

Perception of tourists from Lima about the Paracas National Reserve in times of Covid-19 (Peru)

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Abstract

Biodiversity is a significant element in tourist perception of a nature destination. The objective of this study is to analyze the perception of tourists from Lima about the Paracas National Reserve in times of Covid-19. This is a quantitative, descriptive, cross-sectional and non-experimental research work. An online questionnaire was applied to Lima Metropolitan residents who had visited the reserve before and during the pandemic. For data collection, the survey technique with the Google Forms tool was used; the results were tabulated and the quantitative data were analyzed by using the MS Excel tool.

The findings show that tourists from Lima value the biodiversity of the Paracas National Reserve more highly during the pandemic, the average stay of 5 days has not changed, and now they are concerned about staying healthy, taking into account the protocols recommended by the state.

Keywords

Tourism perception; Natural Protected Area; Tourist Satisfaction; Paracas, National Reserve

Tourism is an activity carried out by people during their trips and stays in areas different from their usual environment, for a period of time of less than one year, for entertainment purposes, for business, not linked to the development of a remunerative activity in the place visited" (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism, 2019).

Tourism activity shows relevance and perspectives worldwide, since it promotes the arts and crafts of a nation to preserve the beauty of nature, its cultural heritage, the history of the land, and to promote the process of national unity and world brotherhood. Tourism is an alternative for the economic diversification of many developing countries [1]. The UNWTO expected international tourist arrivals to reach 1.6 billion by 2020. In

Peru, tourism in 2018 represented 3.9% of the Gross Domestic Product [GDP] and 4.6% in Lima. In 2019 it was predicted that by 2026 the contribution of tourism to the Gross Domestic Product [GDP] would be 7.2 % on average [2, 3]. Unfortunately, this was interrupted with the arrival of Covid-19.

The pandemic has had a devastating effect worldwide, affecting people's health and well-being. One of the most striking features of the current emergency is the magnitude of its impact on consumers' lives and behavior in all aspects of their lives. Besides the growing health and hygiene concerns, economic recession and the related decline in consumption [4, 5].

According to [2, 6, 7] COVID-19 means that the future of tourism is a blank sheet of paper, Peru has not been exempt from this reality and a new perspective of tourists on the biodiversity of nature destinations is foreseen. This research seeks to identify feelings, perceptions and opinions after a period of confinement. Therefore, the following research problem is presented: *What is the perception of tourists from Lima on the biodiversity of the Paracas National Reserve in times of Covid-19?*

Perception is the interpretation of stimuli received by the senses. For Leonardo [8-10], perception is like a tendency to mental order. Initially, perception determines the input of information; and, secondly, it ensures that the information taken from the environment allows the formulation of abstractions (judgments, categories, concepts, etc.). Tourist perception is managed as an important reference for the management and operation of tourist destinations and is one of the evaluation criteria for the progress of tourist destinations [11-13]. The tourist experience could influence a more positive perception regarding the economic, cultural and environmental aspects of the tourist destination. On the contrary, [14-17] describes perception as something more complex than a simple mechanism of visual capture of the world around us; rather, he explains that the process of perception involves at least three closely interrelated but clearly differentiable phases: sensory experience, cognition and evaluation or preference. The first one refers to the role of our senses in perceiving the environment; cognition comprises the whole set of processes through which we structure the information received by our sensors; finally, perception comprises an evaluative phase, referring to our attitudes and preferences in relation to what has been previously apprehended and structured. For [18-22], tourism perception can be detached in two scenarios, one from the perspective of the entrepreneur or direct beneficiary, and another from the perception of the collectivity, or of those people who do not participate directly in tourism; that is, the neighbor, the owner, the hotel, the community where the resort is located, among others. This research is focused on the direct beneficiary, exactly on the tourist from Lima and the perception he/she has of the Paracas National Reserve.

[23-26] presents the natural environment, the human environment and the economic environment as components of tourism perception. The natural environment corresponds to the aspects of nature and landscape that the tourist values; the human environment, to the facilities and safety; and the economic environment, to the economic characteristics of the destination and personal characteristics.

