Study Regarding Rural Guesthouse and Tourists' Satisfaction

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Abstract. In order to success in any business an important factor is considered to be the quality of the services delivered to customers. The paper presents the tourists' satisfaction with respect to the services offered by the rural guesthouses. Lodging represents an important part of the holiday. According to the available legislation of Romania there are more than 10 different types of accommodation facilities which can be certificated to assure the tourists' services. Hitherto in Romania the certification of accommodation facilities is due only based on the technical characteristics. For the main objective of the paper a survey was conducted in 2 flowers and 3 flowers rural guesthouses. The respondents were asked to evaluate the quality of the services by using the SERVQUAL model. The quality of the services offered by the rural guesthouses did not meet the tourists' expectations for none of the comfort categories. For future research it is recommended to conduct a similar study at the nation level to determine if only the technical characteristics are enough or not to certificate an accommodation unit.

Keywords: quality estimation, SERVQUAL, rural tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism and hospitality represent a business which increases year by year. In order to succeed in such a field an important role is played by the quality of the services. Because of their particularities it is difficult to measure and to define the services quality. Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) defined the services' quality as being the gap between the consumers' perception and expectation of the services. From this assumption Parasuraman *et. al* (1988) developed the SERVQUAL model in order to quantify the quality of the services. The model was used and adapted in time for different kind of services: private health care system (Butt and de Run, 2010), health and fitness sector (Soita, 2012) electronic commerce (Alzola and Robaiana, 2005), public services (Brysland and Curry, 2001), education (Shekarchizadeh *et al.,* 2011), banking (Riadh, 2009).

The hospitality industry was also analysed by using the SERVQUAL method (Bigne *et al*, 2003; Devi Juwaheer, 2004; Zhou and Pritchard, 2009). Rural tourism represents a form of tourism which during the last years encountered an increase of appellation among tourists. Lodgings, food and beverages and transport represent the basis services in the tourism and hospitality industry.

According to the available legislation of Romania there are more than 10 different types of accommodation facilities which can be certificated to assure to the tourist services. In rural tourism mainly, are two: rural tourism guesthouse and agritourism guesthouse. For the moment in Romania the certification of accommodation facilities is due to only through technical characteristics. Stanciu and Hapneciuc (2009) reached the conclusion that the main problem mentioned by the tourists visiting Bucovina was the poor knowledge in the field of the personnel.

Based on the particularities mentioned above the aim of the paper is to analyse tourists' satisfaction with respect to the services offered by rural guesthouses. The level of

satisfaction of the tourists can help the managers of the guesthouses to see which are weakness and the strengths of the business and establish future strategies.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The current research was conducted in 8 rural guesthouses from Tarnava Mare Area, Romania. The guesthouses were classified for 2 and 3 flowers (4 guesthouses for each category of comfort). The research method was the survey based on questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed taking into consideration the SERVQUAL method. The total number of questionnaires applied was 412, and for this research were validated 296 (visitors who spend at least one night in the studied guesthouses).

As a difference from previous studies which were conducted in the accommodation field and which were analysing one company, for this research were analysed 8 guesthouses. This was possible because, as it was mentioned before, in Romania the classification of the guesthouses is made only on technical characteristics. At the same time in the tourism field the SERVQUAL method in Romania was applied before, only for a 4 stars hotel in Bucharest (State and Istudor, 2009).

According to the SERVQUAL method, the quality can be express as being the difference between the perceived quality of the services and the expect quality of the services Parasuraman *et. al* (1988):

Service quality = perceived service (P) – expected service (E)

The questionnaire consists in 22 statements which need to be evaluated from two points of view: (1) what consumers expect by general from a certain service (accommodation in the current study); (2) how they perceived the service they benefit from. In both cases the interviewers need rank each statement on a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 represents very important, and 7 represents not important at all. The service quality is obtained by the difference between the perceived service and expected service for each statement. If the score is negative, it means that the quality of the services is below the expectation of the customers, and the manager should find which problems of the company are and try to improve the situation. If the score is positive, it means that the service crossed the tourists' expectations. In this case the management team should maintain the quality of the services.

To determinate the total quality of the services the average is calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

From the total number of the tourists it could be observed the fact that almost 55 % of them were accommodated in the 2 flowers comfort category guesthouses. This fact can be explained by analysing the travel budget cost, when accommodation expenses represent around 50% of the total budget cost. Another explanation can be the reason of traveling, which in the current situation is represented mainly by the desire of seeing and visiting new places.

From the data presented in Tab.1 it can be observed that the scores registered by the 22 statements are around zero value, plus/minus 0.41. The lower score was obtained for the statement 20 "Staff is always available to attend your request", minus 0.41. This is unusual on one hand if it is taken into consideration the fact that by general this is a family business, where the tourism activity represents a supplementary income source, but on the other hand

this can be explained by the fact that the owners during the day are involved also in other activities, such as agriculture, and that is why sometimes it might be difficult to reach them.

