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Abstract

This study examined whether slow accommodation including homestays, eco-lodges, camping, and cultural huts contributes to sustainable tourism outcomes in Baringo County, a rural destination in Kenya with high tourism potential but persistently low performance. Despite possessing globally significant biodiversity and cultural assets, Baringo County recorded only 25,071 visitors in 2024, down from 74,569 in 2018. The conventional tourism model is characterized by short stays, economic leakage, and limited community engagement. Slow accommodation has been proposed as an alternative, but empirical evidence from sub-Saharan Africa is lacking. A mixed-methods design was used. Quantitative data were collected from 267 tourists via a structured questionnaire (response rate 75.2%). Qualitative data came from semi-structured interviews with 12 tourism service providers and government officials. Hierarchical multiple regression was used to test the contribution of slow accommodation to sustainable tourism outcomes, controlling for demographic variables. Slow accommodation contributed significantly to sustainable tourism outcomes ($\beta = 0.161$, $p = 0.002$), though the effect was smaller than that of slow transportation or activities. Tourists showed strong preferences for camping (mean = 4.09), locally-inspired accommodation (4.02), and homestays (4.01). Qualitative findings revealed that homestays enhance economic retention and cultural exchange, eco-lodges promote environmental stewardship, and cultural huts preserve heritage. However, the attitude-behaviour gap persists: some tourists choose slow accommodation for non-sustainability reasons (e.g., cost, novelty) and behave resource-intensively. Slow accommodation contributes meaningfully to sustainable tourism outcomes, but its potential is maximised only when complemented by tourist education, visible sustainability features, and integrated product design. The BUNON framework (Balance, Uniqueness, Nurture, Ownership, non-haste) is introduced as a practical tool. Policymakers should integrate slow accommodation into county tourism strategies, provide incentives for homestays and eco-lodges, and invest in pre-arrival visitor education.

Keywords: *slow accommodation, sustainable tourism, homestays, eco-lodges, Baringo County, Kenya, BUNON framework*

1.0 Introduction

The global tourism industry has long been recognized as a driver of economic growth, although its environmental and social costs have become increasingly evident (Gössling & Hall, 2019; Higgins-Desbiolles, 2020; UNWTO, 2023; WTTC, 2024). Mass tourism, which is characterized by high visitor volumes, short stays, and concentrated spatial patterns, has been associated with overcrowding, environmental degradation, cultural commodification, and economic leakage (Buckley, 2012; Serra Cantallops & Ramon Cardona, 2017). In response to these challenges, alternative tourism models, including ecotourism, community-based tourism, and slow tourism, have emerged as pathways toward more sustainable tourism development (Yuetao et al., 2023). Slow tourism refers to a travel philosophy that encourages slower overland travel, longer stays, deeper local engagement, and mindful consumption (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). This model has gained considerable attention in Europe and North America. Successful examples include Latvia's "Best Enjoyed Slowly" campaign, which increased tourism earnings from USD 639 million to USD 1.06 billion between 2010 and 2018 (UNWTO, 2019), and Tuscany, Italy, where slow tourism principles increased tourist spending by approximately 25% (Italian Ministry of Tourism, 2019). However, empirical evidence from sub-Saharan Africa remains limited (Balaban & Keller, 2024). The applicability of slow tourism models developed in Europe to African destinations with different economic structures, infrastructure conditions, and cultural settings remains underexplored.

Within the slow tourism system, accommodation plays a foundational role. Slow accommodation refers to small-scale, locally owned, and culturally embedded lodging options such as homestays, eco-lodges, farm stays, camping sites, and cultural huts. These forms of accommodation have been theorized to contribute to sustainable tourism outcomes by extending the length of stay, retaining tourism revenue within local economies, reducing per capita environmental impact, and fostering cultural exchange (Chi & Han, 2024; Fullagar et al., 2012; Matos, 2004). However, empirical testing of these propositions in developing country contexts remains limited. This study addressed this gap by examining the contribution of slow accommodation to sustainable tourism outcomes in Baringo County, Kenya. Baringo County possesses high-value tourism assets, including Lake Baringo, Lake Bogoria, hot springs, flamingos, the Tugen Hills, paleoanthropological sites, and three indigenous communities, namely the Ilchamus, Tugen, and Pokot. Despite these assets, tourist arrivals declined from 74,569 in 2018 to 25,071 in 2024 (KNBS, 2025). The county's conventional tourism model has been associated with economic leakage and pressure on sensitive ecosystems. Slow accommodation therefore offers a potential alternative, but evidence to guide investment, product design, and policy remains limited. The study therefore sought to establish the extent to which slow accommodation contributed to sustainable tourism outcomes in Baringo County.

