

Original Article

## An Understanding of Tourists' Perception about Seaside Hotels

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### Abstract

Knowledge and understanding on tourists' perception about seaside hotels plays an important role in their management, as the value of the trip is directly influenced by several factors. This paper performs an assessment of tourists' perception towards factors affecting the choice of an accommodation unit. Data was collected using an on-line survey and analysed through descriptive statistics and appropriate statistical tests. Comparative analysis was conducted on the level of importance of a list of factors between two groups of tourists divided by age. Results indicate that location, facilities and price are the most important factors. Cleanliness and safety add value to the trip as well. In contrast, hotel facilities such as business center, games room and access to pets add less value to the quality of the trip. Tourists older than 35 years prefer more complex tourism products with breakfast and dinner, and more facilities in the room such as tea/coffee machines. The study offers managerial implications related to understanding tourists' needs as regard to the choice of an accommodation unit at seaside.

**Keywords:** *seaside, perception, tourists, management.*

### 1. Introduction

The last two decades represented a major challenge for the accommodation business because of the shift produced among consumers and the mechanism of adopting the buying decision. Therefore, understanding the consumer and the attributes considered important when choosing a tourism facility should be a constant objective of hoteliers, especially because its' behaviour is not certain [1]. Because of the Internet expansion there are cases when hotel reviews became more important during the decision-making process than extrinsic attributes [2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7].

Still, for many travellers, location represents the most important attribute when choosing a hotel [3, 8] followed by recommendations of friends or tourism agencies and last are the marketing mix components (price, promotion, personal experiences, facilities) [3] fact which indicates that the decision-making process in tourism is related to trust in others' experience. Two factors extremely important for travellers when choosing hotels from Thailand [9] and Hong Kong [10] are „security” and „front desk”, while culture and religion are the factors that shape the tourist behaviour among the hotels in Ghana [11].

Choosing factors are very different when it comes to other types of facilities like guesthouses, service apartments and commercial homes where the most important attribute is the homely atmosphere, local touch or the relationship with the host [12].

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The touristic potential of Romania seaside lead to the development of different types of tourism during the years, such as: tourism for rest and recreation, spa tourism, social tourism, active tourism and business tourism [13]. According to data provided by the National Institute of Statistics from 2012 until 2016 the number of arrivals increased by 21.5% in the accommodation units from Seaside, while at the national level with 43.1%.

The average length of stay was around 4 days, double than the national average (Table 1).

The occupancy rate rose by 10% from 2012 to 2016, but half of the accommodation capacity still remains unused.

In this context the purpose of this paper is to identify the profile of tourists visiting the seaside and to identify the factors that influence their choice of an accommodation unit.

Table 1. Time evolution of tourism indicators

Region	Indicators	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Romania	Arrivals (number of tourists)	7686489	7943153	8465909	9921874	11002522
	Overnight stays	19166122	19362671	20280041	23519340	25440957
	Length of stay (days)*	2.49	2.44	2.40	2.37	2.31
	Occupancy rate (%)*	25.85	25.14	26.11	28.73	30.53
Seaside	Arrivals (number of tourists)	804198	728748	747103	821659	977386
	Overnight stays	3445753	3084731	3248253	3667947	4108284
	Length of stay (days)*	4.28	4.23	4.35	4.46	4.20
	Occupancy rate (%)*	36.34	34.89	34.82	38.97	46.70

Source: National Institute for Statistics, Tempo on-line data base

Note: \* - compute based on data from National Institute of Statistics

## 2. Material and Method

The research was conducted in May 2016 using an on-line survey. The survey instrument was comprised of three sections.

The first section of the questionnaire was used to collect information about the trip preference of tourists; the second part consists in a set of variables which were used to identify the importance of different facilities in choosing an accommodation unit, while the third part refers to the socio-demographic characteristic of the respondents. The sample consists of 80 respondents from Romania between 18 and 54 years old. Tourists were divided into two groups according to median age (18-34 years old and 35-54 years old).

Descriptive statistics was used to present the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and of the trips. Differences between groups for categorical variables were analysed using the Pearson chi-square test.

