

Evaluating the Services of Malaysian Hotels from the Leisure Traveler's Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the expectation, perception and satisfaction level of leisure travelers towards hotel attributes and services quality in Malaysia. It specifically tried to delineate basic dimensions of local leisure travelers towards hotel attributes and subsequently evaluate their satisfaction level towards hotel attributes. This study involved a questionnaire-survey of 180 respondents and employed Factor Analysis with VARIMAX rotation as the main analysis. Eight underlying factors representing 58.6 per cent of the explained variance were extracted. The most important factor in explaining the variance was "staff service quality", followed by "value" and "core products' quality." The result of reliability analysis showed that the alpha coefficients for the eight factors ranged from 0.62 to 0.84 and eigenvalues from 1.00 to 7.76. Finally, Regression Analysis was employed to examine the eight underlying factors relative importance in contributing to the overall level of satisfaction towards the hotel attributes and services. The findings of the regression analysis suggested that local travelers' overall satisfaction was primarily derived from the factor of "value" followed by "core products' quality" and "staff service quality." Factor of "facility of mini bar" was the only negative factor derived from the analysis. The findings of this study and its marketing implication could assist hoteliers to design their hotel services in order to target the segment of leisure travelers in the most efficient way.

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini mengkaji ekspektasi, persepsi dan tahap kepuasan pelancong berorientasikan keseronokan terhadap atribut-atribut dan kualiti perkhidmatan hotel di Malaysia. Kajian ini melibatkan soal-selidik ke atas 180 responden dan menggunakan Analisis Faktor dengan putarab Varimax sebagai teknik analisis utama. Lapan faktor yang menerangkan 58.6 peratus daripada varians terhasil daripada analisis faktor yang dijalankan. Faktor yang paling penting dalam menerangkan varians adalah "kualiti perkhidmatan staf" diikuti oleh "nilai" dan "kualiti produk teras". Hasil analisis reliability menunjukkan bahawa koefision alpha untuk lapan faktor terbabit adalah dalam lingkungan 0.62 hingga 0.84 dengan eigenvalue

daripada 1.00 hingga 7.76. Akhir sekali, analisis regresi dijalankan untuk mengkaji kepentingan relative lapan faktor terbahit dalam menyumbang kepada tahap kepuasan keseluruhan terhadap atribut-atribut hotel. Penemuan daripada analisis regresi mencadangkan bahawa tahap kepuasan keseluruhan pelancongan berteraskan keseronokan adalah terhasil daripada faktor "nilai" diikuti oleh "kualiti produk teras" dan "kualiti perkhidmatan staf". Faktor "fasiliti bar mini" adalah satu-satunya faktor negatif yang terhasil daripada analisis. Penemuan kajian ini dan implikasi pemasarannya dapat membantu pihak pengurusan hotel untuk merekabentuk perkhidmatan hotel mereka untuk mensasar kepada pelancongan berorientasikan keseronokan dalam cara yang paling efisien.

INTRODUCTION

Tourism industry has played a very significant role in contributing to the Malaysian economy for over the last ten years. From the Eighth Malaysian Plan, the net contribution of tourism industry improved from RM11.2 billion to RM18.1 billion. Tourist arrival increased at 10 percent annually surpassing the target of 6.9 percent. Hotel sector is one of the major components in the country tourism industry that make up substantial proportion of the industry receipts and therefore it needs to be managed effectively. Malaysian hotel industry has been expanding very drastically in line with the robust development in the country tourism industry. The growth of tourism industry has expanded the number of hotels from 1,492 in 2000 to 2,256 in 2005. Consequently, hotel rooms rose by 37.3 percent from 124,413 in 2000 to 170,873 in 2005 (Ninth Malaysian Plan 2006-2010).

