Expectation and Experience Gap for Japanese Travelers Visiting Malaysian Homestay, Utilizing Holiday Satisfaction Model

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Abstract

Homestay program is known as one of the fastest growing segments of the Community–based Tourism, especially in third world countries and is expected to continue in near future. Recent studies in cultural and heritage tourism focused on characteristics of tourists who are visiting cultural and heritage destinations. In this sense, although HOLSAT model can be applied to evaluate tourists’ satisfaction, just a few studies have used this model and its utilization seems crucial. This study attempts to investigate holiday satisfaction among Japanese travelers who visit Malaysian Homestays using HOLSAT model. The results show that HOLSAT model can be worked as a useful tool in understanding tourists’ satisfaction in particular destinations with specific characteristics. In this study, data collected by on–site survey method in questionnaire form and analyzes using Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test. The findings prove the accuracy of Wilcoxon Test in comparison to other methods used in previous works.

Keywords: Holsat, Tourist Satisfaction, Home Stay, Japanese Travelers.

1. Introduction

Tourist satisfaction is an important factor in destination success rate and influences destination selection by potential traveler [1]. Every destination encompasses different attributes that insulate it from other destinations [2]. Once a potential traveler decides to travel, he or she would compare these attributes to choose the most appropriate destination, thus tourists’ decision–making process will be based on the comparison of destination characteristics [3]. In addition, market research shows that in developed countries such as Japan, tourists are maturing, and looking for higher levels of quality in services when on holiday. In other words, they are seeking good value for their money [4].

Furthermore, there are several criteria influencing destination selection by potential travelers and, however they cannot analyze them instantaneously, so they may use a few main criteria to select their destination. This complexity of measures caused the ignorance of some of criteria [5]. As regards, this paper attempts to select the most important measures which are related to Homestay visitors, not all of them.

Malaysia has long been a popular destination for Japanese travelers. For the last few years, the number of Japanese travelers to Malaysia has grown, reaching 415,881 visitors in 2010. In that year, Malaysia was ranked third after Thailand and Singapore in receiving Japanese travelers in ASEAN area, where more than 70% of them travelled to Malaysia for vacation purposes [6]. In the same year, Japanese travelers spent a total of 27.9 billion US$ in the world [7], where Malaysia’s share of revenue from this market was RM 1,144.12 million. Among Malaysia’s attractions, Homestay programs form the pillar of the

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rural tourism. The Homestay program evolution traced back to the early 1970s [8]. In 2009, homestay experienced a 77% increase in visitor arrivals; 130,038 domestic visitors and 31,523 foreign tourists totaling to 161,561 visitors, compared to only 91,533 visitors in 2008 [9]. To the end of 2011, a total of 3,283 homestay operators from 141 homestays and 227 villages have been trained and certified throughout the country. In addition, in the late 1980s, the homestay concept in Malaysia took on a new dimension with the arrival of Japanese youths on exchange and field programs [10].

Johore State is one of the most active states regarding Homestay program in Malaysia. Seven main areas with a total of 550 participants are running Homestay program within the state [9]. Sinaran Baru Homestay is established by a lady in 2006 and for the first time a group of 60 Japanese travelers visited Sinaran Baru as the first international tourists. According to Ministry of Tourism Malaysia, Sinaran Baru is the most successful Homestays in Johor state in relation to number of visitors. Sinaran Baru Homestay is located in the vicinity of Senai International Airport and this phenomenon provides a golden opportunity for this homestay in terms of accessibility. According to the Johor tourism office, Sinaran Baru is the nearest homestay to Singapore which caused the large number of arrivals to this village.

2. Tourist Satisfaction

Visitor satisfaction has been known as a major indicator of a destination’s performance, and has been used by scholars to understand the competitiveness of a destination [11, 12]. In addition, some academics considered the significance of tourist satisfaction within a tourist destination [13–15].

Current literature shows studies in tourist satisfaction are mainly divided in two main areas. The first dimension emphasized on measureable, tangible and functional attributes [16–21] while some other studies discussed about intangible and psychological aspects of satisfaction [22–27]. Furthermore, a list of attributes was introduced [28] that were used frequently such as: scenery, hospitality, receptiveness, cost, climate, activities, entertainment and sports facilities. Further attention to this list shows that tangible and functional attributes gained more attention in comparison to psychological attitudes [28]. Based on a study [29], there are seven main factors in attracting a tourist to a destination which comprises of (1) the physiography and climate, (2) the culture and history, (3) the range and mix of activities available, (4) the special events offered, (5) the superstructure, (6) the types of entertainment found and (7) the market ties or human relationships [29]. Factors 1 and 2 are unalterable since they are naturally occurring and cannot be handled by humans alone. Other factors such as: activities, events, types of entertainment, market ties and hospitality management, at both state and the national levels, appropriate strategies and investment can change the current situation to better or worse, except for superstructures which is not under authority of a small host community such as Homestay and needs investments and agreements in national level. Some authors agreed on categorizing destination attributes into five core factors: Natural, Social, Historical, Recreational and Shopping Facilities and Infrastructure, food and shelter [30, 31, 2].

