ASSESSING THE SERVICE QUALITY OF THE DOMESTIC TOURISM PROGRAM IN TIEN GIANG PROVINCE[*]

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper aims to identify some key components of service quality of domestic tourism programs in Tien Giang province. The paper shows the relationships of tourist satisfaction, loyalty and cultural contact after using tourism service in Tien Giang province based on the qualitative research and quantitative research. Data were obtained from 400 tourists who responded willingly to a questionnaire-based survey. The results of study show factors significantly including tourism infrastructure, natural environment, human resource, safety and security, service price. All of these components and cultural contact have the impact on tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

Keywords*: service quality, satisfaction, loyalty, cultural contact, tourism sector*

1. Introduction

Tourism sector is a key economic field of the development strategy in Tien Giang province. Vietnam has a great potential to exploit this type of tourism service due to its diversity and rich natural resources (Vietnam National Administration of Tourism, 2019). Many typical fruit gardens, with unique traditional villages, Mekong Delta Region also has historical sites, scenic spots. Recently, the tourism industry has interest and significant developments that brought about positive initial results such as creating jobs and increasing incomes for local people. However, the tourism development is still limited compared with the potential of this area. Firstly, tourism infrastructure has not been invested adequately and still difficult in promoting investment in Tien Giang province. The implementation of tourism projects has been delayed. Secondly, the human resources being trained and trained has not yet met the demand of the development of the tourism industry, especially for international tourists. Capacities of officials, employees, workers in the industry have been limited, especially in the private sector. Thirdly, the promotion of tourism has not gone into depth, just participating in trade fairs. It still has not coordinated with organizations to support businesses to find and exploit the market. Therefore, it has not been able to promote the capacity and conditions to organize long-term tours as well as to develop travel business, especially international travel. Fourthly, most of tourist businesses in Tien

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Giang are small and medium-sized, and some businesses do not have long-term investments. Fifthly, the points of sale of goods develop spontaneously at tourist sites and spots, leading to unfair competition. The situation of tourist storks is still happening, affecting the image of local tourism, the coordination between relevant sectors has not been finalized.

According to Saha & Theingi (2009) and Chen et al. (2010), there has been the relationship between service quality and satisfaction as well as the relationship between service quality and tourist loyalty. But putting these issues together in correlation relationships is very rare, especially in the context of tourism in combination with tourism service in Tien Giang province. Up to now, there is currently no scholarly research model to generalize to address the above limitations to develop the tourism industry into a key economic sector in Tien Giang province.

There are many different definitions of service quality. Service quality is considered the impression of consumers about organizations and its services. According to Parasuraman et al. (1985) argued that service quality is "a function of the difference between expected service and visitor perception of actual service provided to those visitors in an industry or a country. Therefore, there are some definitions of service quality, usually the different definitions of service quality have the same outline, service quality is subjective evaluation. of consumers about the service provided by the supplier, according to the distance between visitors' expectations and practical awareness of the service quality.

2. Literature Review and Research Model

Service quality is defined in many different contexts and measured by different components. For example, a first study by Gronroos (1984) proposed three components of service quality such as technical quality, functional quality, images; While Parasuraman et al. (1985) introduced ten components of service quality consisting of tangible, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication, understanding. Parasuraman et al. (1990) only suggested five basic components, namely reliability, assurance, tangible, empathy, responsivenes. It shows that most of the empirical studies of the service quality using the theoretical model of Parasuraman et al. (1985, 1991). In all of the above models, SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1985, 1988) is the most successful assessment tool for service quality. The level of responsiveness of the components is seen as an important criterion for visitor satisfaction (Berry et al., 2006). With the above analysis, the author suggested model based on SERVQUAL model (Parasuraman et al., 1988).

2.1. Tourism infrastructure (TI)

Tourism infrastructure is called all the facilities and techniques created by state and tourism organizations to exploit tourism potential, including hotel and housing systems, amusement parks, entertainment, transportation, etc.Tourism infrastructure is one of the important factors to attract tourists to a country or a tourist destination Moreira & Iao (2014). Tourism infrastructure will create favorable conditions to attract more Grytsiuk et al.

(2017) tourists. According to Cracolici et al. (2008) and Barbu (2013), the essential elements of successful tourism infrastructure include accommodation and catering facilities to serve tourists; communication infrastructure, including transport and telecommunications; human factors such as hospitality, civic education and aesthetics; Some current studies show that traditional rural buildings used as visitor accommodation are an important factor to be promoted for the development of rural tourism. Therefore, the authors hypothesize H1, H2 and H3 as follows:

Hypothesis 1 (H1) Tourism infrastructure has a positive impact on the satisfaction of visitors.

