

The Polish Tourists' Perceptions of the Resort Hotels in Georgia

Abuselidze George – Professor, Department of Finance, Banking and Insurance, Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi, Georgia

Johann Maria – Professor, Department of Business Administration, Warsaw School of Economics, Warsaw, Poland

Abstract

Introduction and aim: The paper presents the results of a secondary data analysis examining Polish tourists' perception of tourism product quality offered by the resort hotels in Georgia. The researchers examined data collected by Polish tour operators between 2015-2016 regarding tourists' satisfaction with the package holidays in Georgia. The package holidays to Georgia is a relatively new tourism product offered by travel agencies in Poland, however, more and more tourists show their interest in visiting Georgia. Assuming the further increase in the number of Polish travelers spending their holidays in Georgia, the analysis of tourists' opinions on tourism product quality will enable responding more effectively to customers' needs. The aim of the research study was to analyze tourists' comments and opinions regarding their holiday experience in the selected summer resort hotels in order to identify the positive experiences as well as the areas of tourists' discontent. The surveyed sample of tourists spent their summer holidays in the resort hotels located in Batumi. The total sample volume was 144 tourists. According to the research results some improvements could be recommended, including serving more diversified meals and providing more entertainment for tourists. Moreover, it is important to improve overall cleanliness, the sewage system and develop programs aimed at protection of the environment.

Research methodology: The primary objective of this study was to analyze Polish tourists' perception of the quality of tourism product offered by Georgian hotels located in the main summer resort. The research task included the identification of the quality gaps and areas of discontent with regard to the attributes valuable for tourists related to their holiday experience in the selected hotels located in Batumi. The analysis of the data in this study consisted of a qualitative analysis of the tourists' comments and opinions regarding their holiday experience. The researchers examined data collected by Polish tour operators between 2015-2016 regarding tourists' satisfaction with the package holidays in Georgia. The empirical data collection was an online questionnaire filled in by the respondents. The questionnaire was sent to the tourists after they returned from their holidays. Tourists who were willing to respond, filled out the questionnaire. Tourists' opinions concerning package holidays have been published on the tour operators' websites.

Results and implications: The analysis presented in this study includes tourists evaluations with regard to their summer holidays in Georgia in the summer resorts located in Batumi. 144 tourists' evaluations were carefully examined in order to identify good experiences as well as the areas of discontent. The qualitative analysis was based on the tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience in the selected hotels with respect to the main tourism product attributes, including: standard of rooms, location of the hotel, entertainment, customer service, meals, attractions and beaches located nearby.

The general opinions about the hotels were positive. In very many cases, the tourists perceive hotels as beautiful, comfortable, nice, clean, and well maintained with the unique design and interior decoration. Many tourists appreciated very nice, spacy, well equipped, and comfortable rooms. Serving a welcome drink (wine) upon arrival was a nice surprise for the hotel guests. Some visitors complained on the poor sewage system in the hotel, noise at night due to night clubs and discos open long hours, as well as on old and neglected equipment in the rooms and smoking in the hotel.

The location of the hotel, which refers to the environment of the hotel as well as the distance from the beach, was considered along with the attractions situated near the hotel and the quality of the local beaches. According to the opinions of many tourists, hotels are nicely situated in the vicinity of the beaches, close to attractions, including: cafes, restaurants, gift market, shops, shows, and performances. The hotel guests described the beach as stony, however, they appreciated free umbrellas and deck chairs available for tourists on the beach. Some visitors were disappointed with the uncleanliness of the beach due to trash, sewage to the sea and smell of oil.

Conclusion: Georgia is an attractive tourist destination for foreign visitors. Beautiful and diversified country, rich history and culture, hospitable and welcoming people, homely atmosphere, and delicious cuisine attract visitors from all over the world. Polish tourists usually spend their summer holidays in on of summer resorts located in Batumi area, choosing in the majority of cases four- and five-star hotels. Due to huge investment in tourism, Batumi presently offers modern infrastructure, many tourist attractions as well as good services for tourists.

