

## **Summary of main results from Visitor Survey Program 2000-2001, Kakadu National Park**

### **Methodology**

A 12 months visitor survey commenced in September 2000. Four quarterly surveys were completed, representing Shoulder 1 (i.e. September, October, and November), Off-peak (i.e. December, January, and February), Shoulder 2 (i.e. March, April and May) and Peak season (i.e. June, July and August). In addition the annual report provides the combined results for the whole year of the survey.

The park-wide survey forms were distributed by KNP staff to vehicles passing through the two entry stations and on request to visitors at the Bowali Visitor Centre. The site-specific survey forms were provided to the survey team for subsequent distribution at individual sites including:

$\frac{3}{4}$ Bowali Visitor Centre.	$\frac{3}{4}$ Gunlom.
$\frac{3}{4}$ Nourlangie Rock.	$\frac{3}{4}$ Koolpin Gorge.
$\frac{3}{4}$ Ubirr.	$\frac{3}{4}$ West Alligator Head.
$\frac{3}{4}$ East Alligator Boat Ramp.	$\frac{3}{4}$ Four Mile Hole.
$\frac{3}{4}$ South Alligator Boat Ramp.	$\frac{3}{4}$ Maguk.
$\frac{3}{4}$ Yellow Water.	$\frac{3}{4}$ Jim Jim/Twin Falls.

Visitors were provided with a number of options for returning completed surveys, including:

- Drop-off at Bowali Visitor Centre (near the completion of their visit).
- Drop-off at one of the entry stations (at the completion of their visit).
- Drop-off at one of the campgrounds or hotels/motels in the Park (near the completion of their visit).

The survey staff attended each of the prescribed sites for a minimum of two days during the season subject to obtaining the required minimum number of completed questionnaires. Where the minimum number of representative surveys was not obtained during this two-day period, survey staff extended their attendance for at least an extra day, or returned to the site on a later day to satisfy the respective minimum response rates for each site. Survey staff also attended each of the prescribed sites for at least one weekend day during each season.

During the 12 months 3,410 surveys were completed, representing 8,167 visitors to the Park.

### **Main results:**

#### **1. Origin of respondents**

##### Park-wide survey:

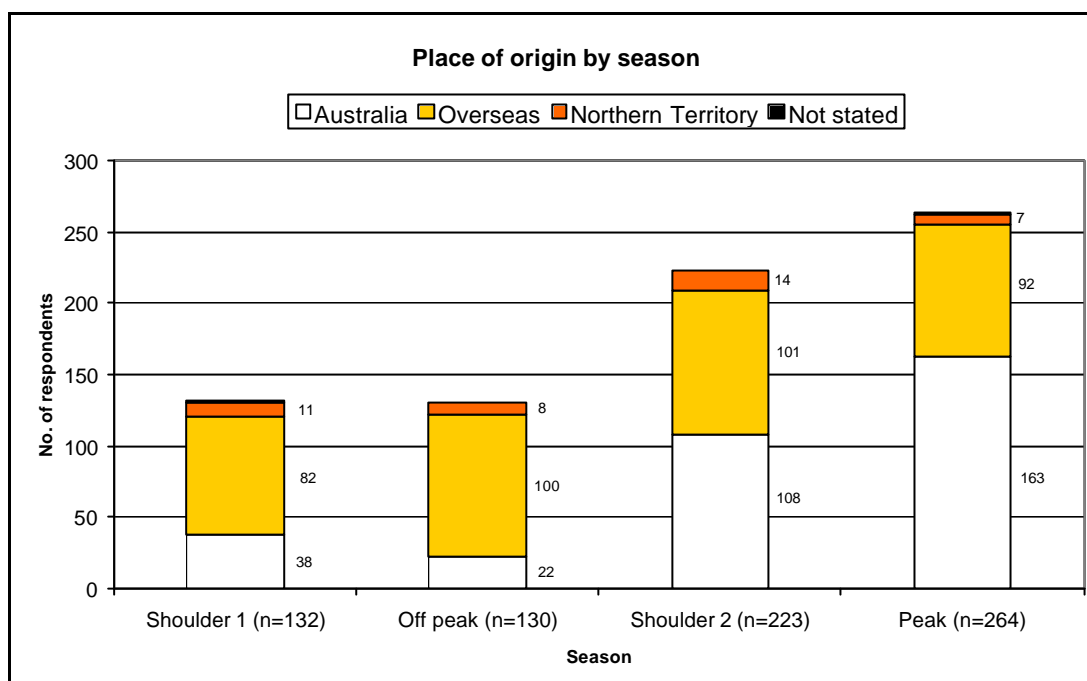
Overseas	51%
Australia	49%
NT	5% (included in Australian percentage)

However, this pattern was not constant over the whole year. Overseas visitors comprised:

- 63% of the total in Shoulder 1 (September, October, November 2000).
- 77% of the total in Off-peak (December 2000, and January and February 2001).
- 45% of the total in Shoulder 2 (March, April and May 2001).
- 35% of the total in Peak (June, July and August 2001).