The strong growth of international and domestic tourists contributed to higher hotel occupancy rate. To promote domestic tourism, Malaysians are encouraged to spend their vacations locally by visiting a lot of wonderful tourist destinations the country are offering. "Cuti-cuti Malaysia" is among the major campaign run by the Malaysian Tourism Development Corporation. Ahmad Azmi, Osman and Wan Idros (2001) noticed that local tourists were found more budget-based in organizing their travel activities including accommodation as compared to foreign tourists. However, the 11 September 2001 tragedy and its subsequent consequences resulted in a big drop in the outbound and inbound travel sectors of many countries in the world including Malaysia. This situation left the tourism industry in general and hotel industry in specific with domestic tourists segment and this will lead to a very intense competition in the industry. Management of locals hotels must made serious efforts to fully understand the needs, expectations and satisfactions of this segment in order to capture this lucrative market. Initiatives are needed to improve the quality and services of the hotels.

Therefore, this study examined the satisfaction level of Malaysian tourists towards attributes and services of local hotels which set as a preliminary step towards establishing an effective hotel marketing programs to target local tourists. The study only focused on the leisure segment of local tourists since leisure tourists are seen as having more freedom in making their travel decision compared to the business or other non-pleasure tourists. Leisure travel was defined by McIntosh and Goeldner (1990) as an activity where a person travels to a destination outside their home community with a pleasure-seeking motive. Medlik and Middleton (1972) described leisure tourism as any travel journey of more than 100 miles and spend at least a night out-of-home. Leisure travel has a very bright future in Malaysia as the country is very rich with its natural attractions. Factors such as increase in leisure time, advancement in transportation system and higher disposable income will further enhance the growth of this enormous market (Dybka 1987).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hotels nowadays have to offer value for money and provide exactly what travelers need (Choi & Chu 2000). As noted by Vavra (1997), customer satisfaction is the leading criterion for determining the quality that is actually delivered to customers through the product and service. Customer satisfaction is a psychological concept that involves the feeling of well-being and leisure that results from obtaining what one hopes for and expects from an appealing product or service (WTO 1985). The definition of customer satisfaction used in this study was based on the disconfirmation theory proposed by Oliver (1980) that has been tested and confirmed in quite a number of studies (Pizam & Ellis 1999; Oliver & DeSarbo 1988; Tse & Wilton 1988). This theory suggests that consumer purchase products or services with pre-purchase expectations about their performance and it will be compared against the actual outcome once the product or service has been used. This comparison has been shown to be a predictor of satisfaction in some situation. With reference to Fornell (1992) and Gundersen et al. (1996), customer satisfaction is defined as post-purchase evaluative judgement concerning a specific product or service.

Heung (2000) had carried out a study to measure the satisfaction levels of Chinese travelers in relation to the hotel services in Hong Kong based on the disconfirmation paradigm. The results indicated that mainland Chinese travelers were satisfied with "Availability of personal care amenities", "Quietness of the room", "Availability of food and beverage variety" and dissatisfied with "Recreation Facilities", "Availability of frequent travelers' program" and the "Baggage handling service". Factor analysis managed to

identify eight dimensions out of 34 items used in this study. "Service quality and value" and "Augmented product quality" dimensions were found to be more important in influencing the customers' overall satisfaction levels and their likelihood of returning to the same hotels.

Taninecz (1990) found that cleanliness, comfortable mattresses and quality towels were rated as important hotel attributes by the respondents while earlier research by Lewis (1985) showed that leisure travelers were more concerned with quietness, service quality and location of the hotels in making their final decision. A more comprehensive study had been done by Ananth et al. (1992) that involved 510 travelers to rate the importance of 57 hotel attributes. The findings indicated that "Price and quality" was the most important factor across all age categories, followed by factors related with "Security" and "Convenience of location". Choi and Chu (2000) carried out a study to investigate Asian and Western travelers' perceptions about the service quality of Hong Kong hotels. Using a principal component factor analysis with a VARIMAX rotation technique, this study identifies seven hotel factors out of 33 hotel attributes and determines the levels of satisfaction among Asian and Western travelers. The seven hotel factors derived from factor analysis are "Staff service quality", "Room quality", "General amenities", "Business services", "Value", "Security", and "IDD facilities". The results from the regression analysis suggested that Asian travelers' overall satisfaction is primarily derived from the value factor, whereas their western counterparts are influenced by the room quality factor. Many research have been done to link customer satisfaction with service quality offered by the tourism industry. Gonzalez, Comesana and Brea (2007) demonstrated the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction by looking at the customers' behavioural intentions. Customer satisfaction towards products or services must be determined in order to improve its quality, resulting in a firm's competitive advantage (Cravens et al. 1988; Garvin 1991), repeat purchases and favorable word-of-mouth publicity (Choi & Chu 2000; Fornell 1992; Halstead & Page 1992). Products and services consists of bundle of attributes and benefit and according to Kivela (1996), determinant attributes are attributes that directly influence consumer decision. According to Pizam and Ellis (1999), it is possible to say that satisfaction with a hospitality experience is a sum total of satisfactions with the individual elements or attributes of all the products and services that make up the experience. Chan, Wan and Sin (2007) managed to look at service quality in terms of service failures. Their study showed that customers were dissatisfied if they could not identify the services delivered by the hotel or restaurant.

