

# Tourism at the Kisite-Mpunguti Marine National Park 2011-2015: A story of change and resilience



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 Sustainable Poverty Alleviation  
**SPACES** from Coastal Ecosystem Services



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## Key Messages:

- There was a significant decline in visitors to the Kisite-Mpunguti Marine National Park after the 2013 terrorist attacks. Foreign tourist numbers declined much more drastically than Kenyan tourists. In 2011 there were about twice as many foreign tourists than Kenyan tourists, but by 2015 there were more Kenyan tourists than foreign tourists.
- There are two types of boats that tourists can use to visit Kisite-Mpunguti, local boats and more expensive company boats. Kenyan tourists preferred to use local boats, while foreign tourists used both kinds equally. Hence, company boats were affected more notably than the local boats after the 2013 terrorist attacks.
- The Kenyan tourists and the cheaper local boats play a very important role in ‘buffering’ the tourism industry against the effects of a crisis, because Kenyan tourists continue to visit the coast and use these services even when there is a slump in foreign non-resident tourists.
- Without the Kenyan tourists, the impacts of the terrorist attacks and associated reductions in tourist numbers might have been a lot worse.
- It is important to carry on recognising the important role that the Kenyan tourists play in the Shimoni area. They may not be as profitable for local businesses, but they are much more resilient than foreign tourists when the country is faced with a shock.

# Introduction

The Sustainable Poverty Alleviation through Coastal Ecosystem Services (SPACES) project has been investigating the relationship between coastal ecosystems and poverty in Kenya and Mozambique since 2013. One component of this research has focused on tourism, particularly in the South Coast region of Kenya. The tourism research has been looking at how different types of tourism contribute to poverty reduction in the region, and the ability of the tourism industry to withstand the shock associated with terrorism-related travel advisories in Kenya that took place in 2013-2015.

As part of this research, Kenya Wildlife Service (KWS) very generously gave SPACES staff access to tourism records kept in Shimoni, which provide data on all visitors to the nearby Kisite-Mpunguti Marine National Park. This report provides a summary of the analysis that has been carried out using these data, and some initial findings and recommendations. We hope that it will prove useful to KWS and other organisations and people involved in tourism in the region.

# Methods

The data collected from KWS records are in the form of monthly counts of visitors in different categories. These categories are month, year, age class (adult / child), nationality class (Kenyan, foreign resident / foreign non-resident), and the type of boat that took the tourists on their trip to the marine park. The type of boat is important, because they represent very different types of tourism, each with different impacts for local people. There are two types of boats – **company boats** that are owned by large companies that provide a full range of services to tourists (minibus transfers, boat trips, restaurant meals, guiding etc.) and **local boats** that are owned by individuals that usually provide only the boat trip to tourists. The company boats are usually more expensive for tourists than the local boats.

The data were collected for every month in 2011-2015. This covered a total of 216,274 tourists who visited the Kisite-Mpunguti during that 5 year period.

# Results

The number of tourists visiting the site was not consistent during the study period. In fact there was a significant decline in visitors, particularly after the terrorist attacks in 2013 (Figure 1).

