

Attractions here vie for local visitors

But Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore shows local satisfaction for attractions on average fell 6.6% from a year ago. **BY CHAN YI WEN**

THE faltering number of tourist arrivals in Singapore has sent attraction businesses here scrambling to capture a larger slice of the local market. From June to October 2014, Singapore's tourist numbers fell 3.3 per cent compared to the same period in 2013, data from the Singapore Tourism Board revealed.

This is sure to place a dent on the city-state's tourist hot spots, including Sentosa and Universal Studios Singapore (USS), which accrues majority of its revenues from tourist visitors. In fact, USS has revealed that more than 70 per cent of its visitors are tourists.

To make up for lost tourist revenues, these attractions are becoming increasingly dependent on local customers and working hard at refreshing offerings to attract more local visitors.

Sentosa has launched a slew of initiatives to cater to local visitors. In November 2014, it opened Madame Tussauds Singapore, and the following month, it relaunched Images of Singapore Live which showcases Singapore's colonial story.

This year, Sentosa will also be unveiling KidZania Singapore and the Intra-Island Cableway – attractions it expects will cater to various groups of guests, and will expand two popular programmes – Sentosa Buskers and PLAYcation.

Sentosa will also introduce new hawker stalls at Palawan Beach to meet guests' needs for more local and affordable food & beverage offerings. USS is gravitating towards the same trajectory. This year, the theme park plans to reopen the Battlestar Galactica ride and introduce Puss In Boots' Giant Journey, a coaster ride themed after the popular franchise which USS believes will cater to both families and thrill-seekers.

USS will also build on its year-round signature events including Easter celebrations and the Halloween Horror Nights, and will launch new campaigns to commemorate Singapore's 50th anniversary (SG50). But new offerings may not be enough to keep the local visitors coming.

Last year, local satisfaction for attractions in Singapore on average fell 6.6 per cent from a year ago, the latest Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG) revealed. Over the same period, both local and tourist satisfaction for Sentosa and USS fell 8.3 per cent and 10.3 per cent respectively.

Significant takeaway

Jointly developed by the Institute of Service Excellence at the Singapore Management University (ISES) and the Workforce Development Authority, CSISG is a joint landmark measure of customer satisfaction in eight core economic sectors of Singapore, including more than 30 sub-sectors. This year's survey data for the attractions sub-sector was collected between June and September 2014, and gathered about 250 responses for each company. Both Sentosa and USS fall under this sub-sector.

Another significant takeaway is that local satisfaction of attractions is increasingly driven by how their actual experience ties up with the expectations they held of the attraction prior to the visit.

In 2014, 26 per cent of local satisfaction was derived from customer expectations, 37 per cent from perceived value and 36 per cent from perceived quality. It's a striking contrast from 2013's results, when customer expectations contributed only 9 per cent to local satisfaction, while perceived quality contributed a significant 55 per cent.

Customer expectations refer to the predicted experience a visitor to the attraction will presume even before he/she visits the actual attraction, according to CSISG. It is influenced by previous experiences and external cues



As part of its initiatives to cater to local visitors, Sentosa will this year unveil KidZania Singapore (above) and the Intra-Island Cableway. PHOTO: KIDZANIA SINGAPORE

from family, friends and the attractions' public branding and image.

"Experience begins before the actual visit," Marcus Lee, academic director of ISES, told *The Business Times*. "This means attractions need to pay more attention to what kind of messaging they are putting out. If the customer's expectations falls in line with their actual experience, they will largely be more satisfied, you cannot overcome this just by having a good experience."

Qualitative research

A fall in satisfaction levels can do damage to the attractions' reputation, which affects the customer's decision to revisit in the future, or whether to recommend the attraction to their network, Dr Lee warned. He suggested attractions to better integrate their customer insights and marketing divisions to create advertisements that tie in with actual experiences.

"Right now, many of these companies have two separate divisions with siloed key performance indicators (KPIs)," he said. "Joint KPIs would be a very big step towards solving this problem."

He also suggested for the customer insights division to build on CSISG's data through qualitative research. "CSISG's quantitative results will hint at problems or opportunities in certain areas, but it doesn't give you the full answer. You have to go down to the ground to under-

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stand customers and investigate what could be wrong," he said.

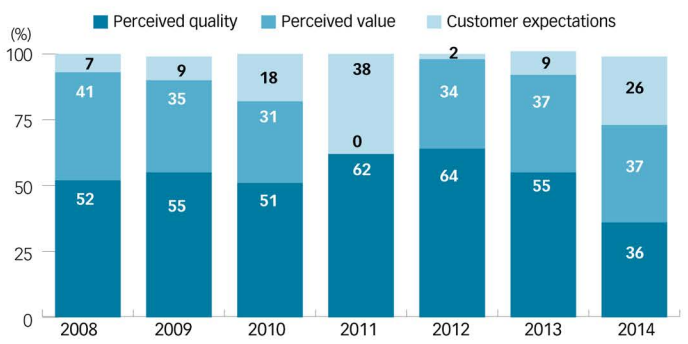
For a good marketing campaign, Dr Lee provided the Nightmares Fear Factory in Canada as an example. The Nightmares Fear Factory claims to be the scariest haunted house in the world, and markets its attraction with photos snapped by a hidden camera right at the scariest

moment of the tour. "You'll see these ridiculous faces of people scared to death," Dr Lee said. "It's a very nice example of shaping expectations based on actual experience. People who really want this will show up and the attraction is putting them up to be satisfied."

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Back to great expectations

Drivers of satisfaction in the tourism attraction sub-sector



Source: Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore (CSISG)