Customers perceive the value of a hotel as the benefits that they got from the offerings of the hotel. Local tourists were more "value-seekers" for each cent they spent in their tourism activities compared to the foreign

tourists (Ahmad Azmi, Osman & Wan Idros 2001). Value can be measured as the difference between customer's ideal standard of value and the actual experience of a service. Common models of consumer behavior assume that consumers possess an ideal value standard. This ideal standard was said as developed through the learning process and is apply to the customer satisfaction process that is focal in any service business (Yesawich 1992; Yucelt & Marcella 1996).

Research on tourism is mainly dominated by the western cultural experience (Towner 1995). Among the eastern related research on hospitality industry is Heung and Chu's study on consumers' choice package tours in Hong Kong (2000). The results showed that travel agencies focused only on the mass market and ignored what the competitors are doing. In addition, Ahmad Azmi and his colleagues (2001) conducted a study on Malaysian tourism according to lifestyle segmentation. Therefore, this study is undertaken to broaden the hospitality research in the eastern context and assist the local hotel industry in improving its services.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

The study attempted to evaluate the perception and satisfaction level of leisure travelers towards hotel attributes and services quality in Malaysian scenarios. The specific study objectives were to:

1. assess tourist's expectations, perceptions and satisfaction levels towards hotel attributes in Malaysia.
2. identify the underlying dimensions of perception of local tourist towards Malaysian hotel characteristics and service quality
3. examine the relative impact of perception dimension in affecting tourist's overall satisfaction with the hotel services.

The findings from this study could assist local hotel management to develop a highly- focused marketing strategies to target the domestic tourists based on their expectation, experience and level of satisfaction.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

This study employed the disconfirmation model to assess Malaysian travelers' satisfaction levels towards the hotel services in this country. A structured questionnaire was designed based on relevant past studies which comprised 38 questions and was divided into two main sections. The first section contained 33 questions related to hotel attributes, which were generated from relevant literature and were modified to suit the local situation. The

respondents were asked to rate their expectations and perception of each of the 33 service attributes for Malaysian hotels on a 5 point likert scale, ranging from "1 = totally agree" to "5 = totally disagree". In addition, a question on overall satisfaction level was included based on the same scale. The second section gathered some data about respondents' profiles.

SAMPLING AND DATA COLLECTION

Convenient sampling method was applied for this study. A total Of 200 customers who visited any of ten chain stores of a well-established retail outlet in the area of Kuala Lumpur, Negeri Sembilan and Melaka were given the questionnaires. The samples were chosen using the systematic samples selection, where, every third customers who came into the store was chosen. Two screening questions were imposed to identify whether the respondents were (i) above 18 years old and had permanent job and (ii) had experience staying in a hotel in the past 2 years for leisure tourism. All of the questionnaires were successfully collected and of which 180 were completed and satisfied for further analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