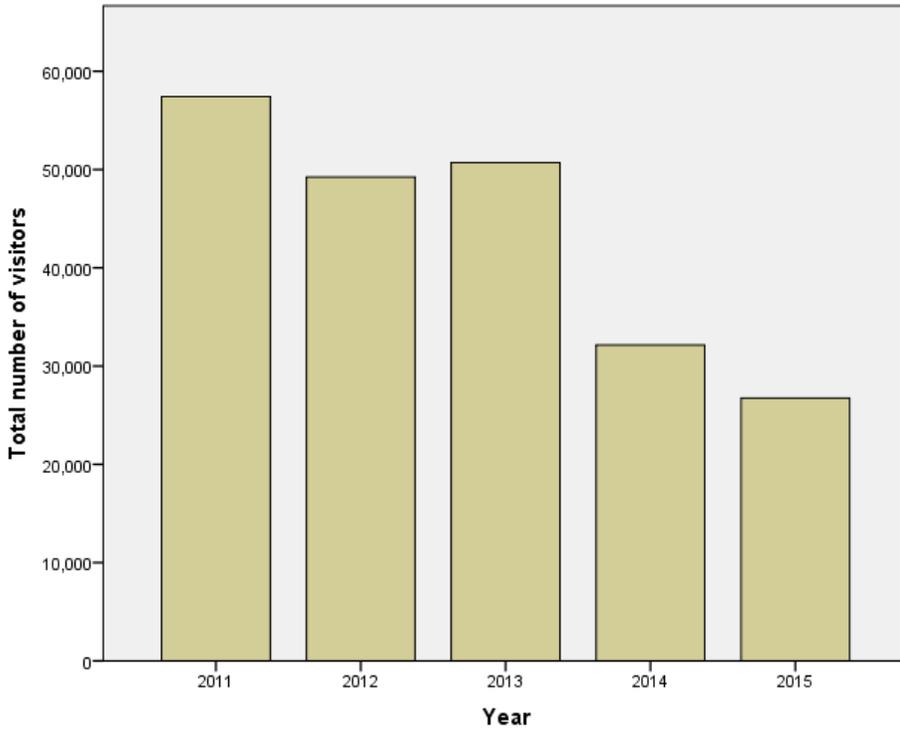


Figure 1: The total number of tourists visiting Kisite-Mpunguti in each year

Looking at the effect of the tourism crisis in more detail, we see that the foreign tourists have been much more affected than the Kenyan tourists (Figure 2). In 2011 there were about twice as many foreign tourists than Kenyan tourists, but by 2015 there were actually more Kenyans than foreigners.

