

**Satisfying the guests:**  
*Despite their scores falling, most hotels remain optimistic about the future*



## Hotels move to improve service as their scores dip

### Tourist considerably less satisfied with hotels this year than last year: survey

THE shortage of manpower, a result of tightened labour conditions, has left many hotels with less satisfied customers, according to a recent survey conducted by the Institute of Service Excellence at Singapore Management University (ISES).

The hotels sector recorded the biggest drop in customer satisfaction scores on the Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG), scoring 70.1 points, 5.9 per cent lower than in 2011.

Other sectors that were surveyed for the CSISG include tourist attractions, fast-food restaurants, cafes and snack bars, and food courts.

Among the hotels, Grand Hyatt saw customer satisfaction scores dipping the most from 79.9 points in 2011 to 72.8 points this year.

According to Grand Hyatt's spokesman, the hotel has engaged in various measures to improve productivity as a result of the manpower crunch.

One of these measures includes expanding its pool of part-time employees so as to encourage more Singaporeans to come on board.

The hotel has also developed an executive programme to ensure that locals are retained and remain attracted to working with the hotel.

Other improvements include incorporating more technologically advanced devices such as passport scanners at the front desk to reduce waiting time.

These measures are al-

ready bearing fruit, according to the hotel's internal audit system which reflected an improvement in customer satisfaction.

Other hotels, such as the Royal Plaza on Scotts, have created new cross-department service positions to allow the workload to be shared across the housekeeping and F&B departments as part of its productivity measures.

Additionally, all departments, including the general manager's office, are chipping in to help with the manpower crunch by doing housekeeping for their own offices.

According to the Royal Plaza on Scotts' spokesman, the initiative has saved the housekeeping department more than 20 hours a week.

She added: "The hotel strives to overcome the labour crunch by working together as an organisation on the whole and by extending wholehearted understanding to each other. Through this, our housekeeping colleagues feel appreciated and recognised for their work which helps the hotel in staff retention since this is essential over the long haul of the labour crunch."

The CSISG survey, which is conducted annually, also found that it were the tourist respondents, as opposed to locals, who were considerably less satisfied with hotels this year compared to last year.

According to the ISES, this was due to a significant year-on-year decline in the tourists' perceived quality of hotels.

"The tourists' frame of reference on what constitutes a high-quality service may have changed. Business must look beyond their service model and seek to understand their customers and external

landscape better," explained ISES academic director and SMU assistant professor of marketing (practice) Marcus Lee.

However, Prof Lee cautioned companies against using these findings to suppress tourists' expectations in the hope that service delivery exceeds expected quality.

"This strategy is flawed as customers will approach the service with a negative mindset, looking for service failures to confirm their negative preconceived notions," said Prof Lee.

The results from the survey also alluded to the fact that high customer expectation scores are associated with high levels of customer satisfaction.

As such, Caroline Lim, director of the ISES said: "The higher-performing CSISG companies effectively deploy the three drivers of satisfaction, namely customer expectations, perceived quality, and perceived value, to further advance their customer satisfaction through communication and branding, and improved operations processes."

Although all hotels recorded a dip in customer satisfaction scores, most remain optimistic about the future and expressed commitment towards incorporating more productivity measures to ensure customers remain satisfied.

"We remain focused on attracting the right talent while simultaneously boosting and innovating learning and development efforts to meet the needs for our ladies and gentlemen," commented Peter Mainguy, general manager of The Ritz Carlton whose hotel recorded a dip of 7.3 per cent in customer satisfaction scores this year.

By **ZEINAB YUSUF SAIWALLA**