Tourist Satisfaction with Hospitality Services on River Ship "Ms River Aria"

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Abstract

The main prerequisite for a successful business of hospitality services and building customer loyalty is to develop measures for improving and development hospitality services and offer. This paper presents the results of tourists satisfaction surveys based on the measurement of expected and perceived levels of quality hospitality services on a river ship "MS River Aria" company "Grand Circle Cruise Line". The survey was conducted between March and September 2012 on the itinerary: Amsterdam - Vienna (SGE), Amsterdam - Antwerp (SHH), Linz - Budapest (EDR) and Budapest - Constanta (LBS). A model for measuring hospitality services was developed by the company itself. During statistical data analysis, only the highest ratings, whose share was shown as percentage, were taken into account. The obtained results may be relevant for other cruise companies and contribute to the improvement of business and pleasure tourist.

Keywords: satisfaction, quality, hospitality service, tourist boats

Introduction

During the global economic crisis the primary goal of any company is building customer satisfaction and loyalty, in order to meet contemporary requirements of market quality. The main struggle is about customer retention and providing tailor-made services - (individualized consumer service). So far, hospitality literature has witnessed growing interest in research on service quality and customer satisfaction, applying related theories and methods in the hospitality industry (Martinez and Bosque, 2013; Spielmann et al., 2012; Oh, 1999; Oh and Parks, 1997; Oh and Jeong, 1996; Bojanic and Rosen, 1994; Getty and Thompson, 1994; Patton et al., 1994; Parasuraman et al., 1994a; Parasuraman et al., 1994b; Barsky, 1992; Barsky and Labagh, 1992; Knutson et al., 1992).Quality of hospitality services should be addressed as a market category, what means that quality of tourism product is formed by the chain of heterogeneous and complex tourism services and products. A studious approach

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to quality measurement is also required, with full consideration of multidisciplinary context when making a choice of quality criteria, as well as the methods and techniques used to measure it (Vićić and Kosar, 2010; Blešić et al., 2009; Kosar and Rašeta, 2004; Haemoon, 1999; Cheung and Law, 1998; Oliver, 1997; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Saleh and Ryan, 1991; Parasuraman et al., 1988).

Rating the quality of tourist satisfaction is based on their behavior at different stages, starting from the creation of needs, through the decision to travel, to travel realization, where the role of hotel industry is coming to the fore (Vićić and Kosar, 2010; Stefanovic, 2007). Tourists' satisfaction is not a static category, but dynamically changeable one according to their behavior, desires, needs and requirements. Although researchers struggle to clearly define the concept of customer satisfaction, an essential aspect of customer satisfaction is an evaluation process (Back, 2005). This evaluative process oriented approach has been regarded as the most effective way to measure the level of customer satisfaction (Oliver, 1997; Yi, 1990). Key determinants of quality are: safety, hygiene, accessibility and authenticity of the offer. Many companies believe that their consumers are generally satisfied because the percentage of complaints is very small. However, complaints are very unreliable indicator of customer satisfaction. Some studies show that only 4% of dissatisfied customers tend to complain and such percentage of complaints come to those who hear appeals (Gajic-Arsenijević, 2010). Dissatisfied customers inform, on average, nine people about their negative experience, but satisfied customer informs, on average, only five to eight people about his/her positive experience (Gajic-Arsenijević, 2010; Stefanović, 2007). In order to make and keep consumers happy, they need to be better acquainted, properly informed and provided with service quality and maximum protection, not only in the legal sense, but also in a practical context. Renowned hotel companies worldwide and market leaders develop special customer care programs and thereby encourage customer loyalty (Kosar and Rašeta, 2004; Kosar, 2002).

Many studies show an increase rate of tourists' movement, national income and employment in tourism industry from year to year (Rita, 2000). Apart from these, there are other factors, such as economic, social and environmental, which have a significant impact on tourism industry. Improving the quality of tourism in this century, has contributed to development of special forms of tourism. These changes have led to diversity of tourist demand, and there are even more heterogeneous offerings on the market. Accordingly, the market succumbs to segmentation and thereby a segment of selective demand is created. It is difficult to say which type of selective tourism is the most common. As an extremely important segment, UNWTO ranks nautical tourism in the group of specific forms of tourism that follow contemporary trends (Hadzić and Bjelac, 2006). Its popularity among the consumers, nautical tourism has received because of its specificities. It is based on a variety of its practice: individual cruise using own ship, rent a ship – charter or take an organized cruise – cruise tourism (Katic et al., 2011; Kosar and Rašeta, 2004).

