

Hotel selection attributes among mature travellers at Redang island

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Abstract

Mature travellers had been contemplated as the major contributor to the hotel's revenue for many resorts. Most of the mature travellers have a freedom to travel due to less family commitment, more flexible with their travelling time, more discretionary income and have ample time to make decision in choosing a final hotel to stay. This research paper looks into the selection attributes for mature travellers focusing on travelling to Redang Island. An investigation on the traveller's preferences among mature travellers was carried out through in-depth interviews with 32 mature travellers staying in hotels/resorts in Redang. Findings suggest that though this mature traveller is evolving, many hotel operators tend to overlook on the importance of this market segmentation. Findings also suggest that hotels should be more proactive in their response concerning the selection attributes for mature travellers.

Keywords: Mature travelers, Redang island; hotel, resorts, selection attributes

1 Introduction

The mature travellers market has been emerging tremendously after the post-World War II where baby boomers started to reach senior ages (Alén, Losada, & de Carlos, 2015). Mature travellers can be defined as a group of peoples who join senior ranks at certain age, normally at 50 years old. There are various terms used to describe this niche group: senior travellers, older market, silvers, grey nomads and grey market (Cho, 2002). Over the past few years, a substantial increase has been detected in the number of mature travellers coming to Redang Island (Tourism Malaysia, 2017). Mature travellers had been contemplated as the major contributor to the hotel's revenue for many resorts based (Rhee & Yang, 2015). Most of the mature travellers have a freedom to travel due to less family commitment, more flexible with their travelling time, more discretionary income and have ample time to make decision in choosing a final hotel to stay.

Additionally, according to Khan (2014), people travel for numerous purposes that includes leisure, visiting friends and relatives (VFR), business, health treatment, shopping, conference, incentive travel, official mission, education, sport, cultural, religious, fraternal and other travels. Realizing the importance of this market segmentation in tourism industry, several researchers have investigated issues on these mature travellers. Supportive augmentation can be found in Cleaver, Green and Muller's (2000) study that highlighted the importance of studying these baby boomers behaviour. While Rasmusson (2000) entailed that mature travellers group were developing due to market size growth and strong market potential. Furthermore, a study conducted by Caber and Albayrak (2014) investigate the importance of hotel attributes for pre-senior and senior tourists when selecting a hotel. Whatever the reasons for travel, these mature travellers have their own selection attributes and preferences in choosing their final destination to stay (Rhee & Yang, 2015). Hence, hotel and resort operators should grab the opportunity in providing all the preferred attributes.

2 Literature Review

2.1 The Overview of hotel selection attributes

The hotel selection attributes for mature travellers had received extensive investigation from researchers since 1990s (e.g. Barsky & Labagh, 1992; Ruys & Wei, 1998) and the interests in this market segmentation keep on growing (Kim, Li, Han & Kim, 2017; Kumar & Singh, 2014; Li, Law, Vu, Rong & Zhao, 2015). The preferred attributes can be defined as a person's general assessment on the importance of criteria for product/services. Hotel attributes is indeed crucial to traveller's perceptions in determining guest satisfaction with the hotel (Alén et al., 2015). There were numerous attributes identified in hotel selection preferences and it combined

tangible as well as intangible attributes of hotel services. A study conducted by Kumar and Singh (2014) indicated that the top five hotel selection attributes are aesthetic sense (which is important to increase guest appeal), hotel public areas & guest room's provisions, brand & location, value services for money as well as cleanliness. In addition, other attributes that were discussed in literatures are safety and security (Watkins, 2004) and functional service in terms of efficient reservation, front desk and smooth functioning of the hotel to business guests as compared to leisure guests (Callan & Bowman, 2000). Furthermore, Dolnicar and Otter (2003) who conducted a meta-analysis, highlighted that cleanliness is found to be the most important among the attributes followed by hotel location.