Hypothesis 2 (H2) Tourism infrastructure has a positive impact on cultural contact.

Hypothesis 2 (H3) Tourism infrastructure has a positive influence on the tourists'loyalty.

2.2. The natural environment (NA)

The natural environment refers to all the elements in nature and is not created by humans. In the field of tourism, Beerli & Martin (2004) confirm that the natural environment includes a number of factors such as weather, beaches, lakes, mountains, deserts, etc. Mihali (2000) considers the natural environment of a destination about beautiful landscapes, natural hydrological structures, clean water, fresh air and diversity of animals or plants. Therefore, it is possible to consider the natural environment as an important factor. Thus, the authors hypothesize H4, H5 and H6 as follows:

Hypothesis 4 (H4) Natural environment has a positive impact on visitors' satisfaction.

Hypothesis 5 (H5) Natural environment has a positive effect on cultural contact.

Hypothesis 6 (H6) The natural environment positively affects tourists'loyalty.

2.3. Human resource (PE)

People who live and work at a destination will create a unique cultural environment for that destination are an important factor in tourism. Maunier and Camelis (2013) argued that positive attitudes from locals not only make tourists happy, but also promote local culture and image. Beerli and Martin (2004) pointed out that the success of a travel website depends very much on human factors, including local people have the intimacy, fun and their enthusiasm and employees involved in guided tours, staff selling souvenirs, hotel-restaurant staff, etc.). Similarly, Ryan and Devar (1995) studied a positive relationship between the capacity of on-site interpreters and visitor retention rates. Moreover, Ulus and Hatipoglu (2016) showed that effective management of human factors helps tourism many organizations to achieve their sustainability. Thus, the authors hypothesize H7, H8 and H9 as follows:

Hypothesis 7 (H7) Human resource has a positive impact on visitors' satisfaction.

Hypothesis 8 (H8) Human resource has a positive effect on cultural contact.

Hypothesis 9 (H9) Human resource positively affects tourists'loyalty.

2.4. Safety and security (SS)

According to Khuong and Phuong (2017), safety and security have always been one of the most important issues that most tourists relate to before visiting a place because of uncertainty and instability that exist in modern society. It refers to the protection from incidents and risks for the entire journey of tourists. Ngoc and Trinh

(2017) defined security as protecting visitors from permanent incidents and risks, and referring to safety as the protection of tourists from unexpected incidents and risks. Once security and safety are well guaranteed at a destination, visitors will have a great experience after their trip. Tourists feel comfortable and safe to explore the destination, contributing to building a more friendly and secure destination image. These tourists will share impressions with others who may be potential visitors to the destination. Thus, the authors hypothesize H10, H11 and H12 as follows:

Hypothesis 10 (H10) Safety and security has a positive impact on visitors' satisfaction.

Hypothesis 11 (H11) Safety and security has a positive effect on cultural contact.

Hypothesis 12 (H12) Safety and security positively affects tourists'loyalty.

2.5. Service Price (SP)

Service price refers to what visitors actually pay for their trip, including destination, safety level, quality of service, etc. Price should be suitable for the service quality (Khuong & Phuong, 2017). It is one of the important factors related to customer satisfaction and service quality. Therefore, service providers need to provide the best value to the visitors. Murphy et al. (2000) argued that tourists' perception of such a value on a trip is a reasonable assessment of the experiences gained during a trip for the time and money they spend. Thus, the authors hypothesize H13, H14 and H15 as follows:

Hypothesis 13 (H13) Service price has a positive impact on visitors' satisfaction.

Hypothesis 14 (H14) Service price has

a positive effect on cultural contact.

Hypothesis 15 (H15) Service price positively affects tourists' loyalty.

2.6. Tourist's Satisfaction (SA)

Satisfaction is the perceived difference between expectation and improved performance (Oliver, 1980). Satisfaction is related to the extent that a person likes or dislikes a product or service after using it; or respond to differences between expectations and cognitive performance (Oliver, 1980). Tourists' satisfaction is the subject of travel discussions and reviews and is defined by many different ways. Traveler satisfaction is very important in introducing destinations, because it directly affects the choice of destination, consumption of products and services, and influences the decision to return of visitors (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). According to Bowen and Clarke (2007), visitor satisfaction is defined as one of the main consumer reviews through tourism service assessment. In addition, tourists' satisfaction is the result of tourists' expectations of destinations based on their previous images of destination and from their assessment based on experience at the destination they come. General satisfaction is to assess subjective consumption of individuals based on all factors related to the experience, such as accommodation, attractions, activities and cuisine. The concept of satisfaction defined by marketers as purchasing behavior is of strategic importance to businesses because of its impact on repeat purchases and word of mouth recommendations. One of the other studies found that satisfied travelers are more likely to show positive behavior responses such as revisit and positive word

of mouth. Therefore, travel managers need to predict which components of the service visitors use to evaluate their overall quality. Thus, the authors hypothesize H16 as follows:

Hypothesis 16 (H16) Cultural contact has a positive impact on visitors' satisfaction.

