An Empirical Study on the Satisfaction Level of National and International Tourists towards Natural Attractions in Kurdistan

M. Prabhu*
Department of Business Administration
Lebanese French University
Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq
E-Mail Id: bordauprabhu@lfu.edu.krd

Nabaz Nawzad Abdullah
Head, Department of Business Administration
Lebanese French University
Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

G. Madan Mohan
Department of Management Studies
School of Management, Pondicherry University
Puducherry-605014, India

Corresponding author*

Abstract

This study assesses the satisfaction level of national and international tourists towards natural sight-seeing spots in Kurdistan Region. The study employed structured questionnaires administered personally to 312 tourists who visited the region. After applying the statistical tools of Cronbach alpha test, Descriptive statistics, Cluster analysis, Chi-square analysis and Correspondence analysis on the collected data, results revealed that the People factor is the most important factor influencing satisfaction of tourists towards their tourism experience in Kurdistan Region. This was followed by accommodation and food, climate and image, expenses and facilities. Furthermore, the level of satisfaction is significantly associated with the gender of travelers, the type of tourism and origin of tourists and it was found not be associated with either age or education.

Keywords: Satisfaction, tourists, people factor, natural attractions, Kurdistan Region.

Introduction

The tourism industry in Kurdistan has flourished in the recent past with rapid spurts in numbers of tourists visiting the region. Tourism is emerging as a sector which can offer good revenue and this has sparkled both the government and private sectors to invest more in the sector and in making efforts to transform the region as a tourist hub. Security and hospitality offered by the people in Kurdistan along with its relatively stable economy has catalysed the growth of the tourism sector in the region. Government has now realised the importance of diversifying to other sectors rather than relying heavily on oil and gas for contributing to nation's economic growth. Tourism is thus considered to be the best sector which has been identified as the most potential offering sector.

Determinants of Tourist Satisfaction

When considering what attracts tourists towards a particular destination this may be affected by different factors such as the hospitality of local people, availability of healthy and hygienic food, costs involved, and the types of accommodation and other facilities available. These

factors coupled with natural beauty associated with natural tourist spots play a vital role in enhancing the satisfaction level of tourists towards a tourism destination. The shifting of importance to tourism from oil by Kurdistan requires certain changes in the national policy so as to create an adequate infrastructure through which more tourists can be attracted to the destination and have their aspirations satisfied. By commercialising the tourism sector, the economic prosperity of the region can be enhanced and this goal can be best accomplished only by satisfying and exceeding the needs and wants of the tourists. Towards achieving this endeavour, the various needs of tourists have to be carefully identified and effective measures have to be implemented in order to satisfy these needs. Effective planning and execution is required if the tourism sector is to be promoted.

However, the needs of the tourism industry are fast changing and proactive measures have to be implemented in the sector to ensure sustainable growth. With the tourism industry making rapid strides in recent times, the world economy will depend largely on the growth of this industry (Pantouvakis, 2013). Tourist satisfaction resulting in the arrival of more tourists will also result in the generation of greater revenue for the local people which will in turn lead to the desired flourishing of business and of the economy of the country as a whole (Dmitrovic et al. 2009).

Sadeh et al. (2012) have also indicated that tourist satisfaction plays a dominant role in the success of companies and service providers engaged in tourism business. Forozia et al. (2013) have indicated that tourist satisfaction is the most important factor determining performance of tourist industry and survival of all firms and service providers engaged in the industry, which is highly competitive.

Literature review

The term satisfaction of tourists on tourism has been used differently by different authors. Some authors consider the terms of customer satisfaction and performance to be on par while some other studies have suggested that customer satisfaction is influenced by their experience while additional studies have used customer satisfaction to denote both performance and experience (Chi & Qu, 2008; Huang & Hsu, 2010). Nor et al. (2014) conducted a study on 500 domestic and foreign tourists visiting Malaysia and discovered that tourist expectations, perceived quality and destination image cast a significant positive impact on tourist satisfaction. Mahadzirah et al. (2011), on the basis of a study on Malaysian tourists, found that Destination Image exerted significant positive impact on tourist Satisfaction.

