

A Study on International Tourist's Satisfaction with Tourism Services in Kerala

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Abstract: In the tourism industry quality issues are of prime importance in an increasingly competitive and saturated market. High standards of tourism services has become an important parameter for those choosing a holiday destination. The 6 S framework outlined in india's National tourism Policy namely swagat (hospitality), soochna (information), suvidha (facilitation), suraksha (security/protection), sahyog (cooperation) and sanrachna (infrastructure development) are the key factors which was used to assess the perceptions of service from the perspective of 513 International tourists in Kerala. The paper aims at analyzing the gap between expectation and experience, effect of demographics and certain tourism service parameters on overall satisfaction with a destination. Paired T test, Anova and Regression analysis was employed for this purpose. The findings have strategic implications for the marketers of services in kerala to improve crucial quality attributes and improve the perception of brand Kerala.

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Key words: Kerala tourism, 6 S framework, ANOVA, Paired T Test, Regression.

1. Introduction:

The service sector accounts for two thirds of GDP in developed economies (Lovelock, 1999). Tourism remains a great source of foreign exchange earnings from services for many countries. In recent years there has been a notable shift in the preference for destinations like Europe and North America to East and South Asia (WTO, 2004). A review of literature revealed a lacunae in service quality studies in India, and more specifically Kerala. The study explores the perceptions of International travelers towards tourism service parameters in the context of Kerala, a famous tourist destination in the South Asian economy, India. Quality improvement is one of the core areas of concern and improvement that tourist destinations are currently focusing on. To improve the destination's competitiveness destination marketers are increasingly analyzing tourist's perception on the quality of tourism services.

The new policy document of Kerala Tourism titled "Vision 2020" reflected on the growing concern for environmental conservation, heritage and culture protection, lack of basis infrastructure surrounding major destinations, and the need for proper quality assurance systems and legislations to regulate and bring quality in tourism.

The objectives of the study were to:

- 1) Analyze the gap between pre trip expectations and actual experience with

respect to tourism service parameters in Kerala

- 2) Analyze the effect of demographic variables on overall satisfaction.
- 3) Analyze the effect of quality of Service parameters on overall satisfaction with Kerala as a destination among International tourists.

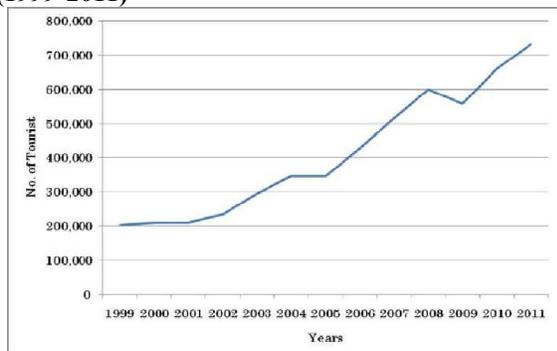
Kerala Tourism

Kerala has been rated as "one of the fifty destination to be visited in one's lifetime" by the National Geographic Channel (2004). Moderate climate, rich art, colorful festivals, diverse natural and cultural attractions are causing tourism to flourish in Kerala. This diversity offers tourists a range of attractions and experience such as beaches, backwaters, wildlife, evergreen forests, and diverse flora and fauna of Kerala. It is often projected as the "Green Gateway" to India (Netto,2004). According to the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) with an annual average arrival growth rate of 12% for International tourists, kerala is becoming one of the fastest growing destinations in the World.

Unique products like backwater tourism and Ayurveda emerged as the innovation of tourism industry which attained international recognition. Currently there are about 1,000 houseboats in Kerala backwaters from basic to luxury resembling floating mini-palaces. Similarly, Ayurveda, the traditional medicine system in Kerala was promoted among the tourists for rejuvenation of health. Accommodation facilities ranging from luxury hotels to home stays

including vernacular architectural style, culture, tradition and various art forms are today being widely used for creating memorable experiences to tourists.