The score obtained for this statement is opposite with the score registered by statement 7 "Services are adequate to tourist needs and do not need to be change". Even if the tourists were not satisfied with the fact that the personnel was not at their disposal all the time, they do not consider that the guesthouses need to adapt their services to the needs of the tourists.

As it was observed also in other studies (Hassamaldin, 2008), in the case of the tangibles, which group the statement 1 to 4, the most important and appreciated aspect was the cleanness of the staff (statement 3).

In the case of the statement "The guest house keeps the engagement to the tourist" the score was minus 0.32. This can be explained by the fact that for some services the guesthouse was not the main responsible in assuring them (such as visit to local crafts). The same was observed in the case of a four star hotel (Hassamaldin, 2008) where the score for this statement was minus 0.62. In both studies the expectations of the tourists were higher regarding this aspect.

Tab. 1

SERVQUAL scores at general level from the tourists' point of view

No	Statement	Scores		
		E_{ij}	P_{ij}	$P_{ij}-E_{ij}$
1	Architecture of the buildings and internal decoration is pleasant. simple and in harmony with the rural surroundings	4.01	4.01	0.00
2	The physical facilities are visually appealing and easy to use	3.83	3.81	-0.01
3	Staff look well groomed and dress	4.23	4.11	-0.12
4	The promotion materials should be attractive and convincing	4.03	4.04	0.01
5	The guest house keeps the engagement to the tourist	4.18	3.86	-0.32
6	Services offered allow tourist take part of the community's life	4.17	4.06	-0.11
7	Services are adequate to tourist needs and do not need to be change	3.91	4.04	0.13
8	Services are delivered in the established terms and time	3.96	4.04	0.08
9	The guesthouse offers real information. and keeps their records accurately	4.03	3.91	-0.12
10	Staff offer good advice regarding the terms of delivering the services	4.02	4.09	0.07
11	When a problem arises request is quickly dealt with	4.05	4.15	0.10
12	Staff treats you politely and with warmth	4.26	3.97	-0.29
13	Staff gives you good advice regarding the tradition. events and gastronomy of the place	3.96	3.93	-0.03
14	You may trust the staff	4.13	3.98	-0.16
15	The safety feeling in your relation with the staff	3.86	4.05	0.19
16	Staff at your disposal treat you pleasantly	4.04	4.05	0.02
17	Staff go out of their way to solve problems customers may have in proper manner	4.11	4.07	-0.04
18	Staff give you adequate and individual attention	4.01	4.05	0.04
19	Guesthouse's schedule is flexible and convenient for you	3.91	3.99	0.08
20	Staff is always available to attend your request	4.19	3.79	-0.41
21	Staff have tourists' best desire and offer alternative solutions	4.04	4.02	-0.02
22	Staff should understand each tourist specific needs to offer him quality services at the establish price	4.09	3.97	-0.12

Note: E_{ij} – the expectation for statement i from dimension j; P_{ij} – the perception for statement i from dimension j;

The lower score registered by the 4 star hotel can be explained by the fact that this type of lodging compared with the analysed guesthouses has a more luxury image, so the expectations are even higher and the tourists are more critical and by general those who visited the 4 stars hotel mentioned the business as being the main purpose of the travel.

The tourists were more satisfied by the safety feeling in the relation with the staff, even if by general the services of the guesthouses were below the expectation of the tourists.

The next step in achieving the purpose of the research was to analyse the 22 statement used to evaluate the services' quality of the guesthouses, in the case of each category of comfort (Tab. 2 and Tab. 3).

In the case of the 2 flowers guesthouses the statements registered scores from minus 0.60 to plus 0.25. It was noticed the fact that for 2 flowers guesthouses the tourists appreciated negative the architecture of the building because this is not part of the local environment.