Zeithaml et al. (1993) found that tourist satisfaction is influenced by different factors such as transport, airline service, food, banking service and accommodation facilities. According to Tribe and Snaith (1998), satisfaction of tourists towards holiday destination is influenced by attractions, activities, accessibility, accommodation and amenity. Satish Chandra Bagri and Devkant Kala (2015) found that tourist satisfaction is significantly influenced by spiritual and cultural nature, atmosphere and climate, hospitality and safety factors.

A people friendly approach, service excellence, positive behaviour and hospitality of locals lead to greater tourist satisfaction (Kozak, 2001; Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Quality of accommodation plays an important role in enhancing the competitiveness of tourist firms and satisfaction level of tourists (Xia et al, 2009; Ekinci et al, 2003). Tourist satisfaction can be enhanced by several factors such as nature, climate, art and culture of the people, safety and security, friendliness and hospitality of staff, availability of restaurants and shopping places, reasonability of product and service prices (Qu and Li, 1997; Crompton & Love, 1995; Neal & Gursoy, 2008; Wu & Liang, 2009).

Objectives of the Study

Based on the above literature review, the following objectives have been framed for this study:

- To assess the level of satisfaction derived by domestic and foreign tourists visiting Kurdistan;
- To check the association between such satisfaction and demographic profile characteristics of the tourists.

Research methodology

The proposed study was descriptive in nature, and based purely on primary data collected by administering a structured questionnaire to 312 national and international tourists who visited Kurdistan. The sample was drawn using a systematic random sampling method. The questionnaire used consisted of two sections, one on the demographic profile of the tourists and the second section comprising of statements in Likert's five-point scale to measure the satisfaction level of the tourists about different aspects relating to tourism. Data collected was analysed using SPSS, applying the statistical tools of Frequency, Percentage, Mean, Chi-square Analysis, Cluster Analysis and Correspondence Analysis.

Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis part consists of four sections. The first section explains demographic profile of the respondents while the second section discusses the level of satisfaction derived by the tourists on the basis of different factors. The third section highlights the grouping of respondents using Cluster Analysis and the fourth section throws light on the prevalence of association between the three groups formed on the basis of the satisfaction level towards tourist destinations and their demographic profiles. Before starting with the analysis, reliability of data needs was tested to ensure internal consistency and reliability of data. The Cronbach alpha test was applied for this purpose and the coefficient of Cronbach alpha in respect of the five constructs ranged from 0.618 to 0.789, which is well in excess of the minimum threshold limit of 0.6 (Nunnally, 1987). Hence, the first step of checking reliability of data was completed successfully and the next step of analysing data could be proceeded with.

Demographic profile of the respondents

Of the 312 respondents selected for this study, 40.00% (125) are aged 18 - 25 years while 49.40% (154) are aged 26 - 45 years and 10.60% (33) are aged above 45 years; 61.2% (191) are males and 38.8% (121) are females; 39.4% (123) possess school level educational qualifications while 25.3% (79) are Diploma-holders, 25.3% (79) are graduates, 4.5% (14) possess post-graduation while 5.4% (17) possess other educational qualifications; 76.0% (237) are national tourists while 24.0% (75) are foreign tourists; 10 foreign tourists are from United Kingdom, 15 from United States, 7 are from Germany, 4 are from Ireland, 2 are from Canada, 5 are from Iran, 4 are from India, 6 are from Pakistan, 2 from Finland, 15 from Syria and one each from Romania, Egypt, Jordan, Turkey and Ethiopia.

Satisfaction level of the tourists

Level of satisfaction derived from tourists visiting Kurdistan has been obtained through statements in Likert's five-point scale and the results are portrayed in table 1.