The construction of destination image influences the decision making when traveling either positively or negatively. Some components of image construction are the visual elements, such as photography and videos as well as the qualification of its attractions, services, accessibility and prices. [27-30] "Destination image can be defined as the sum of beliefs, ideas and impressions that a person has of a destination" (p.104). Following this line, [31, 32] comment that the cultural landscape as a destination image is extremely important in the current situation because it attract cultural and nature tourism. Its enhancement as a tourism product involves economic and social development for the area, preservation and conservation of the heritage. Additionally, it is part of the cognitive or perceptive, affective or emotional and cognitive or behavioral components that are developed before the trip to be made, which can be modified by external factors [33-35]. For his part, [36-39] states the importance of

knowing tourist perception, since this allows determining appropriate marketing objectives, tourism promotion and the appropriate positioning strategy". Tourist perception and experience are important factors in identifying satisfaction from tourist sites; perceived value on product quality, price, emotions and social characteristics are important for measuring tourist perception. Measuring tourist perception at any site helps to identify the attributes of weaknesses and deficiencies related to satisfaction. Finally, tourism perception of the Paracas National Reserve helps with the preferences held by local and foreign tourists for the different tourist areas within the reserve itself [40-43].

The article takes the Paracas National Reserve as the research area and tourists from Lima as the research object to analyze tourist perception of the protected natural area and tourist satisfaction.

In a press conference, Peru's Minister of Culture, Rocio Barrios Alvarado, expressed that an average of local and foreign tourists prefer national destinations in a post-pandemic scenario, for which one of the favorite candidates would be the city of Paracas due to its proximity to Metropolitan Lima and its great biodiversity. Therefore, Paracas will be an anchor destination in the reactivation of domestic tourism (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism, 2020). In 2019, 83 745 tourists were received, out of which 75 347 were national tourists and 8 398 were foreign tourists (Ministry of Foreign Trade and Tourism, 2020).

[44-47] published a study showing the perception of tourists from Lima and abroad of the Paracas National Reserve, with a sample consisting of 85 foreign tourists and 35 national tourists, who were in the Paracas National Reserve, Ica, Peru. The results indicate that Peruvian tourists were highly satisfied with their visit, with an average of 8.35, and foreign tourists had an average of 7.53, indicating a high degree of satisfaction.

On the other hand, [48-51] presents a study of the tourist perception of Koh Lan Island -Thailand, with similar characteristics to the Paracas National Reserve, through a scientific article where he recommends promoting ecological protection and diverse tourism; for it is necessary to improve the homogenization of the building and inadequate service facilities. For his part, [52-54] conducted a study explaining that the population, tourism operators and artisanal fishermen in the Paracas National Reserve do not have a high level of understanding of Non-Formal Environmental Education, but they are interested in training on this topic because they consider it fundamental to solve the environmental problems and sustainability of the Paracas National Reserve.

The objective of this research is to analyze the perception of tourists from Lima about the Paracas National Reserve in times of Covid-19. Likewise, the hypothesis of this research is that tourists have a positive perception of the Paracas National Reserve, appreciating nature and showing respect for the environment; all this based on the awareness that has been taken as a result of the pandemic.

Cross-sectional research designs collect data at a single point in time. Their purpose is to describe variables, and to analyze their incidence and interrelation at a given moment. This means that this research will study the relationship at a single point in time, which, in this case, is the tourist's new perspective on the Paracas National Reserve during Covid-19.

Thanks to this research, the new tourist's perspective on the Paracas National Reserve will be known, based on the 3 environments of perception, each one composed of several attributes that evaluate the perception and satisfaction of tourists from Lima. The three environments considered are: natural environment, human environment, and economic environment. Likewise, this research will help to implement or improve some of the tourist activities in the Paracas National Reserve, taking into account the conservation of the natural attributes that make up its attractiveness.

Materials and methods

Research Design

This research has a descriptive, non-experimental, cross-sectional design. In a non-experimental study, no situation is created, but existing situations are observed. In this research, we will observe the different situations in the areas of the Paracas National Reserve and how tourists from Lima manage to interact in the reserve. This will help us analyze new tourist perceptions and improve the new tourist profile.

