

# Restaurants and hotels fall short on satisfying tourists

They rate restaurants and hotels differently from locals, ISES findings show

By Teh Shi Ning

tshining@sph.com.sg

@TehShiNingBT

VISITORS to Singapore were far less satisfied with its food and tourism offerings in 2014 than they were a year earlier. And if businesses want to figure out how to stem the slide in satisfaction, they could do worse than look to the factors their foreign customers prize most about their experiences here, says the Institute of Service Excellence at the Singapore Management University (ISES).

The institute's splicing of data collected from a survey of 4,850 locals and 3,750 tourists on the food & beverage and tourism sectors found that tourists were significantly unhappier than they had been a year ago. And their dissatisfaction led to significant drops in the two sectors' Customer Satisfaction Index of Singapore scores.

Tourists are typically more satisfied than locals are, and 2014 was no exception. The tourist satisfaction scores for the F&B and tourism sectors, at 71.1 and 72.5, still surpassed the locals' 67.2 point score for both sectors by a wide margin.

However, these scores were still much lower than in 2013. Tourist satisfaction with hotels, for instance, fell 10.2 per cent, while Singapore residents were 6.7 per cent less satisfied with hotels here.

And while there was no significant change in locals' views on restaurants here, tourists were 11.5 per cent less satisfied in 2014 than they were a year ago.

Delving deeper into the data, ISES

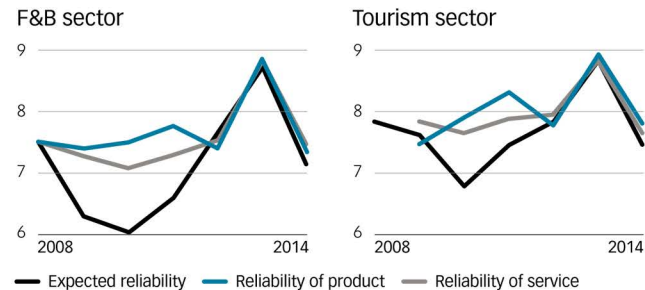
## Tourists vs locals

What they look for in restaurants

IMPORTANT TO LOCALS	RATING		IMPORTANT TO TOURISTS	RATING	
	2013	2014		2013	2014
<b>1 Quality of food</b>	7.3 ▲	7.6	<b>1 Bill timeliness and accuracy</b>	8.8 ▼	7.6
<b>2 Staff responsiveness</b>	7.1 ▲	7.6	<b>2 Cleanliness</b>	8.8 ▼	7.8
<b>3 Order process</b>	7.2 ▲	7.5	<b>3 Quality of food</b>	8.8 ▼	7.3
<b>4 Time taken to receive food</b>	7.0 ▲	7.6	<b>4 Ease of reservation</b>	8.5 ▼	7.6
<b>5 Waiting time to be seated</b>	6.9 ▲	7.6	<b>5 Time taken to receive food</b>	8.5 ▼	7.5
<b>6 Ease of reservation</b>	7.1 ▲	7.9	- Waiting time to be seated	8.5 ▼	7.6
<b>7 Bill timeliness and accuracy</b>	7.7 ■	7.8	- Staff responsiveness	8.6 ▼	7.6
- Cleanliness	7.5 ■	7.5	- Order process	8.5 ▼	7.5
- Time taken to receive menu	7.3 ▲	7.6	- Time taken to receive menu	8.5 ▼	7.5

Source: Institute of Service Excellence, Singapore Management University (ISES)

## Not reliable



Source: Institute of Service Excellence at Singapore Management University (ISES)

found that what a Singapore resident looks for in the restaurants and hotels they patronise differs quite significantly from the factors that are most important to tourists.

The quality of food topped the list for local patrons of Singapore's restaurants, followed by staff responsiveness and the order process. But tourists were more sensitive to aspects such as how timely and accurate the bill was and the cleanliness of the restaurant.

Unfortunately for restaurants here, the tourists surveyed (at the departure lounges of Changi Airport) rated them more poorly on all the touchpoints that most mattered to them.

"The profile of tourists to Singapore seems to be changing. They have different needs and expectations, they are better travelled, they are using a different benchmark to measure their expectations of Singapore against," said Caroline Lim, ISES

"The profile of tourists seems to be changing. They have different needs and expectations, they are better travelled, they are using a different benchmark to measure their expectations of Singapore against."

Caroline Lim, ISES director

director. And this poses questions for businesses beyond the F&B and hospitality sectors too.

"If we are really seeing higher spending tourists in Singapore, they probably have higher standards. Are we able to meet those standards? When it comes to luxury purchases, how far are we from the other luxury purchase destinations in the world? Are we able to meet up to that stand-



The quality of food mattered most for local patrons of Singapore's restaurants, followed by staff responsiveness and the order process. Tourists were more sensitive to aspects like how timely and accurate the bill was and the cleanliness of the restaurant. PHOTO: FREEIMAGES

ard of professionalism? These are some of the questions we want to ask ourselves, with the changing profile of tourists and customers," Mrs Lim said.

With the varied priorities of different segments of customers, businesses have their work cut out for them, ISES academic director Marcus Lee said.

"If I'm a restaurant owner, I must describe to myself who the ideal customer is. If there's a large enough market willing to come to my establishment, then I can survive, it's sustainable. So I'll design everything for my ideal customer first. Then, I look at my next most important segment of customers, and ask, what should I tweak to incorporate and encompass

my next most important segments into my design," he said.

Part of this has to do with how reliable visitors to Singapore perceive F&B and tourism-related businesses here to be.

Both their expectations of how reliable restaurants, hotels and attractions here are, as well as their experience of the reliability of products and services bought, saw a sharp fall in 2014, after rising in 2013.

"Providing consistent and reliable service is an important aspect of customer satisfaction. Businesses will be prudent to review their operating processes and manage variability in their service delivery," the ISES report said.