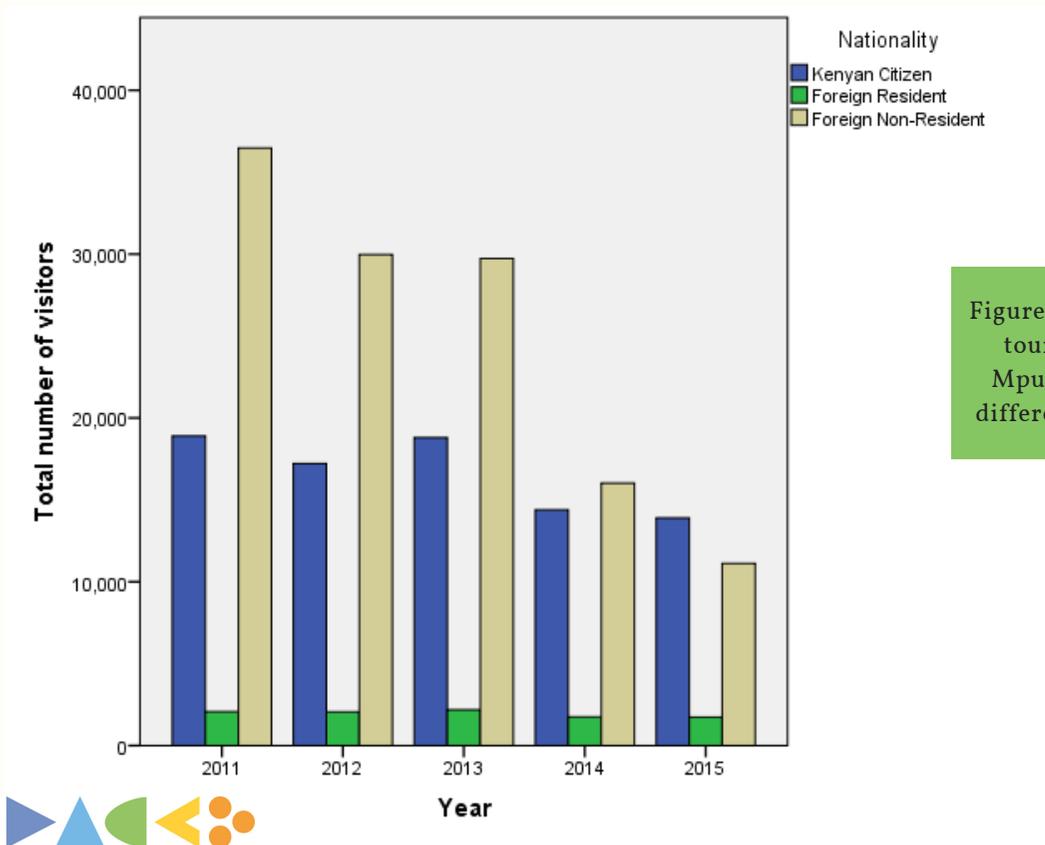


Figure 2: The total number of tourists visiting Kisite-Mpunguti each year from different nationality classes

Something similar can be seen in the boat data. The local boats have been affected by the decline in tourism, but not as badly as the company boats which have declined steeply (Figure 3). In 2011 they were doing nearly as well in terms of numbers, but by 2015 they had dropped dramatically.

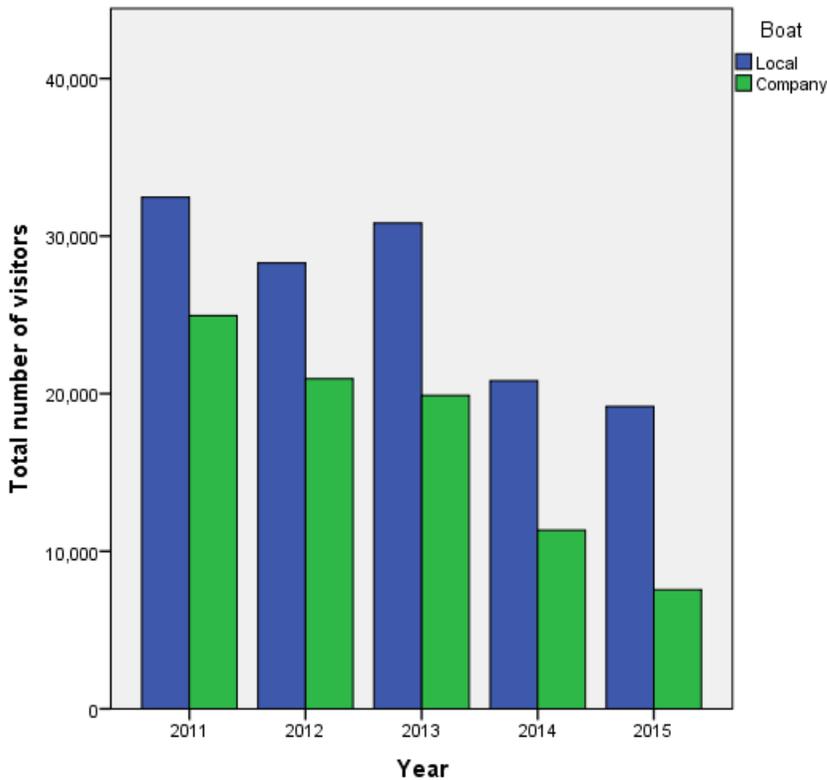


Figure 3: The total number of tourists visiting Kisite-Mpunguti each year using different types of boat

Looking at the nationality of tourists and the type of boat together, it can be seen that Kenyan tourists preferred to use local boats, whereas the foreign tourists used both kinds of boat about equally (Figure 4). This helps to explain why the use of company boats fell faster than the local boats in Figure 3.