Table 1: Satisfaction Level of Tourists

Sl. No.	Variables	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
	People	3.7981		I
1	Hospitality	3.7308	1.00702	5
2	General treatment of local people	3.9487	.85844	1
3	Willingness of staff to help tourists	3.7244	1.07335	6
4	Warm and welcoming of local people	3.7436	1.01988	3
5	Language and communication	3.7372	1.06455	4
6	Cultural and Historical Attractions	3.9038	.87685	2
	Expenses	3.6116		IV
1	Accommodation	3.5641	1.10933	5
2	Food and beverages	3.6827	1.06928	1
3	Local transportation	3.5897	1.13053	4
4	Products	3.5641	1.12943	6
5	Recreation	3.6442	.88849	2
6	Tax and toll	3.6250	1.01931	3
	Facilities	3.4603		V
1	Entertainment and Enjoyment Activities	3.4199	1.08778	4
2	Immigration and customs procedures	3.4744	1.17009	2
3	Infrastructure	3.3397	1.25776	5
4	Atmosphere	3.6090	1.18714	1
5	Shopping centers	3.4583	1.01668	3
	Accommodation and Food	3.7699		II
1	Restaurants and pubs	3.9199	.92656	1
2	Quality of accommodation	3.5994	1.01265	5
3	Size of accommodation	3.6859	1.03199	4
4	Local foods	3.7372	1.12334	3
5	Safety and Security	3.9071	1.12313	2
	Climate and Image	3.6533		III
1	Quality of hot springs and environment	3.5769	1.07014	4
2	Nature and scenery	4.0513	1.00989	1
3	Cleanliness of environment	3.4071	1.02588	6
4	Preservation of environment	3.6763	1.06131	2
5	Destination Image	3.7372	.99589	3
6	Level of noise	3.4712	1.14502	5

Table 1 showcases that tourists who visited Kurdistan consider the people aspect to be the most important factor followed by food and accommodation, climate and image, expenses and facilities having a bearing on their satisfaction towards choosing Kurdistan as their sought after tourist destination. Facilities available in Kurdistan are not satisfactory for the tourists as they have expressed an average level of satisfaction towards the availability of entertainment and enjoyment activities, immigration and customs procedures, infrastructure and shopping centers, which are all considered to be deficient when it comes to tourists.

The positive aspect is that the tourists are well satisfied with the treatment provided by the local people in the form of hospitality and general treatment, willingness of staff to help tourists and warmth with which they welcome tourists. They are also happy with cultural and historic attractions available in the region and understandable means of effective communication.

Grouping tourists based on their satisfaction level

On the basis of the satisfaction levels of the tourists towards Kurdistan as a tourist destination, Cluster Analysis has been employed to group the respondents and the results are portrayed in table 2.

Table 2: Grouping Tourists based on their Satisfaction Level

Factor	C1	C2	C3	F	Sig.
People	3.85(II)	3.11(III)	4.28(I)	127.837	0.000
Expenses	3.56(II)	3.04(III)	4.26(I)	87.773	0.000
Facilities	3.46(II)	2.41(III)	4.43(I)	245.692	0.000
Accommodation and Food	3.76(II)	3.01(III)	4.48(I)	171.137	0.000
Climate and Image	3.56(II)	3.13(III)	4.38(I)	125.829	0.000

Table 2 highlights the formation of three distinct clusters based on satisfaction derived by tourists who visited Kurdistan, and all the five factors play a substantial role in the clusterisation process since the F values in respect of all the statements are significant at one per cent level. The facilities factor plays the highest role in the clusterisation process as the F value in respect of this factor is the maximum. Based on mean values of each of the clusters in respect of the five factors, they have been labeled as "Moderately Satisfied Group", "Low Satisfied Group" and "Highly Satisfied Group", each encompassing 178, 64 and 70 tourists respectively.

Association between clusters formed based on satisfaction towards tourism and demographic profile of tourists

The association prevalent between the clusters formed on the basis of satisfaction of tourists towards Kurdistan as a desired destination spot and their demographic profile has been explored using Chi-square Analysis and the results are depicted in table 3.

