

A Comparative Study of Domestic and Foreign Tourists' Service Experience in Kashmir

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Abstract: *The growing competition in the service sector and increased significance of tourism in the global economy has made service quality as the most important concern for tourism destinations. In order to maintain competitive position in the market, tourism entrepreneurs need to maintain and improve the quality of tourism services. Providing high quality service enables them to attract large number of tourists and ensures tourist satisfaction which in turn leads to repeat visitation and success of the tourism business. Successful tourism business increases destination's tourist receipts, income, employment and government revenue and leads to the growth of the GDP of an economy. Keeping this in view, an attempt was made to study the domestic and foreign tourists' service experience in Kashmir. Data was gathered with the help of self-administered and statistically tested questionnaire. A total of 1043 filled in questionnaire were used for the purpose of study. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20.0 was then used to analyze the data. Both domestic and foreign tourists were found highly satisfied with the tourism services of Kashmir and no significant variation in service experience between domestic and foreign tourists was found.*

Keywords: *Service Experience, Tourism, Domestic Tourists, Foreign Tourists, Kashmir Valley.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Tourism has turned out to be a most important industry in the modern age. It is considered as one of the most diverse and richest global industries in the twenty-first century and is expected to be at the top of the world's high income industries. It generates substantial economic benefits to both host countries and tourists' home countries. In developing countries, one of the primary motivations for a region to promote itself as a tourist destination is the expected economic development. Tourism creates employment opportunities, brings foreign exchange to the host country, reduces poverty and improves standard of living. Moreover, it helps in improving infrastructure, encourages conservation of wild life and preservation of traditional customs, handicrafts and festivals that might otherwise have been allowed to wane. Tourism promotes the business of other service enterprises also such as accommodation, hotel and railway booking, restaurant services, hospitality, guide service, recreational services, communication and transportation.

India, a developing and an emerging market economy, is experiencing a significant growth in tourism sector. It is so because of its rich culture, beautiful natural attractions, colorful festivals and much more. The initiatives taken by the Government have also helped a lot to promote Indian Tourism sector growth and create visitor-friendly image of India. At present, India ranks 40th in World Tourist Arrivals and 17th in world tourism receipts which itself indicates that tourism in India has a high potential of growing at a lightning speed (Abhyankar and Dalvie, 2013).

Due to intense competition in tourism business markets, service quality has become one of the most important sources of competitive advantage. Research has extensively revealed that higher levels of service quality produce higher levels of customer satisfaction, which in turn lead to higher levels of customer patronage, positive word-of-mouth, employees' satisfaction and commitment, enhanced corporate image, reduced costs and improved profitability (Berry et. al., 1989; Amin and Isa, 2008; Lien, 2010). Consequently, all tourism enterprises need to focus on various ways to increase the level of service quality, tourists' satisfaction and their revisit intentions (Gillbert, et. al., 2004; Qin and Prybutok, 2008). Thus, attention to service quality is an important strategy through which service organizations can position themselves more effectively in the market place. Recognizing the importance of service quality for the growth and development of the tourism business and also of the economy, an attempt has been made to conduct the study and achieve the following objectives:

Objectives of the Study

- To study tourism service quality perceived by domestic and foreign tourists in Kashmir.
- To make a comparative analysis of domestic and foreign tourists' service experience.
- To suggest, on the basis of study results, ways and means for improving service quality perceptions of domestic and foreign tourists.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Service Quality in Tourism

The concept of service quality has created considerable interest and debate in the research literature because of the difficulties in defining and measuring it with no overall consensus (Wisniewski, 2001). There are several definitions on service quality. The commonly used defines service quality as the extent to which a service meets customers' needs or expectations (Lewis and Mitchell, 1990; Dotchin and Oakland, 1994; Wisniewski and Donnelly, 1996; Asubonteng et al., 1996). Expectations can be defined as prior estimations made by customers' while receiving service (Oliver, 1981). Therefore, perceived service quality is viewed as the difference between consumers' perceptions and expectations for the service provided (Parasuraman, et. al., 1985).