2.1 Japanese Travelers

Some authors believe that tourists’ lifestyle and attributes play an important role in their destination selection [2, 32, 28]. In the same way, considering Japanese traveling behavior seems crucial in studying their expectation and satisfaction. Exploring related scientific articles to Japanese travelling behavior shows that there is a broad range of unique behaviors which are summarized in Table 1. This research tries to investigate the Japanese satisfaction level in Malaysia based on their specific psychological behavior in travel which has been ignored in previous studies. For example, studies such as holiday satisfaction assessment in Cuba [33] and Australian tourist

Table 1. Japanese behavior in travel

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Japanese behaviors in travel</th>
<th>Author</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Personal participation in soft activities and risk avoidance</td>
<td>[35–37]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attentive service expectation of high standards of presentation</td>
<td>[38]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food service and preference for fine restaurants</td>
<td>[39, 40]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purchasing gifts for family and friends, Price being the most influential factor in buying certain items</td>
<td>[41, 40]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of togetherness</td>
<td>[42]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Photography and socializing, polite and harmonious and social relationships</td>
<td>[43, 20]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese-speaking tour guides</td>
<td>[44]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interested in cultural heritage attractions</td>
<td>[20]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embarrass about doing something wrong</td>
<td>[45, 46]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
satisfaction in Vietnam [34] are some of the main case studies focusing on general tourist satisfaction attitudes rather than visitors' specific behaviors and attitudes. Subsequently, current study has engaged the Japanese travelling behavior instead of employing general tourist satisfaction indicators and it is noticeable that these indicators have been selected based on Japanese travelling behavior provided in previous literature.

3. HOLSAT Model

HOLSAT model for the first time was used to evaluate tourist satisfaction in a resort in Cuba [33]. After application of this model [34] in understanding Australian travelers' satisfaction in Vietnam, the concept of satisfaction was defined [33, 34] as "the degree to which a tourist's assessment of the attributes of that destination exceeds his or her expectations for those attributes".

HOLSAT model has conceptual differences with other popular satisfaction measurement models such as SERVQUAL and SERVPERF. HOLSAT measures satisfaction in two phases, expectation and experience, thus comparing the satisfaction with experience. While, SERVQUAL evaluates performance in accordance to the best quality [47] not expectation, and also SERVPERF assesses satisfaction in one phase and just measure the experience [48].

Another key feature of HOLSAT model is addressing the multidimensional characteristics and variables of tourists' satisfaction in a specific destination by comparing a broad range of destination attributes against customers' expectation of the same. Furthermore HOLSAT is a “site specific” model which tries to investigate the most appropriate attributes of the selected destination. This character of HOLSAT provides an opportunity for better evaluation of satisfaction among Japanese travelers who travel for educational reasons beside leisure purposes. Although the HOLSAT model has been explored comprehensively with respect to satisfaction phenomena in the tourism field, the focus on specific tourists' travelling behavior has been neglected in previous works [33, 34].

Considering positive and negative attributes of a destination, is another highlighted characteristic of HOLSAT model [34]. In this study, focusing on the Sinaran Baru Homestay, the study questionnaire was designed and validated based on two main perspectives; engaging Japanese travelling behavior and choosing satisfaction attributes in accordance to Malaysian Homestay. The attributes are asked to rate their experience once more after visiting the site. For both situations, a Likert Scale is used to evaluate the attribute and a mean score is calculated for each expectation and experience separately. Expectation and experience mean difference for each attribute provides a qualitative measure which indicates the level of satisfaction in the specific destination.

The outcomes in some previous studies have shown in a matrix whereby the expectation rate is outlined against experience score [33, 34]. The rates showed in a 45° Draw line. The evaluated scores are presented in three possible areas in the matrix, where the first area represents the “Win”, where the expectation is reached or exceeded (Expectation ≤ Experience), “Loss” shows experience doesn't meet the expectation (Expectation > Experience), and “Draw” which show same answers for the same attribute before and after experiencing the destination (Expectation = Experience). As the results were not shown clearly in previous studies, this study used stack graphs to illustrate the outcomes. Negative and positive attributes illustrated in Figure 1 and 2 respectively.

3.1 HOLSAT in Malaysian Homestay

As noted earlier, in contrary to the SERVQUAL which uses 22 fixed attributes, being site specific is the key feature of HOLSAT model [34]. In this study, focusing on the Sinaran Baru Homestay, the study questionnaire was designed and validated based on two main perspectives; engaging Japanese travelling behavior and choosing satisfaction attributes in accordance to Malaysian Homestay. The attributes are asked to score their expectation of each destination attribute before travel and are asked to rate their experience once more after visiting the site. For both situations, a Likert Scale is used to evaluate the attribute and a mean score is calculated for each expectation and experience separately. Expectation and experience mean difference for each attribute provides a qualitative measure which indicates the level of satisfaction in the specific destination.

