

Romanian Coast of the Black Sea - Quality of Tourism Services and Choice Destination Factors

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Abstract

Romanian seaside is a summer destination for tourists Romans and not only, offering multiple holiday resorts. This paper propose to identify attitudes and perceptions of tourists on the quality of tourism services on the Romanian coast of the Black Sea. Authors is focused to measuring the perception of Romanian tourists on the quality of the Romanian seaside, the recovery of the tourism potential, the service personnel and appreciation of rates/quality balance. Also, we propose to identify key factors of choice of seaside destinations. The research hypothesis are: perceived quality of service is average to poor, coastal tourism potential is underexploited, the prices are high for the quality offered, and insufficiently trained service personnel; is the fact that the choice of holiday destination depends on a number of factors, not one critical.

Keywords: coastal tourism, tourism services, services quality, quality perception, Romanian Black Sea coast, holiday destination

Introduction

Tourist Services represents a set of activities aimed at meeting the needs of tourists. There are basic services - accommodation, transport, catering or leisure, that satisfy general needs (rest, food), and there are additional services that actually adapts basic services to the needs of tourists.

The objectives of the article aim the measurement of perceptions for romanian tourists regarding the services quality on the Romanian seacoast, regarding the valorification of tourist potential, regarding service personnel and the appreciation of tourists for the balance tariffs and quality. Authors identify the most important factors in choosing seaside destination and characterizing Romanian seaside, positive or negative.

The article is based on a pilot study conducted in September 2012 based on a questionnaire answered by 124 of romanian tourists who have traveled recently on the romanian seaside. Research results were released in Doctoral Conference "Trends in economic scientific research", 22-23 September 2012, Sibiu.

The paper is organized as follows: first - a short overview through specialized literature, consisting of previous researches which had the objective of study tourism services quality; section two – a presentation of research methodology; section three - research results and their analysis; section four - conclusions.

Literature review

The perception of quality for tourism services has been the subject of many study for economists. A known model – SERVQUAL - was developed by Parasuraman (1988) and validated by Asbonteng (1996). Parasuraman et al. (1988) described an instrument – SERVQUAL - for measuring the perception for service quality and possible solutions by applying measurement scale. Asubonteng et al. (1996) provided a review of SERVQUAL, pursuing in defining and measuring the quality of services, pursuing the reliability and validity of SERVQUAL. Service quality was measured by Vogt, Fesenmaier (1995), Weiermair, Fuchs (1999), Reichel et al. (2000), Prasnikar et al. (2010), Yusof, Rahman (2011). The studies were based on Vogt, Fesenmaier (1995), Yusof, Rahman (2011) questionnaire, or the analysis model of "Sirgy" - Weiermair, Fuchs (1999), the Groknroos model of tourism services perception - Reichel et al. (2000) . Some researchers were concerned about a particular type of service, front-office departments from hotels – Keung (2000), airport facilities – Cejas, Rendeiro (2006), and the hotel industry – Ukwayi et al. (2012). There have been made studies for coastal tourist destinations – Prasnikar et al. (2010), for mountain destinations – Weiermair Fuchs (1999), rural destinations – Reichel et al. (2000). Other researchers have measured the satisfaction of tourists in certain destinations Mallorca and Turkey – Kozak (2000), Israel – Reichel et al. (2000), Gran Canaria – Cejas, Rendeiro (2006), Lake Kenyir, Malaysia – Yusof, Rahman (2011), Cross River State – Ukwayi et al. (2012). Alegre, Garau (2010), Lee (2010) have measured the satisfaction of tourists in their summer holidays. Otto, Richie (1996) have analyzed the perception for services by the tourists in terms of three factors – sociology factors, anthropology factors, psychology factors. Kozak (2000) carried out a study on british and german tourists who visited Mallorca and Turkey, identifying differences in satisfaction between those two types of tourists. Vogt, Fesenmaier (1995) concluded that tourists perceive tourism services depending on the service provider rather than the nature and the quality of the service itself. Weiermair, Fuchs (1999) have indicated a linear relationship between quality perception of tourism in general and the perception for strictly tourist services. Keung (2000) they brought recommendations to improve employee behavior in terms of customer privacy, ethics and discipline. Cejas, Rendeiro (2006) concluded that the facilities from airports is an indirect indicator for the services quality from tourism for a tourist destination.