Table 3: Association between Clusters Formed based on Satisfaction towards Tourism and demographic Profile of Tourists

SL. No	Variables	Value	df	Sig.	Significant or not
1	Age	6.046	4	0.196	Not Significant
2	Gender	11.181	2	0.004	Significant
3	Educational Level	14.561	8	0.068	Not Significant
4	Type of Tourism	35.974	2	0.000	Significant
5	Origin of Tourist	79.593	30	0.000	Significant

Table 3 highlights the prevalence of significant association between clusters formed on the basis of satisfaction levels of tourists towards Kurdistan as tourist destination and the gender of tourists, type of tourists and origin of the tourists. The nature of this association has been further explored using Cross tabs and Correspondence Analysis and the results are depicted in tables 4&5 and figure 1.

Table 4: Association between Clusters and Gender

Gender	Moderately Satisfied	Low Satisfied	Highly Satisfied	Total
Males	95	44	52	191
	49.7%	23.0%	27.2%	100.0%
Females	83	20	18	121
	68.6%	16.5%	14.9%	100.0%
Total	178	64	70	312
	57.1%	20.5%	22.4%	100.0%

Table 4 suggests that the majority of both male and female tourists are moderately satisfied with Kurdistan as a tourist destination. The number of highly satisfied male tourists outnumber the low satisfied male tourists, while the number of low satisfied female tourists outnumber the highly satisfied tourists, though not by much.

Table 5: Association between Type of Tourists and Clusters

Type of Tourists	Moderately Satisfied	Low Satisfied	Highly Satisfied	Total
National	143	31	63	237
	60.3%	13.1%	26.6%	100.0%
Foreign	35	33	7	75
	46.7%	44.0%	9.3%	100.0%
Total	178	64	70	312
	57.1%	20.5%	22.4%	100.0%

Table 5 suggests that larger numbers of domestic tourists constitute the moderately satisfied group followed by the highly satisfied group, and finally, the low satisfied group. However, in the case of foreign tourists, larger numbers comprise the moderately satisfied group and these are closely followed by the low satisfied group while a only a few of them constitute the highly satisfied group.
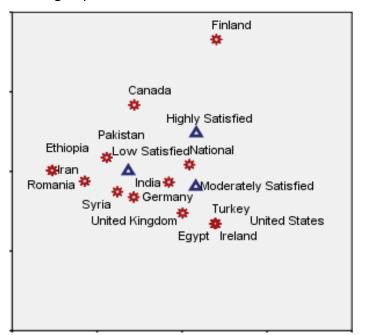

Figure 1: Association between Origin of Tourists and Clusters

Figure 1 above shows that tourists from Finland and Canada are highly satisfied while those emanating from the United Kingdom, Turkey, United States, Germany, Ireland, India, Egypt and Jordan are moderately satisfied. Tourists from Ethiopia, Romania, Iran, Syria and Pakistan are not that satisfied with Kurdistan as tourist destination.

Inferences from the study and suggestions

Tourists who visited Kurdistan are immensely satisfied with the warmth of the local people in the form of hospitality and in their general treatment. Employees of tourism service providers are also courteous, thus boosting the satisfaction levels of tourists. The relatively easy means of communication and the presence of historical and cultural sights further induce the satisfaction levels of tourists towards Kurdistan as a desired tourist destination.

However, a tourism promotion facility in Kurdistan is the most important matter of concern for tourists. Strict immigration and customs procedures are inadequate for the tourists visiting Kurdistan. Entertainment and recreational facilities in the form of shopping complexes, theatres and pubs are not available in a manner which would satisfy the tourists. If such facilities are provided by the region, Kurdistan will transform rapidly into a desired tourist hub.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that Kurdistan should further concentrate on providing better facilities to satisfy its tourists, especially the foreign tourists, since foreign tourists are rarely satisfied with the tourist spots they visit, while almost all of them are either moderately satisfied or not satisfied with the region at all. Facilities need to be improved so as to capture the satisfaction of all types of tourists, especially the foreign ones. This will boost the tourism sector in the region which will enhance its economic progress and lead to greater sustainability.