Generally, customers form expectations from their past experience, friends' advice, and marketers' and competitors' information (Kotler, 2000). Perceptions, on the other hand, are defined as consumers' beliefs concerning the service received. Perception is an opinion about something viewed and assessed and it varies from customer to customer, as every customer has different beliefs towards certain services. According to Vazquez (2001), service quality results from a comparison of customers' before-service expectations with their actual service experience. In the tourism context, tourists have expectations after selecting a destination for a holiday and their perceptions are formed during and after their holiday period (Korzay and Alvarez, 2005; Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Huh, et. al., 2006). Quality in tourism-related services is basically about balancing tourists' perceptions and expectations (Bhat, 2012). The service will be considered excellent, if perceptions exceed expectations; it will be regarded as good or adequate, if it only equals the expectations; and, the service will be classified as bad, poor or deficient, if it does not meet them.

Service Experience of Tourists

Service experience is the subjective personal reactions and feelings that are experienced by consumers when they consume a service, and thus has important influence on consumer service evaluation and satisfaction (Otto et al., 2000). Evaluation of experience in tourism services depends on the behaviour of tourists towards those services and behaviour of tourists is influenced by their socio-economic characteristics. In this connection, Bhat (1998) conducted a study to analyze tourists' behaviour by examining their socio-economic characteristics. The study showed that low income groups does not prefer first class air fares, expensive hotels and costly restaurants while as White, Gold and Diamond Collar occupation groups demand facilities of their own standard. It is also revealed that recreational behaviour of tourists is directly influenced by their socio-economic characteristics. Atilgan, et. al., (2003) also suggest that cultural characteristics have an effect on experiences of service quality in tourism. They found that different cultural groups can have different levels of expectations and perceptions in terms of service-quality dimensions. As such socio-economic characteristics also play an important role in the service experience of tourists. Tabasum, et. al., (2012) concluded that perception about service quality varies among tourists in terms of socio-economic differences. Hence, a better understanding of experiential phenomena of domestic and foreign tourists' is particularly important. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been framed.

H: There is significant difference in tourism service quality as experienced by domestic and foreign tourists.

For studying tourists' service experience, SERVQUAL is considered as a concise scale, easy to use by managers, and is now referred to as a standard by other service researchers (Llosa, et. al., 1998; Gonzalez, et. al., 2007; Stromgren, 2007; Amin and Isa, 2008; Siddiqi, 2010; and, Islam, et. al., 2011). The scale has been replicated in many different service categories so as to examine its generalizability. The SERVQUAL scale has been used by many researchers in different service industries. Kettinger and Lee (1997) mentioned the suitability of this approach and inferred that it was a remarkable diagnostic tool for the assessment of service quality. Stressing the importance of customer services in the tourism industry, Augustyn and Ho (1998) claimed that the SERVQUAL model was of the utmost importance for defining the real meaning of customer satisfaction. In a similar context, Ryan (1999) considered that SERVQUAL was a simple tool for tourism managers to use in tackling the areas of weaknesses in their service delivery. However, he added that it was difficult for any mathematical model to capture all aspects of service quality and customer satisfaction particularly in the tourism industry, which is a complex mixture of entertainment, education, self-discovery and sheer fun.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to study the tourism service quality experienced by domestic and foreign tourists, a modified SERVQUAL scale developed by Bhat and Qadir (2013) was used. After carrying out in-depth interviews on tourism services with tourists, eight more items were added and each item was checked once again to reflect the

need of the study. All the items in the questionnaire were then arranged alphabetically to later identify the underlying expectation/perception dimensions and those items that were highly related to the same dimension using factor analysis. After the addition, removal and rephrasing of several questions, the final questionnaire was prepared consisting thirty-two questions. Level of expectation/perception was measured on a ten point scale (ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 10 = strongly agree) and all questions were phrased positively as suggested by Parasuraman et. al., (1994). The data were then put into the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 20.0 and analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and reliability tests.

Sample Design

A self-administrated questionnaire survey was conducted to collect empirical data from tourists in Kashmir. By applying convenience sampling technique, survey was designed to uncover tourists' expectations and perceptions in order to reach their service experiences. In order to make sample representative of the population, due care has been taken to ensure that respondents represent different socio-economic groups classified on the basis of age, gender, income, occupation, education, nationality, purpose of visit, length of stay and number of visits. This care in sampling is sought to ensure that the sample size does not adversely affect the validity of study's results.