Alegre, Garau (2010) evaluated satisfaction and dissatisfaction independently, reaching the conclusion that dissatisfaction is not necessarily the opposite of satisfaction. Lee (2010) has enlarged the horizon of researches, measuring not only the satisfaction characteristics but also characteristics of sustainable development, demography and recreation. The conclusion is that it would be useful to develop ecotourism programs which would balance the effects of coastal tourism – that is a mass tourism by definition – and to support sustainable development.

Identifying the factors that influence the choice of holiday destinations is an ongoing concern for both researchers and the private sector. Scientific studies have focused on tourists satisfaction and intention to return (Kozak (2001), Alegre, Juaneda (2006), Campo-Martinez, Garau-Vadell, Martinez-Ruiz(2010)), also on personal motivations for choosing a tourist destination (Nicolau, Mas (2005, 2006, 2008), Hsu, Tsai, Wu (2009), Lyons, Mayor, Tol (2009)). In „Repeaters' behavior at two distinct destinations" paper, author „investigated whether any relationship existed between (a) previous visits, tourist satisfaction, and repeat visit intentions, and (b) previous visits, tourist satisfaction, and intention to visit other destinations in the same area"(Kozak, 2001). Nicolau, Mas (2005) analyzes a multistage tourist choice process: taking a vacation, visiting foreign vs. domestic destinations, taking multi- vs. single-destination vacations. „The empirical application carried out on the sample reaches the following conclusions: the dimensions which appear to have an effect on the decision to take a vacation are income, household size, age, active occupational situation, being a student, size of the city of origin, and opinion of taking a vacation.”(Nicolau, Mas, 2005). Alegre, Juaneda (2006) analyzes the phenomenon of repeat visits to a holiday destination from an economic perspective based on three types of economic theory models: reputation, market with limited information, and consumer behavior. Nicolau, Mas (2006) believe that distance or prices, as reasons to choose a tourist destination, interact with tourists personal motivations. In „Sequential choice behavior: Going on vacation and type of destination" paper, authors „proposes a multistage decision process to the choice of tourist destination types (going on vacation, coastal character, and urban character of the destination) as these choice sets are more idiosyncratic to tourists who prefer a specific type of tourist destination" (Nicolau, Mas, 2008). Hsu, Tsai, Wu (2009) identified factors that motivate tourists elections and evaluated their preferences for tourism destinations. Lyons, Mayor, Tol (2009) analyzed, based on questionnaires distributed during 2000-2006, motivational variables when Irish tourists in choosing holiday destinations. „Destination characteristics such as temperature, GDP and length of coastline at the destination country are all attractive factors that positively influence the likelihood of choosing a given destination”(Lyons, Mayor, Tol, 2009). Campo-Martinez, Garau-Vadell, Martinez-Ruiz (2010) studied the probability of return of tourists to a destination known, concluding that the most important factor in intention of returning is overall satisfaction.

Research methodology

The research is based on an exploratory research, a pilot study, having as an instrument a questionnaire distributed to romanian tourists who have traveled at least on the romanian seaside. The questionnaire was distributed exclusively online in September 2012. The questionnaire was developed in english. As a method of selecting participants it has been used the "snowball" technique.

The questionnaire included 11 closed questions (identification, classification, dichotomous, multiple answer, scaling).

- Education level, income level (questions 1 and 2)
- The question "Have you traveled on the coast inland or abroad?" and having as possible answers: "Yes, only in Romania" and "Yes, in Romania and abroad" - (question 3)
- Establish the importance of factors in choosing seaside destination from "Not at all important" to "essential" (question no 4) and identify positive and negative factors that characterize the Romanian Black Sea coast, with multiple answers (questions no 5 and no 6)
- Assessment of the degree for the capitalization for the romanian seaside tourism potential, on a scale from 1 to 5 (question 7)
- The perception of tourists for the quality level of tourist services on the romanian seacoast, from "very poor" to "very good" (question 8)
- The appreciation of training, the attitude and behavior of serving staff on a scale from 1 to 5 (question 9), the appreciation of the balance prices / quality (question 10) and measuring the intention of returning to the romanian seaside (question 11)
- Measuring the return intention to Romanian seaside(question no 11)

Results and discussion

A total of 124 Romanian tourists have completed the questionnaire, 37 men and 87 women, aged between 18 and 64 years, with an average of 27.5 years. Education level of respondents was – university (52.4%), postgraduate studies (44.4%), high school (3.2%). Regarding the income, there was a balanced distribution. Categories of income:<1000 RON(17.7%), 1001-1500 RON (21.8%), 1501-2000 RON(25.8%), 2001-3000 RON(22.6%), >3001 RON(12.1%). (note: RON - Romanian New Leu)

To the question "Appreciate the importance of the following factors in choosing seaside destination", the results are presented in the following table.

