

CHAPTER 1

A PERSPECTIVE ON THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Cultural tourism is of growing interest to leisure tourists both nationally and internationally (Doggett, 1993). It can be described as travelling to experience the places and activities that authentically represent the stories and people of the past, which includes traditions/lifestyles, food, dance, music, architecture (Steele-Prohaska, s.a.5), arts and crafts, heritage sites and geographical landscape features (Tourism Industry in South Africa [TISA], 2002:2). Southern Africa has much authentic culture that is rated highly amongst international tourists. The South African tourist authorities have recognised the importance of this market as it is not only one of the main reasons international tourists visit the country, but is also viewed as a way of exchanging cultures with other countries (George, 2001). Leisure tourists are mainly the type of tourists who are interested in cultural tourism and travel for purposes not related to business.

There is a need for empirical research studies, in tourism and hospitality, to be planned and executed within a South African context, especially as the tourism and hospitality industry in South Africa is one of the fastest growing industries and the fourth largest earner of foreign exchange in the country (White Paper on the Development and Promotion of Tourism, 1996; SA Yearbook, 2001/2002). According to the Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism Mr Mohammed Valli Moosa in the Governmental White Paper on Development and Promotion on Tourism (1996:6) an estimated 2 million overseas visitors were expected to have visited South Africa in 2000, in comparison to 1.1 million in 1995 and 31,000 in 1961. South Africa is in the process of gaining popularity as a tourism destination world-wide, as it was ranked 25th in the world's top tourist destination in 1998 after being ranked 50th by the World Tourism Organisation in 1996. The country's spectacular natural and cultural tourist attractions contribute to its popularity as an international tourist destination (George, 2001; Ahmed, Heller and Hughes, 1998; Governmental White Paper on Development and Promotion on Tourism, 1996).

Tourism is the term given to the activity that occurs when tourists travel. This encompasses everything from the planning of the trip, the travel to the place, the stay itself, the return, and the reminiscence about it afterwards. It includes the activities the traveller undertakes as part of the trip, the purchases made, and the interactions that occur between host and guest. In short, it is all of the activities and impacts that occur when a visitor travels (Mills and Morrison in George, 2001).

Several trends have been identified in the international tourism industry. The most important trend in the growth of the South African industry relating to this study, is a growing demand for the experiences of the natural environment, local cultures and lifestyles and local customs/traditions in their original living settings (Tourism Industry in South Africa [TISA], 2002:1). This statement is supported by the poll in the South African Yearbook 2001/2002, which indicates South Africa's top 20 tourist attractions according to international visitors. Visits to cultural villages (such as Skakaland/Zulu villages) are ranked under the top twenty activities/attractions according to the poll. This is due to the fact that the search for knowledge and culture is one of the main reasons why many people travel these days and which will increase in the future (George, 2001).

Culture can be described as the sum total of what an individual acquires from his society – those beliefs, customs, artistic norms, food-habits, and crafts which come to him [or her] as a legacy from the past, conveyed by formal or informal education (Lowie in Lett, 1987). As mentioned, food is an aspect of culture. Therefore cultural experiences should also include food. Reynolds in Sparks, Wildman and Bowen (2001) views cuisine as part of the local culture. Sparks *et al.*, (2001) mention that there is an increase in tourists' expectations, awareness and interest in cuisine and dining experiences when visiting a destination. This increased consumer interest can be explained due to (a) the perception that there is an increase in people's travelling experiences, which in turn has increased their willingness to try different foods; and (b) multiculturalism.

Therefore there will be an increased demand for authentic offerings as these types of tourists come to experience a country's foods and wine, diverse people and the way they live, their festivals and so forth.

As tourists engage in the process of choosing destinations as well as in planning their vacations, expectations about a destination are developed. Restaurant meals can contribute to a tourist's experience by association with the host culture. For many tourists, the experiences and subsequent memories associated with restaurants can be an important component of satisfaction assessment of a destination (Sparks *et al.*, 2001). Therefore it is

important to comply with the tourists' expectations regarding their experience. Provision can be made for cultural experiences through establishments such as ethnic (cultural) villages, which provide authentic cultural-specific food for instance. However, according to the tourism industry of South Africa's [TISA's] overview (TISA, 2002), cultural tourism in South Africa remains under-developed for both domestic and international markets, which provide substantial opportunities for investment. A visit to one of the many ethnic villages should give one a true and authentic sense of cultural practices and traditions.

Lesedi Cultural Village a Protea Group resort (hereafter referred to as Lesedi) on the outskirts of Johannesburg is a cultural village where tourists can experience five of the ethnic cultures (tribes) of South Africa. The owners have designed a profit oriented traditional cultural village, depicting the ethnic or indigenous cultures of the Ndebele, Zulu, Basotho, Xhosa and Pedi. Corporate tourists are welcome as Lesedi has conference facilities. This study focuses only on the leisure tourists.

Tourists are taken on a twice-daily guided tour to each of the different tribal homesteads where they are exposed to the different cultures' traditional practices/lifestyles and dances. Relevant information regarding their cultures is also exchanged. Tourists are able to spend the night (in one of four tourist huts) in any of these homesteads. After being exposed to these experiences the guests can enjoy a buffet meal in "Nyama Choma", the restaurant.

Currently cultural establishments such as Lesedi tend to serve western orientated dishes with an African flavour which are not always based upon authentic/cultural-specific cuisine, and therefore do not complete and complement the cultural experience.

Cultural-specific foods may, however, not always be as presentable and attractive as their western counterparts. Furthermore, ethnic food may be culturally strange to tourists of other nationalities and ethnicity. Due to a lack of comprehensive literature, the management of Lesedi may also not have access to information regarding the food habits and ways of the cultures presented at Lesedi. Financial considerations and Lesedi's financial viability are contributing reasons for the current menu that does not totally complement the cultural experience.

As the food consumed in a restaurant (so too in a cultural village) contributes along with various other factors (such as service, ambience, décor and music) to the total meal experience, it is important that the food complements the cultural meal experience.

It is widely accepted in the food service and hospitality and tourism industry that the key to good service quality and ultimately consumer satisfaction lies in providing performances or services that meet or exceed consumer expectations. This places the onus on (food service) managers to pre-empt the expectations of their customers (Calvert, 2001), and to be knowledgeable regarding the factors influencing the meal experience.

Tourists arrive with preconceived expectations regarding the food, service and atmosphere/ambience, arising mainly from demographic factors, the tourists' knowledge of the local cultures, as well as their prior experiences. As mentioned before, satisfying these preconceived expectations is of great importance in a service (hospitality and tourism) establishment, such as Lesedi. By so doing, the experience is acceptable and the consumers are satisfied, which in turn can lead to return/repeat or referral/word-of-mouth recommendation business.

This research determines the extent to which the tourists' expectations are satisfied regarding their meal experience at Lesedi. In particular, the research focuses on the satisfaction of leisure tourists' expectations, in order to determine whether there is a need for a cultural-specific meal experience (food, service and ambience). Ultimately the overall aim is to recommend whether adaptations to the food and/or services and/or ambience are necessary at Lesedi. Adaptations to the aspects of the meal experience (the food and/or service and/or ambience/atmosphere), therefore, will complete the cultural meal experience, but still meet or exceed the consumers' (leisure tourists') expectations.

The cultural meal experience at Lesedi might be enhanced by a cultural-specific menu, supporting service and appropriate ambience/atmosphere. Reynolds in Sparks *et al.*, (2001) specifically states that local cuisine (especially authentic dishes from the region) should be offered by restaurants in a tourist destination for three reasons. Firstly, it provides tourists with exposure to part of the destination's culture, for example the food. Secondly, it preserves the cuisine for local residents. Thirdly, it educates the tourist about the local culture.

Literature relating to consumer studies in food service, regarding consumer expectations and whether these expectations are met, is an underrepresented area (Johns and Pine, 2002). Leisure tourists' food behaviour regarding the satisfaction of expectations concerning their meal/restaurant experiences has not been subjected to much investigation. Kivela, Inbakaran and Reece (1999) support this by stating that an extensive search of the relevant literature has failed to reveal additional conceptual or empirical evidence that would explain the dynamics between consumers' dining expectations and their meal experience, with

accompanying satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Nield, Kozak and LeGrys (2000) have stated that little has been done in respect of tourist satisfaction solely with food service or meal experiences while on vacation at a destination or regarding customer satisfaction in the tourist industry (Danaher and Arweiler, 1996).

In a personal interview with Mrs P Drodskie (Director of Policy at SACOB (South African Chamber of Business)) she stated (2002/06/18) that “you are entering new ground. I know of no research done on tourists’ expectations regarding their meal experience, especially in South Africa (or Africa for that matter)”. Pizam and Ellis (1999) state that the majority of consumer satisfaction research is done in industrialised economies, leaving very little research conducted in Africa, the Middle East, South America, Latin America and large portions of Asia.

Various international research studies that have been conducted regarding consumer satisfaction in the hospitality industry will be used as a guide for this study. Kivela *et al.*, (1999), however, state that literature regarding consumer satisfaction in the restaurant industry is limited, as studies concerning consumer satisfaction in restaurants have investigated overall service quality and satisfaction, rather than dining satisfaction and most have focussed on fast-food operations. Sparks *et al.*, (2001) also state that although food and wine are beginning to be acknowledged as an important dimension of the tourist industry, very little research has been conducted into the nature or the role of restaurant experiences in adding to the tourist product.

The lack of literature regarding consumers’ dining expectations and dining satisfaction regarding their meal/restaurant experience when visiting a more traditional restaurant has also been identified as a gap in the research field as substantiated by Kivela *et al.*, (1999). They state that “there is a profound lack of understanding about dining satisfaction and post-dining behavioural intentions in the consumer literature reviewed so far” (Kivela *et al.*, 1999:206).

From the abovementioned, the following problem statement for this study can be laid down: To what extent is there compliance with the **expectations of leisure tourists**, regarding their **meal experience** at Lesedi Cultural Village?

This research will be directly beneficial to Lesedi, as recommendations regarding adaptations of the food, service and ambience will be made (if necessary) according to the measure of satisfaction of the meal experienced by consumers (leisure tourists), visiting Lesedi. The study will also provide generic information to the tourism and hospitality industry for use in

establishments similar to Lesedi. Furthermore, this research will contribute to cultural tourism regarding the importance of culinary tourism.

From the preceding introduction, the literature study in **Chapter 2**, as well as the consumer perspective in the form of the systems theory in **Chapter 3**, an existing model of Kivela *et al.*, (1999) was adapted as a conceptual framework (**Figure 3.1**), as a guide for this study and to address the objectives set for this study (as seen below).

1.2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

The consumer perspective was used as the tourists visiting Lesedi are consumers of a product (the food), a service (within a food service establishment – the restaurant “Nyama Choma”) and an experience (a meal experience). The systems theory was used as a frame of reference to guide the research. This is explained and illustrated in **Chapter 3**.

This study seeks to fill the research gap concerning consumers’ dining expectations and dining satisfaction regarding their meal/restaurant experience when visiting a more traditional restaurant (as described above). Empirical research is carried out among leisure tourists at Lesedi. Their satisfaction regarding their meal experience was determined by means of a self-administered questionnaire. The issues were addressed by seeking the tourists’ views in respect of the following objectives:

- Objective 1:** whether the leisure tourists’ expectations regarding the meal experience and its components were met, and whether they were satisfied with the current meal experience
- Objective 2:** whether the leisure tourists would be willing to return or refer others to Lesedi
- Objective 3:** whether it is necessary to have a cultural-specific menu to satisfy the leisure tourists’ expectations
- Objective 4:** whether certain components of the meal experience impressed the leisure tourists the more than others
- Objective 5:** whether there is a significant relationship between **food**, **service** and **atmosphere** regarding the meal experience
- Objective 6:** whether other aspects have significant relationships with the components of the meal experience (**food**, **service** and **atmosphere**)

1.3 APPROACH TO AND THE COURSE OF THE STUDY

After a thorough study of the literature and research of consumer satisfaction in the hospitality industry as well as the consumer perspective, in particular the systems theory, a quantitative research approach for this study was chosen. In order to gather the relevant information, two methods of information gathering were used, namely a self-administered questionnaire (**Appendix A**), as well as semi-structured interview schedule (**Appendix B**) to interview the management of Lesedi to gather information regarding the views of the leisure tourists. The primary data collection technique was the self-administered questionnaire as it was easy for a large group of leisure tourists to complete the questionnaire, and systematic for the researcher to analyse the responses.

With the literature as well as the objectives of this study in mind, 255 leisure tourists who could understand and express themselves in English were used as the sample group. A description and motivation for the sample size, the choice and nature of the data collection techniques, the development of the questionnaire, the pilot-test as well as the reliability and validity are set out in **Chapter 4**.

1.4 FORMAT AND STYLE OF THE RESEARCH REPORT

Descriptions and photographs of the components of the meal experience (**food, service and atmosphere**) as presented at Lesedi are presented in **Chapter 2** and **Appendix C** respectively, giving a visual presentation of the arrangements at Lesedi, as well as providing background information.

The written text reflects the practical developments of the research. It is presented in six chapters as follows:

CHAPTER 1: A PERSPECTIVE ON THE STUDY

CHAPTER 2: THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MEAL EXPERIENCE AND TOURISM – A LITERATURE REVIEW

CHAPTER 3: THE APPLICATION OF A SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK – IDENTIFICATION AND EXPLANATION OF THE MEAL EXPERIENCE

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY TO DETERMINE THE SATISFACTION WITH THE MEAL EXPERIENCE AT LESEDI

CHAPTER 5: DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS, EVALUATION AND SUGGESTIONS

The completed questionnaires and statistical data sheets are available on request. Words or sentences that are highlighted or to which the reader can refer are indicated in **bold**. Where the numbering sequence reached saturation the various levels of the information under a certain heading for example in **Chapter 2, section 2.2.2** are indicated by means of different degrees of indentations as well as the headings of the levels in **bold**.

1.5 CONCLUSION

The absence of a clearly defined relationship between cultural tourism, leisure tourists' expectations, the meal experience and the satisfaction provides the opportunity for research, which is covered in the remainder of this report.

The initial starting point of the research requires a sound understanding of the interrelationship between meal experiences and tourism which requires a review of available literature, which is covered in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 2

THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MEAL EXPERIENCE AND TOURISM – A LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Research in the field of tourism follows a general pattern, suggesting that tourist satisfaction is the result of the interaction between a tourist's experience with an aspect of the trip or event and the prior level of expectations (Whipple & Thach, 1988). This research study is no different, as it determines the leisure tourists' satisfaction regarding their meal experience at Lesedi.

Studies by Sparks *et al.*, (2001) have shown that foodservice is an important contributor to tourist satisfaction of an establishment as it can contribute or detract from the whole experience. Research has shown that the foodservice or meal experience consists of the food, the service and the atmosphere, and these factors have an influence on the overall satisfaction of the consumer. Consumers (leisure tourists), however, come to a food service establishment, such as Lesedi, with certain preconceived expectations regarding their meal experience as a result of previous experience. The individual consumer (leisure tourist) also has an influence on the meal experience depending on demographics (age, gender and nationality), previous experiences and knowledge regarding the establishment.

Since the meal experience is a composite of many interrelated components, it is important to identify and understand the individual characteristics of the meal experience, the leisure tourists' expectations and ultimately their satisfaction with the meal experience. This is done by means of a theoretical background and conceptualisation of the following aspects in relation to Lesedi:

- the concept of meal experience and tourism
- the concept of expectations regarding the meal experience
- the concept of meal experience
- the concept of satisfaction with the meal experience

Note: Leisure tourists are the consumers in this study. The terms leisure tourists and consumer's are used interchangeably. The term consumers is used where there is specific reference to a source document that uses that term. Where no specific reference is made to a source document or where it applies directly to Lesedi, the term leisure tourists is used.

2.2 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND AND CONCEPTUALISATION

Prior to considering the concepts and their different aspects, the relationship between the food/restaurant and tourism is first considered, in the conceptual model in **Figure 3.1 (Chapter 3, Section 3.2.2)**, to indicate its importance in the tourists' evaluation of a destination.

2.2.1 The concept of the meal experience and tourism

Consumers in tourism typically purchase and consume a whole range of services, which together make up the holiday as well as the tourism experience (Weiermair, 2000). It is irrelevant, according to Weiermair (2000), whether tourism services (such as food services) are produced and distributed by a multitude of different tourism enterprises, or whether they are produced and sold by a single firm (such as a tour operator). The important aspect to consider is the holistic character of the consumption act. The consumer judges the total holiday experience, even though tourists do experience a multitude of individual service encounters and can also evaluate their inherent qualities (Weiermair & Fuchs in Weiermair, 2000). Lewis (1987) substantiates this by stating that a consumer obtains a service experience comprised of a multitude of service transactions. Each transaction contributes to the service experience and has characteristics relating to the whole set of transactions, which is more than the sum of the individual elements.

A study by Danaher and Arweiler (1996) has concluded that tourists who experienced wildlife parks, farm shows, and some form of cultural performance and liked these attractions (such as those presented at Lesedi) were more likely to rate highly their overall satisfaction with a destination. The authors noted that it is interesting that these particular attractions are the ones with the strongest identity of the country and it is these attractions that possibly draw the tourists to the country. Long (1998b) states that this may be due to the fact that, one can satisfy one's curiosity about the other culture(s) through tourism (especially cultural tourism). It can therefore be presumed that a cultural experience depicting the identity of a country is

an important aspect of a tourist's itinerary/package of a destination and therefore should contribute to it.

How tourism and eating out in a restaurant (the meal experience) interact and influence each other will be described below.

Most tourists view restaurants or food service as an important part of the (or any) tourist package, (Elmont, 1995). Therefore the total package should be seen as an important marketing factor. Marketing the whole experience is seen as more important than marketing the restaurant by itself (Sparks *et al.*, 2001). The food a restaurant or destination offers, can have a major impact on whether or not the establishment will attract tourists, or whether the tourists are satisfied with the destination altogether (Sparks *et al.*, 2001; Sparks, Bowen & Klag, 2003). Research has shown that the restaurant at a destination can enhance or detract from the overall satisfaction with the destination (Sparks *et al.*, 2003.). Nield *et al.*, (2000) and Au and Law (2002) support this, as they state that dissatisfaction with the food can contaminate the overall tourism experience, due to the fact that food service can provide the highest and lowest moments of a vacation experience (Ross in Au & Law, 2002).

Food, restaurants or cuisine are often included as attributes when studying the attractiveness of a destination (Pearce, 1982, Wittier, 1985; Chon, Weaver & Kim, 1991, Chen & Hsu, 2000 and Baloglu & Mangaloglu, 2001 in Sparks *et al.*, 2001). These studies looked at food, restaurants or cuisine as attributes that may attract a tourist to a destination. Au and Law (2002:819) state that, for some tourists, the sole purpose of visiting a place is for the dining experience, thus substantiating the above mentioned statements. Consequently, the importance of restaurants as a component of the tourist product (Sparks *et al.*, 2001) is recognised by all these researchers. Long (1998b:182) motivates this by stating that the foodways (the total cookery complex, including attitudes, taboos, and meal systems – the whole range of cookery and food habits) of a culture may be one of the fullest ways of perceiving or experiencing the other culture as it engages one's physical being, not simply as an observer, but as a participant as well. Consequently, it is important that Lesedi should contribute to meeting the tourists' expectations regarding their meal experience.

Restaurants can also serve to expose tourists to local cultures and educate them by providing authentic dishes, and information thereof, regarding the region of the dishes on the menu (Sparks *et al.*, 2001). Reynolds in Sparks *et al.*, (2001) views cuisine as part of the local culture. The researcher (Reynolds) makes the point that local cuisine should be offered by restaurants in a tourist destination for two reasons: firstly it provides tourists with exposure to part of the destination's culture - especially in this case the food, as it seems to provide the

consumer with a sense of the realness of things (Long, 1998a). Secondly, it preserves the cuisine for local residents, as Malave in Saltzman (1998:205) states “we keep our sense of being through our food”.

Reynolds in Sparks *et al.*, (2001) is of the opinion that if sustainable tourism is to be achieved, ethnic foods must be preserved along with other art forms. Therefore restaurants should strive for an authentic environment and food, which Riley in Johns and Pine (2002) defines as one which makes an unambiguous statement, with no conflicting messages.

According to Au and Law (2002) local food and eating habits are regarded as one of the pull factors of a destination. According to Long (1998b) food is a powerful medium through which to enter or experience another culture on a sensory level. A study by Reynolds in Bali found that many tourists expected a great selection of indigenous dishes (Sparks *et al.*, 2001).

Travelling to experience local food can be described as culinary tourism, which is “the intentional, exploratory participation in the foodways of another culture, participation including the consumption – or presentation and presentation for consumption – of a food item, cuisine, meal system, or eating style considered as belonging to a culinary system not one’s own” (Long, 1998b:181).

Leisure has become a massive industry. An increasing emphasis is being placed upon eating out as a recreational activity in its own right (Beardsworth & Bryman, 1999). According to Beardsworth and Bryman (1999:235), the restaurant has become a source of entertainment, a vehicle of style and fissionability, and a stage for the public presentation of self. Researchers describe these types of establishments as theme restaurants. A theme restaurant, according to Beardsworth and Bryman (1999:228), means “an eating establishment which clothes itself in a complex of distinctive signs (theme) that are largely extraneous to the activity of eating itself”. The “Nyama Choma” at Lesedi can be categorised as a theme restaurant because the restaurant is part of the whole cultural experience and depicts (or tries to depict) an authentic cultural meal experience.

Literature indicates that there are prominent features in tourists’ destination selection processes, and the consumers are seeking new, varied, unique or different experiences. Most tourists want authentic/local food (coupled with efficient service and appropriate atmosphere) and therefore the meal experience should be adapted accordingly. Such an arrangement will not be feasible, however, if the leisure tourists do not, in fact, want authentic food. This desire should therefore be determined.

Reuland, Choudry and Fagel (1985) state that by producing western meals (or food that is similar to the tourists' own) for tourists from other cultures, an artificial meal experience can be developed. This will detract from the uniqueness of the host country or destination, and result in the specific identity and the cultural differentiation of the people - thus the culture - diminishing. The consequence will be that the special atmosphere and culture of the country or destination (in this case Lesedi and its components) might no longer attract tourists. It is important, therefore, that an attempt has to be made to find a balance between the leisure tourists' preferences regarding their meal experience, and cultural differences.

The meal experience is part of the total cultural experience provided at Lesedi. At this stage, the impression is that the meal experience does not fully complement the total indigenous cultural experience, due to western-oriented dishes being served instead of dishes with an authentic/ indigenous African flavour. It is therefore important to determine if the expectations that the leisure tourists have, are satisfied or not, when they visit Lesedi.

Nightingale in Lewis (1987) classifies services along three different dimensions namely: person-related services, product-related services and information-related services. Although a hospitality establishment, such as Lesedi, provides all three of these dimensions of services, it predominantly focuses on person-related services. The food service, especially regarding the meal experience, consists of the following elements, which can be classified into three groups: the material product or physical goods (the food and beverages served); the environment or physical facilities; and the behaviour and attitude of the employees (Lewis, 1987; Pizam & Ellis, 1999). These elements will be discussed below with the concepts of expectations (2.2.2) and meal experience (2.2.3).

For many tourists, the meal experience and subsequent memories associated with the restaurant, can be an important component of satisfaction assessment of a destination (Sparks, *et al.*, 2001). The influence that the meal experience has on tourism is summarised by Jack Kugelmass in Jochnowitz (1998:227) as "culture is made tangible through food, and no tour, sacred or secular, is complete without a meal". Consequently, the conclusion can be drawn that food is important in a destination, thus it will be the case at Lesedi as well.

When consumers decide to patronise a restaurant, they experience the service they receive by proceeding through a sequence of steps making up the transaction (Barrington & Olsen, 1987). This sequence follows an hierarchical order, according to Barrington and Olsen (1987), consisting of three steps: firstly the anticipation, secondly the actual experience of the service and finally the residue. Similar steps have been identified for this study, namely first

the expectations, second the meal experience and finally the conclusion of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the meal experience.

These central concepts or steps included in the conceptual framework (**Figure 3.1** in **Chapter 3**), as well as relevant concepts, which contribute to a better understanding and clarity of the study, are described by means of relevant theory and related to the situation at Lesedi.

2.2.2 The concept of expectations regarding the meal experience

The traditional African feast is the climax of the entire cultural experience offered by Lesedi. Hence it is reasonable to assume that expectations are high, particularly if the leisure tourists have enjoyed the experiences which precede the meal.

These expectations, however, are also influenced by consumerism, media attention, increased advertising and promotions as well as technological progress, as they all contribute to the consumers' belief that they have a right to receive products and services which meet their expectations (Lee & Hing, 1995). The restaurant or food service industry is no exception.

Raats, Daillant-Spinnler, Deliza and MacFie (1995:243), define expectations according to the definition presented by The Oxford English Dictionary as "the action or state of waiting, or of waiting for (something); the action of mentally looking for something to take place; anticipation". Expectations can be described for this study as a changeable internal standard which is based on a multitude of factors including needs, objectives, past personal or alternate experiences with the same establishment (e.g. restaurant in the case of Lesedi), with similar establishments, and the availability of alternatives (Pizam & Ellis, 1999:328).

Prior to the actual experience, the consumer has certain expectations (attitude-based expectations in the case of prior patronage, or expectation-based attitudes, in the case of a new experience) and will be anticipating a level of service consistent with these expectations (Oliver, 1981; Barrington & Olsen, 1987). Expectations are developed over time as consumers are exposed to differing levels of service, product quality, or environmental quality (Wakefield & Baker, 1998). Carman (1990) substantiates this by stating that the consumers' (prior) experience (with similar services) has emerged as the most important factor impacting on the manner in which they form expectations and perceptions of the

service or product. Word-of-mouth, mass media, as well as cultural orientation (Long, 1998b) also play roles.

Knowledge of customer expectations and requirements is therefore essential, as it provides understanding of how the consumer defines quality of service and products (Hayes in Pizam & Ellis, 1999) and thus ultimately satisfaction. Therefore consumers' expectations (pre-purchase or pre-consumption) regarding a product or service, serve as a standard or baseline against which subsequent performance is judged or evaluated (Oliver, 1981; Oh, 2000). The degree of disparity between the expected and perceived performance, which is known as disconfirmation, determines the scale of satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Raats *et al.*, 1995:294).

Every person enters a purchase situation (such as an eating situation) with certain manifest or latent expectations (for example forecasted levels), (Oh, 2000). The expectations are not only of the food itself, but also of the environment in which the food is consumed, as well as the service offered. These expectations may be based upon theoretical knowledge, the recommendations of others, normative standards, pure idealisation or of previous personal experience (Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998). Nevertheless, these expectations are created regardless of whether it is considered as a fair framework for comparison or not. It is, however, important to keep in mind that experiences are inherently personal, existing only in the mind of an individual who has been engaged on an emotional, physical, intellectual, or even spiritual level (Pine II & Gilmore, 1998). Thus, no two people can have the same expectations, because each experience derives from the interaction between the staged event and the individual's state of mind or previous experiences.

Recent research findings indicate those expectations of new or initial purchases are important for choice, but not necessarily for satisfaction (Whipple & Thach, 1988). According to Lewis (1987) the expectations may in themselves be rather hazy and imprecise due to a lack of knowledge or experience. Therefore a lack of experience with a service or product (when service or product category is completely new) or lack of familiarity with a destination/establishment may cause expectations to be tentative, uncertain or not well formed (Carman, 1990; Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998).

The greater the amount and quality of previous experience and available information consumers have, the more their expectations can be expected to reflect that actual experience. This is due to consumers having adjusted their expectations with regard to experience (Klara in Soriano, 2002). However, Oliver in Kristensen *et al.*, (1999), believes that customers who continually use a service will have expectations that remain passive, and

therefore disconfirmation will not arise, due to the fact that customers draw on earlier product experiences when creating their level of satisfaction for these types of purchases. Halstead *et al.*, in Yuksel and Rimmington (1998) similarly argue that when consumers' expectations have become well established, such as in the case of continuous use of the same product or provided services (high familiarity), the confirmation-disconfirmation process will not operate unless the performance or product is clearly outside the range of those norms that are based on experience. This, however, will not be the case at Lesedi, because the majority of tourists only visit Lesedi once or infrequently and similar establishments seldomly.

According to Oliver; Loudon and Della Bitta in Erasmus and Donoghue (1998), there is no direct relationship between the consumer's level of expectations of a particular product and the level or intensity of satisfaction that is eventually experienced. Hughes in Yuksel and Rimmington (1998) states that in the case of tourism, studies have shown that even though experiences did not fulfil expectations, a considerable number of tourists were relatively satisfied. Pearce in Yuksel and Rimmington (1998) substantiated this statement by stating that tourists may be satisfied even though their experiences did not fulfil their expectations. Therefore consumer satisfaction is relative and in fact a compromise between a consumer's expectations and his/her subsequent experience/perception of the reality (Walters and Hawkins, Best & Coney in Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998), as well as the environment in which it is experienced.

Davis and Stone in Pizam and Ellis (1999), state that the same customer/s may have different needs and expectations on different meal occasions, or at different times of the day. Eckstein (1983:24) is of the same opinion. He states that the acceptability of the meal as a whole and of each of its components depends on the mental set used as a standard of comparison. People use different sets in evaluating food they prepare at home, food consumed at a friend's home and food consumed in a restaurant or institution.

