

## How Service Quality effects on Guest Satisfaction in Boutique Hotels: With Special Reference to Central Province

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### ABSTRACT

Following the aftermath of the civil war, the Sri Lankan tourism industry begins to surge and enters its golden era. However, due to the Easter Sunday attack in 2019 and the COVID-19 global pandemic, Sri Lankan tourism is struggling to perform as well as it did previously. When contemplating the hotel sector, particularly with this COVID-19 impact, the boutique hotel category has become one of the world's and Sri Lanka's fastest-growing segments of the hotel industry. They are comparatively small but exclusive properties designed to cater to privileged clients with an exemplary performance at premium prices. Tourists prefer boutique hotels because they want to spend their vacation in a more private secure setting. Even though guest satisfaction has an effect on hotel performance and previous studies show that service quality has a high impact on guest satisfaction, this study was conducted to investigate how service quality effects on guests' satisfaction in boutique hotels with special reference to the Central Province. The researchers chose four boutique hotels in Central Province and collected data from 100 guests who visited those four boutique hotels. The convenience sampling method was used and a structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The SERVQUAL model was used to evaluate service quality. With the help of SPSS 21.0, descriptive statistics, regression, and correlation were used to analyze the data. According to the findings, the tangibles, assurance, and reliability factors have the greatest impact on increasing guest satisfaction and the researchers recommend that service quality be enhanced by increasing the indicators that influence those dimensions.

**Keywords:** central province, registered boutique hotels, service quality, servqual model

## I. INTRODUCTION

The hospitality and tourism sector has grown into one of the greatest lucrative in the entire globe. It also represents one of the most vital sectors of the service market. The government too has focused entirely on the improvement of tourism in Sri Lanka. In terms of actual figures, 2.3 million tourists arrived in 2018 (SLTDA Annual Report, 2018). Because of the growing demands and the significant earnings, it brings to the country's economy, the government has devised a variety of plans for the development of tourism and hospitality. When considering the hotel sector, it's vital to serve the guests with high quality in order to retain the guests and further develop as a well-established tourism destination (Kandampully and Suhartanto 2000). In this light, the Hotel sector consists of different classifications of hotels such as star-grade hotels, eco hotels, motels, transit hotels, resorts, villas, and boutique hotels. Out of the mentioned classifications, boutique hotels have become one of the famous accommodation sectors in the modern day (Essays 2013). Because the modern-day guests are searching for the ambiance of being a personal guest in a private home rather than just a hotel stay boutique hotels become popular among tourists. Accordingly, they do not expect only comfortable accommodation facility from the hotels but expects to personalize service along with privacy and relaxation (Khosravi, Malek et al. 2014). Boutique hotels are typically smaller in scale than standard hotels. Hotel rooms are typically limited to a maximum number of hundred. Boutique hotels offer luxury amenities in distinctive or personal settings and full-service lodging (Erkutlu and Chafra 2006). The goal of boutique hotels is to provide their guests with a one-of-a-kind experience during their stay. The main goal of this process is for the Boutique hotel to always act in a way that increases guest satisfaction during their stay (Dincer, Dince et al. 2016). As a result, the boutique hotel sector is expanding rapidly around the world. As a result, boutique hotels have become the hotel industry's fastest-growing segment (Bardoul 2018). Many new trends are being introduced into the boutique hotel sector these days in order to enhance guest satisfaction (Aggett 2007). The quality of service provided has a significant impact on guest satisfaction. As a result, hoteliers