While Lockyer's (2005) study reported that salient hotel attributes can be categorized into four dimensions: (1) image, (2) value, (3) service, and (4) hotel facilities. In conjunction with all the attributes, Kim et al. (2017) stressed that location, service, room, cleanliness, and value for money are identified as five salient hotel attributes. Furthermore, Kumar and Singh (2014) highlighted that Indian tourists considered aesthetic sense in the hotel public areas and rooms as crucial alongside the usual factors such as value for money and cleanliness. All the discussed attributes were identified as important in contributing to hotel's revenue and creating guest loyalty. Hotel operators had targeted the mature travellers group as a strategic necessity in hotel industry (Rhee & Yang, 2015). These mature travellers are the primary target for hotel in capturing the market for hotel guests.

Most of the mature travellers have a freedom to travel because they have more flexibility with their travelling time, more discretionary income, less family commitment as most of their children have grown up as well as have ample time to make decision in choosing a final hotel to stay. Thus, selecting a hotel to stay is indeed a huge decision for these mature travellers. They tend to select a hotel that can meet their needs apart from providing memorable experiences to them. Therefore, hotel attributes are very crucial in influencing mature travellers to choose a hotel. However, though this mature traveller is evolving, many hotel operators tend to overlook on the importance of this market segmentation (Caber & Albayrak, 2014). They focused more on young travellers as well as business travellers as compared to mature travellers. Hotels should not be ignoring this market group as they have potential in bringing revenue to the hotels. Therefore, this study is worth to carry out to investigate the selection attributes for mature travellers by focusing on mature travellers in Redang Island. It will assist hotels in upgrading their services and attributes to attract mature travellers.

3 Methodology

Data were both concentrated from primary and secondary sources. Secondary sources include online journal publications as well as newspaper articles and books. While primary sources demanded an investigation on the traveler's preferences

among mature travellers. It is emphasized that by using multiple sources, an exhaustive and accuracy data can be achieved (Jaafar & Maideen, 2011). Semi-structured interviews were carried out with mature travellers in Redang Island. Redang was chosen as it has been recognized as the largest and most beautiful island in East Peninsular Malaysia (Tahir, 2008). A search from Tourism Malaysia website as well as field study had identified 14 hotels/resorts located in Redang Island comprised of budget to five star resorts. Researchers approached 32 mature travellers for the sample of this study. According to Roscoe's (1975) rule of thumb, a sample size larger than 30 and less than 500 are appropriate for most research in general. This pilot study identified respondents aged 50 years old and above to qualify them as mature travellers.

The main objective to conduct this pilot study is to pretest the questionnaires in order to enhance validity and reliability. In addition, all respondents are international tourists. It is crucial to investigate their preferences in assisting the tourism growth and encourage them to visit Malaysia and Terengganu specifically. This study used English as the medium of communication with the interviewees. Respondents were approached to gauge their willingness to participate in this study. The duration of interview was limited to 45 minutes per session. The interview was conducted according to the available time of the respondents to avoid unnecessary interruptions. Subsequently, all interviews were recorded and translated according to categories. The in-depth interviews sought to extract information pertaining to the selection attributes preferred by these mature travellers. The data analysis was organized and analysed using Atlas.ti software.

4 Findings

Findings indicated that there were four main themes derived from the interviews. It consists of cleanliness, safety, services and facilities. Different types of travellers have different expectations of hotel attributes (Liu, Law, Rong, Li & Hall, 2013). Some aspects may be important to all travellers, whereas others may be significant only to a specific subgroup (Li et al., 2015). Thus, these variables appeared to be among the preferable attributes in selecting a hotel in Redang Island for mature travellers.

4.1 Cleanliness

All respondents highlighted that cleanliness was listed as the top attributes that influenced them when choosing a hotel in Redang Island. This is in line with the literatures that marked cleanliness increases hotel's occupancy rate (Ramanathan, 2012).

One respondent mentioned that *"I'm coming here to enjoy the breathtaking view of the island besides spending quality time, thus having a clean hotel room does affect my stay"*. Additionally, another respondent stated, *"I'm very conscious with the cleanliness of hotel's room since I'm allergic to dust"*.

