

Service Quality and Foreign Tourist Satisfaction

An Assessment with Special Reference to Sri Lankan Airline

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lanka is at the threshold of economic growth and development after the war and conflict. The government is targeting 2.5 million tourists by 2016 creating a massive opportunity for Sri Lankan airlines to increase its revenue from the increasing trend in tourist arrivals. To achieve these revenue targets it has to compete with other airlines by providing a better service to its passengers. Measuring service quality provides reliable data that can be used to monitor and maintain improved service quality in Sri Lankan airlines.

With the aim of understanding the foreign tourist satisfaction on service quality of Sri Lankan airlines, a field survey was carried out in January 2014. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data on purposively selected foreign tourists who used Sri Lankan airlines to fly. The questionnaire was consisted with questions express the expectations and perceptions of passengers'. The demographic profile of respondents, the overall experiences they received from the airline services and passenger preference as to different travel class provided by airline companies will evaluate through the questionnaire. Service quality was measured by assisting the well-known method called as SERQUAL. Here service quality was measured through seven major attributes such as Reliability, Assurance, Facilities, Employees, Flight Pattern, Customization and Responsiveness. Paired t-test was employed to get gaps between expectations and perceptions, ultimately served as the customer satisfaction. Correlation and regression were also used to analyze the data using SPSS statistical package.

Gap analysis revealed that the attribute so called Facilities recorded the least level of satisfaction by recording a largest positive gap between expected and perceived facilities. The attribute Reliability recorded the lower gap expressing the highest level of satisfaction on perceived service element. When consider the service qualities according to the gender, generally female passengers were more dissatisfied with the service quality attributes than male passengers. According to evaluated demographic characteristics, majority were married, male passengers (65%) than unmarried passengers. Most of the passengers belonged to the 21- 40 age group. Majority of the evaluated passengers were from Europe (37%) while 36%, 18%, 7% and 2% passengers from Asia, America, Australia and Africa respectively.

All evaluated service attributes had significant positive correlation with customer satisfaction on Sri Lankan airlines. Reliability ($r = 0.797$), Assurance ($r = 0.730$), Employees ($r = 0.690$), Facilities ($r = 0.855$), Flight Patterns ($r = 0.674$), Customization ($r = 0.795$) and

Responsiveness($r = 0.800$) recorded the strong positive significant correlations with the customer satisfaction.

According to the study few suggestions can be made; Sri Lankan airlines needs continuous innovations to improve in-flight facilities, if possible it should invest in modern technology, facilities should be improved through feedback of passengers and Sri Lankan airline should give more attention regarding comfortable interiors and seats and in-flight entertainments.

Key words: Sri Lankan airlines, Service quality, Satisfaction, SERVQUAL