2.0 Literature Review

This section reviews literature on slow accommodation and sustainable tourism outcomes. It first conceptualizes slow accommodation and distinguishes it from conventional hospitality. It then discusses how slow accommodation supports economic, environmental, and socio-cultural sustainability. The section further examines the attitude-behaviour gap and identifies the research gaps addressed by the study.

2.1 Defining Slow Accommodation

Accommodation services are central to the tourist experience (Jones, 2002). Within the slow tourism framework, accommodation extends beyond conventional lodging to embrace environmental stewardship, local community integration, heritage conservation, and extended visitor engagement (Fullagar et al., 2012). Matos (2004) introduced the concept of “Slowtels” as accommodation facilities designed to foster deeper connections between tourists and host communities. Examples of slow accommodation include family-operated guesthouses, homestays, eco-lodges, farm stays, camping sites, and locally managed short-stay facilities (Eunkyeong, 2021). Tihilä (2015) defined slow accommodation as forms of accommodation where tourists stay in one place for a longer time and absorb local culture and the environment. These forms are often small-scale, locally owned, and aligned with sustainability, locality, and environmental consciousness. Unlike eco-lodges, which focus mainly on environmental responsibility, slow accommodation integrates ecological sustainability with socio-cultural and experiential dimensions (Chi & Han, 2024).

2.2 How Slow Accommodation Supports Sustainable Tourism Outcomes

The link between slow accommodation and sustainable tourism outcomes operates through several mechanisms. Economically, slow accommodation reduces capital leakage by directing tourist expenditure to local owners, employees, and suppliers (Caffyn, 2012; Timms & Conway, 2012). Longer stays encouraged by slow accommodation also increase visitor expenditure and generate multiplier effects within local economies (Dickinson & Lumsdon, 2010). Environmentally, small-scale and locally constructed accommodation units may have lower embodied energy, reduced waste generation, and smaller ecological footprints (Hall, 2009; Lenzen et al., 2018). Socio-culturally, slow accommodation encourages meaningful interaction between tourists and host communities, thereby preserving intangible cultural heritage and enhancing community pride (Eunkyeong, 2021; Kebete, 2021).

Chi and Han (2024) found that sustainable lodging choices in rural China improved tourist satisfaction and community resilience. Similarly, Lee et al. (2024) found that tourists involved in slow tourism and staying in eco-conscious accommodation developed stronger emotional bonds with destinations and higher intentions to revisit. These studies suggest that accommodation is not only a support service but also a meaningful part of the tourism sustainability process.

2.3 The Attitude-Behaviour Gap

Despite the expected benefits of slow accommodation, its contribution to sustainable tourism depends on tourist behaviour. The attitude-behaviour gap refers to the disconnect between what tourists claim to value and what they actually do (Juvan & Dolnicar, 2014). Tourists may express strong pro-sustainability attitudes but fail to act accordingly due to cost, convenience, habits, or situational constraints (Hergesell & Dickinger, 2013). In the accommodation context, this gap may be more pronounced because behaviours such as water use, energy consumption, and waste disposal are often private and less visible, reducing social accountability.

2.4 Research Gaps

The reviewed literature revealed three major gaps. First, most empirical studies on slow accommodation have been conducted in Europe and North America, while sub-Saharan Africa remains underrepresented (Balaban & Keller, 2024). Second, many studies have adopted a demand-side perspective, with limited attention to measurable sustainability indicators. Third, the

attitude-behaviour gap has not been systematically examined in relation to slow accommodation in developing country contexts. This study addressed these gaps by providing empirical evidence from Baringo County, Kenya.