The qualitative analysis of Polish tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience in the selected hotels enables to draw conclusions with regard to the positive experiences as well as the areas of discontent. The analyzed group of tourists appreciates the most: hotels, which are beautiful, comfortable, and nicely situated according to the opinions of many guests; friendly and helpful hotel personnel; very nice and spacy rooms; and delicious cuisine. Georgians are perceived as warm and hospitable people and the country as interesting and beautiful. The critical comments were related to: repetitive menu, unclean beach, poor sewage system, lack of hotel entertainment such as animation programs. Some guests perceived room furnishing as used and neglected and were annoyed with the noise at night.

The results of the analysis allow formulating recommendations for hotel owners, managers, as well as local authorities. Georgia is well known for delicious cuisine, wine, feasting, great atmosphere, and hospitable and welcoming people. Thus, it is important that tourists experience Georgian style while visiting this country. Serving more diversified meals, including Georgian specialties and wine is highly recommended. Additionally, organization of animations, evening programs, and other form of entertainment would significantly enhance customers' experience. Beautiful beaches and the seaside are crucial for the tourists' holiday experience; therefore, they should be cleaned and maintained daily. Moreover, it is necessary to improve overall cleanliness, the sewage system, and develop programs aimed at protection of the environment. In order to increase the number of tourists visiting Georgia, it is also important to put much effort in marketing communications and develop promotional campaign in Poland.

Keywords: hotel product attributes, product quality perception, qualitative analysis of tourists' perceptions.

Introduction

In tourism markets with enormous competition nowadays between tourism destinations and between resort hotels inside destinations one of the most significant problems for hotel marketers is to know the attributes that determine the accommodation choice of tourists and which attributes are perceived as most important while choosing a resort hotel. The empirical research in this subject area enables hotel marketers and managers to develop a relevant product policy by eliminating gaps between customer expectations and product quality perception. The recent studies show that the tourism product offered by the resort hotels should be regarded as a combination of various factors including: location of the hotel, standard of rooms, quality of customer service, quality and diversity of meals, animation programs offered to entertain the hotel guests, as well as attractions located in the vicinity of the hotel and quality of local beaches.

The paper presents the results of a secondary data analysis examining Polish tourists' perception of tourism product quality offered by Georgian hotels. The researchers examined data collected by Polish tour operators between 2015-2016 regarding tourists' satisfaction with the package holidays in Georgia. Georgia is not a typical travel destination for Polish visitors, however, the number of Polish travelers visiting Georgia has increased over last years.

Assuming the continuation of this trend, it is reasonable to analyze the Polish tourists opinions regarding their holiday experience in Georgia in order to respond more effectively to customers'

needs. The researchers decided to analyze the comments of Polish tourists who spent their summer holidays in the selected hotels located in Batumi, which is a popular travel destination. The aim of the research study was to identify the positive experiences as well as the areas of tourists' discontent. The results of the qualitative analysis of the tourists' comments and opinions regarding their holiday experience in the resort hotels are presented in the paper.

The characteristics of Poland outbound tourism

Polish participation in foreign trips has been constantly growing during last two decades, with Polish visitors present in all of the major world tourist destinations. The most visited countries by Polish tourists are: Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Greece, Czech Republic, Slovakia, France, and Spain. Typical tourist purposes usually account for a half of Polish foreign departures; stays with families and friends keep the level around 32%, while the share of business trips is about 10%. The majority of tourists uses their own means of transportation and arranges their visits individually. The summer holidays are the most popular time of the year for travelling, with the peak season falling in July and August. At this time, the majority of Poles travel on their own, however, more than 20% use travel agencies to purchase package holidays to visit popular summer resorts¹.