must enhance their services by improving the quality of their food and services, making the hotel background and rooms more enticing, improving employees' interpersonal skills, and recognizing emerging trends in order to deliver better service and increase guest satisfaction (Pizam and Ellis 1999). In the majority of service industries, service quality is vital to success (Pizam and Ellis 1999). As a result, over the past decades, practitioners and academic researchers have focused on guest satisfaction and service quality (Olorunniwo, Hsu et al. 2006). (Haemooon 1999), (Faullant, Matzler et al. 2008), (Mei, Dean et al. 1999). According to Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (2021) after the war in 2009, the Sri Lankan tourism industry starts to boom and find its golden era in business. But unfortunately, because of the Easter Sunday attack in 2019 and the COVID-19 global pandemic, Sri Lankan tourism faces difficulties to perform as earlier. The boutique hotel category become one of the fastest-growing segments of the hotel industry in the world as well as Sri Lanka. Especially with the COVID 19 impact, tourists seek boutique hotel to spend their vacation in a more private and secure environment (Jayasinghe, Ellepola et al. 2022). According to Bardoul (2018), demand for boutique hotels highly increased within the past few years (Bardoul 2018). Central province contains 03 districts within the first 10 districts that have the highest number of guest rooms in Sri Lanka (SLTDA Annual Report, 2020). These districts have the leading rate of tourist arrivals since their attractive environmental and infrastructural facilities. According to SLTDA Annual Report (2020), the average industry income per room for a boutique hotel is USD 179.56 which is the highest among all hotel classifications. Higher demand can be a direct impact on this higher revenue generation ability. On the other hand, there are many researchers have done about service quality and guest satisfaction (Lau, Cheung et al. 2013), (Mei, Dean et al. 1999), (Erto and Vanacore 2002), (Gunadersen, Heide et al. 1996). But there are fewer researches based on Sri Lanka about service quality and guest satisfaction in boutique hotels in Sri Lanka.

### **Research Objectives**

- To identify the existing situation of service quality in boutique hotels in Central Province.
- To identify the existing situation of guest satisfaction in boutique hotels in Central Province.
- To find out which service quality dimensions have a significant impact on guest satisfaction in boutique hotels in Central Province.

### **Research Questions**

- What is the existing situation of service quality in boutique hotels in Central Province?
- What is the existing situation of guest satisfaction in boutique hotels in Central Province?
- Which service quality dimensions have significant impact towards guest satisfaction in boutique hotels in Central Province?

### **Hypotheses**

Hypotheses are built up through determining the impact of each five SERVQUAL dimensions of service quality on guest satisfaction of boutique hotels with special reference to Central Province.

H1: There is a significant impact of Tangibles on guest satisfaction

H2: There is a significant impact of Assurance on guest satisfaction

H3: There is a significant impact of Reliability on guest satisfaction

H4: There is a significant impact of Responsiveness on guest satisfaction

H5: There is a significant impact of Empathy on guest satisfaction

## **II. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Service Quality**

The idea of service quality is complicated, subjective, enigmatic, and abstract. It implies that service quality varies from person to person. However, various definitions of service quality may be found in the literature. According to Parasuraman et al (1985), Service quality is the discrepancy between customers' expectations and impression of a certain service. Wilson (2016) noted that the service quality can be defined as the customer's appraisal of the services provided to them. Further, Prakash & Mohanty (2012) mentioned that the guest's overall sense of the superiority or excellence of the service experience is referred to as service quality.

In this light, Parasuraman et al (1985) stated that customers will rate the quality as "poor" if the performance falls short of their expectations, and as "high" if the performance surpasses their anticipations. Closing this gap may need lowering expectations or increasing the guest's assessment of what he or she has received. Mei et al (1999) noted that today's competitive challenges force many service companies to seek competitive advantage via efficiency and lucrative methods to differentiate themselves from competitors. Hence, effective service quality boosts corporate development and wealth. Accordingly, Karuru

& Aloo (2014) mentioned that Hotels and hospitality businesses are becoming increasingly concerned with increased competition for high-quality service and customer satisfaction. Thus, paying attention to service quality may help a firm gain a competitive advantage.

