

# TOURIST SATISFACTION WITH MAURITIUS AS A HOLIDAY DESTINATION

Perunjodi Naidoo, University of Technology Mauritius  
Prabha Ramseook-Munhurrin, University of Technology Mauritius  
Jeynakshi Ladsawut, University of Technology Mauritius

## ABSTRACT

*Tourist satisfaction is one of the most important concerns of competitive destinations as it considerably impacts on the tourist's choice of the holiday destination, and the decision to visit the destination in the future. As a result, tourist satisfaction is one of the most investigated topics in the field of tourism due to its role in the survival of a destination. Several studies have researched tourist satisfaction; however, there has been limited investigation of tourist satisfaction with small island holiday destinations. This paper reports the findings of a study carried out to determine tourist satisfaction with the holiday destination Mauritius, a small island situated in the Indian Ocean. The method used consisted of a questionnaire distributed at the international airport among 400 departing international tourists. Findings are analyzed and the implications are discussed.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Tourist satisfaction, destination, tourism, Mauritius

## INTRODUCTION

Mauritius, a small isolated island is performing relatively well as a tourism destination. Tourism has grown into one of the main pillars of the Mauritian economy. In 1973, international tourist arrivals amounted to 67, 994 and the figure rose by more than 10 times to reach 702, 818 in 2003 (Central Statistical Office, 2008). In February 2007, the number of visitors to the island was 72, 358 while in February 2008, a 7.5% increase was recorded representing 77, 763 visitors. In 2007, 906, 971 tourists visited the island and tourism receipts amounted to 40, 687 million rupees (approx. USD 1265 million) and provided direct employment to 26, 322 individuals (Central Statistical Office, 2008). However, due to the increasing number of existing and emerging destinations, it is important for Mauritius to remain competitive. Additionally, the economical conditions prevailing due to the current global financial crisis may impede on the growth of the industry. In order to maintain its competitive edge and continue to attract visitors, there is an increasing urgency for the destination to ensure that tourists are satisfied with the overall holiday experience as well as the specific range of products, services, events and activities available at the tourism destination. It is important to assess tourist satisfaction since various studies have shown the relationship between satisfaction and future purchase behavior (Juaneda, 1996; Kozak and Rimmington, 2000). Additionally, satisfied customers spread positive word-of-mouth recommendations about the destination to friends and relatives. Although several studies have measured customer satisfaction with tourism destinations, no studies were found on customer satisfaction with the destination Mauritius. Hence, this study aims to investigate tourists' satisfaction with this small island destination. Based on the analysis, the intention is to discuss if tourists are satisfied with the specific destination attributes as well as with their overall satisfaction with the destination. As a result, the destination can choose to redress the weak attributes to remain competitive on the international tourism map. This paper employs the following organization: Firstly, the literature on customer satisfaction is reviewed with a focus on tourism. Next, the method of data collection including questionnaire design and sampling is exposed. Finally, the results are presented and the article concludes with a discussion of the research findings and its implications.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Customer satisfaction is one of the most investigated topics in the tourism and hospitality industry due to its role in the survival and future of any tourism products and services (Gursoy, McCleary and Lepsito, 2003, 2007). Customer satisfaction considerably impacts on the tourist's choice of a holiday destination (Ahmed 1991), the consumption of products and services and the decision to visit the destination in the future (Stevens 1992). Studies have revealed that customer satisfaction is likely to produce positive behavioral intentions from customers such as positive word-of-mouth and repeat purchases (Saleh and Ryan, 1991; Barsky, 1992; Bojonc and Rosen, 1994; Yuksel, 2001; Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Gursoy, McCleary and Lepsito, 2003; Karatepe, 2006; Andaleeb and Conway, 2006; Neal and Gursoy, 2008). Other investigations have also revealed that it is highly likely that a dissatisfied customer will not return to a company, and that repeat purchases impact directly on the finances of a business given that obtaining a new customer costs more than keeping an existing one (Dube, Renaghan and Miller, 1994; Stevens, Knutson, and Patton, 1995; Oh and Mount, 1998). Hence, customer satisfaction results in the reduction of marketing costs (Haywood 1989; Rosenberg and Czepiel 1983) and achieving customer satisfaction is a cost-effective way to run a business (Murray, 1992).