2.7. Cultural Contact (CC)

Cultural contact refer to groups of people who are coming into or staying in contact with a different culture for days, years, decades, centuries, or even millennia. According to Gosden (2004) an isolated culture does not exist. As all cultural forms are essentially in contact with others, cultural contact is, therefore, a basic human resource (Gosden, 2004). In the tourism literature, cultural contact is seen as a newly emerging concept that measures the purpose and depth of experience tourists seek when traveling for experiencing a different culture (Gnoth & Zins, 2013; McKercher, 2002). Thus, cultural contact can be affected by other components of service quality and tourists' satisfaction. According to Chen and Rahman (2018), the study examined the influence of visitor engagement on cultural contact, cultural contact on memorable tourism experience, and the influence of memorable tourism experience on revisit intention and intention to return. Cultural contact positively influences tourists' memorable tourism experience. In addition, the memorable tourism experience have positive effects on cultural tourists' revisit intentions. Thus, the authors hypothesize H17 as follows:

Hypothesis 17 (H17) Cultutal contact has a positive effect on tourists' loyalty.

2.8. Tourist's loyalty (LO)

There are many definitions of loyalty, such as loyalty that repeats the buying behavior of tourists due to price, cost changes, indifference, or inertia (Gallarza et al., 2016). Behavior loyalty means that visitors intend to buy a brand or service from a service provider over time, while attitude-based loyalty means that visitors intend to buy. There are good signs of visitor loyalty. However, most extensive studies only apply attitude-based loyallynschty measurement. Gallarza et al. (2016) show that the most commonly used index is word of mouth, followed by repeated intentions. Word of mouth is a good indicator of visitor loyalty and word of mouth is likely to increase over time. Visitor loyalty is defined as "visitors who buy from the same service provider whenever possible and who continue to offer or maintain a positive attitude towards the service provider. Loyalty to tourist destination is an important driving force for future stability and growth of any organization and tourist destination. The positive relationship between service quality and satisfaction is supported by previous researchers (Martensen et al., 2000), whereby high quality of service will increase visitor satisfaction. Martensen et al. (2000) argue that service quality components are an important component of visitor satisfaction. The link between service quality and tourist satisfaction is arguably the most widely studied relationship in tourism literature (Canny & Hidayat, 2012). Service quality has a direct impact on tourist satisfaction (Chi & Qu, 2008). The main goal of the travel service providers is to invest in the evaluation and improvement of performance quality and to find ways

to improve the satisfaction level of tourists. Canny and Hidayat (2012) conclude that components of service quality are an important premise about visitor satisfaction, thus affecting visitor loyalty. High quality of service will lead to higher and more positive visitor acquisition behavior. Service quality is one of the attractive dimensions that directly affects visitor loyalty. More importantly, an empirical evidence suggests that there is a significant relationship between service quality and visitor destination loyalty. Thus, the authors hypothesize H17 and H18 as follows:

Hypothesis 17 (H17) Cultutal contact has a positive effect on tourists'loyalty.

Hypothesis 18 (H18) Tourists'satisfaction has a positive impact on tourists'loyalty.

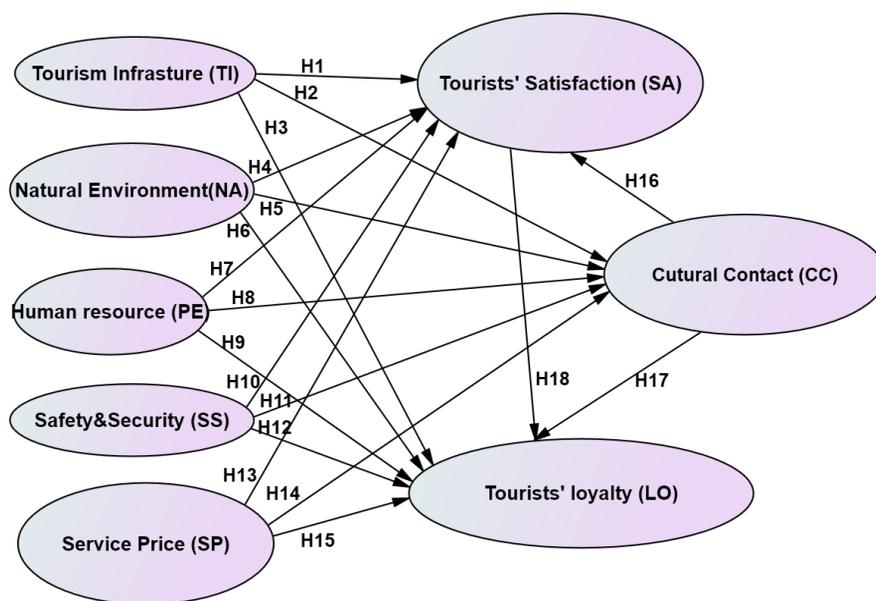All the hypotheses are described in Figure 1:

Figure 1. Model and proposed hypotheses

3. Methodology

This study has combined pilot research (qualitative study) and survey research (quanlitative study). The pilot research was conducted in order to refine scales and contructs in relation to tourist' satisfaction and loyalty in the questionnaire. Qualitative interviews can be conducted through a series of one-to-one interviews with a sample of 10 tourists and 10 tour operators in My Tho city of Tien Giang province to gain an understanding of the tourist' viewpoints. The qualitative pilot study can be used to explore the meaning of the constructs, the relevance of the measurement and the relationships between constructs in tourism context. Participants will be encouraged to explain in their own words, their viewpoints about research concepts of tourist' satisfaction and loyalty in the questionnaire. Then, key constructs based on the literature review can be confirmed and be added to the questionnaire.

Quantitative research has been

conducted through direct interviews (face-to-face interviews) with 400 respondents in Tien Giang province during June-September, 2019 by convenient sampling using a detailed questionnaire to test model and research hypotheses. Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis, Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA), and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) were used to assess the scales. And the structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test model and research hypotheses.All items were measured by using 5 point Likert scale, anchored by 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree.

4. Results

Description of research sample

Among 400 respondents, 28 people were declined as inappropriate respondents. Data processed by SPSS software 20.0 covered 372 valid respondents (included 92% in allquestionnaires).

The results analysis of scales' reliability

The results show that of the 34 observed variables used to measure research concepts satisfy the conditions in the reliability analysis of the scale via the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Cronbach's Alpha coefficient > 0.6 and correlation coefficient – total > 0.3, Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Table 1. Rotated matrix results[a]

	Component					
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
TI3	.815					
TI2	.804					
TI5	.793					
TI1	.760					
TI4	.729					
SP4		.781				
SP3		.769				
SP2		.763				
SP5		.751				
SP1		.719				
SS3			.836			
SS4			.799			
SS1			.795			
SS2			.762			
PE2				.806		
PE3				.802		
PE4				.785		

	Component					
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**
PE1				.749		
NA4					.813	
NA3					.773	
NA2					.772	
NA1					.730	
CC1						.743
CC3						.724
CC2						.724
CC4						.656

a. Rotation converged in 5 iterations.

The results of EFA

EFA factors affecting the tourist's loyalty are respectively extracted into 06 factors corresponding to observe variables from 06 concepts. EFA tourist's loyaltyresults have been extracted into 1 factor with an extracted variance of 65.962% at the Eigenvalue of 1,082. The EFA results are analyzed by Varimax rotation method. These observed variables used to measure 08 research concepts meet the conditions in EFA analysis. Therefore, all of these 34 observed variables are used in this research.
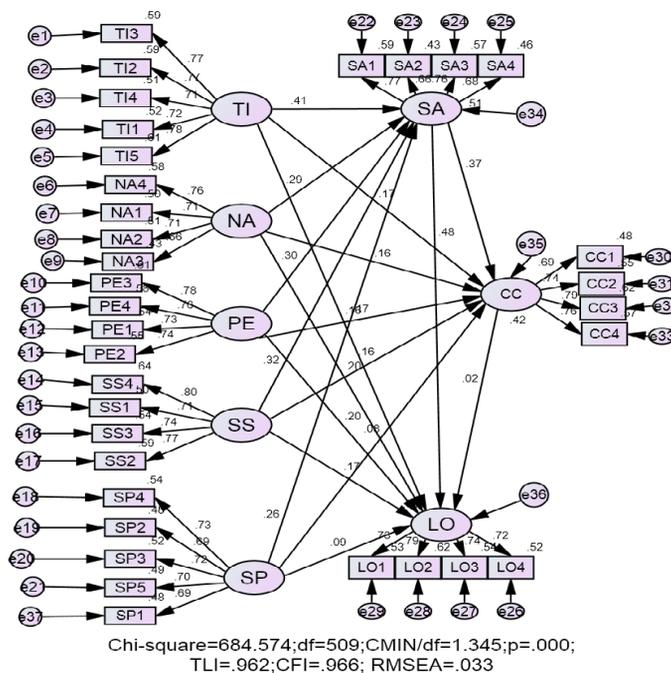

