International Tourist Satisfaction and Dissemination Information towards Home stay Attributes

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Abstract

This paper analyzed the relationship between homestay attributes towards international tourist satisfaction and dissemination information in Homestay, in Malaysia. Tourist perception of the homestay attribute, satisfaction with their experience caused the dissemination information and these items are vital for successful destination management. Moreover destination attributes affect the perceived quality of tourist offerings, which positively relates to satisfaction as well as visitors loyalty and dissemination information. Nevertheless, there are other factor which are also significant such as type of building, feature of equipment, host family’s empathy and responsiveness and moreover feel of safety and security at the destination. Furthermore, tourist satisfaction significantly contributed to the prediction of intention to return as well as homestay attributes was found significantly influence the tourist’s intention to return and tourist satisfaction demonstrates a mediating effect towards the relationship between homestay attributes and dissemination of information. A thorough understanding of tourists’ expectation and satisfaction will assist homestay managers to provide better services to their customers, to identify their faulty and weaknesses and to understand the characteristics and behaviours of tourists visiting homestay. Moreover identifying the attributes which affects satisfaction level of the international tourists who visit homestay will help tourism planners develop appropriate strategies to attract more customers and to serve them successfully.

Keywords: Homestay, attributes, satisfaction, international tourist, dissemination of information

1. Introduction

In recent years, tourism has been considered as a tool for promoting the development of some economically and socially depressed rural areas (Yague, 2002; Fleischer & Felsenstein, 2000; Valde’s & Del Valle, 2003). Moreover, the majority of countries promote tourism at the expense of natural resources and local cultures. Indeed, from the tourist’s perspective, rural destinations provide nature related activities free from pollution and mass development.

Thus a key strategy for consolidating rural tourism is improving the quality of services offered (Fuentes, 1995; Tyrvainen et al., 2001). However the concept of rural tourism depends fundamentally on the products offered. Nevertheless, same as urban and seaside tourism, the appeal of rural tourism lies also in the range and quality of attractions and facilities.

Nowadays, there are different types of accommodation in the rural areas and the accommodation supply in rural areas varies in terms of size, type, design, location, catering and activities offered. Homestay tourism refers to one pattern of tourism with emphasis on ecotourism and community based tourism in which visitors will stay with foster families in rural areas, and the host families have to treat the tourists as their own family and involve them in their daily activities to share the experiences, learning life styles of the local community, and learning about the local culture.
The usage of the term “homestay” might be diverse in different countries. For instance, Lanier and Berman (1993) describe homestay venues as “private homes in which unused rooms are rented for the purpose of supplementing income and meeting people.” In the United Kingdom, traditions of hospitality and providing food for seasonal farm workers contributed to the development of farm-based holidays, and now recreation and tourism have become significant forms of business diversification for the farmers in many parts of the country (Davis & Turner, 1992).

The homestay program is a tourism product that has been given special emphasis by the Malaysian government through the Ministry of Tourism. Annop Bunchan, (2001) stated that the Malaysian homestay is a rest-house based on community participation where the price of staying is low and that the tourists have to stay with their hosts. The Malaysian homestay program can be regarded as a rural-cultural-community based tourism product, and it was introduced by the Ministry of Tourism, Malaysia in 1988 as an effort to diversify the tourism products through the provision of an alternative accommodation for tourists.

Despite the enormous growth of the homestay program in Malaysia, the industry faced numerous new challenges due to external and internal factors in its business environment which affects its program performance. The external factors include stiff competition from neighbouring countries and uncertainties in the hospitality industry life-cycle (Tourism Malaysia, 2007). Besides that, homestay operators have to deal with internal challenges which are related to the homestay management. The internal factors may contribute to their poor performance in terms of low level of service quality and a moderate level of average occupancy rates (Razalli, 2008).

The Homestay program offers a great significance to the stabilization and improvement of the social economic conditions. Problems arise as those who are engaged in homestay programs lack marketing knowledge which is indispensable for successful business. Moreover, insufficient attention is given to meeting the requirements of the rural tourism consumers, the diversity of services, customer satisfaction and behavioural intentions.

These days, homestay tourism is a new niche market in Malaysia. Both the government and the private sector contributed in planning to develop this new industry. Homestay industry creates a prospect for tourism planners and operators to build up strategies in order to meet tourist’s expectation of their new experiences. The Homestay is an alternative tourism product that has the potential to attract tourists since there is a marked increase in the demand by the international tourists for tourism that has the characteristics of increasing knowledge, including observing, experiencing, and learning the way of life of the local residents at the destination they visit.

This paper contributes to both the academicians and the industries. Academically, it will widen the dimensions of service quality in an organization. Poor service quality can reduce the satisfaction towards the organization product. Besides that, in the long term it will confer a dreadful image towards the organization itself.