In the case of restaurants (such as Lesedi), four general mental sets apply, according to the type of restaurant, when judging food. These four mental sets are a fast food restaurant, a moderately priced restaurant, an elegant restaurant or an unusual ethnic/foreign restaurant (such as the case at Lesedi). These types are judged on factors such as cost, service and the serving of the food itself, variety as well as preparation (Eckstein, 1983:24). In essence, they are judged on the basis of value for money.

Cost is the most important factor in determining acceptability because it influences the clients' expectations of the service, the food itself, the preparation and the variety. The higher the price, the higher the expectations of the above mentioned factors. In this study,

however, cost is not an issue due to the fact that the meal is included in the whole tour package offered by Lesedi.

The food regarding its variety and presentation and the service will be discussed later in sections 2.2.2.1 and 2.2.2.2 respectively.

According to Erasmus and Donoghue (1998), consumer expectations are speculated to be influenced by the **product** features, the **context** of the purchase as well as **individual** characteristics of the consumers. These aspects can further be divided into food and non-food related factors (context/environment and the individual), as illustrated diagrammatically in **Figure 2.1**, which follows and will be discussed thereafter.

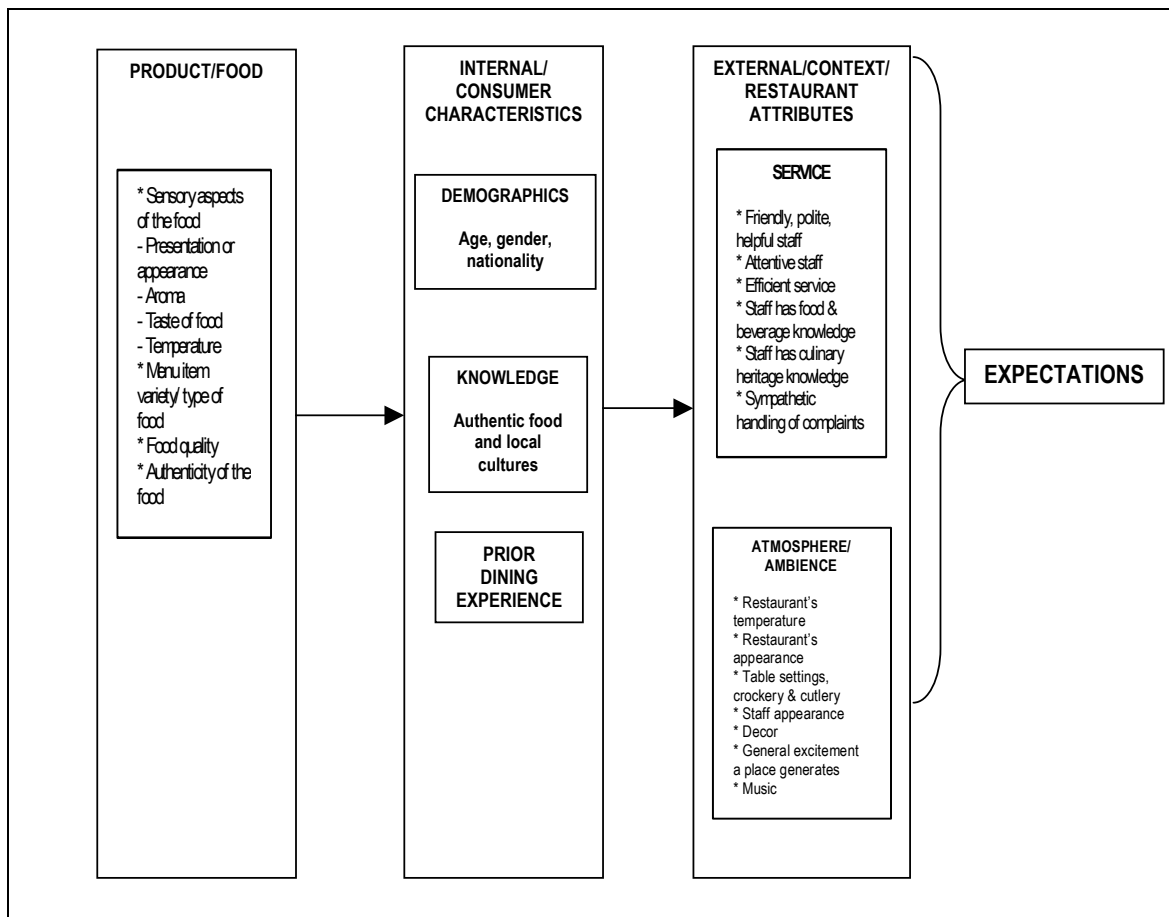


FIGURE 2.1: A DIAGRAMMATIC MODEL INDICATING THE ASPECTS THAT INFLUENCE CONSUMER EXPECTATIONS

2.2.2.1 Food-related factors: Food related factors include other foods and beverages

served/eaten coincidentally with the food of interest, as well as encompassing all foods and beverages recently consumed.

The product: Raats *et al.*, (1995:243) is of the opinion that expectations play a very important role in food consumption, because they may contribute to enhancing or detracting from the perception of a product, even before it is tasted.

The consumers' food expectations greatly depend on the following aspects: the sensory aspects of the food – presentation/appearance, aroma, taste and the temperature of the food; type of food served; the quality of food, (Cardello, 1995:165), as well as the authenticity of the food.

Food and sensory attributes, which are usually separated in the subject literature, are considered to be inseparable and are therefore combined in this research, as the foods at Lesedi are served in a buffet style, thereby making the characteristics of the food and the sensory attributes part of a single whole.

The food/product attributes that are identified for this research are the **sensory attributes, menu variety, food quality and authenticity of the food**. These attributes will be discussed in greater detail and illustrated in **2.2.3: The concept of meal experience**.

2.2.2.2 Non-food factors: The non-food factors are mainly the intangible aspects of the whole meal experience. The intangible non-food factors include the social setting, ambient conditions or other aspects of the dining environment, such as the type of service; the staff and their knowledge (regarding food and beverage as well as culinary heritage); the atmosphere (ambience); the décor; the temperature and appearance of the restaurant, table settings, crockery & cutlery; general excitement the place generates; the music, the menu itself and the acceptability of the food or compliance with the expectations of the consumers. These factors are described by Long (1998b) as framing the food – it involves designing a context surrounding a food item(s) that then defines the exoticness of the food.

The most important aspect to know about intangible factors, according to Levitt in Whipple and Thach (1988), is that customers usually don't know what they're getting until they don't get it. Only when they are dissatisfied, do they realise what they had been expecting. As Levitt states "Satisfaction is, as it should be, mute. Its existence is affirmed only by its absence" (Whipple & Thach, 1988:16).

Services or products (such as a meal experience) are generally purchased and consumed simultaneously, and typically require direct human contact. Therefore customers and employees interact with one another within the organisation's physical facility (Bitner, 1992). It is consequently important that these aspects - the environment in which the service or product is consumed, the service and atmosphere as well as the consumer of the service or product - should also be discussed.

External or restaurant attributes (the environment/context): According to Milliman (1986) consumers respond to more than the tangible product or service being offered. The place/environment (or more specifically its atmosphere) is more influential than the product itself, and therefore should be taken into account. As mentioned before, each individual consumer comes to a particular service establishment with a goal or purpose as well as certain expectations relating to these goals. For example guests expect an environment that does not cause them trouble (Knutson, 1988). According to Bitner (1992) the environment may aid or even hinder these goals and expectations.

Various researchers define the environment differently, but the definition of Belk and Meiselman in Bell and Meiselman (1995:299) is the most appropriate definition with respect to Lesedi. They define the environment as "the physical and social surroundings of the actual eating situation, which is also the context of the eating experience". The physical environment or context of the meal experience can be referred to as restaurant attributes, location and set-up. The National Restaurant Association of the United States of America defines restaurant attributes as the intangible factors, which directly influence the meal experience and therefore affect consumer satisfaction as well (Ladki & Nomani, 1996).

Bell and Meiselman(1995:295) state that expectations are situation-dependent. As tourists engage in the destination choice process (as well as an eating situation) they form and bring with them certain expectations about the destination or establishment (which includes not only the food itself, but also regarding the service and the environment in which the food is being offered). This context (wherein food is presented and eaten) may be established either by factors that are physically and concurrently present with the food object or by factors that are antecedent to it (Cardello, 1995:165). Within this context, foods are considered acceptable or not and, furthermore, whether they comply with the consumer's expectations or not.

Thus the physical setting or environment within which the foods are consumed, influence the consumer's ultimate satisfaction with the service (Bitner, 1992).

The intangible factors, which have been identified as the external or restaurant attributes in this study, include aspects such as the **service** and **atmosphere** (or **ambience**) of the restaurant.

Service: Employees of an establishment not only work together with customers in the creation of service, but customers tend to rely on the performance of those employees when forming their perception of satisfaction since the actual service itself is often intangible (Chung, 1997), and cannot be tried before the purchase (Bitner, 1990). Customers are more influenced by people, their personalities and moods than by anything else in the restaurant according to Quinn (1981:31). They are looking for more than just someone who puts food in front of them, they are looking for personal and enthusiastic service. Therefore customers have become increasingly concerned about the quality of service (Soriano, 2002).

Service quality can be described as the difference (function of the magnitude and direction of the gap) between a consumer's expectations (of service) and the consumer's perceived sense (assessment/perception) of actual performance or service during the meal experience (Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997:178; Calvert, 2001). Schiffman and Kanuk (1997:177) are of the opinion that it is more difficult for the consumer to evaluate the quality of service than the quality of products. These authors, as well as Bitner (1990) state that to overcome the fact that the consumers are unable to compare services side-by-side, they rely on surrogate cues (extrinsic) to evaluate the service quality such as room furnishings, the pleasantness as well as the effectiveness of the waiter, cleanliness as well as décor of the establishment, which all contribute to the consumer's overall evaluation of the service quality. Therefore the service at an establishment can directly contribute to or detract from the meal experience and may influence whether the meal experience is considered satisfactory or not.

In this study the service attribute includes the following aspects, **friendly, polite, and helpful staff; attentive staff; efficient service; food and beverage knowledge of staff, culinary heritage knowledge of staff** as well as **sympathetic handling of complaints**, which all influence the meal experience directly. Each will be discussed separately in **2.2.3: The concept of the meal experience**.

Offering good food and good service is not enough to attract, retain or satisfy customers. To gain a competitive advantage and to satisfy customers, restaurants have to offer meals that offer good value in a favourable ambience (Soriano, 2002).

Atmosphere or ambience: Atmosphere or ambience is an all-encompassing term used to describe the experience felt but not always seen (Milliman, 1986). An organisation's overall climate of service, the atmospherics or feel of the setting is, according to Bowen and Chase in Lee and Hing (1995), very important in shaping both customers' and front-line employees' attitudes about the process and outcome of service delivery. The atmosphere or ambience of an establishment can contribute to or significantly detract from a restaurant's success (Ullo, 2000). According to Quinn (1981:1) the proper atmosphere can make the food, service and the whole dining experience seem better and therefore increase the consumer's satisfaction. The atmosphere is usually remembered long after the meal is finished. Pine II and Gilmore (1998:101) state that "it (the atmosphere) is the 'takeaways' of the experience". Therefore, if the consumer was satisfied with the meal experience, in particular the atmosphere, it might result in repeat or referral business. Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) support this view by stating that the primary food service offerings must be of acceptable quality, but a pleasing service environment or ambience (for example the building, décor, layout, employee appearance, *et cetera*) may determine to a large extent the degree of overall satisfaction and repatronage.

The way the consumers feel (the physical and emotional response) while in the restaurant, and during their meal experience, is the result of the atmosphere (the total environment to which customers are exposed), (Quinn, 1981:1). The atmosphere consists of everything that makes an impression on the consumers.

In this study the atmosphere or ambience attribute includes aspects such as the **restaurant's temperature; its appearance; table settings, crockery & cutlery; staff appearance; décor; general excitement the place generates and music**, which influence the meal experience directly. Each will be discussed separately below in **2.2.3: The concept of the meal experience**.

Internal or consumer characteristics: Tourists' expectations of specific levels of service (or food) quality in tourism, according to Weiermair (2000), partly stem from their own culture and prior socialisation (experiences), which can predispose them to interpret factors influencing tourism destination choice and destination experience (or their meal experience in Lesedi's case) from a distinctive viewpoint.

Prior experience: According to Bell and Meiselman (1995:292), when a consumer enters an eating environment in order to select food, as well as to experience a meal, both the state of the individual and the state of the environment, can affect the consumer's behaviour and the degree to which the consumer is satisfied. The individual will interact differently depending upon the degree to which he/she may be susceptible to changes in different environments. The individual will have different expectations for different eating environments, due to the fact that the person's prior experiences will differ for each eating environment, which will ultimately influence the degree of satisfaction.

Westbrook and Newman in Whipple and Thach (1988) reported that consumers with prior experience developed more moderate expectations and reported greater satisfaction than did consumers without previous experience. Previous experience, according to Woodruff, Cadotte and Jenkins in Whipple and Thach (1988), affects expectations for the next purchase, as it sets criteria or standards according to which the current or future experience will be evaluated. Krondl (1990:12) substantiates the above statements, as he states that food perceptions (and the ensuing expectations for future experiences) can be viewed as the outcome of previous real or vicarious food experiences. Therefore ideas and information acquired through past experience, such as trying different food, also affect people's approach towards the food (Furst *et al.*, 1996).

Literature has shown that there is an increase in tourists' expectations, awareness and interest in cuisine and dining experiences. McIlveen and Chestnutt (1999) substantiate this view as they state that consumers' tastes, needs and expectations are continually changing and becoming more complex and adventurous, as consumers search for novelty and excitement. This increased interest can be explained by means of the following: a) the perception that there is an increase in people's travelling experiences (and therefore meal experiences as well), which in turn has increased their willingness to try different foods; as well as b) multiculturalism (Sparks *et al.*, 2001).

Knowledge: The consumers will also react differently to a meal experience when they have accurate knowledge regarding the food and the cultures of the destination they visit. Individuals are inclined to avoid unfamiliar food. Tuorila *et al.*, in Bell and Meiselman (1995:294) are of the opinion that by offering information about a novel product, its ingredients, its use and its context of use, expected liking and actual liking of the product increased, and so too, the meal experience will also be

enhanced. This factor has a great influence on the food selection as well as acceptability of the food served at Lesedi, because traditional African food is foreign and new to the majority of the consumers, who are afraid or hesitant to try/taste it. Thus there is a need to include information on the foods as part of the menu and dining experience.

Not only the previous experiences of the leisure tourists, but also their demographics and culture, have an influence on their expectations (and ultimately their satisfaction) regarding the meal experience.

Demographics: Consumers differ regarding their age, gender, nationality, genetics, culture and tradition and, therefore, will react differently regarding their expectations of the meal experience as well as their perceptions or assessment of their meal experience. The variables such as age, gender and nationality are described as the demographics of the consumer and are important when designing a food service for an establishment, as the main goal of a food service operation is to serve food that is desired by its clientele. The unique characteristics of a particular tourism sector, according to Teye and Leclerc (1998), are also significant in understanding consumers' satisfaction. Therefore it is important to know the target market area so as to know whom to cater for with regard to clientele characteristics, needs, expectations and food preferences (Payne-Palacio & Theis, 1997:89). Miller and Pavesic (1996:10) are of the opinion that "success and profit await any restaurant that can define its market area and offer products and service appropriate to that area".

The demographics collected during this research are the **age**, **gender** and **nationality** of the leisure tourists, in order to compile a profile of the English speaking leisure tourists who visit Lesedi, as these demographic aspects are important in the following ways:

Age: Schiffman and Kanuk (1997:453) state that each major age sub-grouping of the population might be thought of as a separate subculture, because important shifts occur in the demand for specific types of products in every age group. Due to this reason, age is a particularly useful demographic variable for distinguishing market segments (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997:53), as well as consumers' food choice.

Characteristics of a given age cohort (individuals born during a certain time period and who grew up sharing a similar environment (Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997:53)) or

generation, according to Furst, Connors, Bisogni, Sobal and Falk (1996), affect the way people regard and use food. This statement is substantiated by Marshall (1995:7) as she states that the population is ageing and these consumers are more conservative in their food consumption and food choice, as they can remember the restrictions on their choice imposed by rations and food shortages. The younger generations of customers, however, consume more, eat out more often and are more likely to follow food fads and try new food.

Gender: Each gender attaches a different importance to its food choice. This statement can be substantiated by the findings of Schafer in Raats *et al.*, (1995:234) that husbands rate taste followed by nutrition as being the most important determinant of food choice, whilst the wives rate nutrition followed by taste as being most important. Men are also not inclined to try different or new foods, while females are more willing to try new or strange foods. Therefore it is important to determine the gender profile so as to determine whether the majority of consumers will try authentic (culturally new) food or not, although it is no guarantee.

Nationality (regional and cultural aspects): The nationalities of the consumers will greatly determine their cultures and traditions which in turn determine the food they will consume and what their expectations regarding this food or service will be, as well as on their satisfaction perceptions or assessment. This is confirmed by the statement of Verma, Pullman and Goodale (1999:77) that “research has also shown that customers from different cultures and nationalities have different expectations from services and perceptions of the actual service delivered”. Services and products important to Asians may be completely different from those sought by Europeans, for example (Pizam & Ellis, 1999).

An integral part of the leisure tourists' nationalities are their distinguishable cultures and traditions, which have a distinct influence on their expectations and assessment of satisfaction.

Culture: Culture can be defined as the sum total of learnt beliefs, values, and customs that serve to regulate the consumer behaviour of members of a particular society. Culture is a shared experience, consisting of learnt behaviours that directly impinge on individual consumer's food choice as it influences the formation of individual beliefs and attitudes (Southgate, 1996:375; Shaw & Clarke, 1998).

Long (1998b) and Weiermair (2000) also state that cultural norms have an impact on both the expectations of tourists and their perceptions of received food and service quality/standards. This is due to culture having an impact on perception, problem solving and cognition, and often leads to differences in satisfaction levels for a single product amongst different global customers. Global customers, however, may have different expectations and different ways of evaluating performance (Pizam & Ellis, 1999). Arguably culture, rather than biological conditioning and taste (Marshall, 1995:5), plays an important role as an underlying determinant for what one views as food (thus food choice as well), but also for what is appropriate or not (Fieldhouse, 1995:200). Fieldhouse states that substances normally judged as inappropriate may be consumed under special circumstances, as inappropriateness is a cultural judgement, which may be set aside if necessity dictates.

Long (1998b) states that some populations or cultures, for whatever reason, will be more open to new culinary experiences than others. Therefore culture will also influence an individual's willingness to try different foods. However, there will always be some individuals who are more conservative in their tastes than others, just as there are individuals who are willing to try unfamiliar food.

Traditions: Traditions have a powerful influence on what we eat, what we prefer and that we like (Rozin, 1996:89). Every culture has traditions relating to the size, content, duration and context of meals (Rozin, 1996:87). These traditions and norms may have a surprising amount of control over what food is chosen and consumed and therefore will influence what their satisfaction would be regarding their meal experience at Lesedi.

Regarding this study, expectations are an important factor, as the leisure tourists have certain expectations regarding their visit to Lesedi, which are created through advertising, the tour of the villages and the traditional dancing, which precede the dining experience. These expectations will directly influence their satisfaction with the meal experience (Long, 1998b). For example, should the leisure tourists expect authentic cultural-specific food, efficient service and appropriate atmosphere and should they receive western orientated food, inefficient service and inappropriate atmosphere their expectations of the meal experience are unlikely to be met. This may lead to dissatisfaction or a lesser degree of satisfaction, which may have a negative effect on their whole cultural experience, including the meal. Information regarding expectations will not be collected for this study. It is assumed, however, that the tourists do arrive with certain preconceived expectations as a result of their

demographic factors, knowledge and prior experience, which will influence the meal experience directly, such as described below.

2.2.3 The concept of meal experience

According to Pine II and Gilmore (2000), goods and services are no longer enough to compete in today's increasingly commoditised world. Companies therefore need to move beyond goods and services to stage experiences (and guide transformation). Experiences can be described as memorable events that engage customers in inherently personal ways (Pine II & Gilmore, 2000). This can be substantiated by Long (1998b) as she states that the tourist experience (like going to a cultural village and consuming traditional or cultural-specific food in particular) offers not only new cultures and new insights, but new ways of perceiving those insights. These new perceptions ultimately enhance the individual.

The food service industry has features, which set it apart from other areas of the service sector, as it is closely concerned with food choice and quality, but at the same time has long been considered to offer a rich meal experience, to which many other factors contribute (Johns & Pine, 2002). Riley in Johns and Pine (2002) claims that although there is a general marketing assumption that food quality and variety are the key factors in consumer experience, it is the holistic and the intangible that really matter. Sparks, *et al.*, (2001) substantiate this claim, as they see the meal experience as more than just the food.

The meal experience emerges from a consumer's interaction with a store's (or restaurant's) physical surroundings or environment, personnel and customer-related policies and practices (Kerin, Jain & Howard, 1992) as well as the product (food). The meal experience is perceived as the total dining experience which includes good service, design elements (décor), location, dining precincts and intangible aspects such as ambience/ atmosphere or the general excitement a place generates, which is thought to enhance the restaurant experience (Sparks *et al.*, 2001). A recipient, quoted in Sparks *et al.*, (2001:24), states that "...when you go into a restaurant you go there for an experience, you don't just go there for the food. You go for the whole experience of enjoying the food, enjoying the company, the atmosphere, the service, and it's so important". The consumers therefore are in essence "buying" experiences (Pine II & Gilmore, 1998), when they visit a restaurant.

An experience according to Pine II and Gilmore (1998), occurs when a company (in this case Lesedi) intentionally uses services (food service) as the stage, and goods (the food, the décor and atmosphere) as props, to engage individual customers in a way that creates a

memorable event. The authors state that to realise the full benefit of staging experiences, businesses must deliberately design engaging experiences that command a fee. This can be done by customising a good (the food), which will turn into a service (a food service), which in its turn, if it is customised, will turn into an experience (a meal experience) and if it is customised, the meal experience will turn into a transformation (Pine II & Gilmore, 2000).

The experiences (the meal experience in Lesedi's case) of the consumer (leisure tourists) during the hospitality process, everything from entering to leaving the restaurant, according to Fagel in Reuland, Choudry and Fagel (1985), follow three important stages. These stages are crucial for the experience of the guest during the encounter as well as the final evaluation of the experience. The three stages are the period before entering the restaurant; the first five minutes after entering the restaurant; and the period during the meal. During these stages different aspects of the meal experience are important to the consumer, as described below.

The period before entering the restaurant: The way a guest goes through the meal experience is, as mentioned before, a personal experience, because norms and standards play an important role in the process of evaluation, acceptance and ultimately satisfaction. Before a consumer enters a restaurant, he/she will set his/her norms and standards (expectations) after identifying the way in which his needs and objectives have to be fulfilled, according to the type of restaurant chosen and the amount of money he/she is prepared to spend (Reuland *et al.*, 1985).

The first five minutes from entering the restaurant: The guest should in some way have the feeling that he/she is welcome and is being recognised as a guest, by means of some personal attention (service) thus forming a host-guest relation. If the personal attention (service) is not present during the first five minutes, the guest will be inclined to take action to leave the restaurant and will do so if he/she can (Reuland *et al.*, 1985; Knutson, 1988).

During the first five minutes indirect attention (the environment/atmosphere) will also influence the consumer's perception of the meal experience. The consumer will study the level of care that is given to the environmental aspects of the meal experience, such as a clean table, acceptable light, not too much noise, and the behaviour of other guests in accordance with his/her own standards (Reuland *et al.*, 1985).

The period during the meal: During this stage of the meal experience Reuland *et al.*, (1985) state that the product (the food) and the behaviour (the service) elements are important factors influencing the meal experience of the consumers. The environment plays

a subordinate role in this stage, as the consumer is now part of the environment and has accepted it, although it may not be in accordance with the consumer's style and atmosphere.

The product (food) and behaviour (service) influence each other, but the service dominates the food. An unsuccessful meal can, for instance, be compensated for by the good service of the waiter; on the other hand, impolite and bad service cannot be compensated by excellent food. However, if the food is below a certain standard the guest will always have a negative judgement, even if the person was treated well (Reuland *et al.*, 1985). It is therefore important to remember that when customers leave service establishments (such as Lesedi), all they take with them are the memories of their experience. They remember bad experiences longer and in more graphic detail than positive experiences.

Finkelstein in Au and Law (2002) has identified three categories of dining (meal experiences): experiential, experimental, and existential.

Experiential dining experience is the least active mode, where the diner will try some unknown foods and then decide to avoid consuming them again.

Experimental dining experience is where the diner tastes unknown foods on a trial-and-error basis in order to find the ones complementing his aspirations.

Existential dining experience is the most active, where the diner is devoted to try different restaurants, foods, and dining fashions (Au & Law, 2002).

The dining experience at Lesedi will constitute one of the above categories depending on the individual leisure tourist's sense of adventure or boldness.

The majority of leisure tourists, however, have presumably not visited an establishment such as Lesedi before and do not know what to expect. Oliver in Kristensen *et al.*, (1999) states that when expectations are vague, such as is the case at Lesedi, the actual experience is more important than the preconceived expectations. It is, however, important to remember that, if the dining/meal experience is flawed in whatever manner, the patrons are less likely to return for a second visit or will not refer others. Therefore return visits and referrals will be influenced by this single experience.

The aim of Lesedi is to create an experience as they strive to provide a memorable cultural experience, including a meal. This can be done by paying attention to the aspects illustrated in **Figure 2.2** and described thereafter.

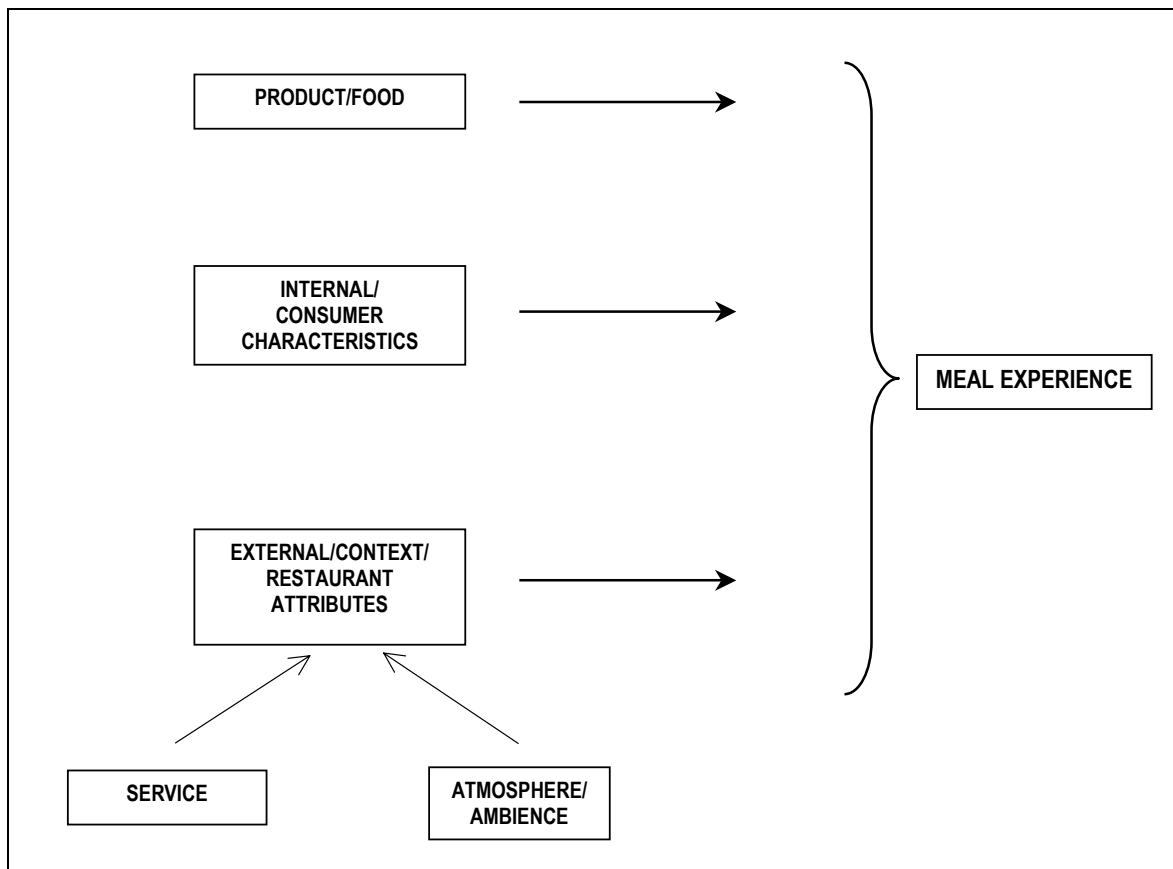


FIGURE 2.2: A DIAGRAMMATIC MODEL INDICATING THE ASPECTS THAT HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON THE MEAL EXPERIENCE.