Participants

The population for this study is composed of tourists from Lima who visited the Paracas National Reserve. The representative sample is made up of a total of 83 centennials or millennials. The data correspond to a universe of 1,584,512 centennials or millennials from the city of Lima [55-57]. The inclusion criterion applied in this research will be the socioeconomic level, where it was taken into consideration that the participants had made a trip during the pandemic to the Paracas National Reserve.

Sources and instruments for data collection

Bibliographic information obtained from different databases was used, in which the latest study of tourist perception of the Paracas National Reserve in 2015 was found; it belongs to the Oceana Magazine. On the other hand, to obtain primary data for the study, the tourism perception survey was applied in order to evaluate the new perception of tourists from Lima of the Paracas National Reserve, as well as the desired and undesired perceptions. A pilot instrument was used, which was adapted from [58-60] in his article "Analysis of the island tourism environment based on tourists' perception-A case study of Koh Lan, Thailand". The questionnaire is structured with 14 questions, with multiple and dichotomous response alternatives.

Procedure

For the development of the survey, questions were first established based on three aspects: the natural environment, the human environment and the economic environment. Then, the scale and the number of questions were revised through the pre-test, and the final form of the questionnaire was determined. The questionnaire has three parts: basic characteristics, behavioral characteristics and evaluation of tourist satisfaction. The questionnaire includes questions about the natural, cultural and economic environment of the Paracas National Reserve in three sections, in order to examine the state of the tourist environment [61-64].

Subsequently, the survey was published on the official Facebook page of the Paracas National Reserve and tourism blogs, indicating the criteria for its development. Finally, the collection of results was done by using Google Forms and the tabulation of the results of the instruments used was done in Microsoft Office Excel.

Results

To identify tourists' perceptions of the Paracas National Reserve, general data were found. Figure 1 shows that the sample was primarily made up of women (53%) and men only represented 47%. Regarding their district of residence, 65% were from northern Lima (Figure 2); as for age, 81% were between 18 and 29 years old (Figure 3).