Table 1. Level of importance of factors in choosing seaside destination

| Factor | Not at all important | Less important | Important | Very important | Essential |
|---------------------------------|----------------------|----------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|
| Service quality | 0% | 2.4% | 23.6% | 44.7% | 29.3% |
| Beach / sea quality | 0% | 3.3% | 26% | 44.7% | 26% |
| Leisure/ Entertainment | 0.8% | 6.5% | 46.3% | 32.5% | 13.8% |
| Tariffs | 0% | 2.4% | 23.6% | 35% | 39% |
| Novelty / variety | 1.6% | 20.3% | 46.3% | 22.8% | 8.9% |
| Safety and personal security | 1.6% | 1.6% | 23.6% | 36.6% | 36.6% |
| Is trendy | 38.2% | 45.5% | 11.4% | 4.9% | 0% |

Source: by the authors, based on research

We appreciate the the delimitation of three categories of factors: very important, average, less important.

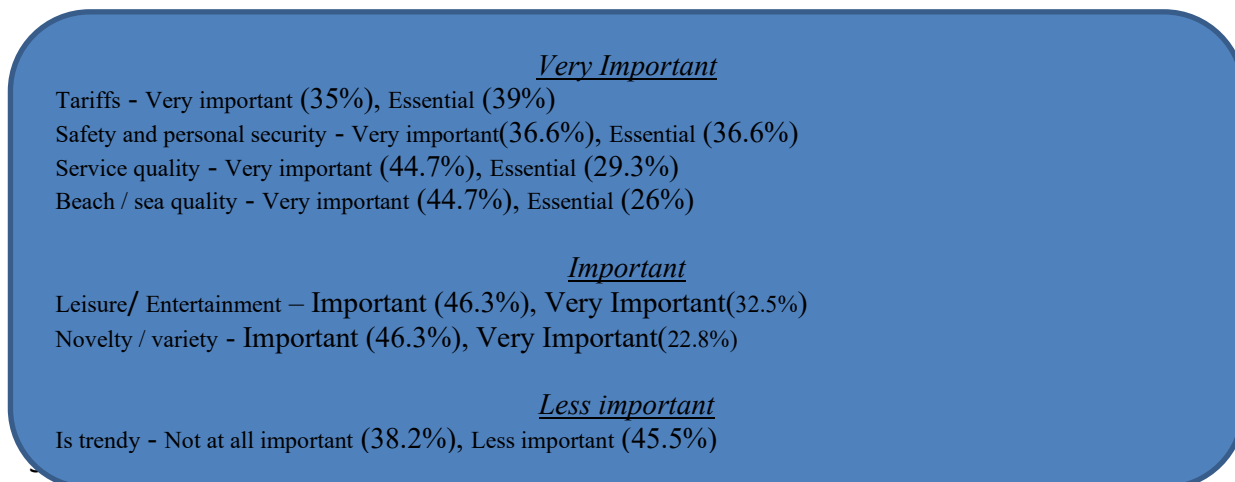


Fig 1. Factors in choosing seaside destination

Source: by authors, based on research

To describe Romanian seaside, positive or negative, the answer was multiple, registering 195 for positive and 400 for negative factors.

