

SPECIAL FEATURE

Keeping more local customers satisfied

An SMU study shows that hotels and restaurants in Singapore drew higher ratings from local customers in Q3 2017

THE taste of success has infused both the tourism and food and beverage (F&B) sectors in Singapore, as local customers' satisfaction ratings rose in relation to restaurants as well as hotels. Tourists' ratings remained statistically unchanged, while continuing to reflect higher ratings than locals.

Those were the findings from the 2017 third-quarter Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG) for the Food & Beverage and Tourism Industries released by Singapore Management University's (SMU) Institute of Service Excellence (ISE) at the industry forum held on Nov 29.

The data, based on a study conducted between July and October this year, drew responses from 3,035 local residents and 3,865 tourists. It showed a marked increase in Singaporeans' satisfaction in both restaurants and hotels.

Year-on-year results showed that the restaurants sub-sector scored 71.5 points, a 2.5 per cent increase, while hotels achieved 74.4 points, up 1.88 points, a 2.6 per cent rise.

The CSISG is a landmark study that computes customer satisfaction scores at the national, sector, sub-sector and company levels, and produces an objective and comprehensive assessment of Singapore's service quality.

Service that matters

"For the restaurants and fast food sub-sectors, locals reported statistically higher satisfaction ratings for attributes such as 'menu options to suit your needs', 'quality of food' and 'ability to accommodate to your needs' this year compared to the same period last year," said Neeta Lachmandas, executive director of the ISE.

Innovation and the increased use of available technology, including the development of more innovative menu options with a wider price range, could have been contributing factors, said Ms Lachmandas.

She pointed out that digital applications could be used to make the reservation process easier and more ef-



Service sector leaders and representatives at the Institute of Service Excellence Industry Forum held at Picnic, Wisma Atria. PHOTOS: SMU-ISE

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Thomas Goh, chief client officer and managing director, Asia Pacific, Center for Creative Leadership

cient, as well as streamline the ordering process. This may then enable service staff to perform higher-value work, like making menu recommendations, interacting with customers, or seeing to their specific needs and requests.

For fast food restaurants, cafes and coffee houses, perceived waiting times in excess of 10 minutes contributed to lower satisfaction scores.

According to Chen Yongchang, head of research and consulting at ISE, "Given that the issue of waiting time was found to be a common driver of both perceived quality and loyalty, F&B operators would do well to bear this in mind when designing their service processes."

While the overall Attractions sub-sector did not see any significant

movement in satisfaction, locals were more satisfied this year than in 2016.

Keeping customers loyal

Singaporeans rated attributes such as "entertainment and/or educational value of the attraction", "cleanliness of the attraction" and "friendliness and courtesy of the staff" higher. In addition, locals who visited the attraction with their families were found to have higher loyalty scores as compared to those who either went alone or with other companions.

"When considering local customers, Attractions may wish to consider targeting this segment given that this was the largest segment among locals, and the most loyal," said Mr Chen.

To keep customers coming back, operators will have to ensure that the "value proposition of these attrac-



Neeta Lachmandas (left) pointed out that digital applications could be used to make the reservation process easier and more efficient, as well as streamline the ordering process in the F&B sector. Chen Yongchang (right) said that waiting time at food outlets was found to be a common driver of both perceived quality and customer loyalty.

tions" remains relevant and attractive.

Know what's important

The issue of leadership style and its direct relevance to the broader industry sectors covered in the survey was addressed by the forum's keynote speaker Thomas Goh, chief client officer and managing director, Asia Pacific, of the Center for Creative Leadership.

He said: "These days, it is more about an overall experience. If employees are not engaged, they are not going to deliver superior customer service."

"It is important to pass on this range of leadership skills. Increasingly, there are more and more people (in the workforce) for whom there is a societal component towards their work, and this is far more meaningful than just collecting a salary."

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On being future-ready, Mr Goh cited the importance of assessing and evaluating final outcomes as key to promote an efficient workflow.

He added: "Assessing your key selling point is all-important. Is it experience, is it efficiency or is it something else?"

A major factor in the process, according to Mr Goh, was continuous evaluation. "It is the role of supervisors to help people to learn from the previous day's lessons," he said, underlining the need to review and assess daily operations to maximise the opportunities for improvement.

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