This observed pattern was the result of two factors:

- The overall trend in seasonal visitation to the NT whereby interstate visitor numbers reach their maximum in the Peak season (school holidays, southern winter, pleasant climate in the Top End are some reasons for this).
- International visitors reach their maximum in the Shoulder 1 and Off-peak seasons, which correspond to the northern winter.



### Site-specific surveys

Overseas            52%  
 Australia          48%  
 NT                    19% (included in Australian percentage)

## **2. Travel mode**

### Park-wide survey

Commercial tours:    31%  
 Independent travellers: 69%

Guided tours:        31%,    with coach tours 22% and 4WD tours 9%;  
 Private vehicles:    36%,    with private 4WD 19% and private 2WD 17%;  
 Rental vehicles:    28%,    with 2WD 21% and 4WD 7%.  
 Other:                5%,    including bus, taxi, bicycle and light aircraft

This pattern was not constant over the whole year. For example, guided tours represented a larger percentage of visitors during the Off-peak season (65%) than during the Peak season (16%).

Similarly, private vehicles represented a smaller percentage of visitors during the Off-peak season (16%) than during the Peak season (52%).

### Site-specific survey

Commercial tours 40%  
 Independent travellers 60%

Guided tours: 42%, with coach tours 18%, 4WD tours 20% and 2WD 4%;  
 Private vehicles: 37%, with private 4WD 24% and private 2WD 13%;  
 Rental vehicles: 18%, with 2WD 8% and 4WD 10%.  
 Other: 3%, including bus, taxi, bicycle and light aircraft

Commercial tours comprising:

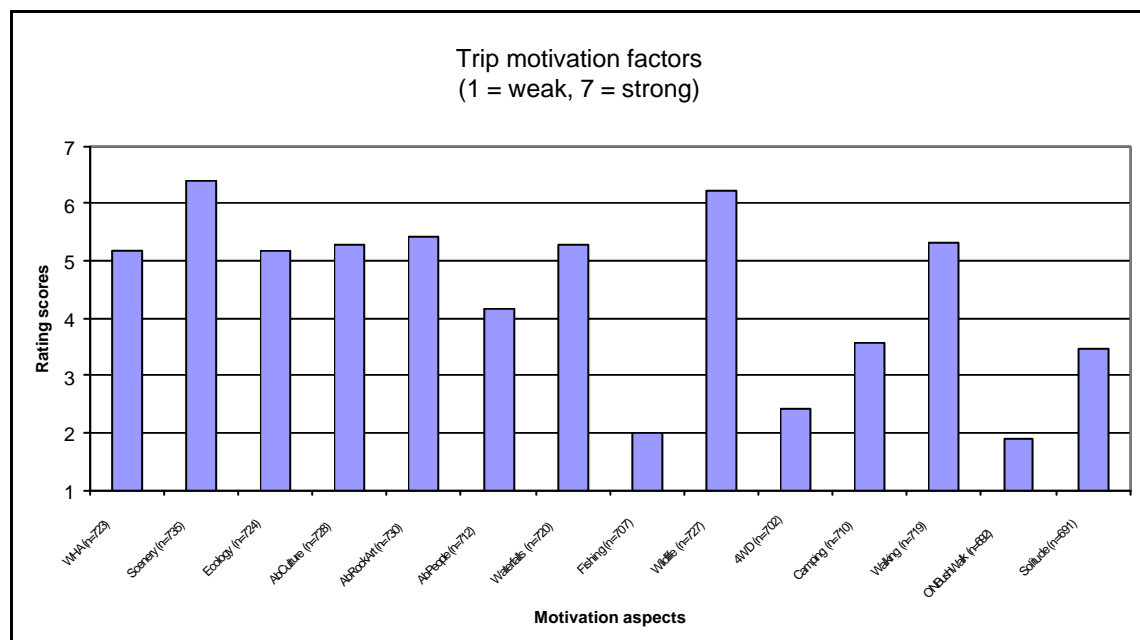
- 55% of respondents in Shoulder 1.
- 37% of respondents in Off-peak.
- 41% of respondents in Shoulder 2.
- 30% of respondents in Peak.

### 3. Prior visits (park-wide survey)

First trip 86%  
 Once before 8%  
 2 – 6 times 5%  
 more than 6 times 2%

This pattern was relatively constant during each of the seasons, with the proportion of first time visitors to the Park ranging between 83 – 89%.