Cruise business is a growing segment of the international tourism market (Dwyer and Forsyth, 1998). It is predicted that until 2020 cruises and cruise business will be one of the leading forms of tourism in the world (Katic et al., 2011). Tourist boats took the meaning of the hotel in the true sense of the word (floating hotels) (Dragin, 2010; Dragin et al., 2009; Dowing, 2006). Some authors consider cruise ship as a destination itself (Brida et al., 2012). It represents all four facets of the tourism industry: transportation, accommodation (including food and beverages), attractions and tour operators. Tešanović et al. (2010) suggest that the structure of guests on tourist boats are mostly elderly persons, whose primary

motive is hedonism, i.e. enjoyment of ride and good food (Dragin et al., 2010; Dragin, 2008; Dragin et al., 2008) . Based on papers dealing with this issue, it can be concluded that tourists give increasing significance to quality, but price is less important. Quality is the ability of a product or service to meet or exceed the consumer's expectations (Hadzić and Bjelac, 2006). Every organization should have a target group of customers and know their needs and desires. Floating hotels provide not only accommodation and food services, but also other activities such as entertainment, leisure, sports and recreation (Kalenjuk et al., 2010). Compared to other tourism service sectors, the cruise line industry faces a much greater challenge in delivering a high quality service at the time of product consumption, which begins when passengers initially board the ship until they disembark at the end of the cruise (Teye and Leclerc, 1998).

One of the main goals of tourism companies is to advance existing products by expanding offer (by creating new contents of the hotel) or improve existing products-services (redesign rooms, menus, drink menus, employee uniforms). All these engagements in favor of improving the quality of available services ease the tendency to meet more effectively the diverse needs of tourists (Vićić and Kosar, 2010).

On river boats, i.e. within the service companies, services are in constant correlation between tourists and employees. Developing a strong brand in service firms is accomplished through service employees (Ekinci and Dawes, 2009) and this is because the attitudes, skills, behaviors, and personalities of employees can influence customer perception of service quality, corporate image, and consumer loyalty (Ekinci and Dawes, 2009; Ekinci et al., 2008; Bowen and Schneider, 1985). Therefore, the quality scores of tourists mostly depend on the service staff, their skills and knowledge. The interaction between tourists - consumers and employees may affects both positively and negatively in the evaluation of satisfaction. It is particularly important to make a clear distinction between the service and its delivery process (Kalenjuk et al., 2010). Quality is composed of both core quality (what is delivered) and relational quality (how it is delivered) with various levels of tangible and intangible elements (McDougall and Levesque, 2000). Employees are the ones who need to influence the evaluation of services as well as tourists satisfaction.

Consumers will be satisfied after purchasing services or products, depending on how the offer fulfills their expectations (Ekinci and Dawes, 2009; Ekinci et al., 2008; Anderson and Fornell, 1994). According to Stefanovic (2007) customer will not be satisfied if his/her expectations are not confirmed or if he/she expects something different from what he/she can find and experience when he/she arrives in the hotel. In case when the perceived quality is above expectations, we can say that the customer is highly satisfied or delighted. Each consumer individually perceives quality of a service. Confirming the expectations is possible to observe by the difference that emerged among customer expected and perceived value (Blešić et al., 2011; Gajic-Arsenijević, 2010; Stefanovic, 2007; Kotler and Keller, 2006).

Defining the concept of loyal customers is a very delicate task, and it is not easy to determine, with certainty and accurately. Service management literature, proposes that customer satisfaction influences customer loyalty, which in turn affects profitability (Leal and Pereira, 2003; Baker and Crompton, 2000; Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000; Hallowell, 1996; Rust, et al, 1995; Schneider and Bowen, 1995; Anderson and Fornell, 1994; Storbacka et al., 1994; Heskett et al., 1994; Gummesson, 1993; Rust and Zahorik, 1991; Reicheld and Sasser, 1990; Zeithaml et al., 1990). In other words, building customer loyalty (loyal tourists) increases the income of the company. Loyalty building in some industries may be more profitable than in others. Veljković (2007) points out that one has to take into account the frequency of ser-

vices consumption in relation to travel. Accordingly, travel services are different from services of banks, post office, hairdressers because all of them we use very often. Also, when we use them, we know what to expect, because there are long-term connections and relationships in many cases. Therefore, in travel service context, consumer needs more time to build his/her experience and he/she primarily chooses quality tourism services using the basic principle "value for money" (Kotler and Keller, 2006).