3.0 Research Methodology

The study was conducted in Baringo County, Kenya, a semi-arid region with significant tourism assets (Baringo County Government, 2023). The study adopted a pragmatist mixed-methods design and collected data from ten sites, including Lake Bogoria, Lake Baringo, Marigat Town, Kabarnet, and Kipsaraman, in February 2025. Quantitative data were collected from a target population of 3,131 tourists, from which a sample size of 355 was derived using Yamane's formula at a 95% confidence level and 0.05 margin of error. Simple random sampling at tourism entry points produced 267 fully completed and usable questionnaires, representing a response rate of 75.2% (Dillman et al., 2014). Qualitative data were collected from 12 key informants, comprising four county tourism officers, seven local service providers, and one Kenya Wildlife Service official. The informants were purposively selected and interviewed using a semi-structured guide until thematic saturation was achieved (Guest et al., 2006). The structured questionnaire measured slow accommodation using nine items with Cronbach's alpha of 0.823, adapted from Matos (2004), Fullagar et al. (2012), and Chi and Han (2024). Sustainable tourism outcomes were measured using 11 items with Cronbach's alpha of 0.891, aligned with UNWTO and UNEP (2005), while consumer behaviour was measured using 10 items with Cronbach's alpha of 0.856, grounded in Fishbein and Ajzen's Theory of Reasoned Action (1975). All scales demonstrated construct validity through Exploratory Factor Analysis, with KMO values above 0.75, significant Bartlett's tests, and factor loadings above 0.61. The instruments were further validated through expert review by three academics and two tourism practitioners. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS version 26 through descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and hierarchical multiple regression while controlling for age, income, education, length of stay, and travel frequency. The assumptions of normality, linearity, homoscedasticity, and multicollinearity were checked and met. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase framework. Ethical clearance was obtained from Moi University and the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation. Additional permissions were obtained from the Baringo County Government and Kenya Wildlife Service. All participants provided informed consent, were assured of anonymity and confidentiality, and were informed of their right to withdraw from the study without consequence.

4.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the study findings and discussion on the contribution of slow accommodation to sustainable tourism outcomes in Baringo County. It covers the demographic profile of respondents, descriptive statistics for slow accommodation, correlation analysis, regression analysis, qualitative findings, the attitude-behaviour gap, and practical implications.

4.1 Descriptive Statistics for Slow Accommodation

The study examined tourists' preferences for different forms of slow accommodation in Baringo County. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Slow Accommodation

Item	Mean	SD	Agreement (%)
Camping allows one to connect with nature.	4.09	2.62	84
I would like to spend a night in accommodation that reflects local architecture.	4.02	0.97	84
I prefer homestays run by local communities.	4.01	2.75	79
When I visit Baringo, I opt to stay in an Airbnb.	3.97	1.13	82
Accommodation made with local materials is appealing.	3.96	1.05	86
Eco-lodges promote minimum waste generation.	3.91	1.02	80
I prefer staying with a local family during my travels.	3.87	1.14	75
Staying in cultural huts encourages active interaction with local customs.	3.73	1.14	85
I would choose to stay in a farmhouse over a hotel.	3.72	1.13	85

The results in Table 1 show that all mean scores exceeded the neutral point of 3.0, indicating positive tourist perceptions toward slow accommodation. Camping received the highest mean score of 4.09, suggesting that many tourists associated camping with stronger connection to nature. Accommodation reflecting local architecture recorded a mean of 4.02, while homestays run by local communities recorded a mean of 4.01. These findings indicate strong tourist receptivity to accommodation options that are locally embedded, nature-based, and culturally meaningful. Agreement levels ranged from 75% to 86%, showing that most respondents supported slow accommodation options in Baringo County.

4.2 Correlation Analysis

Correlation analysis was conducted to establish the relationship between slow accommodation and sustainable tourism outcomes. The results showed that slow accommodation had a moderate, positive, and statistically significant relationship with sustainable tourism outcomes ($r = 0.439$, $p < 0.01$). This indicated that higher preference for slow accommodation was associated with improved sustainable tourism outcomes. However, this relationship was weaker than the relationship between consumer behaviour and sustainable tourism outcomes ($r = 0.515$), suggesting that accommodation choice alone explained only part of the variance in perceived sustainability. The finding implied that slow accommodation contributed to sustainability, but its effectiveness depended on broader tourist behaviour and destination management practices.

