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Foreign Consumer Perception of Tourism Services

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ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menilai tanggapan pelancong terhadap kualiti perkhidmatan di dalam sektor hotel, restoran dan pengangkutan. Keputusan analisis menunjukkan bahawa kriteria tanggapan pelancong terhadap kualiti perkhidmatan bagi penginapan ialah: Layanan pekerja, kualiti bilik penginapan, kemudahan dalam melakukan urusan perniagaan, keselamatan Makanan yang bernilai serta memadai, dan lain-lain kemudahan. Dimensi tanggapan pelancong terhadap restoran adalah: Kualiti serta penghidangan makanan, lokasi dan kemudahan pengangkutan, dan Layanan dan reka bentuk restoran. Bagi dimensi yang berkaitan dengan pengangkutan, faktor-faktor yang telah dikenal pasti ialah: kualiti sistem pengangkutan, kemudahan untuk mendapatkan perkhidmatan pengangkutan, dan layanan pekerja. Melalui analisis regresi, faktor-faktor yang penting dalam mempengaruhi kepuasan pelancong telah dikenal pasti. Akhir sekali, kajian ini telah memberi cadangan tentang isu-isu yang perlu dipertimbangkan demi memajukan lagi sektor pelancongan.

ABSTRACT

This paper performs an assessment of tourists' perception towards services associated with lodging (hotel factors), dining (restaurant factors), and transportation (transportation factors). The results of the empirical analysis suggested that these are the underlying dimentions held by the tourists: (1) Hotel factors - Staff service quality, room quality, business services, security, value and food quality, and general amenities, (2) Restaurant factors - serving and food quality, accessibility, and general service and layout design, and (3) Transportation factors: system quality, accessibility, and staff service quality. By linking these factors with tourists' overall satisfaction level, those factors that significantly contribute to better travelling satisfaction have been identified. In addition, this paper provides information on level of service performance, and sheds light on areas that present great potential in retaining and attracting tourists.

INTRODUCTION

Today we can see the tremendous growth in the number of international travellers surfing all over the world. Based on the statistics compiled by the World Tourism Organisation (WTO), the number of international tourists has dramatically increased from 327.1 million in 1985 to 698.3 million in 2000. Also from the same source, the world international tourism receipts have jumped from USD 118.1 billion in 1985 to 476 billion in 2000. The surge of outbound travelling has transformed the tourism industry in most developing countries from a cottage industry to a lucrative foreign exchange earner. In other words, tourism industry is the only service sector that presents similar trading opportunities for all countries, regardless of their level of development (Diaz 2001).

This remarkable surge could be attributed to the long economic boom of developed and developing countries starting from the 1990s. Report by World Trade Organisation on tourism services has noted that the increase in global wealth has stimulated higher levels in tourism demand (World Trade Organisation 1998). Another factor that has contributed to the enormous growth of outbound travellers is the expansion of MNC operation. As the scale and

operation of many MNCs expand to countries abroad, outbound travelling of their personnel, and even chief executives, has become inevitable (The Economist 2001). WTO Secretary-General, Francesco Frangialli, pointed out that the surge of international tourists at the turn of the century, could also be due to the international occasions and sport events such as Summer Olympics, Expo 2000, etc (World Tourism Organisation 2001).

One of the main characteristics of the tourism industry is that its supply of products, tourism services, involves cross-border movement of consumers coming to suppliers (World Trade Organisation 1998). Although in most case the main concern of tourists lay on tourist destinations, the tourist destination is not confined to places alone. Mill and Morrison (1992) noted that these elements are the building blocks of tourist destinations: attractions, facilities, infrastructure, transportation, and hospitality. Laws (1995) considered those elements proposed by Mill and Morrison (1992) as secondary elements. Laws (1995) recognised these elements as the primary contributors to attractiveness of tourist destinations: climate, ecology, culture and traditional architecture. These primary factors are often the distinct characteristics of one country, and should be preserved and maintained in the course of tourism developments. On the other hand, the secondary factors become the major determinant in ensuring tourists' travelling satisfaction.