According to a survey conducted by easygo.pl², the most popular tourist destinations in 2015-2016 included: Greece - 32.02% of sales, Spain – 18,18%, Egypt – 14,57% Turkey - 9.91%, Bulgaria - 8%, Italy – 6,36% and other destinations - 10.96%. It is important to notice that the percentage of sales of package holidays to Georgia has increased over the last years, however, it is relatively small. Beside the analysis of the typical tourists destinations, further characteristics of Polish tourists preferences were described in the report, including: duration of stay, number of persons travelling together, means of transportation, and form of alimentation. 73.63% of customers decided to buy a 7-day package, while longer stays constituted respectively: 9.62% - 14-days packages, 6.77% - 8-days packages, and remaining stays - 10.07%. 57.00% of tourists traveled with one person, 2+1 option was selected by 17.10% travelers, 2+2 chose 8.90% of visitors, 3 chose 4.30%, and singles represented 4.00% of all tourists, and other cases - 8.70%. The majority of tourists decided to travel by plane which constituted 91.02% of all selected ways of transportation, while 5.67% traveled on their own - in

¹ Ministry of Sport and Tourism, www.turinfo.pl, accessed June 2017

² A survey was conducted on the basis of the sales analysis of the top tourism portals: EasyGo.pl and Wakacje.pl, www.easygo.pl, accessed June 2017.

majority of cases by cars and 3.31% by bus. All inclusive option remained the most popular form of alimentation, since it was selected by 62.61% of visitors. 23.69% decided to buy package holidays with a HB option, 2.74% - BB, and 4.73% chose no alimentation option. 44.23% of tourists decided to spend their holidays in 4-star hotels, 32.74% in three-star hotels, and 19.04% in 5-star hotels, and 4.00% in other types of accommodation.

Georgia as a tourist destination

Situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Georgia is a country ripe with diverse natural beauty, maritime and mountainous climates. Georgia has a rich history, and the country's folklore, traditions, dances and songs are unparalleled in their intrigue and beauty. Georgia is also renowned for its exquisite cuisine and wine culture. In fact, Georgia's winemaking traditions stretch back thousands of years. The 8000-year-old Georgian winemaking method uses a traditional clay vessel, called a Kvevri and Georgian polyphonic singing are both part of the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage List. Additionally, UNESCO recognizes the city of Mtskheta, Gelati Monastery, Bagrati Cathedral and Upper Svaneti as World Heritage Sites. Georgia is an up-and-coming tourist destination due to its vast tourism potential. The Rough Guide, a popular UK travel guide, listed Georgia as one of the most attractive tourist destinations for 2014.

One of the most beautiful regions in Georgia, Ajara is situated in southwest Georgia on the Black Sea coastline. Ajara operates as an autonomous republic in Georgia and has its own flag and coat of arms. Turkey borders Ajara to the south. Christianity started to spread throughout Georgia in the 1st cent. AD from Ajara, and it became the state religion in the 4th cent. AD. The apostles Andrew and Simon preached in Georgia. According to some sources, Matthew the Apostle was buried in Ajara in Gonio. Gionio-Apsaros fortress is also associated with famous mythos about Argonauts, who landed here to find Golden Fleece. Today, Ajara is home to a variety of religions. In the same day, you can visit Christian orthodox churches, mosques, synagogues, and Catholic and Armenian churches. In addition to religious monuments, Ajara has a myriad of unique arch stone bridges, which date back to the Middle Ages. Ajara is home to the picturesque beaches of Batumi, Kvariati, Sarpi, Gonio, Tsikhisdziri, Mtsvane Kontskhi (the Green Cape) and Kobuleti. During the summertime, the beaches are often crowded with tourists enjoying their holidays. Ajara's visitors especially admire the region's pristine and unaltered nature. The region is particularly intriguing for eco tourists. The coastline

of Ajara is a favorite destination among tourists visiting Georgia and is famous for its numerous resort areas. Ajara's coastline resorts are located within the municipalities of Batumi, Khelvachauri and Kobuleti.

