Quality attributes of Jericoacoara, Brazil

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Quality attributes of Jericoacoara, Brazil

Sara Joana Gadotti dos Anjos, Jéssica Vieira de Souza Meira, Melise de Lima Pereira and Pablo Flôres Limberger

Abstract

Purpose – Some recent research studies in tourism have focused on the quality of the destination. The purpose of this paper is to identify and test the quality attributes of the destination of Jericoacoara, Brazil, in order to contribute to theoretical and empirical knowledge of the subject.

Design/methodology/approach – This study is exploratory and descriptive in nature, with a quantitative approach, and uses questionnaires administered to 391 tourists in Jericoacoara. Data were analyzed through exploratory factor analysis and confirmatory factor analysis.

Findings – Results showed that the most important factor in assessing the quality of the destination is service, followed by the factors accommodation, management, destination, and, lastly, attractions.

Originality/value – This study is a theoretical and empirical contribution to the debate on destiny quality and a management tool for strategic planning.

Keywords Quality, Destination, Brazil, Attributes, Jericoacoara

Introduction

Quality issues are currently the subject of the studies of many tourism researchers. They believe that destinations should meet tourists’ expectations and differentiate themselves from competitors through quality (Limberger et al., 2014; Meira and Rossini, 2016). Countries, especially emerging ones, should invest in tourism as an economic growth strategy, given its importance for the development of those nations (Goffi, 2013; Mota et al., 2013; Oliveira et al., 2012).

The study of the relationship between service quality and customer satisfaction revealed that quality is an important factor for satisfaction (Markovic and Jankovic, 2013). The research by Kuo et al. (2013) verified the relationship between satisfaction, recovery service, perceived value, service quality, and customer loyalty. In another research, Grobelna and Marciszewska (2013) assessed the perception of guests and managers regarding service quality and verified that reliability and empathy got a negative evaluation.

Some studies are focused on the quality of tourism destinations. These studies discuss the main components of the tourism destination that influence the quality of experience (Assaf and Tsionas, 2015); the variables of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in tourism services (Alegre and Garau, 2010); the key attributes for a tourism product (Blázquez et al., 2012); the debate about the Spanish Quality System for Tourism Destination (Corral-Marfil, 2012); and the application of European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) to tourism destinations (Go and Govers, 2000; Woods and Deegan, 2003; Müller and Berger, 2012; Limberger and Mendes, 2015).

Specific studies show how heritage tourism is a way of strengthening local economy and renewing urban spaces, by understanding the processes and results associated with the development of heritage tourism in urban case studies in Montreal and Singapore (Chang et al., 1996). Other studies examine the relationship between the urban space and the hotel, considering the function of the hotel as an extension of the public space. Some authors look into the relationship between cities and hotels as a way of understanding urban space and the twentieth-century urban design (McNeill, 2008).
This paper contributes to the ongoing discussion, offering a new view on the subject, which has not been properly debated yet. This research aims to provide a theoretical and empirical contribution to the subject, by identifying and testing the quality attributes of the destination of Jericoacoara, Brazil. It presents the quality dimensions of the destination being studied, identifying the significant influence of the attributes related to destination quality, obtained in the literature.

This place was chosen as it is internationally known and is one of the 65 tourism inducer destinations of Brazil (Stein and Vianna, 2015). Jericoacoara is recognized by its international quality standards and attracts tourists from all over the country and abroad (Buosi and Silva, 2013; Huffington Post, 2014; Stein and Vianna, 2015). Jericoacoara is one of the main tourism destinations in the state of Ceara, in Brazil.

Nature is the main tourist attraction all year round. One of the best-known beaches in the municipality of Jijoca de Jericoacoara, considered one of the most beautiful in Brazil and in the world, is the beach of Jericoacoara, located in the National Park of Jericoacoara (Municipality of Jijoca de Jericoacoara, 2016).

Quality of tourism destinations

Tourists have become increasingly demanding with respect to the quality of products and services offered. Thus, it is critical that the destinations seek to differentiate themselves from competitors, investing in quality and satisfying the wants of the target-segments in the best possible way (Limberger et al., 2014; Meira and Rossini, 2016). According to Konecnik and Gartner (2007), the quality of tourism destinations has been given little attention. This is interesting given the fact that the overall assessment of a destination is a combination of products, services, and experiences, quality being a key factor in consumer behavior.

