Contents lists available at SciVerse ScienceDirect

Journal of Destination Marketing & Management
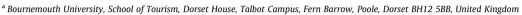
journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/jdmm

Research Paper

A cross national study of golf tourists' satisfaction

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was two-fold: firstly, it was to examine the determinant satisfaction levels of golf tourists and secondly to investigate if these vary across golf tourists' country of residence. Using data collected through a survey of golf tourists visiting Lisbon (Portugal), attributes directly related to playing golf as well as more generic destination attributes were examined as potential determinants of golf tourists' satisfaction. The data was analysed in two stages by the means of logistic regression. In stage one, the analysis was based on a representative sample of golf tourists to the region. In the second stage, two separate analyses were undertaken, one examining the satisfaction of Nordic golf tourists and another of British golf tourists (the two main markets for Lisbon). The results indicate that the satisfaction level of golf tourists is influenced by several factors, including those related to perceived quality and value. In addition, the results suggest that satisfaction is influenced by cross-cultural differences. While some determinants were important influences for both the British and the Nordic golfers, other determinants were specific to each country of origin.

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1. Introduction

In order to hold a strong competitive position, destinations are required to hold a balanced product portfolio. This involves developing existing products so that weaknesses are overcome, as well as developing new products so as to explore internal strengths and market opportunities. This might involve adopting a diversification strategy, which focuses on new products for new markets. Diversification strategies are usually associated with attempting to attract high value-added tourists in markets that are expected to grow (Schmallegger, Taylor, & Carson, 2011; Boukas & Ziakas, 2012). Golf tourism has been identified as one such market by many destinations because the golf tourist tends to earn higher levels of income when compared to more established tourist segments, which leads to higher average spending (MINTEL, 2006). In addition, golf tourism has been regarded as a means of reducing tourism seasonality, notably in destinations which are traditionally dependent on sun and sea tourism (Garau-Vadell & Borja-Sole, 2008; Boukas & Ziakas, 2012).

Portugal is an example of one country where golf tourism has achieved an important status. It is considered as a priority tourism product (Portuguese Tourism Board, 2007). According to

the Portuguese government, in 2006 the average spending per day of a golf tourist was approximately 260€ (Portuguese Tourism Board, 2007). A more recent study by the Lisbon Tourism Board concluded that golf tourists spent the largest amounts of money among all tourists visiting the Lisbon region (Netconsumo.com, 2011). At the same time, golf tourism has made a very important contribution to reduce the seasonality of destinations like the Lisbon Coast. If the city of Lisbon is removed from the analysis, the remainder of the Lisbon Coast is prone to seasonality since it relies more on the leisure market than on the business market (Lisbon Tourism Board, 2010). As the demand for golf tourism tends to be spread around the year, it provides these destinations with a reliable and attractive segment which fulfills vacant capacity in the low season periods.

With 24 golf courses, accounting for 32% of golf courses in the country (Portuguese Golf Federation, n.d), the Lisbon region has embraced golf as a strategic tourism product. Although the region maintains a steady growth in the number of rounds since the early 2000s, the occupancy rate of golf courses is lower than 40%, which indicates a substantial spare capacity of 60% (Lisbon Tourism Board, n.d). The growth in the number of golf courses over the years has not been accompanied by a growth in demand, with the average price per round decreasing since 2004 (Lisbon Tourism Board, 2009). Destinations whose growth has stalled despite substantial spare capacity face the challenge of increasing demand, either through a higher number of rounds and/or the average price per round. This can be achieved through longer

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stays, greater levels of re-visitation or new demand. Past research suggests high levels of satisfaction are a critical factor in influencing these outcomes (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Therefore, monitoring tourist satisfaction is an important step in implementing strategies aimed at improving the performance of tourist destinations through attempting to influence the levels of tourist satisfaction. This involves not only understanding golf tourists' level of satisfaction, but also those factors that contribute to their satisfaction. Therefore, this paper aims to analyse the determinants of golf tourist satisfaction, with a focus on tourists visiting the Lisbon region.

Enhancing our understanding of golf tourists' satisfaction requires exploring approaches and methodologies not used in previous studies. In this article, logistic regression is posited to be a valuable, yet still largely unused, statistical tool for examining golf (and sport) tourists' satisfaction. A second area of enquiry developed in this paper refers to the extent to which country of origin influences golf tourists' satisfaction. Previous studies within the tourism literature have attempted to examine the influence of culture on satisfaction, but the results have been inconsistent. Given the value of such information to destination marketing and management (Kozak, 2001), it is imperative that cross-cultural differences in golf tourists' satisfaction are examined.