### 4. Trip motivation (park-wide survey)



Most of the abovementioned factors partly overlap with other factors. Consequently, it is possible to summarise these factors and indicate that visitors generally came to KNP because of:

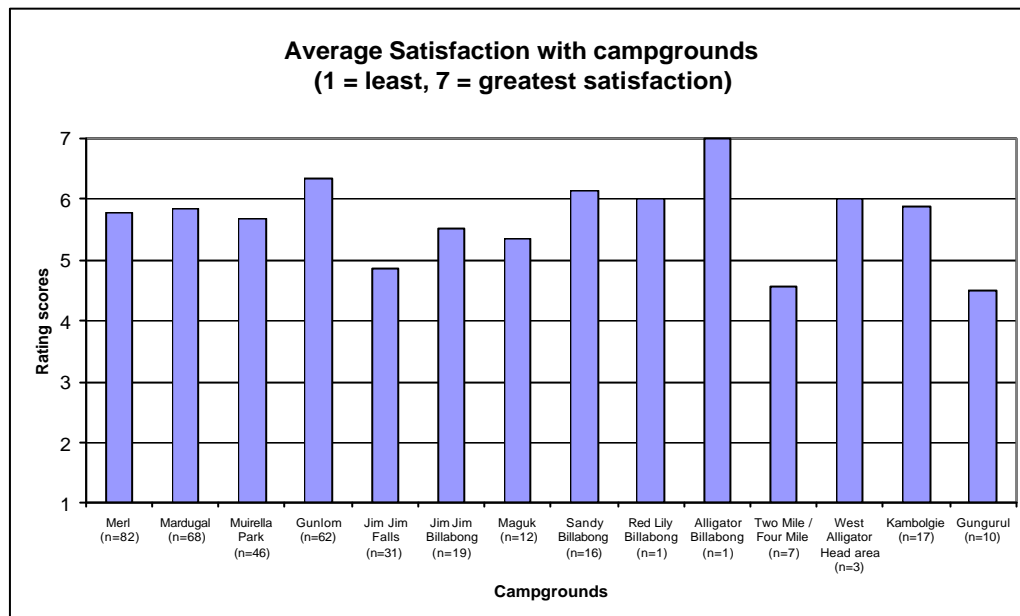
- A desire to experience nature and scenery.
- A desire to learn about Aboriginal culture.

Allowing for differences in detailed definitions these factors equate to the top motivators for visitors to the NT as a whole as indicated in NTTC statistics (NTTC, 2001).

**5. Length of Stay** (park-wide survey)

The average length of stay was 2.6 nights

**6. Satisfaction with campgrounds** (park-wide survey)



**7. Activities not undertaken** (park-wide survey)

The majority of comments to this question related to:

- An inability to visit certain parts of the Park due to road closures or 4WD restrictions (particularly in terms of Jim Jim Falls and Twin Falls).
- An inability to meet or interact with Aboriginal Rangers or Guides.

**8. Activities undertaken** (park-wide survey)

The main activities undertaken by visitors who completed the Park-wide survey were:

- Photography (85% of respondents).
- Walking (71% of respondents).
- Wildlife viewing (63% of respondents).
- Yellow Water Boat Cruise (63% of respondents).
- Camping (54% of respondents).
- Bird watching (53% of respondents).
- Swimming (49% of respondents).
- Picnicking (43% of respondents).

This pattern was relatively similar during each of the seasons.

**9. Satisfaction with aspects of Kakadu** (park-wide survey)

(1-7 with 7 the highest satisfaction)

Campground facilities	5.8
Walks	5.6
Boating / fishing	5.3
Time of year	5.4

A number of visitors also provided written comments to this question. About half of these comments were favourable and supportive of the Park. The other half of the comments made references to:

- The hot and/or wet climatic conditions during the particular season the visitor was at the Park. These comments often acknowledged that these issues were beyond anyone's control.
- The abundance of flies and mosquitos. These comments also often acknowledged that these issues were beyond anyone's control.
- Lack of sufficient toilet facilities and/or shade at some locations.
- An inability to visit certain sites due to road closures or 4WD restrictions.
- An inability to meet or interact with Aboriginal Rangers or Guides.
- The inconsiderate (usually noisy) nature of some visitors at some campsites.
- The expensive nature of some items such as food, accommodation and Park entry fees.

#### **10. Ranger Guided Activities (park-wide survey)**

Satisfaction with the amount of information, quality of the activity, duration of activity and ease of understanding were all high (above 6 out of 7) although some aspects of the Walk at Ubirr scored slightly less than 6. Generally visitors were well satisfied with the different aspects of such Ranger guided activities.

A number of visitors provided comments to this question. Most of these comments were positive, particularly with respect to the involvement of Aboriginal Rangers at Nourlangie, Ubirr and East Alligator Boat Ramp.

