

COMPARISON OF SERVICE QUALITY PERCEPTIONS OF CHINESE TOURISTS' VISITING GOLDEN TRIANGLE IN INDIA

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Abstract Tourism industry has grown steadily over the last decades and has been playing a pivotal role in the overall economy of the world. During recent years numerous tourism firms have entered into tourism marketplace and have brought with them the concept of having better delivered services. Further, given the rapidly changing profile of travellers, in terms of their nationality, this study investigates Chinese tourists' service quality perceptions visiting Golden Triangle in India. The results from the regression analysis suggest that Chinese tourists' overall satisfaction is primarily derived from the value. This study is strategically and managerially important to the Indian tourism industry. Using the results of this study, tour operators can focus their efforts to provide quality services and facilities that their customers perceive as being important and as having high value.

Keywords: Chinese Tourists, India, Service, Quality, Tourism

INTRODUCTION

Tourism in India has undergone significant changes in recent years seen by the rising numbers of international tourists and increase in domestic tourism. This has led to the redesign and reframes the tourist destinations to offer a composite tourism product to the tourists. Today's, tourism business environment is becoming more competitive and volatile, only those companies/ destinations win long term sustainability having competitive product. Thus, the influx of tourist's arrival to any destination/ country has undoubtedly reflected by the service quality it has to provide. According to The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2013, India ranks 65th out of 144 countries overall. Further, the report ranks the price competitiveness of India's tourism sector 20th out of 144 countries. It mentions that India has quite good air transport (ranked 39th), particularly given the country's stage of development, and reasonable ground transport infrastructure (ranked 42nd). As per the UNWTO World Tourism Barometer, December 2013, India's rank in the World Tourism Receipts during 2012 was 16th and rank in international tourist arrivals was 41. The rank of India was

7th among Asia and the Pacific Region in terms of tourism receipts during 2012.

The fast growth of Chinese travelers going abroad has gained much attention from many destination countries. These days, traveling overseas has become much easier for many mainland Chinese. Coupled with the rising living standards, Chinese's outbound tourism has been developing fast. China National Tourism Administration (CNTA, 2013) pointed out that in 2012 the tourism in China showed a good momentum of development, there were 41.0 million outbound travelers of Chinese citizens, up 18.6% than 2010, indicating a 22.5% annual growth rate from 2001 to 2012. Fast-growing number of mainland tourists also made China a bigger spender.

There is a visible evidence of growing competitiveness of tourist destinations at the global level and India is no exception in this context. However, the Indian tourism industry is confronted with considerable challenges imposed by the turbulent and rapidly changing external environment that it operates in. Moreover, many nations (Singapore, Thailand, China and others) are receiving more tourists than India despite her long and prestigious history and culture i.e. tourism resources. Thus, in order for the successes to

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International Tourist Arrival to India from Top 15 Country

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Arrivals from Region/ Country												
USA	329147	348182	410803	526120	611165	696739	799062	804933	803021	931292	980688	1039947
UK	405472	387846	430917	555907	651803	734240	796191	776530	748765	759494	798249	788170
Canada	88600	93598	107671	135884	157643	176567	208214	222364	221448	242372	259017	256021
Germany	80011	64891	76868	116679	120243	156808	184195	204344	193557	227720	240235	254783
France	102434	78194	97654	131824	152258	175345	204827	207802	195307	225232	231423	240674
Australia	52691	50743	58730	81608	96258	109867	135925	146209	202105	169647	192592	202105
Italy	41351	37136	46908	65561	67642	79978	93540	85766	77995	94100	100889	98743
Japan	80634	59709	77996	96851	103082	119292	145538	145352	124219	168019	193525	220015
Malaysia	57869	63748	70750	84390	96276	107286	112741	115794	134340	179077	208196	195853
Singapore	42824	44306	48368	60710	68666	82574	92908	97851	94754	107487	119022	131452
Nepal	41135	37136	42771	51534	77024	91552	83037	78133	87487	104374	119131	125375
Sri Lanka	112813	108008	109098	128711	136400	154813	204084	218805	240836	266515	305853	296983
Netherlands	42368	31669	40565	51211	52755	58611	67429	71605	63476	70756	75153	74800
China	13901	15422	21152	34100	44897	62330	88103	98093	96997	119530	142218	168952
South Korea	27150	29374	35584	47835	49895	705407	84583	79802	69316	95587	108680	109469