Parasuraman et al (1985) introduced SERVQUAL model including ten dimensions to measure service quality. Such as Access, Communication, Competence, Courtesy, Credibility, Reliability, Responsiveness, Security, Tangibles, Understanding/Knowing the Guest. However, According to Parasuraman et al (1988) has restructured SERVQUAL model by observing early SERVQUAL model (1985) including five dimensions. Accordingly, there are three original dimensions (Tangibles, Reliability, and Responsiveness) other two dimensions (Assurance and Empathy). New two dimensions have combined with other seven dimensions as Communication, Competence, Courtesy, Credibility, Security, Understanding/Knowing the Guest. Hence this study employed aforesaid five-dimension Service Quality Model.

### **Customer Satisfaction**

Many explanations for customer satisfaction have been proposed by researchers. Accordingly, Erto & Vanacore (2002) defined customer satisfaction as the overall evaluation of a specific product or service by guests at a specific time. In addition, Olorunniwo et al (2006) mentioned that guest satisfaction is the process of assessing what was received in comparison to what was anticipated. Pizam & Ellis (1999) noted that guest satisfaction is a corporate strategy that helps to create value for customers by anticipating and managing their expectations and displaying the capacity and obligation to meet their demands.

Anderson et al (1994) mentioned that Customer satisfaction has an impact on corporate performance, either directly or indirectly. Hence, Yeung (2002) suggested that Customer Satisfaction has a favorable impact on business profitability. Olorunniwo et al (2006) stated that Customer satisfaction has a relationship with customer behavior patterns. Accordingly, customer satisfaction boost visitor loyalty, purchasing intentions, and favorable word-of-mouth. Moreover, Singh (2006) stated that There are several aspects that influence customer satisfaction, namely helpful and pleasant staff, competent workers, respectful employees, competitive price, billing timing and correctness, billing clarity, excellent value, service quality, and quick service.

Pizam & Ellis (1999) emphasized when considering consumer satisfaction in hospitality, it is clear that it is not a universal occurrence, and not everyone derives the same amount of satisfaction from their hospitality experience. Customers' expectations are influenced by their diverse demands, ambitions, and prior experiences. Saleem & Raja (2014) noted that in contrast to material things or pure service, the majority of hospitality experiences are a blend of product and service. As a result, Satisfaction with a hospitality experience is a combination of satisfaction with each individual part or feature of all products and services.

### **Relationship between Service Quality and Customer Satisfaction**

Parasuraman et al (1988) suggested that tangibility refers to the physical infrastructure, tools, and personal grooming of staff. Accordingly, Bowie et al (2016) noted that customers generate opinions about the quality of service based on the look and comfort of the physical facilities, equipment, employee uniforms, dinnerware, clothing, and advertising materials of the hospitality organization. Watiki (2014) discovered that the strongest correlation with customer satisfaction in Kenya hotels is room quality. According to the researcher, hotel managers should pay greater attention to the practical parts of the service quality because customers may be unsatisfied if hotels provide low-quality physical services aspects such as physical facilities, employee appearance, and equipment

Parasuraman et al (1988) noted that reliability relates to the capacity to deliver on promised services consistently and precisely. Daniel & Berinyuy (2010) noted that reliability implies that the hotel offers its visitors with accurate service the first time, without making any mistakes, and delivers what it has promised to accomplish within the agreed-upon time. Accordingly, Bandara & Dahanayaka (2020) mentioned that there is a positive relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction in three and above star graded hotels in Dambulla in Sri Lanka.

According to the Parasuraman (1988), responsive involves the willingness to help customers and provide prompt service. Bowie et al (2016) mentioned that when the service is provided, the customer may have numerous questions about the menu, hotel location, hotel facilities, and other topics. In such a case, the customer service representative must be able to reply to consumer inquiries and requests in a courteous manner. Hence, Rao & Sahu (2013) discovered that there is a positive relationship between responsiveness and guest satisfaction in hotel industry.

Parasuraman et al (1988) described that assurance refers to personnel' expertise and politeness, as well as their capacity to inspire trust and confidence. Moreover, Bowie et al (2016) suggested that assurance refers to whether employees are informed, efficient, polite, or pleasant in their dealings with coworkers. When personnel exhibit the aforementioned characteristics, customers have confidence that the hotel will provide the promised service. Hence, Rao & Sahu (2013) emphasized that strengthening of assurance has an impact on the level of Customer Satisfaction.