#### **11. Expectation regarding visitor numbers**

Park-wide survey

Respondents' expectations regarding the number of visitors at KNP. Views were distributed between visitors finding:

- A lot less people than expected (23%).
- A little less people than expected (24%).
- About as many people as expected (28%).
- A little more than expected (9%).
- A lot more than expected (4%).
- Did not have any expectations (9%).

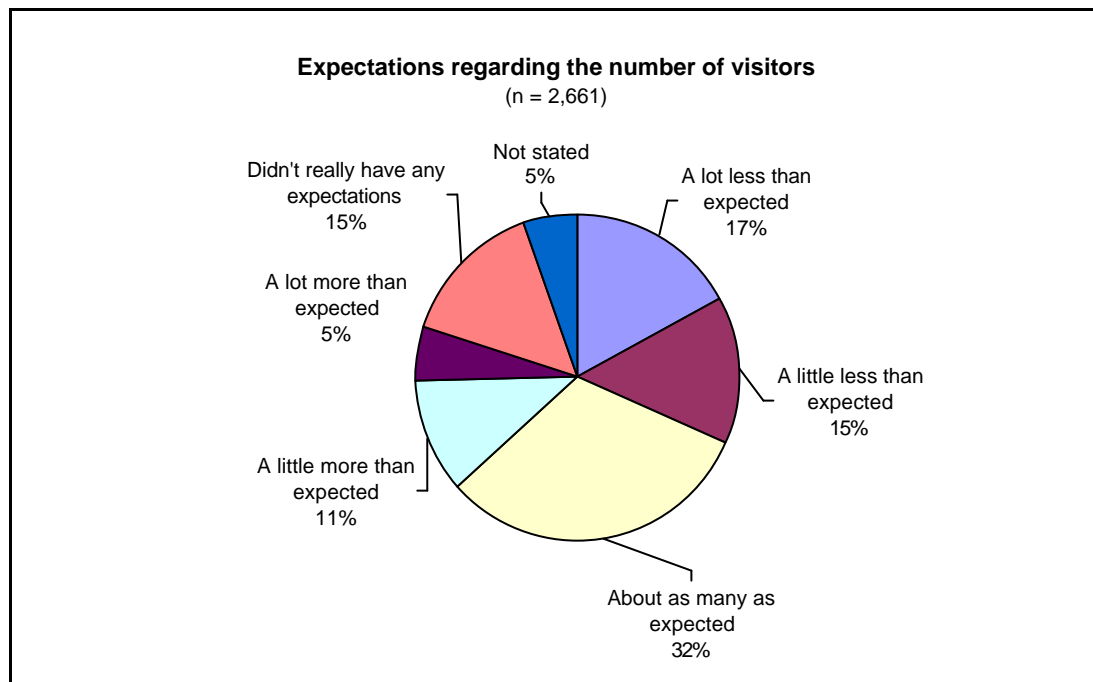
This suggests that the majority of respondents (75%) find visitor numbers to be less than or about as many as they were expecting.

There was some (relatively minor), seasonal variation around the abovementioned annual average, such that the corresponding numbers were:

- 76% for Shoulder 1.
- 82% for Off-peak.
- 78% for Shoulder 2.
- 68% for Peak.

### Site-specific survey

This figure shows site-specific survey respondents' expectations regarding the number of visitors they encountered at the site. The most common survey response (32%) was that respondents regarded visitor numbers to be about what they expected. Some respondents thought visitor numbers were a little less (15%) or a lot less (17%) than they expected. Collectively 16% of respondents indicated there were more visitors than they expected, with 11% indicating there was a little more and 5% a lot more than they expected. 15% of respondents indicated they had no preconceived expectations with respect to visitor numbers, and 5% did not answer the question.



There was some seasonal fluctuation in the abovementioned general pattern. Respondents who thought that numbers were either a little more or a lot more than expected comprised:

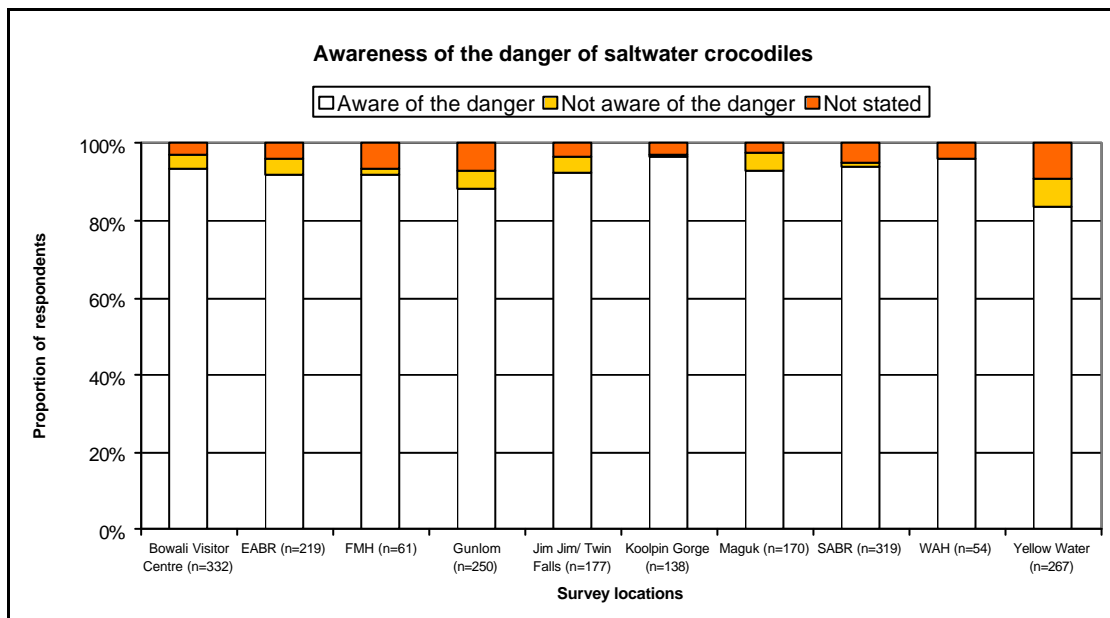
- 13% of the total in Shoulder 1.
- 6% of the total in Off-peak.
- 17% of the total in Shoulder 2.
- 24% of the total in Peak.

**12. Feelings about the number of visitors (site-specific survey)**



**13. Awareness of crocodile danger (site-specific surveys)**

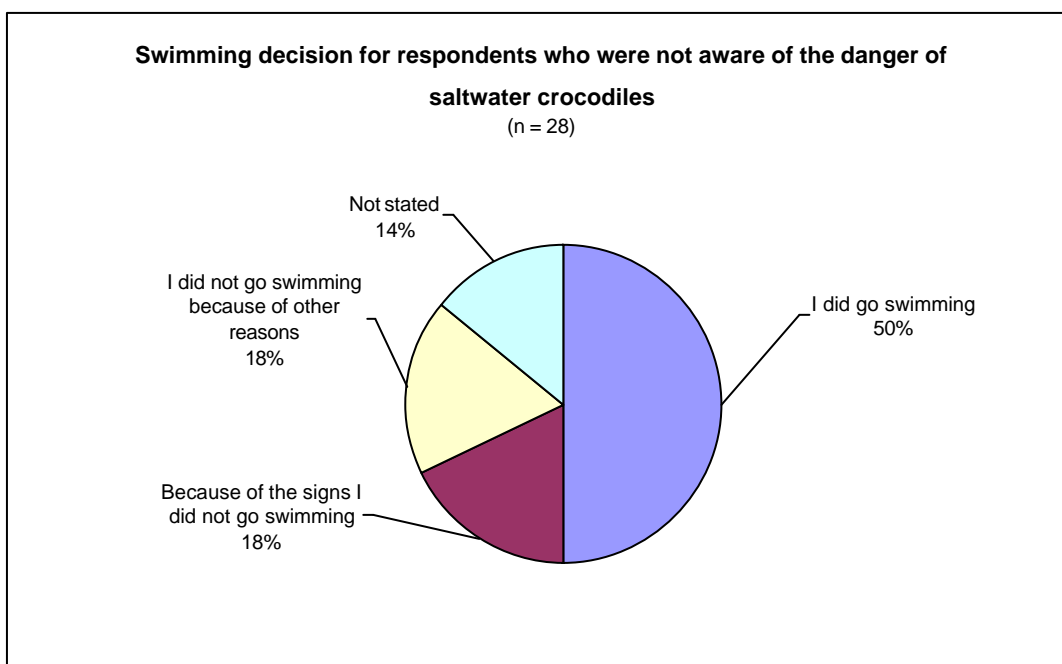
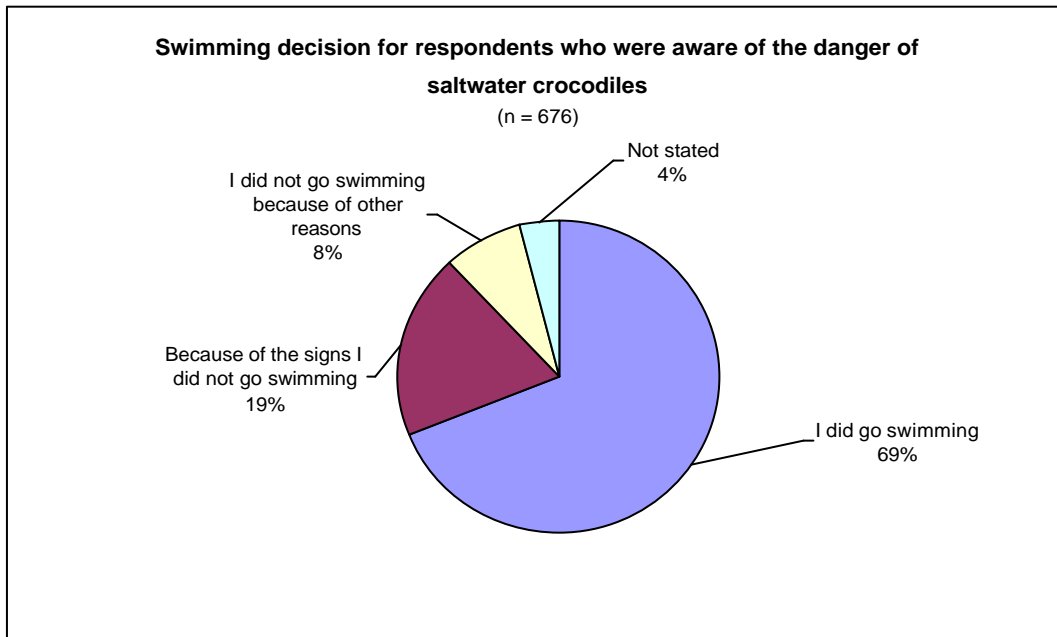
The figure shows, for the ten site-specific survey locations where this question was asked, the proportions of respondents that were aware of the danger of crocodiles, and the proportions that were not aware. The results show a generally high level of awareness at all sites. The highest proportion (7%) of surveyed respondents not aware of the dangers of crocodiles was at Yellow Water, followed by Gunlom and Maguk at 5%.