2.2.3.1 Food

According to Symons in Sparks *et al.*, (2001), the restaurant meal can contribute to a tourist's experience through connection to the host culture, by means of the host culture's culinary foodways or practices. This substantiates the perception that a cultural-specific menu and food dishes, as well as efficient service and appropriate ambience, would contribute to a larger overall cultural experience of Lesedi for tourists.

The food/product attributes that are identified for this research are the **sensory attributes**, **menu variety**, **food quality** and **authenticity of the food**. How they influence the meal experience will be discussed below.

Sensory attributes: According to McKee and Harden (1990), sensory properties, which correspond with the desired food items are some of the first factors to influence food patterns and behaviour (food choice). Sensory stimuli and perception are highly individualistic among

subjects due to biological and other factors, thus one must remember that one can't satisfy everybody.

In this study, the sensory attributes comprise the following aspects: presentation of the food, the aroma, the taste of the food and the temperature of the food, which influence the meal experience directly. Each will be discussed separately.

Presentation or appearance: Before selecting a food, a consumer evaluates the merits and source of the food. However, there are times when consumers assess food products before they experience them; the result is a stereotype (Bell & Meiselman, 1995:295). The presentation of food, especially if it is unfamiliar to the consumer, is therefore an important factor in creating expectations with regard to the meal experience. It is often said that one eats with ones eyes first. If the food looks good, we think it will taste good, therefore the appearance of a food product (its presentation) will determine one's initial reaction to the food - whether it may encourage or discourage an individual from purchasing or selecting a food item (McKee & Harden, 1990).

The presentation of the food can also make the difference between a guest having a good or a bad restaurant experience (Andorka Jr, 1997) and whether the consumer will be satisfied or not, which is the ultimate goal of a food service organisation. Andorka Jr (1997) states that creating visual excitement that accentuates the food's natural beauty should be the hallmark of any food presentation. Mills in Tractenberg (1986:229) notes that it is important to consider colour when one presents food by stating "warm reds, browns, yellows and gold enhances the appearance of the food, making it more desirable".

The presentation of the different food dishes, at Lesedi, can be seen in **Appendix C, Photographs 1, 2, and 3.**

Not only the presentation of the food but also aroma have an initial influence on the consumers' experience of the meal.

Aroma: The sense of smell is, according to McKee and Harden (1990), a primitive sense, but is more highly developed and complex than taste, and plays an important role in food habits and food acceptance today. A smell can attract (increase appetite) or repel (decrease appetite) a consumer from consuming a certain product, thereby influencing the acceptance of a food product (McKee & Harden, 1990).

Although one cannot recall a smell from past experience, smells often conjure up vivid memories (McKee & Harden, 1990). These memories can be of great influence in the choice (pleasant memory/-ies) or rejection (unpleasant memory/-ies) of food products, as well as the evaluation of the product as satisfactory or unsatisfactory. These memories will influence the perception or assessment of the meal experience directly, as the consumers will create expectations regarding the food after having visited the same cultural village or having had a similar experience elsewhere.

If the presentation and aroma of the food were pleasing and inviting to the leisure tourists, the decisive factor is the taste of the food.

Taste of the food: Senses such as sight, touch and smell play important roles in one's initial reaction to foods (McKee & Harden, 1990), but taste is ultimately what is important in a food product. Taste keeps one coming back (if one likes the taste) or never tries the product again (dislikes the taste).

Taste is also a highly individual aspect because fundamental taste preferences may be a result of biological factors, which account for innate preferences for sweet tastes and aversion for bitter tastes. However, it is not only a consumer's biological aspects that influence his/her taste, but the environmental and cultural influences as well.

Cardello (1994:265) is of the opinion that the context in which tastes/odours are experienced is critical to the degree of pleasantness or unpleasantness that they elicit. No taste or odour can be said to elicit invariably pleasant or unpleasant sensations, without consideration of the context in which they are presented or the expectations that the context creates.

Fisher in Shaw and Clarke (1998) suggests that tastes also diverge, as consumers become increasingly educated and affluent. Past experiences have conditioned us to expect that certain food items look and taste in a certain manner, and any deviation (from the expected) may deter one from choosing or purchasing that product (McKee & Harden, 1990) due to the dissatisfaction it generates.

The final aspect that influences the food relating to the leisure tourists' senses (after the presentation, aroma and taste of the food) is the temperature of the food.

Temperature: The temperature of the dining room and the food influences the individual's perception of the atmosphere. A comfortably warm room and hot food portrays a feeling of

high quality, elegance and a slow leisurely meal while the opposite is true of a dining room and food that are cooler (Quinn, 1981:3).

Not only the sensory aspects of the food, but also the type of food and the variety, have an impact on the leisure tourists' satisfaction with the meal experience.

Menu variety: The perceived variety available can, according to Bell and Meiselman (1995:298), function to interact with the environment to affect the expectations of consumers regarding the meal experience as well as which food they will choose.

In order to be part of a new experience, the food types provided need to be different from those to which consumers are accustomed, but at the same time must not be so foreign as to discourage the clientele from selecting a wide range of dishes available. A balance must be obtained between food types with which the clientele can relate and those which will encourage the more adventurous to partake in food types with which they are not familiar.

The menu boards, depicted in **Appendix C, Photograph 4**, illustrate the menu variety that Lesedi provides. These menu boards are part of the décor as the chief's throne is situated between them. Lesedi prepares the same menu twice a day (lunch and supper).

However, the meal experience is not enhanced if the restaurant has a large variety of menu items, but the quality of the menu items is low.

Food quality: According to Clark and Wood (1999), the most important consideration influencing a restaurant is food quality, as well as food selection by consumers regardless of the occasion or type of restaurant. This statement is substantiated by research done by Boughton and Fisher (1999), as they found that the quality of the food is the major driver of overall satisfaction, as well as the reason why customers return to a restaurant (Soriano, 2002). (This goes hand in hand with the quality of service as described previously).

Consumers often judge the quality of a product on the basis of a variety of informational cues that they associate with the product. Some of these cues are intrinsic to the product (physical and sensory characteristics of the product – size colour, flavour, *et cetera*), while others are extrinsic (external to the product itself –price, packaging/presentation, brand image, manufacturer's image, or even the country of origin). Either singly or collectively such cues provide the basis for perceptions of product (food) quality (Kerin *et al.*, 1992; Schiffman & Kanuk, 1997:176).

Where quality can only be assessed at point of consumption (such as in the case of the food served at Lesedi – or at any other restaurant for that matter), consumers also tend to rely on attributes peripheral to the merchandise (food) itself (such as the service and atmosphere for instance) to infer quality (Kerin *et al.*, 1992).

Authenticity of the food: The authenticity of the ethnic/regional food can be described as the food consumed by the population or inhabitants (natives) of a specific country, when they still had traditional lifestyles (Kuznesof *et al.*, 1997). Stated differently, authentic food is the linkage to the traditions and heritage or origins of a specific region and the people living there (Kuznesof, *et al.*, 1997). Lu and Fine in Beardsworth and Bryman (1999:234), however, state that authenticity cannot be judged by any absolute criterion, but is, in practice a “... locally constructed folk idea”, which usually entails a process of negotiation accompanied by some degree of adaptation of an ethnic cuisine to the culinary conventions of the host culture.

Elements that contribute to an understanding of the factors that make food authentic relate to the use, recipe ingredients, methods of cooking, and means of serving or presenting the food, which are unique to an area or population (Kuznesof *et al.*, 1997). As with the concepts of expectations and meal experience, perceived authenticity of ethnic/regional foods is, according to Kuznesof *et al.*, (1997:203), related to a number of personal (individual), products and also situational (environmental) factors. Brief descriptions are given below.

Personal factors: Personal factors affecting perceived authenticity, according to Kuznesof *et al.*, (1997) include “knowledge” and “experience” of the foods.

Product-related factors: A number of product-related factors such as the product’s name, its description, appearance, packaging (or presentation) and ingredient information are regarded according to Kuznesof *et al.*, (1997), as a means of judging a food’s ethnic/regional authenticity. According to the authors these factors, combined with personal knowledge and experience, accentuate acceptance or rejection of food authenticity.

Situational (environmental) factors: Situational or environmental factors, such as the place and context of purchase or consumption of an ethnic/regional food, serve to enhance the perception of authenticity of ethnic/regional food (Kuznesof *et al.*, 1997).

Authenticity of a product (in Lesedi’s case the meal experience, particularly the food), is a unique selling point, according to Kuznesof *et al.*, (1997), assuming organisations can

position their products as “authentic”, and may give businesses a competitive advantage. This is especially the case where authenticity can be communicated by the place of origin, the place of purchase (or consumption), product attributes such as packaging, presentation or appearance and ingredients, as is the case at Lesedi. Authenticity can be targeted particularly to those consumers with a personal interest in and knowledge of foods (Kuznesof *et al.*, 1997), such as those present at Lesedi. However, McIlveen and Chestnutt (1999) state that consumers have a limited knowledge of ethnic food in general, therefore their expectations regarding the food will not be so realistic and they may accept non-authentic food as authentic, which may be the case at Lesedi.

2.2.3.2 Service

The snapshot of service received during a service experience (such as a meal) has a significant impact on the perception of the consumer (Calvert, 2001:733), as the customers are more influenced by people, their personalities and moods, than by anything else in the restaurant (Quinn, 1981:31). These perceptions form subsequent expectations as a result of the experience, which will be used as a basis for evaluation. A series of such encounters will form the consumer's expectations of service quality for example (Calvert, 2001), whereby other similar services, for instance, will be judged.

According to Worsfold and Jameson in Lee and Hing (1995), of the fundamental variables contributing to consumer satisfaction of a meal experience in a restaurant, the service element will eventually provide a business with sustainable competitive advantage.

As mentioned before, the service attributes in this study comprise **friendly, polite, helpful and attentive staff; efficient service; food, beverage and culinary heritage knowledge of the staff** as well as **sympathetic handling of complaints**.

Friendly, polite, and helpful staff: Bitner (1990) and Cadotte and Turgeon in Pizam and Ellis (1999), categorised the helpful attitude of employees as a critical attribute in a food service establishment, because the attitudes and behaviours of the staff can influence the perceived service performance, as well as eliciting both complaints and compliments. Critical factors deserve special attention, according to Pizam and Ellis (1999), because of their potential for both hurting and helping a business. Therefore, for critical attributes the objective is to raise performance above the norm.

The display of positive emotions (for example friendliness and happiness) is required in many service occupations, according to Tsai (2001), including restaurant workers. Chung

(1997) confirms this as she found in her study that customers expect the servers always to be nice, helpful, friendly and happy, even when they (the customers) are rude.

According to Rafaeli and Sutton in Tsai (2001), friendly, polite and helpful service (positive emotions), would result in some positive consequences for the organisation, such as immediate purchase, return or word-of-mouth business. The reasons for the aforementioned, according to Tsai (2001:500-501), are the following:

The function of emotional contagion: the customers are influenced by the positive emotions from the staff. The friendliness, politeness and helpfulness the customers experience will in turn increase the possibility of their willingness to return or refer others.

The comparison of the customers' expectations with the customers' perceptions of the actual service performance. If the staff is friendly, polite and helpful it is possible that the customers' expectations may be met or exceeded, thus leading to high levels of satisfaction. These positive evaluations may lead to willingness to return or refer others.

The norm of reciprocity: Customers may feel guilty leaving the store without buying anything if the employees were friendly, polite and helpful. This, however, is seldom the case in a food service establishment, as customers' seldom leave the establishment without purchasing a meal for instance if the staff are friendly, polite and helpful.

Hand in hand with friendly, polite and helpful staff is attentive staff. It is unlikely that staff who are unfriendly, impolite and unhelpful will be attentive.

Attentive staff: The study of Walsh (2000) indicated that two related matters were important to guests in a restaurant, namely a feeling of being paid attention to and a notion that the servers cared about helping them. Staff can meet consumers' expectations, according to Walsh (2000), by paying attention to the consumers and by providing timely or speedy service. On the other hand Chung (1997) is of the opinion that customers expect employees of an establishment to anticipate guests' needs. This will increase the consumers' perception of the efficiency of the service.

Efficient service: According to Walsh (2000), staff should strive to convey a sense of an already existing relationship with the customer. The staff can accomplish this by paying attention to and focusing on what is important to each particular guest (Walsh, 2000). Experienced employees are able to attain a skilled level of service.

The efficiency of service, the attentiveness of the staff as well as the whole meal experience can be enhanced if the staff have food, beverage and culinary heritage knowledge. This is beneficial if the consumers have any questions regarding the food or beverages served as well as to supply relevant information regarding culinary heritage, such as that of the five tribes depicted at Lesedi.

Staff has food, beverage and culinary heritage knowledge: The research of Chung (1997) indicates that the customers expect the employees to have and give them background information on the establishment. It can therefore be assumed that the customers expect the employees to have information or knowledge regarding the food, beverage and culinary heritage of the food served at the establishment.

According to Campbell-Smith in Pierson *et al.*, (1995), serving staff have control over many aspects of the restaurant environment, which may affect this experience. Therefore, if the staff at Lesedi have food, beverage and culinary heritage knowledge the meal experience of the consumers (leisure tourists) can be enhanced.

If the service or staff of an establishment are not friendly, polite and helpful, attentive or efficient for example, it is inevitable that the consumers will complain as their expectations regarding the service were not met and hence they are dissatisfied. The manner in which the complaints are handled will also influence the overall satisfaction with the meal experience.

Sympathetic handling of complaints: After the service experience, not only is the meal experience evaluated, but the consumer also evaluates how the establishment has handled any complaints (Barrington & Olsen, 1987). Restaurateurs/managers cannot eliminate complaints, but they can learn to effectively respond to them.

The response to the failures or complaints can either reinforce customer relationships or exacerbate the negative effects of the failure. Barrington and Olsen (1987) state that if a consumer had a negative experience and the problem was not solved satisfactorily, the experience is likely to become intensified because the more a person thinks about the experience the more angry he/she tends to become. Hoffman *et al.*, and Kelly *et al.*, in Maxham III and Netemeyer (2002) support this view as they state that it is often a retailer's (restaurateur's) response to a failure, rather than the failure itself, that triggers discontent. If by chance the consumer has a complaint and it is handled and corrected professionally and promptly, it can be turned into a positive experience thereby increasing the satisfaction with the experience. The manner in which the complaints are handled is very important, as

consumers will not be inclined to return or refer others if they are dissatisfied with the handling of their complaints.

Consumers have distinct expectations regarding the service at an establishment. This is true for Lesedi as well. These expectations have an impact on a consumer's meal experience and ultimately upon satisfaction.

Offering good food and good service is not enough to attract, retain or satisfy consumers. To gain a competitive advantage and to satisfy customers, restaurants have to offer meals that offer good value in a favourable ambience (Soriano, 2002).

2.2.3.3 Ambience/atmosphere

As mentioned before the atmosphere is made up of everything that makes an impression on the consumers (Quinn, 1981:1). People want a dining or meal experience – an escape from problems and everyday surroundings. Therefore the atmosphere should project a feeling of friendliness and comfort, be attractive and interestingly different (Quinn, 1981:1). The atmosphere of a restaurant, according to Quinn, can make the food, service and whole dining experience seem better.

In this study the atmosphere or ambience attributes comprise the **restaurant's temperature and appearance appearance; table settings, crockery and cutlery; staff appearance; décor; general excitement the place generates** and **music**, which influence the meal experience directly. Each will be discussed separately below.

Restaurant's temperature: Environmental elements such as temperature are, according to Baker in Wakefield and Baker (1998), not noticed by consumers unless they exist at unpleasant levels. This can be substantiated by Cadotte and Turgeon in Pizam and Ellis (1999), when they state that in warm (or extremely cold) climates, the availability of reliable air conditioning (or heating systems) in restaurants is a critical factor. When an air-conditioning or heating system breaks down, everyone suddenly becomes dissatisfied. Therefore the restaurant's temperature can be classified as a dissatisfier (factor for dissatisfaction), because this attribute will be more likely to earn a complaint for low performance or absence of a desired feature than anything else (Pizam & Ellis, 1999).

At Lesedi the restaurant is not equipped with an air-conditioning or cooling system. The views of customers regarding the absence of such a system on their satisfaction is included in the survey for this study.

Apart from the temperature of the establishment, the appearance of the restaurant is the first and main influencing factor of the atmosphere on the leisure tourists' perception of the meal experience.

Restaurant's appearance: According to Wakefield and Blodgett (1994; 1996), a restaurant's appearance and attractiveness, are influenced by the facility's aesthetics, which refer to factors such as the surrounding external environment, architectural design, facility upkeep and cleanliness as well as interior design and décor. The décor aspect is discussed separately later in this section. The aesthetic factors of an establishment are important because they influence the ambience of the place (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994), as well as providing sensory stimulants that accompany the experience, by enhancing the theme.

According to Wakefield and Baker (1998), consumers are inclined to perceive the physical environment in a holistic manner. Their first impression (and initial level of excitement) is likely to originate, at least in part by the physical environment (especially the exterior of the facility) to which they are exposed (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996; Wakefield & Baker, 1998). The exterior will mainly determine whether the consumers will patronise an establishment or whether they will avoid it before even entering the facility (Wakefield & Baker, 1998). Once inside the service facility, customers can spend a considerable amount of time observing the interior of the facility (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996). These evaluations of the physical environment (exterior as well as interior) influence the attitudes of the consumers towards the establishment, and will determine whether a consumer will be inclined to return or refer others to the establishment.

Knutson (1988), along with Walt Disney, is of the opinion that detail is most important in creating the first impression. Of these the most important is cleanliness, which creates a good impression. Wakefield and Blodgett (1996) state that cleanliness is an important part of a service, especially in those situations in which customers spend a considerable amount of time, such as at a restaurant. Many customers implicitly associate cleanliness with the quality of the service establishment. If the establishment's cleanliness does not meet the customer's expectations, they may be dissatisfied and will not return or refer others to the establishment. According to Wakefield and Blodgett (1996), cleanliness is probably the most controllable element of quality, and therefore should not be neglected, being relatively easy to satisfy consumers in this regard.

The entrance to the restaurant at Lesedi ("Nyama Choma") as well as to the bar can be seen in **Appendix C, Photographs 5 and 6**. These contribute to the African feeling depicted at

Lesedi. Additional photographs appear in the section dealing with the description of the décor.

Once inside the establishment, the table settings and the manner in which the crockery and cutlery are arranged will support the consumers' perception of the atmosphere of the meal experience and the theme of the restaurant.

Table settings, crockery and cutlery: Whether an establishment is a fine-dining establishment or a fun, casual eatery, its first communication with the guests is via the tabletop. According to the article *Designing a winning tabletop* (2000:38) – the table and its appointments set the stage for the dining experience to follow, the interplay of linen, china, crystal, and flatware speaks, volumes about the personality of the proprietors, as well as what to expect from the dining experience.

Christou in Andorka Jr (1997) states that one must look upon a table setting as a work of art, in which table linens are the frame. Just by adding tablecloths and napery a restaurant can be transformed into a fine-dining establishment. Christou states it is a matter of perceived value. Merely adding a small thing (such as a tablecloth or a napkin) can boost cheque average – and can therefore also boost the meal experience.

Durocher (1991) states that the appearance, feel and heft of flatware can significantly add to – or detract from – a restaurant's image, as well as the overall experience, which ultimately affects one's attitude toward the restaurant. One of the most tactile experiences consumers have is the feel and heft of the flatware one offers them, because consumers form an instant impression of a restaurant when they touch their eating utensils (Durocher, 1991). The weight, smoothness and shape define the feel of the flatware, which is sensed by the fingers, lips, and tongue.

How one displays ones flatware in a restaurant also makes a lasting impression (Durocher, 1991). For example, a tabletop with nine pieces of flatware carefully arranged around a base plate tells consumers they are in for a special dining experience. The pattern of the flatware should also be chosen so that it enhances the overall décor of the restaurant, and also matches the menu (Durocher, 1991).

The table settings as well as the crockery used by Lesedi can be viewed in **Appendix C, Photograph 7**.

Apart from the table settings, crockery and cutlery the appearance of the staff can also enhance the meal experience of the leisure tourists.

Staff appearance: As the service provided as well as the atmosphere of an establishment are intangible, consumers use tangible aspects as cues to form their expectations of the restaurant. One of the various tangible cues consumers use is the appearance of the staff. The visual inspection of their dress, according to Solomon in Bitner (1990), and the non-verbal cues as to the demeanour of both the staff and also other consumers in the facility lead the consumers to categorise the establishment and to form pre-experience expectations of the encounter.

According to Pizam and Ellis (1999) the appearance of the employees can be classified in the category of satisfiers in Cadotte and Turgeon's classification. This is due to satisfiers (factors influencing satisfaction) being defined as "those attributes (the appearance of the staff) where unusual performance apparently elicited compliments and satisfaction, but average performance or even the absence of the feature did not cause dissatisfaction or complaints" (Pizam & Ellis, 1999: 331; 332). This can be the case with the appearance of the staff who work at Lesedi. If they do not wear traditional clothes while serving the customers, the customers may not be less satisfied with the meal experience. However, if they wear traditional or more traditional clothes their appearance may increase the cultural meal experience.

In **Appendix C, Photograph 8** shows the dress of a staff member at Lesedi.

As described in the appearance of the restaurant the décor contributes to the atmosphere and to the meal experience as well.

Décor: A restaurant's design and décor directly contribute to the customer's experience and, therefore, it is important to make this space both interesting and inviting. The more senses an experience engages, the more effective and memorable the experience will be (Pine II & Gilmore, 1998). Wakefield and Baker (1998) state that in an establishment particular attention should be paid to the design and décor factors, since they have a major influence on the excitement a place generates as well as a desire to stay longer or to return.

While the theme (in Lesedi's case a traditional African experience) forms the foundation of the experience, the image and décor fulfil the theme. Pine II and Gilmore (1998) believe that the experience must be rendered with memorable/unforgettable impressions. To create the desired impressions, companies must introduce cues that affirm the nature of the experience

to the guests. Each cue must support the theme, and none should be inconsistent, as the cues make the impressions that create the experience in the consumer's mind – the expectations (Pine II & Gilmore, 1998).

Robson (1999) states that to be effective, the design and décor of a restaurant must quickly and clearly communicate to a prospective consumer what can be expected from the meal experience. Pine II and Gilmore (1998) state that the décor must drive all the design elements and staged events of the experience toward a unified story line that wholly captivates the customer.

According to Quinn (1981:31) a restaurant is similar to a theatre, where the décor is the stage setting, the props are the table settings, the service personnel are the actors and actresses, and the guests the audience. The more the dining room looks like a theatre, the more intrigued the consumers will be.

Therefore:

- the exterior design should reflect the character of the locality, but be different enough to attract attention;
- the atmosphere on the inside should be a reflection of the exterior image. A little thought and imagination in the treatment of the dining room walls can greatly enhance the atmosphere. Wall accessories and paintings should relate and contribute to the general theme of the restaurant (Quinn, 1981:21).

Lesedi's compliance with these attributes is shown in **Appendix C, Photographs 9, 10 and 11**. The ethnically painted walls, the displays as well as the throne of the chief, which is placed between the menu boards, are used to decorate the restaurant and to reinforce the African theme.

All the physical aspects of the atmosphere described above will inevitably lead to a certain amount of excitement.

General excitement a place generates: A number of studies, according to Wakefield and Baker (1998), suggest that excitement, which is a positive emotional state consisting of high levels of pleasure and arousal, is a key part of the shopping experience for consumers. It can be assumed that the same will be applicable to a meal or restaurant experience.

According to Wakefield and Baker (1998), excitement (an emotion) is both a consequence of perceptions of the physical environment and a precedent to behavioural responses. The authors (1998:530) have found that the physical environment of the establishment can have an effect on the mood or emotion (in this case excitement) arising from what consumers experience in an establishment, as the physical environment is the first impression that the consumers have of an establishment.

In general, arousing environments or excitement a place generates, are those that are complex, providing high volumes of information to all the senses at once (Robson, 1999), but not too much to overstimulate the senses and then decrease the pleasure.

Research done by Mano and Oliver as well as Russell and Pratt in Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) indicates that the degree of arousal or excitement which the consumers experience while consuming the leisure service (meal experience) may be a major determinant of the consumers' subsequent satisfaction with the service experience provided by an establishment (Lesedi).

Emotions or excitement that consumers experience will directly influence the meal experience in Lesedi's case as well as the consumers' ultimate satisfaction with the establishment, which may lead to return or referral business. The opposite may also be true.

The music played at an establishment can directly influence the general excitement of the place.

Music: The atmosphere or ambience of an establishment is made up of and is affected by numerous factors, some more controllable than others. One of the factors that is highly controllable, as well as relatively inexpensive to change, is the music played in the establishment, whether fast or slow tempo, loud or soft, vocal or instrumental.

Music, according to Wakefield and Baker (1998) and Sullivan (2002), is found to evoke emotions by providing a link to prior experiences, shortens time perceptions, reduces boredom, creates excitement and is best viewed as an enhancer of messages.

Music can help set the atmosphere in a restaurant, as music (especially background music) has a strong and direct effect on the consumers' moods (Quinn, 1981:30). The appropriate background music puts customers in a good mood and can make staff more relaxed and efficient, while creating a pleasant atmosphere before a dining room fills up with the noise of

people. The music should be unobtrusive and never compete with conversation (Quinn, 1981:30).

Research has also indicated that music can increase the consumers' buying behaviour (Milliman, 1986; Robson, 1999). Milliman in Bitner (1992); Robson (1999) and Sullivan (2002) have found that the tempo of the background music can affect turnover rate as the type of music played can influence the time spent dining in a restaurant. Milliman (1986) states that restaurant patrons spent more time over their meal (slower turn over rate) and consumed more alcoholic beverages under slow tempo conditions than when music of a faster tempo was played.

Sound volume, according to Robson (1999), is more likely than music tempo to be noted by guests as detracting from the enjoyment of their experience. According to the author, care should be taken, therefore, to ensure that the volume of the music in a restaurant is sufficient to provide a moderately high level of arousal or excitement, but not so much that it prevents comfortable conversation.

In Lesedi's case, music can therefore enhance the traditional cultural message if used appropriately. Main (1997) and Tom in Sullivan (2002) support this assumption when they state that findings showed that there is a need for music to suit or complement the environment/message or theme, due to the similarity of information at input (the traditional cultural environment) and cues at output (enhanced cultural experience).

The musical instruments the staff of Lesedi play when the tourists enter the restaurant after their tour and dance performance are shown in **Appendix C, Photograph 12**. These instruments are only played until all the tourists have entered the restaurant and have taken their seats, whereafter two of the tribal members play on a guitar and concertina. However these are not their traditional musical instruments, and do not really contribute to the whole experience. The influence of the music is an aspect considered in this study.

2.2.3.4 Relevance of the concept of meal experience to this study

The quality of each of the product areas and the manner in which they are delivered, contribute to the guests' perception or observation, enjoyment, and satisfaction with the overall meal experience (as well as cultural experience in the case of Lesedi) (Teye & Leclerc, 1998). Perceptions or assessments of the meal experience and its different components and aspects are therefore a personal interpretation regarding the information about a specific stimulus or product, which has successfully attained a level of significance in

the mind of a consumer (Chisnall in Kuznesof *et al.*, 1997) after comparison with their initial expectations of the stimulus or product.

However, after their experience they will have formulated the snapshot, which will form their expectations regarding a similar or repeat experience. This is substantiated by Oh (2000) who states that by the time the consumer considers patronising the restaurant again, he or she has formed revised expectations regarding the food, service and atmosphere based upon his/her previous experience.

Bateson in Lee and Hing (1995) notes that a problem arises if the establishment is perceived by the consumers (leisure tourists) to have failed to deliver the level of service quality or experience it promises to provide in its advertisement. Therefore in order to ascertain the extent to which leisure tourists perceive that Lesedi's restaurant (Nyama Choma) has fulfilled their expectations, (because the meal experience is advertised as "the greatest African feast – sample traditional dishes from around the African continent") a study in this regard was undertaken. This study contains a survey of leisure tourists' opinions about the degree to which their meal expectations have been met at Lesedi.

Included in the survey, are questions addressing the issue that if a cultural-specific menu is implemented at Lesedi, the satisfaction of the overall experience would be enhanced, which may lead to return or referral business. The study is done in order to assist the owners and management of Lesedi to increase the cultural meal experience the tourists come to enjoy, by means of adapting the food and/or the service and/or the atmosphere to incorporate authentic cultural-specific aspects, if such measures are found to be necessary.

For Lesedi to be profitable and to ensure that the leisure tourists would be willing to return or refer others to Lesedi, the leisure tourists should be satisfied with what they receive. In order to understand the dynamics of the leisure tourists' sense of satisfaction, or dissatisfaction for that matter, the concept of satisfaction with the meal experience is explained.

2.2.4 The concept of satisfaction with the meal experience

A consumer-orientated organisation is one that delivers high levels of consumer satisfaction. Satisfied consumers are consumers who stay and repeatedly buy products or use services (Boughton & Fisher, 1999). This is ultimately the aim of any foodservice establishment and presumably Lesedi's as well.

When the consumer is presented with the actual experience with its multiple aspects (variables), as described above, the consumer forms an impression, which is almost immediately compared with his/her expectations, and the resultant level of satisfaction is determined (Lewis, 1987). This satisfaction judgement is defined here within the disconfirmation of expectation paradigm (Bitner, 1990) described later.

