

Hotels, eateries are keeping the customer satisfied: Poll

By MELISSA LIN

DESPITE the manpower crunch, restaurants and hotels are keeping customers and tourists more satisfied than ever compared with the last six years.

This was the conclusion drawn by the Singapore Management University's Institute of Service Excellence yesterday when it released its Customer Satisfaction Index for the tourism and food and beverage sectors.

The tourism sector, made up of attractions, hotels and travel services, produced a record score of 74.5 out of 100 – the highest since the index began in 2007 – up from 70 last year.

The best hotel performer was the Shangri-La Hotel, Singapore.

Its general manager Manfred Weber said staff regularly review

guests' feedback and form focus groups to come up with new ideas to improve service. One such initiative this year, called "Teh Tarik in the Lobby", involves preparing and serving the traditional milk tea in the lobby every evening for free "in order to bring a taste of local culture" to guests, he said.

For the food and beverage sector, satisfaction scores also hit a new high of 70.3, against last year's 67.7.

Improvements came primarily from restaurants like Crystal Jade, and cafes such as Starbucks and The Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf.

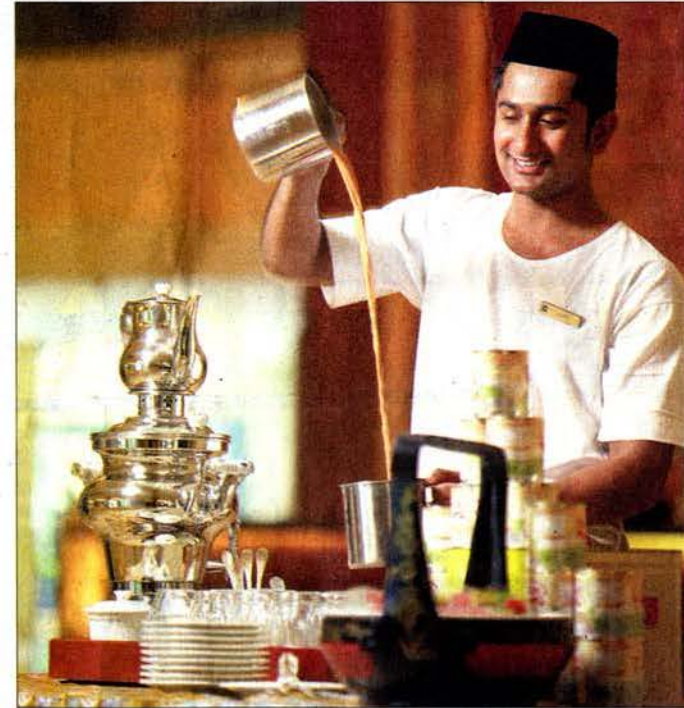
The institute's director Caroline Lim said the results are encouraging for businesses in the service industries which are faced with a tight labour market. "This is a timely reminder that the drive for customer satisfaction can be

achieved with resources besides increasing manpower," she said.

Dr Michael Chiam, a senior lecturer in tourism at Ngee Ann Polytechnic, said the results could be due to better training of not just frontline staff but also the people who manage them.

"Companies are realising that it's a collective effort and everyone is responsible for delivering good service, not just the frontline staff," he said. He added that last year's results, where scores for the tourism sector dipped to 70 from 73.5 in 2011, may have caused companies to "reflect and take the necessary measures" to improve the results this year.

The study, which involved face-to-face interviews, polled 8,503 people between August and September. Of these, 4,943 were Singapore residents interviewed



A Shangri-La staff member preparing teh tarik in the hotel's lobby. The free milk tea is served to guests every evening. PHOTO: SHANGRI-LA HOTEL, SINGAPORE

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TEAM EFFORT

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in their homes and 3,560 were tourists at Changi Airport.

A forum for industry players to exchange ideas on how to raise service standards was held when the results were released. When asked at the forum about handling customers who complain via social media, panellist Edward Chia, who is managing director of music lifestyle company Timbre Group, said businesses should acknowledge the complaint, and then take the discussion offline.

He said: "The instinct is to delete the comment but actually it irritates the customer even more."

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