The quality, as an integrated management approach, incorporates control, development and marketing aspect of business and the ultimate goal is satisfying customer needs. Marketing concept is a philosophy of business conducts which overall business policy subordinate to consumers, e.g. market demands (Gajic-Arsenijević, 2010; Blešić et al., 2009; Kotler, 2000). Acceptance concept of management and total quality management contributes to companies to remain profitable. According to Kotler (2000) total quality management is an organizational approach to continuous quality improvement of all processes, products and services within the organization.

Marketing experts have a duty to provide assistance to companies trying to define a high level of quality, and its implementation, that is, placing to the target consumers. It should strive to maintain the high quality not only of the products, but also services provided quality. Marketing experts carry out their tasks in the following ways:

1. Take over the main responsibility for accurately identifying the needs and demands of consumers.
2. They need to convey the expectations of consumers to the product planners.
3. They must ensure that consumer orders are correctly and timely fulfilled.
4. They have to check if consumers have received the right advice and technical assistance for product usage.
5. They need to stay in touch with customers after sale to make sure that consumers are satisfied.
6. They need to collect consumer ideas for products and services improvement and forward them to certain parts of the organization.

Their implementation in practice would significantly contribute to companies in total quality management and customer satisfaction (Blešić et al., 2009; Kotler and Keller, 2006; Kotler, 2000).

The food offer is important segment of the tourism product. Hospitality food scholars acknowledge the importance of food quality in restaurant operations (Sulek and Hensley, 2004; Kivela et al., 1999; Koo et al., 1999; Auty, 1992). Not only food quality represents the core quality of the restaurant with a sizable tangible characteristic (Kim et al., 2013) but satisfaction with the offered menu is an important determinant of the tourists' final impression (Vuksanović et al., 2012b; Tešanović et al., 2010).

At the beginning of the 21th century, the rapid expansion of the cruise industry has produced considerable research interest on cruise passengers' segmentation, motivation, satisfaction and behavior related to the cruise tourism experience. A number of scientists deal with this issues perceiving them through different lenses (Brida et al., 2012; Lemmetyinen and Go, 2010; Li and Petrick, 2010, 2008; Johansson and Naslund, 2009; Lobo, 2009; Park and Petrick, 2009; Pratt and Blake, 2009; Vogel, 2009; Kwortnik, 2008, 2006; Petrick et al., 2007, 2006; Petrick and Li, 2006; Duman and Mattila, 2005; Weaver, 2005; Yarnal and Kerstetter, 2005; Petrick, 2005, 2004a, 2004b, 2003; Petrick and Sirakaya, 2004; Miller and Grazer, 2003; Ikeda and Jaswar, 2002; Teye and Leclerc, 2002). Howev-

er, there are very few officially presented surveys regarding cruise passengers' satisfaction with meals, as one of the major elements of a cruise product component purchased by a customer. Teye and Leclerc (1998) presented the results of an exploratory and comprehensive study which examined passengers' satisfaction with a number of cruise product and service delivery components, peculiarly quality of food.

This lack of research, together with the growing importance of the cruise line industry, formed the bases for this study. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the satisfaction of cruise passengers with Corporation hospitality services on a river ship "MS River Aria", company "Grand Circle Corporation, to evaluate whether services are provided in accordance with the expectations and whether they exceed or do not meet expectations. This work also consider the different factors affecting a cruise ship passenger's satisfaction of quality of breakfast, lunch, dinner and services provided, as well as their overall satisfaction related to the cruise experience on the boat.

Ms "River Aria" is a part of a company "Grand Circle Corporation" with a branch office in Boston, Massachusetts, which operates from 1958 with over 1.5 million tourists so far. "Grand Circle Cruise Line" is one of the main brands of the company that operates for 12 years in Europe. Fleet "Grand Circle Cruise Line" has 10 ships, including six on the river Rhine-Main-Danube Canal, three in France and one on the Elbe River. In addition, it is also present at other markets. Company conducts organized cruises in Russia, the Mediterranean Sea, the Atlantic, Asia and Panama Channel. This corporation has become a leader in the United States in the international tourist vacations for Americans over the age of 50. Focused on a very sensitive market category, the company "Grand Circle Cruise Line" is aware of the significance of food quality as an important determinant of tourists' final impression, trying to achieve satisfying selection of dishes that may be appropriate to every customer.