Regarding the analysis of tourism destinations, Buhalis (2000) considers the following elements important: attractions, accessibilities, amenities, available packages, activities, and ancillary services. For their part, Murphy et al. (2000) believe that the tourism experience results from service infrastructure and environmental conditions of the destination. In this case, the tourist’s experience is directly linked to the natural environment and to the legal, political, technological, economic, cultural, and social factors that form the environment of the destination. The tourist’s experience is also linked to the service infrastructure, i.e., shopping, recreation and attractions, food, travel, transport, and accommodation.

According to Assaf and Tsionas (2015), destination quality comprises three main components: infrastructure quality, human resource quality, and natural and environmental quality. The authors include in the infrastructure, ground and air transport infrastructures, and information communication technology. The indicators of human resource quality are the educational system, local availability to specialized research and training services, extent of staff training, availability of qualified labor, ease of hiring foreign labor workforce, and attitude of population toward foreign visitors.

The last component of destination quality – natural and environmental quality – comprises, according to Assaf and Tsionas (2015), the following indicators: number of World Heritage natural sites, quality of the natural environment, total known species, number of World Heritage cultural sites, access to improved sanitation, access to improved drinking water, stringency of environmental regulation, sustainability of travel and tourism industry, threatened species, environmental treaty ratification, and carbon dioxide emission.

Destination quality links to tourists’ satisfaction/dissatisfaction. In this sense, Alegre and Garau (2010) present a model of tourist destination based on six groups of variables related to satisfaction and two groups of variables related to dissatisfaction. These groups are comprised of the following elements: Satisfaction 1 (sun and beach products), Satisfaction 2 (cultural activities and contact with nature), Satisfaction 3 (activities and social interaction), Satisfaction 4 (accessibility and choices), Satisfaction 5 (local lifestyle), Satisfaction 6 (price), Dissatisfaction 1 (overdevelopment and traffic jam), and Dissatisfaction 2 (poor performance).
Destination quality attributes

The researchers Blázquez et al. (2012) have identified the key quality attributes according to the tourism product. In this way, the research has identified the key variables for beach destinations, rural tourism, and cultural tourism. Variables related to “sun and sea” destinations are cleanliness, natural environment, nightlife, tranquility, and ambiance. Regarding rural tourism, the variables that stand out are cleanliness, accommodation, ease of access to facilities, hospitality, tranquility, and ambiance. For cultural tourism, the variables are accommodation, conservation of resources, hospitality, natural environment, and nightlife.

The elements of “sun and sea” destinations that have a greater influence on perceived quality are those that contribute to the destination image as a place of escape and relaxation. Destinations focused on rural tourism are an alternative for tranquility in which the hospitality of local community plays an important role. It is also relevant whether there are suitable accommodation facilities and venues for activities. Finally, for cultural destinations, hospitality is very important, even if appropriate conservation of resources and alternative nightlife are relevant as well (Blázquez et al., 2012).

Markovic et al.’s (2015) research addressed lakeside tourism destinations. Their model identified five dimensions: additional tourist infrastructure (variety of tourism facilities, variety of physical activities available, nightlife in the area, variety of shops, access to tourist information, water-related activities); lake water quality (swimming safety, lake water bathing quality, edible lake fish); natural environment (beauty of the scenery, beauty of the lake, local history and heritage, variety of wildlife on the lake, variety of flowers and plants around the lakeside); hospitality (quality of the accommodation, cost of accommodation, quality of restaurants, friendliness of local people); and cleanliness of the place (absence of litter and rubbish, cleanliness of the air).

Corral-Marfil (2012) presents a debate over the Spanish Tourism Quality System for Destinations, called SICTED. The municipality of Vic applied this model with positive outcomes. However, it was difficult to assess the real profits for the city. The enhancements targeted by SICTED are improving the perceived reliability of supply and positioning through quality, improving service quality, increasing the coordination of public and private initiatives, spreading a culture of quality and continuous improvement, and increasing the participation of the tourism sub-sectors in the objective of the destination.

Go and Govers (2000), Woods and Deegan (2003), Müller and Berger (2012), and Limberger and Mendes (2015) have applied management systems, particularly the EFQM, to tourism destinations. In these works, the criteria of EFQM model presented a positive relationship with the quality of tourism destinations. Woods and Deegan (2003) point out the partnership principles of the EFQM as a way of overcoming the problem of fragmentation and the dominant presence of small- and medium-sized enterprises. According to the authors, a good customer-supplier partnership enables a holistic management of the destination.

Research by Ozdemir et al. (2012) has examined the relationship between the tourist profile and their level of satisfaction. The authors identified the socio-demographic characteristics and the travel behavior that make up the profile of the tourist. The level of satisfaction was assessed through the services at the destination, tourist attractions, hospitality, accommodation facilities, and safety. The study has concluded that gender, marital status, age, level of education, occupation, nationality, and income directly affect the satisfaction, whereas the length of stay does not significantly affect the satisfaction of tourists in Turkey.