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Figure 1. Experience vs. expectation for negative studied attributes.
The attributes were categorized into five main groups: “Attractions”, “Meal”, “Accommodation”, “Hygiene”, and “Hospitality”. Classification system used in this study was different from previous studies [33], which used physical resort and facilities; ambiance; restaurants, bars, shops and nightlife; transfers; heritage and culture; and accommodation as the main categories, while recent study [34] used “Five A’s” (“Attractions”, “Activities”, “Amenities”, “Accommodation” and “Accessibility”) as their main variables.

4. Findings and Discussion

The attributes were placed in two groups: positive and negative questions, and were analyzed separately. The form of questioning, either negative or positive is the only difference between negative and positive categories which helps in preventing crowdedness in one graph. Negative attributes were analyzed using Wilcoxon Paired Comparison Test to investigate the difference between expectation and experience. In other words, Wilcoxon Test was applied to determine whether the experience has met the expectation or not. Wilcoxon assumed that the data are paired and coming from the same population and each pair is selected independently and randomly [49]. For the statistical analysis of the collected data, researchers used SPSS v16.

All items were scored on a Likert Five–point scale ranging from “less satisfied” (1) to “more satisfied” (5). The questionnaire also open ended questions. To enhance the generalizability of the study, data were collected from three separate groups in three different days with different ages, genders, carriers and education level.

4.1 Negative Attributes

As represented in Table 2, the results show that there is no significant difference in travelers’ perception regarding the “Accessibility”, in other words, their satisfaction has been met, but in comparison to their expectation, it is not exceeded much. On the other hand, Wilcoxon test on “Hygiene”, “Privacy” and “Presentation” indicates that satisfaction is not up to the expectation mark which means these attributes were not as well as initially thought. For other two attributes; Environment and Crowdedness, experience exceeded the expectation with significance of 1:100.

4.2 Positive Attributes

The results of Wilcoxon Signed–ranked test on positive attributes show that 10 attributes out of 14, scored positively with the significance of 1:100. In other words, Japanese travelers to Banghuris Homestay were significantly satisfied with first 10 attributes mentioned in Table 3 signed with “+”. On the other hand, three attributes; “Climate”, “Air Conditioning” and “Souvenir Shops” did not meet travelers’ expectation and did not satisfy the travelers.

5. Conclusion

The results prove that safety was one of the most concerning items associated with Japanese travelers. In this regard, visiting cultural dance was the most favorable activity for these travelers, due to low risk with this activity. Furthermore, their high expectation of safety shows the importance of this attribute for youth Japanese travelers. Moreover, as per their explanations of their parents advising them regarding safety, intense the importance of this attribute as well.

An idea was put forth [50] saying food can be worked as a promotional tool in promoting tourist destinations. In the same way, results of this study indicate that Malaysian foods satisfy Japanese palate in terms of on time service, variety, taste, and ingredients.

Also the outcomes reveal that there is a linkage between host family language proficiency and tourists’ hospitality satisfaction due to better communication. Families with lower range of language proficiency couldn’t
Table 2. The summary of results from survey questionnaires for negative attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attributes</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Wilcoxon Statistic</th>
<th>SIG</th>
<th>Result</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hygiene</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>−5.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>2.54</td>
<td>0.86</td>
<td>3.03</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>−3.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>2.46</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>0.76</td>
<td>−4.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>2.64</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>−4.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowdedness</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>−5.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessibility</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>2.59</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>−1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ Expectation is met
− Expectation is not met
NS: No Significant Difference between expectation and experience

Table 3. The summary of results from survey questionnaires for positive attributes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Expectation</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Wilcoxon Statistics</th>
<th>SIG</th>
<th>Results</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Std. Deviation</td>
<td>Statistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>−3.56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Con</td>
<td>3.81</td>
<td>0.73</td>
<td>2.81</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>−5.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Souvenir</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>0.72</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>0.83</td>
<td>−3.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional Dance</td>
<td>3.80</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>−4.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safe Activities</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>4.36</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>−3.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste*</td>
<td>3.97</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>4.40</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>−4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design*</td>
<td>4.11</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>−3.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On time service*</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>−3.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety*</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>4.51</td>
<td>0.58</td>
<td>−3.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>4.30</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>−3.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hospitality</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>4.23</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>−4.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japanese TourGuide</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>−4.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>0.69</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>−3.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Proficiency</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>0.84</td>
<td>−1.81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

+ Expectation is met
− Expectation is not met
NS: There is No Significant Difference between expectation and experience (Experience still met)
* Food related attributes

Satisfy their guests as such as those with higher level of English language skill. In this context, it is recommended that older Homestay participants with lower English proficiency receive local or Indonesian tourists rather than other countries due to language similarities as solution.

According to previous literature tourism remembrances are crucially important for women travelers, but reviewing current literature reveals lack of study about remembrance behavior [51–53]. Here the results prove that youth women consider remembrance stuff as well as elders and also females were less satisfied with souvenir shops in comparison to men which show the necessity of improving souvenir shops.

The prices’ results of this study in comparison to previous study by engaging Wilcoxon Test revealed that the utilized model of HOLSAT may be applied in many other tourism destinations to find out satisfaction level as this model response to the site specific nature of tourism products.
6. References