Batumi - the "Pearl of the Black Sea" as it is often called - is administrative centre of Ajara. European architects undertook numerous projects in Batumi at the beginning of the 20th cent. Today, Batumi is still a place of numerous architectural innovations. Batumi is one of the most distinguished tourist destinations on the Black Sea. Batumi's juxtaposition of ancient and modern architecture, its historical port, serene botanical garden, Seaside Boulevard, European squares and streets - not to mention its world-class hotels, restaurants, cafes and bars - make up the face of modern Georgia. It is important to note that in 2012 American Academy of Hospitality Sciences nominated Batumi as the best tourist destination of the year. In the second half of the 20th century European architects flocked to Batumi and designed numerous unique architectural designs. Development of Batumi was closely connected with the global economic and industrial development. During this period Nobel Brothers and Rothschild family started their commercial activities (businesses) in Batumi. Batumi today is still distinguished by modern architecture and abundance of investments. In addition, modern Batumi is a cultural centre in Georgia hosting numerous international festivals with participation of famous musicians and artists³.

In 2016 International Tourism revenues has increased by 12 percent YOY and generated more foreign exchange income by USD 230 million. In January – April, 2017 the number of international arrivals in Georgia amounted to 1,776,719, showing an increase of 11.1 % compared to the same period of previous year. Out of the total number of visits, 736,265 lasted longer than 24 hours (+ 26.9%). The majority of foreign travelers were Azerbaijanian (+4.9%), Armenian (+14.6%), Turkish (-15.5%), Russian (+24.1%) and Iranian (+227.3%). A positive trend in arrivals was also observed among citizens of the European Union countries. A notable increase was registered of German +43%, Polish +30%, French +30%, British +26% and Lithuanian +25% travelers. Exceptional growth in arrivals was recorded of citizens of the following countries: Iran +227%, Uzbekistan +190%, India +140%, Saudi Arabia +116%, Israel +67% and Russia +24%. During the period of January – April, 138 countries recorded an increase in the number of international arrivals, which in figures amounted to 239,075. Top ten countries showing increase of more than 1,900 international arrivals registered cumulative

³ Georgian National Tourism Administration, www.gnta.ge , accessed 2017.

increase amounting to 205,410 (86% of total increase). In April, 2017 the number of international arrivals in Georgia amounted 510,594, representing a 10.2 % increase over the same period of 2016. In May, 2017 International Tourism revenues amounted to USD 203.7 million, 14% higher to the same period of 2016. In January-May international tourism revenues increased by 21.5% (USD 146 mln.) and amounted to USD 826 million⁴.

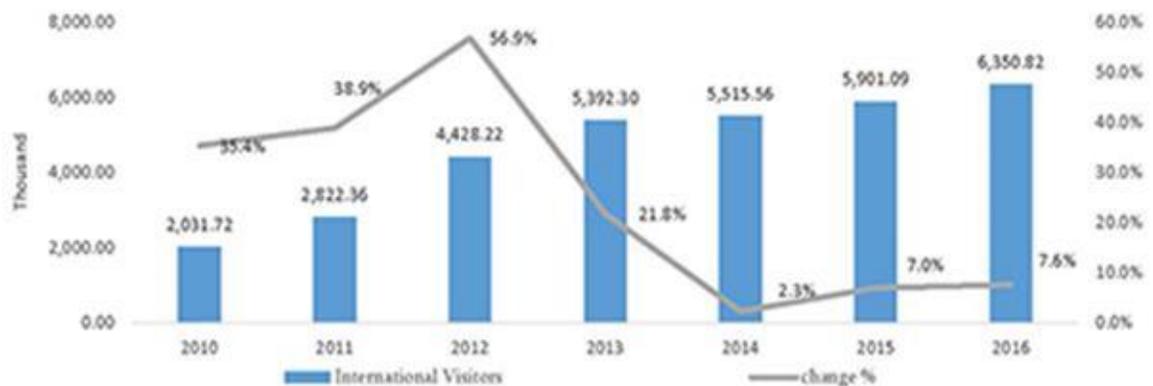
Tourism

International Tourism Receipts (mln USD)