The work by Aguiar and Carvalho (2012) featured the profile of tourists who visit the city of São Raimundo Nonato (Brazil), outlining their degree of satisfaction. The authors concluded that hygiene and safety, customer service, and tourism services have a significant impact on tourist satisfaction. Research by Kim et al. (2013) developed a correlation between destination image, service quality, perceived value, and tourist satisfaction. The results indicate that the destination image influences the service quality and the perceived value, which have a significant effect on tourist satisfaction.
Chagas and Marques Junior’s (2010) work looked into the relationship between quality, satisfaction, loyalty, and image of the destination of Natal, Brazil. The study concluded that the dimensions of quality influence tourists’ satisfaction and loyalty, which, in turn, are influenced by the destination image. Additional research by Chagas and Marques Junior (2011) showed that the complex image, i.e., originated after the experience, influences the assessment of destination quality. A similar study conducted by Chagas et al. (2012), analyzing other destinations in the Northeastern Brazil, concluded that all dimensions of quality influence tourist satisfaction. However, only the dimensions related to competence, friendliness and safety, and customer service and information influence loyalty.

The study by Konecnik and Gartner (2007) explores the following four dimensions of destination brand from the tourists’ perspective: awareness, image, quality, and loyalty. The authors have identified, measured, and tested these dimensions through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The exploratory stage was performed separately for each of the explored dimensions and using oblique rotation procedure, also used in this research. Confirmatory analysis was conducted in order to verify exploratory data and examine the convergence of the dimensions tested. The results confirm the importance of all dimensions, thus asserting that quality comprises the following attributes: high-quality accommodation, high-quality infrastructure, high level of cleanliness, high level of personal safety, and food and beauty of the place. The results suggest that the four dimensions intertwine and all of them are important to evaluate the destination.

The literature review presented confirms the importance of identifying and testing the quality attributes of tourism destinations, given that this subject has been barely touched by other researchers (Konecnik and Gartner, 2007).

Methodology

The present study is exploratory and descriptive with a quantitative approach. The research tool was designed by Brazilian researchers from the University of Vale do Itajaí (UNIVALI) and the University of Caxias do Sul, participants in the Pro-Integration Project, funded by the Coordination of Improvement of Higher Education Personnel in partnership with the Ministry of National Integration (Notice No. 055/2013, Pro-Integration No. 3155/2013). The sample consists of 391 tourists selected by probabilistic, simple random sampling.

The research tool comprises two parts. The first one relates to the respondents’ socio-demographic characteristics and the second comprises 25 questions on a five-point Likert scale (strongly agree to strongly disagree) about the quality of the destination of Jericoacoara. We carried out the fieldwork during September 18-24, 2014. Researchers validated all questionnaires, verifying these in situ and asking the respondents to complete all answers, whenever necessary.

Information about the characterization of respondents was analyzed through descriptive statistics (frequency and mean value). EFA identified destination quality attributes by reducing the amount of data contained in the list of variables to a smaller number of factors, with minimal loss of information (Hair et al., 2005). In addition, we used oblique rotation because the factors correlate and the results are more accurate (Costello and Osborne, 2005).

Finally, we used CFA to assess the attributes and to build a measurement model of the constructs. We have identified the model in the exploratory stage and through the references, and we improved it through modification indices, suggested by MPlus system (Muthén and Muthén, 2007). CFA was performed using the maximum likelihood robust (MLR) estimator because it is considered a suitable algorithm “recommended for cases with non-normal data” (Brown, 2006, p. 76), as in this study.

Results and discussion

The majority of respondents are female (53.3 percent), aged between 16 and 34 years (66.1 percent), and have completed higher education (61.4 percent). The percentages of married (50.6 percent) and single people (41.9 percent) are close. In terms of occupation, the majority of the respondents have a formal job (30.9 percent), followed by public employees (22.4 percent), and professional workers (20.8 percent). Average family income is between R$3,391.00 and R$10,170.00 (53.3 percent).
Tourists in the sample are mostly from other Brazilian regions, totaling 356 respondents (91 percent). However, 18 tourists were from Europe (4.6 percent), 16 from other countries in South America (4.1 percent), and one tourist interviewed was from Africa (0.3 percent). The majority were first-time visitors (71.5 percent), 14.9 percent were second-time visitors, and 13.6 percent had visited the destination three or more times. The length of stay for the majority ranged from one to three days (60.3 percent), and from four to six days for the other respondents (27.4 percent).

