

Overview and Key Characteristics

Protected and Conserved Areas (PCA) entrance fees are charged for access to sites. They are premised on the user pays principle and are one of the most widely used and mature sources of self-generated protected area revenues with a long history of application globally. Fees are commonly charged per individual or group and, in some cases, are included with the payment for the means of transport used to gain access including vehicles, boats and aircraft. In most cases they provide access for a specified period such as 24 hours or for a season/year (see season passes such as the [SANParks WildCard](#) and [Parks Canada Discovery Pass](#)). Entrance fee revenue can be an important contribution to site management budgets or community benefits if the fees are retained by the site management authority, communities, or other agency that consistently allocates part or all the funding to the site management or community activities.

Entrance fees have high gross revenue potential where visitor numbers are high, or fees can be elevated due to unique attractions. They represented over 80% of total site-based or self-generated revenues in more than half of Latin American countries (Bovarnick et al., 2010), 40-50% in the United States, approximately 75% in Namibia (Van Zyl et al., 2022) and between 25% and 30% in Uganda (Stevens et al., 2023). Revenue levels can be highly variable due to their dependence on tourism flows linked to ease of access, popularity trends, disease (COVID-19 decimated revenues from international tourists in many countries), political instability, crime, etc. Revenues also tend to have annual seasonal variations, which can be extreme for instance if a PCA shuts down entirely for winter.



How to plan for and implement entrance fees

Typical broad steps required to implement entrance fees include:

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| 1 | <p>Scoping and feasibility:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clarify the legal mandate to charge fees and compatibility of visitors accessing the PCA with its general management plan.• Assess whether baseline conditions are favourable including engagement with stakeholders such as local communities, tourism operators and businesses, tourism authorities and PCA visitors.• Assess market demand including a consideration of what will attract people, infrastructure needs and product niche.• Consider whether charging fees would be socially acceptable, what access and access-control infrastructure is in place or needed, etc.• Conduct a feasibility study including determining appropriate fee schedule and amounts, likely revenue from fees vs all cost of implementing especially to avoid the introduction of loss-making fees. This can be done using a cost-benefit analysis.• Determine a mechanism for retaining revenue for conservation and communities and assure political buy-in. |
| 2 | <p>Design and preparation - Design and implement a work plan (assuming positive feasibility study results) including notifying stakeholders, establishing infrastructure and facilities, purchasing equipment, establishing payment mechanisms and banking channels, clarifying management and finance protocols, and training staff.</p> |
| 3 | <p>Launch and adaptive management - Commence charging fees, managing finance, and communicating to stakeholders. Update fee schedule regularly.</p> |

Determining appropriate fee structures is a critical determinant of success. In addition to revenue maximisation, management authorities consider other objectives or criteria depending on the context, which include (Brown, 2001; Oleas, 2008; Banerjee, 2017; Watson, 2013; Eagles et al., 2002):

- Ensuring optimal visitor numbers, to manage the level of ecological impact within the PCA and to reduce congestion for visitor satisfaction.
- Encouraging or discouraging visits to substitute sites, or visits during particular times.
- Achieving a socio-economic purpose, such as tourism sector promotion, environmental education or ensuring that people have access to places for recreation.
- Aligning fees with those of similar attractions; thus, matching them with public expectations.

Formal fee determination protocols and procedures can assist with fee setting and transparency though they are not particularly common (Van Zyl, 2019). To varying degrees, fee determination

tends to be the outcome of consultations and negotiations/bargaining with key stakeholders often in the tourism industry (Wankuru, 2011). In South Africa, the South African National Parks Authority (SANParks) apply a Tourism Pricing Protocol and a Tourism Yield Management Protocol to pricing decisions. At its core, it requires that fees must be market related, affordable to locals and not be influenced predominantly by operational budget requirements (SANParks, 2014). Benchmarking relative to fees elsewhere is a critical informant (see Van Zyl et al., 2019) along with understanding the likely impacts of fees and monitoring tourist numbers and impacts. Management authorities also rely on consumer research, which look at visitors' willingness to pay (WTP) to inform PA pricing (for application examples see Letley & Turpie, 2018; Bruner et al., 2015; Baral et al., 2008; Adams et al., 2008 etc). While helpful, WTP surveys are complex and fairly resource-intensive. If done properly, they require detailed design, testing, large enough samples, and skilled survey administrators to help control for the various potential biases among respondents.

To achieve the varied goals of ecotourism in PCAs, entrance fees can be differentiated or discounted in numerous ways including:

- By age with children, pensioners and student groups paying lower or no fees.
- According to citizenship or place of residence particularly in developing countries with the most common distinction between international visitors and national citizens reflecting the higher ability/willingness to pay of the former and tax contribution, rights of the latter. In some cases, a third category for citizens of regional blocks is included, such as countries that are part of the Southern African Development Community. Members of local host or neighbouring communities often are allowed free access or passage through sites.
- Within a network of PCAs, entrance fees for individual sites can be differentiated according to the level of attraction (landscape features, key species, etc.), amenities and infrastructure. Most Southern and Eastern African national parks networks use between two and five different 'classes' or 'tiers' of parks.
- For different seasons or even times of day with lower fees for less popular periods.
- Some PCAs offer discounted fees to persons that are accompanied by registered guides (who then pay an annual licence fee to the site) to support them (e.g., Botswana and Zambia).