Parasuraman et al (1988) empathy indicates the firm's caring, personalized attention to its customers. Bowie et al (2016) suggested that empathy refers to knowing clients as individuals, treating them as such, and giving a more customized hospitality experience. However, Rao & Sahu (2013) mentioned that empathy has a positive relationship with the customer satisfaction.

### **Boutique Hotels**

Lim & Endean (2009) described that Boutique hotels often have a luxury ambiance and distinguish themselves from bigger chain/branded hotels and motels by providing individualized accommodations and services. Erkutlu & Chafra (2006) mentioned that boutique hotels often adhere to a certain theme or design and have at least 3 to 100 rooms, as well as hotel personnel that is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Many boutique hotels provide on-site eating options, and the majority have bars and lounges that are available to the public.

Researchers proposed many definitions of the idea of boutique hotel. However, the majority of academics have proposed a uniform definition by taking into account the most essential qualities of boutique hotels, such as location, size, architecture and design, services and quality given. Accordingly, Lim & Endean (2009) noted that Boutique hotels are often found in suburbs or metropolitan centers. Further they said that boutique idea has been applied to both resort locations and rural regions where visitors are frequently drawn. Aggett (2007) described that the majority of boutique hotels have less than 100 rooms. A maximum of 100 hotel rooms would allow the hotel to specialize its service to its visitors while also protecting the integrity of interactions between guests and personnel. Further, Lim & Endean (2009) described that boutique hotels provide modern amenities while retaining historic charm, beauty, and majesty. Interior designs that are stylish and premium stress the designed antique style furniture, as well as occasionally the décor themes that correspond with these themes. To emphasize the glory and old-world elegance of these hotels, well-known painters are occasionally hired to adorn the rooms. In addition, Aggett (2007) noted that Boutique hotels do have high staff-to-guest ratio, allowing them to deliver excellent customized service to their valued clients. Moreover, Lim & Endean (2009) described that customers are attracted to these Boutique hotels due to their great quality, from food and beverage to interior design and services, Boutique hotels beat all other typical hotel attributes in the globe.

## **III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of in this study, the researchers highly focused of the impact of the service quality on guest satisfaction in boutique hotels with special reference to Central Province in Sri Lanka. Therefore the researchers should choose a design that would provide relevant information on the research questions and do the job most efficiently. The researchers used only questionnaire to collect the data from the guest who stay at Boutique hotel in Central Province. In addition, Research design includes information about selection of sample, utilization of questionnaires in order to gather primary data, Population, Sample, Participants, Data collection instruments, Variables, and materials, Data analysis Procedures, Anticipated ethical issues in the study.

The study area selected by the researchers is Central Province in Sri Lanka. Population of the study is boutique hotels in Central Province. According to SLTDA Annual Report (2020) there are four boutique hotels in Central Province. The researchers selected four bouquet hotels to collect data in Central Province. Convenience sampling method was used as the sampling technique in this study. Sample size of the study is 100 guests who stayed at boutique hotels in Central Province. The researchers used a survey methodology approach for this study. Data collection process implemented within boutique hotels in Central Province. Questionnaire distributed among the guest who staying at boutiques in Central Province.

## **IV. ANALYSIS**

### **Demographic Profile of the Respondents**

According to the survey data Out of 100 respondents' male guests are higher than female guests. There are 65% percent of guests are males. 35% percent of guests are females and Majority of the respondent guests were in between 21-40 age group and they represent 55% from the sample. 40% respondents were in between 41-60 age group. 3% guests belong to 61 or above 61 age group and 2% guests belong to 20 or below 20 age group. According to illustration of it majority of the guests who visit boutique hotels in Central province are married tourists. It is 81% percent. As well as it shows 19% percent of tourists are single. 69% visitors have visited to the hotel with purpose of leisure and recreation. 13% guests are visit for religious and cultural purpose. 16% guests are visit for the purpose of business. 2% guests are visit for the purpose of visiting friends and the relatives. Duration of stay of the guests at the boutique hotels, majority of the respondent guests were stay in between 1-3 days and they represent 70% from the sample. 29% respondents were stay in between 4-6 days. 1% respondents were stay in between 7-9 days. There is no anyone who stays 10 days or more.