4.3 Contribution of Slow Accommodation to Sustainable Tourism Outcomes

Hierarchical multiple regression was conducted to test the contribution of slow accommodation to sustainable tourism outcomes. Control variables, including age, income, education, length of stay, and travel frequency, were entered in Step 1 and explained 8.4% of the variance. Slow accommodation was entered in Step 2 and increased the explained variance by 9.5% ($\Delta R^2 = 0.095$, $F \text{ change} = 27.34$, $p < 0.001$). The final model was statistically significant, $F(6, 260) = 14.27$, $p <$

0.001, and explained 24.8% of the variance in sustainable tourism outcomes, with an adjusted R² of 0.231.

Table 2: Regression Coefficients for Slow Accommodation and Sustainable Tourism Outcomes

Variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Constant	2.342	0.287		8.16	<0.001
Age	0.042	0.051	0.045	0.82	0.412
Income	0.087	0.049	0.094	1.78	0.076
Education	0.065	0.044	0.081	1.48	0.141
Length of stay	0.134	0.042	0.167	3.19	0.002
Travel frequency	0.098	0.047	0.112	2.09	0.038
Slow accommodation	0.161	0.049	0.198	3.29	0.002

The results in Table 2 show that slow accommodation made a positive and statistically significant contribution to sustainable tourism outcomes ($\beta = 0.198$, $B = 0.161$, $p = 0.002$). The unstandardized coefficient indicated that a one-unit increase in preference for slow accommodation increased sustainable tourism outcomes by 0.161 units, holding other variables constant. Length of stay also had a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.167$, $p = 0.002$), while travel frequency had a positive and significant effect ($\beta = 0.112$, $p = 0.038$). This suggested that tourists who stayed longer and travelled more frequently were more likely to contribute to sustainable tourism outcomes. Overall, the results confirmed that slow accommodation was a meaningful predictor of sustainable tourism, although its effect was moderate.

4.4 Qualitative Findings: Typologies and Mechanisms

Thematic analysis of interview data revealed three main types of slow accommodation in Baringo County: homestays, eco-lodges and camping, and cultural huts. Each accommodation type contributed to sustainable tourism outcomes through different mechanisms.

4.4.1 Homestays: Economic Retention and Cultural Exchange

The findings showed that homestays promoted economic retention and cultural exchange. A homestay operator in Kabarnet explained that eco-huts were built by local residents using local materials, allowing tourists to stay longer and connect with the local way of life. Another operator in Marigat noted that tourists were taught how to cook traditional meals, make beads, and interact with elders. These findings showed that homestays supported direct economic retention, as revenue remained with host families. They also promoted cultural transmission, extended length of stay, and reduced environmental impact through simple and locally grounded accommodation practices.

4.4.2 Eco-Lodges and Camping: Environmental Stewardship

Eco-lodges and camping facilities contributed to environmental stewardship by using solar energy, rainwater harvesting, composting, local construction materials, and low-impact operations. One eco-lodge manager at Lake Baringo noted that tourists became more conscious of water and energy use when they observed the sustainability systems in place. However, the same manager observed

that some tourists stayed in eco-lodges for the rustic appearance or affordability but continued to use resources carelessly. This finding highlighted the need for tourist education and clear communication of sustainability expectations.

4.4.3 Cultural Huts: Heritage Preservation

Cultural huts supported heritage preservation by allowing tourists to experience traditional architecture, food, dances, music, storytelling, and local customs. A cultural village elder in Marigat explained that tourists who stayed in traditional huts learned to appreciate simplicity and cultural heritage. Similarly, a performer at the Ilchamus Cultural Centre observed that performances created learning opportunities, while overnight stays extended the cultural experience. These findings showed that cultural huts were not only accommodation facilities but also spaces for cultural education and heritage preservation.