Chart 1: Foreign Tourists arrivals in Kerala (1999-2011)



6S of Tourism Development in Kerala

The National Tourism Policy of India, 2002, has underlined the '6 S' of tourism development, the six key result areas of swagat (hospitality), soochna (information), suvidha (facilitation), suraksha (security/protection), sahyog (cooperation) and sanrachna (infrastructure development) These six areas comprise both 'hard' and 'soft' elements of tourism, and encompass all positive initiatives and measures.

Based on the above 6 S framework, this paper focuses on tourism service parameters namely, Accommodation, Cleanliness and hygiene, Information, Safety, Local people and food, Convenience. The effect of these variables on overall satisfaction is studied through the regression analysis.

2. Review of Literature:

Reviews reveals different definitions of quality. According to Crosby (1993), quality is compliance with a specification and appropriate for use. Parasuram et al., (1985) imply that it is the customer who decides whether a service is of quality or not. Berry (1989) implies that service is what the customer says it is and that tourists assessment of quality is all that matters. This implies that quality should focus on tourism destination services and the tourist's assessment of the same.

Service quality and customer satisfaction:

Service quality and customer satisfaction continue to be an important area of research in tourism as in any other industry. Service quality has relationship with costs (Kellog, 1997), Financial performance (Rust, 1994), customer satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1992), customer retention (Hocutt, 1998) and price elasticity (Bolton & Myers, 2003). The increasing competition among tourist destinations necessitates an understanding of the

relationship between a destination's products and attributes and visitors perception of quality and value (Baker and Crompton, 2000). Examining the relationship between the destinations attributes and visitor's impressions of them would provide an opportunity to evaluate visitor's perceptions of satisfaction, quality and value and the influence of these factors on destination loyalty (Opperman, 2000).

Many studies (Hill and Alexander, 2000) have supported that customer satisfaction and company success are connected. Taylor (1998) reveal that companies have experienced high defection rates in spite of high satisfaction ratings and there is a need for customer loyalty to be employed as a predictor of actual behavior. The study suggested that overall satisfaction, likelihood to repurchase the product or service and likelihood to recommend a product or service are important predictors of actual behavior. Retaining existing customers has a much lower associated cost than winning new ones (Fornell and Wernerfelt, 1987). Also loyal customers are more likely to spread positive word of mouth and act as advertising agents among their friends, relatives and other potential customers to a product/service (Reicheld and sasser, 1990). In such a context, studying customer loyalty is highly relevant.

Customer satisfaction is one of the most examined topics in tourism as it plays a crucial role in the survival and the future of any tourism product and service (Gursoy et al. 2003, 2007). According to Kozak and Rimmington (2000), tourist satisfaction influences the choice of destination, the consumption of products and services and provides the ground for revisit and positive word of mouth recommendations which are indications of destination loyalty.

Trying to understand what comprises tourist satisfaction is one of the most relevant areas of research in the tourism sector as satisfied tourists tend to transmit their positive experience to third persons as well as repeating their visit (Kozak and Rimmington 2000). Satisfied tourists tend to communicate their positive experience to others and they tend to buy repeatedly. Studies have also revealed that dissatisfaction leads to negative word of mouth and not revisit the destination and choose alternate destinations (Pizam 1994). The questions of relevance are what makes tourists satisfied and what constructs should be considered when analyzing tourist satisfaction.

In tourism studies it is important to study satisfaction of tourists with individual attributes. Middleton and Clarke (2001) highlighted the fact that tourists experience a medley of services like hotels, restaurants, shops, amenities, conveniences etc. Kozak and Rimmington (2000) highlighted the fact

that satisfaction with various attributes of the destination leads to overall satisfaction. Therefore it is imperative to study the attributes satisfaction, overall satisfaction and the relationship between the two.

Chen and Hsu (2000) revealed that Korean tourists' considered adventure, scenic beauty, environmental friendliness, availability of tourist information and architectural style, travel cost, lifestyle, quality restaurants, freedom from language barriers and interesting places to visit as the main factors while choosing travel destinations. Kozak and Rimmington (2000) study of tourists satisfaction in Spain revealed that the overall tourist satisfaction, likelihood revisit and recommend were influenced by destination attributes such as value for money, accommodation standards, service at accommodation, safety, hospitality of people, hygiene, cleanliness, sanitation, quality and variety of cuisine. They suggested that satisfaction need not necessarily lead to revisit, rather the destination would benefit from word of mouth itself.