The secondary elements are produced jointly by different service sectors that are directly, or indirectly, supporting the tourism industry: hotel, restaurant, and transportation. One of the uniqueness of these service sectors, or tourism service providers (TSP), is that their product possesses these general characteristics, as opposed to the normal products (i.e. assets): *intangibility, variability, inseparability,* and *perishability.* The supply of services by TSP is not limited only to the contact personnel, but also include contact of customers with the physical environment, service systems, and other service customers (Stauss and Mang 1999). In other words, the TSP and the facilities they employ in the service delivery process determine the overall tourism performance in serving tourists' needs. Their level of performance could be judged through five service quality dimensions: *tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance,* and *empathy.*

While good level of service is a must in attracting or retaining customers, a quality service could only be attained if it matches customer's perception of quality. This means that a service is considered to be of high quality only when the customer judges it so. Empirical analysis has suggested that considerable gap may occur between the service quality perceived between TSP and the customer itself (Camison *et al.* 1996). The role of customers is especially important for service evaluation because of their involvement in the service production process. Such participation in turn affects the customers' quality perception. Thus, asking tourists to express their degree of satisfaction towards attributes related to hotels, restaurants and transportation would provide inferences on the level of quality service performance of the TSP. This piece of information also reflects the general needs of tourists associated with hotel services, restaurant services, and transportation services. To sum, the findings of this study would provide information on:

1. The current level of service performance by TSP in fulfilling customers' needs and expectations, and
2. Which areas of operation they should act on so as to remain competitive, and better serve their existing customers and prospective ones.

The findings of this study would be beneficial to Malaysia that has great potential in the tourism industry. The weight of tourism industry in the coming Malaysia's Third Outline Perspective Plan reflects the importance of this particular industry in driving service sectors' growth. Various initiatives and plans are being formulated in order to expand the industry. Areas being considered include eco-tourism, research on travellers' characteristics and behaviour patterns, expansion of recreational and entertainment activities, human resource development and tourism education, regional co-operation among ASEAN countries, among others.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A large number of tourism researchers have been concentrating on investigation of hotel attributes, and its importance to the travellers. An extensive review by Choi and Chu (2000) has identified these important attributes from previous literature: "cleanliness, location, room

rate, security, service quality, and the reputation of the hotel or chain". Empirical analysis by Choi and Chu (2000) identified these seven hotel factors: "staff service quality", "room quality", "general amenities", "business services", "value", "security" and "IDD". In terms of importance, travellers survey by Ananth *et al.* (1992) have identified "price and quality" as the most important attribute, followed by "security" and "convenience of location". On the other hand, LeBlanc and Nguyen (1996) maintained that environmental cues are more useful in attracting new customers. The findings reported by Wong *et al.* (1999) indicated that employee related dimensions (i.e. behaviour and appearance) are more significant than the tangibles and reliability dimensions of hotel attributes.

In terms of restaurant attributes, Pizam and Ellis (1999) proposed three major groupings: "material product", "environment", and "behaviour and attitude". The first group covers items such as quality and price of F&B, portion size, range of tastes and textures, and availability of menu items. The second group comprises items such as cleanliness of restaurants, location and accessibility, furniture and fittings, noise level, availability of parking, and hours of operation. The third group comprises employee-related items such as friendliness, competence, courtesy, and professionalism. Koo *et al.* (1999), used nine restaurant attributes in their analysis: "location", "type of food', "variety of food", "uniqueness", car park", "price", "quality or taste of food", "decoration", and "service". Through their analysis, they have found that it is possible to segment the restaurant market based on customers' meal purposes (i.e. family meal, business meal, and tourists). With regard to the nature of the attributes, Cadotte and Turgeon (1988) have found that the following attributes of restaurants earn complaints more easily from customers: "availability of parking", "hours of operation", "traffic congestion", "noise level", and "spaciousness of the establishment". They also found other attributes where its unusual performance could earn compliments, but average performance or absence of it will not cause complaints: "clean and neat restaurant", neat employees", "ample portions", and "responsiveness to complaints".

Unlike hotel and restaurant attributes, relatively few research papers have addressed transportation attributes comprehensively. However, the importance of transportation attributes in promoting and supporting tourism industry should not be neglected easily. In Augustyn's (1998) point of view, "tourism generating area", "transit", and "tourism destination area" represents the three important components of tourism products at various stages of tourist purchase-consumption process. In Kozak and Rimmington's (1998) compiled list of tourist destination components, transportation-related factors are being included. In a recent study by Chen and Gursoy (2001), they discovered that different cultural experiences, safety, and convenient transportation have a positive relationship with tourists' loyalty towards destinations. Hence, the finding of this study on transportation attributes could provide more insight into the travelling dimensions perceived by tourists.