In addition, one respondent quoted *“I can still take it if the environment’s and hotel’s ambience is ordinary, but if my hotel’s room is not clean, then I’m sorry”*. This indicates that cleanliness is very significant attributes for mature travellers when choosing a hotel in Redang Island.

Cleanliness represents the hotel’s image, reputation as well as giving added value to the hotel organization. From reviewing of the past studies, it is clear that hotel cleanliness attributes act as the prime role in influencing mature travellers to choose and stay at a hotel in Redang Island. Thus, hotel operators can take this opportunity in upgrading their services to provide a clean environment and guestroom for hotel guests especially for mature travellers. Presumably, hotel operators for example, can provide clean linen together with pillows, bedding, blankets and bedcovers to each new guest as well as changing it daily. Moreover, hotel swimming pool can be chemically treated with filtration plant. By understanding the attributes for mature travellers in choosing a hotel in Redang Island, hotel operators can fulfil the needs of this market segmentation and enhance their quality of service. Mature travellers will absolutely return back to the hotel/resort if they feel special during their stay. First impression is crucial and hoteliers need to impress this market segment the very first time they come to the hotel. The identification of mature travellers’ needs has become determinant to the competitiveness of hotel industry. Supportive augmentation can be found in Rauch, Collins, Nale and Barr (2015) study that highlighted cleanliness of hotel guestrooms has significant impact in influencing travellers to choose a hotel destination.

4.2 Safety

On top of that, all respondents emphasized that safety is essential in selecting a hotel to stay in Redang Island. Majority of the respondents highlighted that they do safety research on the hotels in Redang through the net before finalizing the hotel that they intend to stay.

One respondent accentuated *“Safety is a basic thing that I would definitely look for when I’m going to any hotels, be it Redang or other destinations all over the world”*.

In conjunction with that, another respondent pointed out *“I traveled far from my hometown just to enjoy my holiday, of course I want my hotel rooms to be safe”*.

Safety equipment’s and features in the hotel guestrooms include in-room safe, electronic door locks, sprinklers, security cameras in interior corridors and safety materials. Supportive augmentation on safety attribute can be found in Hilliard and Baloglu’s (2008) study that affirmed safety fall as part of the overall “servicescape” of a consumption setting and delve into service experiences. Interestingly, safety is a major factor for Western travellers coming to Malaysia especially after the 11 September tragedy (Poon & Low, 2005).

4.3 Service

Given the importance of attributes in choosing a hotel, the survey asked respondents to indicate their perceptions on attributes that affect their choices of hotels. Majority of the respondents agreed that service appeared significant in influencing mature travellers in selecting a hotel in Redang Island. Service is very hard to measure, as it is intangibles. It covers the treatment of employees to hotel guests as well as their attitudes and behaviours in delivering service.

One respondent specified *“I’ll definitely come back to the hotel if I’m satisfied with the hotel services”*.

While another respondent quoted *“Though we are living in the era of information technology, but nobody can argue on the important of services especially when it comes to hotel industry”*.

Interestingly, one respondent of a loyal guest for one hotel brand in Redang Island highlighted *“I preferred to stay at the hotel since the service is excellent, they know my preferences on the hotel rooms such as my selection of newspaper that I was reading. It may look simple but it did matters”*.

All the statements mentioned above signifies service as important attributes for mature travellers. It is evident that this market segmentation favoured friendly services and personalized attention. Thus, services give a huge impact on mature travellers’ decision to choose a hotel. Hotels with good services will definitely boost their revenue (Vieregge, Phetkaew, Beldona, Lumsden & DeMicco, 2007).