Chaudhary (2000) conducted a study to determine pre- and post-trip perceptions of foreign tourists about India as a tourist destination. A gap analysis between expectations and satisfaction levels was used to identify strengths and weaknesses of India's tourism-related image dimensions so that necessary efforts can be made to ensure that tourists' expectations are met. The study revealed that India is rated highly for its rich art forms and cultural heritage. However, irritants like cheating, begging, unhygienic conditions, lack of safety dampen the spirits of tourists. It was suggested that India can be positioned on the world map only after these hygiene factors are improved along with other motivators.

Kozak (2001) compared satisfaction of tourists across two nationalities in Turkey. The study employed the Principal component analysis and eight factors emerged: services at accommodation, local transport services, cleanliness and hygiene factors, customer care and hospitality, activities, price, language and communication and airport services. Aspects like security, information and attractions have not been considered in the study.

Kozak and Rimmington (2002) analyzed tourist satisfaction in Malorca, Spain. Upon factor analysis, four factors emerged namely: destination attractiveness, tourist attractions and facilities, availability of English language and facilities and services at the destination airport.

Sonmez and Sirakaya (2002) analyzed American traveler's perception of Turkey. The study revealed that safety, hospitality, general vacation atmosphere and mood, relaxation, local attractions, authentic experiences, tourist facilitation, comfort,

communication and the overall appeal of Turkey influenced Americans perception and likelihood of traveling to Turkey.

Alampay (2003) analyzed four service dimensions in Guam, a territory of the US, namely, lodging, dining, shopping and attractions. They determined the satisfaction with each of these components and was hypothesized to have direct effects on the perceived quality of the destination and an overall satisfaction with the destination.

Edward (2006) analyzed service quality in Kerala, India. He measured the perception on the performance of the attributes, namely, quality of accommodation, tourist information, airport services, restaurants, local transport, safety, hygiene, staff attitude, friendliness of the local people, language of staff members, service of the tour operators, service of tour guides, climate, rest and relaxation, nightlife, shopping, fun and excitement activities, basic amenities near attractions, access, beach cleanliness, natural attractions, cultural attractions and historical attractions.

Mohammed.I.Eraqi (2007) analyzed the service quality and positioning in Egypt. The variables included were transportation quality, hotel service quality, restaurant quality, tourist guide quality, driver's behavior, airport services, security and safety and friendliness of the people. The variable – friendliness of people was rated as excellent and the weak points came across as the tourism transport services, airport services and bad behavior of the drivers. Suggestions to improve tourism infrastructure in the weak areas were made.

Bindu Narayan, Chandrasekharan Rajendran, L. Prakash Sai and Ram Gopalan (2009) analyzed the dimensions of service quality in the Indian context and they proposed 10 dimensions that categorise service quality of a tour. They were core tour experience, information, hospitality, Fairness of price, hygiene, amenities, value for money, logistics, food and security. They concluded that in an ever expanding service industry like tourism, there is a need for relooking what constitutes service quality.

Zainuddin Zakaria, Azemi Che Hamid, Zokree Abdul Karim, Norzaidi Mohd Daud (2009) analyzed tourist's expectations and perceptions on service quality in Malaysian tourism industry. They analyzed five dimensions of service, namely, transportation, accommodation, food and beverages services, information services and recreational services. They reported significant gaps in the perception of respondents for all the service quality dimensions.

Tourism Satisfaction and Destination loyalty

In a highly competitive market, a deep understanding of the travel motives that enable tourists to choose amongst various destinations and

the satisfaction with the travel experience would enable offering an attractive tourist destination and guiding tourist resort management. It has been highlighted that tourist satisfaction, loyalty and revisit intention have strong relationship (Prebensen, 2004; Yoon & Uysal, 2005).

Satisfaction is the function of consumer perceptions. Researchers in tourism have used different perspectives to examine tourist satisfaction. Oliver (1980) developed the expectation-disconfirmation model which suggests that consumers develop expectations about a product before buying it. They compare the actual performance with the expectation. They experience positive disconfirmation if the actual performance is better than their expectations and would repeat purchase of such products. But if the performance is worse than expectations then they experience negative disconfirmation and look for alternate products.