**Descriptive Analysis for Service Quality**

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	Statistics	Std. error
Tangibles	4.3800	.59084	-1.014	.241
Assurance	3.6675	.78581	-.511	.241
Reliability	3.8580	.63900	-.029	.241
Responsiveness	3.6575	.68870	-.255	.241
Empathy	3.8540	.68688	-.552	.241
Guest Satisfaction	4.2175	.67481	-.743	.241

Source: Survey Data

According to analysis data, most of guest are agree with level of Service quality in boutique hotels. Tangibles are the highest mean value among the independent variables and it makes as 4.3800. Mean value of Assurance, Reliability, Responsiveness and Empathy involvement are 3.6675, 3.8580, 3.6575 and 3.8540 respectively. All variables mean values are higher than 3. Assurance involvements has the highest value of standard deviation with 0.78581. Dependent variable of the study, mean value of Guest Satisfaction is 4.2175 and standard deviation is 0.67481. That mean respondents are happy with level of guest satisfaction.

**Regression Analysis**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.783a	.612	.592	.42887

Source: Survey Data

According to table 4.26 results of model summary shows the regression coefficient “R” value is .783a. It means that there was positive correlation between dependent variable and independent variable is 78.3%. Adjusted R square value is 0.592 or 59.2%. According to model summary, it indicates that 59.2% of the total variance in the dependent variable is explained by the total independent variables.

**Results of Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Tolerance	VIF
(Constant)	.766	.353		2.173	.032		
Tangibles	.386	.105	.339	3.660	.000	.485	2.061
Assurance	.318	.089	.374	3.592	.001	.384	2.602
Reliability	.252	.120	.241	2.107	.038	.319	3.130
Responsiveness	-.044	.083	-.045	-.525	.601	.572	1.749
Empathy	-.055	.093	-.056	-.592	.555	.460	2.174

Source: Survey Data

Based on the above table he influence of each independent variables on the dependent variable as follows,

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1X_1 + \beta_2X_2 + \beta_3X_3 + \beta_4X_4 + \beta_5X_5 + \epsilon$$

$$GS = 0.386TAN + 0.318ASS + 0.252REL - 0.044RES - 0.055EMP$$

Tangibles (TAN) is significantly impact on guest satisfactions ( $P = 0.000$ ) and there has a positive impact on guest satisfaction (Beta = 0.339). Assurance (ASS) is a significantly impact on guest satisfaction ( $P = 0.001$ ) and there has a positive impact on guest satisfaction (Beta = 0.374). Reliability (REL) is significantly impact on guest satisfactions ( $P = 0.038$ ) and there has a positive impact on guest satisfaction (Beta = 0.241). Responsiveness (RES) and Empathy (EMP) are not significant impact on guest satisfaction. Because of their sig. value are ( $P = 0.601$ ) and ( $P = 0.555$ ) respectively higher than 0.050. According to multi-Collinearity Statistics, VIF value is less than 5.0 that represent one independent variable not depend on other independent variables. According to table 4.28, VIF values of all variables are less than 5.00. Therefore, there is no multi Collinearity effect in this research.