Chi-square=684.574;df=509;CMIN/df=1.345;p=.000; TLI=.962;CFI=.966; RMSEA=.033

Figure 2. The results of research concepts verified by SEM model

The results of the testing model

The results of the testing model presented in Figure 2 showing that the model has Chi^2 = 684.574, Df = 509, and Cmin/df = 1.345 with p-value = 0.000 (<0.05) was not appropriate due to the size of the sample (only 400 respondents surveyed). However, other appropriate measures such as TLI = 0.962, CFI = 0.966 are consistent. Thus, it is still possible to conclude that this model is consistent with data collected from the market.

Table 2. Test hypotheses test results

			Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	P	Label
SA	<---	TI	.313	.060	5.210	***	H1 Acceptable
SA	<---	NA	.235	.056	4.224	***	H4 Acceptable
SA	<---	PE	.259	.058	4.449	***	H7 Acceptable
SA	<---	SS	.277	.062	4.474	***	H10 Acceptable
SA	<---	SP	.162	.056	2.870	.004	H13 Acceptable
CC	<---	ST	.290	.077	3.755	***	H16 Acceptable
CC	<---	SP	.208	.056	3.743	***	H14 Acceptable
CC	<---	TI	.327	.062	5.297	***	H2 Acceptable
CC	<---	NA	.206	.055	3.722	***	H5 Acceptable
CC	<---	PE	.240	.058	4.121	***	H8 Acceptable
CC	<---	SS	.236	.062	3.833	***	H11 Acceptable
LO	<---	ST	.021	.065	.318	.750	H18 Rejected
LO	<---	CC	.433	.084	5.128	***	H17 Acceptable
LO	<---	TI	.150	.057	2.652	.008	H3 Rejected
LO	<---	NA	.167	.049	3.378	***	H6 Acceptable
LO	<---	PE	.153	.052	2.949	.003	H9 Acceptable
LO	<---	SS	.192	.055	3.489	***	H12 Acceptable
LO	<---	SP	.079	.048	1.630	.103	H15 Rejected

5. Discussions and Managerial Implications

According to the research results, the compatibility of the research model has been verified. There is a close relationship between the factors affecting tourists' satisfaction of tourism service quality such as infrastructure, natural environment, human factors, service prices, security and safety and loyalty. The satisfaction of visitors is influenced by 06 factors such as tourism infrastructure (TI), natural environment (NA), human resource (PE), security and safety (SS), service price (SP) and cultural contact (CC) with a 5% significance level, 95% confidence interval. There are some managerial implications as

follow:

(1) When visitors are satisfied with convenient infrastructure for example, electricity and water supplies, quality of transportation to tourist destinations; accommodation facilities, convenient accommodity services; tourist destinations with spacious facilities, clean toilets. The signs to tourist destinations are simple, easy to understand and the facilities of tourist destinations meet the needs of tourists, visitors intend to continue using eco-tourism services. This is the most important factor with beta coefficient of 0.313, which gives visitors the potential for tourism destinations in Tien Giang province to be expected by tourists to improve their local tourism infrastructure.

(2) When visitors feel tourism service quality that brings comfort; helping to reduce stress, tourists satisfying the beliefs of tourists or tourists that homestay tourism not only receives ecological beliefs but also receives cultural value. They are willing to return to the tourism destination.

(3) When tourists think that the political environment is stable, visitors feel secure when visiting the tourist destination; Convenient medical facilities, medical team ready to support timely; good order and security situation (no situation of rowing guests, pickpockets, robberies) and when visitors encounter problems on the local tourist itinerary, they will be able to solve problems on time.

(4) When local people are always friendly and hospitable; local management staff facilitates and supports visitors promptly; professional and enthusiastic tour guide and staff style at the tourism site understand and create a sense of connection with visitors will make visitors feel attached, want to come back again.

(5) In addition, visitors feel satisfied with the tourism service in Tien Giang province when the local service prices are appropriate and affordable; dining prices at suitable tourist destinations. The price of the service is consistent with the quality of services provided and the price of services at the various tourism sites, suitable to the needs of visitors. Therefore, they are willing to pay for good tourism services at these destinations.

6. Conclusion

In general, this study revealed key components of service quality including tourism infrastructure, natural environment, human resource, safety and security, service price. All of these components and cultural contact have the impact on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. It is necessary to enhance some key components of service quality and cultural contact to suit tourist' needs and satisfaction.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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