Oliver and Swan (1989) adopted the equity theory which suggests that customer satisfaction is the result of the relationship between cost and reward. If the rewards exceed the costs, consumers will be satisfied. If travelers perceive the rewards from their travel experience outweigh the costs (time, price, effort) then they are satisfied with their travel experience.

Latour and Peat (1979) developed the norm theory that suggests that norms serve as reference points for evaluating products. Chon (1989) studied tourist satisfaction and reported that satisfaction is the result of the relationship between tourist's expectation about the destination and their experience at the destination. Satisfaction is based on the goodness of fit between the expectation about the destination and the perceived experience which is the result of comparing previous images of the destination and what is actually seen and felt at the destination. Yoon and Uysal (2005) suggest that tourists use past experience to form a norm to evaluate their experiences at the new destination to determine if they are satisfied with their new experience at the destination. Tse and Wilton (1988) developed the perceived performance model and suggests that customer's satisfaction can be assessed only by examining their perception regarding the actual performance.

Leiper (1990) defined satisfaction with travel and tourism services as the total of traveler's satisfaction with each service aspect like pre trip services, satisfaction with services at the destination and satisfaction with transit route services.

Literature on travel satisfaction deals with different contexts: cultural trips (Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991); depending on the characteristics of the tours,

certain aspects of the tourist programme and satisfaction with the chosen destination (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000). The overall satisfaction is then the result of the relative importance and the level of satisfaction experienced for all the single attributes (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980).

Janet D. Neal and Dogan Gursoy (2008) examined how traveler's satisfaction with the pretrip services, satisfaction at the destination and satisfaction with return trip services affects the overall satisfaction with travel and tourism services in Virginia. The Leiper model was employed. The study found that the tourism experience happens in phases and travelers use services from more than one existing organization. Their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the services they receive from each of those organizations will determine their overall satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the trip and therefore it is imperative to manage and control every service encounter to enhance overall customer satisfaction with travel.

Tribe and Snaith (1998) proposed a tool referred as HOLSAT to measure tourist satisfaction with the holiday destination. They defined satisfaction as the degree to which the tourist's evaluation of a destination's attributes exceeds his/her expectations. The model allows tourists to express both satisfaction and dissatisfaction by evaluating the positive and negative attributes of a destination. This model was applied in Cuba and Vietnam. The negative attributes included too much construction, street prostitution, industrial pollution, lines and waits for services, shortage of certain foods and drinks, power failures, crowds at tourist attractions, too many beggars and vendors, no public toilets, trouble getting money with credit card, having to be careful with food and drinks, trouble changing money, slow customs clearance. Given that the impact on the tourist is clearly negative, it is imperative to ask the tourist about his degree of dissatisfaction with respect to these attributes.

Kozak and Rimmington (2000) studied travel satisfaction in Mallorca and found that the tourist's intention to revisit was influenced by destination attractiveness, facilities and services at the destination airport, overall satisfaction and previous experience. The intention to recommend Mallorca was influenced by destination attractiveness, availability of English language and facilities and services at the destination airport.

Kozak (2001) found that the overall satisfaction, satisfaction with destination airport services and local transport services were the most important attributes relating to satisfaction and intention to revisit Turkey. Further the findings indicate that more mature destinations receive more

repeat visits. Also, the way in which the local people interact with tourists influence the level of satisfaction and revisit intention.

Joaquin Alegre Marin and Jaume Garau Taberner (2006) studied the impact of satisfaction and dissatisfaction on the tourists overall satisfaction and their intention to return to Balearic Islands. The attributes measuring satisfaction were cleanliness and hygiene, inexpensive destination, easy access, sports activities, peace and quiet, contact with nature. The attributes measuring dissatisfaction were pollution, expensive, problems at airport, sports facilities and infrastructure, traffic, noise, crowding, too much development, too much construction and destruction of landscape and lack of natural environment. The results suggest that the displeasure based evaluations influence tourists satisfaction, yet their influence is far lower than the dimensions of satisfaction. Negative evaluations may not determine the final evaluation of satisfaction, yet they make the destination less attractive and reduce the probability of return. Further, a high degree of satisfaction with the attributes typical of a sun and sand destination (beach, climate, landscape etc) guarantees a high rate of return.