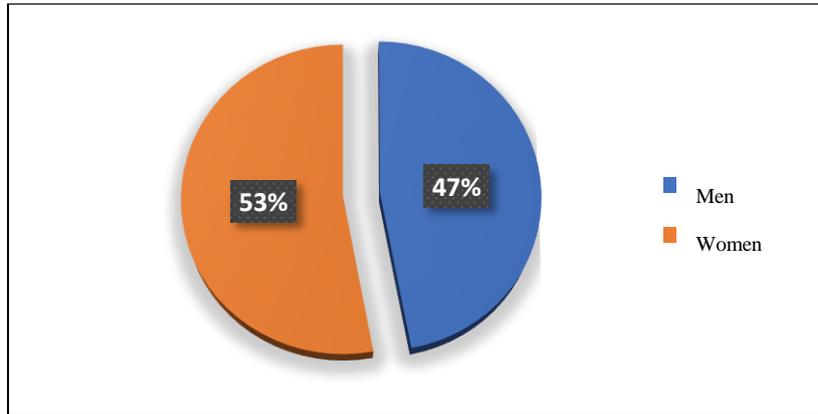


Figure 1: Gender
Source: Own elaboration

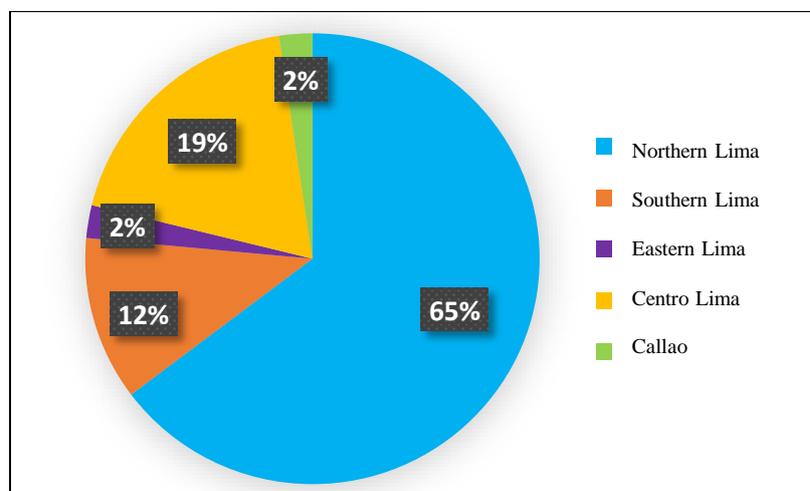


Figure 2: Place of Residence
Source: Own elaboration

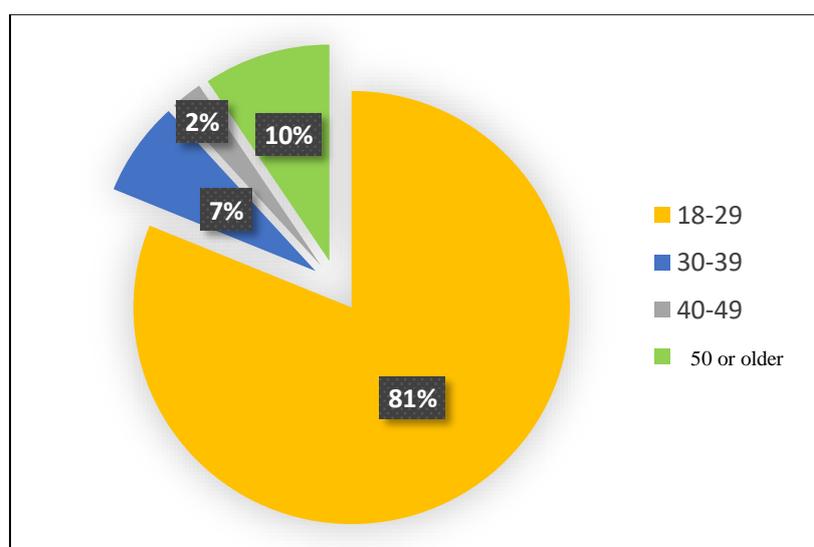


Figure 3: Age range
Source: Own elaboration

As for obtaining information about the Paracas National Reserve, 34% answered that they found out about it through advertising in social networks, while 30% found out about it through travel agencies.

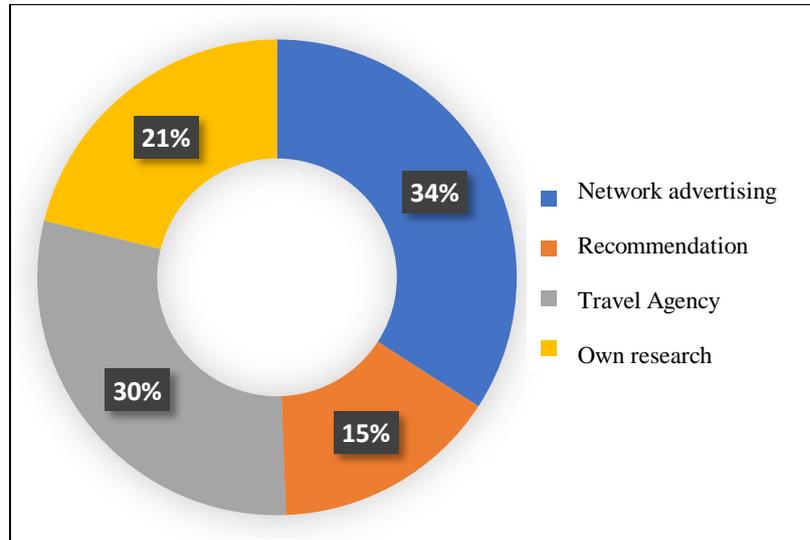


Figure 4: Means of information about the site
 Source: Own elaboration

Another important factor is that 88% prefer to travel in the company of family or friends. In addition, 84% say that they consider themselves financially independent for traveling.