The abovementioned pattern was relatively the same, irrespective of the season.

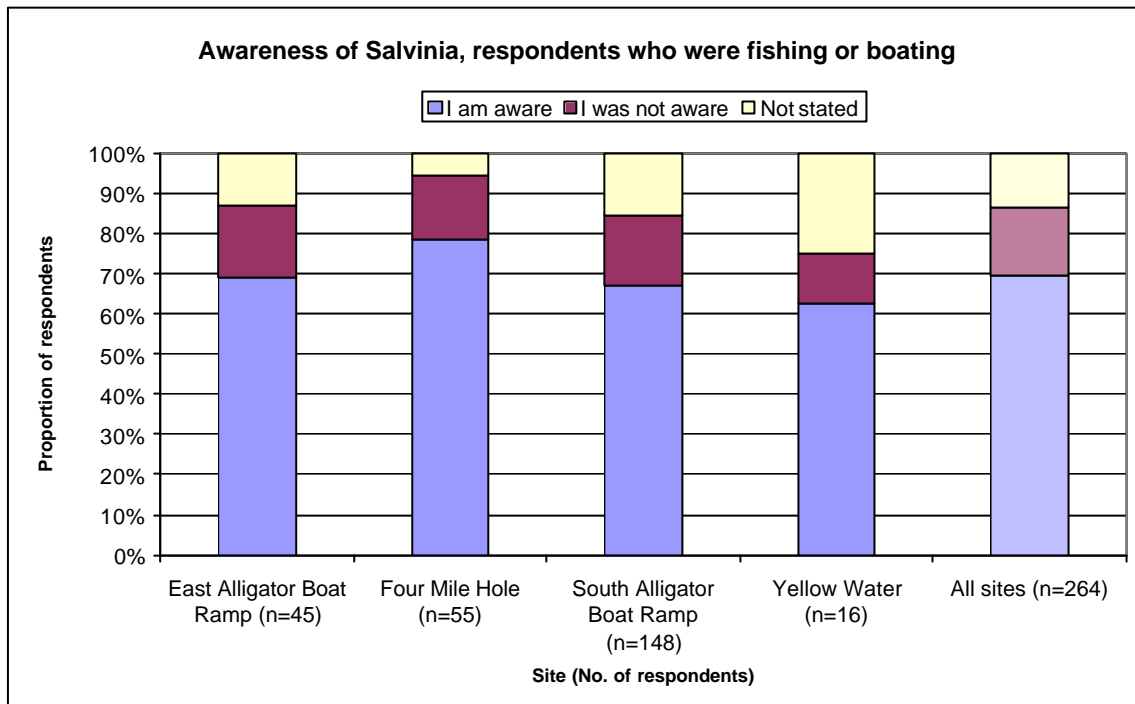
**14. Reasons for swimming decision** (site-specific surveys)

The figure shows the reasons for their decision whether or not to swim for respondents who were aware of the danger of saltwater crocodiles at Gunlom, Jim Jim/Twin Falls, Koolpin Gorge and Maguk. The second figure shows similar information for respondents who were not aware of the danger of saltwater crocodiles at those sites. 69% of respondents who were aware of the danger of saltwater crocodiles chose to go swimming, 19% chose not to go swimming because of the signs warning of the danger of saltwater crocodiles and 8% did not go swimming for other reasons. Half of the respondents who were not aware of the danger of saltwater crocodiles went swimming and 18% did not go swimming because of the warning signs. A further 18% did not go swimming for other reasons.