As been discussed earlier, this research focuses on the international tourists’ perception towards the quality of services provided by Malaysia Homestay. In general, the findings of this research will help the Homestay operators to have a better understanding on tourist perception and the service quality impact towards the satisfaction level and behavioural intentions.

1. To examine the relationship between homestay attributes and tourist satisfaction;
2. To examine the relationship between tourists satisfaction and the dissemination of information;
3. To examine the relationship between homestay attributes and dissemination of information;
4. To examine the mediating effect of tourists satisfaction towards the relationship between homestay attributes and the dissemination of information.
The proposed model is designed with homestay attributes as independent variables. Tourist satisfaction plays role as mediator, whereas dissemination of information is a dependent variable. The following discussion provides an overview of variables and conclusion as well.

2. Service quality

Homestay is a form of accommodation where the tourist can live with the chosen host family and has the opportunity to interact as well as experience the daily way of life of the family and culture directly. At the destination level a tourism product is a package of components such as accommodation, food and entertainment. Rural holiday accommodation elements and their customers have continuously and rapidly grown in past years. Moreover, tourism becomes the priority tool of rural planning orthodoxy (Augustyn, 1998).

There are different types of accommodation in rural area such as rural hotels, rented houses, campsites, and what is known as ‘homestay’ that it is the main Asian rural tourism product. Homestay has a series of uniqueness which differentiate them from other types of accommodation. Thus they are located within a rural environment, offer a limited number of rooms/beds for guests, and are equipped with basic services, and they should be architecturally consistent with the surrounding styles (Valdes & Del Valle, 2003).

From the tourist perspective, the appeal of homestay lies firstly in the natural surroundings and their intrinsic rural characteristics, but other factors play important roles in their selection. Characteristics like size or type of building, the quality of the furnishing and the services and activities offered may all be decisive when opting for one homestay or another (Albaladejo-Pina & Diaz-Delfa, 2009).

Since the development of SERVQUAL by Parasuraman et al. (1985), service quality has been widely researched and applied in different types of industries. Service quality has been defined as how well a consumer’s needs are met and how well the services delivered meet their expectations (Su,
Moreover, service quality is consumers’ evaluation towards the perceived quality, instead of their satisfaction toward an incident or transaction. In SERQUAL multiple-item scale, five dimensions are identified to measure service quality, including tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy.

The service dimension of the tourism experience is vital. Provision of reliable and responsive services enhances a destination’s competitive advantage (Dwyer & Kim, 2003). They also identified that destination environment in terms of climate, scenery, ambience, friendliness and cleanliness is a key predictor of destination quality.

In the tourism sector, service quality can be regarded as the tourist’s judgement about a product or the overall excellent service or superiority (Zeithaml, 1998). Chi (2005); Hu (2003); Chacko et al. (2005) also indicate that service quality is an important antecedent of customer satisfaction. They argue that service quality highly affects a tourist’s perceived value of a destination and behavioural involvement in the visit.

Thus, Kozak (2001) suggest that service quality performance could be an appropriate measurement to test customer satisfaction, because the customer is likely to be satisfied when a product or service performance is at a desired level. One of the five dimensions of service quality is safety and security today. Safety and security has been identified as one of the five global forces that drive the tourism industry.

In service quality, empathy was explained as a social/communication skill of paying attention to other peoples’ needs by understanding their feelings (Parasuraman et al., 1985). It is well argued that staff empathy represents one of the five main dimensions of service quality. Results of a literature review has shown that empathy is more or less underestimated in services research and, in some service areas; it is regarded as the least important component of service quality (compared to tangibles, reliability, assurance and responsibility). On the other hand, empathy caring is the individualized attention that the firm provides to its customers.

3. Customer satisfaction

Measuring tourists’ satisfaction with a destination is conceptually different from measuring satisfaction at the transaction specific level. Moreover, it is contended that while satisfaction at the destination level is influenced by the various transactions that occur at that destination, an individual’s level of satisfaction is influenced by much broader global factors, some of which are beyond the capacity of the tourism industry to affect.

One of the key elements of successful destination marketing is tourist satisfaction which influences the choice of destination and the decision to return (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). It is generally believed that in tourism, high service quality and resulting satisfaction lead to positive word-of-mouth endorsements, referrals, and repeat visits, which ultimately affect the financial performance of suppliers associated with the tourism industry. Most tourism product providers as well as destination management organizations perform regular visitor satisfaction surveys. However, the key issue is how the survey results are used in policy design and implementation.

Tourist satisfaction is measured by three items, based on Oliver (1997); Yoon and Uysal (2005) concerning the overall satisfaction with the visit to a given tourist destination; the degree to which expectations are exceeded; and the willingness to spread a positive word of mouth about the destination among friends and relatives.