Due to the imperative role of customer satisfaction, a great deal of research has focused on the topic (Yuksel, 2001). Customer satisfaction is defined as a psychological concept that involves the feeling of well-being and pleasure that results from obtaining what one hopes for and expects from an appealing product and/or service (WTO, 1985). Consumer satisfaction is therefore a post-consumption evaluation (Tse and Wilton, 1988) of the product or service received. It is also explained as a function of consumer perceptions (Neal and Gursoy, 2008). For example, customer satisfaction is synonymous of the perceived quality of products that are delivered to consumers (Vavra, 1997; Pizam and Ellis, 1999). Tourists as travelers experience products and services of several destinations, and their perceptions of a holiday destination is influenced by comparing the different facilities, attractions and level of service (Laws 1995). However, understanding and measuring customer perceptions is extremely complex as each individual has unique perceptions. Furthermore, measuring customer perceptions is even more challenging for a destination due to the characteristics of the tourism product. The latter is considered as a complicated phenomenon as it consists of a range of attributes, which makes it complex to describe and evaluate. According to Echtner and Ritchie (1993), a destination consists of a combination of tangible (i.e. ecotourism activities) and intangible attributes (i.e. hospitality of locals). Research indicates that several components of the destination contribute to tourist satisfaction such as destination services, recreational facilities, cultural tours, hotel services, restaurant services and host culture (Yuksel, 2001). Other attributes such as the destination's natural environment, local culture and climate also affect tourist satisfaction (Pizam, Neumann and Reichel, 1978). Yuksel and Yuksel (2001: 337) argue that 'various positive and negative experiences may occur as a result of [customer] interactions with these components [attributes], and it is the cumulative effect that will ultimately determine the tourists' overall evaluation of the experience'. Hence, it is important to measure tourist satisfaction with individual destination attributes as well as tourists' overall satisfaction with the holiday destination. Assessing individual attributes will help detect areas of strengths or shortfalls within the destination.

Customer satisfaction has been examined in a multitude of empirical and conceptual investigations within the marketing literature (Oliver, 1980; Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985; Gronroos, 1990; Cronin and Taylor, 1992). A review of the customer satisfaction literature exposes numerous studies that have been carried out in tourism-related areas such as accommodation (Saleh and Ryan, 1991; Barsky, 1992; Barsky and Labagh, 1992; Bojanic, 1996; Karatepe, 2006), restaurants (Fick and Ritchie, 1991, Bojonc and Rosen, 1994; Dube, Renaghan and Miller, 1994; Gursoy, McCleary and Lepsito, 2003; Andaleeb and Conway, 2006); destinations (Chon and Olsen 1991; Yuksel, 2000; Kozak and Rimmington, 2000; Neal and Gursoy, 2008); tours (Ross and Iso-Ahola, 1991; Hughes, 1991; Hsieh, O'Leary and Morrison, 1994; Reisinger and Warysak, 1995). The literature depicts that most widely used model within the customer