To determine the importance of several characteristics associated with the choice of accommodation, respondents were asked to state the level of importance on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "without importance" and 5 = "very important") in a set of statements. Shapiro-Wilk test was used to test the normality of the statements ( $p < 0.05$ ), thus the Mann-Whitney U test was chosen to compare the two groups.

## 3. Results and Discussions

Majority of respondents were female (76.25%), with at least university degree (85%) and a personal monthly income of 1500-3000 RON (56.25%) (Table 2). No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups for socio-demographic characteristics ( $p > 0.05$ ).

The characteristics of the trip and of the chosen accommodation are presented in Table 3 and Table 4. Majority of tourists travelled in groups being accompanied by their life partner (47.50%), family (32.50%) or friends (27.50%). About 64.58% of groups travelled with children.

Longer trips were preferred most probably due to the main purpose of the trip, which was relaxation (90%). As regard to the country chosen for the trip, the Romanian Black Sea was visited only by 37.50%. No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups for socio-demographic characteristics ( $p > 0.05$ ). The hotel was the main type of accommodation chosen (61.25%), of 3 or 4 stars (76.25%). Moreover, tourists made the reservation of their trip at a travel agency (31.25%) or using an online booking system on specialized websites (31.25%).

Significant differences were observed between the two groups of tourists as regard to the type of service packages they chose ( $p < 0.01$ ). Basic packages with only accommodation or with breakfast

included were preferred by tourists younger than 35 years old, while more complex packages with

breakfast and dinner included were preferred by tourists older than 35 years.

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Variables	Total (N=80)		18-34 years (N=40)		35-55 years (N=40)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Gender</b>						
Female	61	76.25	33	82.50	28	70.00
Male	19	23.75	7	17.50	12	30.00
<b>Level of education</b>						
High school	12	15.00	3	7.50	9	22.50
University degree	40	50.00	19	47.50	21	52.50
Master/PhD degree	28	35.00	18	45.00	10	25.00
<b>Personal monthly income</b>						
Less than 1500 RON	13	16.25	8	20.00	5	12.50
1500-3000 RON	45	56.25	21	52.50	24	60.00
3001-5000 RON	15	18.75	7	17.50	8	20.00
Over 5000 RON	7	8.75	4	10.00	3	7.50

Table 3. Characteristics of the trip

Variables	Total (N=80)		18-34 years (N=40)		35-55 years (N=40)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Purpose of the trip</b>						
Relaxation	72	90.00	39	97.50	33	82.50
Health	1	1.25	0	0.00	1	2.50
Visiting family or friends	6	7.50	1	2.50	5	12.50
Other (visiting tourist attractions)	1	1.25	0	0.00	1	2.50
<b>Accompanying persons*</b>						
No one	4	5.00	1	2.50	3	7.50
Life partner	38	47.50	22	55.00	16	40.00
Family	26	32.50	13	32.50	13	32.50
Group of friends	22	27.50	11	27.50	11	27.50
<b>Children in the group</b>						
Yes	31	64.58	13	54.17	18	75.00
<b>Length of stay</b>						
1-3 days	3	3.75	2	5.00	1	2.50
4-7 days	55	68.75	30	75.00	25	62.50
8-12 days	20	25.00	8	20.00	12	30.00
More than 12 days	2	2.50	0	0.00	2	5.00
<b>Country visited*</b>						
Romania	30	37.50	15	37.50	15	37.50
Other country	55	68.75	26	65.00	29	72.50

\*Some respondents chose more than one option

In the choice of the accommodation, the trip attributes were perceived of the same importance by both groups, except for the reviews read on specialized websites which were more important for younger tourists ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 5). Online reviewers offer a broad evaluation of the accommodation on both tangible and intangible dimensions [14] and considered as the most influential factors in the choice [15]. Moreover, the recommendations of the travel agent is the least important factor in the choice made, previous and friends experience being more appreciated. Location was the most important factor

in choosing the accommodation, in accordance with other studies [3, 8]. Facilities and price were also assessed as important by both groups. Other studies [3] point that price is a significant factor only to some groups of consumers, being analysed in correlation with the facilities offered.