Required Elements

Key requirements for the implementation of entrance fees include the following:

- An attractive tourism offering (natural features, landscapes, wildlife, infrastructure quality, service quality, security) and adequate visitor numbers to the PCA or the prospect of achieving them through adequate tourism infrastructure/facilities development, marketing, etc.
- Compatibility of visitors accessing the PCA with its objectives and management plan including visitor carrying capacity, zonation and permitted uses.
- Legal mandate that allows the PCA management authority to charge fees or good prospects for the necessary legal changes.
- Social acceptability, or good prospects of securing it, of paying for entrance which may be low for some stakeholders such as citizens that feel their tax contributions should pay for PCA management or within the tourism sector.
- Access control and a secure system for the collection and banking of fees.

Success Factors and Risks

Key success factors for the implementation of entrance fees include:

- Marketing and branding to support/increase demand. It is highly beneficial to partner with national tourism promotion agencies, tourism operators, local communities, and individual champions to assist.
- Appropriately and transparently determined fees informed by research and consultation.
- Regular updating of fees to adjust for demand, inflation and comparable PCAs (it is substantially more difficult to raise fees by one highly significant increment than through gradual annual or bi-annual adjustments).
- Transparent and timely communication of fee increases is important for tourism stakeholders who, for example, may take payment for tours that include entrance fees several months in advance.
- The ability to retain fee revenues, at least within the parks network, is preferable from a finance, efficiency, and management alignment standpoint and may increase the willingness of visitors to pay fees.
- Credit card and other electronic payment options can increase visitor satisfaction, reduce costs, limit fraud and increase staff safety.

Case Studies

Botswana National Parks

In 2019, with support from the Biodiversity Finance Initiative (BIOFIN) programme, the Botswana Department of Wildlife and National Parks (DWNP) commissioned a review of entrance and tourism activity fees at their parks that had last been adjusted in 2000. The review focused on (Van Zyl, 2019):

- Benchmarking of Botswana against nine African countries for fee structures, fee amounts, the criteria used for fee determination and revenue retention practices.
- The impact that inflation adjustments between 2000 and 2019 would have had on fees.
- Review of previous WTP studies on entrance fees in Botswana.
- Assessment of the product quality and park experience based on field visits and interviews.
- Stakeholder engagement with the tourism sector, community leaders, NGOs, and others.

Fee setting criteria were recommended that aimed to strike a balance between generating revenues, promoting affordable access for citizens, supporting tourism and assisting with management goals. A revised fee schedule was provided including the introduction of two tiers of parks and a distinct fee for SADC nationals. Examples of revised amounts included fees for the most popular parks increasing from P10 to P30 (US\$ 3) for citizens and from P120 to P270 (US\$ 21) for non-residents. Albeit significant, fee increases which were adopted in 2021, were generally less than inflation as this would have resulted in unjustifiably high fees relative to key competitors.



Water buffalo (*Syncerus caffer*) at a national park in Botswana

Komodo National Park, Indonesia

Until 2022, visitors to the Komodo National Park in Indonesia paid an IDR 225,000 (US\$ 15) entrance fee on weekends. This was considered too low, especially as the Park is the only practical place in the world to see the impressive Komodo dragons (*Varanus komodoensis*) in their native habitat. In mid-2022, the regional authorities and national Ministry of Forestry and Environment announced an almost 17-fold increase of the fee to IDR 3.75 million (US\$ 250). This resulted in the tourism sector embarking on a two-day strike in protest, which effectively brought tourism to a halt. The strike was only called off once the authorities agreed to revert to the US\$ 10 entrance fee until December 2022. In April 2023 a revised fee of IDR 450,000 (US\$ 30) was announced and the fee structure was also revised. This case shows the importance of thorough engagement and feasibility/impact assessment to inform the determination of appropriate, and implementable fees and the importance of advance communication to stakeholders about fee changes.



Komodo national park, known for its famous Komodo dragons (*Varanus komodoensis*)

Trends and Future Directions

Trends and potential future directions include:

- More use of digital and mobile payment technologies to make it easier for visitors to pay and to reduce the security and fraud risks associated with cash payments.
- More sophisticated fee schedules and price differentiation including more flexibility in pricing.
- More use of seasonal passes and potentially in groups of countries.
- Better ongoing monitoring and research to support fee determination and implementation.

Additional Resources and References

Resources

[CFA 2019 Conservation Finance Guide: Tourism Entrance and Activity Fees](#)

IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA), Tourism and Protected Areas Specialist Group ([TAPAS Group](#)) 2018 Guide on Tourism and Visitor Management in PAs

Links to a selection of online fee schedules can be found here: [Canada](#), [Argentina](#), [Nepal](#), [Kenya](#), [South Africa](#), [Uganda](#)

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