METHODOLOGY

The Instrument

Questionnaire survey technique was used in the data collection process. Two versions of self-administered questionnaires were used in the data collection process: Chinese version and English version. The questionnaire comprised two sections. The first section is designed to measure tourists' perception towards various dimensions of service performance in hotel services, restaurant services, and transportation services. Specifically, the samples were asked to reflect their degree of satisfaction in relation to the listed hotel attributes, restaurant attributes, and transportation attributes on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The list includes 29 hotel attributes covering areas such as: staff service quality, room quality, general amenities, business services, value, security, and IDD facilities. For restaurant attributes, 17 items covering the following aspects: location, layout design, customer service, and food and beverage quality. Finally, for transportation attributes, five dimensions described in 14 items were considered: staff service quality, accessibility, station quality, security, and others. The type of tourist destination is also listed in this section in order to obtain samples' perception and preferences in their choice of travelling destination. The respondents were also asked to indicate their overall satisfaction of Malaysia as a

tourist attraction compared to other Asian countries, using a 10-point scale with 1 (very not satisfied) and 10 (very satisfied). This response is used later in the regression analysis. The second section concentrates on capturing the samples' demographic and travelling characteristics. The questions asked in this section are gender, age, occupation, purpose of visit to Malaysia, and days stayed in Malaysia.

The Sample and Sampling Procedure

The samples used in this study were randomly selected from those international travellers whose departure was from the Malaysia Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA) between 17 – 31 October 2000. A total of 506 sets of questionnaires were successfully collected, but only 483 sets of usable questionnaires were used in this study. For the definition of "traveller", this study followed those proposed by Ananth *et al.* (1992) and Choi and Chu (2000): "A traveller is any individual who is a temporary visitor, possessing a fixed place of abode, travelling in the expectation of business or pleasure, and staying overnight at a place other than his or her own, and involving an exchange of money". The characteristics of the respondents used in this study could be summarised as below:

1. Country of origin: Western (81%), Asian (19%)
2. Purpose of travelling: business (28.6%), vacation (54.5%), others (16.9%)
3. Age (years): below 25 (11.6%), 25-34 (39.3%), 35-44 (20.7%), 45-54 (16.8%), 55-64 (8.5%), over 64 (3.1%)
4. Travel arrangement: group-travel (12.9%), non-group travel (87.1%)
5. Length of stay (days): 1-10 (69.2%), 11-20 (18.2%), 21-30 (8.4%), 31 and above (4.2%)

Data Analysis

Before the mean score of the investigated attributes are assessed, the underlying dimensions perceived by tourists in term of hotel services, restaurant services, and transportation services must be identified. This piece of information would provide a more complete assessment on current service performance in each perceived dimension. Hence, the first step of the analysis was the principal component factor analysis, which was run separately on the hotel attributes, restaurant attributes, and transportation attributes. The orthogonal VARIMAX rotation method was used in this study since it could produce clear factor structures with higher factor loading on the appropriate dimensions (Choi and Chu 2000). The VARIMAX rotation method is also recognised as the standard rotation method for factor analysis (Manly 1986; Ngai and Cheng 1997). The decision on the number of factors to be extracted from the analysis, was based on the criterion of "eigenvalue greater than 1". The eigenvalue is the total variance explained by each factor. After that, items were grouped to those components (or factors) where it had the highest factor loading score. An item would be removed if none of its factor loading is greater than 0.5. Then, the internal reliability of these factors was assessed using the Cronbach's alpha coefficient. This statistic measures the extent to which a set of variables is consistent in what it is intended to measure (Hair *et al.* 1998). Only those factors that have Cronbach's alpha value greater than 0.7 were considered as reliable, and retained in the following analysis (Hair *et al.* 1998).

