

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE GUEST CHOICE OF LEISURE HOTELS IN CALABAR, CROSS RIVER STATE, NIGERIA.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33281/JTHS20129.2021.1.1>

Abstract

This study was carried out to examine the factors influencing the decision of guests when choosing leisure hotels in Calabar. The study adopted a descriptive survey method with a sample size of two hundred and fifty-nine (259). The study used questionnaires and oral interviews to get information from the 259 respondents comprised of staff and customers of two leisure hotels in Calabar namely, Tinapa Business Resort and Marina Resort. The data generated were analyzed using mean and standard deviation with an average mean of 2.50 and above as acceptable and significant while responses with a mean below 2.50 were regarded as insignificant. The result showed that among other factors, hotel image, service quality, security condition, and location are the major factors that influence the choice of leisure seekers for a hotel in Calabar and that an improvement of hotel image, more security, cheaper pricing of services and service quality will go a long way to heighten a customer's choice of one leisure hotel over another. The study goes on to recommend among others that leisure hotel management should focus more on factors that improve patronage of leisure hotels such as improving the hotel image by going into broad-spectrum advertising, by improving leisure hotel service quality, by improving security and enhancing easy access of leisure hotels such as the provision of vehicles that are affordable to convey customers to such hotels

Keywords: Guest choice, Leisure, Hotels, Calabar.

Introduction

It is in human nature to be curious and try to figure out what lies beyond our boundaries. For decades now, human beings have been using accommodation facilities with different levels of patronage in hospitality firms as it is one of the fastest-growing economic sectors in the world. (Soraya Palani & Seima Sohrabi, 2013). The evolving marketplace of the hotel industry has started recognizing the importance of understanding the attitudes, interests, delights and aims of today's leisure seeker for a more profitable, satisfactory, and higher quality of service opportunities (Soraya Palani & Seima Sohrabi, 2013)

Hotel, in its concept according to the hotel proprietorship Act of (1956), a hotel in any establishment set aside that provides accommodation, food and beverage services to any guest presenting himself to be willing and ready to pay for the services rendered and who must be in the right fixed state of mind. It is an establishment that provides paid lodging on a short-term basis

(Sebastian T. J. 2013). A leisure hotel is also known as a holiday resort. A resort according to the Oxford dictionary is a place where people go for recreation, especially one with facilities such as lodgings, entertainment and a relaxing environment. A leisure hotel/holiday resort is an entity that comprises every kind of tourism organization and operation in its geographical area, these include; hotels, transport, attractions etc. It can include anything in a region, (the people, the other industries, the landscape etc.) (Kotler, 2000).

Predicting guest hotel choice is influenced by different factors. These are composed of dimensions that are linked to the attributes of the hotel product, marketing activities and personal characteristics of guests (Wilkins, 2006). Hotel products can be viewed as bundles of various attributes which directly influence choice and they may arouse the guest' purchase intentions and differentiate themselves from their competitors' offers (Alpert, 2008).

Alpert (2008) product, location, product offers and service quality, price, security, room positioning and reputation among others are important elements that influence the guest choice of a leisure hotel. Wuest *et al.* (2006) defined perceptions of hotel attributes as the degree to which travellers find various services important and to the guest' satisfaction. Bull (1998) stresses the importance of location for product differentiation in the hospitality industry which produces "place-sensitive products". In the marketing literature, there is a rising level of importance placed upon hotel branding and brand is treated as part of the firm's intangible asset value (O'Neill & Belfrage, 2005) which also has an important influence on consumer decision-making in choosing a hotel.

Swarbrooke and Horner (2007) opined that the location of a hotel is a major factor that affects customer choice. Customers tend to patronize hotels that are located where an area that is of interest to them. Hotels that are located where potential guests can easily reach out tend to attract more customers than those that have no means of reaching them easily. Social classes can be found in almost all societies, they are a relatively permanent and ordered division in a society where the members share similar values, interests, and behaviours (Kotler *et al.*, 2006).

The customer on the other hand is seen as that person that a marketer or firm believes will benefit from the goods and services offered by the organization. There are three types of customers: The customer who knows what he wants, the customer who does not know exactly what he wants but has a need to satisfy and; the customer who does not know if he wants or need anything (Lawrencia Ifeoma Ifegbo, 2007). Because of this, the customer falls into three groups: Existing customer, Former customer, and Potential customer.