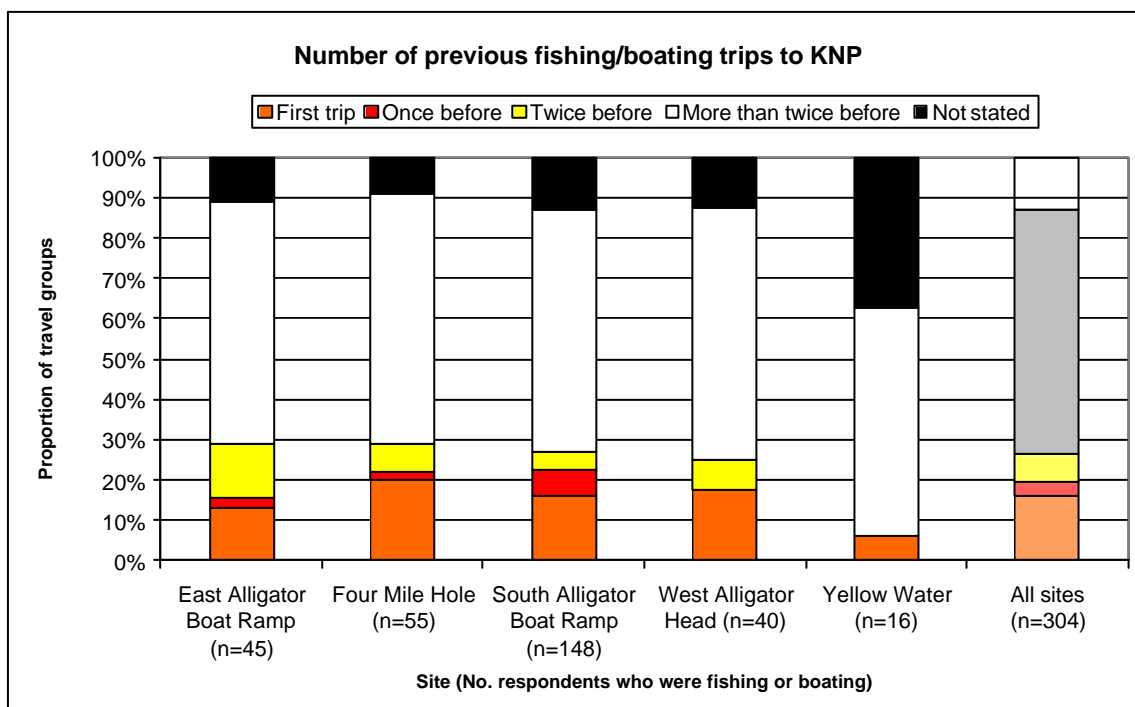


**15. Salvinia** (site-specific surveys)

The figure shows the variation between sites in the awareness of Salvinia among respondents who were fishing or boating. Although respondents at Yellow Water showed the lowest awareness of the weed (63%) the small number of respondents who were fishing or boating at Yellow Water means that this result may not be representative of all who go fishing or boating at Yellow Water. Four Mile Hole showed the highest proportion of visitors that were aware (78%).



**16. Fishing / boating** (site-specific surveys)



The above figure shows that a similar proportion (approximately 60%) of fishing/boating respondents at all fishing/boating sites had been fishing or boating in KNP more than twice before. The proportion of respondents who were on their first fishing/boating trip to KNP varied between the sites from a minimum of 6% at Yellow Water to a maximum of 20% at

Four Mile Hole. However, as discussed above in relation to awareness of Salvinia the small number of respondents who were fishing or boating at Yellow Water means that this result may not be representative.

#### **17. Additional services, facilities or activities (park-wide survey)**

Comments indicated that:

- A lot of visitors felt that no additional services or facilities or activities were needed. They thought that the management of the Park achieved the right balance in terms of facilities.
- Some visitors thought that it would be good to have:
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  Better road access to some locations (especially to Jim Jim/Twin Falls).
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  More Aboriginal Rangers or Guides.
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  Lower prices for food, accommodation and Park entry fees.