An EFA identified five factors characterizing the quality attributes of the destination of Jericoacoara – Factor 1: Services; Factor 2: Attractions; Factor 3: Destination; Factor 4: Management; Factor 5: Accommodation. Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) assessed the internal consistency reliability. Four of the factors had adequate reliability, with values higher than 0.6, the minimum recommended value in the literature for exploratory research (Hair et al., 2005). The factor “Attractions” did not have adequate internal consistency (Cronbach’s \( \alpha \) of 0.556).

Given the factor structure identified in the exploratory stage, with five factors accounting for 53 percent of cumulative variance, and taking into account the set of quality attributes previously identified in the literature, it stands out that two of the variables are not included in any of the five factors. In the CFA, the relationships between variables were respecified based on the modification indices and through the MLR estimator, in order to test (confirm) the set of the factors of quality for the destination of Jericoacoara.

Through this method, it was possible to confirm the existence of five factors that characterize quality attributes of Jericoacoara, maintaining the designation from the exploratory phase. The internal arrangement of quality attributes maintained the final structure. However, it was necessary to exclude the variables “workforce is skilled” and “the promotion of the destination is adequate,” excluded in the exploratory stage and also the variable “the residents are welcoming,” because they do not fit the model. For a better understanding of the CFA, we present Table I.

CFA confirmed that the manifest variables relevant to the destination quality construct reached statistical significance (\( p < 0.05 \) and load factor/standard error > 3.6) according to the factors to which they were assigned, indicating convergent validity of factors. Measure of overall fit was acceptable according to Hair et al. (2005). The RMSEA value (0.066) is in accordance with the expected pattern (\(< 0.08\)). However, the values of the incremental fit indices TLI (0.838) and CFI (0.862) are slightly below the cut-off value of 0.90 (Hair et al., 2005). Even so, the fit of the structure tested is acceptable.

Average variance extracted (AVE), also a measure of reliability, reflects the overall amount of variance in the indicators accounted for by the latent constructs. The higher the values of variance extracted, the more representative the manifest variables of the latent dimension (Hair et al., 2005). The analysis of the variance extracted from each factor (latent dimension) shows that variables that make up factor “Services” contribute the most to the quality of the destination of Jericoacoara (explained variance of 50.5 percent). Following appear “Accommodation” (variance explained of 49.1 percent), “Management” (variance explained of 46.4 percent), “Destination” (variance explained of 45.9 percent), and “ Attractions” (variance explained of 39.5 percent).

Composite reliability (CR) was calculated from standard load factors presenting the values within the expected minimum. Only the factor “Attractions” presented a CR value which was a little below 0.7, the minimum acceptable for confirmatory research (Hair et al., 2005), a result also found in the EFA. Furthermore, four of the five factors showed AVE below the minimum threshold value (0.5). These shortcomings do not affect the reliability of the structure tested; however, we must acknowledge the limits of the applicability of the set of variables of tested factors (attractions, destination, management, and accommodation) to the destination studied.

The destination quality attributes of factor “Services” present CR and AVE results well above minimum acceptable values (0.845 and 0.505, respectively). This indicates that the relevant indicators are as follows: “The price of meals is compatible to the service”; “I am satisfied with the price charged by supporting facilities”; “I am satisfied with the prices in local shops”; “I am satisfied with food and beverage service”; “Supporting services (gas stations, department stores, supermarkets, bakeries) meet my expectations”; and “I am satisfied with the buying options available for tourists.”
CFA verified the results from the EFA. Factors have presented the same internal structure, with CR values above 0.7, considered the minimum threshold value (Hair et al., 2005), in four of the five factors. The factor “Services” contributes the most to the quality of the destination of Jericoacoara. This result agrees with the findings by Buhalis (2000), Murphy et al. (2000), Aguiar and Carvalho (2012), Chagas et al. (2012), Ozdemir et al. (2012), and Markovic et al. (2015), which assert the importance of service quality for tourist destination management.

The second most important factor contributing to the quality of the destination of Jericoacoara is “Accommodation.” This result concurs with studies by Blázquez et al. (2012), Ozdemir et al. (2012), and Markovic et al. (2015). The factor “Attractions” is the least influential on the quality of the destination of Jericoacoara, although research by Alegre and Garau (2010), Buhalis (2000), Blázquez et al. (2012), Ozdemir et al. (2012), and Markovic et al. (2015) highlighted its role. This study acknowledges “Management” and “Destination” as factors contributing to destination quality, in line with Corral-Marfil’s (2012) work. The results of factor “Services,” the most significant for Jericoacoara’s quality, and the factor “Attractions,” the least influential, are consistent with the findings of Corral-Marfil (2012).