Lewis (2002), in his studies, discovered that customers perceived that quality, security and image were important factors in determining a lodging choice while leisure travellers perceived the quietness, service quality and location of the hotel as more important factors of choice. Research has clearly shown that customers among other factors place importance on quality when

choosing a preferred hospitality industry and coupled with globalization, customer needs may be magnified with change and continuous innovation being introduced and customized to the hospitality industry. In this growing pace of change, expectations are changing and customers are becoming more and more difficult to satisfy or delight (Oliver, 2006).

Behaviour is the way people or an individual act or do things. An individual behaviour refers to the way he conducts himself openly or secretly in response to internal or external stimuli (Munit Abmad 2015). Stating further, Munit Abmad (2015), stressed that in marketing, buyer or consumer behaviour is concerned with how buyers conduct themselves when faced with a purchase decision. A buyer faced with the decision to purchase a product or service ends up buying or not buying it; and no matter which of the options the buyer chooses, he has undertaken a decision involving buying behaviour. There have been extensive researches in consumer behaviour most of which are directed towards products and services in general. Consumer decision making has long been of interest to researchers. Beginning about 300 years ago early economists, led by Nicholas Bernoulli, John von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, started to examine the basis of consumer decision making (Richarme, 2005). This early work approached the topic from an economic perspective and focused solely on the act of purchase (Loudon & Della Bitta, 1993). The most prevalent model from this perspective is Utility Theory which proposes that consumers make choices based on the expected outcomes of their decisions. Consumers are viewed as rational decision-makers who are only concerned with self-interest (Zinkhan, 1992). It was not long after that marketing scholars responded to the concept and growth of consumer behaviour and activities that impact consumer decisions (Blackwelletal. 2001).

Munit Abmad (2015) opined that buyer's behaviour is concerned with finding answers to such questions as Who buys the goods or services needed by an individual, a household or an organization? What does he buy? Why does he buy this and not the other product or service? How much does he buy and why? Where does he make his purchases and why?

Leisure hotels/holiday resorts in Calabar includes quality recreational facilities for recreation and amusement and natural and artificial sceneries located throughout the city. Calabar is one of the most prosperous and liveliest cities in the south-south and south-east combined with tourist attractions little wonder it is nicknamed "The Peoples Paradise" therefore; this work seeks to analyze the factors that influence the guest choice of leisure hotels in Calabar. Over the years it is becoming increasingly glaring that this long-standing reputation is gradually going down the drain because most of the leisure hotels in the city have begun to lose their reputation thereby leading to lower patronage of such hotels by customers (Onumadu, 2014). Several factors are leading to the failure of the leisure hotels in Calabar; such as location, security, service quality and so forth.

Vanguard Newspaper (2015) explained that the lack of management and core objective by the resort centres in the city of Calabar has led to customers

and travellers viewing them with increasing levels of disrepute. It went ahead to cite the security menace in the southern part of the city as a big problem to patronize of such resort especially the Marina resort closely situated to the southern part of the city. Owing to the location of these leisure hotels, security is of great importance and many of these resorts do not guarantee security outside the resort. Transportation is also an issue as regards leisure hotels in Calabar because they do not offer transport service to their customers to and from the airport. Accessibility is also a challenge that has led to poor patronage of these resorts. All these issues necessitate this study to ascertain the leading factors that influence customer's choice of leisure hotels in Calabar. The study will focus on the analysis of factors that influences the guest choice for choosing a leisure hotel in Tinapa and Marina Resort in Calabar, Cross Rivers State of Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The main aim of this study is to examine the factors influencing the decision of guests when choosing leisure hotels in Calabar. Specifically, the study is to:

1. Identified the leisure hotels in Calabar.
2. Ascertained the level of patronage in the leisure hotels in the study areas.
3. Identified the factors that determine the high patronage of leisure hotels in Calabar.
4. Identified factors that determine low patronage of leisure hotels in Calabar.
5. Determined ways to improve the patronage of leisure hotels in Calabar.

Research Questions

The following questions will be in the course of this study:

1. What are the leisure hotels available in Calabar?
2. What is the level of patronage of these leisure hotels?
3. What are the factors that determine the high patronage of leisure hotels in Calabar?
4. What are the factors that determine the low patronage of leisure hotels in the study area?
5. What are the ways to improve the patronage of leisure hotels in Calabar?

Methodology

Research Design

The study adopted a survey research design.

The Area of Study

The study was carried out in Calabar. Calabar is in Cross River State, in south southern Nigeria.

Population for the Study

The target population for this study is made up of Customers and staff of various leisure hotels in Calabar. For this study, two leisure hotels were studied namely Tinapa Resort Center with a total of 150 staff and 250 customers as at the time of visit (CRSTB, 2016) and Marina Resort centre with a staff force of 115 and customer strength of 225 as at the time of visit (CRSTB, 2016). This brought the population of this study to a total of seven hundred and forty (740).

