The Development of Hotel Service for Senior Citizen in Taiwan

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ABSTRACT

This study gauges the development of hotel services for senior citizens in Taiwan. Senior citizens are described as people aged 65 years or more. According to statistics obtained in the course of this study, senior citizens make up 10.7 percent of Taiwan’s population. Considering that the 2009 estimates indicated that Taiwan had a population of 25 million people, this study notes that the percentage of senior citizens presented in the country deserves some special attention from the hoteliers especially considering that they have more time to spend socializing with their peers after retirement. They are also freer to travel to visit friends and relatives and when such is the case, the need for hotel services arises. With concerns that the Taiwan aging population is increasing at a fast rate, which overshadows the birth rates, one can only anticipate a situation where services that are friendly to the senior citizens will increase steadily in the foreseeable future. This study however notes that not enough efforts have been directed at developing the hotel service sector for senior citizens. It therefore recommends that hoteliers need to research the needs and interests of the elderly citizens with the view of developing facilities and training staff for purposes of meeting the interests and needs of the elderly population in Taiwan.

INTRODUCTION

Taiwan is classified among the most densely populated countries in the world. With approximately 25 million residents occupying a landmass of not more that 36,000 sq kilometers, it is clearly a country that deserves the ranking. With such high population however comes the need for development especially because the natural resources have been stretched too far. According to the CIA world fact book (2010), the Taiwan population is aging at a worrying rate. At present, 10.7 percent of the entire population is made of people who are 65 years old and above. Most notably, hotels will need to develop services and facilities that will attend to the needs of the elderly.

The country also receives quite a boost from the republic of china citizens. In 2003 for example, the total earnings from ROC citizens was estimated to be $6.8 billion. Earnings from domestic tourism on the other hand were at about $4.2 billion. In total, the total tourism earnings were approximately $11.05 billion, which accounted for 3.92 percent of the country’s gross domestic product.

Since the senior citizens in Taiwan form quite a sizeable percentage of the population, Chang et al. (2008), notes that the hotel industry can only ignore them at their own peril. In fact, he notes that other service sectors in Taiwan are competing for a share of the senior citizen market. This in turn leads to reduced prices, higher quality service provision and efficient service delivery to the seniors.
**Description of Terms**

*Senior citizens:* This refers to people (both male and female) aged above 65 years older. Such people have already attained retirement age and have fewer responsibilities on the domestic front. As such, they are more likely to spend their free time socializing with people of similar age, and on leisure. The term senior citizen is alternated with ‘elderly clients’ or ‘elderly people’ in this study.

**Hypothesis**

The development of hotel services for senior citizens in Taiwan is yet to reach its full potential since most hotels that are in high demand from younger people do not find the need to develop senior-friendly facilities or services.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

In Taiwan, Hsieh & Chen (2008) notes that there is an aspect of price discrimination in hotels. On the lower side (often favored) are students whose charges in hotels are moderately priced. On the higher side of the scale are senior citizens, who often have to pay higher prices despite the fact that they are more flexible and often travel when the tourism season is low. What then form the basis of the increased prices? According to Chang et al. (2008), the hotels in Taiwan do not offer anything different to the senior citizens that would justify the price increase. The travel patterns of the elderly were analyzed by Georggi & Pendyala (2001).

The older a person becomes, the less likely he or she is to travel for very long distances. This is especially so because with age comes ill health often requiring a doctor’s approval before travelling or requiring constant doctor consultation. This in turn inconveniences many elderly people who would like to travel without such limitations. The study by Georggi & Pendyala (2001), found out that the average trip taken by 65-74 year olds was 3.9 per year. This however decreased when a person hit the 75 year mark, whereby people resulted to taking an average of two trips per years.

Most senior citizens who use hotels services especially during travel hope that the hotels can be restful and relaxing (Anderson & Langmeyer, 1982) and that they can be an escape from the daily routine that they are used to (Shoemaker, 1989). Some of the most cited reasons why seniors travel include visiting historical sites, visiting friends and families, visiting new places and experiencing new things. Hung (2006) suggests that any development in the services sector cannot be realized without corresponding changes in human resource management. Accordingly, he suggests that there must be a correlation between HRM practices and service provision in the hotel sector in order to affect the outcomes of service provision in hotels.

**Research Model**

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<td>This study seeks to answer the following questions:</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>Do hoteliers in Taiwan realize the potential posed by the aging population even as predictions indicate that the percentage of senior citizens will steadily increase in coming years?</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Is there evidence that hotels are developing hotel services to cater for the senior citizens in Taiwan?</td>
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METHODOLOGY

This study will use a questionnaire which was sent by email to 20 selected Taiwan hotels. All the hotels were tourism hotels which ranged from bed and breakfast hotels to four star hotels. The questionnaire was specifically sent to 5 bed & breakfast hotels, 8 three-star hotels and 7 four-star hotels. The questionnaire was intended to evaluate the development initiatives that the hotels engaged specifically for the elderly market. Some of the things that the questionnaire sought to establish was the establishment of special rates for the seniors, whether the hotel staff were trained to handle elderly clients, whether there were special dietary provisions in their menus to cater for the elderly clientele, and whether the facilities in the hotel were developed in such a way so as to encourage or cater for elderly accommodation. For example, the questionnaire sought to establish if the side walks in the respondent hotels were even, whether the entry ways were accessible by wheelchair; whether the hotels provided porter services to the elderly; whether there were special dietary considerations for elderly patients who had medical conditions like diabetes and whether there were emergency medical provisions to cater for emergency.