Meanwhile, Lee (2005) suggests that satisfaction is determined by tourists comparing their perception of service performance to expectations. Lee (2005, p. 48) further summarises that ‘a tourist’s expectations are confirmed when a service performs as expected; positively disconfirmed when the service performs better than expected; and negatively disconfirmed when the service performs worse than expected’.

Moreover, as stressed by Yoon and Uysal (2005), satisfaction should be perceived from a multidimensional perspective, i.e., more than one observed variable should be considered. Chon (1989) demonstrates that both the perceived evaluative outcome of the holiday experience at the destination and associated expectations are important elements in shaping tourist satisfaction.
Customer satisfaction can be estimated with a single item, which measures the overall satisfaction (Fornell, 1992; Spreng & Mackoy, 1996; Bigné et al., 2001).

Customer satisfaction has long been recognized as a process (Oliver, 1997) and is the difference between consumers’ perceived and expected performance of a product or service. In other words, customer satisfaction occurs when performance is higher than expected, while dissatisfaction occurs when performance is lower than expected. Lastly, Parasuraman et al. (1988) concluded that customers’ satisfaction led by perceived service quality. They also concluded that service quality is highly correlated with satisfaction and loyalty.

4. Customer loyalty
In the tourism literature, prior research findings suggest a significant relationship among tourist satisfaction, intention to return, and positive word-of-mouth communication (Pizam, 1994; Ross, 1993). Furthermore, satisfied tourists are most likely to recommend destinations they have visited to their friends and relatives (Becho & Prentice, 1997; Ross, 1993).

In another study, Kozak and Remington (2000) reported that the more satisfied the tourists were with their visits, the more likely they were to return and recommend the destination to others. Further, satisfied tourists were more likely to recommend holidays in Mallorca than to repeat their visits to the destination. A significant correlation also was found between intention to recommend and intention to revisit the destination. Thus, tourists were more likely to recommend the destination to others if they intended to revisit.

Meanwhile, some studies recognize that understanding which factors increase tourist loyalty is valuable information for tourism marketers and managers (Flavian et al., 2001). Many destinations rely strongly on repeat visitation because it is less expensive to retain repeat tourists than to attract new ones (Um et al., 2006). On the other hand, Petrick et al. (2001) reported that perceived value and satisfaction could be used to predict the travellers’ intention to revisit an entertainment destination. Therefore, when customers have positive and/or beneficial service experiences, they should be motivated to encourage their friends and family members to have the same experience (Babin et al., 2005).

Notwithstanding, revisit behaviour is considered to be the most important manifestation of loyalty (Knox & Walker, 2001; Wong & Sohal, 2003). Findings of many studies, such as Baker and Crompton (2000); Zeithmal (2000), suggest that it is important to consider all relevant aspects of consumer behaviour that may be less prominent but nonetheless important indicators of loyalty in order to achieve a reliable assessment of customer loyalty.

Kotler and Amstrong (2005) measure the construct “future behavioural intention” by using two indicators: the intention of repurchase and the intention to provide positive recommendations. In tourism research, a similar approach is adopted and tourist loyalty intention is represented in terms of the intention to revisit the destination and the willingness to recommend it to friends and relatives (Oppermann, 2000; Bigné et al., 2001; Chen & Gusoy, 2001; Cai et al., 2003; Niininen et al., 2004; Petrick, 2004). Therefore, two indicators, “revisiting intention” and “willingness to recommend” are used as measures of destination loyalty intention.

Lastly, loyal customers are valuable marketing tools, telling friends and families of their positive experiences and creating new business and increased revenue for successful service organizations. In the marketing and tourism analyses, repeat visits have generally been regarded as desirable (Oppermann, 2000) because among other things, it is thought first that the marketing costs needed to attract repeaters are lower than those required for first-time tourists; secondly, a return is a positive indicator of one’s satisfaction; thirdly, an inertial attitude of high repeaters increases their likelihood to return (Oppermann, 1998).

5. Conclusions
The homestay programs have proven to be one of the key mechanisms in the economic transition. Economic reforms unleashed the potential for entrepreneurial development in a direction that assisted microeconomic stability and competitive market behaviour. Successful tourist businesses were found
to be focusing on a particular product or niche market, developing a strong competitive advantage offering high quality, and superior service and products. Earning high satisfaction ratings from homestay’s guests is an especially important strategy or homestay operators, because loyal customers are the principal driver of their future profits. Along with continuing to stay at a brand’s properties, satisfied customers also refer new business. Organizations with satisfied, loyal customers enjoy may revisit again. Therefore, there is a need on strategic planning to provide customer satisfaction and retention. Its efficient application enhances the hospitality industry, activates the effects of tourism development in socio-cultural issues and provides economic growth.

REFERENCES