Drawing on a number of studies, customer/consumer satisfaction can be defined as a post-consumption evaluative judgement concerning a product or a service (Yuksel & Rimmington, 1998). The outcome of consumer satisfaction is a result of a comparison of what was initially expected and what was received (Bitner, 1990; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; Kristensen *et al.*, 1999). According to such a definition, consumer satisfaction results when a purchase is evaluated in the course of its use, and the consumer concludes that it meets or exceeds his or her initial expectations (Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998). The interaction between expectations of a product or service and the eventual performance of the product or service therefore leads to either consumer satisfaction or consumer dissatisfaction (Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998).

Most hospitality experiences, or which Bitner (1990:70) calls “a service encounter” (such as the meal experience at Lesedi), are an amalgam of products and services with which a consumer directly interacts during a period of time (as described above). According to Pizam and Ellis (1999), it is therefore possible to say that satisfaction with a hospitality experience or service encounter, such as a restaurant meal, is a sum total of satisfaction with the individual elements or attributes of all the products and services that make up the experience. Bitner (1990) has classified these products or services within a service encounter in a marketing mix which she defined as the controllable variables that an organisation can co-ordinate to satisfy its target market.

Since service encounters have distinguishing characteristics from other encounters, additional variables in the mix were suggested beyond the “four P’s”, because services and products are produced and consumed simultaneously. The expanded marketing mix suggested by Booms and Bitner in Bitner (1990) are composed of the four traditional elements (product, price, place, promotion) and three new elements: physical evidence (the physical surroundings and all tangible cues), participants (all human actors in the service encounter including personnel and other customers), and process (procedures, mechanisms, and flow of activities).

Price and promotion are not considered in this study as the price of the meal provided by Lesedi is included in the whole cultural package and promotion is managed as a package by

Lesedi. The new elements, especially the physical evidence (the environment/ external or restaurant attributes) and the participants (staff or service providers), are important to this study as they are an integral part of the meal experience along with the product (the food) as described previously.

It can therefore be speculated that consumer satisfaction with hospitality services consists of and is influenced by the product (in Lesedi's case the food) on the one hand, and the context/environment of the purchase or service and atmosphere on the other (Pizam & Ellis, 1999). According to Erasmus and Donoghue (1998), the individual's characteristics, which include demographic variables, previous experience and personality attributes, also influence the consumer's satisfaction. Therefore every consumer evaluates his or her meal experience distinctly in terms of a limited set of characteristics that have been individually (personally) compiled and prioritised. Consequently, the experience as well as the intensity of the satisfaction will differ amongst consumers visiting an establishment such as Lesedi.

The evaluation process of the service, product or environment can be viewed as binary, as it is subjective and affective. It is subjective, because the evaluation is done in the consumer's frame of reference (depending on additional aspects such as knowledge, consumer's socialisation and previous experiences) and because the evaluation is based on more than concrete facts (Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998). On the other hand the evaluation is a function of affective influences, which are integral to the consumer (e.g. a consumer's expectations or mood), and purchase-related cognitive factors (a consumer's perception or assessment of how a product deviates from the pre-set expectations) (Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998).

Oliver (1981), as well as Reuland *et al.*, (1985), have concluded that consumer satisfaction is experienced in stages and that it is quite possible that a consumer's focus in evaluating a product (in Lesedi's case, the meal experience) could shift according to the situation that is considered to be of importance at any particular stage, during the meal experience. This is substantiated by Oh (2000) who states that a consumer will constantly perceive (confirm or disconfirm) the quality, value and satisfaction provided by the restaurant through a variety of product and service attributes (or cues). Therefore, during the meal experience each aspect that makes up the meal experience (such as the food, the service and atmosphere) will be considered important at different stages. For instance, at first the exterior then interior décor and ambience may be considered important, after which the service and the food may be important. After the meal experience, the memory of the atmosphere is usually retained long after the meal is finished (Quinn, 1981:1).

Lewis (1987) states that consumers may be satisfied with the meal experience in spite of some aspects being unsatisfactory. Hughes in Yuksel and Rimmington (1998) substantiates this when referring to studies that have shown that even though experiences did not fulfil expectations, a considerable number of tourists were relatively satisfied. Therefore, consumer satisfaction is relative and, in fact, a compromise between a consumer's expectations and his/her subsequent experience of the reality (Walters & Hawkins, Best & Coney in Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998), as well as the environment in which it is experienced.

Consumers' expectations of a product, service or atmosphere, serve as standards for comparison and evaluation. When consumers evaluate actual service and product performance against their prior (predictive or pre-conceived) expectations, their expectations can influence their satisfaction in the following ways (Oliver, 1981; Pizam, Neuman & Recihel in Whipple & Thach, 1988; Pizam & Milman, 1993; Kristensen *et al.*, 1999; Pizam & Ellis, 1999):

Positive: where experiences compared to expectations are exceeded or result in feelings of gratification. This results in positive expectation disconfirmation, as well as consumer satisfaction.

Non-existent/neutral: where the outcome (service or product) of the experience compared to expectations matches the expectations. This results in expectation confirmation and consumer satisfaction.

Negative: where the performance/service (experiences) compared to expectations fall short of the expectations or result in feelings of displeasure. This results in negative expectation disconfirmation as well as dissatisfaction.

According to Yuksel and Rimmington (1998:60), this evaluation is known as expectancy disconfirmation. According to Churchill and Suprenant in Kivela *et al.*, (1999), disconfirmation is a critical intervening variable, arising from discrepancies between prior expectations and actual performance, or as Oliver (1981) calls it a mental comparison of an actual state of nature with its anticipated probability. It is this magnitude of the disconfirmation effect (difference between perceived and expected) that generates satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Based upon the consumer's perception of the restaurant's performance regarding the food, service and/or atmosphere, the consumer will develop some level of intention to return and recommend the restaurant to others (Pizam & Milman, 1993; Oh, 2000). The consumer's

return and referral intentions are reflected by his or her attitude towards the restaurant. Consumer satisfaction is often used as an indicator for whether customers will return to a restaurant (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994), although it doesn't guarantee the fact (Dubé, Renaghan & Miller, 1994). It is, however, nearly certain that a dissatisfied customer will not return. Peter and Olson in Pizam and Ellis (1999) state that if consumers are satisfied with a product or service, they will be more likely to continue to purchase and use it as well as to tell others of their favourable experience with it. However, if they are dissatisfied, they will be inclined not to purchase and use the product again, and complain to the manufacturers, managers and other consumers about the product or service. However, Barrington and Olsen (1987) state that people have a tendency to more easily remember positive experiences and, therefore, may eventually return in spite of a negative experience, though one should not depend on it.

By the time the consumer considers patronising the restaurant again, he/she has formed revised expectations based on his/her previous experience (Oliver, 1981; Oh, 2000). These expectations will then be used during evaluations of the same restaurant or similar establishments. Barsky in Kivela *et al.*, (1999) substantiates this, by arguing that in determining satisfaction, customers compare new or previous service experience, with some basis that they have developed from prior experiences.

Therefore previous experience contributes to the formation of dining satisfaction or even dissatisfaction. However, the satisfaction a consumer experiences may change. These changes in the consumer's satisfaction with the meal experience may result from changes in the perception or assessment of the actual quality of outcomes received, according to Pizam and Ellis (1999), or from changes in the expectations against which these outcomes are compared. According to McCallum and Harrison in Pizam and Ellis (1999), alterations to expectations can result from change in needs (for example hungry versus sated; tired versus rested), change of objectives (for example business versus leisure trip), new personal or substituted experience (for example recently had a superb hospitality experience at another establishment) and any other influences that make a particular quality of outcomes prominent (for example it's a very hot day and the restaurant is not air conditioned).

Satisfaction, however, is not a universal phenomenon and not everyone gets the same satisfaction from the same hospitality experience. The reason, according to Pizam and Ellis (1999), is that customers have different needs, objectives and past experiences that influence their expectations. Therefore, it is nearly impossible to satisfy every consumer, but by determining the degree of overall satisfaction, a high level of satisfaction can be obtained. The diagrammatic model in **Figure 2.3** illustrates the process outlined above.

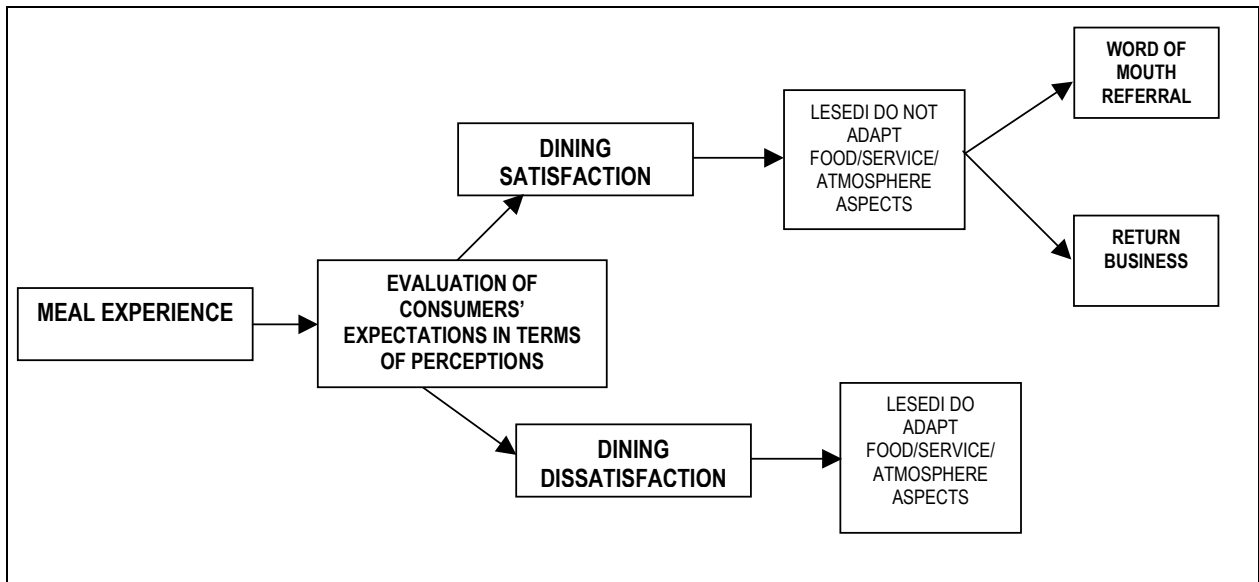


FIGURE 2.3: A DIAGRAMMATIC MODEL INDICATING THE ASPECTS THAT HAVE AN INFLUENCE ON CONSUMERS' SATISFACTION WITH THEIR MEAL EXPERIENCE AND THE CONSEQUENCES OF THE SATISFACTION/ DISSATISFACTION.

In this study consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the meal experience will directly influence the status quo of the current meal experience (the food and/or the efficient service and/or the appropriate atmosphere) at Lesedi. If the consumers are satisfied with the current western orientated meal experience, the food and/or service and/or atmosphere aspects will not have to be adapted or only minor adjustments will be required. However, if the consumers are dissatisfied with the current meal experience regarding the food, service and atmosphere it may be wise to incorporate more traditional cultural-specific aspects, so as to increase the consumers' satisfaction with the meal experience.

2.3 CONCLUSION

It is clear from the literature review, therefore, that consumers have certain preconceived expectations regarding the food, service and atmosphere of a food service establishment. These expectations directly influence the meal experience as they are used as a basis for comparison or evaluation. The extent, to which the meal experience complies with the

expectations, will influence the degree of satisfaction or dissatisfaction the tourists will have regarding the meal experience or other aspects.

After the meal experience, the leisure tourist stores the information in his/her memory and uses it to form revised expectations, which will make up the basis of comparison for a next similar experience, and therefore may be more realistic.

The interrelationships between the expectations that the leisure tourists have regarding their meal experience, the meal experience itself and the subsequent satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the meal experience (as described in this chapter) are indicated in a conceptual framework in **Chapter 3, Figure 3.1**. The conceptual framework is based upon the consumer perspective, in particular the systems theory. The dynamics and the systems theory are explained in **Chapter 3** and are integrated for the situation at Lesedi.

CHAPTER 3

THE APPLICATION OF A SYSTEMS FRAMEWORK - IDENTIFICATION AND EXPLANATION OF THE MEAL EXPERIENCE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The consumer perspective is used as a point of departure, since the tourists visiting Lesedi are consumers of a product (the food), a service (within a food service establishment – the restaurant “Nyama Choma”) and an experience (a meal experience). The systems theory will be used as a frame of reference to guide the research.

A model from Kivela *et al.*, (1999) was adapted to indicate the main interaction and influence of the various components on the consumer’s (leisure tourist’s) meal experience and ultimately dining satisfaction within the systems theory.

The systems theory approach and how it is incorporated into the study of Lesedi are discussed by means of the following:

- The systems theory
- The conceptual framework/model of the systems theory approach
- The characteristics of the system theory

3.2 THE SYSTEMS THEORY

As the leisure tourists who visit cultural villages such as Lesedi are consumers of a product (the food), a service (in a food service establishment - the restaurant “Nyama Choma”) as well as an experience (the total cultural experience with emphasis on the meal experience), the appropriate perspective to be used as a guide is the consumer perspective. The consumer perspective will be used in the form of the systems theory approach, using an

adapted model, so as to determine the satisfaction of leisure tourists' expectations regarding their meal experience at Lesedi.

3.2.1 The systems theory

The systems theory provides a useful vehicle integrating the various factors in terms of an outcome of satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) of leisure tourists' expectations regarding their meal experience at an establishment such as Lesedi. The systems approach focuses on the totality of the meal experience, not on its separate parts. The impact/influence of the food, the internal as well as the external environment on the meal experience are all considered. A system is therefore defined as a collection of interrelated parts or subsystems unified by design to obtain one or more objectives (Spears, 1995:36). Von Bertalanffy's basic definition in Whitchurch and Constantine (1993:332) of a system is that of a set(s) of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and with the environment (internal and external environments).

Integral to the systems theory are three fundamental core assumptions (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993:328):

- Systems theories **unify science**: It is possible to use theories from other disciplines and use them in various theories. Theories and frameworks of marketing, tourism and consumer behaviour/science are used within the social sciences to answer this particular research objective.
- The systems theory offers a holistic approach (should be understood as a **whole**) rather than viewing the individual component parts: Satisfaction would thus result from tourists' total experience rather than their experience of the ambience, service or meal (food) individually. According to Pizam and Ellis (1999) it is therefore possible to conclude that satisfaction with a hospitality experience such as a restaurant meal (in this case a cultural experience) is a sum total of satisfaction with the individual elements or attributes of all the products and services that make up the experience.
- Human systems are unique in their **self-reflectivity**: Humans have the ability to make themselves and their own behaviour the object of examination and the target of explanation. This research project focuses especially on this assumption, as it examines tourists' reflection upon their meal experience in

terms of their initial expectations and evaluates it according to what they have received.

To make it easier to apply the systems theory to this particular research problem, a systems model has been developed (from the model of Kivela *et al.*, 1999) to illustrate the interrelationship of the different parts. This model will be used as the conceptual framework for this study and is presented as **Figure 3.1**.

3.2.2 The conceptual framework/ model of systems theory approach

On the basis of the concepts described in **Chapter 2** and shown diagrammatically in Figures **2.1**, **2.2** and **2.3**, **Figure 3.1** represents a general systems model of the preceding factors (inputs) and outcome (outputs) of the consumers' dining satisfaction regarding their meal experience. Any systems model has a specific primary objective, major components and unique characteristics (Spears, 1995:37) displayed in terms of inputs, transformation and output. The primary objective of this research is to determine the satisfaction of leisure tourists' expectations regarding their meal experience at Lesedi. The primary objective in its turn determines the major components of the system: the inputs, transformation and output, which are interrelated and have an influence on the meal experience. These components of the system will be discussed below.

Inputs: These are resources or factors that are changed in the transformation process to produce the outputs of the system (Spears, 1995:26). In this study the inputs represent all the various factors that might influence the expectations of the consumers (leisure tourists) when visiting Lesedi. For example, Johns and Pine (2002) regard eating out as a function of the food itself and the situation/environment in which it is eaten. Therefore, these factors can be seen as the inputs that influence consumer expectations and form three main components: the food, the internal environment (the individual him or herself), and the external environment (physical environment).

The leisure tourists arrive at Lesedi with certain preconceived expectations regarding their meal experience that consist of expectations regarding the food, the service and the atmosphere, as a result of their demographic factors, knowledge and prior dining experience. These expectations will influence the consumers' meal experience in such a manner that the consumers (leisure tourists) by means of their meal experience (transformation) evaluate the experience as satisfactory or dissatisfactory (output).

Transformation: This refers to the collective transformation of inputs (any action or activity, such as the meal experience) into outputs (Spears, 1995:26). Barsky in Kivela, Inbakaran and Reece (1999) argued that customers compare or evaluate new or previous service experience, based on their prior experiences. In the transformation process of this study, previous dining experiences, which are part of the internal or consumer input, will form the basis for evaluation of the meal experience and influence the current meal experience of which the food, service and atmosphere are important parts.

Finkelstein in Kivela et al (1999) in particular, has emphasised that the customers' dining needs are often linked with the factors of the restaurant, such as the food, the service quality and the ambience, which provide much of the initial setting for the formation of the individuals' experience of the dining event (meal experience). This view is supported by Sparks, Wildman and Bowen (2001) as well as Sparks, Bowen and Klag (s.a.) as they state that besides serving excellent food, good service, the location of the restaurant, its décor and intangible aspects such as ambience and atmosphere are important factors essential to enhancing the consumers' meal experience. These factors, collectively, give the restaurant its particular identity and character which directly and indirectly intervene during the meal experience as well as post-purchase behaviour, i.e. return/ referral business or non-return (Finkelstein & Woods in Kivela et al, 1999). If one of these factors, however, changes, the meal experience will not be the same and will inevitably change the outcome of the whole experience (satisfaction or dissatisfaction).

Output: This is the result of transforming the inputs to outputs and represents the achievements of the system's function (Spears, 1995:38). The output is the result of the meal experience, i.e. satisfaction (expectations were met or exceeded – positive disconfirmation) or dissatisfaction (expectations were not met - negative disconfirmation), which will indicate whether or not adaptations should be made to the food and/or service and/or atmosphere aspects.

Satisfaction, according to Kivela *et al.*, (1999), is a function of an initial standard (expectations) and some perceived discrepancy (in this study the meal experience) from the initial reference point (expectations). If the consumers are satisfied with their (first or previous) meal experience (it has met or exceeded their expectations), they are more likely to return or refer others (Kivela *et al.*, 1999). If they are not satisfied (their expectations have not been met) they are unlikely to return/refer others. Each previous as well as current meal experience (positive or negative) is stored in the customers' memories as a reference for forthcoming meal experiences.

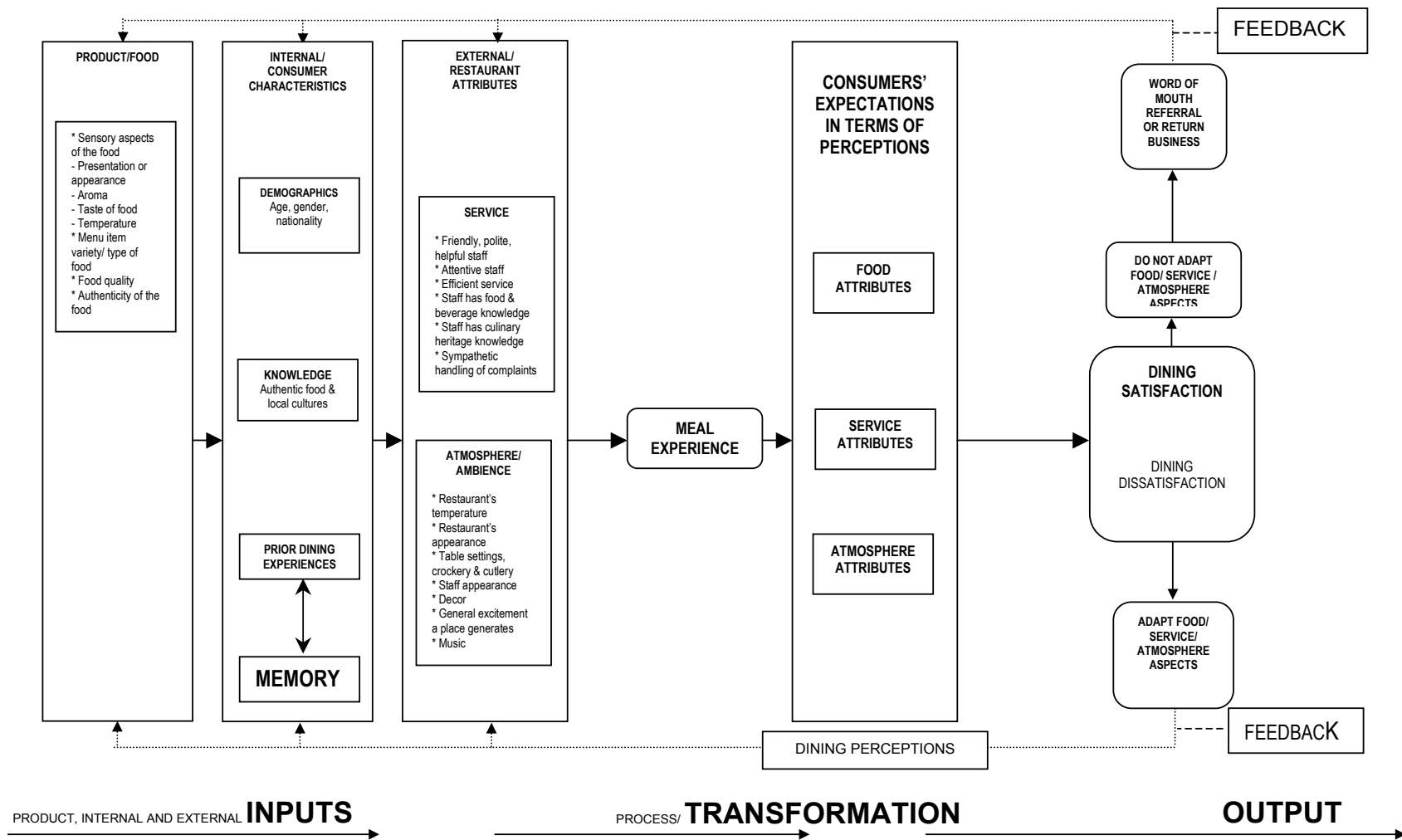


FIGURE 3.1: AN ADAPTED DIAGRAMMATIC SYSTEMS MODEL INDICATING THE INFLUENCE OF LEISURE TOURISTS' EXPECTATIONS ON DINING SATISFACTION REGARDING MEAL EXPERIENCE AT LESEDI CULTURAL VILLAGE (Adapted from Kivela, Inbakaran & Reece, 1999)

Memory/prior experience: It includes all the stored information as well as information received continually from the internal and external environments. The memory/prior dining experience provides the historical records of the system's operation (Spears, 1995:38), as previous food, service or atmosphere experiences form structures stored as memory schemata, which may be activated on new encounters with food, service or atmosphere, to provide an evaluation within a given situation (Kronl, 1990:12). This evaluation leads to the formulation of a judgement about a food or meal and results in instantaneous acceptance or rejection.

The memory in the systems model in **Figure 3.1** refers to all of a leisure tourist's previous meal experiences, which might be very significant, especially if a tourist is "well travelled".

Feedback: This includes those processes by which a system continually receives information from its internal and external environments as well as from the output. The feedback assists the system to adjust to changes (Spears, 1995:38), and to maintain homeostasis or equilibrium (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993:355). The feedback of the systems model in **Figure 3.1** refers to the outcome of the meal experience (satisfaction/dissatisfaction) which could be used to determine whether the current meal experience (the food and/or service and/or ambience) should be retained or adapted. The tourists' satisfaction or dissatisfaction leads to the feedback of information that could colour the consumers' motives, attitude and consciousness as inputs for subsequent experiences (consumer decisions) (Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998).

3.2.3 The characteristics of the systems theory

As was mentioned before, the system has a number of unique characteristics, which will be discussed below. The systems theory provides a schematic **overview of the whole issue** – the factors influencing the consumers' (leisure tourists') expectations and how those contribute to their satisfaction with their meal experience. The systems theory thus reveals the links between the consumers' (leisure tourists') expectation factors (individual, the food and the physical environment) which influence the meal experience. Spears (1995:38) explains feedback as the process by which the system acknowledges experiences in terms of information that will be used to direct future behaviour. The leisure tourists react to the outcome (satisfaction or dissatisfaction) of their experience by return or referral business. If utilised, feedback assists the system to adjust to required changes to maintaining homeostasis or **equilibrium** (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1985:355).

Continuous response and adaptation of a system to its internal and external environments achieve the equilibrium. If the leisure tourists are dissatisfied with their meal experience, management should seriously consider altering the aspects of the meal experience (the food and/or efficient service and/or appropriate ambience) that require adaptation so as to achieve and retain satisfaction and to maintain viability.

As the primary unit, the leisure tourists who visit an establishment such as Lesedi are in constant interaction with their environment, which indicates **permeability of boundaries**, since influences from their environments directly influence their expectations. They behave according to the collective inputs that they receive from the food itself (sensory attributes and characteristics of the food) and the different environments (internal - biological, personal, psychological and physiological; external - cultures/religion, the physical environment and socio-economic factors). The tourists also influence the environment by the expectation they have, as it will directly influence their meal experience, which will in its turn influence their satisfaction/dissatisfaction. This constant interaction, indicating permeable borders, allows one to view this system as an **open system**.

Each part of the system **mutually affects** the performance of **other parts** of the system. Changes in one part of the system influence the rest of the system. For example, if much effort goes into the aesthetic aspects of the restaurant, cultural exhibits and ethnic decor, tourists' expectations of the menu might be influenced in the sense that they expect similar characteristics of the food. The synergistic effect of the various factors can produce more impact than the sum of the parts.

Equifinality is another characteristic typical of the systems theory whereby various alternatives can achieve similar results (Spears & Vaden, 1985:29). For example, when dishes are offered for sampling instead of changing the whole menu, consumer satisfaction can also be enhanced. As one aspect of the whole experience changes, the rest will tend to adapt accordingly. Every aspect (the décor, the music and the ambience, to mention a few) contributes to the tourists' positive experience, even should the meal experience (food) as such not be as positive as what was expected. The tourists could be satisfied regardless. A weakness in one attribute can be compensated by the strength of another (Pizam & Ellis, 1999).

3.3 CONCLUSION

The systems model with its different components and stages (input, transformation, output, memory and feedback) forms a sound structure for the subsequent stages of the research for this study.

In order to establish the tourists' satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the dining experience at Lesedi, a survey was undertaken to determine the extent to which tourists' expectations of the meal experience were satisfied. Emphasis was placed upon key characteristics, over which the owners of Lesedi have direct influence namely, food, service and atmosphere/ ambience, against a background of limited information of the characteristics of the tourists themselves.

In order to determine the extent to which the current meal experience satisfies the leisure tourists' expectation, a structured framework of how one intends conducting the research process had to be designed. This is done in order to plan and structure the research project in such a way that the eventual validity of the research findings is maximised through either minimising or, where possible, eliminating possible error (Mouton, 1998:101). The methodology and research design for this study is explained in **Chapter 4**.

CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY TO DETERMINE SATISFACTION WITH THE MEAL EXPERIENCE AT LESEDI

4.1 INTRODUCTION

From the afore mentioned discussion, it is evident that the consumers' (leisure tourists') expectations regarding each of the components (food, service and atmosphere) of the meal experience, as well as the meal experience itself, are important to the leisure tourists' feelings of satisfaction.

Consumer satisfaction measurements serve two purposes. Firstly, they provide information to the management regarding what consumers indicate should be done differently or to assess how well an organisation is currently meeting its customers' needs or expectations. Secondly, by surveying customers, an organisation is demonstrating its interest in communicating with its customers regarding their needs, pleasures, displeasures and overall well-being (Pizam & Ellis, 1999).

Therefore it is beneficial for Lesedi that a survey is conducted to measure the consumers' satisfaction, especially regarding their meal experience, so as to improve the aspects that do not meet the leisure tourists' expectations in order to enhance their satisfaction. The manner in which the study was conducted is described below in terms of the following:

- objectives and delimitations/parameters for this study
- choice of research strategy and style
- choice of sample
- choice and description of data collection and other methods
- data analysis
- course and procedures of the study
- data presentation
- validity and reliability

4.2 OBJECTIVES AND DELIMITATIONS/PARAMETERS FOR THIS STUDY

For every research study, objectives should be stated and delimitations/parameters determined to set the boundaries for the specific research project as well as to indicate what will specifically be measured or investigated. From the foregoing problem statement namely, to what extent is there compliance with the expectations of leisure tourists regarding their meal experience at Lesedi Cultural Village, the consumer perspective and theoretical background, the following specific objectives were set for this study.

4.2.1 Objectives

The objectives of the research study were to determine whether:

- Objective 1:** leisure tourists' expectations regarding the meal experience and its components were met, and whether they were satisfied with the current meal experience
- Objective 2:** leisure tourists would be willing to return or refer others to Lesedi
- Objective 3:** it is necessary to have a cultural-specific menu to satisfy the leisure tourists' expectations
- Objective 4:** certain components of the meal experience impressed the leisure tourists the most
- Objective 5:** there is a significant relationship between **food, service** and **atmosphere** regarding the meal experience
- Objective 6:** other aspects have significant relationships with the components of the meal experience (**food, service** and **atmosphere**)

From this, the ultimate goal is to draw conclusions of the significant relationships with respect to the components of the meal experience at Lesedi, in order to make suggestions regarding possible improvements for consideration by the management of Lesedi.