4.5 The Attitude-Behaviour Gap in Slow Accommodation

The study found that the attitude-behaviour gap remained a constraint in slow accommodation. Several participants observed that some tourists appreciated the aesthetics of community huts and eco-lodges but failed to adjust their consumption habits. For example, tourists sometimes requested packaged foods, left lights on, used excessive water, or preferred imported food despite staying in accommodation designed around sustainability principles. A Kenya Wildlife Service officer observed that some visitors appreciated the appearance of slow accommodation but did not behave sustainably. An eco-lodge manager further noted that when tourists were informed that water was scarce and electricity was solar-powered, some changed their behaviour, while others did not. This finding supported Juvan and Dolnicar's (2014) argument that pro-sustainability attitudes do not always translate into responsible behaviour. It also showed that slow accommodation must be supported by pre-arrival information, on-site orientation, and visible sustainability cues.

4.6 Practical Implications: The BUNON Framework for Slow Accommodation

Based on the findings, the study proposed the BUNON framework as a practical tool for designing and evaluating slow accommodation. BUNON represents Balance, Uniqueness, Nurture, Ownership, and Non-haste. These five principles were derived from the empirical findings and the slow tourism literature.

Table 3: BUNON Framework for Slow Accommodation Design

Pillar	Meaning	Application to Slow Accommodation	Key Metrics
Balance	Equal attention to environmental, cultural, and economic benefits	Accommodation should not prioritize one sustainability dimension while ignoring others.	Percentage of local staff; waste diversion rate; cultural programming hours
Uniqueness	Local identity, authentic stories, and living traditions	Accommodation should reflect local materials, architecture, and cultural practices.	Number of locally sourced materials; guest recall of cultural features
Nurture	Care for cultural and environmental assets through education	Facilities should provide orientation and explain water, energy, and waste systems.	Percentage of guests completing orientation; reduction in resource use per guest-night
Ownership	Local communities lead, co-create, and benefit	Accommodation should be locally owned, operated, and supplied.	Percentage of local ownership; percentage of local supplies; revenue retention rate
Non-haste	Unhurried and immersive experiences	Accommodation should encourage longer stays, storytelling, shared meals, and local participation.	Average length of stay; guest satisfaction with pace

For Baringo County, the BUNON framework can be applied by auditing existing accommodation against the five pillars, training homestay operators on waste management and pricing, developing pre-arrival communication for eco-lodge visitors, setting behaviour expectations, encouraging minimum stay requirements, and incentivizing the use of local materials and architecture through county planning regulations.

5.0 Conclusion

The study concluded that slow accommodation contributed significantly, though moderately, to sustainable tourism outcomes in Baringo County, Kenya. Tourists showed strong interest in homestays, eco-lodges, camping, cultural huts, and accommodation reflecting local architecture. These forms of accommodation supported sustainability through economic retention, environmental stewardship, cultural preservation, and longer visitor engagement. However, the contribution of slow accommodation was not automatic. The attitude-behaviour gap showed that some tourists selected slow accommodation for reasons such as cost, novelty, and aesthetics but failed to adjust their resource-use behaviour. Therefore, slow accommodation should be supported by tourist education, pre-arrival communication, on-site orientation, visible sustainability systems, and product designs that make responsible behaviour easy. The study contributed to slow tourism

literature by providing empirical evidence from sub-Saharan Africa, specifying the role of accommodation in slow tourism, identifying distinct slow accommodation types, and highlighting the attitude-behaviour gap in private accommodation settings.

6.0 Recommendations

Destination managers and local authorities should promote slow accommodation as a distinct tourism product in Baringo County. Eco-lodges, homestays, cultural guesthouses, and agritourism farm stays should be developed and marketed as products that support deceleration, cultural depth, and community connection. County governments and the Kenya Tourism Board should integrate slow accommodation into County Integrated Development Plans and county tourism strategies. Incentives such as reduced licensing fees, expedited permits, and planning support should be provided to operators who meet sustainability standards. In addition, pre-arrival and on-site visitor education should be strengthened to explain local water, energy, waste, and cultural conditions. Future studies should compare Baringo County with other destinations in Kenya and sub-Saharan Africa, use longitudinal designs, include objective sustainability indicators, validate the BUNON framework, and examine host community perspectives on the effects of slow accommodation on local wellbeing, livelihoods, and cultural vitality.

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