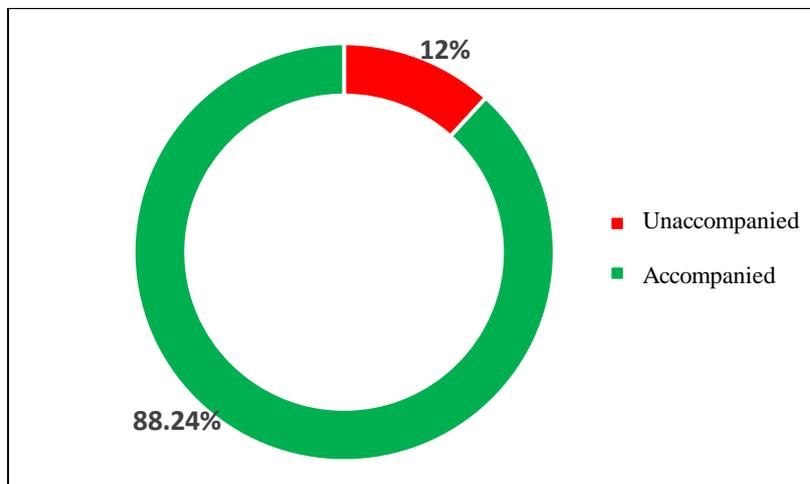


Figure 5: Accompanied and unaccompanied travel
 Source: Own elaboration

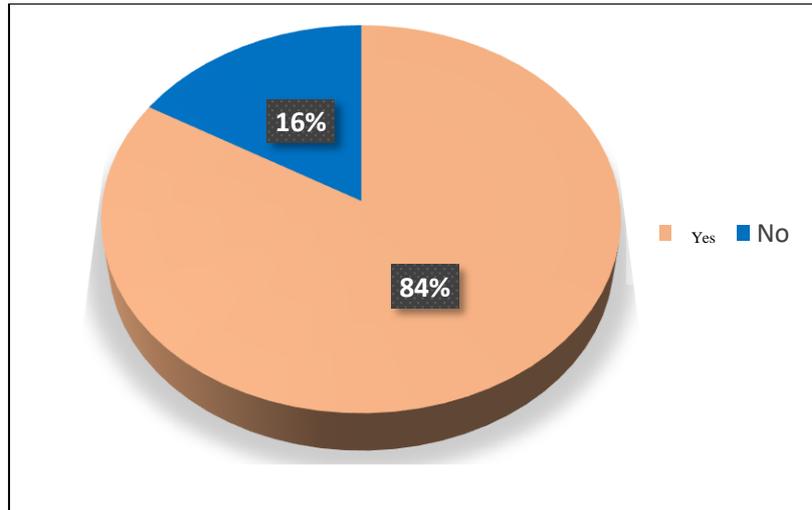


Figure 6: Financially independent

Source: Own elaboration

Likewise, 60.2% of respondents said that they perceived that the Paracas National Reserve was well cared for, which is what they expected, so this is related to the research they had done before going to the Reserve. The surveys also show that 75.9% were satisfied with the activities they did as tourists [65-67].

Table 1

Satisfaction with the Paracas National Reserve

N° Respondents	Paracas National Reserve			
	Perception of care ¹		Satisfaction with Activities ²	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
85	60,2%	39,8%	77,2%	22,8%

Note: ¹ Perception of biodiversity care ² Satisfaction with Tourism Activities

Regarding the changes that have been made in times of Covid 19, as shown in Figure 7, 88.24% consider important the reduction of the number of groups, 69.41% consider important the social distancing, 68.24% the repeated disinfection and 60% the disinfection of places. According to the respondent's experience about the service during the visit, 94% consider that it was professional and entertaining, as shown in Figure 8.