4.2.2 Delimitations/parameters

- The study will focus only on leisure tourists visiting Lesedi.

- The study will only include leisure tourists that understand and can express themselves in English to facilitate communication and collection of information (data) and who are 18 years and older.
- Due to logistics, the assistance of tour organisers will be enlisted. The focus will be on visitors in tour groups.
- The study will focus exclusively on the meal experience (the food, service and atmosphere/ambience) and not on other components of the cultural experience.
- The study does not focus on the quality of the food, but upon the extent to which the current meal experience (the food and/or service and/or ambience) meets the expectations of leisure tourists as part of an authentic cultural experience.

4.3 CHOICE OF RESEARCH STRATEGY AND STYLE

The research objective/purpose of this study is exploratory-descriptive in nature. The research objective or purpose according to Mouton (1998:101) gives a broad indication of what researchers wish to achieve in their research. The objective of this study is to obtain comprehensive insight into and perception of the satisfaction of leisure tourists' expectations regarding their meal experience at Lesedi, as well as to describe the results.

According to Babbie and Mouton (2001:79), an exploratory research study is undertaken for various reasons. Firstly it is done when a researcher examines a new interest or when the subject of the study itself is relatively new, secondly to satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding of the research area, and thirdly to explicate the central concepts and constructs of a study.

Mouton (1998:103) states that the aim of the exploratory study is to determine whether there are interesting patterns in the data, whereas a descriptive study tends to describe behaviour, inclinations, situations and events (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:80). According to Veal (1997:3) descriptive research is very common in the leisure and tourism area, partly because leisure and tourism are relatively new fields of study and there is a need to map the territory. Much of the descriptive research in the field might therefore be described as exploratory: it seeks to discover, describe or map patterns of behaviour.

According to Veal (1997:3), a second reason for the preponderance of descriptive research is that leisure and tourism phenomena are subject to constant change. Over time, the following activities can change: the popularity of different leisure activities; the leisure preferences of different social groups; and the relative importance of different tourism markets. Descriptive research is, therefore, used to provide up-to-date information. Descriptive research is also common because there is often a division between research projects and the policy, planning or management activity (Veal, 1997:3). This is the case with the research done for Lesedi, where the results of the research will be presented to the management, who will decide upon the relevant action to be taken with the information provided by the research.

After a thorough study of the literature and research on hospitality and tourism, consumer satisfaction and the consumer perspective, in particular the systems theory, a quantitative research paradigm was thought to be a suitable style for the purposes of this research. The quantitative paradigm places emphasis on variables in describing and analysing human behaviour (variable analysis) (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:49). Discussions were held with the management in order to gather primary data so as to set the stage for the research as well as to confirm or verify certain aspects of the quantitative paradigm.

This study can be classified as an empirical study. The research problem will be solved by collecting new data and by analysing existing data. Primary empirical data (data collected by the researcher via self-administered questionnaires) together with secondary empirical data (existing data, especially textual data regarding hospitality and consumer behaviour) will be used. Information regarding the leisure tourists will be gathered by means of a questionnaire.

The study will be cross-sectional in nature, as the information will be collected in the same period of time e.g. within a month, (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995:66). Babbie and Mouton (2001:92) state that exploratory and descriptive studies are often cross-sectional in nature.

4.4 CHOICE OF SAMPLE

4.4.1 Unit of analysis

For the purpose of this study the unit of analysis was the leisure tourists who visited Lesedi (as they are the main group of clientele), who were 18 years and older and who could

understand and express themselves in English. The satisfaction of their expectations regarding the meal experience would influence whether the current meal experience regarding the food and/or service and/or ambience would be maintained as it currently is, and whether recommendations regarding the food and/or service and/or ambience would be made.

4.4.2 Sample selection

Non-probability sampling was adopted, using a purposive or judgemental sampling type. As a small subset (tourists from a limited number of dining sessions) of a larger population (the total clientele of Lesedi) was studied. The members of the subset were easily identified (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:166), as they were mainly part of tour groups visiting Lesedi.

Lesedi has three dining sessions (breakfast, lunch and dinner), 365 days a year. The target population was the leisure tourists who dined at “Nyama Choma” (the restaurant) during the afternoon as well as evening dining sessions during the month of November 2002. As stated before, the research was done amongst leisure tourists who understood and spoke English, who were 18 years and older and who were willing to participate at the end of the meal. Therefore the target population was selected based on convenience and the researcher’s judgement as well as the purpose of the study.

4.4.3 Sample

The information that was used to determine the sampling (explained below) was gathered by means of a qualitative research method (a semi-structured interview schedule), where the manager of Lesedi was questioned (**Appendix B**).

Only the lunch and dinner sessions were considered. The total population of visitors that visited Lesedi the previous year (June 2000-June 2001) were approximately 31000 people of whom approximately three-quarters (23250) were leisure tourists.

As the numbers of visitors vary monthly, no fixed number per month could be determined. However during the same period the previous year (November 2001), 3154 visitors visited Lesedi. During October 2001 between 4500-5000 visitors visited Lesedi. The tourists included English speaking as well as non-English speaking persons. Arising from the estimations of the management, approximately one third (1/3) of the total population of

tourists who visit Lesedi are English speaking, (who is, as stated before, the target population for this study). Therefore approximately 1000 English-speaking tourists were expected during November 2002.

The number of tourists per session normally varies from 20 to 200 people depending on the bookings that Lesedi received. The average number of tourists per session is between 60-80.

According to Veal (1997:146) questionnaire surveys usually involve substantial numbers of subjects ranging from perhaps 50 or 60 to many thousands. For this study, however, 255 leisure tourists completed the questionnaire.

Not all the English-speaking leisure tourists, who visited Lesedi during November 2002, were willing to complete the questionnaire. Consumers attending a Christmas or year-end function were not approached, since they were not leisure tourists, but only visited Lesedi for purposes related to business (which was not included in the definition of leisure tourists).

The number of recipients who participated in the research provided a sizeable and representative sample of the target population, which is a prerequisite for generalisation of the findings.

4.5 CHOICE AND DESCRIPTION OF DATA COLLECTION AND OTHER METHODS

4.5.1 Methods of data collection

For this research, two types of data collection methods were used namely semi-structured interview schedule as well as a structured questionnaire. These methods were considered suitable, as the research objectives were achieved.

4.5.1.1 Semi-structured interview schedule

The data collection method that was appropriate for the qualitative part of the study was done by means of a semi-structured interview schedule to guide the interview. The interview was used to obtain background information and set the stage (to gather primary information) for the study. In the restaurant at Lesedi, the menu items and decisions regarding the dishes served are in most cases not based on theoretical knowledge, but on years of experience.

This internal information regarding their experiences was gathered during these interviews so as to determine the success and failures of present and past practices.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to ensure that all the topics are covered at the time of the interview. As Babbie and Mouton (2001:289) state, the interview schedule is a general plan and not a questionnaire. It serves as a guide according to which the interviewer can structure the interview.

4.5.1.2 Structured questionnaire

A questionnaire survey was used as the data-collection method for the quantitative part of the research (**Addendum A**), as it delivers reliable results, the information is relatively easy to obtain, and the results are easy to process.

In particular a user, site or visitor survey (when tourists or day-trippers – users of a leisure or tourism facility or site, such as at Lesedi – are surveyed on-site), was used (Veal, 1997:149; 155).

The questionnaire consisted of 22 questions (**Addendum A**), and was structured in such a way to make it easy for the recipients to complete, as time was of the essence as well as the fact that many of the tourists' mother tongue may not have been English. To further simplify the questionnaire it was divided into two parts (described later on). The questionnaire consisted mostly of closed-ended or pre-coded questions. Closed-ended questions can be answered by ticking boxes (Veal, 1997:147; 164) or by selecting an answer from among a list provided by the researcher (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:233).

Since the objective with the visitor survey was to determine what the leisure tourists expected from their meal experience, as well as whether these expectations were met and satisfied by the meal experience, the closed-ended question questionnaire was appropriate.

Closed-ended questions also provided a greater uniformity of responses and were more easily processed (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:233), especially when large numbers of recipients were concerned, as at Lesedi. According to Neuman (2000:261), closed questions are also easier and quicker for respondents to answer. This is an important consideration as time is important for the leisure tourists who visit Lesedi. They are mostly on planned tours, which operate within a predetermined schedule. However, three questions were open-ended questions.

The questionnaire was compiled after a wide variety of sources was consulted, in order to identify the aspects that are applicable to determining consumer expectations, that have an influence on expectations and which determine satisfaction within the framework of the objectives outlined previously. By this means content validity was supported. A previous questionnaire used by Kivela *et al.*, (1999) was used as information to adapt the questionnaire used in this study, which thus also increased the questionnaire's validity.

The questionnaire was developed with the intent of asking respondents about the three main variables of the meal experience: the food, the service and the atmosphere. In turn, each of these three variables was divided into a number of attributes.

In order to identify the tourists' satisfaction regarding their meal experience at Lesedi, certain questions were asked which cover the various aspects of the meal experience, the tourists' expectations and ultimately their satisfaction with the meal experience. The structure of the questionnaire can be summarised as follows:

TABLE 4.1: THE STRUCTURE OF THE SELF-ADMINISTERED QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION	ATTRIBUTES	QUESTIONS
1	Tourists expectations	Questions 1.1 – 1.3
2	Demographics	Questions 2.1 - 2.3
	Previous knowledge	Questions 2.4 – 2.8
	Expectations	Questions 2.9 – 2.11
	Satisfaction	Questions 2.12 – 2.14 2.17 – 2.19
	Inclination or tendencies	Questions 2.15 – 2.16

The questionnaire was divided into the following two sections: **Section 1**, which contained questions **1.1** to **1.3**, determined the respondents' perceptions or assessment of how the different aspects of the meal experience met their expectations, by means of a 4-point scale where "1" indicated has not met with my expectations at all and "4" indicated has exceeded my expectations. A four-point scale was chosen instead of a three or five point scale, since the three or five point scales frequently result in recipients choosing the middle or neutral statement, if there is no strong preference or disparagement.

In **Section 2**, the respondents' demographic information, their previous experiences, their expectations, and overall satisfaction with the meal experience, as well as verification of questions in Section 1 (by means of closed and open questions) were determined. The tourists' likelihood to return and refer others was also determined. These questions were used as a proxy for repurchase intentions, as it is an indirect indication of the tourists' satisfaction with the meal experience, and as most tourists would probably not have the opportunity to return to South Africa, especially not to Lesedi itself.

The majority of the questions were such that the recipients had to choose one aspect between different options or between yes and no. There were only three open-ended questions where the tourists had to indicate their country of origin, or aspects that impressed or disappointed them the most. The last two questions, mentioned above, were used with questions **2.17 - 2.19** as verification for the questions in **Section 1**.

The questionnaire was compiled in such a manner that it does not take too long to complete. The questions were easy to understand and were relevant to the topic. These features have contributed to the accuracy and precision of information supplied by respondents, and therefore have enhanced the reliability of data collected. A time constraint was experienced in some cases, because most tourists were in tour groups and had to follow a set programme. However, there were limited alternatives to gather the information.

The use of more than one data source to gather information regarding the leisure tourists (information direct from the tourists themselves, from the management as well as text data), together with the various methods that were used to gather information such as those described above (the questionnaire, and interview) support the construct validity of the research (Mouton, 1996:128).

4.5.2 Data collection procedures

When the gaps, regarding the meal experience (especially the food) and its cultural contribution to the cultural experience were recognised, the managers of Lesedi and the Protea Hotel Group were approached and asked whether the research project could be undertaken. The aim and intention of the research, from the researcher's point of view, were discussed and clarified. The aspirations of the managers from both Lesedi and Protea regarding the outcome of the study were also taken into consideration.

To gather the background information regarding the set-up at Lesedi, a guided tour was done to experience and observe what the leisure tourists' experience when they visit Lesedi. An interview was arranged with the manager of Lesedi to gain additional information by asking semi-structured questions (**Appendix B**), which took place in the restaurant (Nyama Choma).

A questionnaire was constructed. Experts from the hospitality and tourism industries, as well as statistical advisors, evaluated the questionnaire for content as well as measurement validity (to eliminate ambiguous and repetitive questions) before it was distributed. Changes were made, whereafter the questionnaire was subjected to a pre-test by means of a pilot test. The pilot test was used to test all aspects of the survey such as questionnaire wording, question sequencing, questionnaire layout, familiarity with respondents, estimate response rate and test analysis procedures, to name a few (Veal, 1997:195). The questionnaire was subjected to a pilot test on 1 November 2002 at Lesedi. The respondents for the pilot study were 28 leisure tourists visiting Lesedi from Canada.

Statistical advisors were of the opinion that due to the fact that the questionnaire was evaluated by experts in the hospitality and tourism industry and were pre-tested by tourists at Lesedi, as well as the fact that the sample was relatively large, the results should be reliable. This view is strengthened by the fact that the questionnaire was based upon a similar model and questionnaire from a previous research study of Kivela *et al.*, (1999) which they found reliable.

Lesedi was contacted daily prior to the data collection so as to ascertain whether the tour group they expected, could speak and understand English. The surveys were conducted onsite, the sample being lunch and dinner customers and the target group being members of tour groups who were conversant with English.

The structured questionnaires were completed by the target population of the leisure tourists dining at Lesedi, after the researcher introduced herself and explained the research project to them, which they, the leisure tourists, were asked to complete after their meal experience. This was done because by leaving the questionnaire in advance the result could be that the questionnaire would be completed by only those who have either had an exceptional good experience or a very poor one (Pizam and Ellis, 1999).

The data was collected during the month of November 2002, as this is a high tourism period in South Africa. Information was gathered during all the days of the week so that both

weekdays and weekends were included as well as to ensure that the time (day) of the week did not have an influence on the information.

To reduce the possible sources of error during data collection by means of the questionnaires, the following precautions were taken: A cover letter was attached to the questionnaires to emphasise the purpose of the survey. In an effort to motivate respondents to answer questions seriously and truthfully, the cover page stated the researcher's affiliation and informed respondents that confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed, although the information gathered was not personal in nature and would not harm respondents in any way, as the identity of the respondents was not necessary for the success of the study and was not collected. This contributes to the reliability of the study.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

For the first part of the data analysis, descriptive statistics were used, as it is concerned with organising and summarising the data at hand, to render it more comprehensible (Mouton, 1996:163). Descriptive statistics were used to describe the objectives set for this study, specifically with regard to the different geographical areas (Africa, Europe and Australia/Asia/America). It includes graphs, frequency, and percentage distributions. Descriptive statistics is a general term for methods of summarising and tabulating data that make their features more transparent, for example calculating means and variables and plotting the results in tables, graphs (histograms and bar charts) and charts (pie-charts).

The data-analysis method used to determine the relative importance and significance of each of the food, service and atmosphere/ambience attributes for this study, was inferential statistics, in particular the chi-square test of significance and measure of correspondence between facts and theory (Bless & Kathuria, 1993:187). Inferential statistics refer to methods for making statements on the basis of partial information. The aim of inferential statistics is to provide one with information that is not directly included in the collected data (Bless & Kathuria, 1993:77).

The Chi-square test is based on the null hypothesis, which is the assumption that there is no relationship between the two variables in the total population (Veal, 1997:258, Babbie & Mouton, 2001:481). The chi-square test investigates the correlation of categorical data, as it tests whether the observed or actual frequency of a phenomenon corresponds to the frequency which should have been recorded (the expected frequency). Therefore the chi-

square test is based on a comparison between observed frequencies and expected frequencies. The larger the difference between the actual cell frequencies and those expected assuming no relationship, the larger the value of chi-square will be and the more likely that the relationship exists in the population (Mouton, 1996:166, Veal, 1997:258).

When one reports the chi-square values as being statistically significant, one actually states that it is highly unlikely that the results that have been obtained were due to some form of sampling or random error (Mouton, 1996:166).

4.7 VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The value and applicability of the results of any research study depends on the validity and reliability of the respective data collection methods. Validity implies the extent to which the information collected by the researcher truly reflects the phenomenon being studied (Veal, 1997:35, Neuman, 2000:138 and Babbie & Mouton, 2001:122), while reliability refers to the extent to which research findings would be the same if the research were to be repeated at a later date or with a different sample of subjects (Veal, 1997:35; Neuman, 2000:138 and Babbie & Mouton, 2001:119).

From the preceding text it is clear that requirements regarding the validity and reliability of the study were taken into consideration throughout the study. A summary of the validity and reliability requirements is set out below:

4.7.1 Validity threats

Prerequisites for generalisation of findings are using a representative sample of the target population and ensuring a sizeable and representative response. Steps to ensure the aforementioned, were included in the target population in the survey in order to accomplish a representative sample.

4.7.1.1 Content/theoretical validity refers to what extent a measure covers the range of meanings included within the concept (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:123). To support content validity the following steps were taken when compiling the visitor survey questionnaires:

A wide variety of sources was consulted in order to identify the aspects that are applicable to determine consumer expectations, that have an influence on expectations and which determine satisfaction.

Experts from the hospitality and tourism industries evaluated the questionnaire for content as well as measurement validity.

A previous questionnaire used by Kivela *et al.*, (1999:283) was used as information to adapt the questionnaires that will be used in this study, which thus increases the questionnaire's validity.

4.7.1.2 Construct validity is based on the logical relationships among variables (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:123). Construct validity refers to the extent to which a scale, index or list of items measures the relevant construct and not something else (Mouton, 1998:128). To support construct validity the following steps were taken:

More than one data source was used to gather information regarding the leisure tourists. Information from the tourists themselves as well as information from the management of Lesedi and text data, which they may have gathered regarding the leisure tourists, was be collected and used.

More than one method to gather the information was used. A questionnaire was distributed, an interview with the manager was executed, and observations were made (fieldnotes).

A valid measurement instrument was obtained through good conceptualisation.

4.7.2 Reliability threats

Research also aimed to produce reliable data. This means that if the same measures were used and conditions under which data were collected were held as constant as possible, the same data should be collected from situation to situation (Mouton, 1996:111).

To reduce the possible sources of error during data collection by means of the questionnaires, the following precautions were considered:

A cover letter (page) was attached to the questionnaires to emphasise

- the purpose of the survey
- the researcher's affiliation
- that confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed

The questionnaire was constructed in such manner that

- it did not take long to complete
- the questions were easy to understand and were relevant to the topic

The questionnaire was submitted to a pre-test or trial run by means of a pilot test.

The above steps have contributed to the accuracy and precision of information supplied by respondents, and therefore have enhanced the reliability of data collected.

4.8 DATA PRESENTATION

The data obtained from the survey were analysed statistically. The analysis sheets constitute 642 pages and in the interest of brevity are not included in this study report. The analysis sheets are available in hard copy in the researcher's files and the electronic version is on the database of the statistician at the University of Pretoria.

The findings of the statistical analysis are set out in **Chapter 5**, starting with the findings of an interview with the manager of Lesedi.

In **Chapter 6**, the findings of the study are utilised to make suggestions for the improvements of the menu, to draw conclusions regarding the extent to which the leisure tourists' expectations of the meal experience were met at Lesedi and to evaluate the applicability of the selected model, as well as the systems theory to an establishment such as Lesedi.

4.9 CONCLUSION

A well-structured questionnaire, applied to a significant sample of leisure tourists and subject to a Chi-square test, is expected to give a realistic indication of leisure tourists' perceptions of satisfaction of the meal experience at Lesedi.

The responses reflect those aspects, which have a significant relationship with one another in respect of leisure tourists' perceptions of the factors that influence the meal experience and its various components. The responses will also give an indication of those aspects, which should receive attention from the owners of Lesedi to enhance the tourists' satisfaction with the meal experience.

The findings of the analysis of the survey conducted during November 2002 follow in **Chapter 5**.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, the background information received from the manager of Lesedi as well as data collected from the structured questionnaire completed by leisure tourists (n=255) who visited Lesedi were analysed to determine leisure tourists' satisfaction with the current meal experience and its individual components in co-ordinance with the objectives set-out for this study. The measurement of the difference between the expectations and fulfilment of each component was analysed and discussed in order to gauge the extent to which leisure tourists expectations regarding the meal experience and all its components were met, their satisfaction with the current meal experience offered at Lesedi and the extent to which they would be willing to return or refer others to Lesedi. Thereafter conclusions were drawn of the need for a cultural-specific menu at Lesedi, as well as aspects with which the tourists were the most and the least impressed in order to make recommendations, if necessary, to address these issues. The significance of the relationship between food, service and atmosphere regarding the meal experience and other aspects was determined in order to verify literature as well as to supply additional information regarding the study.

- The findings of the semi-structured interview schedule were dealt with as follows:
 - Reasons for the current menu
 - Client basis
 - Peak time for tourist visits to Lesedi
 - Number of dining sessions per year
 - Number of people per visit
 - Number of staff

- The structured questionnaire was analysed in terms of the profile of the leisure tourists and the objectives of the study to determine:

- Objective 1:** the extent to which leisure tourists' expectations regarding the meal experience and its components were met, and whether they were satisfied with the current meal experience
- Objective 2:** the extent to which leisure tourists would be willing to return or refer others to Lesedi
- Objective 3:** the extent to which it is necessary to have a cultural-specific menu to satisfy the leisure tourists' expectations
- Objective 4:** the extent to which certain components of the meal experience impressed the leisure tourists the most
- Objective 5:** the extent to which there is a significant relationship between **food, service** and **atmosphere** regarding the meal experience
- Objective 6:** the extent to which other aspects have significant relationships with the components of the meal experience (**food, service** and **atmosphere**)

To meet the objectives set out for this study, the data was analysed and the following statistical methods were used:

Descriptive statistics were used for **Objectives 1 to 4**

Inferential statistics were used for **Objectives 5 and 6**

5.2 THE MANAGER'S VIEW REGARDING THE FUNCTIONING OF LESEDI

The semi-structured interview's information was analysed to set the stage for the present situation at Lesedi as well as to see if the tourists' reactions to the current meal experience validate the findings of the management of Lesedi. The semi-structured questionnaire was presented to the general manager of Lesedi, and his reactions are discussed below.

Question: **Why do you present a westernised menu and food dishes, when your marketing and brochures state that you are offering "The greatest African feast – sample traditional dishes from around the African continent?"**

The manager stated that they had provided a complete traditional menu when Lesedi opened, but the tourists did not like the food provided and sent much back as plate wastage. Therefore, they decided that they would rather offer westernised food that the tourists like

and with which they are satisfied rather than to have customers who are dissatisfied with the food.

Question: Who is your client base?

The manager stated that their client basis was mostly international tourists from various countries. The tourists were mostly part of organised tours, however, drop-ins (those that just arrive) were also welcome. So too are corporate clients who come for conferences, or year-end and Christmas functions.

Question: When is the most popular time for the tourists to visits, and how does it vary during the sessions per day (lunch versus dinner)?

The most popular session for the tourists is the lunch session. The majority of the tourists have a pre-planned itinerary, and have to travel a distance after the experience.

March and April are the busiest months, however, each tourist component prefers its own time frame. International tourists usually visit Lesedi during November and February. They do not usually travel or visit South Africa during the holiday season, as it is more expensive, and because they prefer to spend that time at home (their own countries). The local tourists, however, prefer October to December to visit Lesedi, mostly for year-end or Christmas functions. The middle of December, as well as January, are very quiet, and clientele starts to pick up from the middle of February.

Question: How many dining sessions are there per year?

There are two dining sessions per day 365 days a year. Breakfast is also served if there are tourists staying over in the guest huts. Lesedi Cultural Village, therefore, never closes.

Question: How many people are normally expected per dining session?

The number of tourists who visit Lesedi differs from 20-200 per dining session, depending on the bookings. The average number per session is 80 people.

Question: How many staff do you have in the foodservice establishment?

The total staff of the foodservice establishment is 20 individuals at a shift: a food and beverage manager, 10 permanent kitchen staff and one trainee, as well as four permanent waiters and four trainees.

5.3 RESEARCHERS OBSERVATIONS

The observations that were made by the researcher were used as verification for the information received from the self-administered questionnaire where possible.

The set menu for the lunch and dinner period was as follows:

- Salads:** carrot salad, potato salad, corn and kidney beans, lettuce, tomato, cucumber, onions, fish dumplings, chilli baked beans
- Meat:** roast chicken, crocodile, beef stew, ostrich goulash, roast kudu, roast leg of lamb and impala neck
- Vegetables:** roast potato, cabbage, butter beans, sweet butternut, rice, “mielie pap”, tomato and onion gravy and spinach
- Desserts:** custard, baked bread and butter pudding, malva pudding, chocolate mousse, koeksisters, fruit salads, various fritters (pumpkin, pineapple, banana, apple) and ice cream.

It was also observed that some tour guides did not eat at Lesedi, however a meal is inclusive in their package. When asked why not, they responded that they had become ill after a meal at Lesedi previously and therefore will not do so again.

When the researcher introduced herself and explained the study briefly, some tourists questioned the fact that they come to an establishment such as Lesedi with expectations regarding the food. They stated that “one does not come to a cultural village for a meal experience, how can one then have expectations regarding the food”. This fact may substantiate the high percentage of tourists whose expectations have been met or exceeded.

A tourist made the comment that the question regarding the staffs' knowledge of food, beverage and culinary heritage is silly because how should they know. These factors are therefore not visible in the staffs' conduct and therefore may need some attention.

Another observation from a food service point of view that might create a bad impression is that kitchen staff dish-up for themselves while the tourists are still busy dishing up. The music was also provided by tribe members who played guitar and a concertina, however it was so loud that the tourists could not interact with one another in a normal manner.

5.4 THE PROFILE OF THE LEISURE TOURISTS (DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS)

In order to cater for a specific market, an establishment's customer profile should be known to the managers, as it also supplies background information. In the case of the research the profile was determined so as to verify the background information that the manager of Lesedi supplied, as well as to familiarise the researcher with the client profile of Lesedi. The profile of the leisure tourists who visited Lesedi was compiled of the following:

- country of origin
- gender age profile
- the leisure tourists' previous experiences and knowledge.

5.4.1 Country of origin

Two hundred and fifty five respondents (leisure tourists) were questioned by means of a self-administered questionnaire. Five leisure tourists did not fill in the country of origin. The leisure tourists who were included in the survey came from 24 different English speaking countries. Due to limitations with regard to language the survey had to be confined to tourists from English speaking countries and to countries whose citizens have a good command of the language.

The sample for individual countries was too small to provide meaningful results. Consequently countries were grouped into three subsets (which hereafter are referred to as countries), largely based upon geographic proximity/location. These subsets are Africa, Europe and Australia/Asia/America, respectively comprising 36%, 44% and 20% of the sample.

Although there are cultural differences between Asia and America/Australia, the number of respondents from Asia was so small (9 respondents) that they were grouped with Australia

and America. In the geographical sub-set Asia, the countries are Russia, Sri-Lanka and Ukraine (**Table 5.1**). The compilation of the geographical subsets can be seen in **Figure 5.1** and **Table 5.1**, rounded up to the nearest full percentage value.

The majority of the leisure tourists who were included in the survey originated from Europe, followed by Africa and Australia/Asia/America respectively. From the countries under each sub-set (**Table 5.1**) the majority of tourists originated from the Netherlands/Holland and the United Kingdom/Scotland (Europe), South Africa (Africa), and Canada and the United States of America (Australia/Asia/America).

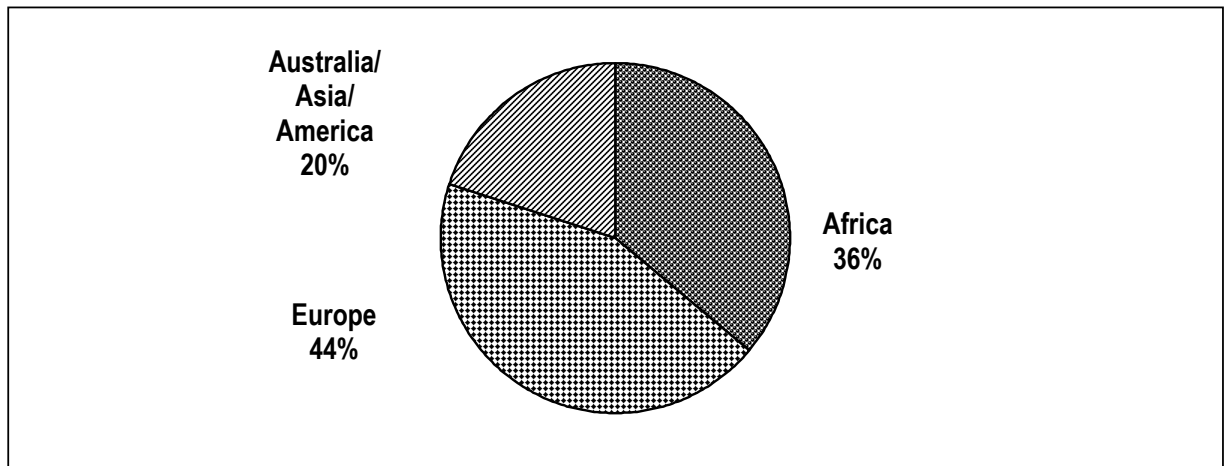


FIGURE 5.1: PERCENTAGE OF TOURISTS REPRESENTING COUNTRY OF ORIGIN

5.4.2 Gender-age distribution

Of the respondents, 115 (46.03%) were male and 135 (53.97%) female. The age distribution of these leisure tourists can be seen in **Figure 5.2**. It can be concluded from the descriptive statistics that the majority of the leisure tourists are between the age 18-34 (89 or 35.18%), followed by the age group 55-65> (62 or 25.69%). The largest gender-age group was female between the ages of 18 and 34 years, comprising 55 leisure tourists. The gender-age group represented most by males was between 45 and 54 years with 35 leisure tourists, closely followed by the age group 18 to 34 years with 34 leisure tourists.