Source: Ministry of Tourism, Govt. of India, 2014

continue, the industry requires to develop tourist – centric products/ services. Since the successes of tourist destination is dependent upon the quality of visitors’ services, it is imperative for the service providers to understand how the elements of their product/service delivery are evaluated by visitors.

According to the above background and motivation, this study was conducted to investigate Chinese tourists’ service quality perceptions visiting Golden Triangle in India

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The concept of service quality is linked to a variety of issues in the tourism research literature, but is most commonly mentioned in relation to tourism destination and discussions provide evidence of how tourism destinations influence the provision of various types of services, safety, and security in the country. During recent past tourist service quality research has received much attention in tourism management literature (Gunn, 1972; Goodrich, 1978; Pearce, 1982; Phelps, 1986; Calantone et al., 1989; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993; Milman and Pizam, 1995; Chand, 2010). Moreover, a wide range of tourism management literature suggested variables of tourists’ destination choice behaviors with relation to service quality such as socio-psychological motivation, benefit sought, socio-demographics, economic, family togetherness and geographical distance (Mohinder, 2010; Baloglu and Brinberg, 1997; Goodrich, 1978; Chaudhary, 2000; Julta, 2000). Generally, these studies underscore the vital role of destination image perceived by tourists in evaluating tourist behavior and satisfaction.

Thus, over the years quality service has become a serious issue among research scholars in the hospitality industry. Moreover, in the highly competitive tourism industry, tourist service becomes one of the most important elements for gaining a sustainable competitive advantage in the global marketplace. Consequently, the efforts of service managers and academic researchers are directed towards understanding how customers perceive the quality of service have become pivotal issue. Generally, tourists are likely to view services as a variety of attributes that may, in different ways, contribute to their purchase intentions and perceptions of service quality. Many researchers (Grönroos 1984; Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml 1985; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry 1988; Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry 1990) have focused on different aspects of service quality, they all agree that the emphasis should be on customers.

For decades, many researchers have developed a service perspective (Zeithaml, 2009; Ramsaran and Fowdar, 2007). Chang (2008) describes that the concept of service quality should be generally approached from the customer’s point of view because they may have different values, different ground of assessment, and different circumstances. Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1990) opine that service quality is an extrinsically perceived attribution based on the customer’s experience. Kumra (2008) points that service quality is not only involved in the final product and service, but also involved in the production and delivery process, thus employee involvement in process redesign and commitment is important to produce final tourism products or services. Similarly, Lovelock and Wirtz (2007) discusses how confirmation or disconfirmation of expectations relates to satisfaction and delight: The terms “quality “and

“satisfaction” are sometimes used interchangeably. Some researchers believe, however, that perceived service quality is just one component of customer satisfaction, which also reflects price/ quality trade- offs, and personal and situation factors.

The service quality construct is mostly conceptualized in the context of service marketing literature (Lee, et.al., 2000; Zeithaml, et.al.,1990), Ghobadian, et.al. ,1994). Furthermore, Edvardsson (2005) points out that service quality perception are formed during the production, delivery and consumption process. Similarly, O'Neill and Palmer (2003) report that customers' perceptions of service quality may, to a large extent, be influenced by the degree of their prior experience with a particular service. Zeithaml (2007) states that service quality are the tourist judgment about the overall excellence or superiority of service. Further many scholars have suggest that service quality as “the relationship between what customer's desires

from a service and what they perceive that they receive and is crucial for the service providers (Mackay and Crompton ,1990; Ostrowski, O'Brian, & Gordon,1993. ;Wyllie 2000; Godbey,1997 and Fynes and Voss, 2001).