satisfaction literature is the disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver 1980, 1981, 1989, 1993; Swan and Trawick, 1981; Oliver and Bearden, 1985; Oliver and Burke, 1999). After using the service, consumers compares their perceptions of the actual performance with their expectations (Neal and Gursoy, 2008). Consumers are likely to have a positive confirmation if the performance is superior to their expectations, implying that consumers are highly satisfied and will be more willing to purchase the same service in the future. On the other hand, if the actual performance is worse than expectations, consumers are likely to have a negative disconfirmation, where consumers will be dissatisfied. In this situation, consumers will not become loyal to the organization and are likely to look for alternative products for their next purchase (Neal and Gursoy, 2008). Previous studies on tourist satisfaction indicate that there is no agreement on when to measure satisfaction (Kozak and Rimmington, 2000). Some researchers have compared pre-holiday expectations with post-holiday perceptions (Duke and Persia, 1996) and others have collected data during the holiday (Gate and Phelps, 1989). The present study measures tourist satisfaction before the departure of tourist by assessing their opinions at the departure lounge of the airport.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The quantitative method was selected for the study though the use of a questionnaire as it was a suitable way to reach a geographically dispersed audience at a relatively low cost. A one sheet survey was administered to a sample of 400 international tourists. The convenience sampling method was used where customers were approached at the departure lounge of the international airport during the period of March to April 2008. A pilot test was carried out among 30 tourists in well known tourist spots in the capital city and on public beaches. Following this exercise, the layout of the questionnaire was changed from three A4 pages to one A4 sheet questionnaire as the appearance of the instrument discouraged respondents as length was an issue. The questionnaire was therefore printed on both sides of an A4 paper. It also comprised of a short covering letter, and directions on how to fill the questionnaire. Questions 1-5 related to the background of tourists, questions 6-7 enquired about the expectations and the performance of the destination attributes. A list of 18 destination attributes was provided to tourists where they were asked to provide ratings on a 5-point Likert Scale. The last question was open-ended and sought to gather data regarding improvements to be made to enhance the satisfaction of tourists with the destination.

## **RESULTS**

Out of the 400 questionnaires distributed, 339 were found usable for the study representing a response rate of 85%. Table 1 depicts the nationalities of the respondents. It can be noted that the largest segment came from the United Kingdom (37.4%), followed by South Africa (26.4%), Australia (21.4%) and France (12.1%) and this is primarily due the high frequency of flights departing for these countries at the time the survey was carried out.

43.7% of the respondents stayed in 4-star hotels and 37.2 % in 5-star hotels while only 5.9% resided in 3-star hotels. 13.2% of respondents stayed in non-hotel accommodation such as bungalows and flats. Among the nine different nationalities surveyed, it was found that most of the Australians, South Africans and British tourists preferred 4-star and 5-star hotels whereas most of the French tourists stayed in 3-star and non-hotel accommodation. This could be because the French tourists have close cultural ties with Mauritius including language. Due to these factors, French tourists feel comfortable to visit the destination as independent tourists and do not require the extensive facilities offered on the premises of luxurious hotels.

The length of stay for the majority of tourists (37.1%) was 5-10 days, followed by 28% who stayed for more than 15 days, 27.3 % stayed for 11-15 days and 7.6% visited the destination for less than 5 days. Since Mauritius is a long-haul destination and the prices of airline tickets are relatively expensive, most

tourists stay for more than 5 days as a shorter vacation would not be worth the trip. Additionally, it was found that 76.4 % of the visitors were motivated to travel for leisure purposes, 20.3 % travelled to visit friends and relatives (VFR) while 3.3% travelled for business. It can be noted that none of the respondents travelled for health purposes although Mauritius promotes Medical Tourism. 59.9% of tourists were on their first visit to Mauritius while 40.1 % were repeat visitors.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics (n=339)

		Frequency	Percentage
Country of Respondents	United Kingdom	126	37.4
	South Africa	89	26.2
	Australia	73	21.4
	France	41	12.1
	Switzerland	5	1.4
	China	2	0.6
	Italy	1	0.3
	Malaysia	1	0.3
	Germany	1	0.3
Accommodation	3-star hotel	20	5.9
	4-star hotel	148	43.7
	5-star hotel	126	37.2
	Non-hotel	45	13.2
Length of Stay	Less than 5 days	26	7.6
	5-10 days	126	37.1
	11-15 days	92	27.3
	More than 15 days	95	28
Purpose of Travel	Leisure	259	76.4
	Visiting Friends & Relatives	69	20.3
	Business	11	3.3
Number of Visits	1	203	59.9
	2	32	9.5
	3-5	60	17.8
	6-10	30	8.7
	More than 10	14	4.1