3. Methodology

The study employed personal interviews in Kerala among International tourists over a period of 6 months on 600 respondents. Only 513 samples were usable for analysis. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of demographic data and the second part analyzed the quality as perceived by international tourists. 27 variables were employed for the study under accommodation, cleanliness and hygiene, information, safety, local people and food, convenience. The parameters considered for accommodation were related to variety of accommodation options, distinctive accommodation, cleanliness of accommodation, friendly and competent staff, reasonable price of accommodation. The parameters considered for cleanliness and

hygiene were related to cleanliness of tourist spots, clean and neat toilets and amenities, well maintained tourist spots, hygienic amenities near tourist spots. The parameters considered for information were availability of information on important tourist sites to visit, signboards, information points, point of contact during emergency and useful promotional material. Safety parameters considered were regarding safety of tourist destination, safety in accommodation, safety in tourist spots, safety in travel. Perception regarding local people and food were analyzed regarding warm and friendly locals, helpful locals, variety of food, quality of restaurants and food. Conveniences were related to facilities at the airport, ease of communicating in English, quality of local transport, ease of exchanging money, availability of guides and tour operators.

Based on the above review of literature and the 6S framework, the following service elements have been considered for the study:

- 1) Accommodation
- 2) Cleanliness and hygiene
- 3) Safety
- 4) Information
- 5) Locals and food
- 6) Conveniences

4. Analysis and Results:

Paired sample T test

The paired sample T Test was conducted to analyze the difference between the expectations and perceptions of International tourists towards tourism services in Kerala.

Ho: There is no significant difference between Expectation and experience with respect to accommodation, cleanliness, information, safety, locals and food, conveniences.

Ha: There is significant difference between expectation and experience with respect to accommodation, cleanliness, information, safety, locals and food, convenience.

Table 1: Paired T Test results of tourist's expectations and experience with Kerala

Dimensions	Expectations Mean	Expectations S.D.	Experience Mean	Experience S.D.	Mean gap	P value (sig)
Accommodation	3.6881	.62261	4.0380	.61636	.3499	.000
Cleanliness	3.2636	.82860	2.9878	.82279	-0.275	.000
Information	3.4242	.43270	2.8534	.69172	-0.570	.000
Safety	3.5970	.70050	4.0010	.63584	.404	.000
Locals and food	3.4074	.79408	3.8416	.47356	.4342	.000
Conveniences	3.5556	.63015	3.0487	.72664	-0.507	.000

Since $p < .05$ for all service parameters, the null hypothesis H_0 is rejected and the study reveals that there is significant difference between expectation and experience with respect to accommodation, cleanliness, information, safety, locals and food, conveniences.

The paired sample statistics reveals that for accommodation, safety, locals and food the mean experience is higher than mean expectation. The mean experience is the highest for their experience with locals and food, followed by safety and accommodation respectively. The mean experience is lower than the mean expectation regarding information, conveniences and cleanliness in that order.

2 Way Anova

2 way Anova was performed to analyze the effect of demographic variables of age and gender on overall satisfaction with the following hypothesis:

Ho: Age does not influence overall satisfaction

Ho: Gender does not influence overall satisfaction

Table 2: Tests of Between-Subjects Effects
Dependent variable: Overall satisfaction

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	102.735 ^a	9	11.415	30.969	.000	.357
Intercept	4841.398	1	4841.40	1.313E4	.000	.963
Gender	18.065	1	18.065	49.009	.000	.089
Age	54.294	4	13.574	36.825	.000	.227
Gender * age	33.087	4	8.272	22.441	.000	.151
Error	185.405	503	.369			
Total	9740.000	513				
Corrected Total	288.140	512				

The Anova table reveals that both Ho are to be rejected because the F values are <.05. Therefore we can conclude that age and gender influences overall satisfaction.