The data were analyzed using the SPSS software. Descriptive statistics, paired t-test, factor analysis and regression analysis were used in the analysis. Descriptive statistics were used to identify the nature of all the responses and paired t-tests were used to compare the mean score of expected level and the mean score of the perceived level of the 33 hotel service quality and characteristics. Factor analysis was employed in order to identify the underlying dimensions (factors) of travelers' perception of hotel services and finally the regression analysis was conducted to examine the relative importance of underlying dimensions in affecting Malaysian leisure travelers overall satisfaction towards the hotel attributes.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILES OF THE RESPONDENTS

Of the total respondents, 56.1 percent were female and 82.3 percent were aged between 21 to 50 years old. In terms of employment, 25.0 percent worked in managerial fields, 21.7% self-employed and 9.4 percent were professionals. More than half of the respondents were from lower-middle class where they earned income less than RM25,000 a year.

Satisfied Attributes, Indifferent Attributes and Dissatisfied Attributes Paired t-tests were applied to the mean score of the 33 hotel attributes. The results showed that relatively Malaysian leisure tourist had a low expectation

towards hotel attributes. Of the 33 attributes listed, there were 27 satisfied hotel attributes, 2 indifferent and 4 dissatisfied. The details were shown in the following table:

Based on the disconfirmation model, the *satisfied hotel attributes* were those positively disconfirmed attributes, where those attributes had greater perception scores than expectation scores. (i.e positive mean difference) and with a significant *t-value* ($p < 0.05$). The results showed that Malaysian leisure travelers were satisfied with “cleanliness of room”, “politeness and friendliness of hotel staff”, “comfortability of bed”, “efficiency of hotel services”, “quietness of room”, “efficiency of check-in/check-out”, “the hygiene of food and beverage”, “reliability of fire alarms”, “helpfulness of staff”, “comfortability of hotel environment”, “staff understanding of consumer request”, “efficiency of room service”, “neatness and cleanliness of hotel staff”, “efficiency of information desk”, “adjustability of room temperature”, “convenient and reliable reservation system”, “quality of food and beverage”, “baggage handling service”, “responsibility of security personnel”, “hotel staff language skills”, “availability of food and beverage variety”, “hotel location”, “hotel recreation facilities”, “availability of parking space”, “availability of reliable wake-up call service”, “the price of hotel room”, and “the physical appearance of hotel”

Indifferent hotel attributes were defined as the attributes with a non-significant *t-value* ($p > 0.005$), regardless of the positive or negative mean. Malaysian leisure travelers felt indifferent towards two hotel attributes, “in-room audiovisual equipment” and “the price of food and beverage”.

Dissatisfied hotel attributes were those attributes negatively disconfirmed by the respondents. With a negative mean difference, the expectation outweighed perception scores and with a significant *t-value* ($p < 0.05$), Malaysian travelers were dissatisfied with “availability of mini bar”, “availability of IDD facilities”, “availability of efficient laundry service” and “availability of safe-deposit box”

UNDERLYING DIMENSIONS OF TOURISTS' PERCEPTIONS

The underlying dimensions (factors) of the perceptions of the Malaysian Leisure travelers towards hotel attributes were identified by factor analysis using principal component with varimax rotation. For the purpose of interpretation, a loading cut-off 0.50 was adopted in this study. Eight factors with eigenvalues equal to or greater than one were extracted and could be seen in the table below. These eight underlying factors represented 58.62 per cent of the variance explained and they were “Staff service quality”, “Value for money”, “Core product quality”, “General facilities”, “Room quality”, “Security”, “Mini bar facility” and “Multilingual Skills”. Table 2 shows the data of the factor analysis.