In order to identify those factors that contribute to the tourists' overall satisfaction, three multivariate regression models were estimated. The dependent variable for these three models was the tourists' overall satisfaction of Malaysia as a tourist attraction compared to other Asian countries. The factors identified through the factor analysis would be used as the independent variables. Specifically, these three regression models were the interest of this paper:

$$O = C_1 + h_1H_1 + h_2H_2 + \ldots + h_nH_n \quad (1)$$

$$O = C_2 + r_1R_1 + r_2R_2 + \ldots + r_nR_n \quad (2)$$

$$O = C_3 + t_1T_1 + t_2T_2 + \ldots + t_nT_n \quad (3)$$

where O = tourists' level of overall satisfaction
h_i = beta coefficient for hotel factor H_i
r_i = beta coefficient for restaurant factor R_i
t_i = beta coefficient for transportation factor T_i
C_i = intercept

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Factor Analysis

The factor analysis results for the three tourism sectors are summarised in Tables 1, 2, and 3. Column "Mean" indicates the mean score for each item. Column "factor loading" indicates the degree of correlation between the item with

its associated factor. The grouping of attributes was based on its factor loading; an attribute is grouped to the factor that has the highest factor loading score. In other words, an item is grouped to the factor that it is highly correlated with. The column "communality" records the amount of variance an item share with all other items included in the analysis. Column "EV" represents the amount of variance accounted by each factor or component.

Hotel Factor

The principal component analysis with VARIMAX rotation of the 29 hotel attributes returned a factor matrix comprising seven factors, with 25 attributes falling under these factors (see Table 1). Four of the attributes have been omitted, as their factor loading is less than 0.5. The factor loading of those attributes listed under each factor was all greater than the minimum acceptable value of 0.5. All six factors account for 65.7% of the total explained variance. The internal reliability of each of the factor is considered reliable and consistent, as suggested by Cronbach's alpha coefficient value. The identified factors are interpreted as:

- Staff service quality: this factor is associated with the staff's attitude when serving customers.

TABLE 1
Factor analysis results for hotel attributes

	Mean	F.L	Comm	C.A.	EV	V
Factor 1: Staff service quality	3.98			0.90	11.70	40.50
Staff provide efficient service	3.92	0.77	0.70			
Staff understand your request	3.68	0.76	0.64			
Staff are helpful	4.12	0.75	0.72			
Check-in/check-out is efficient	4.01	0.73	0.63			
Staff are polite & friendly	4.18	0.71	0.70			
Staff have multilingual skills	3.75	0.68	0.51			
Staff have neat appearance	4.17	0.62	0.62			
Factor 2: Room quality	3.95			0.85	2.40	8.20
Room is clean	4.06	0.75	0.77			
Good room temperature control	3.83	0.72	0.64			
Room is quiet	3.90	0.70	0.60			
Bed/mattress/pillow is comfortable	4.02	0.68	0.67			
Factor 3: Business services	3.46			0.95	1.50	5.30
Business meeting rooms are available	3.51	0.90	0.91			
Business facilities are available	3.52	0.90	0.91			
Secretarial service is available	3.35	0.86	0.84			
Factor 4: Security	3.72			0.75	1.30	4.40
Security personnel are responsible	3.76	0.76	0.71			
Loud fire alarms are reliable	3.40	0.72	0.64			
Safe box is available	3.99	0.66	0.63			
Factor 5: Value and food quality	3.77			0.79	1.10	3.70
Hotel's F&B is value for money	3.66	0.76	0.68			
Room is value for money	3.89	0.67	0.69			
F&B facilities are of great variety	3.73	0.54	0.58			
F&B facilities are of high quality	3.79	0.54	0.67			
Factor 6: General amenities	3.77			0.75	1.00	3.60
Wake-up call is reliable	3.72	0.67	0.54			
Valet/laundry service is efficient	3.67	0.67	0.63			
Information desk is available	3.88	0.59	0.60			
Room service is efficient	3.80	0.55	0.61			

Notes: (α =Cronbach's alpha, F.L = factor loading, comm = commonalities, EV = Eigenvalue, V = variance explained)

- Room quality: this factor refers to the hotel's performance in terms of providing room quality.
- Business services: this factor reflects the services hotels provide in supporting customers' business needs.
- Security: this factor is related to security features or facilities offered by the hotel.
- Value and food quality: this factor refers to aspects related to monetary value for the major services provided by the hotel, and its ability to provide quality food.
- General amenities: this factor deals with those secondary services provided by the hotel for the convenience of customers.