Source: National Bank Of Georgia

International Visitors



Source: Georgian National Tourism Administration

In April, the majority of travelers were citizens of the following countries: Armenia (+13.2%), Azerbaijan (+7.1%), Turkey (-19.2%), Russia (+16.5%) and Ukraine (+27.2%). Out of the total number of visits, 222,622 lasted longer than 24 hours (increase +29.7%). A positive

⁴ Ministry of economy and sustainable development of Georgia, <http://www.economy.ge/?lang=en> , accessed 2017.

trend was also maintained of the nationalities of the European Union countries. Notable increase was registered of German +74%, British +51%, Lithuanian +43% and Polish +26% travelers. Exceptional growth in arrivals was recorded of citizens of the following countries: Uzbekistan +332%, Saudi Arabia +207%, Iran +184%, India +114%, Israel +57% and USA +34%. During this period, 130 countries recorded an increase in the number of international arrivals, which in total amounted to 70,090. Top ten countries showing increase of more than 1,000 international arrivals registered cumulative increase amounting to 54,830 (78% of total increase).

Research method

The primary objective of this study was to analyze Polish tourists' perception of the quality of tourism product offered by Georgian hotels located in the main summer resort. The research task included the identification of the quality gaps and areas of discontent with regard to the attributes valuable for tourists related to their holiday experience in the selected hotels located in Batumi. The analysis of the data in this study consisted of a qualitative analysis of the tourists' comments and opinions regarding their holiday experience. The researchers examined data collected by Polish tour operators between 2015-2016 regarding tourists' satisfaction with the package holidays in Georgia. The empirical data collection was an online questionnaire filled in by the respondents. The questionnaire was sent to the tourists after they returned from their holidays. Tourists who were willing to respond, filled out the questionnaire. Tourists opinions concerning package holidays have been published on the tour operators' websites.

Empirical results

The analysis presented in this study includes tourists evaluations with regard to their summer holidays in Georgia in the summer resorts located in Batumi. 144 tourists' evaluations were carefully examined in order to identify good experiences as well as the areas of discontent. The qualitative analysis was based on the tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience in the selected hotels with respect to the main tourism product attributes, including: standard of rooms, location of the hotel, entertainment, customer service, meals, attractions and beaches located nearby. 124 tourists out of 144 made detailed comments about their holiday experience. The most frequently repeated positive and negative tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience are presented in Table 1.

The general opinions about the hotels were positive. In very many cases, the tourists perceive hotels as beautiful, comfortable, nice, clean, and well maintained with the unique design and interior decoration. Many tourists appreciated very nice, spacy, well equipped, and comfortable rooms. Serving a welcome drink (wine) upon arrival was a nice surprise for the hotel guests. Some visitors complained on the poor sewage system in the hotel, noise at night due to night clubs and discos open long hours, as well as on old and neglected equipment in the rooms and smoking in the hotel.

The location of the hotel, which refers to the environment of the hotel as well as the distance from the beach, was considered along with the attractions situated near the hotel and the quality of the local beaches. According to the opinions of many tourists, hotels are nicely situated in the vicinity of the beaches, close to attractions, including: cafes, restaurants, gift market, shops, shows, and performances. The hotel guests described the beach as stony, however, they appreciated free umbrellas and deck chairs available for tourists on the beach. Some visitors were disappointed with the uncleanliness of the beach due to trash, sewage to the sea and smell of oil.