TABLE 5.1: DISTRIBUTION OF THE DIFFERENT COUNTRIES IN EACH GEOGRAPHIC SUBSET

AFRICA		EUROPE		AUSTRALIA/ASIA/AMERICA	
Country	Number of tourists	Country	Number of tourists	Country	Number of tourists
Mozambique	1	Austria	16	Australia	3
South Africa	85	Denmark	2	Brazil	4
Uganda	1	Europe	1	Canada	18
Zambia	3	France	6	Peru	1
Total	90	Germany	18	Russia	4
Percentage	36%	Greece	1	Sri-Lanka	3
		Hungary	1	Ukraine	2
		Italy	1	United States of America	15
		Netherlands/Holland	27	Total	50
		Poland	2	Percentage	20%
		Sweden	2		
		Switzerland	6		
		United Kingdom/Scotland	27		
		Total	110		
		Percentage	44%		

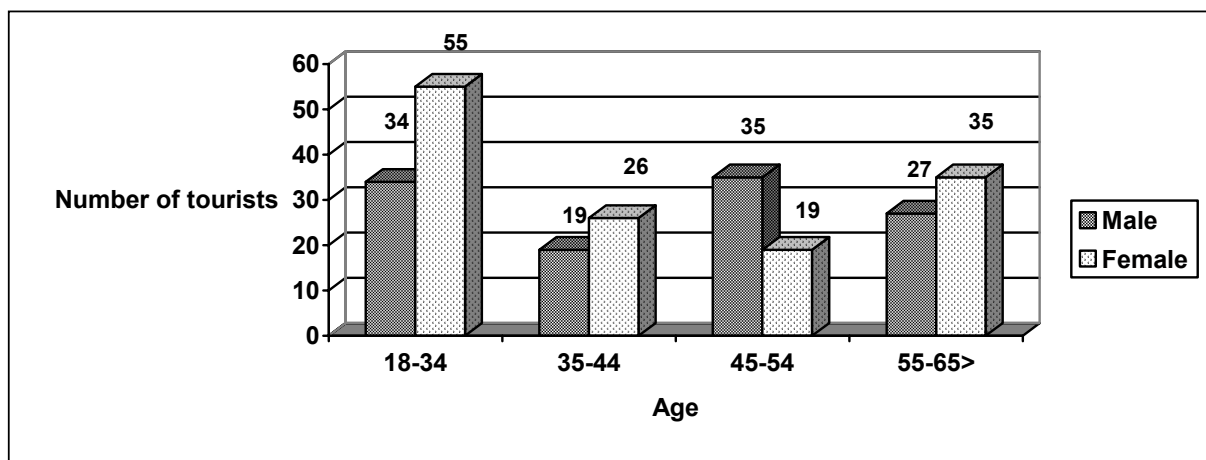


FIGURE 5.2: NUMBER OF TOURISTS PER GENDER-AGE PROFILE

5.4.3 The leisure tourists’ previous experience and knowledge

In establishing the leisure tourists’ previous experience and knowledge of cultural-specific meals such as that provided at Lesedi, respondents were asked whether they had dined at Lesedi before, as well as whether or not they have dined at a similar establishment before. The same was asked regarding respondents’ knowledge of the traditional cultural-specific food of the ethnic tribes depicted at Lesedi, as well as of other tribes or nationalities. The responses are considered in turn.

5.4.3.1 Have the leisure tourists dined at Lesedi before?

Of the total tourist population who responded, the majority (83.79%) of them had not dined at Lesedi. If these results are analysed in relation to country (**Figure 5.3**), the following can be concluded: the tourists originating from Australia/Asia/America indicated that the largest number of them had not dined at Lesedi before (94.00% of respondents), followed by Europe with 90.00% indicating so. The majority of the tourists originating from Africa (69.66%) also indicated that they had not dined at Lesedi before; however, it is approximately a third less than the tourists from Europe or Australia/Asia/America.

It can, therefore, be concluded that the tourists from Africa were more inclined to have visited Lesedi before. It might be because the establishment is closer for them than for the other tourists, as well as the fact that the majority of the tourists from Africa originated from South Africa.

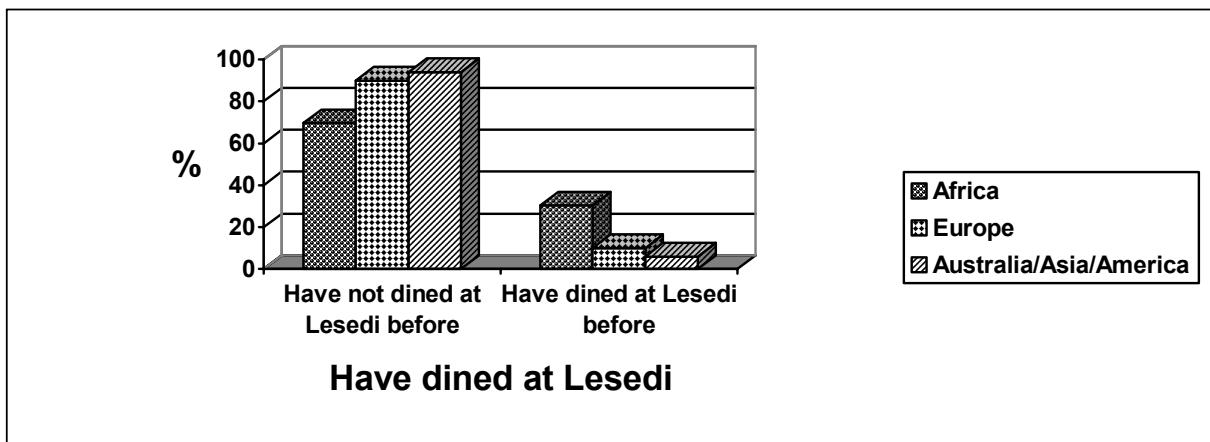


FIGURE 5.3: PROPORTION OF COUNTRIES RELATING TO HAVE OR HAVE NOT DINED AT LESEDI BEFORE

5.4.3.2 Have the leisure tourists dined at similar establishments before?

Approximately equal numbers of tourists have (50.40%) or have not (49.60%) visited a similar establishment before. Therefore half of the leisure tourists may have certain set expectations made up of information gathered from their prior experiences, which may be more realistic than those leisure tourists who have not dined at a similar establishment before.

5.4.3.3 Do the leisure tourists have knowledge regarding the traditional cultural-specific food of the ethnic tribes depicted at Lesedi?

The majority (52.96%) of the leisure tourists do not have knowledge regarding the traditional cultural-specific food of the ethnic tribes depicted at Lesedi.

5.4.3.4 Do the leisure tourists have knowledge regarding the traditional cultural-specific food of other tribes or nationalities?

The majority (52.19%) of the respondents have knowledge regarding the food of other tribes or nationalities. Therefore, they may have certain expectations or anticipation of what to expect regarding the food when they visit Lesedi or a similar establishment as a result of their experiences at other establishments.

5.5 COMPARISON OF THE FINDINGS WITH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY (DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS)

5.5.1 The extent to which the leisure tourists' expectations regarding the meal experience and its three components (food, service and atmosphere) were met and whether they were satisfied with the current meal experience. (Objective 1)

5.5.1.1 The extent to which the leisure tourists' expectations regarding the meal experience were met

In measuring the extent to which the leisure tourists' expectations regarding the meal experience were met, respondents views were obtained as to whether or not they would like

to consume cultural-specific food, expected to be served authentic cultural-specific food as well as the type of menu preferred. Each is considered in turn.

Would the leisure tourists like to consume cultural-specific food?

Of the total tourist population, 77.42% stated that they would like to consume cultural-specific food, whereas 22.58% stated otherwise. Therefore, more than three-quarters of the tourists were willing to consume cultural-specific food.

Were the leisure tourists expecting to be served authentic cultural-specific food?

Of all respondents, 79.10% indicated that they expected to be served authentic cultural-specific food, whereas 20.90% indicated that they did not. Therefore, the majority of the tourists were expecting authentic cultural-specific food to be served to them.

The relatively high proportion of those not expecting cultural-specific food could be the result of previous experience at Lesedi.

5.5.1.2 The extent to which the leisure tourists' expectations regarding food were met

As **food** is the grouped variable consisting of presentation or appearance, taste, temperature, menu item variety, quality, and authenticity, the views of respondents on each of these variables were obtained and combined to give an entire impression of the component, and are discussed below.

Of the total population, 56.77% indicated that their expectations regarding the grouped variable **food** (all the aspects that make up the variable **food** as described above) was met, whereas 29.43% indicated that their expectations were exceeded. The tourists, who have indicated that their **food** expectations were not met, amounted to 12%, whereas only 1.81% indicated that their expectations were not met at all (**Figure 5.4**).

The aspect of the grouped variable **food** that showed a different tendency than the other aspects, is menu item variety where the tourists indicated that their expectations were exceeded to a greater extent (47.18%) than their expectations were met (43.15%).

The responses for all these aspects showed that most respondents felt that the **food** either met or exceeded their expectations. Together these proportions exceeded 80%. The

degree to which expectations were exceeded varied from some 19% in the case of the temperature of the food to 47% in the case of menu variety.

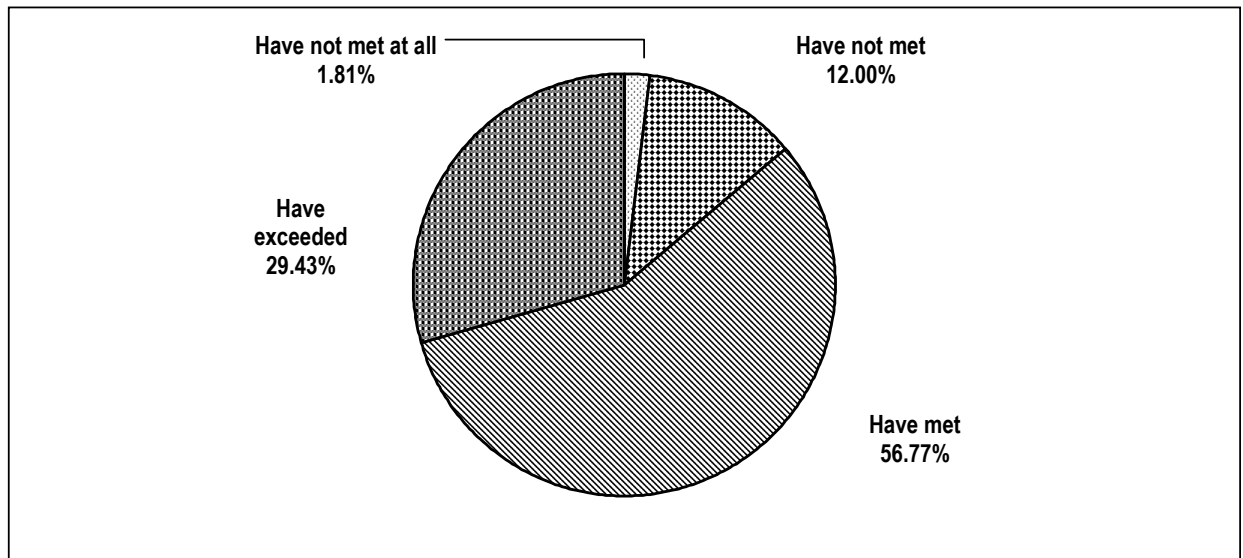


FIGURE 5.4. THE AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE FOOD MET THE TOURISTS' EXPECTATIONS

5.5.1.3 The extent to which the leisure tourists' expectations regarding service were met

The grouped variable **service** consists of friendly, polite and helpful staff, efficient service, food and beverage knowledge, culinary heritage knowledge, and sympathetic handling of complaints. The views of respondents on each of these variables were obtained and combined to give an entire impression of the component, and are discussed below.

Of the total population, 61.42% indicated that their expectations regarding the grouped variable **service** (all the aspects that make up the variable **service** as described above) were met, whereas 26.41% indicated that their expectations were exceeded. The tourists, who have indicated that their **service** expectations were not met, amounted to 10.48%, whereas only 1.69% indicated that their expectations were not met at all (**Figure 5.5**).

The responses for all these aspects showed that most respondents felt that the **service** either met or exceeded their expectations. Together these proportions exceeded 82%. The degree to which expectations were exceeded varied from some 17% in the case of the staffs'

food and beverage knowledge to almost 35% in the case of friendliness, politeness and helpfulness of staff.

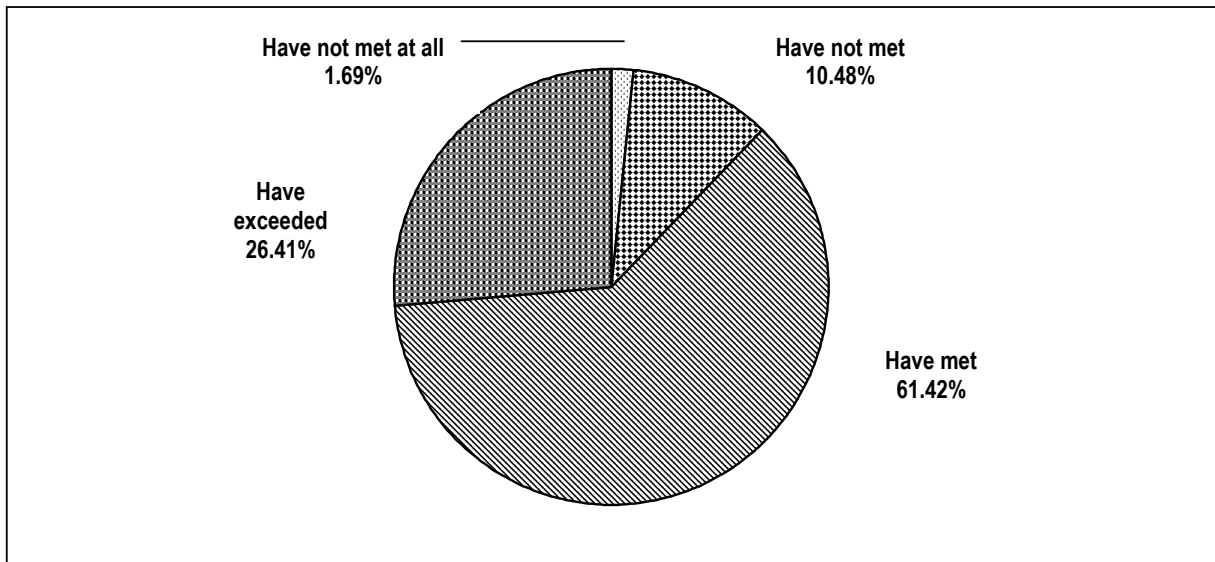


FIGURE 5.5: THE AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE SERVICE MET THE TOURISTS' EXPECTATIONS

5.5.1.4 The extent to which the leisure tourists' expectations regarding atmosphere were met

The grouped variable **atmosphere** consists of the restaurant's temperature, appearance, table settings, crockery and cutlery, staff appearance, décor, general excitement a place generates and music. The views of the respondents on each of the variables were obtained and combined to give an entire impression of the component, and are discussed below.

The aspects of the grouped variable **atmosphere** that showed a different tendency than the other aspects, are restaurant appearance and décor. The tourists indicated that their expectations were exceeded, regarding the restaurant's appearance, to a greater extent (51.00%) than their expectations were met (43.15%). The same tendency was observed for the aspect décor were the tourists indicated that their expectations were exceeded to a greater extent (54.44%) than their expectations were met (42.34%).

The responses for all these aspects showed that most respondents felt that the atmosphere either met or exceeded their expectations. Together these proportions exceeded 75%. The

degree to which expectations were exceeded varied from 19% in the case of the restaurant's temperature to more than 54% in the case of décor.

Overall the conclusion can be drawn that the expectations of more than three-quarters of leisure tourists' have been met or exceeded in respect of all the components of the meal experience.

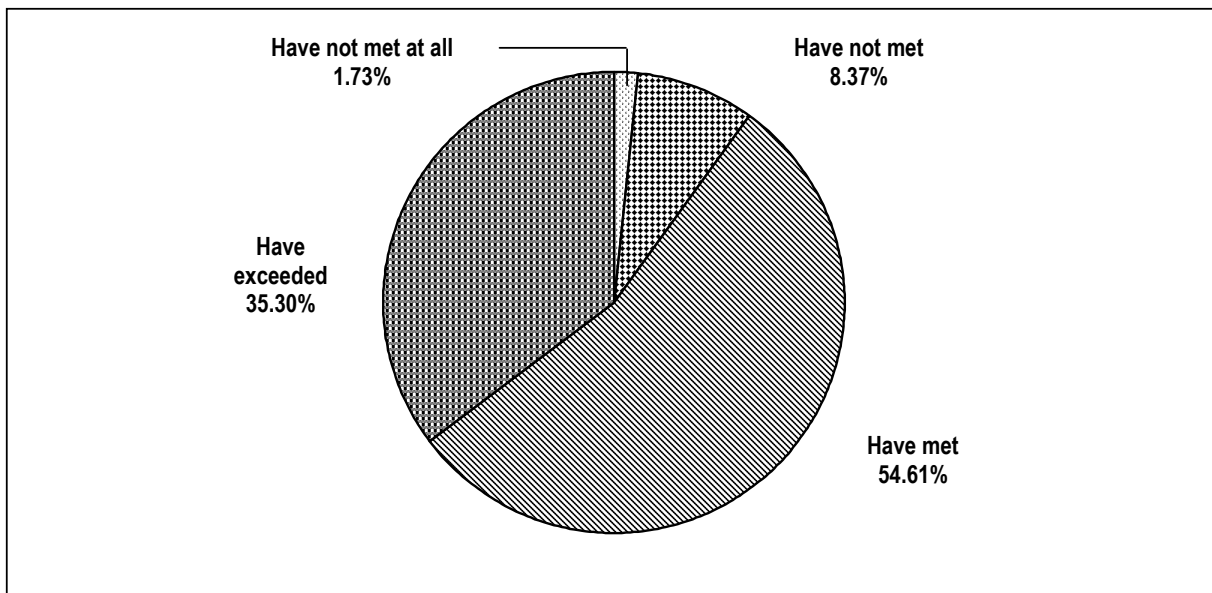


FIGURE 5.6: THE AVERAGE PERCENTAGE OF THE EXTENT TO WHICH THE ATMOSPHERE MET THE TOURISTS' EXPECTATIONS

5.5.1.5 The extent to which the leisure tourists were satisfied with the current meal experience

The majority (55.82%) of the tourists expressed satisfaction, while 37.35% are totally satisfied with the meal experience at present. The result is an overwhelming judgement of satisfaction with the meal experience, with a total 93.17% stating that they were satisfied. Only 1.61% of the tourists were totally dissatisfied and 5.22% were dissatisfied with the meal experience at present, a total of 6.83%. These percentages are shown diagrammatically in **Figure 5.7**.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the leisure tourists are mostly satisfied with the meal experience regarding all its components, although in differing degrees, even though more than half of the respondents indicated a preference for a menu containing cultural-specific food. The literature, however, supports this occurrence as Hughes in Yuksel and

Rimington (1998) states that studies have shown that even though experiences did not fulfil expectations, a considerable number of tourists were relatively satisfied. A reason which might explain this occurrence is that the tourists may have presumed that the food presented by Lesedi may have been cultural-specific in regard to the tribes depicted at Lesedi.

The **service** was rated more satisfactory than the **food**. The **atmosphere** was rated more satisfactory than the **food** and **service**, therefore the **food** was the least satisfactory and the **atmosphere** the most satisfactory of the three components of the meal experience. These relations will be discussed below, to the extent in which there is a significant relationship between **food**, **service** and **atmosphere** regarding the meal experience, where each component will be compared with one another if a relationship exists (**Section 5.4.6**).

What appears to emerge, however, is that adjustments to the food (or menu) might enhance the satisfaction with the food and could contribute to increasing the relatively low proportion of tourists who are totally satisfied.

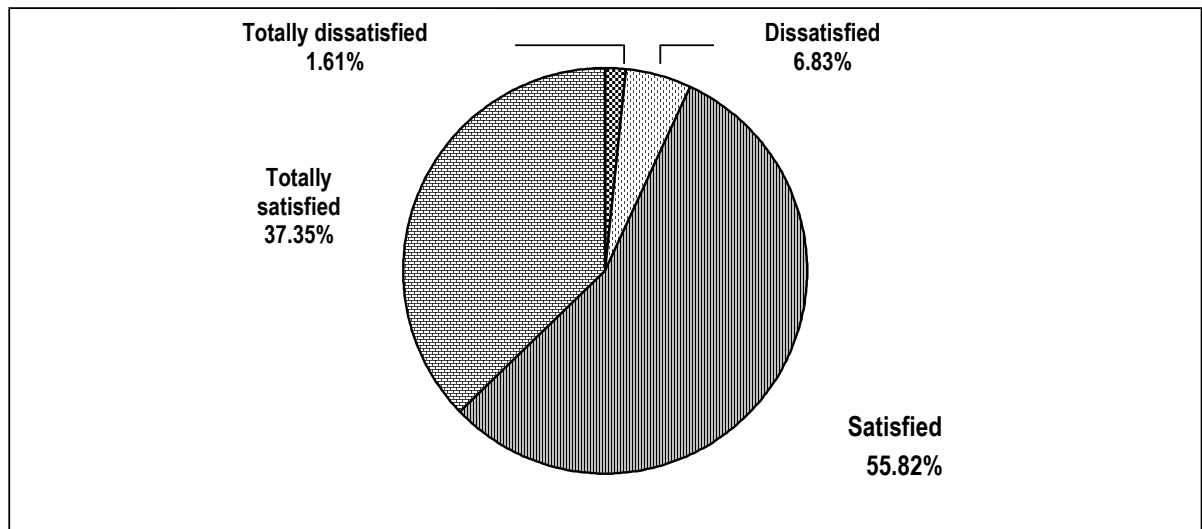


FIGURE 5.7: PERCENTAGE OF SATISFACTION WITH THE MEAL EXPERIENCE

Figure 5.7 shows that overall more than 93% of the leisure tourists were either satisfied or totally satisfied with the meal experience, and 37% of the respondents indicated that they were totally satisfied.

These figures compare well with the degree to which expectations were either met or exceeded. Indeed, they are higher than the results for **food**, **service** and **atmosphere** individually. This could indicate that the positive aspects of the individual components tend to work together so that the whole is more positive than the sum of the parts. This tends to

bear out one of the three assumptions of the systems theory (set out in **Chapter 3, Section 3.2**) that satisfaction would result from the tourists' total experience, rather than the experience of the food, service and atmosphere individually. Pizam and Ellis (1999) are in agreement when they state that satisfaction with a hospitality experience or service encounter, such as a restaurant meal, is the sum total of satisfaction with the individual elements or attributes of all the products and services that make up the experience.

5.5.2 The extent to which the leisure tourists would be willing to return or refer others to Lesedi (Objective 2) (DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS)

5.5.2.1 The extent to which the leisure tourists would be willing to return to Lesedi

The assumption that was made that the tourists who visit Lesedi only visit once, which is supported by the small number of respondents (16.20%) who had visited Lesedi previously, are conceivably applicable, although 65.13% stated they would return. This, however, might be difficult, due to the fact that the majority of the tourists are from destinations outside South Africa.

5.5.2.2 The extent to which the leisure tourists would be willing to refer others to Lesedi

Approximately 85.48% of the respondents indicated they would refer others to Lesedi, which is a positive indication of their satisfaction with the meal experience offered by Lesedi.

Overall the results showed a high inclination for referral, which is in support of the positive ratings to which expectations and satisfaction had been met or exceeded, as described previously.

This also tends to support the literature set out in **Chapter 2, Section 2.2.4** (The concept of satisfaction with the meal experience) that there is a strong relationship between the degree of satisfaction with the expectation and the intention to return or to refer others.

5.5.3 The extent to which it is necessary to have a cultural-specific menu to satisfy the leisure tourists' expectations (Objective 3) (DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS)

5.5.3.1 Would the leisure tourists have preferred a complete traditional menu, a menu with some traditional dishes, a menu with traditional ingredients prepared in a westernised manner or the current menu?

The indications are that more than 77% of the respondents would have liked to consume cultural-specific food while nearly 80% of the leisure tourists were expecting to be served authentic cultural-specific food (as was described in **Section 5.4.1**). By far the greatest majority, therefore, wished to have and were expecting authentic cultural-specific food.

Of those respondents who indicated the type of menu they preferred, some 42% indicated they preferred the current menu. This is significantly less than those expecting cultural-specific foods. The second most preferred menu option was a menu with some traditional dishes (28.50%), followed by a complete traditional menu with 19.76% responding to this effect and the menu option selected the least was a menu with traditional ingredients prepared in a westernised manner selected by 9.68% of the respondents (**Figure 5.8**). Less than 20% of the respondents indicated that they preferred a complete traditional menu. This response is not inline with the responses outlined in **Section 5.4.1.1**, where respondents indicated that they would like to consume cultural-specific food as well as expected to be served authentic cultural-specific food. This therefore does not verify the objective set out above. This may possibly be due to a lack of knowledge the consumers might have of the authentic cultural food of the tribes depicted at Lesedi, and therefore might assume that the food they currently receive, is authentic of the different tribes.

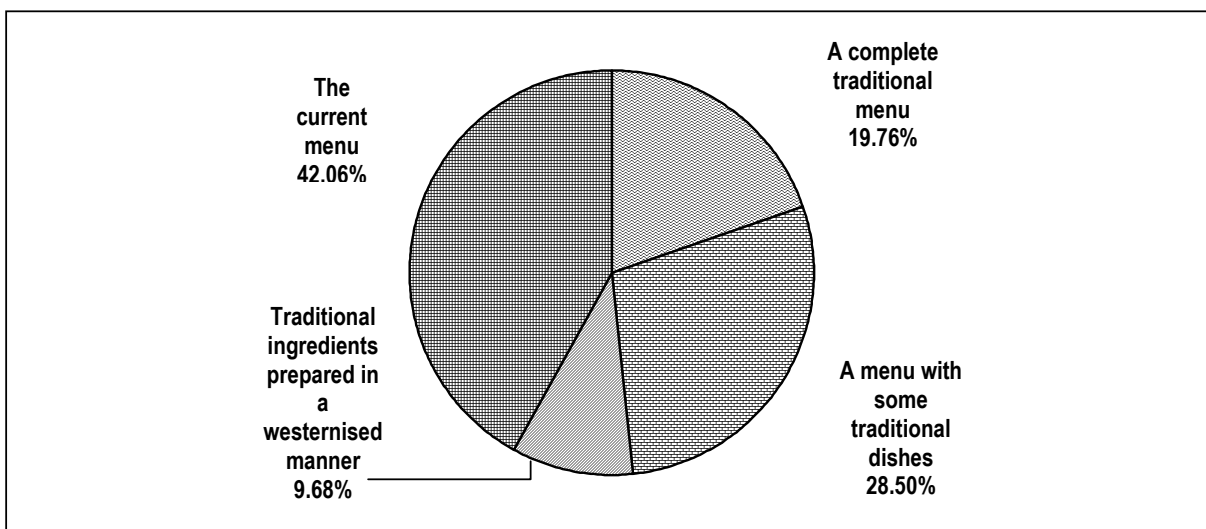


FIGURE 5.8: PERCENTAGE OF TYPE OF MENU PREFERRED

However, in order to bring the menu preferences of respondents more in line with their expectations, the difference can be made up by including some traditional dishes in the current menu. Some 28% of the respondents expressed this option as their preferred menu.

This tends to substantiate the notion that inclusion of authentic cultural-specific food adds to satisfaction of the meal experience at an establishment such as Lesedi, as described in **Chapter 2, Section 2.2.1**.

Referring to the satisfaction levels of the leisure tourists outlined in **Section 5.4.1.5** it is not necessary to have a cultural-specific menu to satisfy their expectations regarding the meal experience at an establishment such as Lesedi, but the responses indicate that the chances of satisfying the expectations to a greater extent would be enhanced by including some authentic cultural-specific dishes in the menu.

5.5.4 The extent to which certain components of the meal experience impressed the leisure tourists the most (Objective 4) (DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS)

5.5.4.1 Which aspects of the meal experience at Lesedi regarding the food, service and atmosphere impressed the leisure tourists the most?

Aspects of the meal experience at Lesedi regarding the food, which impressed the leisure tourists the most

The aspects of the **food** were divided according to the sensory aspects of the food (presentations of the food, the taste of the food and the temperature of the food), the menu item variety, food quality and authenticity of the food.