Restaurant Factors

The factor analysis on 17 restaurant attributes produced a factor matrix with 3 factors that possessed an eigenvalue greater than 1 (Table 2). The three identified factors represent 64% of the explained variance. None of the attributes are removed as their factor loading is greater than 0.5. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for all three factors ranged from 0.78 to 0.92. These three factors are interpreted as:

- Serving and food quality: this factor reflects staff performance in their customer service, and the quality of food served.
- Accessibility: this factor explains whether the restaurants provide accessibility that is convenient to customers.
- General service and layout design: this factor covers the appearance of the restaurant in terms of layout design, and also provision of secondary or general services.

Transportation Factors

The VARIMAX rotation of the 14 transportation attributes indicates that three factors related to transportation could be derived (Table 3). The three factors accounted for 73.5% of the explained variance. The loading of the attributes for each factor ranged from 0.58 to 0.84, suggesting that these attributes are closely correlated with their respective factors. The Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the three factors is found greater than 0.70, implying substantial level of consistency among the attributes in each factor. The identified factors could be viewed:

- System quality: this factor covers issues related to the quality of the station, facilities, and value.

Table 2
Factor analysis results for restaurant attributes

	Mean	F.L	Comm	∝	EV	V
Factor 1: Serving & food quality	3.96			0.92	8.20	48.20
Server is willing to serve	4.00	0.82	0.80			
Server is polite & friendly	4.08	0.82	0.79			
Server provide efficient service	3.93	0.81	0.76			
Individualized serving	3.86	0.72	0.70			
Food presentation is good	3.97	0.61	0.66			
Food is tasty & delicious	3.97	0.59	0.71			
Food is in wide variety of choice	3.91	0.54	0.63			
Factor 2: Accessibility	3.92			0.78	1.50	8.70
Distributed all around & convenient	3.82	0.75	0.67			
Easy to reach	3.88	0.68	0.60			
Dining experience is value for money	3.97	0.66	0.55			
Payment through cash	3.99	0.64	0.47			
Factor 3: General service & layout design	3.75			0.85	1.20	7.10
Easy to access parking	3.44	0.79	0.65			
Handling of telephone reservations	3.48	0.66	0.46			
Easy entrance & exiting of restaurant	3.94	0.65	0.68			
Convenient & pleasant waiting area	3.81	0.64	0.69			
Easy movement in the restaurant	3.94	0.61	0.67			
Easy payment through credit card	3.90	0.57	0.40			

Notes: (α =Cronbach's alpha, F.L = factor loading, Comm = commonalities, EV = Eigenvalue, V = variance explained)

- Accessibility: this factor contains items explaining whether the transportation system provides sufficient reach of destination and places.
- Staff service quality: this factor covers items associated with staff behaviour during the service delivery process.

Regression Analysis

The factor scores derived from the factor rotation were then used to estimate the 3 regression models stated in the Methodology section. The estimated regression models are reported in Table 4. The Multiple R (or multiple correlation coefficient) indicates the degree of linearity between dependent variable with the independent variables (or factors). R square (or coefficient of determination) indicates the proportion of the total variation in tourists' overall satisfaction that is accounted for by the variation in the factors. The F-ratio explains whether the estimated regression model could have occurred by chance. All these statistical values represent the measure of goodness-of-fit of the estimated regression model. The "Variables" column lists out the factors that are being entered into the regression model. During the estimation process, all factors are put in the regression model. If the result suggests that some factors were statistically insignificant, these factors would be omitted and the regression model is re-estimated again using the retained factors. The process is continued until all factors in the regression model are statistically significant. The criterion of retaining a factor in the model is that the *p-value* for that factor must be less than 0.01. The "Beta value" column indicates the relative impact each factor makes on tourists' overall satisfaction levels. A higher beta value would mean that its associated factor is significant in influencing tourists' overall satisfaction, as compared to those factors that have lower beta value.

