

Customers' satisfaction with restaurants and cafes improves, says SMU study

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Customers at a Starbucks outlet in City Link Mall. PHOTO: ST FILE
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SINGAPORE - Customers have grown more satisfied with restaurants and cafes here this year, but satisfaction with hotels, attractions and travel agencies remained largely flat.

This was the result of a three-month study, released on Wednesday (Nov 25), by Singapore Management University's Institute of Service Excellence (ISES), which compiled the Customer Satisfaction Index for the tourism and food and beverage sectors.

The food and beverage sector produced a score of 67.1 out of 100 this year, up from 65.8 in 2014. Improvements came primarily from restaurants such as Sushi Tei and cafes such as Starbucks.

The score of the tourism sector - which includes hotels, attractions, and travel and tour services - inched up from 69.1 to 69.4. This was not a statistically significant change, said ISES.

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Hotels such as Grand Hyatt and Mandarin Orchard boosted the score. But attractions did worse than last year, with Universal Studios declining the most.

The overall results are a "positive and encouraging sign" for the sectors to further innovate and reinvent Singapore's service proposition amid the challenging business climate, such as the manpower crunch, said ISES executive director Neeta Lachmandas.

The study also shed light on how customer behaviour affects satisfaction levels. Restaurant patrons who made reservations tend to be more concerned with the quality of food, while walk-in customers were more affected by time-related issues, such as how long it takes to get a seat and for their food to be served.

Meanwhile, consumers who preview an eatery or attraction on social media before visiting the establishment tend to have higher expectations, compared to those who did not.

Another observation from the study was that the quality of an attraction affected customer satisfaction the most, regardless of whether the consumer was given discounts or free passes.

Dr Marcus Lee, academic director of ISES, said this does not mean businesses should remove discounts and price promotions.

"(These) are still useful tools to entice and get visitors in the door," he said. "Instead, what this finding underscores is the importance of periodically innovating and refreshing the visitor experience so as to spur satisfaction and ultimately promote revisits."

The study, which involved face-to-face interviews, polled 10,460 people between July and September. Of these, 6,109 were Singapore residents interviewed in their homes and 4,351 were tourists at Changi Airport.