2. Literature review

2.1. Satisfaction, quality and value

Satisfaction is a major construct in the field of tourism research, with many papers devoted to this topic. This reflects the importance of satisfaction for the management of tourist services, whether whole destinations or specific tourism providers such as hotels, airlines and visitor attractions. Much of this research attempts to examine what influences satisfaction. The assumption behind this focus is that by understanding what determines satisfaction, tourism managers will be in a better position to implement appropriate marketing strategies and tactics that will maximise levels of tourist satisfaction (Petrick, Morais, & Norman, 2001). The importance of studying satisfaction is enhanced once its consequences are recognised. Not only has the level of satisfaction been shown to be related to intention to return, but it is also indication of word-of-mouth behaviours (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). In a context where social media provides a platform for word-of-mouth information to many future travellers (Vermeulen & Seegers, 2009; Zehrer, Crotts, & Magnini, 2011), managing satisfaction should be a priority for any tourism manager.

Oliver (1997) defines satisfaction as an evaluation of a consumption event or its constituent parts. The study of satisfaction involves addressing two important issues: how satisfaction judgments are formed and what is evaluated. The first involves understanding the mental heuristics (or processes) used by consumers when evaluating an experience. The disconfirmation of expectations posits that consumers develop fairly specific expectations about the performance of the service, which are then compared to the actual performance (Szymanski & Henard, 2001). From comparing these two elements, consumers become dissatisfied (when actual performance does not match expectations) or satisfied (when performance is better than expectations). Such relationships assume that consumers have positive expectations about the experience. The disconfirmation of expectations heuristic has been employed in several tourist satisfaction studies (e.g. Baker & Crompton, 2000; Akama & Kieti, 2003). The performance heuristics emphasises the actual performance element

at the expense of expectations (Tse & Wilton, 1988). This is reflected in the use of scales like 'terrible-delighted' (e.g. Kozak & Rimmington, 2000) and 'very poor–very good (or excellent)' (e.g. Crompton, 2003; Song, van der Veen, Li, & Chen, 2012). Other heuristics include equity (Oliver & Swan, 1989) and social equity (Szymanski & Henard, 2001), the former reflecting a comparison between tourist inputs (sacrifices) and outputs (benefits), and the latter concerns the tourist's perception of the input–output relationship vis-a-vis other tourists. Apart from notions of value for money (e.g. Williams & Soutar, 2009) and price–quality relationship (e.g. Song et al., 2012), equity-based heuristics have not gained much traction in tourist satisfaction research.

With regards to the second important area of satisfaction research—what is evaluated—many determinants have been suggested in the tourism literature. Much of the literature focuses on the notion of value as the key influence on tourist satisfaction. For example, Lee, Petrick, and Crompton (2007) focused on perceived functional value, overall value and emotional value, while Williams and Soutar (2009) added the dimensions of social and novelty value. A recent study (Bradley & Sparks, 2012) offered a longer list of value dimensions, to include elements such as rest and relaxation, financial value, quality value, convenience and status and esteem. Other studies specifically focused on service quality, usually through the Servqual dimensions (e.g. Akama & Kieti, 2003; Hutchinson, Lai, & Wang, 2009). Additional perspectives on the determinants of satisfaction include brand equity (Nam, Ekinci, & Whyatt, 2011), the push/pull theory (Prayag & Ryan, 2012) and Pine and Gilmore's 4 realms of experience (Oh, Fiore, & Jeoung, 2007). In this study, both value and service quality were assumed to determine golf tourists' satisfaction, hence both areas are reviewed next.

According to Baker and Crompton (2000) quality differs from satisfaction in that the former measures a provider's output (how well the provider performs), while the latter measures the tourist's outcome. Delivering high quality services is a critical success factor for tourism destinations and organisations alike, since consumers' perceptions of the quality they receive influences their satisfaction (Knutson, Stevens, & Patton, 1995). The tourism literature has also found convincing evidence for the positive relationship between perceptions of quality and satisfaction (e.g. Baker and Crompton (2000)). Quality is usually conceptualised from a disconfirmation of expectations perspective (Baker & Crompton, 2000). Much of the literature has focused on the dimensions of service quality. The servqual model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1990), with its 5 quality dimensions, is perhaps the most widely used model. In tourism it has been used in different settings such as such as hotels (Ladhari, 2009), low cost carriers (Kim & Lee, 2002), destinations (Chand, 2010) and sport tourism (Kouthouris & Alexandris, 2005). With some minor variations, the five dimensions have been found to be important determinants of tourist satisfaction (Ladhari, 2009).

The perceptions of value have also been recognised as an important influence on overall satisfaction judgements (Chen & Chen, 2010). Two major perspectives on value have been offered over time. Several authors (e.g. Holbrook 1999; Woodall, 2003) define value as the benefit associated to the consumption of an object or experience. As Bradley and Sparks (2012, p. 191) summed up, for these authors value is viewed as "something consumers prise over other things". A different perspective associates value to a comparison between what the consumer receives and what it gives (Zeithaml, 1988). Thus, a major difference between the two perspectives is that the latter emphasises the comparison between the benefits and the sacrifices (Sánchez, Callarisa, Rodríguez, & Moliner, 2006), while the former notion of value places emphasis on the comparison between the benefits of the different offers. The study of value within the