Sample/Sampling Techniques

Taro Yamane formula was used to get the sample size of 259 respondents for the study. A random sampling technique was used for the for study.

The instrument for Data Collection

The study employed quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The instrument used were questionnaires and oral interviews guided by the interview schedule which was produced from the questions in the questionnaire in other to gather information from the staff and guests of the leisure hotels under study.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data collected were analysed using SPSS 20.0 statistical package. The average mean of the agreement in the questionnaire was 2.50. Any response with a mean of 2.50 and above was regarded as significant while any response with a mean less than 2.50 were regarded as insignificant. Regression analysis was carried out on the data to test the hypothesis.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Research question 1: What are the leisure hotels available in Calabar?

Table 1 Identifies Leisure hotels in the study area.

Leisure Hotels
Tinapa Business Resort
Marina Resort
Mirage

Source: field survey

Attractions at Tinapa Business Resort

The attractions in the leisure hotels available in Calabar include swimming pools, bush bar, ferries wheel, boat cruise, Fulani hut, Cinema, history museum, club and bar etc.



Swimming pool



Swimming pool and play ground



Kiddies Ground



Arial View of Swimming pool and Hut at Tinapa



Tinapa Restaurant



Kiddies Pool

Attractions at Marina Resort Center Calabar



Cinema



Boat Cruise Marina



Slave Museum Marina



Anchor Statue Marina



Ferries Wheel Marina



Ferries Wheel

Research question 2: What is the level of patronage of these leisure hotels?

Table 2 level of patronage of leisure hotels in the study area

Items	Mean	STD. Deviation	Decision
Very high patronage	3.45	0.51	**
Moderately patronized	3.73	0.45	**

Very low Patronage	2.02	0.49	*
Rarely patronized	1.21	0.41	*

Source: field survey

Table 2 showed the mean responses of the level of patronage of leisure hotels in the study area at very high patronage, moderately patronized, very low patronage and rarely patronized as 3.45, 3.73, 2.02 and 1.21 respectively. From the result, the mean values greater than 2.5 (>2.5) were accepted while those less than 2.5 were rejected therefore from the response, we accept that leisure hotels in Calabar have been very well patronized.

Research question 3: What are the factors that determine the high patronage of leisure hotels in Calabar?

Table 3 factors that determine high patronage of leisure hotels

Items	Mean	Std. dev.	Decision
Hotel image	3.64	0.48	**
High-quality service	3.58	0.49	**
High security	3.62	0.48	**
Location/ease of access	3.48	0.50	**
Price/value for money	2.09	0.43	*

Source: field survey

Table 3 shows the mean responses of the factors that determine high patronage of leisure hotels in Calabar such which are hotel image, high-quality service, high security, location/ease of access and price/ value for money are 3.64, 3.58, 3.62, 3.48 and 2.09 respectively. According to the decision rule, hotel image, high-quality service, high security and location proved to be accepted as factors that determine high patronage of leisure hotels in the study area whereas price/ value for money which did not reach the acceptable mean score was disagreed as a factor causing high patronage of leisure hotels in Calabar.

Research question 4: What are the factors that determine the low patronage of leisure hotels in the study area?

Table 4 Factors that determine low patronage of leisure hotels in the study area

Items	Mean	Std. dev.	Decision
Poor hotel image	3.64	0.49	**

Poor service quality	3.58	0.49	**
Poor security	3.62	0.48	**
Poor access to location	3.48	0.50	**
High price	2.09	0.49	*

Table 4 showed that the mean responses for the factors that determine low patronage of leisure hotels in the study area with poor hotel image, poor service, poor security, poor location and high price were 3.64, 3.58, 3.62, 3.48 and 2.09 respectively. The decision rule, therefore, aids us to accept poor hotel image, poor service quality, the poor security and poor access to the location as factors that might cause low patronage of leisure hotels in the study area since they passed the acceptable mean score.

Research question 5: What are the ways to improve the patronage of leisure hotels in Calabar?

Table 5 ways to improve the patronage of leisure hotels

Items	Mean	Std. dev.	Decision
Improving hotel image	3.45	0.51	**
Improving hotel security	3.73	0.45	**
Improving hotel quality of service	3.25	0.57	**
Easily accessible hotel location	3.40	0.49	**
Moderate pricing of services	3.51	0.50	**

The table 5 shows the mean responses for ways to improve leisure hotel patronage in the study area with improving hotel image, improving hotel security, improving service quality, location and moderate pricing scoring 3.45, 3.73, 3.25, 3.40, and 3.52 respectively. All the items were accepted by the respondents as a means of improving leisure hotel patronage in the study area.

