

# Customers happier with eateries this year, survey shows

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## Satisfaction with tourism sector unchanged, with attractions faring worse: SMU poll

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Customers became more satisfied with restaurants and cafes in Singapore this year, but satisfaction with hotels, attractions and travel agencies remained flat.

This was the finding of a three-month nationwide study, released on Wednesday 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 last year. Improvements came primarily from restaurants such as Crystal Jade and cafes such as Starbucks.

A Crystal Jade spokesman said that it has, over the past year, trained staff to interact more with customers, and that it conducts regular mystery dining programmes to identify areas for improvement.

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.

Hotels such as Grand Hyatt and Mandarin Orchard Singapore boost-

ed the score. But attractions did worse than last year, with Universal Studios declining the most.

A spokesman for Resorts World Sentosa, which runs the theme park, said customer service has always been its top priority.

He said: "We continuously strive to deliver a holistic customer experience to meet the varying needs of our diverse customers."

The annual study, now in its ninth year, 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.

Consumers who preview an eatery or attraction on social media before visiting tend to have higher expectations too.

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

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. 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," he said.

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.

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