Table 1. The most repeated tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience

Positive comments	% of indications	Negative comments	% of indications
Nice, friendly, helpful hotel personnel	40.32	Repetitive menu	40.32
Nice, good, great location	35.48	Lack of entertainment in the hotel	17.74
Clean, nice, well maintained hotel	29.03	Trash on the beach, unclean sea	16.94
Delicious, very tasty meals	24.19	Poor sewage system in the hotel	11.29
Very nice, spacy, comfortable rooms	22.58	Construction near the hotel	8.87
Nice, attractive city	13.71	Smoking is not forbidden	8.06
Nice, friendly, hospitable people	12.90	Old equipment in the room	5.65
Beautiful country, nice countryside	12.10	Noise in the hotel (disco, club)	4.84
Good hotel infrastructure (fitness, wellness)	11.29	Lack of sport facilities	2.42
Nice beach, free umbrellas and deck chairs	8.06	Lack of Polish channels on TV	2.42
Nice atmosphere	8.06	Homeless dogs	2.42

Customer service is a significant component of the overall service experience. Professionalism, friendly attitude, communication skills, and good command of foreign languages are very important for a positive evaluation of customer service. Considering all the tourists' opinions regarding service personnel, positive comments prevailed and the hotel personnel was highly evaluated. The visitors noticed also that it was easy to communicate in English and in Russian. Moreover, welcoming attitude, friendliness, and hospitality of the hotel personnel was very often mentioned as an important advantage.

The quality and diversity of meals is also a very important part of a holiday experience, especially when tourists buy package holidays with the all-inclusive option. In general, Polish visitors appreciate Georgian cuisine, however, very many hotel guests complained about a repetitive menu. Some were astonished with the canned and frozen food served at meals and the limited selection of dishes and lack of Georgian dishes and specialties. Another critical comments were concerned with the lack of animation programs and other forms of entertainment organized for tourists. which is so important for creating nice and friendly atmosphere and having good time and fun.

Conclusions

Georgia is an attractive tourist destination for foreign visitors. Beautiful and diversified country, rich history and culture, hospitable and welcoming people, homely atmosphere, and delicious cuisine attract visitors from all over the world. Polish tourists usually spend their summer holidays in on of summer resorts located in Batumi area, choosing in the majority of cases four- and five-star hotels. Due to huge investment in tourism, Batumi presently offers modern infrastructure, many tourist attractions as well as good services for tourists.

The qualitative analysis of Polish tourists' comments regarding their holiday experience in the selected hotels enables to draw conclusions with regard to the positive experiences as well as the areas of discontent. The analyzed group of tourists appreciate the most: hotels, which are beautiful, comfortable, and nicely situated according to the opinions of many guests; friendly and helpful hotel personnel; very nice and spacy rooms; and delicious cuisine. Georgians are perceived as warm and hospitable people and the country as interesting and beautiful. The critical comments were related to: repetitive menu, unclean beach, poor sewage system, lack of hotel entertainment such as animation programs. Some guests perceived room furnishing as used and neglected and were annoyed with the noise at night.

The results of the analysis allow to formulate recommendations for hotel owners, managers, as well as local authorities. Georgia is well known for delicious cuisine, wine, feasting, great atmosphere, and hospitable and welcoming people. Thus, it is important that tourists experience Georgian style while visiting this country. Serving more diversified meals, including Georgian specialties and wine is highly recommended. Additionally, organization of animations, evening programs, and other form of entertainment would significantly enhance customers' experience. Beautiful beaches and the seaside are crucial for the tourists' holiday experience; therefore, they should be cleaned and maintained daily. Moreover, it is necessary to improve overall cleanliness, the sewage system, and develop programs aimed at protection of the environment. In order to increase the number of tourists visiting Georgia, it is also important to put much efforts in marketing communications and develop promotional campaign in Poland.

References

1. Ministry of Sport and Tourism, www.turinfo.pl, accessed June 2017.
2. A survey was conducted on the basis of the sales analysis of the top tourism portals: EasyGo.pl and Wakacje.pl, www.easygo.pl, accessed June 2017.
3. Georgian National Tourism Administration, www.gnta.ge , accessed 2017.
4. Ministry of economy and sustainable development of Georgia, <http://www.economy.ge/?lang=en>, accessed 2017.