TABLE 1. Paired T-tests: Satisfied, indifferent and dissatisfactory attributes

	Mean Difference	t-value	Significance
<i>Satisfied attributes</i>			
1. Politeness and friendliness of hotel staff	1.73	18.82	0.000
2. Helpfulness of staff	1.38	13.21	0.000
3. Staff understanding of customer request	1.22	12.01	0.000
4. Baggage handling service	0.84	8.09	0.000
5. Efficiency of check-in/check-out	1.47	15.44	0.000
6. Hotel staff language skill	0.78	6.62	0.000
7. Efficiency of hotel services	1.52	15.29	0.000
8. Neatness & cleanliness of hotel staff	1.16	12.97	0.000
9. Comfortability of bed	1.72	18.20	0.000
10. Adjustability of room temperature	1.00	10.12	0.000
11. Cleanliness of room	1.76	18.26	0.000
12. Quietness of room	1.50	15.41	0.000
13. Comfortability of hotel environment	1.30	13.90	0.000
14. The location of hotel	0.58	5.45	0.000
15. Convenient and reliable reservation system	1.00	9.74	0.000
16. Efficiency of room service	1.19	11.83	0.000
17. Availability of reliable wake-up call service	0.33	2.80	0.000
18. Efficiency of information desk	1.07	10.55	0.000
19. The hotel recreation facilities	0.50	4.62	0.000
20. Availability of parking space	0.46	4.67	0.000
21. Availability of food and beverage variety	0.59	5.86	0.000
22. The quality of food and beverage	0.97	9.71	0.000
23. The hygiene of food and beverage	1.42	16.62	0.000
24. The price of hotel room	0.24	3.47	0.000
25. The physical appearance of hotel	0.23	2.06	0.041
26. Security personnel responsibility	0.84	8.34	0.041
27. Reliability of fire alarms	1.42	13.20	0.000
<i>Indifferent Attributes</i>			
1. In-room audiovisual equipment	0.22	1.93	0.055
2. The price of food and beverage	0.01	1.00	0.319
<i>Dissatisfied Attributes</i>			
3. Availability of efficient laundry services	-0.29	-2.52	0.013
4. Availability of mini bar	-0.41	-2.86	0.005
5. Availability of safe- deposit box	-0.25	-2.01	0.046
6. Availability of IDD facilities	-0.31	-2.54	0.012

TABLE 2. Factor analysis: Malaysian leisure tourist perception towards hotel attributes

Hotel Factors	Factor loading	Eigenvalue	Variance
<i>Factor 1. Staff service quality ($\alpha=0.84$)</i>		7.76	23.50
Staff are polite and friendly	0.74		
Staff are helpful	0.75		
Staff understand your requests	0.79		
Facilities for baggage handling	0.72		
Check-in and check-out are efficient	0.58		
Staff provide efficient services	0.64		
<i>Factor 2. Value for Money ($\alpha=0.83$)</i>		2.97	8.99
Hotel parking space	0.78		
Hotel F&B are value for money	0.77		
Hotel room is value for money	0.83		
<i>Factor 3. Core product quality ($\alpha=0.73$)</i>		2.08	6.31
Room cleanliness	0.66		
Room quietness	0.66		
Room service is effective	0.69		
Cleanliness of F&B	0.57		
<i>Factor 3. Core product quality ($\alpha=0.73$)</i>		2.08	6.31
Room cleanliness	0.66		
Room quietness	0.66		
Room service is effective	0.69		
Cleanliness of F&B	0.57		
<i>Factor 4. General Facilities ($\alpha=0.67$)</i>		1.070	5.14
Hotel laundry services	0.57		
Hotel wake-up call is reliable	0.64		
Hotel safe box is available	0.60		
Hotel IDD facilities is available	0.81		
<i>Factor 5. Room Quality ($\alpha=0.71$)</i>		1.56	4.72
In-room temperature control	0.72		
Audiovisual equipments	0.80		
<i>Factor 6. Security ($\alpha=0.62$)</i>		1.20	3.63
Responsible security personnel	0.73		
Reliable fire alarms	0.74		
<i>Factor 7 Mini bar facility</i>		1.11	3.29
Availability of mini bar	0.73		
<i>Factor 8 Multilingual skills</i>		1.00	3.04
Staff have multilingual skills	0.72		

Factor 1: Staff service quality. This factor contains 6 items and explained 23.5 percent of the variance with an eigenvalue of 7.76. The items were “Staff understand your request”, “Staff are helpful”, “Staff are polite and friendly”, “Baggage handling services”, “Staff provide efficient services” and “efficiency in check-in and check-out”