Methodology of the research

Internal documentation of the ship was used in the research in order to test perceived and expected quality level of tourist satisfaction of hospitality services and further continue to evaluate whether services are provided in accordance with the expectations, whether they exceed or do not meet expectations. The data used for this study were collected among tourists on the ship Ms "River Aria" in the period from March to September 2012 on the following itineraries:

- Amsterdam - Antwerp (SHH), "Holland & Belgium in Springtime" (Antwerp, Ghent, Veere, Rotterdam, Kinderdijk, Schoonhoven, Amsterdam, Keukenhof, Hoorn and Enkhuizen); cruise duration: 10 days,
- Linz - Budapest (EDR) "Old World Prague & the Blue Danube" (Budapest, Hungary; Bratislava, Slovakia; Austria: Vienna, Durnstein, Melk, Salzburg; Prague, Czech Republic); cruise duration: 7 days,
- Budapest - Constanta (LBS) - "Eastern Europe to the Black Sea" (Budapest, Kalocsa, Hungary; Osijek, Croatia; Belgrade, Serbia; Vidin, Ruse, Bulgaria; Constanta, Bucharest, Romania); cruise duration: 10 days,
- Amsterdam - Vienna (SGE) - "The Great Rivers of Europe" (Amsterdam, Netherlands; Cologne, Koblenz, Bamberg, Nuremberg, Passau, Germany; Vienna, Austria); cruise duration: 14 days.

Passengers filled the survey questionnaire a day before their departure of the cruise. Respondents were expected to rate quality of breakfast, lunch, dinner and service as well as their overall satisfaction on a 4 point scale. This survey used a modified 4 point Likert scale form. It can be noticed that there is no point 3. The company Grand Circle Cruise Line considers that point as a middle neutral point between good and bad, on neither side, thus it is irrelevant evaluation. Hence they didn't give that mark as an option for evaluation. In addition to the survey questions, there was a space for comments and suggestions. The structure of the tourists' satisfaction survey is presented in Table 1.

The population of this study consisted of passengers which average age is 73 years, which explains the fact that most of the passengers (85%) were retired. The gender structure of the passengers is evenly distributed (50% of women and 50% men) (Grand Circle Cruise Line, 2012).

After each cruise, the results have been summarized and a report has been written. The report presents the results and comments both positive and negative. Negative comments are not discouraging, but constructive, and used to correct those segments of the tourist offer with which consumers were more or less dissatisfied. At the beginning of each cruise, managers of the sector organize a meeting, in order to analyze the results, and special attention is given to constructive comments. During the statistical analysis of the data only the highest grades were taken into consideration and their share was shown as percentage of the proportion.

Table 1. The structure of tourists' satisfaction survey

Survey questions				
	Excellent	Very good	Fair	Poor
Quality of overall satisfaction	5	4	2	1
Quality of breakfast	5	4	2	1
Quality of lunch	5	4	2	1
Quality of dinner	5	4	2	1
Quality of service	5	4	2	1
Comment:				

Source: Grand Circle Cruise Line, 2012

Results and discussion

Internal documentation of the company Grand Circle Cruise Line was used for data collecting, and the results were summarized. Results are presented by graphical analysis of the perceived and expected level of tourist satisfaction with the quality of hospitality services.

First, overall satisfaction with the quality of meals was analyzed, in order to make a comparative analysis of the overall satisfaction and satisfaction with quality of products and services.