For the study, a sample survey of domestic and foreign tourists of Kashmir valley was conducted. In total, one thousand-seventy (1070) questionnaires were distributed among the respondents at different tourist attractions like: Pahalgam, Gulmarg, Sonamarg, Sinthan-top, Daksum and Mughal Gardens. After collecting responses, only one thousand-forty three (1043) filled in questionnaires (727 from domestic tourists and 316 from foreign tourists) were found usable for the purpose of analysis in this study. However, the usable responses were above the minimum sample size of 345 as suggested by Hair, et. al., (2006).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data, after sorting out for invalid questionnaires, were coded and analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, version 20.0) software. The methods used for analysis are described as follows:

Frequency Analysis

The sample for the study consists of one thousand forty-three (1043) respondents, which includes 730 domestic respondents (70 percent) and 313 foreign respondents (30 percent). In order to analyze the background of respondents, frequency analysis has been performed. In the respondents' profile, most of the sampled tourists (63.1 percent) were males and females constitute only 36.9 percent. A considerable number of respondents (33.9 percent) belonged to the age group of 31-40 years followed by 26 percent in the age group of 41-50 years. Lowest participation of respondents (15 percent) belonged to the age group of above 51 years followed by the age group of up to 30 years (25.1 percent). Respondents with graduation were largest in number (61.2 percent) followed by post graduates (23.1 percent) and the remaining (15.7 percent) were undergraduates. Respondents with monthly income of Rs 21,000-40,000 were highest in number (34.4 percent) followed by the respondents having monthly income of Rs 41,000-60,000 (27.6 percent), whereas respondents having monthly income above Rs 61,000 were lowest in number (15.4 percent) followed by respondents having monthly income up to Rs 20,000 (22.5 percent). Majority of the participants belonged to service class (54.6 percent) followed by business (33 percent) and the remaining were professionals. Respondents who stayed for 1-6 days in Kashmir were highest in number (43.7 percent) followed by those who stayed for 7-12 days (34.3 percent) and those who stayed for more than 19 days were the least (6.1 percent) followed by those who stayed for 13-18 days (15.8 percent). Maximum number of participants were leisure/holiday tourists (66.5 percent) followed by pilgrimage tourists (13.1 percent) whereas tourists visiting for business purpose were the least (6.6 percent) followed by sports tourists (6.7 percent) and the remaining (7 percent) were tourists visiting friends/relatives. Majority of the respondents were first time visitors (61.6 percent) followed by second time visitors (26.7 percent) while as least number of respondents were fourth time visitors (2.8 percent) followed by third time visitors (8.8 percent).

Factor Analysis

In order to determine the dimensions of the 32 item service quality scale, Exploratory Factor Analysis has been performed (Table 1). The study used R-mode Principal Component Analysis with a Varimax Rotation and Eigen value equal to or more than 1. In order to get clear factorial design, 3 items with factor loadings of less than 0.50 were dropped and loadings equal to or above 0.50 were retained (Hair, et. al., 2006). The dropped questions were 3, 17 and 24 and were labeled as: comfortable recreational facilities; professional, polite and competent service personnel; and, provision of information about local events and entertainment. The factor analysis got completed in 8 iterations, identified 5 factors on service quality construct consisting of 29 items and Explained 67.94% Variance. The 5 factors identified were labeled as per the items loaded onto it – F1-

'Tangibility', F2-'Assurance', F3-'Reliability', F4-'Responsiveness' and F5-'Empathy'. Highest variance was observed on Tangibility (17.37%) and Assurance (16.33%) and as such these two dimensions are considered as the most important determinants of tourism service quality.

To measure the consistency of the scale in the present study, Cronbach's alpha test was used as a measure of reliability. The reliability scores for all the extracted variables were found high. The lowest range of Cronbach's alpha for SERVQUAL was 0.761 for the dimension of empathy and the highest was 0.839 for the dimension of reliability. Nunnally (1967) suggested that a modest reliability range for SERVQUAL instrument of between 0.5 and 0.6 would be sufficient. Therefore, Cronbach's alpha values of service quality dimensions fulfill the minimum requirement level of reliability.

The appropriateness of factor analysis was confirmed with the help of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity. The KMO measure of sampling adequacy reported a value of 0.948 which is higher than the suggested value of 0.6 (Tabachnik and Fidell, 2001). The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity revealed a Chi-square at 12158.612 ($p < 0.000$ at 1% level) which confirmed that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix (Table 2).