The trip was also evaluated in terms of the service quality provided by the accommodation staff (Table 6). There are no statistically significant differences between the two groups, the mean values ranging from 3.55 to 4.18, meaning medium to important on the evaluation scale.

Table 4. Characteristics of the accommodation

Variables	Total (N=80)		18-34 years (N=40)		35-55 years (N=40)	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
<b>Type of accommodation</b>						
Hotel	49	61.25	25	62.50	24	60.00
Motel	1	1.25	0	0.00	1	2.50
Tourist villa	14	17.50	8	20.00	6	15.00
Camping	1	1.25	1	2.50	0	0.00
The house of a local resident	14	17.50	6	15.00	8	20.00
Non-response	1	1.25	0	0.00	1	2.50
<b>Accommodation category</b>						
1 star	1	1.25	1	2.50	0	0.00
2 stars	9	11.25	6	15.00	3	7.50
3 stars	40	50.00	18	45.00	22	55.00
4 stars	21	26.25	10	25.00	11	27.50
5 stars	8	10.00	5	12.50	3	7.50
Non-response	1	1.25	0	0.00	1	2.50
<b>Reservation</b>						
At a travel agency	25	31.25	12	30.00	13	32.50
By phone	12	15.00	6	15.00	6	15.00
Online booking system on specialized websites	25	31.25	15	37.50	10	25.00
Online on hotel website?	6	7.50	2	5.00	4	10.00
Directly to the host	11	13.75	4	10.00	7	17.50
I didn't make the reservation	1	1.25	1	2.50	0	0.00
<b>Type of tourism products</b>						
Only accommodation	27	33.75	17	42.50	10	25.00
Accommodation with breakfast included	22	27.50	13	32.50	9	22.50
Accommodation with breakfast and dinner	14	17.50	1	2.50	13	32.50
All inclusive (accommodation, food, non-alcoholic drinks)	7	8.75	3	7.50	4	10.00
Extra all inclusive (accommodation, food, non-alcoholic and alcoholic beverages)	10	12.50	6	15.00	4	10.00

Table 5. Importance of factors in choosing the accommodation

Statements	18-34 years (N=40)		35-55 years (N=40)		p-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
1 Price	3.97	0.94	3.75	1.15	0.448
2 Comfort category	3.40	1.03	3.25	1.10	0.586
3 Reviews on accommodation website	3.90	1.13	3.50	1.24	0.116
4 Reviews on specialized websites	3.70	1.26	3.15	1.33	0.049*
5 Previous experience	3.50	1.06	3.75	1.30	0.121
6 Recommendations of friends	3.33	1.23	3.43	1.22	0.698
7 Recommendations of the travel agent	2.60	1.28	2.68	1.35	0.739
8 Facilities	4.13	1.09	3.95	1.04	0.231
9 Location	4.47	0.75	4.23	1.10	0.359

Note: 1 – without importance; 5 – very important; \* Difference significant at 5% level

Table 6. Staff service quality

Statements	18-34 years (N=40)		35-55 years (N=40)		p-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
1 Staff provide efficient service	3.88	1.20	3.95	0.93	0.810
2 Staff understand client requests	3.83	1.17	4.05	0.93	0.499
3 Staff are helpful	3.75	1.15	4.00	0.96	0.317
4 Staff are polite and friendly	4.18	1.03	4.30	0.94	0.615
5 Staff provide information about tourist destination	3.55	1.30	3.88	1.18	0.245
6 Staff have neat appearance	3.88	1.16	4.08	1.10	0.403
7 Staff have multilingual skills	3.63	1.35	3.70	1.14	0.972
8 Efficient check-in and check-out	3.93	1.23	3.93	1.07	0.732

Note: 1 – without importance; 5 – very important; \* Difference significant at 5% level

Tourists' perception towards the presence of several facilities at the accommodation was different in terms of the opportunity to use the fitness centre and to play in the games room, being more important for tourists older than 35 ( $p < 0.05$ ) (Table 7). However, staying at hotels with clean rooms, guarded and protected and with fire protection system, were evaluated as the most important facilities for a pleasant trip.