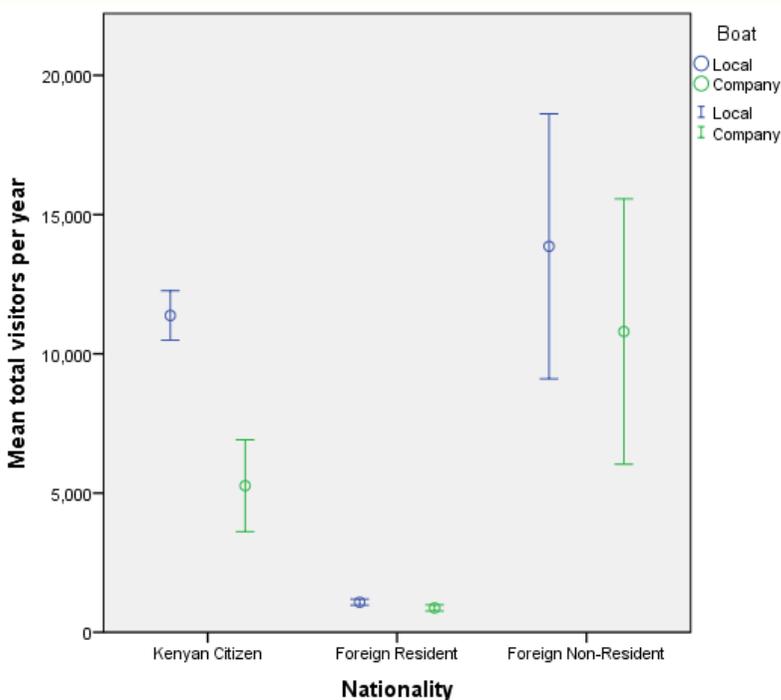


Figure 4: The mean number of tourists per year visiting Kisite-Mpunguti from different nationality classes and using different types of boat

The largest number of tourists visiting the site was foreign non-residents, followed by Kenyan Citizens. The foreign residents visiting are very few in number (Figure 5).

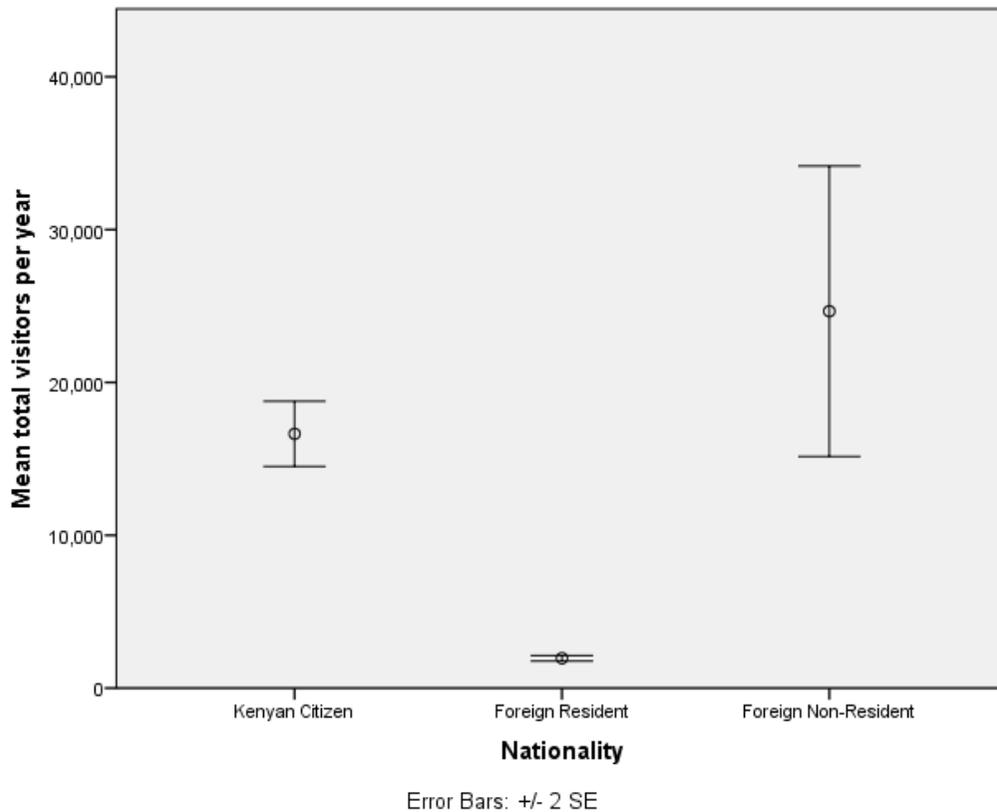


Figure 5: The mean number of tourists per year visiting Kisite-Mpunguti from different nationality groups

More tourists visiting the site used the local boats as compared to the more expensive company boats (Figure 6).