Table 1:- Summary of the Results of Factor Analysis: Dimensions, Factor Loadings, Communalities, Eigen Values, Explained Variance and Cronbach's Alpha

Items	Factors					Communalities
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5	
1 TAN	.720	.356	.397	.010	-.107	.815
2 ASS	.242	.577	.134	.008	.273	.484
4 TAN	.557	.110	-.359	-.299	.474	.766
5 REL	-.141	.171	.854	.049	.142	.800
6 ASS	-.104	.835	.206	.187	-.076	.792
7 REL	.033	-.079	.714	.104	-.093	.537
8 EMP	.432	.267	.246	.111	-.651	.755
9 REL	.077	.403	.553	.355	-.029	.602
10 REL	.313	.428	.576	-.155	.144	.657
11 ASS	.031	.872	-.066	.122	.130	.797
12 TAN	.661	.335	.301	.181	-.186	.707
13 REL	.325	.342	.518	.447	.022	.691
14 EMP	-.278	-.087	.007	-.124	.547	.400
15 REL	.200	.526	.549	.277	.212	.739
16 TAN	.772	.328	-.174	.050	-.067	.741
18 ASS	.146	.797	.173	.066	-.028	.691
19 EMP	.033	.309	.010	.195	.756	.706
20 TAN	.724	.167	.233	.141	-.115	.639
21 TAN	.710	.179	.341	-.203	.311	.791
22 ASS	.268	.737	.075	-.284	-.016	.701
23 TAN	.710	-.169	.260	.391	.014	.754
25 EMP	.253	.168	.194	.051	.749	.693
26 RES	.170	.001	.255	.513	.493	.600
27 REL	.488	-.014	.637	.144	-.041	.666
28 TAN	.686	-.094	-.244	.220	.089	.595
29 RES	.482	.065	.159	.658	.009	.695
30 RES	.191	-.133	.177	.679	-.128	.563
31 RES	-.140	.168	-.088	.816	.122	.737
32 RES	.099	.525	.257	.640	-.222	.810
Eigen Value	10.279	3.278	3.212	2.673	2.301	21.743 ¹
Percentage of Total Variance	17.374	16.332	13.521	11.582	9.139	67.948 ²
Cronbach's Alpha	0.784	0.794	0.839	0.784	0.761	0.949 ³
Number of Items	8	5	7	5	4	29 ⁴

Note: 1 represents 'Sum of Eigen Values', 2 represents 'Total Variance Explained', 3 represents 'Overall Cronbach's Alpha' and 4 represents 'Total Number of Items'

Table 2:- KMO and Barlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.948
Barlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square)	12158.612*

*At 1% Significance Level

V. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

In line with the objectives, the study is aimed to study service experience of domestic and foreign tourists in Kashmir. To achieve this objective, mean scores were calculated separately for expectations and perceptions and for each category of tourists. Accordingly, service quality scores were computed by subtracting perceptions from expectations for each of the service quality dimensions. Independent sample t-test was also performed to test the hypothesis. The results are shown in Tables 3 to 8.

Table 3: Overall Comparative Service Quality Scores on Tourism Services

Dimensions of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores		Service Quality	Standard Deviation	't' Value	'p' Value*
		E	P				
Tangibility	Domestic	7.23	7.53	0.30	0.98	0.29	0.76
	Foreign	7.16	7.48	0.32	0.93		
Assurance	Domestic	7.11	7.68	0.57	0.91	0.40	0.68
	Foreign	7.13	7.67	0.54	0.92		
Reliability	Domestic	7.10	7.48	0.38	0.93	0.46	0.46
	Foreign	7.12	7.54	0.42	0.91		
Responsiveness	Domestic	7.21	7.73	0.52	0.96	0.33	0.73
	Foreign	7.19	7.73	0.54	0.90		
Empathy	Domestic	7.03	7.40	0.37	0.97	0.13	0.88
	Foreign	7.03	7.40	0.37	0.99		
Overall Service Quality (Averaged on all dimensions)	Domestic	7.13	7.56	0.43	0.83	0.24	0.80
	Foreign	7.13	7.57	0.44	0.83		

**Insignificant (p>0.05) at 5% level*

Note: - E and P represent Expected and Perceived service

The results (Table 3) reveal higher levels of service quality experienced by domestic (0.43) and foreign tourists (0.44). Table 3 clearly indicates that there is an insignificant difference (p>0.05) in tourism service quality as perceived by domestic and foreign tourists meaning thereby that both domestic and foreign tourists have experienced same quality service in Kashmir. Dimension-wise analysis also reveals insignificant difference (p>0.05) in service quality perceptions of domestic and foreign tourists on all dimensions.