The aspect of the **food** in the meal experience that impressed the tourists the most, was the menu item variety as 40.24% of the tourist selected this option, followed by sensory aspects of the food with 36.89% selections (**Figure 5.9**).

Which aspects of the meal experience at Lesedi regarding the service impressed the leisure tourists the most

Due to the fact that the individual aspects of the component service are closely related to one another and influence each other, some aspects were grouped together, in order to give more meaningful information (**Figure 5.10**). The aspects that were grouped together are

efficient service, attentive friendly and helpful staff, staff have food, beverage and culinary heritage knowledge.

From this it is clear that the actual service and the staff performance impressed the leisure tourists the most, with a combined value amounting to 86.31%, followed by the knowledge the staff has regarding the food, beverage and culinary heritage with a combined value of 9.12%.

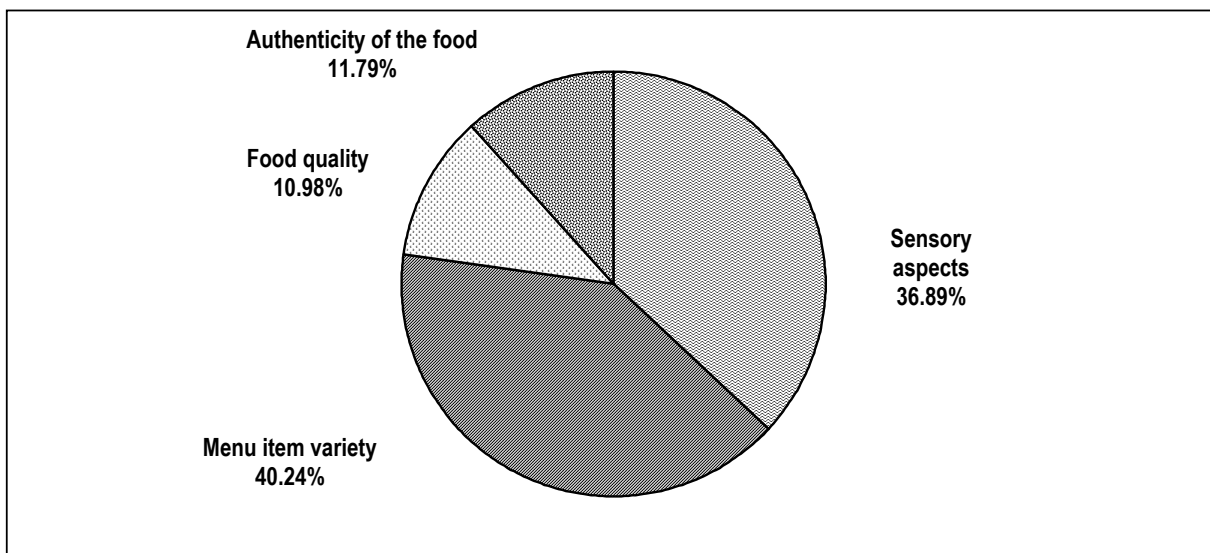


FIGURE 5.9: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE ASPECTS OF THE FOOD THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

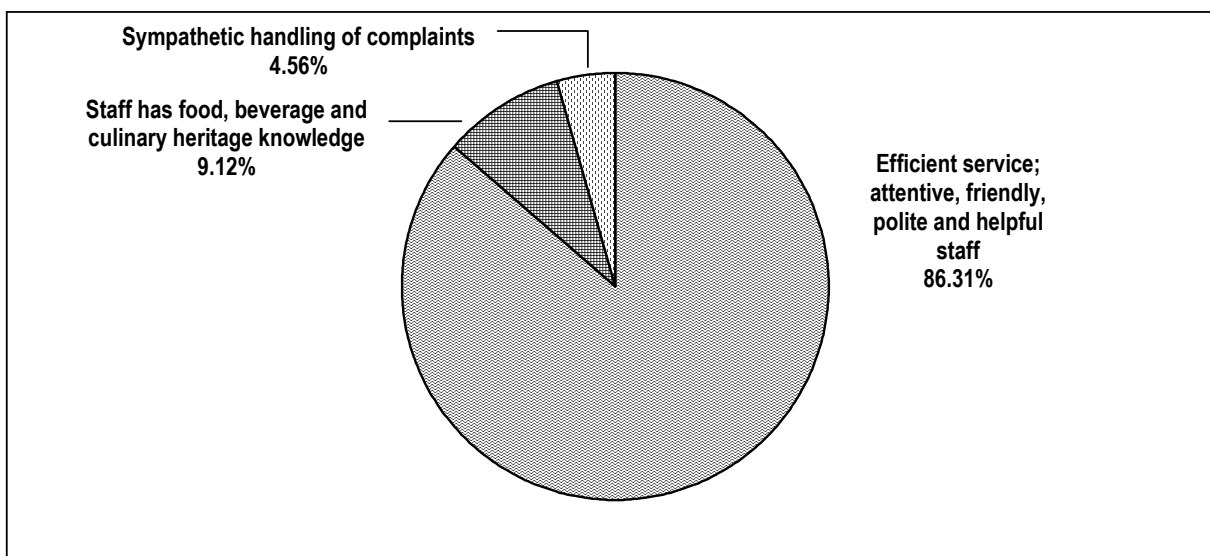


FIGURE 5.10: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE COMBINED ASPECTS OF THE SERVICE THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

Aspects of the meal experience at Lesedi regarding the atmosphere, which impressed the leisure tourists, the most

As with the aspects of service the aspects of atmosphere are closely related to one another and influence each other, therefore some aspects were grouped together, in order to give more meaningful information (**Figure 5.11**). The aspects that were grouped together are restaurants' appearance, table settings, crockery and cutlery, décor,

From this it is clear that the restaurant's appearance, décor and table settings and crockery impressed the leisure tourists the most, with a combined value amounting to 77.46%, followed by the general excitement the place generates with 9.12% of the tourists indicating so.

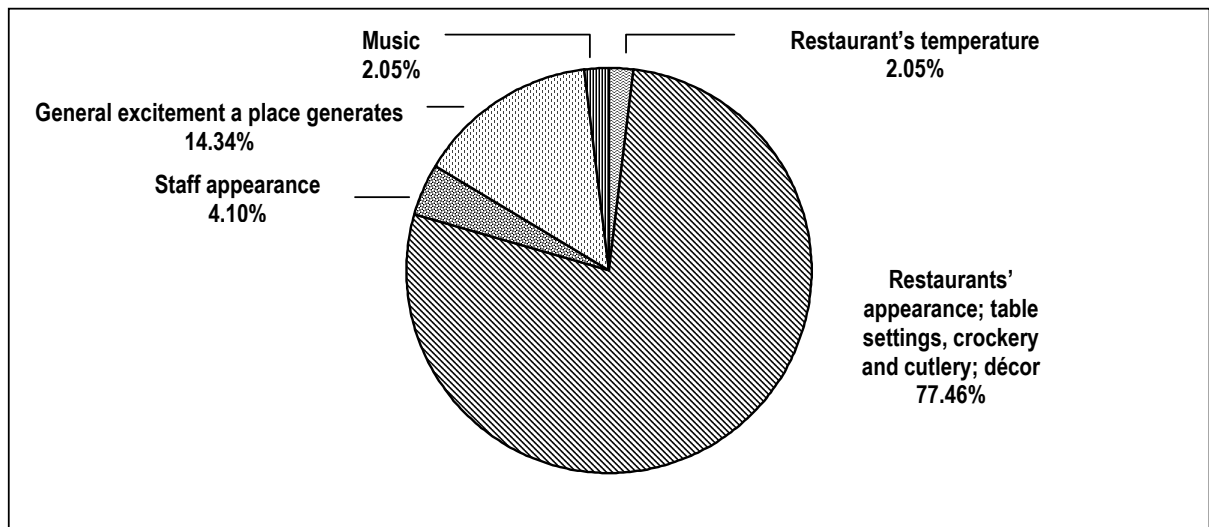


FIGURE 5.11: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE COMBINED ASPECTS OF THE ATMOSPHERE THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

The aspect of the meal experience that impressed the leisure tourists the most.

Of the three components (**food**, **service** and **atmosphere**) of the meal experience the grouped variable **food** significantly impressed the tourists the most (70.47%) followed by **atmosphere** with 19.41% of the responses (**Figure 5.12**).

The combined results of the survey showing those aspects with which the respondents were most impressed regarding the meal experience, are shown in **Figures 5.9 (food)**; **5.10 (service)** and **5.11 (atmosphere)**.

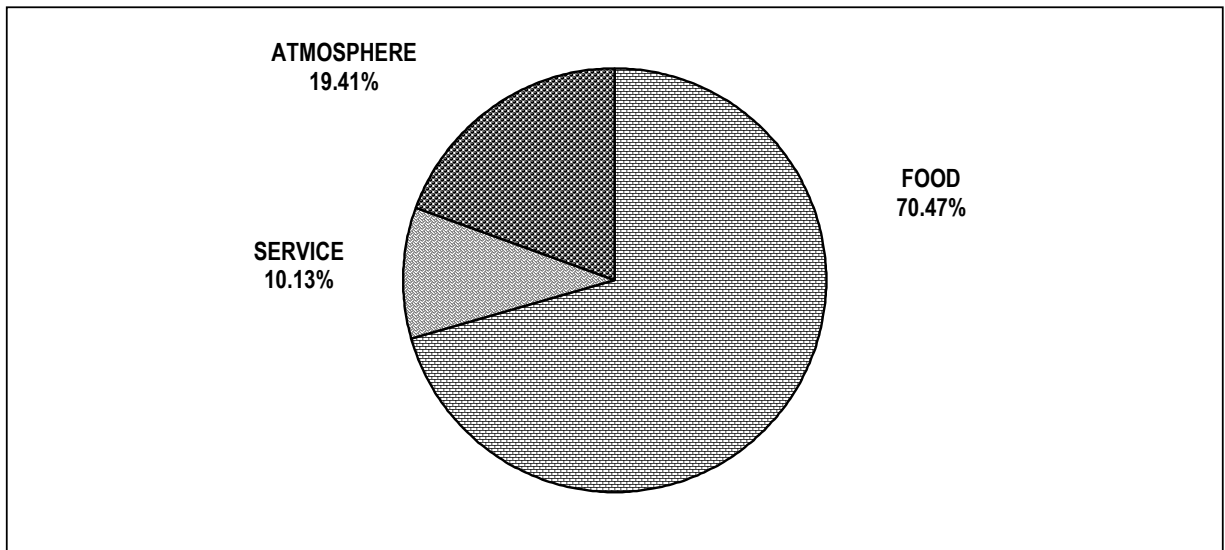


FIGURE 5.12: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE GROUPED VARIABLES OF THE MEAL EXPERIENCE THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

The findings by number of respondents are summarised in **Figure 5.13** in respect of those aspects, which impressed most.

Results of the grouped variable food as a component of the meal experience which impressed most

TABLE 5.2: RESULTS OF THE FOOD COMPONENT THAT IMPRESSED MOST

INDIVIDUAL ASPECTS	IMPRESSED MOST	GROUPED ASPECTS	
Presentation and appearance	15.75%	Sensory aspects	36.89%
Taste of the food	18.70%		
Temperature of the food	2.44%		
Menu item variety	40.24%	Menu item variety	40.24%
Food quality	10.98%	Food quality	10.98%
Authenticity of the food	11.79%	Authenticity of the food	11.79%
	100%		

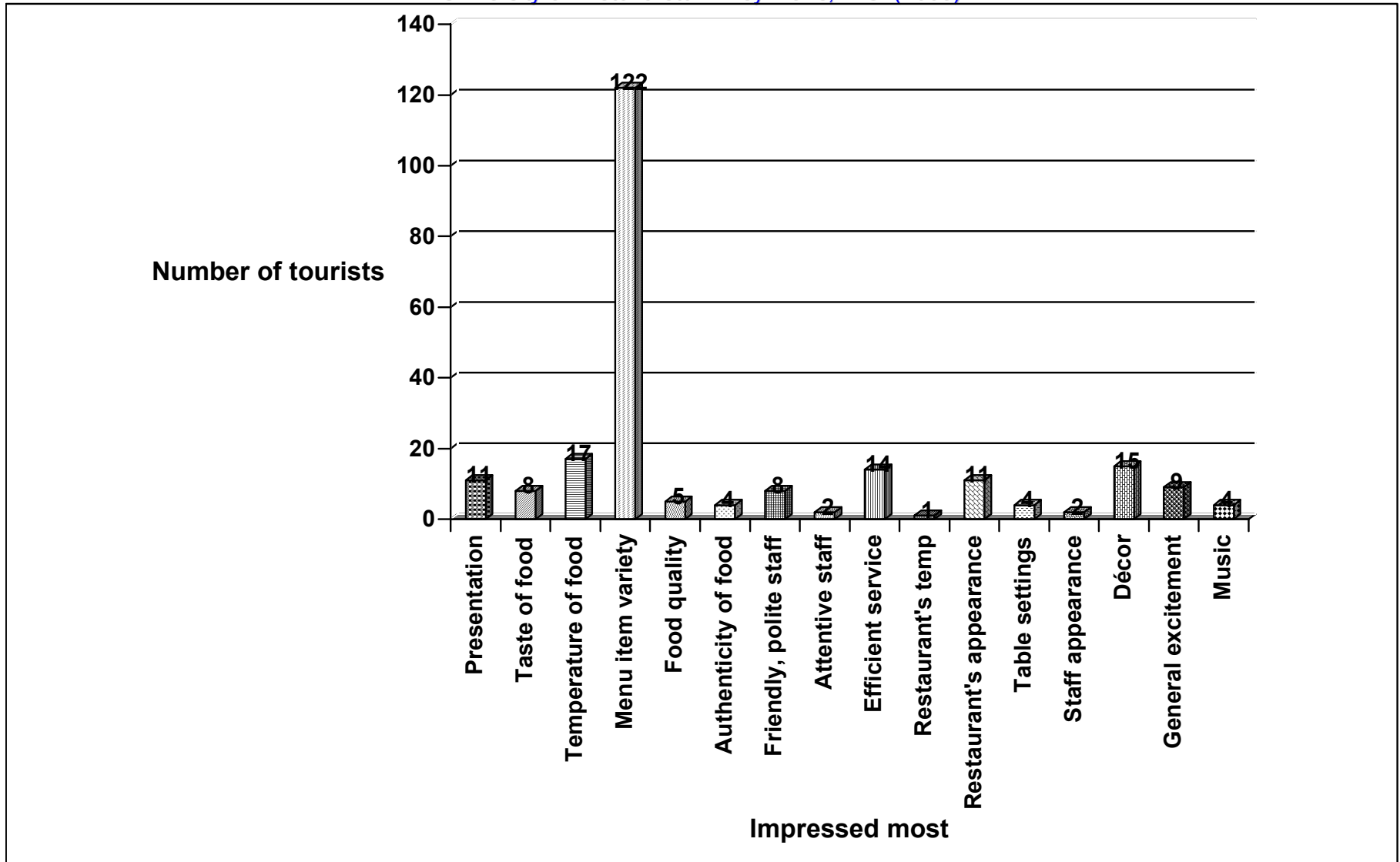


FIGURE 5.13: THE PRESENTATION OF THE ASPECTS OF MEAL EXPERIENCE THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

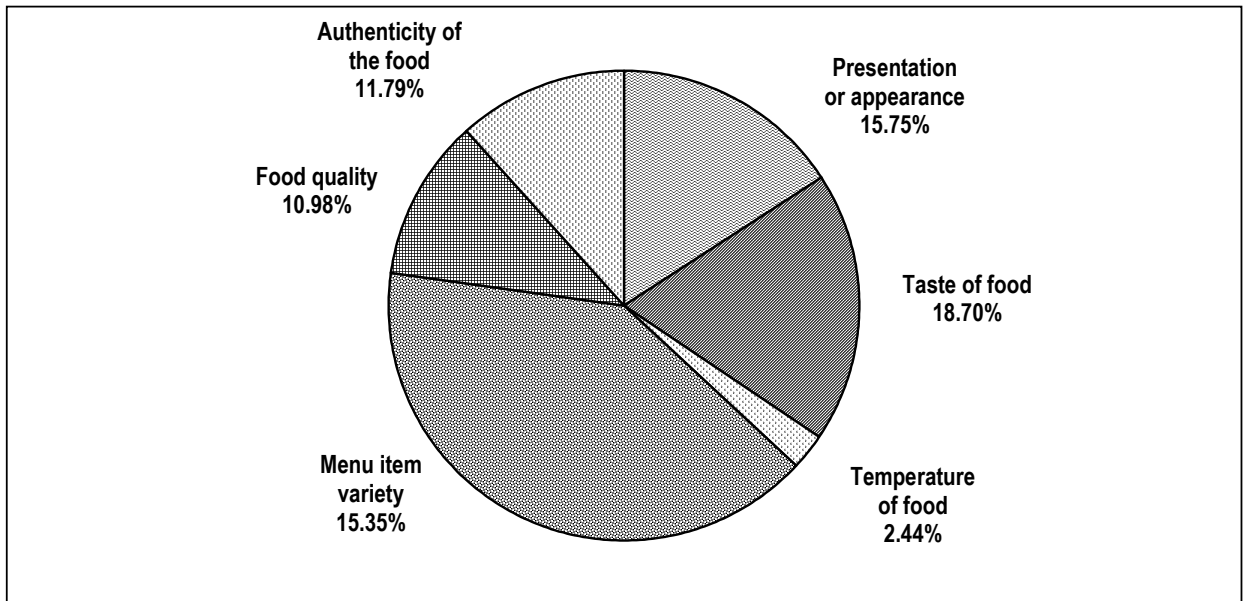


FIGURE 5.14: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE ASPECTS OF THE FOOD THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

The aspect of the **food** in the meal experience that impressed the tourists the most, was the menu item variety as 15.35% of the tourist selected this option, and were followed by taste of food with 18.70% selections (**Figure 5.14**).

The menu item variety was by far the aspect, which elicited the greatest response. The responses in respect of the remainder were all similar.

Of importance with regard to menu item variety, was that 15.35% of the leisure tourists viewed this as the most impressive aspect of the meal experience. If this is coupled with the perceptions of the authenticity of the food, the conclusion can be drawn that the composition of the menu is the single most important aspect affecting the tourists' perceptions of the meal experience at Lesedi.

Beneficial results could well arise as a result of modifications to the menu as outlined in **Section 5.4.4** above.

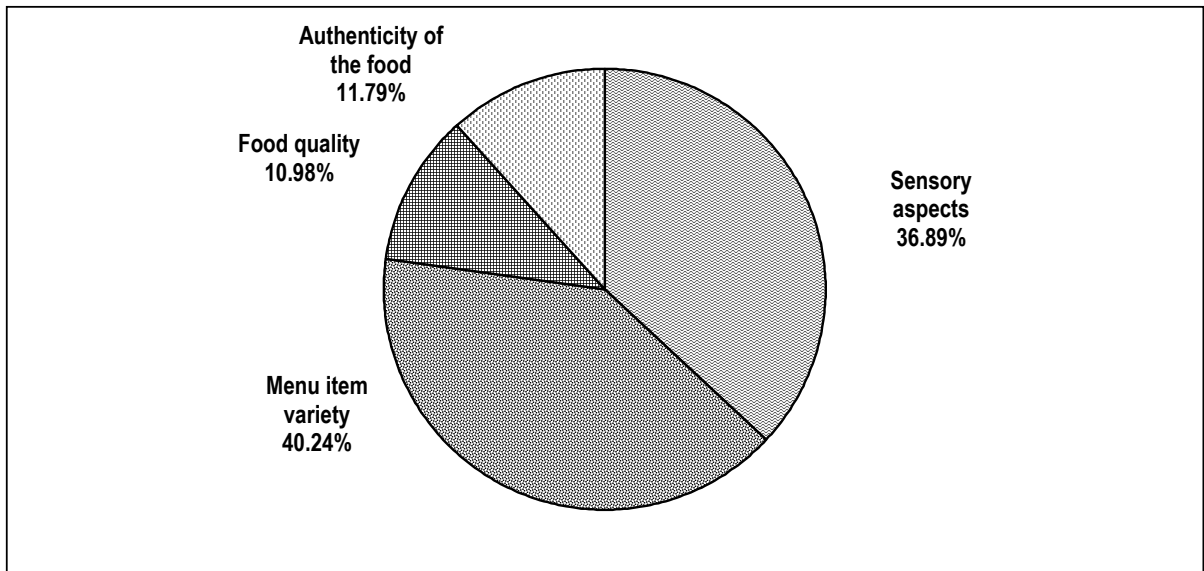


FIGURE 5.15: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE GROUPED ASPECTS OF THE FOOD THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

Results of the grouped variable service as a component of the meal experience which impressed most.

TABLE 5.3: RESULTS OF THE SERVICE COMPONENT THAT IMPRESSED MOST

ASPECTS	IMPRESSED MOST	GROUPED ASPECTS	
Friendly, polite and helpful staff	58.51%	Efficient service, attentive, friendly, polite and helpful staff	86.31%
Attentive staff	13.69%		
Efficient service	14.11%		
Staff has food and beverage knowledge	3.73%	Staff have food, beverage and culinary heritage knowledge	9.12%
Staff has culinary heritage knowledge	5.39%		
Sympathetic handling of complaints	4.56%	Sympathetic handling of complaints	4.56%
	100%		

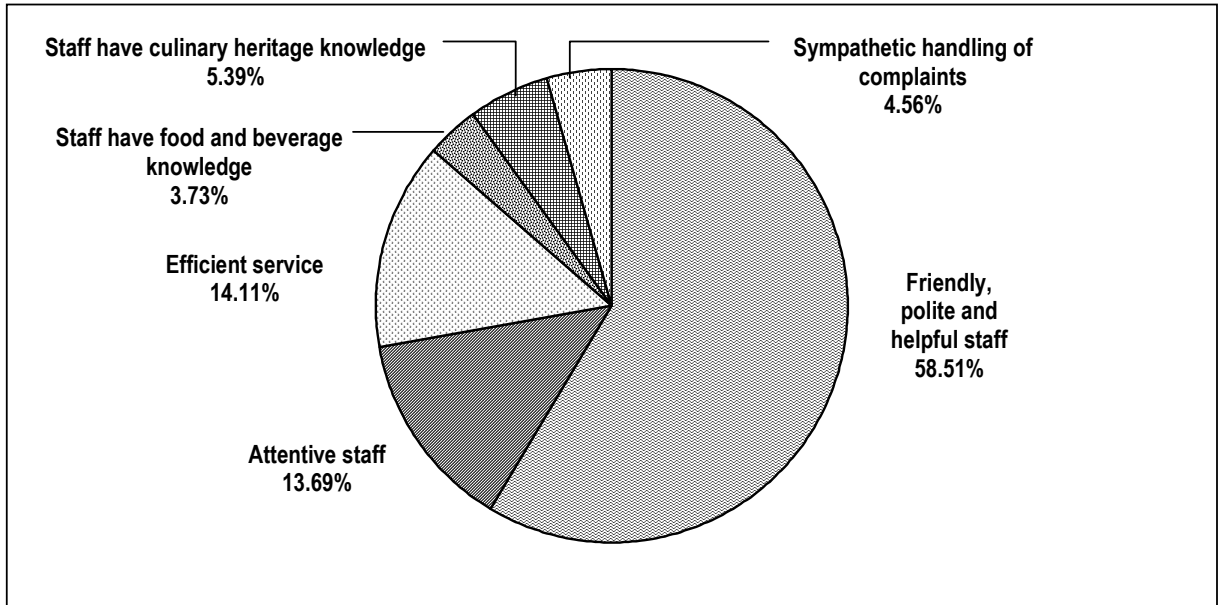


FIGURE 5.16: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE ASPECTS OF THE SERVICE THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

The aspect of the **service** in the meal experience that impressed the tourists the most was overwhelmingly the friendly, polite and helpful staff, which 58.51% of the tourists selected, followed by efficient service and attentive staff, with 14.11% and 13.69% selections respectively (**Figure 5.16**).

Efficient service was the aspect of the service which respondents addressed the most. Efficiency of service appears to be the aspect upon which the management of Lesedi should focus with the view to enhancing the perceptions of service as part of the meal experience.

Results of the grouped variable atmosphere as a component of the meal experience which impressed most.

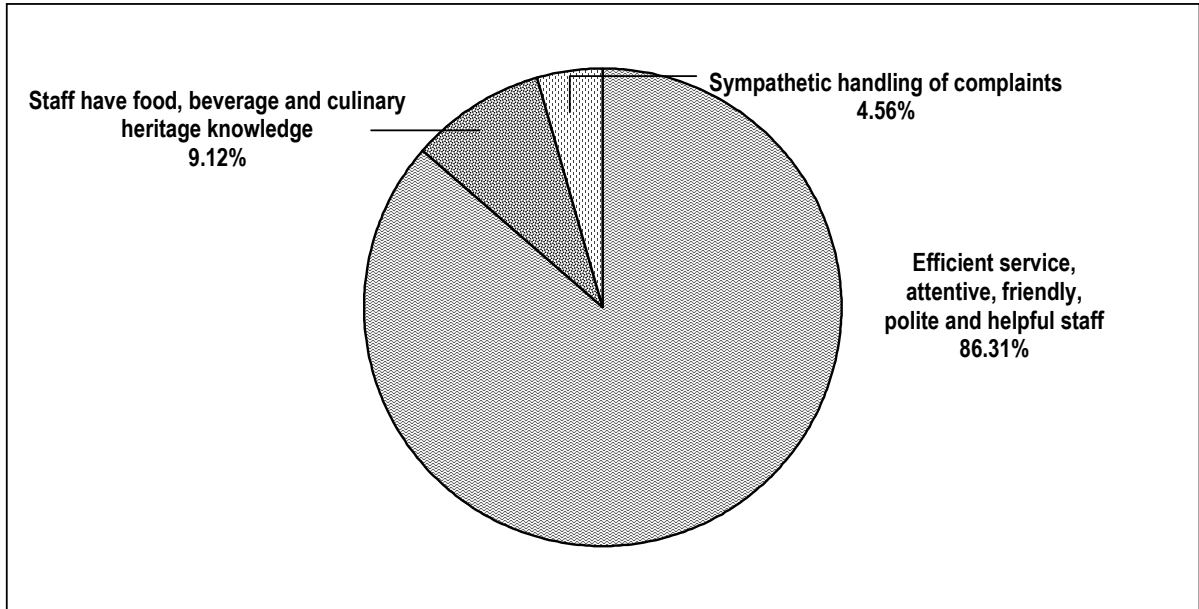


FIGURE 5.17: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE GROUPED ASPECTS OF THE SERVICE THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

TABLE 5.4: RESULTS OF THE ATMOSPHERE COMPONENT THAT IMPRESSED MOST

ASPECTS	IMPRESSED MOST	GROUPED ASPECTS	
Restaurant's temperature	2.05%	Restaurant's temperature	2.05%
Restaurant's appearance	39.75%	Restaurant's appearance, table settings and décor	79.43%
Table settings, crockery and cutlery	7.30%		
Décor	30.33%		
Staff appearance	4.10%	Staff appearance	4.10%
General excitement a place generates	14.34%	General excitement a place generates	14.34%
Music	2.05%	Music	2.05%
	100%		

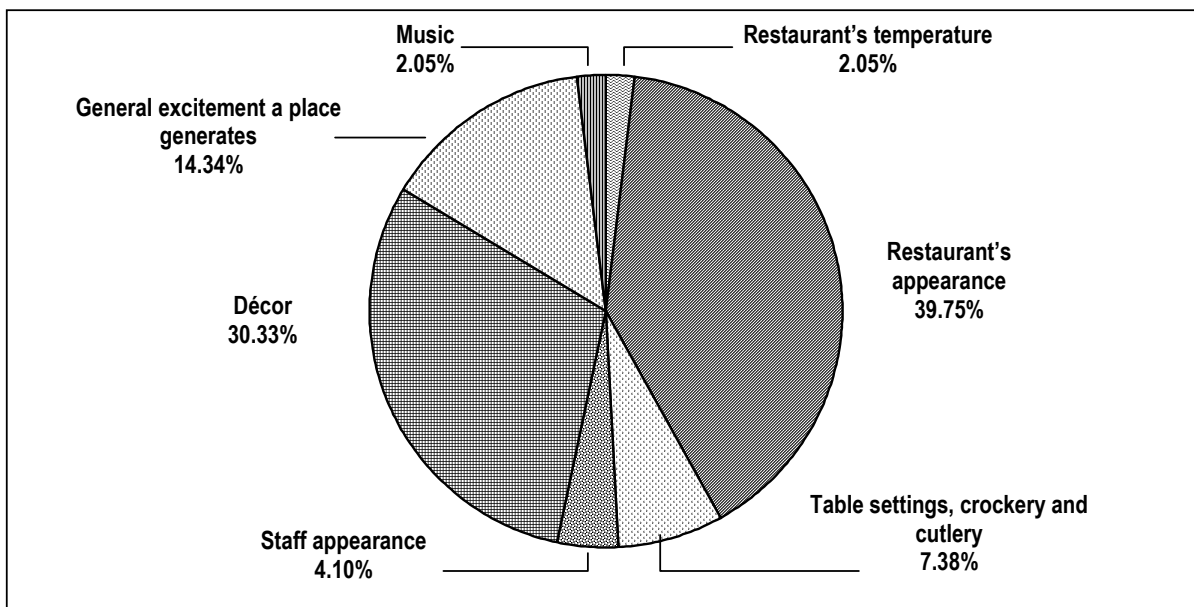


FIGURE 5.18: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE ASPECTS OF THE ATMOSPHERE THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

The aspects of the **atmosphere** in the meal experience that impressed the tourists the most were the restaurant's appearance, with 39.75% of the respondents selecting this aspect followed by the décor of the restaurant, with 30.33% of the respondents selecting this aspect (Figure 5.18).