In conjunction with the attributes, services appeared significant and add value to the hotel products. Hotel operators should focus on guest’s perception and be able to deliver at guest’s level of expectation. Amusingly, findings revealed that as international mature travellers, they tend to stay longer if they are comfortable and interested with the local ambience. They are not restricted to any work commitments compared to local guests. Knowing this, hotel operators should tailor their products to these market preferences. Long-term plans can be made by the hotel to improve cleanliness, safety, services and facilities at their hotel. For instance, adding club facility and improve food quality. Majority of the respondents tend to plan their holidays in advance and they know exactly the hotel product offerings before their actual visit. This is where the hotel attributes involved in the selection process.

4.4 Facilities

All respondents agreed that facilities appeared essential attribute in selecting a hotel for mature travellers in Redang Island. Facilities comprised of in-room amenities such as in-room safety box, minibar, telephone services, iron & ironing board, data port, workspace, in-room television, water heater etc. Moreover, facilities cover hotel building site with bright and protected main and secondary entrances, exits, reception area, dining room, kitchen and service area, lounge area, restroom facilities, showers

and toilets, guestroom, storage areas, swimming pools, corridors and stairs equipped with proper air circulation. This is in line with Rauch et al. (2015) study that indicated exercise facilities, swimming pools, restaurants and gift shops are perceived as absolute necessities.

One respondent highlighted *“Although we are looking for a cheaper accommodation, but we do take into account the facilities of the hotel”*.

In addition, another respondent quoted *“Facilities of the hotel will definitely affect guest’s perceptions on the hotel products and services”*.

The findings of this study are in line with the literatures which supported by a current study (Kim et al., 2017). Kim et al. (2017) highlighted that with the ever-demanding needs of savvy hotel guests, exploring which products, amenities, and services have emerged as important attributes to hotel guests. Hence, all four attributes discussed above are very crucial to tap this market segmentation. However, researchers feel that this study is not large enough to be able to claim generalizability. Probably, the attributes will vary among different market segments and domestic guests. Findings also suggest that hotels should be more proactive in their response concerning the selection attributes for mature travellers. In fact, hotel operators should not be ignoring this market group as they have potential in bringing revenue to the hotels. Serving the needs and wants of this niche market can probably lead to customer loyalty and boost the revenue for the hotel. Hence, this study is hoped to assist hoteliers in fulfilling the needs for mature travellers, improve the quality of service as well as enhancing hotels brand image, reputation and competitive advantage.

5 Conclusion

Findings of this study provide a source of information for hoteliers to improve on the quality aspects of their hotels specifically focused on cleanliness facilities and safety services. Hotels play a crucial part in developing the tourism industry and implication on country’s economy (Khozaei, Nazem, Ramayah & Naidu, 2016). Satisfaction of mature travellers with their hotel choices significantly vital as it can affect the revisit intention among them in the future. Overall, this study also highlighted that mature travellers expect great services from the hotels they stay. The attentive and friendly staffs will definitely contribute to the positive outcome and experiences of mature travellers’ hotel stay, besides comfortable place to stay, clean and safe facilities. In addition, the quality of the services provided to hotel guests is also significant in improving customer’s satisfaction (Khozaei et al., 2016). Hotel attributes can be viewed as the degree to which travellers find various services and facilities important in promoting their satisfaction with hotel stay. Success in hotel business depends largely on understanding the preferences attributes for hotels guests in determining the final destination to stay.

Effective marketing strategies are essential to attract these mature travellers as Malaysian hotels continue to compete for a broader market share. An in-depth investigation on current and past trends of mature travellers had been done, however limited studies were available especially on current local studies pertaining to mature travellers. Most of the studies conducted were international. Hence, researchers strongly encouraged further investigation on this market segmentation. Further studies can enhance the value of this research. Future study can probably focus on the hotel operator's perspectives with regards to their perceptions of services offered to mature travellers. It is crucial to ensure that the needs of this market segmentation are being met. This untapped resource can bring in huge revenue and increase the potential of return business. Improving service quality tremendously, can lead to a better customer satisfaction and loyalty, thus, resulting in better relationships with hotel guests (Jones, 2007). Additionally, future studies can focus on other attributes that drive travellers to choose and stay at the hotel. It may also investigate other hotel brands and different populations of customers including different segments.

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