Factor 2: Value for money. This factor loaded with three items and explained 8.99 percent of the variance, with an eigenvalue of 2.97. This factor contained attributes relating to the value for money and the attributes were “Hotel room is value for money”, “Hotel food and beverage are value for money”, and “Hotel parking space”

Factor 3: Core product quality. Four items were involved in this factor that was related to the quality of the product. This factor had an eigenvalue of 2.08 and represented 6.31 percent of the variance. Attributes included in this factors were “Effectiveness of room service” “Room cleanliness”, “Room quietness”, and “Food and beverages cleanliness”

Factor 4: General hotel facilities. This factor had 4 items with an eigenvalue of 1.70. Attributes. Included in this factor were “Availability of IDD facilities”, “Reliability of wake-up call “Availability of safe-deposit box”, and “Laundry service”. This factor represented 5.14 percent of variance.

Factor 5: Room quality. This factor explained 4.72 percent of the variance and comprised of 2 items with an eigenvalue of 1.56. The attributes were “Audiovisual equipments”, and “In-room temperature control”.

Factor 6: Security. Two items included in this factor with an eigenvalue of 1.20 and an explained variance of 3.63 percent. The attributes were “Reliable loud fire alarms”, and “Responsible security personnel”

Factor 7: Mini bar facility. The factor explained 3.29 percent of the variance and with an eigenvalue of 1.11. There was only one item in this factor, namely “Availability of mini bar”.

Factor 8: This factor also had one item, namely “Staff have multilingual skills”. The factor explained 3.04 percent of the variance and an eigenvalue of 1.00.

RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE PERCEPTION DIMENSIONS ON OVERALL SATISFACTION

The eight hotel underlying factors were subsequently analyzed further using regression analysis to determine their relative importance in contributing to

levels of satisfaction for Malaysian travelers. In this study, travelers' overall satisfaction level was used as a dependent variable and the eight factors identified by factor analysis were used as independent variables. Furthermore, the regression analysis also showed the relative importance of each the independent variables had on travelers' satisfaction levels, as revealed by the beta coefficient.

GOODNESS-OF-FIT REGRESSION MODEL

The results of the regression analysis could be seen in the table below. The correlation coefficient (R) of the eight independent variables was 0.913, indicating that Malaysian leisure travelers have a positive and very high overall satisfaction levels towards eight underlying factors. Coefficient of determination (R^2) was 0.833, suggested that approximately 83 per cent of the variation of the travelers' overall satisfaction was explained by the eight factors. In behavioral statistics, and R^2 of between 0.50 and 0.60 was considered as acceptable (Lewis, 1985). The F -ratio of 35.568 at the significant level of 0.000 indicated that the results of the regression model could hardly have occurred by chance. As a conclusion, the regression model was said to have achieved a satisfactory level of goodness-of-fit in predicting the variance of Malaysian travelers overall satisfaction in relation to the eight hotel underlying factors, as measured by R , R^2 and F -ratio.

TABLE 3. Goodness-of-fit of regression model

Multiple R	0.913
R^2	0.833
Adjusted R^2	0.809
Standard deviation	0.525

Note: F -ratio = 35.568, F -significant = 0.000

BETA COEFFICIENT OF HOTEL UNDERLYING FACTORS

The relative importance of each eight underlying hotel factors in terms of their contribution to the variance in Malaysian leisure travelers overall satisfaction could be explained by Beta Coefficient. The results in Table 4 revealed that all eight factors remain significant with contributing different weights to the variance of travelers' overall satisfaction.