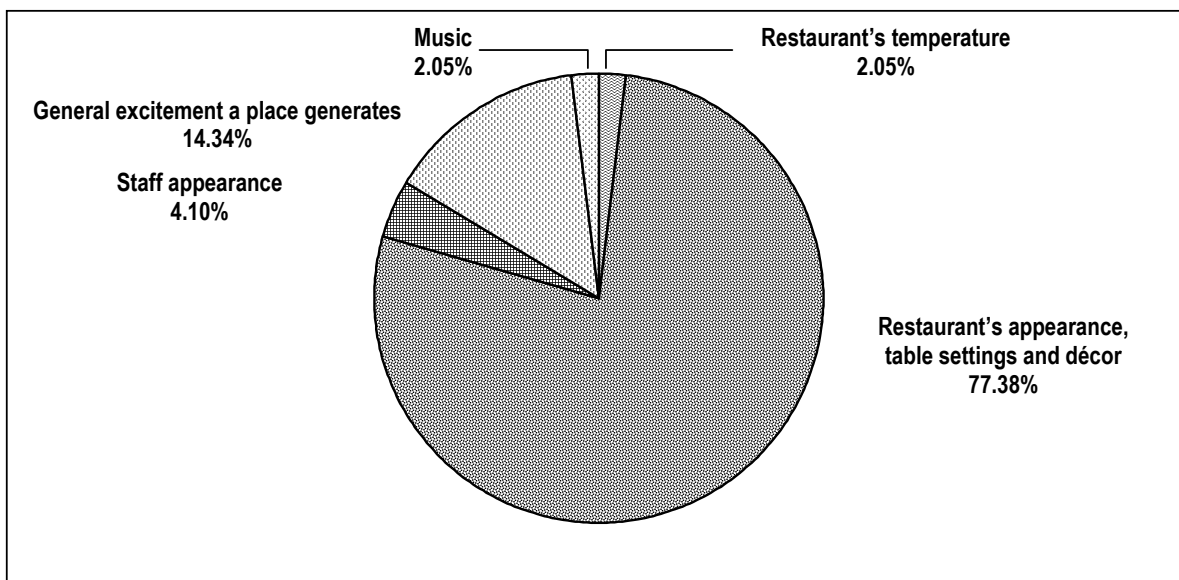


FIGURE 5.19: PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF THE GROUPED ASPECTS OF THE ATMOSPHERE THAT IMPRESSED THE TOURISTS THE MOST

5.5.5 The extent to which there is a significant relationship between food, service and atmosphere regarding the meal experience (Objective 5) (INFERENTIAL STATISTICS)

Relationships between two variables, classified in a two-way table, are detected by means of the chi-square test. The results have shown that the three main components of the meal experience (**food**, **service** and **atmosphere**) have a significant relationship with each other, therefore substantiating the literature statements that the meal experience is composed of these components.

The individual variables will be discussed according to the relationships they have with other aspects. The chi-square test statistics and the p-value of this test will be shown in tabular form for each variable. The aspects that showed a significant relationship with a particular variable (had a p-value less than 5%), are separated from those aspects that showed an inclination or tendency of a relationship, (had a p-value less than 5%, but with a warning that a certain percentage of the cells have expected counts less than 5). These aspects may not be reliable, as the chi-square test on two-way tables with warnings may not be valid, and are not included in the analyses.

The grouped variable **food**, for example, will be discussed in relation to all the aspects with which it has a significant relationship, followed by the grouped variable **service** and **atmosphere** respectively. The aspects with which **food**, **service** and **atmosphere** have an inclination or tendency of a relationship are listed in **Section 5.4** of this chapter.

5.5.5.1 A significant relationship with the grouped variable food as a component of the meal experience

Food versus Service

The results have shown that there is a significant relationship between **food** and **service**. Due to the fact that there was a significant relationship between **food** and **service**, the researcher compiled the following hypotheses.

TABLE 5.5: AN INDICATION OF A SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FOOD AND SERVICE

FOOD		
VARIABLE	CHI-SQUARE TEST STATISTIC	p-VALUE <0.05
Service	408.0078	<0.0001

The following hypotheses are tested:

H0: There is no relationship between the grouped variables of **food** and **service** regarding the consumers' expectations with the meal experience.

H1: There is a significant relationship between the grouped variables of **food** and **service** regarding the consumers' expectations with the meal experience.

Table 5.5 indicates that there is a significant relationship between the grouped variable **food** and the grouped variable **service** due to the fact that the p-value is less than 5%.

The **chi-square test statistic** for the comparison between the grouped variable food and service is **408.0078** with a **p-value <0.0001**. Therefore Ho is rejected in favour of H1. The grouped variable of **food** showed a significant relationship with the grouped variable of **service** at a 5% level of significance.

Leisure tourists who indicated that both the food and the service have not met their expectations numbered 18 (7.11%), whereas those indicating that the food and service have met their expectations were 151 (59.68%), and those indicating that both the food and service have exceeded their expectations totalled 70 (27.67%). All were above the expected values.

A similar number of respondents, who recorded that their food expectations were not met, had the same view regarding service. Those who considered their food expectations were met or exceeded, gave the same ratings to service (**Table 5.6**). This data supports the conclusion that there is a strong correlation between **food** and **service** at Lesedi with regards to the realisation of the tourists' expectations.

TABLE 5.6: RESULTS OF THE COMPARISON BETWEEN THE GROUPED VARIABLE FOOD WITH THE GROUPED VARIABLE SERVICE

SERVICE	FOOD			
	Not met	Met	Exceeded	Total
Frequency				
Percentage				
Not met	18 7.11	0 0.00	0 0.00	18 7.11
Met	4 1.58	151 59.68	3 1.19	158 62.45
Exceeded	0 0.00	7 2.77	70 27.67	77 30.43
Total	22 8.70	158 62.45	73 28.85	253 100.00

The leisure tourists indicated that the **food** and **service** had met their expectations, but it seems that the leisure tourists were more satisfied with the **service** than with the **food**.

TABLE 5.7: FOOD VERSUS ATMOSPHERE

FOOD		
VARIABLE	CHI-SQUARE TEST STATISTIC	p-VALUE <0.05
Atmosphere	59.7421	<0.0001

The statistics shows that there is a tendency of a relationship between the grouped variables **food** and **atmosphere**, as a warning attached to it and therefore the relationship may not be valid. It can not be concluded, therefore, that there is a significant relationship between the grouped variables food and atmosphere.

5.5.5.2 A significant relationship with service as a component of the meal experience

TABLE 5.8: SERVICE VERSUS ATMOSPHERE

SERVICE		
VARIABLE	CHI-SQUARE TEST STATISTIC	p-VALUE <0.05
Atmosphere	59.3897	<0.0001

Similar to the above, the statistics shows that there is a tendency of a relationship between the grouped variables **service** and **atmosphere**, but a warning is attached to it and therefore the relationship may not be valid. It can no be concluded, therefore, that there is a significant relationship between the grouped variables service and atmosphere.

From the literature in **Chapter 2, Section 2.2.2.2** it was evident that atmosphere can make the food, service and the whole dining experience seem better (Quinn, 1981). The high level of satisfaction as described in the findings above, linked to the findings of the tendency of significant relationships between **atmosphere** on the one hand and **food** and **service** on the other hand, tends to support this view at Lesedi.

In the case of Lesedi, the notion that there is a significant relationship between **food, service** and **atmosphere** regarding the meal experience is shown to be not totally correct.

5.6 The extent to which other aspects have significant relationships with the meal experience and its components (food, service and atmosphere) (Objective 6)

5.5.6.1 Significant relationships between the grouped variable food, service and atmosphere

The significant relationships with the grouped variables **food, service** and **atmosphere** in respect of the various variables are summarised in **Table 5.9**. The complete discussion of each aspect is not included, however it is available.

The assumption that there is a significant relationship between **food, service** and **atmosphere** and the objectives set-out in **Section 4.3.3**, is only partly correct. The significant relationship between **food, service** and **atmosphere** only apply to the variables “have dined in a similar establishment before” and “refer others to Lesedi” in respect of **food** and **service** and “return to Lesedi” in respect to **service** and **atmosphere**. Variables

“expected to be served authentic cultural-specific food” and “menu preferred” and “knowledge regarding the traditional cultural-specific food of other tribes or nationalities” only apply to **food**.

TABLE 5.9: TABLE INDICATING THE SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE GROUPED VARIABLES FOOD, SERVICE AND ATMOSPHERE

OTHER VARIABLES	SATISFACTION WITH		
	FOOD	SERVICE	ATMOSPHERE
Dined in Lesedi before			
Dined in a similar establishment before	X	X	
Knowledge regarding the traditional cultural-specific food of the ethnic tribes depicted at Lesedi	X		
Knowledge regarding the traditional cultural-specific food of other tribes or nationalities			
Like to consume cultural-specific food			
Expect to be served authentic cultural-specific food	X		
Menu preferred	X		
Satisfaction with the whole meal experience			
Return to this establishment		X	X
Refer to this establishment	X	X	
Food impress you the most			
Service impress you the most			
Atmosphere impress you the most			

The significant relationship between dined in similar establishments before (**Table 5.9**), coupled with the high degree of satisfaction with the meal experience (described earlier in **Section 5.4.2**) could be the result of the significant relationship regarding the stated intention of respondents to return or to refer others to Lesedi. This tends to support the views in **Figure 3.1** that satisfaction with the meal experience (food attributes, service attributes and atmosphere attributes) would lead to return or referral business.

5.6 CONCLUSION

From the interpretation of the results described above, conclusions in terms of the objectives, the evaluation of the study, suggestions for further investigation as well as suggestions for Lesedi will be discussed in **Chapter 6**.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, EVALUATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The goal of this research was, as described in **Chapter 1**, to determine to what extent there was compliance with the expectations of leisure tourists, regarding their meal experience at Lesedi Cultural Village. A quantitative research paradigm was chosen for this research study with the consumer perspective as the point of departure, in the form of the systems theory. For this research the self-administered questionnaire was the principle method of data collection. However, to gain background information a semi-structured interview schedule was used to interview the manager of Lesedi. The analysis of the data and interpretation of the results were done in accordance with the objectives set for this study, as set-out in **Chapter 1**. The data were analysed with regard to whether:

- Objective 1:** the leisure tourists' expectations regarding the meal experience and its components were met, and whether they were satisfied with the current meal experience
- Objective 2:** the leisure tourists would be willing to return or refer others to Lesedi
- Objective 3:** it is necessary to have a cultural-specific menu to satisfy the leisure tourists' expectations
- Objective 4:** certain components of the meal experience impressed the leisure tourists the most
- Objective 5:** there is a significant relationship between **food, service** and **atmosphere** regarding the meal experience
- Objective 6:** other aspects have significant relationships with the components of the meal experience (**food, service** and **atmosphere**)

Subsequently a description of the general conclusions that could be made is given below. Further research possibilities are suggested and an evaluation of the study is done. Furthermore, suggestions are made to Lesedi as to measures which can be taken to increase consumers' satisfaction with their meal experience.

In this research the value of dividing the meal experience into the three primary components of **food**, **service** and **atmosphere**, rating the consumers' expectations in respect of each of these components and then establishing consumers' satisfaction with the whole meal experience, has provided a sound picture of the suitability of the current menu at Lesedi.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS

6.2.1 Conclusions with regard to the extent to which leisure tourists' expectations regarding their meal experience and its components were met and the extent to which they were satisfied with the current meal experience

From the analysis of the results of the survey conducted at Lesedi as well as from the discussion of the results in **Chapter 5** and the interpretation thereof it is clear that the majority of the leisure tourists were of the opinion that the current meal experience and all its components provided at Lesedi met or exceeded their expectations. This however contradicts the tourists' inclination to state that they would like to consume cultural-specific food and were expecting cultural-specific food. The reason for this feature might be, as Lewis (1987), Carmen (1990) and Yuksel and Rimmington (1998) stated, that the consumers' expectations are rather hazy and imprecise because the experience is new or unfamiliar to the majority of the tourists. The largest percentage of the survey population had not dined at Lesedi or a similar establishment before.

Another possible reason might be that the leisure tourists lack relevant knowledge, since 64% of them were from outside Africa. Even those from Africa might have had limited exposure to cultural-specific food of the particular tribes depicted at Lesedi.

The statement of Oliver *et al.*, in Erasmus and Donoghue (1998) that there is no direct relationship between the consumers' level of expectations of a particular product and the level or intensity of satisfaction that they eventually experience is substantiated. The consumer's satisfaction is therefore relative and is a compromise between a consumers' expectations (in this case, expecting cultural-specific food) and his/her experience (consuming western orientated food), (Walters & Hawkins *et al.*, in Erasmus & Donoghue, 1998).

The consumers were overall satisfied with the meal experience, as is shown by more than 93% of respondents being either satisfied or very satisfied even though certain aspects of the

meal experience mainly met their expectations to a lesser extent. The literature, however, supports this occurrence as Hughes in Yuksel and Rimmngton (1998) states that studies have shown that even though experiences did not fulfil expectations, a considerable number of tourists were satisfied, such as is the case at Lesedi.

The positive responses to most of the questions in the questionnaire at Lesedi and the resultant satisfaction with the meal experience also tends to support the views of Pizam and Ellis (1999) that satisfaction with a hospitality experience or service encounter such as a restaurant meal, is a sum total of satisfaction with the individual elements or attributes of all the products and services that make up the meal.

The analysis of the questionnaire also substantiates the study by Lewis (1987) where he found that consumers obtain a service (foodservice) comprising of a multitude of service transactions (or components – **food**, **service** and **atmosphere**). Each component contributes to the meal experience and has characteristics relating to the whole set of components, which is more than the sum of the individual elements.

The occurrence that Danaher and Arweiler (1996) have found that tourists who experience an attraction such as that presented at Lesedi were more likely to rate highly their overall satisfaction with a destination may be applicable to Lesedi as well, although the results of the analysis are not conclusive in this respect.

6.2.2 Conclusions with regard to the extent to which leisure tourists would be willing to return or refer others to Lesedi

From the analysis of the questionnaire it is clear that the majority of the leisure tourists, 65.13% would be willing to return and 85.48% would be willing to refer others to Lesedi. These statistics concerning the willingness of respondents to return or refer others coupled with the high level of satisfaction with the meal experience are a useful indication of the validity of the views of Wakefield and Blodgett (1994) that there is a direct correlation between satisfaction and a consumer's unwillingness to return to an establishment. However, due to the tourists' countries of origin, the majority of the tourists will be unlikely to return even though they indicated that they would be willing to do so. The most likely positive outcome is that they will refer others to Lesedi. This information will also be useful to tour operators to promote Lesedi and similar facilities.

6.2.3 Conclusions with regard to the extent to which it is necessary to have a cultural-specific menu, to satisfy leisure tourists' expectations

From the analysis of the questionnaire, the indications are that it is not necessary for Lesedi to have a cultural-specific menu to satisfy the leisure tourists as they prefer the current menu that is provided at Lesedi. This however is a contradiction of the view of Reynolds in Sparks *et al.*, (2001). He is of the opinion that local (cultural-specific) cuisine should be offered by restaurants in a tourist destination. This study has shown that the contrary can be true.

Reuland *et al.*, (1985) state that by providing western meals (or food that is similar to the tourists' own) for tourists from other cultures, an artificial meal experience can be developed. This however does not seem to be the case at Lesedi where they provide western-oriented food to the consumers and the customers are overwhelmingly satisfied. An explanation for this might be that the leisure tourists might assume that the food provided at Lesedi is authentic cultural-specific to the tribes depicted at Lesedi due to a lack of knowledge of actual cultural-specific foods of the tribes. The culinary heritage can also be depicted more truthfully in the tour prior to the meal.

The research therefore indicates that it is not necessary for an establishment such as Lesedi to provide cultural specific food in order to satisfy their customers. This could be a subject for further investigation in order to determine if it is only applicable to Lesedi or to other similar establishments.

6.2.4 Conclusions with regard to the extent that there was a significant relationship between food, service and atmosphere

From the discussion of the results and the interpretation it is clear that a significant relationship exists between **food** and **service**. However, there is an inclination or tendency of a relationship between **food** and **atmosphere** and between **service** and **atmosphere**. From the literature, however, it was indicated that atmosphere can make the food, service and the whole dining experience seem better, also that the memory of the atmosphere may be retained long after the meal is finished (Quinn, 1981).

The high level of satisfaction as described in the findings, linked to the findings of the tendency of a relationship between **atmosphere** on the one hand and **food** and **service** on the other hand, tends to support this view at Lesedi, but the findings are not conclusive. The analysis was also not able to verify these views, as the survey was conducted too soon after

completion of the meal experience. A follow up survey some months after completion of a meal experience will be required to determine the applicability of Quinn's views to Lesedi.

6.2.5 Conclusions with regard to the extent to which other aspects have significant relationships with the components of the meal experience (food, service and atmosphere)

While the emphasis of this research has been upon establishing the influence of the components of **food, service** and **atmosphere** on leisure tourists' satisfaction of the meal experience at Lesedi, other aspects, the most common of which are listed below have been shown to have significant relationships with the components as well.

The most common aspects are:

- dined at a similar establishment before
- knowledge of traditional cultural-specific food of the tribes depicted at Lesedi
- expect authentic cultural-specific food
- menu preferred
- return or refer others to Lesedi

Table 5.9 on page104 summarises the significant relationships between each aspect on the one hand and **food, service** and **atmosphere** on the other hand.

The table shows that there are nine significant relationships, of which five relate to food, three to service and one to atmosphere.

All the aspects also relate to the internal characteristics of the respondents.

However, as the numbers of respondents who had previous experience of Lesedi and establishments such as Lesedi and those who had no previous experience were virtually equal, no firm conclusion could be drawn regarding the views in the literature concerning internal or consumer characteristics.

What appears to be important, however, is that irrespective of whether or not respondents had prior experience, they were generally well satisfied with the meal experience.

These relationships support the literature review in **Chapter 2**, which sets out the importance of past experiences on the creation of expectations as well as the attitudes which a favourable experience will have on a consumers' inclination to return to an establishment or to refer others.

6.3 EVALUATIONS

6.3.1 Introduction

It is important for the researcher to evaluate the research truthfully and objectively at the end of the investigation. The evaluation of this investigation is done under the following points:

- the reliability of the study
- evaluation of the method of data collection and its usefulness to other researchers
- the achievement of the objectives set out for this research study
- the contribution to the theory of hospitality and tourism

6.3.2 Reliability of the study

An overview of the reliability and validity of the study has already been given in **Chapter 4**. The researcher is aware that the reliability of an empirical study can produce difficulties with replication as the results may differ if the research were repeated at a later date with a different sample of respondents. Babbie and Mouton (2001:122) emphasise that these problems can be overcome in various ways. One of these ways, which was applicable to this research, was by using established measures. The study of Kivela *et al.*, (1999), with particular reference to the questionnaire and conceptual model, was used as a guide for this study. The complete literature study that preceded the study has also increased the worthiness of the study. The reliability of the study is further enhanced by the use of the theoretical perspectives from the planning stages of the study.

Various methods of data collection (the self-administered questionnaires, the structured interview schedule and observations) were used which complemented each other and

consequently served as cross validation to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the study (Mouton, 1996:156).

By using a cover letter to accentuate the purpose of the study, the researcher's association with the University of Pretoria and the guarantee that the information is confidential and anonymous, increased the reliability as well (Mouton, 1996:149; 157). It became apparent that the respondents were more willing to participate and give a true reflection of their experience when they understood that the researcher was independent of the establishment than they would have been if the researcher was an employee of Lesedi. The fact that the respondents who participated did so of their own free will also increased the reliability of the responses.

As the questionnaires were distributed directly after completion of the meal, the sources of error that could take place with regard to the length of time that elapsed since the occurrence of the event was eliminated which also increased the reliability of the information the respondents supplied (Mouton, 1996:153).

6.3.3 Evaluations of the method of data collections and its usefulness to other researchers

It is necessary that the researcher gives an honest evaluation regarding the research strategies that were followed in this study, as well as the success of the methods of data collection that were used.

An exploratory-descriptive research strategy was followed in this study, to explicate central concepts and constructs, to determine whether there are interesting patterns or relationships in the data, as well as to map new information as the subject area of this research (hospitality and tourism in particular consumers' meal experience) is relatively new and are subject to constant change (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:79; Mouton, 1996:103; Veal, 1997:3). In consideration of the consumer perspective in particular the systems theory, two types of data collection techniques were used namely a self-administered questionnaire and a structured interview schedule. By using these methods background information regarding Lesedi was obtained as well as to what extent there was compliance with the expectations of leisure tourists, regarding their meal experience at Lesedi Cultural Village.

Since the respondents were mainly part of tour groups with a set itinerary they therefore had limited time, hence along with the relatively large sample size, a set questionnaire was

considered the best technique to collect data as it delivers reliable results. The data was relatively easy and quick to obtain as well as easy to process, thereby reducing the risk of error. The questionnaire also provided a way in which the data was collected under similar circumstances for all the respondents.

As stated before, the questionnaire was adapted from the study of Kivela *et al.*, (1999). The questionnaire that the researcher developed provided the information that was sought to meet the objectives of this study, therefore it can be concluded that this questionnaire was the correct method of data collection for this type of research study, and can be recommended for further research studies similar in the field of hospitality and tourism.

6.3.4 The achievement of the objectives set out for this research study

The ultimate question is whether the researcher has met the objectives that were set for this research. From **Chapter 1** it is clear that the research statement of this particular study was to determine and describe to what extent the expectations of the leisure tourists regarding the meal experience at Lesedi were met. In order to meet the broad research statement set for this study, certain objectives were stipulated in order to gain insight into the consumers' perception of the current meal experience at Lesedi.

From the results it is clear that a large amount of information was gathered on the broad domain in which the study was concerned, which enabled the researcher to describe the leisure tourists' perception of the current meal experience at Lesedi. It provided the means for the researcher to discuss and interpret the results with regard to the various objectives. Subsequently conclusions could be drawn regarding each component of the meal experience and hence recommendations or suggestions could be made to the management of Lesedi regarding each component.

From the discussion and interpretation of the results as well as the conclusions reached, it is clear that the objectives set out in **Chapter 1** for this research have been met. The objectives of the study to establish the extent to which expectations of visitors to Lesedi had been met as well as whether they were satisfied with the current meal experience, were met. The objectives, which were formulated as a result of the literature study (significant relationships between **food**, **service** and **atmosphere**), were found to be only partly applicable in the case of Lesedi.

6.3.5 Contributions to the theory of hospitality and tourism

The value of research is enhanced if it can contribute to the theory of the research area. With regard to this study, the researcher is of the opinion that a considerable contribution has been made concerning:

- the value of the consumer perspective, in particular the systems theory, in the study of hospitality and tourism especially in studies regarding consumers' satisfaction with for example their meal experience
- the role of cultural specific menus in the leisure tourists' perception of their meal experience.

6.3.5.1 The consumer perspective, in particular the systems theory, in the study of hospitality and tourism especially in studies regarding the consumers' satisfaction.

From the results of this research as well as the conclusions that were drawn, it is clear that the consumer perspective in particular the systems theory, with its fundamental core assumptions, characteristics and different components, can be used meaningfully in studying the extent to which consumers' expectations have been met and ultimately consumer satisfaction achieved.

Just as the systems theory states, it was clear in this study that a system is a collection of interrelated parts or subsystems unified by design to execute a certain function (Spears, 1995:36), in this case to provide a meal experience to the consumers (leisure tourists) that satisfied their expectations. It implies that the whole experience is not exclusively reliant on one factor, but various parts influence one another to ultimately achieve the sole objective - satisfaction.

This however is applicable to virtually all aspects of the hospitality and tourism industry or service industry for that matter, as the consumers of a service, product or experience come with certain preconceived expectations which they compiled from demographic factors, knowledge and previous experiences. These expectations will determine how the consumers perceive the product, service or experience as it is used as a basis for evaluation, resulting either in consumer satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the product, service or experience. These perceptions of the product, service or experience will be stored in the consumers' memory for subsequent product, service or experience evaluations.

The leisure tourists' satisfaction of their meal experience hence does not only rely on the menu or the food that they served, but on other factors such as service and atmosphere as well. Therefore, the systems theory provides a schematic overview of the whole aspect under investigation – from the food offered to the way it is served, the surroundings in which it is consumed as well as the ultimate outcome of satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

These aspects however influence one another. For instance, it does not matter how relaxing or impressionable the atmosphere of the establishment is, if the service or food is poor the consumers' meal experience will be dissatisfactory. However, if the food and atmosphere are mediocre and the service is excellent the consumers will be satisfied.

The study showed that the conceptual model adapted from Kivela *et al.*, (1999) and based upon the consumer perspective, in particular, the systems theory is applicable to research in the hospitality and tourism industry, such as an establishment like Lesedi.

The results of the survey revealed that although the expectations of the leisure tourists to Lesedi were met to a high degree and that satisfaction levels were also high, there is scope for improvement. Those aspects, which would yield the most beneficial results, were identified and included as suggestions to the management at Lesedi.

Where appropriate, reference is made to the correlation between the findings of the survey and relevant part of the literature study.

6.3.5.2 The role of cultural specific menu's in the leisure tourists perception of their meal experience

In the case of Lesedi it is apparent that a cultural-specific menu is not essential to the satisfaction of leisure tourists' meal experience. However, the addition of some cultural-specific food items to the menu might enhance satisfaction of the tourists with the meal experience.

6.4 FURTHER RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

Arising from the results of the survey, certain aspects, which could justify further research, were highlighted. These are:

- the modification of the menu at Lesedi, rather than its total revision
- the significant relationships between the grouped variables **food**, **service** and **atmosphere** and other variables of
 - country of origin of the tourists
 - dined at Lesedi before
 - dined at similar establishments before
 - knowledge of traditional cultural-specific food of the tribes depicted at Lesedi
 - knowledge of the traditional cultural-specific food of other tribes or nationalities
 - staff have food and beverage knowledge

6.4.1 Suggestions regarding the components of the meal experience (food, service and atmosphere)

In **Chapter 6, section 6.5** suggestions are made to the manager of Lesedi to include some authentic cultural menu items and vegetarian dishes to the current menu. This process could form the subject of further investigation, which can include the selection of new dishes, trial runs, evaluation, adjustments and implementation of the new dishes.

In order to improve the efficiency of service, the existing level of service including knowledge of food and beverage and culinary heritage could be established. The current training programs and continuity of staff could be evaluated with a view to possible improvement in training as well as awareness of the importance of service.

6.4.2 Suggestions regarding the significant relationships with variables other than the components of the meal experience

As a by-product of this study the results of the questionnaire survey showed that there are significant relationships between variables other than those of the components of the meal experience (**food**, **service** and **atmosphere**).

The variables are:

- Country of origin of the tourists

- Dined at Lesedi before
- Dined at a similar establishment before
- Knowledge of traditional cultural-specific food of the tribes depicted at Lesedi
- Knowledge of the traditional cultural-specific food of other tribes or nationalities
- Staff have food and beverage knowledge

Establishing the importance of the relationships between these variables falls outside the scope of this study, but it could be beneficial to investigate their impacts upon operations of food establishments such as at Lesedi.

6.5 SUGGESTIONS FOR LESEDI

Arising from the findings based on the literature study, the conceptual model and the questionnaire survey, the following suggestions are made for improvements at Lesedi regarding the components of the meal experience (food, service and atmosphere).

6.5.1 Food

- Consideration should be given by the management of Lesedi to adjust the current menu to include some authentic cultural-specific menu items. From the responses of the leisure tourists to the unsolicited questions (**Appendix D**), there is an indication that greater provision should be made for vegetarian dishes.
- To identify those aspects which can be viewed by tourists as adversely affecting food quality and rectifying those aspects.

From the responses to the open questions in **Appendix E**, the issues, which are most likely to require attention, are the quality of the ingredients and the manner in which the food is prepared.

6.5.2 Service

Consideration should be given to improving the efficiency of the staffs' service. From the response of the manager of Lesedi in **Appendix E** there is a significant number of trainees amongst the waiters. The manner in which the trainee staff and the permanent waiters interact with the leisure tourists could be reviewed to ensure that at all times the service is efficient and that one or more of the waiting staff has sound knowledge of the food and beverage as well as culinary heritage, both of which were viewed by a significant number of respondents as the least impressive aspect of the service (**Figure 5.36**).

6.5.3 Atmosphere

The responses to atmosphere were generally positive. The management of Lesedi should give attention to the nature but, more particularly, to the volume of the music supplied.

While not substantiated by the findings, the researcher observed while conducting the survey and taking into account the importance of temperature in an establishment such as Lesedi, as set out in the literature study (**Chapter 2, section 2.2.3**), the installation of fans or air conditioning would be beneficial in maintaining a comfortable ambient environment.

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