Regression Analysis

Multiple Regression Analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between tourism service experience and overall satisfaction.

Table 3: Variables Entered/Removed^b

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	CoEav, AcEav, saEav, loEav, ClEav, inEav ^a		Enter

a. All requested variables entered.

b. b. Dependent Variable: Overall satisfaction

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.766 ^a	.587	.582	.48508

a. Predictors: (Constant), CoEav, AcEav, saEav, loEav, ClEav, inEav

ANOVA^b

Model	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	169.076	6	28.179	119.757	.000 ^a
Residual	119.064	506	.235		
Total	288.140	512			

a. Predictors: (Constant), CoEav, AcEav, saEav, loEav, ClEav, inEav

b. Dependent Variable: Overall satisfaction

Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Constant	-1.69	.271		-6.247	.000
AcEav	.739	.041	.607	18.097	.000
ClEav	.281	.037	.308	7.642	.000
InEav	.056	.053	.051	1.056	.292
SaEav	.146	.043	.124	3.420	.001
loEav	.503	.053	.317	9.405	.000
CoEav	-.169	.045	-.164	-3.791	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Overall satisfaction

The multiple correlation coefficient value 0.766 shows a fairly high degree of relationship between the dependent and independent variables. R square value is 0.587 which means that only 58.7% of variability is explained by these 6 independent variables.

The F value 119.757 is highly significant because $P = .000$

$$Y \text{ (Overall Satisfaction)} = -1.690 + 0.607 \text{ (Accommodation)} + 0.308 \text{ (Cleanliness)} + 0.051 \text{ (Information)} + 0.124 \text{ (Safety)} + 0.317 \text{ (Locals)} - 0.164 \text{ (Conveniences)}$$

Looking at the independent variables, except information, all other variables are statistically significant. As the variable convenience is showing coefficient with the negative sign, it could be removed from the existing model.

This study was performed based on preconceived approach which involves backward or forward step wise regression.

5. Discussion

Based on the above analysis, there are significant gaps between expectation and experience regarding information, conveniences and cleanliness. The service providers and destination managers have not been able to meet the expectations of tourists on these parameters. But experience is better than expectation with regard to locals and food, safety, accommodation. Destination marketers should place more emphasis on improving the areas of weakness.

Age and gender seem to affect overall satisfaction. Specific research regarding the impact of socio demographic variables on overall satisfaction and destination loyalty should be undertaken.

Acknowledging the important constructs that affect tourist satisfaction and the subsequent tourist intention to re buy and recommend the product would be of immense value to the tourism planners as it would enable them to focus their attempts to improve their offerings and position the destination right. Therefore enhancing tourist satisfaction should be one of the main aims of destination marketers as it is

a prerequisite for developing strategies to enhance the destination's attractiveness and its competitive positioning.

Of particular concern is the point on information availability. Kerala tourism planners should focus on making available travel information by using portable travel devices like GPS, PDA or smart phones. The International tourist may not have information on different things to do in a Kerala holiday and may not be aware of the new tourism products like rural holidays in Kerala and the relevance of local festivals etc. Pizman, Neuman and Reichel (1979) asserted that it is important to measure consumer satisfaction applying as many destination attributes as possible. They also asserted that dissatisfaction with one of the attributes leads to dissatisfaction of the whole tourism destination. In addition to the 6 S framework, Kerala can focus on a 7 S, 'Safai' which translates to cleanliness in Hindi. The Kerala Tourism Policy, 2011 states that Kerala, based on feedback surveys has initiated various programs like Kerala Clean toilet campaign, For Kerala to build and sustain a boutique image for its unique holiday attraction elements would require making tourism everybody's business. All stake holders, including the public at large, should be involved in developing the sector.

Since satisfaction may also relate directly to the consumer's needs and motives, they should also be included. By including travel motives and perception of attributes at the destination it is possible to have a better understanding about why people intend to recommend and revisit. The journey from leaving home to return consists of a series of elements including infrastructural aspects, activities, service elements, service level, nature, travel party, food. After the journey all these elements are viewed as possible influences on overall satisfaction and subsequently on the intention to recommend and revisit.

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