselves like carriage drivers and souvenir buyers. A female tour guide expressed her occupational feelings toward the site as: ‘the way the carriage drivers treat the horses is so tough and harsh … I feel sorry when I see them like this …’ (Guide 3).

She continues:

The souvenir buyers also have negative impacts on the site …. They put their stuff on the rocks or under the trees … We as tour guides can’t do that because they are from the local community and they feel that the site is for them … (Guide 3)

The previous extracts revealed how the effects of OT are traced back not only to the tourists who are always the blamed users of tourism attractions, but also to tourism service providers. The awareness on the part of industry people and the local community is a strategy that the management bodies in PAs should focus on and formulate regulations regarding OT effects.

Discussion and conclusion

The findings of this study revealed the importance of tour guides in promoting and achieving the goals of ecotourism in PAs. The tour guides regarded themselves as protectors and conservatives of the environment and its surroundings. These findings confirm previous literature on tour guides’ role as interpreters of the environment, motivators of environmentally responsible behaviour and conservation values, and as special information givers (Eagles et al., 2002; Black & Ham, 2005; Yamada, 2011). Thus, more concern should be made to the performance of tour guides and the quality of interpretation they provided, which reflected on the positive experience for the tourists aligning with the principles of ecotourism. This may be achieved through the continuous education and training of tour guides in PAs. Appropriate guide training provides tour guides with necessary skills and knowledge that enables them to ensure the ‘safety of visitors, to provide accurate and compelling interpretation of sites and modeling appropriate environmental and cultural behaviours’ (Black et al., 2001, p. 147).

Even though the phenomenon of OT is a term that is manifested by changes brought by the increasing numbers of tourists including the negative impacts on the resources and the local community, the tour guides analysed in this study found that OT’s negative impacts, including
environmental degradation, on PPA are also brought by local people as well as industry. Tour guides provide an essential role in raising the environmental awareness of tourists, other partners in the industry, and the local community. As safe-guardians of PPA, tour guides emphasised their capability to influence the behaviour of, not only the tourists, but also other tourism partners such as drivers and souvenir buyers in addition to the local community. Their views support the literature in the field of ecotourism that viewed them as major contributors to the success or failure of an ecotourism trip, and promoters of positive behaviours and practices toward the environment (Pond, 1993; Stewart et al., 1998 as cited in Christie & Mason, 2000, 2003; Weiler & Ham, 2002; Alazaizeh et al., 2019). It is thus possible that tourism managers and planners concerned with PAs may refer to the tour guides to give feedback on behaviour of tourists on PAs. The tour guides, therefore, are capable in achieving the goal of environmental education in ecotourism.

The guides in this study expressed their concern about OT in PPA because of the many impacts. As direct observers, day-to-day field workers, tour guides mentioned that the management in PPA is lacking updated strategies and regulations to overcome the impacts of OT. They conveyed that OT is harming PPA, and putting infrastructure under enormous strain. The tour guides also indicated that OT in PPA is an issue that is oversimplified and not managed well, thus, confirming the findings of previous studies that showed a lack of organisational cohesion and effectiveness among organisations and lack of authority for on-site managers in PPA (Comer, 2012; Moustafa & Balaawi, 2013). One might ask if the management in PPA is able to cope with OT impacts and maintain the balance between keeping the site for future tourism demand, in one hand, and avoiding more degradation of the ecosystem of PPA in the other hand.

The findings raise some interesting managerial implications. The tour guides offered several suggestions that may enhance the effectiveness of the management of PAs. They felt that because they are not decision makers or, at least, a part of the decision-making process that their voices would not be heard. Accordingly, the study advocates tour guides as direct observers of and key informants on the tourism performance of PAs. The informative skills of tour guides, which are cumulatively acquired from their daily work in the field and their closeness to the tourists and the tourism attractions, including PAs, make them capable of offering significant managerial insights. As such, they stand as a considerable source of data for national tourism management bodies. Tour guides’ capability as in-depth information givers on the management of PAs confirmed other studies that advocated the tour guides as important for the management of tourism sites in general and for the PAs in specific (Moustafa & Balaawi, 2013; Schaller, 2016; Aloudat, 2017). The findings also confirm studies that position them as key informants of national tourism performance (Aloudat, 2013). The implications of this study are considerable, since the data suggest their contact with tourists may offer significant insight into the performance of PAs. Precisely because of their location at the “sharp end” of tourism as the sole agents who mediate tourism itineraries “on the ground” to visitors, they appear to be in a position to provide “ground level” insights on current and evolving issues in the delivery of the tourism experience that may be less apparent or available to managers more remote from the operational levels of tourism (Aloudat, 2013).

References

79
Aloudat, A. Sh. (2013). Tour guides as source of tourism performance data. In M. Koerts, & Smith (Eds.), Conference proceedings of 3rd International Research Forum on Guided Tours. Breda: NHTV-BNRIT.


Overtourism in Petra Protected Area