Diverse literature on tourism has supported the proposition that service quality plays a significant role in tourist's destination behavior (Gunn, 1972; Goodrich, 1978; Chaudhary, 2000; Chand, 2010a). Many tourism studies (Pearce, 1982; Phelps, 1986; Gartner and Hunt, 1987; Calantone et al., 1989; Reilly, 1990; Con et al., 1991; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993) suggested that tourist behavior is a fundamental but critical subject affecting the development of marketing strategies vis-à-vis quality and delivery of product. During recent past tourism scholars have investigated various behavioral issues in tourism literature in terms of services quality perceptions before the trip, during the trip, and after the trip (Goodrich, 1978; Pearce, 1982; Phelps, 1986; Calantone et al., 1989; Reilly, 1990; Con et al., 1991; Echtner and Ritchie, 1993;



Milman and Pizam, 1995). These studies provide preliminary information for tourist services. Moreover, destination image is one of the most influential factors affecting tourist (s) perception and consequent behavior on service quality (Lee et al.; 2005).

However, until now research has not been fully subjected to empirical investigation the impact of service quality on tourist satisfaction in tourism context especially in Golden Triangle in Indian tour operation industry. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the genuine needs of Chinese travellers by identifying their perceptions and level of satisfaction with the services and facilities provided by the Indian tour operators in Golden Triangle.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample Design and Data Collection

The respondents were confirmed as Chinese tourists visiting in Golden Triangle (India) as group inclusive tour during October-November, 2013 and showed their willingness to participate in the survey when approached by the authors. New Delhi was selected as the city for data collection because it is a gateway city for inbound tours to India. However, constraints imposed by the participating tour operators prohibited us from directly contacting the tourists. As a result, we relied on the tour escort/ manager to distribute and collect questionnaire from tourists. Of the total sample, 120 responses were received which indicated a response rate of around 55%. This is consistent with previous researches in the field.

Measure Development

Measures for operationalising the constructs were developed on the basis of an extensive literature review that identified previously developed and tested scales. All constructs were measured with multiple-item scales measured on 5-point Likert scale Strongly agreed, Agreed, Neutral, Disagreed and Strongly disagreed.

Study Area

Government of India has identified many golden triangles which are famous all round the world. However, Golden triangle refers to Delhi – Agra – Jaipur is widely visited by the Chinese tourists. Moreover, China is one of the main inbound markets for India. As Chinese traveler are round the year (map 1 showing the study area).

Results and Discussion

The demographic characteristics of Chinese tourists in the survey are given in table 1. As can be seen in the table, the sample of Chinese tourists perceiving service quality as perceived by the tourists in Golden Triangle included 56 % males and 44 % females. The majority of them were the ages 40 above (60 percent), the most of the respondents were married and had university education. In the category of length of stay 56% of the respondents stayed for 5 to 10 days in the destination(s), only 13 % of the respondents stayed for 1-5 days. With regard to their visit to India, most of the respondents were in the inclusive tour package. 70% respondent's purposes of visit were holidays/sightseeing and they prefer 4 to 5 star hotels in India.

Table 1. Distribution of Sample According to Demographic Characteristics

(N=120)		
	Number	Percentage
Gender		
Male	67	55.83
Female	53	44.17
Age (in years)		
20 – 30	27	22.50
30 – 40	20	16.67
40 – 50	36	30.00
50≥	37	30.83
Occupation		
Business	47	39.17
Service	08	6.67
Student	03	2.50
Agriculture	02	1.66
Others	60	50.00
Type		
Single	28	20.83
Family	83	69.17
Group	09	7.5
Types of accommodation		
5 Star Deluxe	25	20.83
5 Star	32	26.67
4 Star	44	36.67
3 Star & others	19	15.83
Travel Planning		
Self	29	24.17
Conductive	82	68.33
Others	09	7.50

Purpose of visit		
Holidays/Sightseeing	94	78.34
Education	04	3.33
Business	18	15.00
History	04	3.33
Duration of tour		
03 Days	16	13.33
04 Days	22	18.33
05 Days	35	29.17
06 Days	47	39.17

Table 2 indicates the significance level of respondents. In order to compare the level of satisfaction between male and female of Chinese tourists visiting Golden Triangle T- test was employed to test the significance level.

