

Lion protection fee paid by tourists could help stop trophy hunting - South African study

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Trophy hunting is contentious. It typically involves paying for and pursuing a specific wild animal, often a large or iconic species, with the goal of killing it to obtain a trophy, such as the animal's head, horns, or hide.



Source: wirestock via [Freepik](#)

Popular public opinion is [largely](#) in [favour](#) of [ending](#) the killing of wild animals for sport. However, the topic is hotly debated by policymakers and academics because of the potential financial [incentives](#) it can provide to local communities and landowners to support conservation efforts.

Against this backdrop, we [set out](#) to test whether visitors to South Africa would be willing to pay a “lion protection fee” at border entry points. Our idea was that this could compensate for any lost revenue from trophy hunting were it to be banned.

We chose lions because they have wide appeal and are one of the most readily recognised trophy-hunted animals.

We spoke to 907 people who were visiting, or planned to visit, the country. We [found](#) that a high percentage – over 80% – were in favour of the idea of a lion protection fee. And we calculated, on the basis of two scenarios, that the amount they were willing to pay could generate enough funds to equal, if not exceed, those currently generated by trophy hunting in South Africa.

Our findings come at an important time. South Africa is opening a public policy [consultation](#) on how the country can adopt a more sustainable and ethically driven approach to wildlife conservation.

A complex debate

The competitive nature of trophy hunting, in particular, has raised serious animal welfare concerns. Animals may experience huge stress as they're pursued for days and separated from their family groups. Some hunting outfits use

methods which may inflict prolonged and undue animal suffering.



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From a conservation perspective, some advocate for trophy hunting because, for example, income generated may help mitigate human-wildlife conflicts, support anti-poaching efforts, and prevent land containing wildlife from being converted to other uses. They believe that [banning](#) it could negatively affect conservation and community livelihoods.

Others, however, argue that trophy hunting could negatively affect conservation. For instance the specific targeting of certain animals – like males – could have a [harmful](#) effect on species population dynamics and social structures. Questions have also been [raised](#) as to whether funds from trophy hunting always reach local communities or those on the frontlines of conservation.

Ultimately, these discussions come down to a single issue: popular public opinion is [against](#) trophy hunting, but how could the financial revenue that it generates be replaced?

Lion protection fee

We surveyed people who had previously visited South Africa, or who would consider visiting in the future. We drew respondents from overseas countries and from the African continent.

Respondents were shown a statement saying that a total ban on trophy hunting in South Africa would help protect lions by preventing them from being hunted and killed as trophies. And that such a ban could be funded by introducing a “lion protection fee”, added to the visas of incoming tourists.

They were then asked questions to gauge what daily fee would be acceptable and how likely they would be to visit South Africa under different daily fee scenarios.

Of 907 respondents, 84.2% stated that being charged a “lion protection fee” was a “great” or a “good” idea. A minority (7.5%) had a negative view. Only two respondents (0.2%) indicated a pro-trophy hunting attitude.

We used this survey to create initial estimates of the maximum price ranges tourists would be willing to pay.

There were two main fee scenarios.

In the first scenario, overseas visitors would pay between US\$6 and US\$7 for every day they're in the country for a

maximum of six days. Southern African tourists would pay between US\$3 and US\$4. We worked on tourist numbers which we sourced from [Statistics South Africa](#). Our calculations were based on around 2.6 million overseas visitors and 12.3 million southern African tourists.



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In the second scenario, fees would be collected as a one-off departure tax of US\$6 for all foreign visitors leaving by land or sea, and US\$33 for air passengers. Once again, we used tourist numbers from the [Statistics South Africa](#). Our calculations were based on around 10.5 million foreign visitors leaving by land, 70,000 leaving by sea, and 3.4 million flying out.

Our calculations show that in both scenarios enough funds could be generated to at least equal, but potentially exceed, the US\$176.1 million currently generated by trophy hunting of all the iconic species in South Africa a year. These calculations are based on number of visitors from different traveller categories multiplied by the median number of days those traveller types stay.

Based on the number of respondents who said they would rather not visit because of the fees, we calculated that there would be a 15% decrease in the number of tourists willing to visit South Africa. But we argue that these decreases could be partially compensated for by increased visits from travellers previously deterred by trophy hunting – [13%](#) of those who did not wish to travel to South Africa cited trophy hunting as a reason.

A 2021 [survey](#) of European Union citizens backs up our findings. It showed that 84% of 10,687 respondents were either somewhat or strongly opposed to “the trophy hunting of wild animals found in Africa”.

Replacing trophy hunting revenue

Our findings could pave the way for a responsible transition away from trophy hunting without unintended repercussions for wildlife and the communities that rely on them.

The practical implementation would need diligent deliberation. For example, administrative logistics and sensitivity to fluctuations in visitor numbers must be taken into account.

In addition, while the idea of channelling these funds towards landowners and communities for wildlife conservation holds promise, there are concerns about public trust in institutions. Such funds must be carefully managed.

The types of tourism taxes we propose are not new. Twenty-two countries around the world currently [charge](#) a tax on tourists to preserve their natural and cultural heritage.

This is a pivotal [moment](#) for the future of South Africa's biodiversity and ethical wildlife tourism. The question now is whether the country seizes this opportunity to redefine its approach to conservation and chart a new course towards a more sustainable and compassionate future.

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