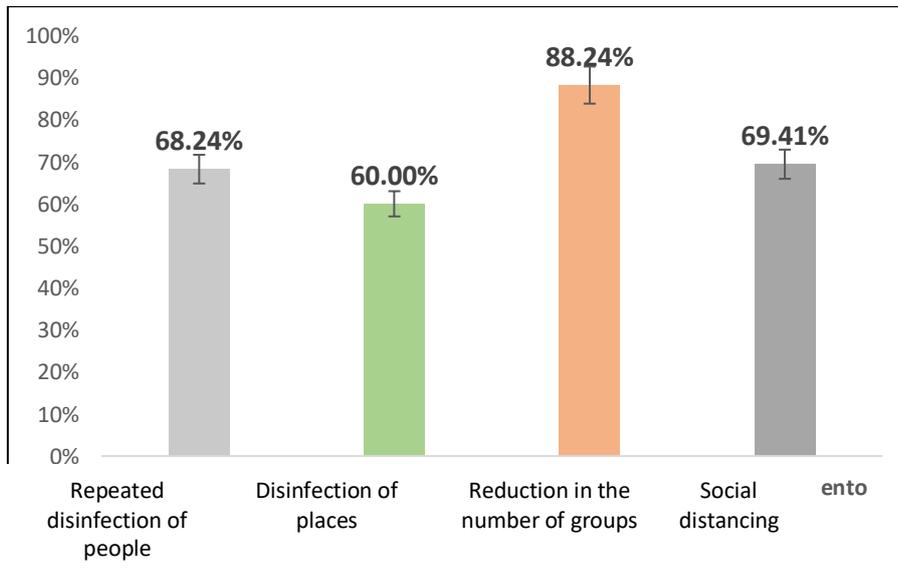


Figure 7: Post-covid travel changes

Source: Own elaboration

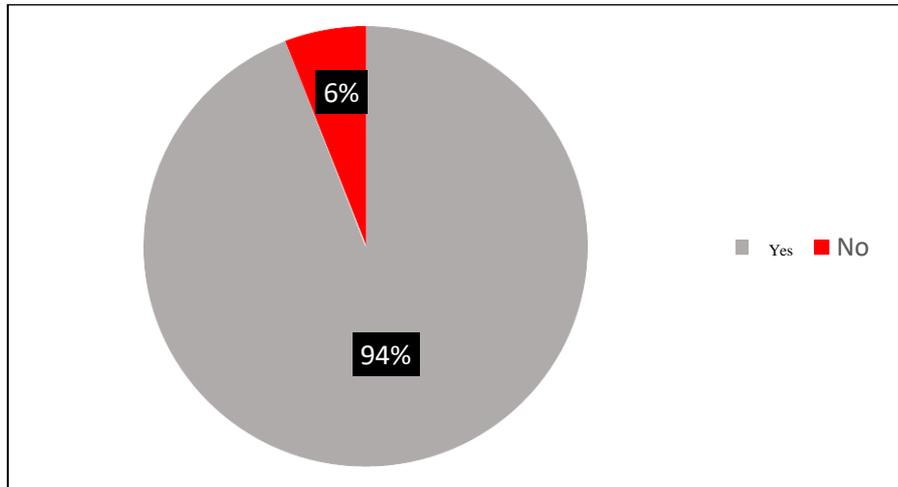


Figure 8: Service during the visit

Source: Own elaboration

In Figure 9, regarding the duration of trips around Covid-19 pandemic, 52% have not changed their trip duration. Figure 10 shows the main motivations for which respondents chose the Paracas National Reserve, where biodiversity is in first place.