Based on the quantitative data collected, Figure no. 1 presents comparative analysis of passengers' satisfaction with the quality of breakfast, lunch and dinner. It can be noticed that the first four cruises have an average of about 92% percent of satisfaction with the breakfast quality. On this basis, in comparison to the set goals of satisfaction (90%), it can be concluded that achieved satisfaction up to 92% is a positive result. In May follows decrease in satisfaction to 88%. In this month there was a staff rotation because of vacations that could have
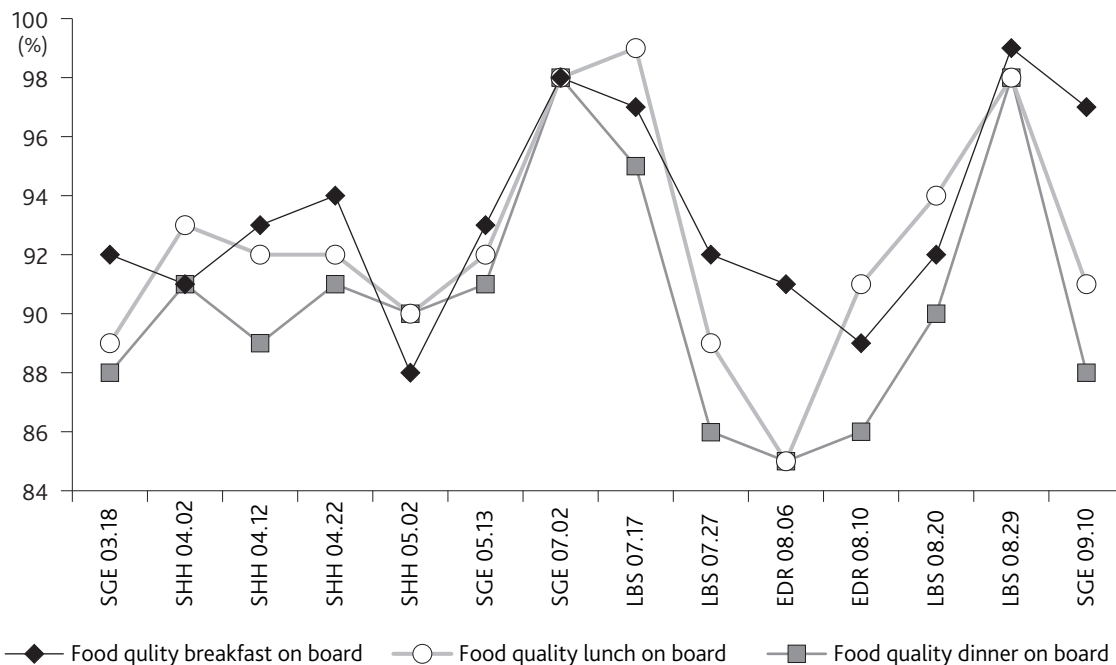
Figure 1. Satisfaction with the quality of breakfast, lunch and dinner

an impact on quality of breakfast and passengers' satisfaction. In June and July there is an increase in satisfaction of 98%. There is an assumption that the increased satisfaction may be caused by stable weather conditions and continuity in the work of employees. Over the next four cruises the lover satisfaction with the quality of breakfast was caused by fluctuation of employees. In the next cruises, increase satisfaction reached a maximum of 99%.

Quality of lunch shows consistently good results from the beginning of the season until July, when perceived quality start to increase to 98%, which is higher than expected (90%). The next three cruises, one from the beginning of July, and two cruises in August, have lower level of satisfaction with lunch quality, 85%. It is assumed that the second rotation of employees due to vacations may have an impact on the quality of lunch and guests' satisfaction. Vuksanović et al. (2012a) report the results of the company Grand Circle Cruise Line that pork meat dominates in the preparation of cold appetizers (29%) and main dishes (39%). Previous statements can be considered as an influence on the satisfaction with the quality of lunch. At the beginning of August (86%) follow an increase to 99% of quality lunch satisfaction, and this is higher than expected quality (90%).

Analyzing quality of dinner there is constant satisfaction about 92% until July. They are not proper results because the expected level of quality (95%) hasn't been achieved. Vuksanović et al. (2012a) said that in the structure of gastronomic offer in the company Grand Circle Cruise Line, domestic dishes dominate from which cold and hot appetizers participate with 56% and fish 78%. Domestic dishes include dishes that are created in the company. Therefore, in addition to the above, these factors can also have an impact on dinner quality satisfaction. After that follows exceeding expected quality to 99%. In the next two cruises decrease of the level of satisfaction with the quality of dinner is recorded, from 99% to 85%. It is assumed that the same factors that have contributed to the satisfaction with the quality of

both breakfast and lunch had an impact on the satisfaction with dinner quality. In mid-August dinner quality satisfaction recorded significant growth in to 98%.