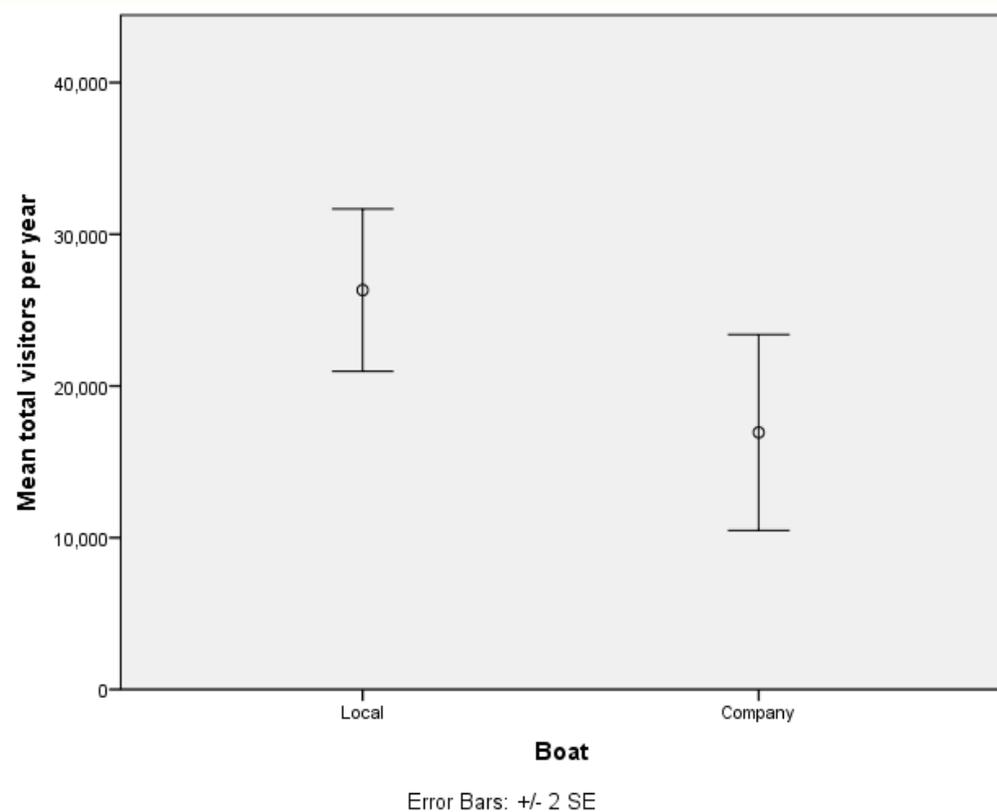


Figure 6: The mean number of tourists per year visiting Kisite-Mpunguti using different types of boat

As well as varying between years, the industry is highly seasonal within years. Averaging across all years (2011-2015), there was a low season around May, a small peak season in August and a very big peak season around Christmas (Figure 7).