Cleanliness is probably the most common attribute any tourist would expect to find in an accommodation unit and was evaluated in many studies as a basic attribute of any trip [9]. Security and safety were assessed as important factors for leisure travellers also by [9-10]. On the other hand, the opportunity to use the business center, the games room and to have access to pets adds little value to the quality of the trip (mean score less than 2).

Table 7. Importance of accommodation facilities

Statements	18-34 years (N=40)		35-55 years (N=40)		p-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
1 Swimming pool	3.03	1.37	3.45	1.32	0.140
2 Fitness center	2.10	1.17	2.85	1.37	0.012*
3 SPA & Massage room	2.48	1.18	2.73	1.32	0.327
4 Sauna	2.40	1.10	2.38	1.13	0.996
5 Bar	2.55	1.22	2.65	1.21	0.701
6 Restaurant	3.45	1.52	3.60	1.30	0.869
7 Car parking	3.25	1.61	3.58	1.47	0.426
8 Games room	1.58	0.90	2.05	1.04	0.029*
9 Credit cards	3.60	1.41	3.73	1.20	0.901
10 Breakfast included	3.30	1.50	3.60	1.35	0.378
11 Playground for children	2.38	1.58	2.47	1.41	0.685
12 Access to pets	1.75	1.15	1.63	0.89	0.837
13 Business Center	1.53	1.01	1.58	0.98	0.673
14 Hotel and room cleanliness	4.55	0.93	4.48	0.93	0.511
15 Electronic key card	3.38	1.27	2.88	1.36	0.070
16 Bright hallway and public areas	3.55	1.26	3.93	0.92	0.218
17 Safety and security	4.00	1.20	4.28	0.82	0.518
18 Fire protection system	3.63	1.29	4.08	0.92	0.150
19 Transfer from/to the airport or train station	2.70	1.65	3.30	1.45	0.114

Note: 1 – without importance; 5 – very important; \* Difference significant at 5% level

Table 8. Importance of room facilities

Statements	18-34 years (N=40)		35-55 years (N=40)		p-value
	Mean	S.D.	Mean	S.D.	
1 Air conditioning	3.88	1.18	4.07	1.28	0.303
2 TV	2.80	1.36	3.65	1.31	0.004*
3 Free WI-FI internet access in the room	4.38	0.84	4.30	1.04	0.872
4 Hair dryer	3.53	1.30	3.45	1.08	0.605
5 Tea/Coffee making facility in the room	2.38	1.15	3.25	1.21	0.001*
6 Refrigerator	3.98	1.16	4.03	0.86	0.665
7 Minibar	2.35	1.23	2.63	1.19	0.350
8 Safety box	2.75	1.58	3.13	1.45	0.288
9 Mosquito net	3.58	1.32	3.85	1.25	0.292
10 Balcony	3.65	1.25	4.13	1.04	0.064
11 Room cleanliness	4.83	0.68	4.63	0.77	0.050*

Note: 1 – without importance; 5 – very important; \* Difference significant at 5% level

The assessment of the importance of room facilities indicates that the analysed groups are different in their perception towards having TV and tea/coffee machines in the room, being more appreciated by tourists older than 35 (Table 8).

Room cleanliness is the most important factor for both groups (mean score greater than 4.6) even though results indicate a statistically significant difference between their assessments ( $p = 0.05$ ).

#### 4. Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the perception of tourists based on age groups shows interesting findings beneficial for hotel management purpose. The present study offers a detail assessment of the factors that affects the decision of customers on choosing the accommodation unit starting with general attributes and continuing with a detailed

evaluation of the room and accommodation facilities. Knowledge and understanding how customers choose the accommodation type, as well as their satisfaction towards what the accommodation offers is very important for the management of the units [15]. Besides, this research provides information to travel agencies to adapt and build tourism products based on the customers' needs and age groups. Although, the analysis of the last years indicates that there is an increasing demand and supply of tourism at seaside, there are still aspects, such as the understanding of tourists' needs, to be correlated in order to increase the occupancy rate.

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