Figure 2. presents comparative analysis of overall passengers' satisfaction, overall quality of hospitality services as well as dining room service from March to September. It is important to note that an average of results of all three meals is a part of overall passengers' satisfaction. Season beginning was very successful with 92% of the total satisfaction with the quality. In April in the Netherlands (SHH), climate is characterized by a large number of rainy days, and this is reflected on the level of tourists' satisfaction. In fact, most of the time they should spend outdoor, on the ship and rainy weather negatively affects the enthusiasm and enjoyment of tourists. Accordingly, the average satisfaction with the overall quality in April is about 90%. Comparing the results it can be noticed several facts: at the same itineraries the total level of satisfaction has significant negative results; hospitality service quality achieved positive results, while dining service quality varies. From the above it follows that rainy days in the Netherlands and vacations of employees during the period from March to June, had no significant impact on guest satisfaction with the quality of hospitality services. The following routes are SGE and LBS, from May to August, with satisfaction increase to 94%. The assumption is that the growth of satisfaction may be caused by stable weather conditions and continuity in the work of employees. In August was significant decrease of the level of overall satisfaction. During the period, change of water level of Danube (river level rise) makes the navigation difficult and leads to routs changing program of routes. It certainly causes lower level of satisfaction. Higher level of satisfaction can be seen by the penultimate cruise in August, when it exceeding the expected goal of the company (92%).

It is interesting to note that the results of perceived quality of the route EDR from August 6th to August 10th show significant decline of overall quality (80%) and quality of hospitality service (87%), while the quality of dining room service of the same cruise is 92% compared
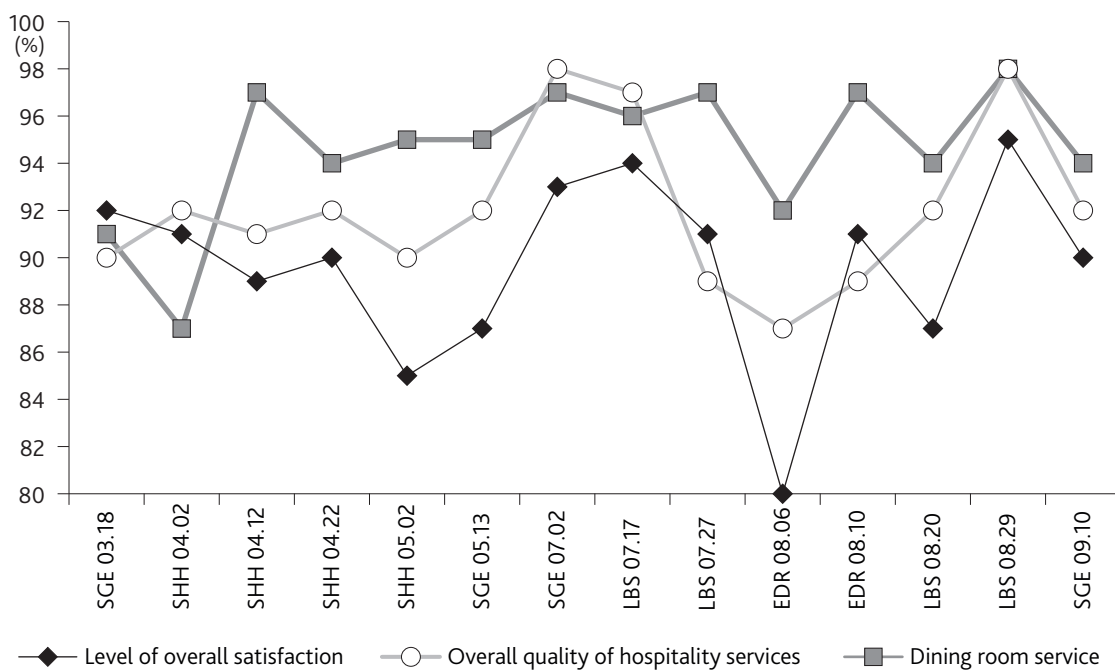