Regression Model for Hotel Factors

The results for Hotel Regression Model (see Table 4: Panel A) suggest that Staff service quality (beta = 0.599) is the most important factor in influencing tourists' overall satisfaction. This is followed by Room quality (beta = 0.394), Value and food quality (beta = 0.356), and General amenities (beta = 0.295). All these factors explained about 22% of the variation in tourists' overall satisfaction levels. The significant F-ratio

TABLE 3
Factor analysis results for transportation attributes

	Mean	F.L	Comm	∝	EV	V
Factor 1: System quality	3.56			0.92	7.50	53.70
Convenient & pleasant waiting areas	3.81	0.84	0.80			
Fully facilitated	3.46	0.84	0.82			
User friendly facilities	3.51	0.84	0.82			
Environment is clean	3.52	0.81	0.75			
Security personnel are responsible	3.49	0.69	0.64			
Safety instructions are noticeable	3.43	0.68	0.64			
Easy ticket purchasing system	3.58	0.64	0.65			
Fare is reasonable	3.70	0.56	0.58			
Factor 2: Accessibility	3.61			0.87	1.50	10.80
High frequency of trips	3.57	0.85	0.80			
Wide area of trip travelling	3.65	0.82	0.78			
Punctuality of every trip	3.60	0.71	0.68			
Factor 3: Staff service quality	3.54			0.87	1.30	9.00
Driver drives safely	3.32	0.85	0.81			
Driver is responsible	3.51	0.82	0.84			
Driver is polite & friendly	3.78	0.62	0.68			

Notes: (α =Cronbach's alpha, F.L = factor loading, Comm = commonalities, EV = Eigenvalue, V = variance explained)

implied that the estimated model could have not occurred by chance.

Regression Model for Restaurant Factors

Observing the estimated restaurant regression model (see Table 4: Panel B), it is found that Serving and food quality (beta = 0.564) is the most important restaurant factor in determining tourists' overall satisfaction. The Accessibility (beta = 0.480) of restaurants to tourists was also found to be significant, although its relative importance is less than the Serving and food quality. The explanatory power of these two factors is quite weak; both factors accounted only about 14% of variation in tourists' overall satisfaction. The model is however valid, judging from its F-ratio value.

Regression Model for Transportation Factors

The transportation regression model in Table 4: Panel C indicates that System quality (beta = 0.379) is the most prominent transportation factor when tourists' satisfaction is concerned. This is followed by the Accessibility (beta = 0.400) aspects of transportation, and Staff service quality (beta = 0.264) for transportation services. This model again suffered the same problem of restaurant regression model. The explanatory

TABLE 4
Regression results

Panel A: Hotel			
Goodness-of-fit			
Multiple R	0.472		
R square	0.223		
Adjusted R square	0.215		
Standard error	1.570		
F = 28.359; Signif. F = 0.000			
Variables		Beta Value	Significance
Staff service quality		0.599	0.000
Room quality		0.394	0.000
Value and food quality		0.356	0.000
General amenities		0.295	0.000
Panel B: Restaurant			
Goodness-of-fit			
Multiple R	0.414		
R square	0.171		
Adjusted R square	0.167		
Standard error	1.620		
F = 41.132; Signif. F = 0.000			
Variables		Beta Value	Significance
Serving & food quality		0.564	0.000
Accessibility		0.480	0.000
Panel C: Transportation			
Goodness-of-fit	0.338		
Multiple R	0.114		
R square	0.107		
Adjusted R square	1.670		
Standard error			
F = 17.046; Signif. F = 0.000			
Variables		Beta Value	Significance
System quality		0.375	0.000
Accessibility		0.396	0.000
Staff service quality		0.264	0.002

power of this model is quite weak if compared to the one for hotel factors.

DISCUSSION

Based on the mean scores documented in Tables 1, 2 and 3, it appears that the overall service performance is considered acceptable in the eyes of tourists. This can be seen from the overall mean score that scored above 3.00. Nevertheless, there still lies room for improvement and enhancement of current service quality level.

Focusing on hotel factors, the *Staff service quality, Room quality, Value and food quality*, and *General amenities* are significant in influencing tourists' overall satisfaction. For *Staff service* quality, it is found that those items associated with staff's communication skills (staff understand your requests and are multilingual) need to be enhanced in order to serve tourists better. The staff's attitudes have been considered as courteous and helpful in fulfilling customers' demand. The *Room quality* is also found to be quite satisfactory in its cleanliness and environment. However, those services associated with provision of food and beverages have been perceived as less favourable compared with staff's attitude and room quality. The same thing happened on *General amenities*. It seems that the tourists would like a dining experience that is more value for money. Tourists also felt that there is a greater need for enhancing the supporting services in terms of lodging. The finding of *Staff service quality* as the most critical hotel attribute contradicted with those reported by Ananth *et al.* (1992) and Rivers *et al.* (1991). The findings reported by Ananth *et al.* (1992) showed that *Price and quality* is the most significant factor, followed by *Security* and *Convenience of location*. Rivers *et al.* (1991) identified *Convenience and location*, and *Overall service* as the critical hotel attributes. Nonetheless, disregarding the relative importance of the factors, the attributes identified in this study correspond to the research findings reported by Choi and Chu (2000), Ananth *et al.* (1992) and Rivers *et al.* (1991), among others.