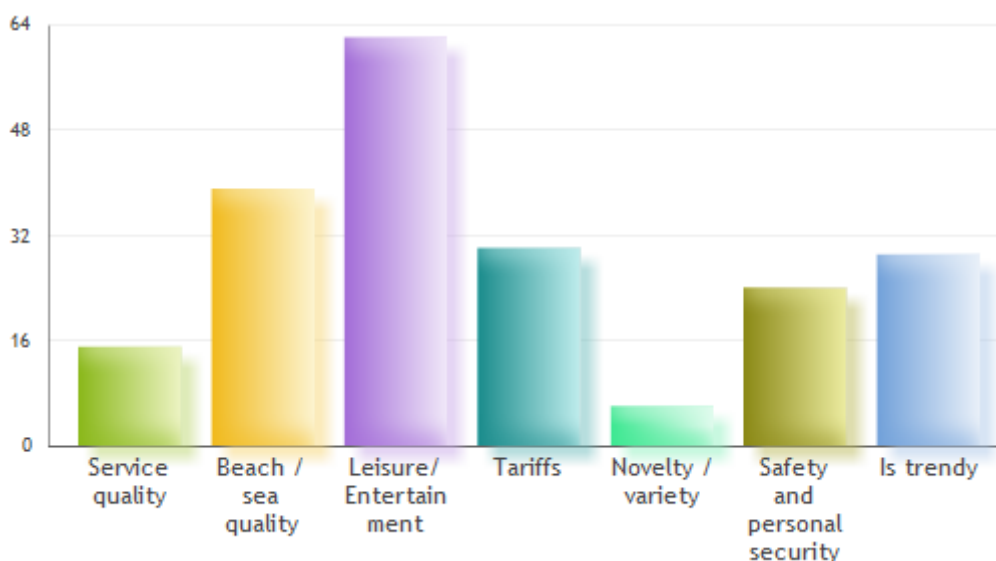


Fig. 2. Positive factors in choosing seaside destination

Source: by authors, based on research

Among the positive factors, are highlighted with a percentage of 30.8% „Leisure/ Entertainment” – average weight factor clasified on previous question , and 18,5% for „Beach / sea quality”, identified as very important factor for tourists. Average weight factor „Novelty / variety” recorded only 6.7% of the total options.

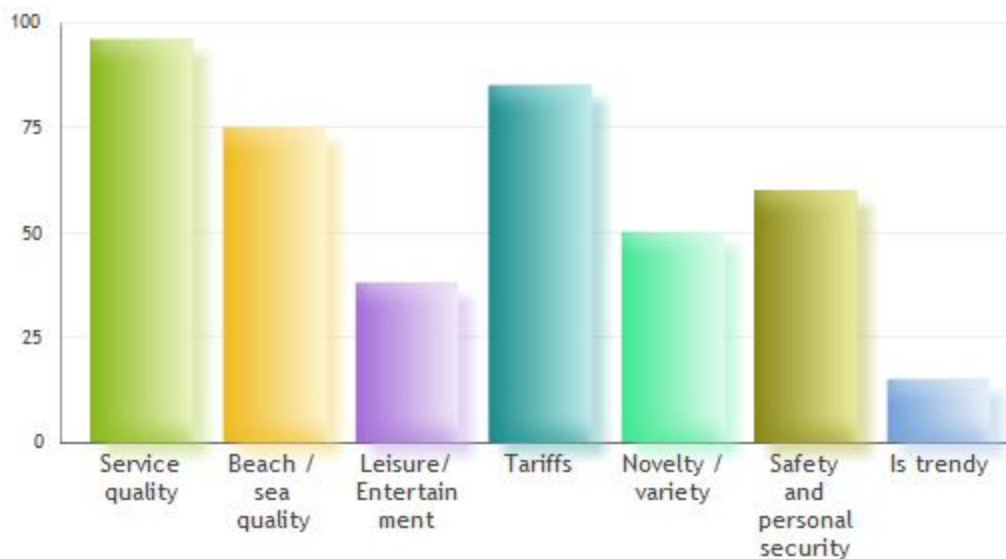


Fig. 3. Negative factors in choosing seaside destination

Source: by authors, based on research

In the case of negative factors, all four very important factors, showed significant percentages - „Service quality”- 23%, „Tariffs”-20%, „Beach / sea quality”-17.8%, „Safety and personal security”-14%. „Is trendy”, ranked as less important, had the lowest percentage - 3.5%.

Tourism potential. On a scale from 1 (least) to 5 (maximum) the average value was 2.19. None of the respondents considered that the romanian potential is highlighted, and the average shows that it is undervalued.

Quality of services on the romanian seaside. For the question "How do you rate the quality for the next tourist services on the romanian seaside?". Results reveal that tourists appreciate at a medium level to low the quality for tourist services on the romanian seaside. The answers "high quality" being found only in a very small percentage.