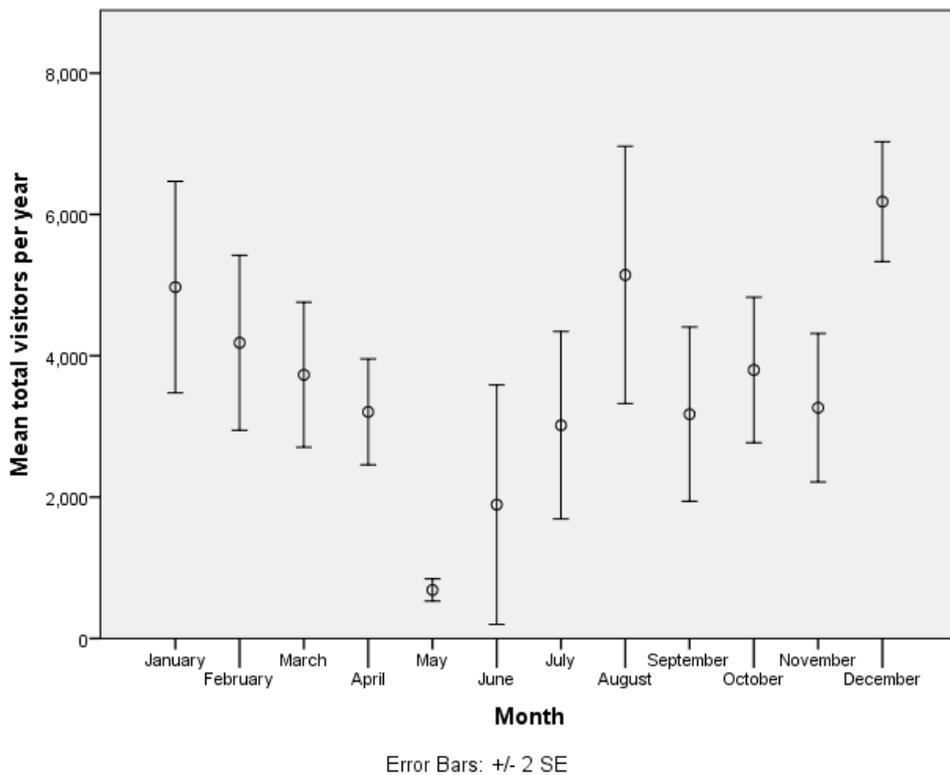


Figure 7: The mean number of tourists per year visiting Kisite-Mpunguti in each month

Averaging across years, foreign tourists outnumber Kenyan tourists in most months, except in December, which is the peak local season due to the school holidays (Figure 8).