For restaurant factors, the regression results suggest that *Serving and food quality*, along with *Accessibility*, are the critical factors in determining tourists' overall satisfaction. Again, the core services have been the tourists' main concerns, rather than the secondary services. This finding should not be surprising as it has been noted that service encounter between the employees working in high-contact services (i.e. hotels, restaurants, and airlines) with customers is one of the significant elements determining customers' overall satisfaction (Bitner *et al.* 1990 and Rhonda *et al.* 2000). Focusing on the Serving and food quality items, it has been found that the food being served could be further improved in its presentation, taste, and choices. However, restaurant managers should not pursue the approach of offering higher food quality at the expense of over-charging the customers. Empirical analysis by Tse (2001) reports that customers tend to unwillingly pay extra for a higher level of services, with other things being held constant. Combining the evidence reported here with those by Tse (2001), restaurant managers should be aware that in their attempt to provide greater level of food quality, it is wise to keep the price as low as possible. In terms of restaurant staff's services, they have perceived to be performing well in shaping a delightful and satisfactory dining experience for tourists. This level of tourists' enjoyment could however be elevated if the location of restaurants is easily identified and within reach.

In terms of transportation factors, the regression analysis outcomes indicate that *Accessibility* is the main contributing factor towards tourists' overall satisfaction level. This is followed by the *System quality*, and *Staff service quality*. Judging from the mean scores for items associated with Accessibility, it appears that the transportation-related services could enhance its performance by addressing its frequency, area of coverage, and punctuality. Other areas that need to be taken into account are the safety features in provision of transportation services, and transportation supporting facilities. This has been reflected through the relative score of items such as Fully facilitated, User friendly facilities, Security personnel are responsible, and Safety instructions are noticeable. Attention should also be placed on the staff's service quality during provision of transportation services.

To sum, the core products of hotels, restaurants, and transportation are the main factors that influence tourists' overall satisfaction level. By concentrating on improving these core services, the tourists' experience of travelling in Malaysia would certainly be more enjoyable and memorable.

CONCLUSION

Basically, this study has revealed three major areas that need to be attended by the TSP. The first improvement-needed area is enhancement of hotel staff's communication skills, including their multilingual abilities. This aspect is becoming more important than ever as the number of outbound travelling has been increasing over the past years, bringing more distant travellers speaking different languages. The hotel's top management could encourage and provide incentives for their staff to learn and be equipped with foreign languages. The education institutions could also play their part by offering more foreign language courses.

The second area that needs to be considered is the food itself. With more diversity in composition of tourists, the choices of food should also be increased. This move would increase the chances of matching the food served with tourists' preferences, apart from giving the tourists more choices. The increase in food types should not be accompanied with sloppy food presentation and taste. Another aspect is offering food that is value-for-money in the eyes of tourists. However, to accomplish this would first require information on tourists' perception of value-for-money. Future research could explore the perception of value-for-money between tourists from different countries of origin.

The third area concerns with transportation services. The current transportation route covered by transportation service providers may need to be analysed more closely, taking into account the locations or places that attract tourists. Punctuality of transportation service and passengers' safety are another two aspects that should be looked into by the transportation services providers.

This study is limited in the sense that the perception of travellers with different cultural backgrounds on hotel factors, restaurant factors, and transportation factors is not being explored here. There is ample evidence suggesting that needs and expectation of tourists with different cultural backgrounds may vary (Liu and McClure 2001; Choi and Chu 2000; Reisinger and Turner 1999). This means that the weight they place on factors related to hotels, restaurants, and transportation may be different as well. A clearer understanding of these issues would provide valuable information to TSP on customer segmentation based on cultural backgrounds.

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