*Table 1 depicts tourists' characteristics with regard to their country of residence, accommodation, length of stay, purpose of travel and number of visits. The majority of tourists were from United Kingdom. Most of the tourists stayed in 4-star hotels, their stay was for a period of 5-10 days, their purpose of visit was for leisure and most of the tourists surveyed visited Mauritius for the first time.*

The length of stay for the majority of tourists (37.1%) was 5-10 days, followed by 28% who stayed for more than 15 days, 27.3 % stayed for 11-15 days and 7.6% visited the destination for less than 5 days. Since Mauritius is a long-haul destination and the prices of airline tickets are relatively expensive, most tourists stay for more than 5 days as a shorter vacation would not be worth the trip. Additionally, it was found that 76.4 % of the visitors were motivated to travel for leisure purposes, 20.3 % travelled to visit friends and relatives (VFR) while 3.3% travelled for business. It can be noted that none of the respondents travelled for health purposes although Mauritius promotes Medical Tourism. 59.9% of tourists were on their first visit to Mauritius while 40.1 % were repeat visitors.

Tourists were asked to rate the expectations of the destination attributes on a Likert Scale (1 *strongly disagree* - 5 *strongly agree*). The highest mean value related to “quality of hotels”, “peaceful environment”, “attractive beaches”, “reasonable price” with mean expectations values of 4.99, 4.76, 4.74 and 4.7 respectively (Table 2). These were followed by “sunny and warm weather” and “friendliness of

locals” with mean values of 4.64 and 3.91. The lowest score for expectations was obtained by “medical facilities” (2.02).

Table 2: Performance Mean, Expectations Mean and Gap Scores

Destination Attributes	Performance Mean (P)	Expectations Mean (E)	Gap Scores	t-values
Cultural and historical sites	3.63	2.22	1.41	4.22
Ecotourism and nature trails	3.74	2.66	1.08	1.97
Sunny and warm weather	4.55	4.64	-0.09	-2.17
Family activities	4.05	2.73	1.32	2.11
Attractive beaches	4.39	4.74	-0.35	-3.03
Friendliness of Locals	4.40	3.91	0.49	2.36
Gastronomy	4.21	3.89	0.32	2.20*
Festivals, events and handicrafts	3.63	2.14	1.49	2.51
Medical facilities	3.00	2.02	0.98	4.38*
Nightlife entertainment	4.05	2.96	1.09	2.17
Peaceful Environment	4.55	4.76	-0.21	-2.76
Quality of hotels	4.55	4.99	-0.44	-5.13
Reasonable price	4.40	4.70	-0.3	-0.51*
Safety and security	4.23	3.65	0.58	3.74
Shopping facilities	4.10	2.35	1.75	5.20
Spa facilities	4.12	2.40	1.72	4.76
Mix of cultures	4.27	3.13	1.14	2.36
Sports facilities	4.09	2.29	1.8	2.40
Total	73.96	60.18	13.78	
<b>Overall Mean Scores</b>	<b>4.11</b>	<b>3.34</b>	<b>0.77</b>	<b>4.85</b>

Table 2 shows the mean scores for the actual performance, expectations and the difference between the performance and expectations, known as gap, for the 18 attributes used to assess tourist satisfaction in a small island destination. The t-values are significant at  $p < 0.005$ ; \* not significant. The Gap Scores for each attribute is calculated by subtracting Expectations from Performance Mean Scores.