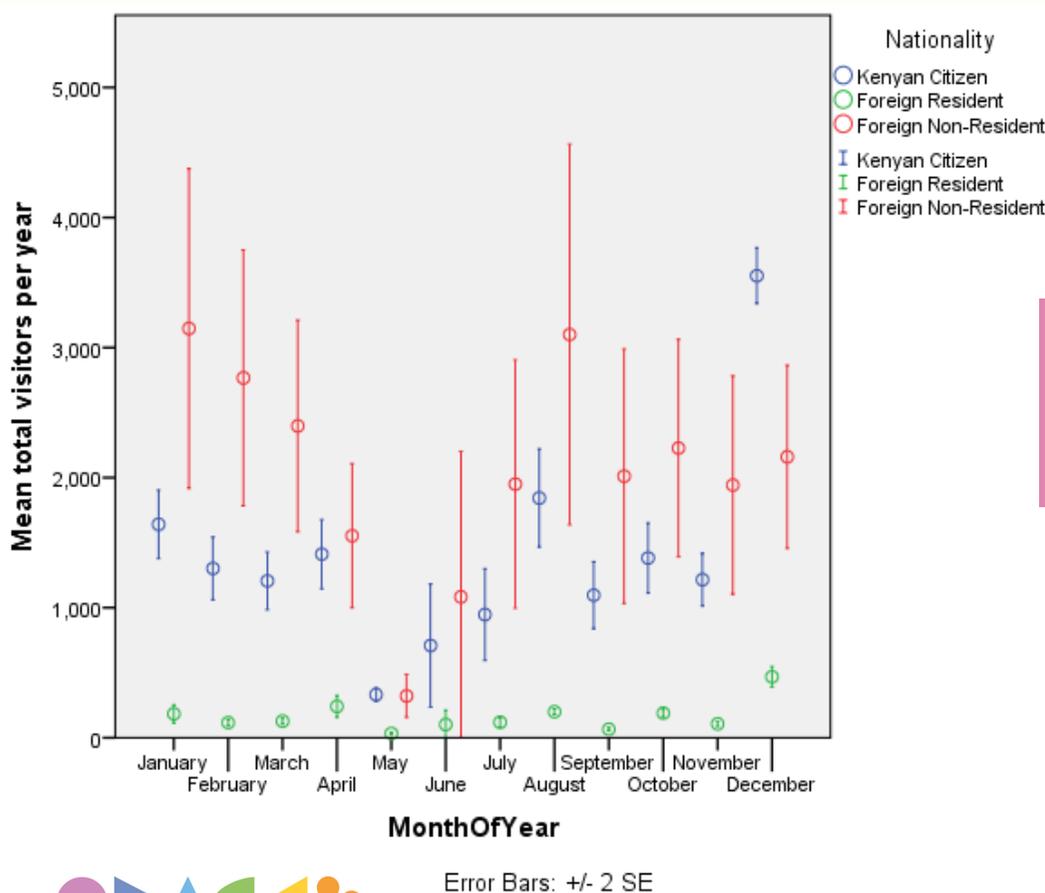


Figure 8: The mean number of tourists per year visiting Kisite-Mpunguti from different nationality classes in each month

The usage of different boats follows a similar monthly pattern, with the local boats being used most frequently in December (Figure 9). This is not surprising as the local boats are commonly used by Kenyans, who come in large numbers in December.