Findings

The result of the analysis presented in the tables above showed that the leisure hotels in Calabar experience high patronage, suggesting that the hospitality industry in such a home of tourism is very much alive. Some of the leisure hotels in Calabar have been identified such as Tinapa Business Resort, Marina Resort and Mirage including some of the leisure activities that go on in these leisure hotels. The major factors that lead to high patronage of leisure

hotels in Calabar have been identified such as hotel image, security, location, and high-quality service. The major factors that lead to low patronage of leisure hotels in the study area include poor hotel image, poor service quality, and poor security. To improve the level of patronage of leisure hotels in Calabar, measures must be put in place to improve hotel image, improve service quality, improve hotel security especially in security volatile areas, and moderate pricing especially in the present economic recession.

Discussion of Findings

The findings of the research question one revealed that the leisure hotels in Calabar are sufficiently patronized as indicated by the responses of the respondents, this is in line with Weidenfeld, (2010) stated that leisure hotels are mostly patronized in urban cities because they are comprised of most of the leisure activities that are found in other recreational centres. More so the high patronage of leisure hotels in the study area can be attributed to the presence of major recreational activities such as swimming pools, cinemas, bars etc. in these leisure hotels.

The findings of research question two showed that hotel image, high-quality service and location of leisure hotels were significantly agreed upon by respondents as the major factors that contribute to high patronage of leisure hotels in the study area. This result is in line with Oswald Mhalanga (2016) who in his studies found out that good/quality service, recommendation by others which is same as hotel image were the contributory factors to consumer selection of hotels in South Africa, the finding also complements the work of Aleksandar *et al.*, (2016) found out that convenience in location of hotels and comfort contributed greatly to the choice of leisure hotels.

The findings of research question three revealed factors that can contribute to poor leisure hotel patronage as poor hotel quality, poor quality service, poor location, as well as poor security. This finding is not surprising as it is in line with prior expectations as poor service in any business at all will lead to poor patronage and the tourism business is not an exception. These findings are in line with the findings of Wakefield and Blodgett, (1994) who found that physical factors such as poor location and poor access to leisure facilities can hamper customers choice of such leisure hotels and they found that such factors tend to have a greater influence on the choice of leisure hotels over other factors such as pricing; its finding is also in line with Tsang, (2000) who studied the effect of poor service on the hotel industry in china from the tourist point of view deduced that poor service quality has an enormous impact on the patronage of hotels in China.

The findings of research question four revealed that to improve the level of patronage of leisure hotels in the study area, factors such as improving hotel image, service quality, security, location and pricing must be put into consideration. The issue of security was so important to the respondents because of the security issues of the area of study especially in southern Calabar where the so-called area boys have made life unbearable for the

residents and tourists alike. This result supports the findings of Kassim and Abdulahi, (1987) who reported that image, moderate pricing and security was one of the factors that can contribute to increased patronage of the hospitality industry.

Conclusion

A leisure hotel/holiday resort is one of the most important factors a tourist puts into consideration when planning to visit a place. This is because they provide the main reason or motivation for leisure guests to visit a destination.

After analyzing the factors that influence the guest choice of leisure hotels in Calabar cross river state, this study concludes that among other factors, hotel image, service quality, security condition, and location are the major factors that affect the choice of leisure hotels by customers in Calabar and that an improvement of hotel image, more security, cheaper pricing of services and service quality will go a long way to heighten a customer's choice of one leisure hotel over another. Stakeholders should understand that leisure hotels are not like any other accommodation facility but require adequate planning void of a noisy environment and accommodating the necessary facilities that are required of a leisure/holiday resort yet accessible to a holiday maker.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations have been made:

1. Cross river state tourism board should harp on the high patronage of leisure hotels in the state to create more of such hotels with lower pricing to boost the tourism journey of the state and also diversify revenue generation of the state.
2. Leisure hotel management should focus more on factors that improve patronage of leisure hotels such as improving the hotel image by going into broad-spectrum advertising, by improving leisure hotel service quality, by improving security and enhancing easy access of leisure hotels such as the provision of vehicles that are affordable to convey customers to such hotels.
3. The Cross River State Tourism Board should come up with policies that will reduce encroachment into the areas a leisure hotel is situated as some level of tranquility is needed in these leisure hotels.

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