Table 2 shows the comparative analysis of Chinese tourists visiting in the study area. The table indicates the mean values between 15.45 to 13.10 where as in case of female it is 11.60 to 9.80. Further, 'the quality of service was excellent' accorded first rank in male where in case of female 'give you individual attention' ranked first. In case of male 'services were basically problem free' and in case of female 'always ready to help' was given second rank. Third rank was given to 'the quality of the services was visually appealing' in case of male and 'serve you by heart' in case if female. 'Never too busy to respond' was given forth rank in case of male and 'tell you when to perform service' in case of female. Furthermore, 'fifth rank was given to 'get close to my spouse' in case of male and 'services were comprehensive and of high quality' in case of female. In case of male 'serve you by heart' and in case of female 'understand your specific needs' was given sixth rank. 'Emphatic behavior' was ranked seventh in case of female whereas it was 'services were basically problem free' in case of female.

Further, 'consistently courteous with tourists' was given eighth rank in case of male and 'give prompt service' in case of female. In case of female 'staff showed genuine interest in solving the problems' and in case of male 'an excellent physical facilities are visually appealing' was given ninth rank. 'Perform the service right the first time' was given tenth rank in case of male while 'the quality of the services was excellent' was given tenth rank in case of female. Eleventh rank was given to 'perform promised service' & 'consistently courteous with tourists' was given in case of male and female respectively. 'Insist error free service' was accorded twelveth rank in case of male where n case of female 'confidence in service delivery'. In case of male 'services were comprehensive and of high quality' and in case of female 'feel safe to delivery service' was accredited thirteenth rank. 'Staff showed genuine interest in solving the problems' and 'insist error free service' was given fourteenth rank in case of male and female respectively.

Sixteenth rank was given by male to 'tell you when to perform service' where as 'perform the service right the first time' was accorded by female respondents. Male respondents have accorded seventeenth rank to 'always ready to help' and female has gone to 'provide promised service'. Next, Eighteenth rank was accredited to 'staff have knowledge to answer' by male and female respondents collectively. 'Feel safe to delivery service' was accorded nineteenth rank in case of male and 'emphatic behavior' in case of female. In case of male 'give you individual attention' was given ranked twentieth while in case of female 'get close to my spouse'. 'Understand your specific needs' was accorded twenty first rank by male while in case if female 'never busy to respond'. In the last, male as ranked 'confidence in service delivery' and female 'the quality of the services was visually appealing' second.

Table 2 presents the t-test result comparing perceived services in the study area.

We found significant differences in almost all variables. However, Get close to my spouse ($t=1.1453$) had the largest assessed differences between the two groups of respondents, indicating a substantive strategic gap in these areas. As mentioned above, the tourist's also thought that high levels of services were Comprehensive and of high quality; Staff showed genuine interest in solving the problems; understand your specific needs; consistently courteous with tourists in order to attract Chinese's tourists.

Thus, Mean comparison yielded a few significant differences and they were in the hypothesized direction. In all the cases male obtained higher mean score compared to its counterpart. In the rest of the cases the mean differences were not significant although male had always an edge over the female. .

In light of these results we may accept H2; supporting that male will be rated higher than female on service quality.

To test the study hypothesis, this study used the method of computing multiple regressions simultaneously between the dependent variable (tourist services) and the independent variables (residents socio-demographic characteristics)

Table 3 shows the results of the multiple regressions pertaining to support for tourist services in Golden Triangle. As can be seen from this table, $R^2 .45$, and the adjusted R^2 value for 10 out 22 independent variables considered in the equation is .42, indicating that the model explains 42% of the variance in support of positive tourism services .

In particular, the respondents in study area were found to have the following perceptions and socio-demographic characteristics:

- The younger the respondent, the more likely he or she was to positive services.

