Red Palm: exploring service quality and servicescape of the best backpacker hostel in Asia

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The Red Palm was voted the best backpacker’s hostel in Asia for 2006. This study explores the reasons behind this phenomenal achievement by examining service quality and servicescape of the establishment. Using NVIVO software, data from 192 website comments and eighteen in-depth interviews were content-analysed. The results show that the most important dimension of service quality experience with the Red Palm is tangibles, followed by empathy and assurance. The most important tangible elements of the Red Palm are facilities and equipment, location and the atmosphere of friendliness, welcome and homeliness, and cleanliness. The excellent staff elements include their courtesy, individualised attention and willingness to help. The paper also presents the illustration of Bitner’s ([1992]. Servicescapes: The impact of physical surroundings on customers and employees. The Journal of Marketing, 55(2), 57–71) servicescape framework in relation to the Red Palm.

Keywords: backpacker; service quality; servicescape; qualitative

Introduction

Backpacker tourism is now considered as one of the most important tourist markets to be targeted in Malaysia. According to the Ministry of Tourism (2008), backpackers in Malaysia stay considerably longer (27.6 nights) compared with the average 6.3 nights of all tourists. The spending patterns which largely benefit small local enterprises, in economically deprived areas, produce a more desirable economic multiplier effect. Researchers have looked into many aspects of economic development of backpacker tourism in the less developed countries (Hampton, 1998; Hamzah, 1997; Jarvis, 2004; Riley, 1988; Scheyvens, 2002; Spreitshofer, 2002; Visser, 2004). However, there is limited knowledge available currently in the aspect of service quality and servicescape of backpacker accommodation. The success of backpacker accommodation depends on the steady streams of backpackers patronising the establishment. The decision to stay, to return and to recommend to others is largely a function of excellent service quality and the provision of the servicescape which fulfil the needs and desires of backpackers. Delighted customers, according to Schneider and Bowen (1999) and Patterson (1997) are more likely to return, become loyal and they eventually contribute to more profitable

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