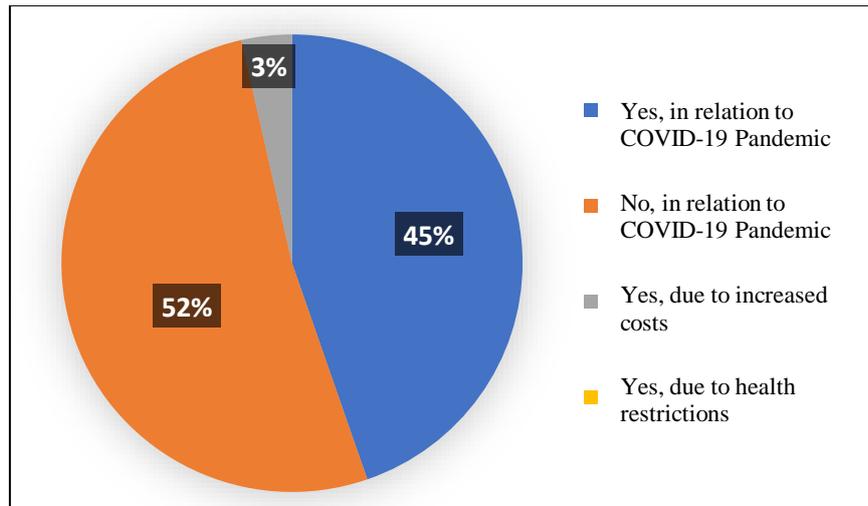


Figure 9: Trip duration

Source: Own elaboration

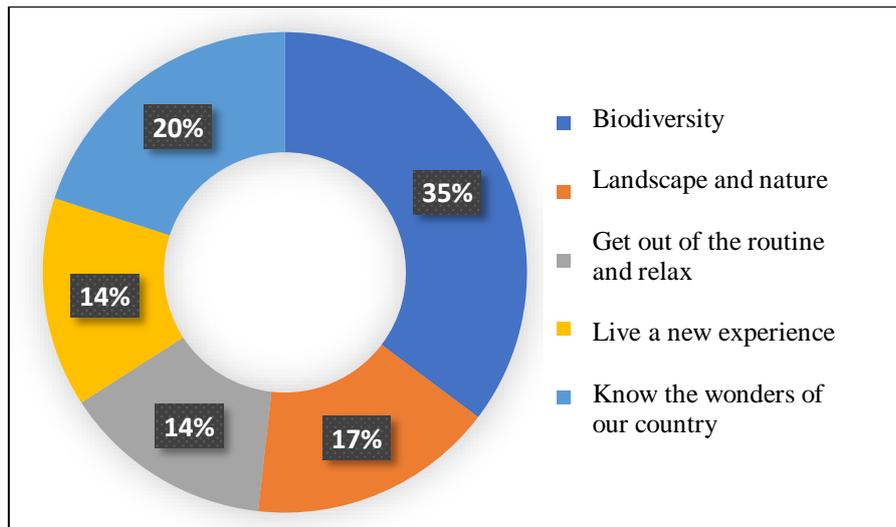


Figure 10: Motivation of the tourist destination
 Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the recommendations provided by the respondents to improve their stay in the Paracas National Reserve, the following aspects stand out: having information about the place before visiting it, security protocols and planning in advance. In conclusion, respondents were asked if they would go on a tourist trip again in the times of Covid 19. 78.3% responded "Yes", which tells us that the tourist essence of our country has not disappeared.

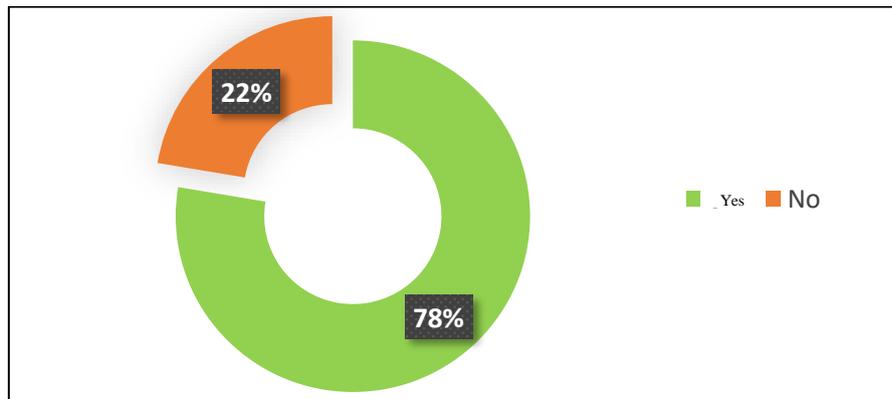


Figure 11: I would travel again in COVID-19 times
 Source: Own elaboration

Discussion

According to [68-71], travel preferences (motivations) have not changed as a result of the pandemic, which is reflected in the research. The main reasons for tourists from Lima to visit the Paracas National Reserve is to know new places and observe biodiversity, which coincides with the study of the reserve made in 2017 by Oceana magazine, which indicates that the main reason for visiting it is to know the Ballestas Islands and see the beaches. It also indicates that other important reasons were the climate, getting to know the place (5.0%), viewing nature (4.2%), the attraction of the Sun (3.3%) and watching animals (3.3%).

The research found that, for tourists, the main sources of information about the Paracas National Reserve are provided by the internet through social networks and websites. This coincides with the research by [72], which indicates that the main social

network through which tourists learn about the Paracas National Reserve is its official Facebook page, which has 24,181 followers. For [73], these technological media should be strengthened as an element of interaction in order to increase the intention to visit the site.