Tab. 2

SERVQUAL scores for 2 flowers guesthouses

No	Statement	Scores		
		E_{ij}	P_{ij}	$P_{ij}-E_{ij}$
1.	Architecture of the buildings and internal decoration is pleasant. simple and in harmony with the rural surroundings	4.14	4.04	-0.09
2.	The physical facilities are visually appealing and easy to use	3.66	3.78	0.12
3.	Staff look well groomed and dress	4.21	4.09	-0.12
4.	The promotion materials should be attractive and convincing	4.16	3.96	-0.20
5.	The guest house keeps the engagement to the tourist	4.09	3.75	-0.33
6.	Services offered allow tourist take part of the community's life	4.16	4.20	0.04
7.	Services are adequate to tourist needs and do not need to be change	3.99	4.02	0.02
8.	Services are delivered in the established terms and time	3.96	4.17	0.21
9.	The guesthouse offers real information. and keeps their records accurately	4.29	4.00	-0.29
10.	Staff offer good advice regarding the terms of delivering the services	3.93	4.17	0.23
11.	When a problem arises request is quickly dealt with	3.99	4.25	0.25
12.	Staff treat you politely and with warmth	4.49	3.89	-0.60
13.	Staff gives you good advice regarding the tradition. events and gastronomy of the place	4.02	4.04	0.02
14.	You may trust the staff	4.17	4.01	-0.16
15.	The safety feeling in your relation with the staff	3.91	4.13	0.22
16.	Staff at your disposal treat you pleasantly	4.01	3.94	-0.06
17.	Staff go out of their way to solve problems customers may have in proper manner	4.15	4.15	-0.01
18.	Staff give you adequate and individual attention	4.12	4.04	-0.07
19.	Guesthouse's schedule is flexible and convenient for you	3.82	4.01	0.19
20.	Staff is always available to attend your request	4.04	3.87	-0.17
21.	Staff have tourists' best desire and offer alternative solutions	4.00	4.05	0.05
22.	Staff should understand each tourist specific needs to offer him quality services at the establish price	4.14	4.10	-0.04

Note: E_{ij} – the expectation for statement i from dimension j; P_{ij} – the perception for statement i from dimension j;

As it was noticed at the general level, also in the case of the two flowers guesthouses, the owners did not meet the expectations of the tourists regarding the assurance of the promise service (statement 5). This fact is reinforced by the score registered for statement 9 "The guesthouse offers real information and keeps their records accurately". Based on the fact that the engagement with the tourists was not respected and because the tourists felt cheated and disappointed, the image of the service quality was also affected, in the end. For the future the managers of the guesthouses should pay more attention to the information which they deliver and the engagement made with tourists in order to succeed in the business.

Tab. 3

SERVQUAL scores for 3 flowers guesthouse

No	Statement	Scores		
		E_{ij}	P_{ij}	P_{ij}-E_{ij}
1.	Architecture of the buildings and internal decoration is pleasant. simple and in harmony with the rural surroundings	3.87	3.97	0.10
2.	The physical facilities are visually appealing and easy to use	4.03	3.86	-0.17
3.	Staff look well groomed and dress	4.25	4.14	-0.11
4.	The promotion materials should be attractive and convincing	3.87	4.13	0.26
5.	The guest house keeps the engagement to the tourist	4.30	3.99	-0.31
6.	Services offered allow tourist take part of the community's life	4.19	3.90	-0.29
7.	Services are adequate to tourist needs and do not need to be change	3.81	4.07	0.25
8.	Services are delivered in the established terms and time	3.96	3.88	-0.07
9.	The guesthouse offers real information. and keeps their records accurately	3.71	3.79	0.09
10.	Staff offer good advice regarding the terms of delivering the services	4.13	3.99	-0.14
11.	When a problem arises request is quickly dealt with	4.12	4.04	-0.08
12.	Staff treat you politely and with warmth	3.97	4.06	0.09
13.	Staff gives you good advice regarding the tradition. events and gastronomy of the place	3.89	3.79	-0.10
14.	You may trust the staff	4.08	3.93	-0.15
15.	The safety feeling in your relation with the staff	3.81	3.96	0.15
16.	Staff at your disposal treat you pleasantly	4.07	4.19	0.11
17.	Staff go out of their way to solve problems customers may have in proper manner	4.05	3.97	-0.08
18.	Staff give you adequate and individual attention	3.87	4.06	0.19
19.	Guesthouse's schedule is flexible and convenient for you	4.02	3.97	-0.05
20.	Staff is always available to attend your request	4.38	3.69	-0.69
21.	Staff have tourists' best desire and offer alternative solutions	4.09	3.98	-0.11
22.	Staff should understand each tourist specific needs to offer him quality services at the establish price	4.02	3.81	-0.22

Note: E_{ij} – the expectation for statement i from dimension j; P_{ij} – the perception for statement i from dimension j;

For the three flowers guesthouses the scores registered by the statements rage between minus 0.69 for "Staff is always available to attend your request" and 0.25 for "Services are adequate to tourist needs and do not need to be change". The main problem indicated by the tourists for the three flowers guesthouse refers to the lack of the personnel, this not being all the time at the disposal of the tourist. Even that, in the case of contact with the personnel this proves to be kind and pay individual attention (statement 12 and statement 19, Tab. 3).

CONCLUSION

Based on the presented results, it can be concluded that the quality of the services of the guesthouses did not meet the tourists' expectations. The main problems derive from the fact that the owners of the guesthouses have no training in the field of tourism and for them this activity did not represent the main source of income. To improve the current situation, the owners of the guesthouses should pay more attention to the human part of the tourists' services. Also it can be recommended that the classification of the accommodation facilities should be done based also on the quality of the staff and not only on the quality of the technical characteristics. At the same time the information campaign should be adapted to the target market to avoid any misunderstand of what the company promises.

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