Sample Questionnaire

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<th>questions</th>
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<td>Does the hotel facility have even sidewalks</td>
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<td>Are the entry ways accessible by wheelchair?</td>
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<td>Do you offer porter services?</td>
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<td>Do you have dietary provisions for the guests?</td>
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<td>Does the hotel have standby medical services?</td>
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RESULTS

Of the 20 questionnaires sent by email to Taiwan hotels, only 18 of the hotels manager took time to respond to the questionnaire and resend it back to me within the stipulated research time. Notably, the two questionnaires that were not answered had been mailed to four star hotels in Taiwan.

Out of the 5 questionnaires sent to the bed and breakfast hotels, all said that they had drive ways and sidewalks that were friendly to the elderly. All the B&B hotels also said that they take special consideration when preparing food for the elderly. This was especially the case if the elderly suffered from a medical condition like diabetes that was managed through diet. Depending on a client’s age, 4 out of the B&B hotels stated that they inquired about any special considerations that they may have to consider before meal preparation from their guests.

The eight questionnaires sent to the 3-star hotels were all returned in good time. Two were however disqualified from the survey because the managers in the respective hotels had failed to fill the entire questionnaire. This means that the analysis was conducted on 6 questionnaires only.

Three out of the six 3-star respondents stated that the entry ways to the hotels were accessible by wheelchair. Four respondents however stated that their driveways were elderly people friendly, and that their sidewalks were leveled well. Three respondents said they had stand-by medical providers to attend to any medical eventualities that may occur in the hotel; while the remaining three stated that they would summon ambulances from local hospitals should a medical eventuality occur within the hotel.

Of the five questionnaires response from 4-star hotels, all said that they considered the elderly tourists a vital clientele segment. 100 percent of the responses indicated that the entry ways to the hotels
and other lobbies therein were accessible by wheel chair. More to this, all four-star respondents indicated that their sidewalks were adequately leveled and that the driveways were elderly friendly. All three-star and four-star hotels agreed that the elderly clientele usually traveled when the tourism season was low and stayed for longer than other younger travelers. They were also more likely to use the hotel entertainment and leisure activities such as swimming pools, bars and restaurants more than the average young traveler.

Analysis

From the data obtained from the questionnaires, it seems that smaller hotels (Bed and Breakfast) hotels have services that are friendlier to the elderly people. They consulted about diets and ensured that the entry ways, drive ways and sidewalks were well suited for the elderly. A number of reasons can be used to explain this: first, B&B are generally smaller hotels that cater for smaller number of clients. As such, they do not contain the hustle and bustle usually associated with large number of guests. This means that the service providers in B &B’s are able to interact with the guests and can even offer them more informal services. Secondly, the B&B are usually run as a family enterprise usually by the owners. According to Hung (2009), tourism development for the elderly helps them (elderly people) to mitigate anxieties and desires that come with age. When they travel to places where they are well taken care of, the elderly take a humanistic approach to their travel destination and they are more likely to enjoy the heritage presented therein, while also feeling at home (Blazey, 1992; Cronin & Taylow, 1992). This is something that would not happen if special attention was not paid in developing age-specific hotel facilities.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As observed herein, the development of hotel services for senior citizens in Taiwan can only happen if the stakeholders in the hotel industry realize the need to develop such. Though the sample used for this research is quite little compared to the hotels in Taiwan, the results of the research reflect the real situation on the ground; hotels in Taiwan are yet to realize the need of developing hotel services that appeal to the senior citizens in the country. Considering that the seniors aged above 65 years makes quite a significant percentage of the country’s population, the hotel industry can only ignore the senior citizens at their own peril. This study predicts that the few hotels which will adopt the strategy that involves building more elderly-friendly facilities, as well as training their staff members on the ideal ways of handling the elderly clients will realize booming business.

This study however is limited by the scope of the research sample and would therefore recommend that further research be conducted on the hotel industry and the relation it has with the elderly clients. More specifically, research to establish the exact statistics of the Taiwanese senior citizens who seek specific hotel services would help the stakeholders in the tourism service development to fine tune their service provision in order to meet the interests and needs of the senior citizens. Future research also need to anticipate how many more people in the Taiwan society will attain retirement age in the next 10 years in order to recommend the viable steps that hoteliers and other service providers need to do in order to cater for the growing elderly population in Taiwan.
REFERENCES