Comparing these findings to Konecnik and Gartner’s (2007) study, we notice that the quality attributes identified by them – high quality of accommodation, high quality of infrastructure, high level of personal safety, food, and cleanliness of the place – are included in the following factors: Services and Accommodation. However, the attributes “level of cleanliness” and “personal safety” were not measured in the quality of the destination of Jericoacoara, Brazil. The study by Konecnik and Gartner (2007) emphasizes the importance

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table I</th>
<th>Confirmatory factor analysis of quality attributes of the destination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factors/Variables</td>
<td>Standard loads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Services</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The price of meals is compatible with the service provided</td>
<td>0.668</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the price charged by supporting facilities</td>
<td>0.748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the prices in local shops</td>
<td>0.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with food and beverage service</td>
<td>0.552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supporting services meet my expectations</td>
<td>0.636</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with the buying options available for tourists</td>
<td>0.532</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Attractions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism contributes to protect the environment in the region</td>
<td>0.396</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism preserves local/regional culture</td>
<td>0.464</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I have noticed concrete actions to protect natural heritage</td>
<td>0.331</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural heritage conservation meets my expectations</td>
<td>0.745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Destination</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The existence of Jericoacoara Park is beneficial to the destination</td>
<td>0.694</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jericoacoara Park enhances the destination environment</td>
<td>0.788</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The presence of tourists affects the daily life of residents</td>
<td>0.354</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The natural attractions were the main reason for choosing the destination</td>
<td>0.505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Management</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The influx of tourists is compatible with destination capacity</td>
<td>0.787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is compatibility between the existing services and the tourist influx</td>
<td>0.808</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government contributes to the development of tourism in the region</td>
<td>0.290</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourism has brought economic growth to the region</td>
<td>0.318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of food establishments is adequate for demand</td>
<td>0.579</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Accommodation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am satisfied with accommodation services</td>
<td>0.436</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily rate is compatible with the service provided</td>
<td>0.835</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was easy to book accommodation</td>
<td>0.685</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Identification of latent variables using the Mplus program, through robust estimator MLR

Source: Direct research (2016)
of identifying and testing the attributes related to destination quality and the need to examine the relationship between quality and other dimensions, such as the destination image and loyalty.

Final considerations

This study is a theoretical and empirical contribution to the debate on destiny quality and a management tool for strategic planning. The methodology adopted proved effective in achieving the goals of research. The number of tourists interviewed adds to the robustness of the study and provides a general outline of what tourists in Jericoacoara value regarding destination quality. We used statistical methods to analyze data, achieve and confirm the results, and to present and discuss clearly the information.

This study provides information to assess the attributes of quality of Jericoacoara, Brazil, recognized for its international quality standards and for attracting tourists from all over Brazil and abroad. A survey among 391 tourists, carried out in Jericoacoara’s main attractions, identified the respondents’ socio-demographic characteristics as well as the factors that contribute to the quality of the destination under analysis.

The present study indicates that the quality of the destination of Jericoacoara, Brazil, can be adequately assessed by five factors: Services, Attractions, Destination, Management, and Accommodation. The results show that the destination quality attributes of factor “Services” are its indicators, since CR and AVE are above the minimum acceptable values. These results are consistent with those by Buhalis (2000), Murphy et al. (2000), Konecnik and Gartner (2007), Aguiar and Carvalho (2012), Chagas et al. (2012), Ozdemir et al. (2012), and Markovic et al. (2015), given that the attributes identified by these authors are included in the factors identified and tested in the present research.

This study contributes to the theoretical knowledge by confirming the significant influence of attributes related to destination quality, identified in the literature, as described by Alegre and Garau (2010), Buhalis (2000), Murphy et al. (2000), Konecnik and Gartner (2007), Aguiar and Carvalho (2012), Blázquez et al. (2012), Chagas et al. (2012), Corral-Marfil (2012), Ozdemir et al. (2012), and Markovic et al. (2015). Furthermore, the study offers empirical data to identify the specific dimensions of the quality of the destination of Jericoacoara, in which “Services” stands out as the most representative dimension of quality. These findings may also help destination managers to develop strategic plans to improve the services provided in Jericoacoara.

Further research is needed on the construct of quality, in the same or other contexts, either to confirm the findings or to overcome the shortcomings related to variance extracted for factors Attractions, Destination, Management, and Accommodation. We suggest that the survey be repeated in the same destination but during different times of the year, to do a longitudinal study and to obtain more data about the Jericoacoara’s quality. By doing so, it would be possible to develop a model for assessing the quality of beach destinations.

References


Further reading

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