Table 2 also reveals the performance of the destination attributes as perceived by the customers during their visit. The mean scores for performance and expectations are shown for each of the 18 attributes. In addition, a paired-samples t-test was run to evaluate where mean performance scores differed significantly from mean importance scores. The two-tailed significance tests reveal that these differences are significant at the level of 1% ( $p < 0.005$ ) on 15 of the 18 attributes examined. Respondents found that the following attributes performed better than others: “sunny and warm weather”, “peaceful environment” and “quality of hotels” with scores of 4.55 each. Other attributes which were well perceived by tourists were “reasonable price”, “friendliness of locals” and “attractive beaches” with performance scores of 4.4, 4.4 and 4.39 respectively. Attributes such as “spa facilities”, “shopping facilities”, “sports facilities”, “family activities”, “nightlife entertainment” and “festivals, events and handicrafts” were rated with mean scores between 4.12 and 3.63. “Medical facilities” had the lowest mean of 3.00. However as illustrated in Table 2, the attributes “gastronomy”, “reasonable price” and “medical facilities” were not statistically significant.

The gap score for each of the 18 destination attributes was calculated by subtracting the expectations scores from the performance scores (P-E). The largest positive gap was identified for “shopping

facilities” (1.75), “spa facilities” (1.72), “cultural and historical sites” (1.41) which reveal that tourists are satisfied to a higher extent with these attributes. Among the 18 destination attributes, 5 attributes obtained negative gap scores showing that these features of the destination are performing below expectations: “quality of hotels” (-0.44), “reasonable price” (-0.3), “peaceful environment” (-0.21), “attractive beaches” (-0.35) and “sunny and warm weather” (-0.09). The study also investigated tourist overall satisfaction with the destination by subtracting the overall mean score for expectations (3.34) from the overall mean score of performance (4.11). The overall tourist satisfaction with the destination was positive as the overall gap score was 0.77.

The open-ended questions probed into factors which could improve the overall satisfaction of tourists during their visit. It was found that an important factor concerned the state of the physical environment as tourists found that the destination was not performing well in terms of preserving this asset. For example, hawkers based around the market in the capital city leave the remains of their food product and packaging which spoil the appearance of the area. Tourists also found that there was litter on public beaches. Repeated visitors mentioned that the lagoons were not well preserved as they found that the corals and amount of fish have deteriorated as compared to their previous visits. The interaction of tourists and locals was a factor which affected tourist satisfaction with the destination. For example, a few tourists claimed that hawkers were sometimes aggressive and forced them to purchase items that they did not wish to buy. Additionally, prices of products were perceived as expensive, including the tariff charged by taxis. In terms of infrastructure, it was found that tourists did not appreciate the congested roads. Mauritian drivers were found to be impolite and the speed limit was not respected. The road signage along connecting roads was not clear and independent visitors could easily get lost. Tourists also commented that certain museums were old and not very interesting. Finally, tourists did not appreciate rainy days as they were compelled to undertake indoor activities at the hotels and thus could not visit the attractions as per their plans.

## CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals that both first time and repeat tourists were satisfied with the destination and this includes those travelling for leisure, VFR and business. The data collected provided important information regarding tourist satisfaction at the destination under scrutiny. The expectancy-disconfirmation model (Oliver, 1980) used in the study has investigated tourist satisfaction across 18 destination attributes as well as overall satisfaction with the destination. Positive disconfirmation arose with the destination because the outcomes were superior to the expectations of tourists. Tourist satisfaction with individual destination attributes reveal that 13 attributes were positively disconfirmed. The highest positive disconfirmation occurred with “shopping facilities”, “spa facilities” and “cultural and historical sites”. It is believed that tourists were satisfied with these attributes as the gap scores were positive. However, these results could be explained by lower expectations scores obtained for these attributes as they have only been promoted during recent years. Hence, customers were more likely to have lower expectations as these were not core attributes which position the destination and which impact on tourists’ expectations. On the other hand, 5 destination attributes were negatively disconfirmed as they fall below the expectations of tourists. These attributes were “quality of hotels”, “reasonable price”, “peaceful environment”, “attractive beaches” and “sunny and warm weather”. Although negative disconfirmation occurs, it is important to note that these attributes fall below expectations of consumers (<0.5) to a little extent indicating that tourists were only slightly dissatisfied. Tourist dissatisfaction could be further explained by the open-ended answers where they stated that the environment of the destination is unclean including the beaches and the destination is lagging behind with regards to protecting the environment. Additionally the traffic and congested road may spoil the “peaceful environment” of the destination. A few tourists also mentioned that on some occasions, they were charged high prices which may explain the dissatisfaction with “quality of hotels” and “reasonable price”. Furthermore, since tourist brochures and advertising always portray a “sunny and warm climate”, this is likely to raise the