Of the eight factors, factor 2, (value for money) carried the heaviest weight in explaining travelers' overall satisfaction with Beta = 0.93. It was followed by "core product quality" with Beta = 0.56, factor 1, "quality of employee service", with Beta = 0.42, factor 4 "hotel general facility", with

TABLE 4. Beta coefficient of hotel underlying factors

Variables	Beta Value	Significance
Value for money (Factor 2)	0.93	***
Core product quality (Factor 3)	0.56	***
Quality of employee services (factor 1)	0.42	***
Hotel general facility (factor 4)	0.30	***
Security system (factor 6)	0.29	***
Room facility equipment (factor 5)	0.27	***
Multilingual skills (factor 8)	0.10	**
Mini bar facility (factor 7)	-0.12	**

Note: *** $p < 0.001$, and ** $p < 0.01$

Beta = 0.30, factor 6 “security system” with Beta = 0.29, factor 5 “room facility equipment with Beta = 0.27 and factor 8 “multilingual skills” with Beta coefficient = 0.1. However, mini bar utility factor gave negative coefficient beta, which means that the factor had negative implication on the overall satisfaction. The results mentioned above indicated that, a unit of increase in satisfaction with the “value for money” (factor 2) would lead to a 0.93 unit or 93 percent increase in the Malaysian leisure travelers’ overall satisfaction in their hotel stayed, with the other factors were held constant.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

VALUE FOR MONEY

The results of this study indicated that local tourists were very concerned with their travel budget in which large portion of it made up of accommodation expenses. They were looking for ways to “buy more for less” and this finding was consistent with previous researchs such as Sellers (1991) and Ahmad Azmi et al. (2001). Local tourists were found to be particular with the hotel room charge, food and beverage prices as well as the availability of parking space when relate to the hotel expenses. Majority of these local tourists were short-haul tourists and spent only a single or a few nights away from home. They were not actually looking forward to a luxury room or great food but the combination of the price paid and the quality of the products or services received must be right or at reasonable level.

Their good knowledge of the local basic food prices was seemed to be the reason why local tourists were more concerned with the food and beverage prices charged by the hotel when compared with the foreign tourists. Observations indicated that a large number of local tourists found

their food outside the hotel for their meals, as the prices were very much cheaper. A large number of them were found driving their own private vehicles in performing their vacation and therefore secured parking space availability in the hotel compound was very important to them for security and maintenance purposes.

CORE PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Quality of core products and services offered by the hotel were found as the second most important factor contributes to the satisfaction level of local tourists towards the hotel services. Specifically, the local tourists were concerned with factors such as the cleanliness and layout of the room, quietness of the room and it's surrounding as well as the room services provided by the hotel. These factors were viewed as common as discovered by majority of past researchers as one of the main factors contributing to the satisfaction levels towards hotel attributes. Hotels management must ensure that all parts of their hotel environments especially the guest rooms must be kept clean and quiet all the time because this was the place where the guests spend most of their time in the hotel. Therefore, the managements needed to study their customers' expectation from time to time to maintain the required room quality standard. When compared with Western tourists, Choi and Chu (2000) found that the room quality was the most important factor determining their satisfaction level while the Asian tourists were more towards the value of money. The finding of this study also showed that in-room facilities such as audio-visual equipments and mini-bar were not significantly important to local leisure tourists. This was probably because local tourists stayed in the hotel for a very short time and spent most of their vacation time for leisure trip.

STAFF SERVICES

The third most influential factor in determining the satisfaction level of local leisure tourists toward hotel services was the staff service quality. This was consistent with a lot of past research that found the factor of staff service quality as one of the main priority (Teas 1993; Barsky & Labagh 1992; Oberoi & Hales 1990). Research by Choi and Chu (2000) also indicated that this factor was not the most important factor but ranked second in determining the overall satisfaction level among both Asian and Western tourists. This factor comprised items related to the way the services were delivered to the customers by the hotel staff and occurred in a situation what we called as "service encounters" point. The hotel staff must be friendly, helpful and polite when interacting with the hotel guests at all time and in all kind of situations. More importantly at first hand, they must take all the necessary means to understand the need or request made by their guests.

This was actually a hard task to perform especially to the new employees. Looking at the importance of this factor, hotel management must not hesitate to invest on special training and development program for their staff from time to time. The customers were also showed to be very concerned with the check-in and check-out procedure of the hotel, which was very much dependent on the proficiency of the front-line staff. The efficiency of the counters also depended largely on the administration of the counter that was under the management factor. Therefore, hotel management must ensure that effective management support system and policies were installed for the service staff to perform their job efficiently.

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