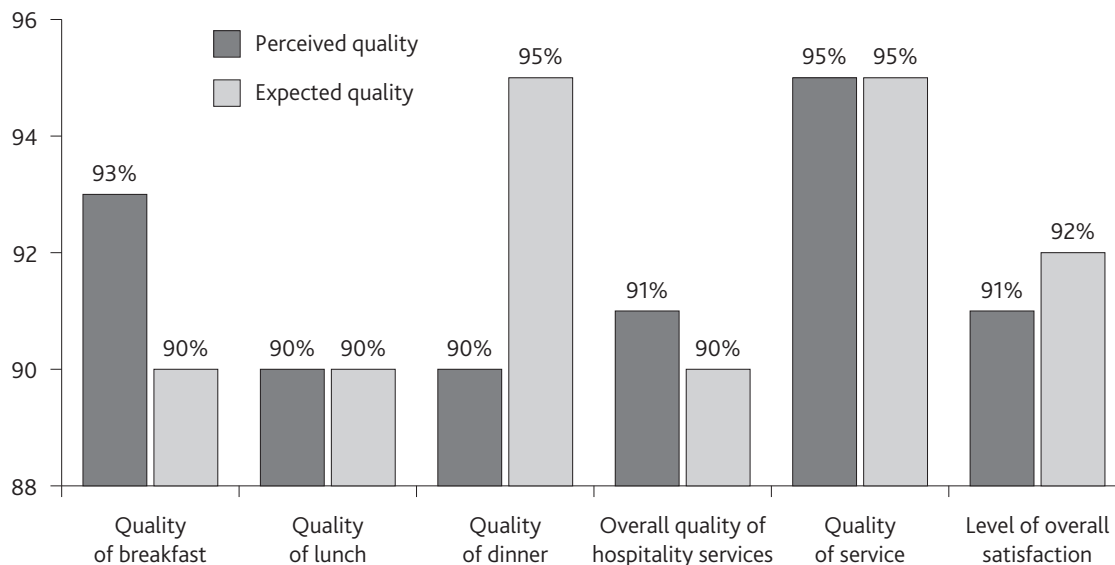**Figure 2**. Level of overall satisfaction

Figure 3. Expected and perceived quality of all cruises

to expected 95%. It is important to note that the best result of perceived quality of the route LBS between August 29th and September 10th is 99% of an average satisfaction with hospitality services compared to the expected (90%). During the same cruise the best result in the season regarding overall satisfaction of passengers was achieved i.e. perceived quality is 95% compared to the expected (92%).

Quality analysis of each meal (Figure no. 3), i.e. breakfast quality analysis with 93%, indicates the overcoming of the expected quality, which is 90%. Quality of lunch indicates equality between perceived and expected quality. Expected quality of dinner is 95% and 90% perceived. Comparing the expected result (90%) and the perceived one (91%), we can conclude that the level of expected quality is overcome. Quality of service has met the expectations of passengers. We conclude that the service sector and hospitality services have achieved the expected quality of satisfaction. The result of overall satisfaction with quality is 91%, which is less than expected quality level (92%). From the above analysis it can be concluded that the overall satisfaction with quality didn't have a major impact on guest satisfaction with hospitality services and catering offer.

Conclusion

The results of the research showed that passengers are generally satisfied with the hospitality services. Satisfaction of consumers (tourists) is one of the key factors to achieve competitive advantage for any company. Education and training of employees and implementation of standards (F&B Handbook - Galley Manual & Service Manual) is one of the reasons positively evaluated attributes of service quality on the river ship MS River Aria. The results showed that the fluctuation of employees, particularly employees in managerial positions have a negative impact on the level of quality. Also, factor like the weather, the local population and structure of gastronomic offer can be considered as a possible positive effect on the

level of quality. On that basis, it is necessary to monitor and implement contemporary trends in the market. In addition, it is necessary to continuously monitor the quality of services through interactive communications with customers and measuring the quality of service.

The paper presents a theoretical contribution of the previous research regarding quality measurement of tourist satisfaction in cruise industry, particularly river cruises. Practical contribution is reflected in the measurement of tourist satisfaction in the company Grand Circle Cruise Line, which also can be used as an example to other companies for their own future research and satisfaction measurement.

Future research should take into account individual characteristics of passengers such as age, gender, culture and emitting area to determine if these characteristics correlates to extent to which the hospitality service of cruise line had come close to meeting their expectations. Such research could focus on comparing service satisfaction between different market segments such as ethnic groups on the same cruise line. Future research can also include the repetition of the study in different seasons to compare results.

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