Furthermore, most respondents made the trip in the company of a family member or friend, showing coincidence with other research [58], in which tourists made the trip to the Paracas National Reserve in groups. On the other hand, respondents indicated that they save money focused on the trips they will make, which indicates that there is pre-trip planning.

Likewise, according to the research, tourists consider important the reduction of the number of groups, social distancing, repeated disinfection and disinfection of the places visited. According to [74-77], this is due to the fear related to contracting COVID-19, but it is not only a health risk but also a psychological risk, in which the tourist has anxiety or mental discomfort rooted in the fear of becoming infected, so spatial and hypothetical distance is highlighted.

[34, 78, 79] explain that the pandemic does not destroy tourist attractions that trigger the experience of tourists, therefore, the emotional, real-time, on-site experience of tourists should not change when tourist destinations are reopened. However, the findings show that the COVID-19 outbreak actually has a negative impact on the emotional, real-time, on-site experience of tourists. Although scenic spots are reopened, the emotional, real-time, on-site experience of tourists does not return to the level before the COVID-19 outbreak, implying that the recovery of tourist numbers and tourism experience may not be synchronous in this sustained global crisis. On the contrary, the research shows that satisfaction with the Paracas National Reserve reaches 75.9%, which goes hand in hand with the natural landscape and soundscape that relaxes the tourist, forgetting the noise of the city.

It is relevant to point out that there are factors that displease tourists such as dirt, poor waste collection, environmental degradation, scarcity of restrooms and lack of improvements in them. This coincides with the research made by [80, 81] who state that in important nature destinations, there is also deficient garbage collection, environmental degradation, broken sidewalks and lack or absence of surveillance.

However, the quality of a tourist destination is determined by the work of public and private managers, who must pay attention to the needs of visitors. On the other hand, visitors also throw trash on the sand and sea, polluting the ecosystem. Hence, the development of tourism activity requires shared participation, where local social organization becomes important within a common policy of integrated development, coordinated by the institutions involved whose role should be the technical and administrative advice as well as the control of all recreational activities, preserving the aesthetic value of the beach and its surroundings.

Conclusion

The objective of this article was to analyze the perception of tourists from Lima about the Paracas National Reserve in times of Covid-19 and to analyze the research findings. This study found that tourists from Lima have a positive perspective (cognitive and affective aspects) about the Paracas National Reserve during the pandemic. Likewise, the average 5-day stay has not changed and now tourists are concerned about staying healthy, taking into account all of the protocols recommended by the government. However, the challenge for the Paracas National Reserve is to make tourists aware of the need to take care of common areas such as restrooms, showers, roads, and to respect the areas designated for visits by the National Service of Natural Areas Protected by the State [SERNANP].

The hedonic benefit for tourists will be a consequence of their aesthetic and visual experiences while visiting the Paracas National Reserve. In this sense, natural attractions should be preserved in the best possible way, and, on the other hand,

comfortable accommodations, good food and beverages, fast and timely transportation, agile travel agencies, easily accessible commerce, and, above all, multiple payment alternatives should be offered. Undoubtedly, a place with a tourist offer based on a uniform combination of the main and accessory components will be able to better meet the needs of tourists, achieving better functional benefits in comparison with other destinations. However, efficient and differentiated marketing must be generated in order to create a relationship between the Paracas National Reserve and the tourist, creating memorable experiences. For this, technological tools must be used effectively, which are the only alternatives for communicating with the outside world in the midst of the health crisis that the planet is currently experiencing.

In general terms, the stakeholders involved in the Paracas National Reserve should focus their actions on providing the best leisure experience for tourists. For this purpose, it is essential to count on the participation of all the stakeholders involved in the Paracas National Reserve (travel agencies, hotels, the community, SERNANP, etc.) for a good organization and coordination of tourism attributes, generating significant benefits for the Paracas National Reserve and its surroundings. In this way, a sustainable tourist destination is shown, creating bonds of reliability with tourists in the natural environment, human environment and economic environment.

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