References

Chi, C. & Qu, H. (2008.) Examining the structural relationships of destination image, tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty: An integrated approach. *Tourism Management*, 29 (4), 624–636.

Crompton, J. L. & Love, L. L. (1995). The predictive value of alternative approaches to evaluating quality of a festival. *Journal of Travel Research*, 34 (1), 11-24.

Dmitrovic, T., Cvelbar, L., Kolah, T., Brencic, M., Ograjensek, I. & Zabkar, V. (2009). Conceptualizing Tourist satisfaction At the Destination Level. *International Journal of Culture, Tourism and Hospitality Research*. 3 (2), 116-126.

Ekinci, Y., Prokopaki, P. & Cobanoglu, C. (2003). Service quality in Cretan accommodations: marketing strategies for the UK holiday market. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 22, 47-66.

Forozia, A., Zadeh, M. & Gilani, M. (2013.) Customer Satisfaction in Hospitality Industry: Middle East Tourists at 3star Hotels in Malaysia. *Research Journal of Applied Sciences, Engineering and Technology*. 5 (17), 4329-4335.

Huang, J. & Hsu, C. (2010). The impact of customer-to customer interaction on cruise experience and vacation satisfaction. *Journal of Travel Research*, 49 (1), 79-92.

Kozak, M. & Rimmington, M. (1999). Measuring tourist destination competitiveness: conceptual considerations and empirical findings. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 18, 273-283.

Mahadzirah Mohamad., Abdul Manan Ali. & Nur Izzati Ab Ghani. (2011). A Structural Model of Destination Image, Tourists' Satisfaction and Destination Loyalty, *International Journal of Business and Management Studies*, 3 (2), 167-177.

Neal, J. D. & Gursoy, D. (2008). A multifaceted analysis of tourism satisfaction. *Journal of Travel Research*, 47 (1), 53-62.

Nor Khasimah Aliman, Shareena Mohamed Hashim, Siti Dalela Mohd Wahid. & Syahmi Harudin. (2014). Tourist Expectations, Perceived Quality and Destination Image: Effects on Perceived Value and Satisfaction of Tourists Visiting Langkawi Island, Malaysia. *Asian Journal of Business and Management*, 2(3), 212-222.

Nunnally, J. C. (1987) *Psychometric methods*. Mc Grow-Hill, New York, NY.

Pantouvakis, A. (2013) Travellers' Behavioral Intentions Depending On Their Beliefs: An Empirical Study. *International Journal of Quality and Service Sciences*. 5 (1), 4-18.

Qu, H. L. & Li, I. (1997) The characteristics and satisfaction of mainland Chinese visitors to Hong Kong. *Journal of Travel Research*, 35 (4), 37-41.

Sadeh, E., Asgari, F., Mousavi, L. & Sadeh, S. (2012). Factors Affecting Tourist Satisfaction and Its Consequences. *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research*, 2 (2), 1557-1560.

Satish Chandra Bagri. & Devkant Kala. (2015). Tourists' Satisfaction at Trijuginarayan, India: An Importance-Performance Analysis. *Advances in Hospitality and Tourism Research*, 3 (2), 89-115.

Tribe, J. & Snaith, T. (1998). From SERVQUAL to HOLSAT: Holiday satisfaction in Varadero, Cuba. *Tourism Management*, 19 (1), 25–34.

Wu, C. H. & Liang, R. (2009). Effect of experiential value on customer satisfaction with service encounters in luxury-hotel restaurants. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28, 586-593.

Xia. W, Jie. Z, Chaolin. G. & Feng. Z. (2009). Examining Antecedents and Consequences of Tourist Satisfaction: A Structural Modeling Approach. *Tsinghua Science and Technology*, 14, 397-406.

Yoon. Y. & Uysal. M. (2005). An examination of the effects of motivation and satisfaction on destination loyalty: a structural model. *Tourism management*, 26, 45-56.

Zeithaml, V. A., Berry, L. L. & Parasuraman, A. (1993). The nature and determinants of customer satisfaction of service. *Journal of the Academy of marketing Science*, 21 (1), 1-12.