expectations of customers. Therefore, when tourists encountered rainy days, the outcome associated with the attribute “sunny and warm climate” was lower than their enhanced expectations. This study has helped to identify the weak attributes of the destination. Particular attention should be paid to improve the destination and satisfy tourists so that they are motivated to travel long distances to visit this small island destination despite of the existence of competing destinations as well the threat of the global financial crisis. Future studies could investigate the impacts of tourist satisfaction on their behavioral intentions.

**APPENDIX: QUESTIONNAIRE**

Directions: Please write down your answers in the space provided or place a tick in the box where appropriate.

1. Nationality:.....
2. Gender: Male  Female
3. Is it your first visit to Mauritius? Yes  No   
 If No, how many times have you visited Mauritius before?  
 (i) Once  (ii) 2-4  (iii) 5-10  (iv) More than 10
4. What type of accommodation did you stay in during your visit to Mauritius?  
 (i) 3- star hotel  (ii) 4- star hotel  (iii) 5- star hotel   
 (iv) Others  (Please specify).....
5. What was the length of stay of your visit?  
 (i) Less than 5 days  (ii) 5 -10 days  (iii) 11-15 days  (iv) More than 15 days
6. What motivated you to travel?  
 (i) Leisure /recreation holidays  (ii) Visiting friends and relatives  (iii) Business   
 (iv) Others  (Please specify).....
7. Please rate what you expected in terms of performance from the following attributes prior to your visit to Mauritius. 1=Extremely Poor, 2= Poor, 3=Neither Poor nor Excellent, 4=Good, 5=Excellent

Attributes	Expected Performance				
	1	2	3	4	5
Cultural and historical sites					
Ecotourism and nature trails					
Sunny and warm weather					
Family activities					
Attractive beaches					
Friendliness of Locals					
Gastronomy					
Festivals, events and handicrafts					
Medical facilities					
Nightlife entertainment					
Peaceful environment					
Quality of hotels					
Reasonable price					
Safety and security					
Shopping facilities					
Spa facilities					
Mix of culture					
Sports facilities					

8. Please indicate the performance of the following attributes during your visit to Mauritius. 1=Extremely Poor, 2= Poor, 3=Neither Poor nor Excellent, 4=Good, 5=Excellent

Attributes	Performance Level				
	1	2	3	4	5
Cultural and historical sites					
Ecotourism and nature trails					
Sunny and warm weather					
Family activities					
Attractive beaches					
Friendliness of Locals					
Gastronomy					
Festivals, events and handicrafts					
Medical facilities					
Nightlife entertainment					
Peaceful environment					
Quality of hotels					
Reasonable price					
Safety and security					
Shopping facilities					
Spa facilities					
Mix of culture					
Sports facilities					

9. According to you, what improvements need to be carried out to enhance your satisfaction with Mauritius as a holiday destination?

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Perunjodi Naidoo is a lecturer in Tourism at the University of Technology, Mauritius. Her main research interests include Sustainable Tourism and Service Quality. Email: pnaidoo@utm.intnet.mu

Prabha Ramseook-Munhurrun is a lecturer in Services Management at the University of Technology, Mauritius. Her research interests focus on Services Marketing, Service Quality and Tourism. Email pmunhurrun@utm.intnet.mu

Jeynakshi Ladsawut is a former undergraduate student at the University of Technology, Mauritius.