Table 2. Tourists' perception of the quality of tourism, %

| | Very poor | Poor | Average | Good | Very good |
|---------------|-----------|------|---------|------|-----------|
| Accommodation | 4.1 | 25.2 | 41.5 | 29.3 | 0 |
| Food Services | 5.7 | 22 | 43.9 | 27.6 | 0.8 |
| Transport | 6.5 | 26 | 49.6 | 17.1 | 0.8 |
| Recreation | 2.4 | 21.1 | 48.8 | 25.2 | 2.4 |
| Treatment | 6.5 | 43.9 | 29.3 | 17.1 | 3.3 |
| General | 6.5 | 30.9 | 55.3 | 7.3 | 0 |

Source: by authors, based on research results

Assessing service quality, generally or sectorial, defines two groups:

- poor to average quality: general quality (average- 55.3%, poor- 30.9%); Treatment and SPA's (poor -43.9%, average 29.3%); transport (poor -26%, average -49.6%)
- average to good quality: accomodation (average- 41.5%, good- 29.3%); food services (average- 43.9% , good- 27.6%); Recreation (average- 48.8%, good 25.2%)

At the extremes, „very poor quality”, respectively „very good quality”, results show the following:

- for „very poor quality” answer, highest percentages were reported in transport, treatment and SPA's , general quality (6,5%), and the lowest percentage, 2,4%, for recreation services.

- for „very good quality” answer, highest percentages were registered for treatment (3,3%), and recreation (2,4%). None of the respondents rated the overall quality of accommodation and general services as very good quality.

Tourism personnel. "On a scale of 1 to 5, how do personnel training and attitude Romanian seaside?" question delimited to two issues: staff training, staff attitudes and behavior respectively. For " personnel training " the most frequent response is "3"(43.1%). The least frequent answer is "5"(0%). The average score was 2.59. For " Attitude and behavior " the most frequent response is "2"(39.8%). The least frequent answer is "5".(0%), and the average score - 2.42. The results show that training, attitude and behavior of employees in tourism are unsatisfactory. Price / quality balance. Represented over 90% of respondents said that prices on the Romanian coast not covered by the quality. No respondent did not consider the prices charged by operators in the Black Sea are small compared to the quality. Intention of returning to the romanian seaside. Almost 30% of respondents said that they would return to safety on the Romanian seaside and only 7.4% are determined to focus on other destinations. About the intention on returning to the Romanian coast, we can appreciate that only 7.4% of respondents said "No", and and almost 30% said „Yes, definitely”

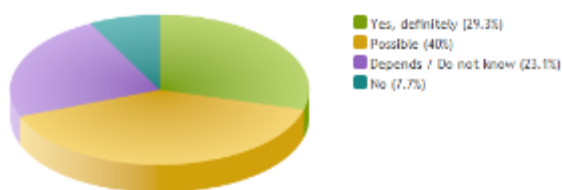


Fig. 3. Return intention

Source: by authors, based on research

Conclusions

Tourism potential of the Romanian Black Sea coast is not enough in a tourism industry that increasingly put more emphasis on quality service. Present relevant research results both in terms of percentage of almost 73% of tourists who visited the Romanian seaside and destinations abroad needs as well as in terms of income distribution and higher education of the respondents. Although the perception of overall quality is average to poor individual, basic services, accommodation food, recreation, the values are above average. We can conclude that the tourists are unhappy especially the overall level of services, rather than on a specific category of travel. Infrastructure, general services quality, service quality complementary tourism-long general perception influence and affect the image of the Black Sea Romanian destinations. In choosing tourism destinations coast, tourism service quality is a trigger. Tourism potential of the Romanian Black Sea coast is not enough in a tourism industry that increasingly puts more emphasis on services.

On the importance of coastal tourist destinations factors and perceived level for the Romanian seaside is observed that there determinants and motivation destination choice is the result of factors together, which confirms the hypothesis research.

Also important factors and their assessment in relation to Romanian seaside reveals heterogeneity and show different perceptions of tourists.

Even in the context of poor value, an unprepared staff and high tariffs, Romanian tourists intend to return the Romanian Black Sea coast. This obligation to the continuous improvement of services, not just tourism, infrastructure, the diversification of raising quality standards across the Romanian coast.

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