## Hypothesis Testing

### Summary of hypothesis result

Hypothesis	Sig.	Result
H1: There is a significant impact of tangibles on guest satisfaction.	0.000	Accept
H2: There is a significant impact of assurance on guest satisfaction	0.001	Accept
H3: There is a significant impact of reliability on guest satisfaction	0.038	Accept
H4: There is a significant impact of responsiveness on guest satisfaction	0.601	Reject
H5: There is a significant impact of empathy on guest satisfaction	0.555	Reject

Source: Survey Data

Tangibles is significantly impact on Guest satisfaction in boutique hotels. Result of the study concluded that guests who concern more about demand which arrive from Tangibles. Tangibles can be considered as very important dimension to be investigated. The indicators for the Tangibles are appearance of the hotel, appearance of physical facilities (rooms, swimming pool), appearance of the hotel employees and Appearance of material associated with the service.

Assurance is significantly impact on Guest satisfaction in boutique hotels. Result of the study concluded that guests who concern more about demand which arrive from assurance. Assurance can be considered as very important dimension to be investigated. The indicators for the Assurance are confident of the employee for attract guest (behavior of employee), safety and security of transaction, politeness and courteous of employee and competence of employees to answer guest questions (Foreign language, Communication skills).

Reliability is significantly impact on Guest satisfaction in boutique hotels. Result of the study concluded that guests who concern more about demand which arrive from reliability. Reliability can be considered as very important dimension to be investigated. The indicators for Reliability are timeliness of service, problem solving interest, efficient of service, consistency of service and accuracy of records.

Responsiveness is not significant impact on guest satisfaction in boutique hotel sector in Central Province. That concluded that guests who not concern about demand which arrive from responsiveness. Therefor responsiveness can be considered as not important dimension to be investigated

According to this survey, empathy is not significant impact on guest satisfaction in boutique hotels sector in Central Province. That concluded that guests who not concern about demand which arrive from empathy. Therefor empathy can be considered as not important dimension to be investigated.

## V. CONCLUSION

### Objective 1: To find out the existing situation of service quality in boutique hotels in Central Province.

According to mean and standard deviations obtained from descriptive statistics, it can be demonstrated that guests are almost agreed with existing level of tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy of service quality in boutique hotels in Central Province. Because of mean values are higher than moderate level (3.00) and close to the Agree level (4.00). Among this service quality, highest mean value is represented by Tangibles it represents that guest were satisfied with the indicators which are Appearance of physical facilities (rooms, swimming pool), Appearance of the hotel, Appearance of material associated with the service (cutlery, towel) and Appearance of the hotel employees respectively.

### Objective 2: To find out the existing situation of guest satisfaction in boutique hotels in Central Province

According to mean and standard deviations obtained from descriptive statistics, it can be demonstrated that guests are almost agreed with existing level of guest satisfaction in boutique hotels in Central Province. Because of its Mean value was 4.2175. it is higher than the Agree level. When considering about the mean of guest satisfaction, guest was satisfied with the indicators which are Feel enjoyable experience, like to revisit this hotel, Satisfaction with decision to visit this hotel and Choice to stay at this hotel was a wise one respectively. All mean values of indicators are higher than Agree level.

### Objective 3: To find out which service quality dimensions have significant impact towards guest satisfaction in boutique hotels in Central Province

Here measure each service quality dimensions impact to the guest satisfaction. When Tangibles increased by one unit while other variables remain constant, guest satisfaction was increased by 0.348 units. When Assurance increased by one unit while other variables remain constant, it resulted in increase of guest satisfaction by 0.363 units. When Reliability increased by one unit while other variables remain constant, it resulted in increase of guest satisfaction by 0.234 units. These three service quality dimensions have significant impact on guest satisfaction in boutique hotels in Central Province.

Furthermore, according to information given in above Regression analysis it can be identified Responsiveness and Empathy were not significant impact on Guest Satisfaction in boutique hotels in Central Province. According to findings of this research indicates that Tangibles, Assurance and Reliability dimensions are positive and significantly impact on guest satisfaction. Therefore these factors are mostly affecting to increase the guest satisfaction in 4 boutique hotels in Central Province. But Responsiveness and Empathy dimension are not significantly impact on guest satisfaction in boutique hotels central province.

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