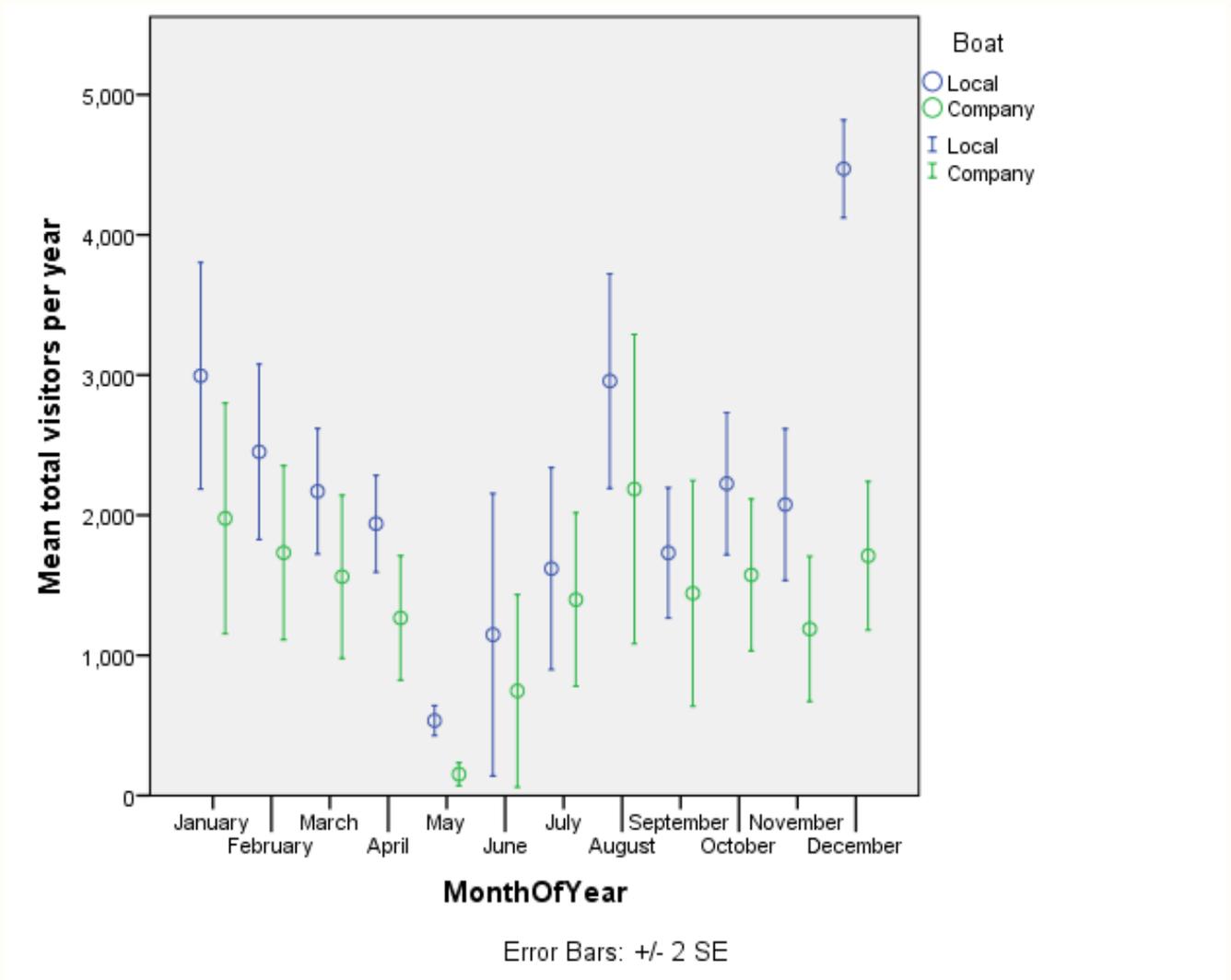


Figure 9: The mean number of tourists per year visiting Kisite-Mpunguti that use different types of boat in each month

The age class data show that there were many more adults than children who visited the park, and that there was a higher proportion of children among Kenyan visitors than local visitors. However, there are no particularly interesting patterns in terms of how the balance of adults and children is affected by the month, year or type of boat used.

# Discussion

The results of this analysis confirm that there was a sharp decline in tourist numbers between 2013 and 2015, but they also reveal interesting patterns about how this decline has played out among different groups of tourists. The decline was strongest among foreign non-resident tourists, and has particularly affected the more expensive company boats that they tend to use. In contrast, Kenyan tourist numbers have not dropped by much, and the local boats have lost less business than the more expensive company boats.

What this means for local poverty reduction is not entirely clear, because that depends on how much the different kinds of tourist and tourism operators actually contribute to the local economy and wellbeing of the community. That is something that is being investigated in another part of the SPACES tourism research. However, it does seem clear from the KWS data analysis that the **Kenyan tourists and the cheaper local boats play a very important role in ‘buffering’ the tourism industry against the effects of a crisis** because Kenyan tourists continue to visit the coast and use these services even when there is a slump in foreign non-resident tourists. Without the Kenyan tourists, the impacts of the terrorist attacks and associated reductions in tourist numbers might have been a lot worse.

An implication of this result for KWS is that **it is important to carry on recognising the important role that the Kenyan tourists play in the Shimoni area**, even if they do not spend as much or appear to make as much of a contribution to the area when compared to foreign tourists. They may not be as profitable for local businesses, but they are much more resilient and likely to continue visiting the coast in the face of a crisis which puts off the foreign tourists.

The SPACES team will continue analysing the other tourism data and will pass the results on to KWS and other tourism actors in Kenya as they become available. We also very much appreciate any feedback that KWS might have on the results presented in this report.

For more information about the SPACES project ([www.espa-spaces.org](http://www.espa-spaces.org)) or to provide feedback, please contact Chris Sandbrook, co-investigator, Cambridge University at [cgs21@cam.ac.uk](mailto:cgs21@cam.ac.uk), Chris Cheupe, research assistant, Wildlife Conservation Society, Kenya at [chrisyt83@yahoo.com](mailto:chrisyt83@yahoo.com), or Ida Gabrielsson, communications officer, Stockholm Resilience Center at [ida.gabrielsson@su.se](mailto:ida.gabrielsson@su.se).