#### **18. Overall satisfaction with Kakadu National Park (park-wide survey)**

Respondents also provided a score between 1 (very dissatisfied) and 7 (very satisfied) to indicate their overall satisfaction with KNP. The average score was 6.0, with n=725. This indicates overall that most visitors were satisfied with their visit to the Park. The corresponding number for each season showed a small amount of variation, such that:

- Shoulder 1 had an average satisfaction rating of 6.3.
- Off-peak season had an average satisfaction rating of 6.0.
- Shoulder 2 had an average satisfaction rating of 5.6.
- Peak season had an average satisfaction rating of 6.2.

#### **19. Visitor demographics (park-wide survey)**

The age profile is derived from all 1,710 visitors represented by the Park-side survey, not just the 749 who completed the survey forms on behalf of themselves and the rest of their group. The highest proportion of visitors (about 30%) was in the 25 – 34 age group. Visitors in the 45 – 54 and 55 – 64 age groups each accounted for around 15% of respondents. Overall, people over the age of 25 accounted for the largest proportion of visitors representing about 80% of the total number indicated in surveys.

The abovementioned general pattern changed during the seasons. Although the 25 – 34 age group was the most frequent category in each season, there were disproportionately more visitors in the:

- 18 – 24 age group during the Off-peak season.
- 45 – 54 and the 55 – 64 age groups in the Peak season.

This profile is different from the age profile for visitors to the NT generally (NTTC, 2001) which shows that the most frequent age category for visitors to the NT in 2000–2001 was the over 55 age group, with a smaller peak in the 25 – 34 age group.

#### **20. Any other comments (park-wide survey)**

Visitors provided a range of comments.

About a third of the respondents were satisfied with most or all aspects of their visit to the Park, and indicated this in their written comments, using phrases such as ‘terrific place’, ‘keep up the good work’, and ‘glad I came’.

A few visitors (about 3 – 5%) had the opposite response and were very dissatisfied with their visit, indicating that they would not come back, and would not recommend to others a visit to the Park.

The remaining two thirds of respondents were generally satisfied with most aspects of their visit, but nevertheless provided some 'constructive criticisms'. Some of the comments provided by different visitors were inconsistent. For example, some visitors thought that speed limits in all areas of the Park should be restricted to 60kph (in order to protect wildlife), while some other visitors thought that the speed limit on the Jim Jim/Twin Falls road should be raised to at least 80kph.

However, there were some relatively consistent comments by a wide-cross section of visitors, requesting:

- A greater ability to have almost year-round access to some key features of the Park (particularly Jim Jim/Twin Falls and Ubirr). Although visitors often tempered such comments with an appreciation of the practical difficulties with providing improved access, they were nevertheless, disappointed with not being able to see some of the key features of the Park, due to access problems.
- A greater ability to meet and interact with Aboriginal people (particularly as artists, Rangers and Guides). Numerous visitors had such an interaction and commented very positively on this aspect of their visit. Other visitors who did not have such interaction commented on their desire (or in some cases their expectation) for such an interaction. Once again, visitors often tempered such comments with an appreciation of some of the practical difficulties related to their request.
- A greater value for money experience. Numerous visitors (particularly from within Australia), suggested that the value for money component of food and accommodation should be improved. Once again, visitors often tempered their comments with an appreciation for the difficulties of operating a business in a relatively remote area, and a number of visitors understood the distinctions between the operations of the Park, and the operations of various businesses within the Park. Nevertheless, visitors (particularly from within Australia) suggested that lower charges could be achieved if efficiency was improved. Overseas visitors generally made few comments about the strict value for money component of their visit to the Park.
- A greater spread of Park entrance fees to accommodate visitors who:
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  Stay for only a few days.
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  Come during the wet season, when a large number of the sites are closed and/or inaccessible.
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  Come from within the NT.Once again, these comments were tempered by an appreciation that entry fees need to be charged to cover at least part of the cost of Park operations. Once again, these comments were generally more likely to be made by visitors from within Australia. Overseas visitors to the Park made few comments about entrance fees.
- A greater availability of locally grown and/or made food and/or souvenirs (as opposed to from elsewhere in Australia or even from overseas). Once again, visitors tempered such comments with an appreciation of the difficulties of obtaining locally made souvenirs in any relatively remote location. Their suggestion was not so much the elimination of non-local foods and souvenirs, but rather an increase in the 'local content' of foods and souvenirs. This request on the part of visitors would also lead to greater employment and business opportunities for the local community.
- A greater level of facilities in some locations, particularly:
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  Toilets at some campgrounds (especially at Jim Jim campground).
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  Recycling bins.
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  Safe swimming areas.
  - $\frac{3}{4}$  Telephones.

A greater amount of up to date information about the Park and its access conditions at different times of the year, on an easy to find Internet site. A number of visitors apparently were not able to locate the overall EA Internet site, which contains information on KNP. A number of visitors were however, able to find the Park information on the overall EA site, but indicated that a more readily identifiable, separate KNP site may be beneficial.