Table 2. The Comparative Analysis of Chinese Tourist's Visiting in the Study Area

	Male			Female			T-Test
	Mean	S.D.	Rank	Mean	S.D.	Rank	
1. Services were Comprehensive and of high quality.	13.42	14.72	13	10.80	11.94	5	0.2954
2. An excellent physical facilities are visually appealing	13.60	13.31	9	10.44	9.14	15	0.3959
3. Services were basically problem-free	15.40	16.13	2	10.75	9.18	7	0.5172
4. The quality of the services was visually appealing	14.20	11.51	3	9.80	8.73	22	0.6091
5. The quality of service was excellent	15.45	13.09	1	10.60	10.87	10	0.3220
6. Provide promised service	13.56	13.09	11	10.40	10.21	17	0.3855
7. Staff showed genuine interest in solving the problems.	13.40	12.75	14	10.69	9.89	9	0.3470
8. Perform the service right the first time	13.58	11.41	10	10.42	7.86	16	0.4618
9. Insist error free service	13.52	7.965	12	10.45	5.953	14	0.6436
10. Tell you when to perform service	13.38	11.94	16	10.85	8.19	4	0.3867
11. Give prompt service	13.39	12.97	15	10.72	9.67	8	0.3462
12. Always ready to help	13.37	11.89	17	10.90	8.754	2	0.3792
13. Never too busy to respond	13.84	7.30	4	10.20	7.36	21	0.6944
14. Confidence in service delivery	13.10	11.99	22	10.52	8.89	12	0.3751
15. Consistently courteous with tourists	13.61	14.00	8	10.55	10.59	11	0.3644
16. Staff have knowledge to answer	13.35	13.56	18	10.35	10.21	18	0.3299
17. Feel safe to delivery service	13.32	9.68	19	10.50	7.66	13	0.4535
18. Give you individual attention	13.30	8.02	20	11.60	8.66	1	0.4745
19. Understand your specific needs	13.29	10.39	21	10.77	8.87	6	0.4101
20. Get close to my spouse	13.80	3.60	5	10.25	5.154	20	1.1453
21. Emphatic behavior	13.62	10.01	7	10.30	9.29	19	0.4687
22. Serve you by heart	13.65	12.63	6	10.80	10.11	3	0.3462

Table 3. Multiple Regression of Perceived Service Quality in the Study Area.

Independent variables	β	t	Sig.
Age	-1.154	-2.435	.010
Gender	.153	2.671	.005
Positive perceptions'	.251	3.231	.000
Negative perceptions	.240	4.321	.000
Note: R2 =.45, adjusted R2 =.42, F=30.553, p<.001			
Gender Dummy coded :0=female , 1=male			

- Males were more supportive of services than females.

It is worth noting that only two out of the nine socio-demographic variables entered the regression equation. Other socio-demographic variables such as age, marital status, level of education, types, purpose of visit, tour duration, and others did not have a shared effect on the tourist's perceptions for services. Interestingly, the other variables that did not have a combined effect on the levels of tourists perceptions of services.

This finding is also consistent with the first finding of previous studies, which signify that services quality is at

most important for all types of tourists which has a pivotal significant to attract and retain tourists at particulars destinations. Thus, the findings denote that the theoretical perspective of this research, the social exchange theory, was helpful in explaining tourist's perceptions towards services.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to measure the perceptions of Chinese tourists visiting in Golden Triangle. Service is a very important issue in the tourism industry and it is used

in their advertisements and expectations of communications. The attitudes and expectations of tourists are very important and have to be followed continuously. The factors that will affect the customer's attractions are economic change, social change and technology. The tourists of the future will be very selective about the types of service delivered, attractions and quality. Travelers will be visiting with a reason and purpose, they will seek something special, different and of particular interest.

As discussed in the research findings, the expectations and perceptions of gender, age, education, types, duration of tour and purpose of trip have been analyzed. It has been observed that there is no difference between males and females perceptions. The most important result from this analysis is that the expectations are higher than perception meaning that the service quality was not at expected level.

To improve the service quality and satisfy expectations continuous research have to be done all through the year from different perspectives.

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