Comparative Service Quality on Tangibility

The data in Table 4 reveals insignificant difference (p>0.05) in service quality as perceived by domestic and foreign tourists on tangibility.

Table 4: Comparative Service Quality Scores on Tangibility

Elements of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores		Service Quality	Standard Deviation	't' Value	'p' Value*
		E	P				
1. Well dressing and neat appearance of service personnel (e.g., tour and hotel escorts).	Domestic	7.27	7.49	0.21	1.49	1.26	0.20
	Foreign	7.33	7.66	0.33	1.28		
2. Unspoiled nature and pollution free atmosphere.	Domestic	7.06	7.26	0.19	1.42	1.90	0.06
	Foreign	6.89	6.90	0.01	1.44		
3. Aesthetic, clean and attractive destination.	Domestic	7.37	7.94	0.57	3.01	0.05	0.95
	Foreign	7.12	7.68	0.56	1.44		
4. Safety and security to tourists.	Domestic	7.11	8.03	0.91	1.44	0.76	0.44
	Foreign	7.16	7.99	0.84	1.35		
5. Hygienic and high quality food and beverages.	Domestic	7.36	7.38	0.01	1.69	0.87	0.38
	Foreign	7.38	7.50	0.11	1.56		
6. Appealing accommodation facilities.	Domestic	7.35	7.60	0.24	1.40	0.54	0.58
	Foreign	7.19	7.48	0.29	1.30		
7. Appropriate location of facilities and equipments.	Domestic	7.16	7.53	0.36	1.32	0.51	0.60
	Foreign	7.16	7.57	0.41	1.25		
8. Modern and technologically relevant vehicles.	Domestic	7.16	7.03	-0.14	1.62	0.97	0.33
	Foreign	7.07	7.03	-0.04	1.58		
Overall Tangibility Scores	Domestic	7.23	7.53	0.30	0.98	0.29	0.76
	Foreign	7.16	7.48	0.32	0.93		

**Insignificant (p>0.05) at 5% level*

Note: - E and P represent Expected and Perceived service

Its element-wise analysis brings to light that Valley is providing relatively better service quality on 'safety and security to tourists (0.91 and 0.84 respectively)' followed by 'aesthetic, clean and attractive

destination (0.57 and 0.56 respectively)' while as it provides relatively poor service quality on 'modern and technologically relevant vehicles (-0.14 and -0.04 respectively)' as reported by both categories of tourists . Also, domestic tourists have reported relatively low service quality on 'hygienic and high quality food and beverages (0.01)' whereas foreign tourists reported relatively low on 'unspoiled nature and pollution free atmosphere (0.01)'.

Comparative Service Quality on Assurance

Data on Table 5 shows relatively better service quality on assurance as reported by domestic and foreign tourists (0.57 and 0.54 respectively).

Table 5: Comparative Service Quality Scores on Assurance

Elements of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores		Service Quality	Standard Deviation	't' Value	'p' Value*
		E	P				
1. Trustworthiness and honesty of the service personnel.	Domestic	7.26	8.27	1.01	1.39	0.49	0.62
	Foreign	7.30	8.26	0.96	1.32		
2. Willingness of the service personnel to help tourists and advise on how to use free time.	Domestic	7.05	7.79	0.73	1.29	0.75	0.45
	Foreign	7.13	7.80	0.67	1.14		
3. Fluent and understandable communication skills of the service personnel.	Domestic	7.25	7.36	0.11	1.51	0.39	0.69
	Foreign	7.30	7.44	0.15	1.37		
4. The behaviour of other participants (local people and others) is not bothersome.	Domestic	6.76	7.16	0.38	1.32	1.27	0.20
	Foreign	6.68	6.95	0.27	1.40		
5. Behaviour of service personnel instills tourists' confidence.	Domestic	7.22	7.83	0.60	1.36	0.66	0.50
	Foreign	7.27	7.93	0.66	1.32		
Overall Assurance Scores	Domestic	7.11	7.68	0.57	0.91	0.40	0.68
	Foreign	7.14	7.68	0.54	0.92		

*Insignificant ($p > 0.05$) at 5% level

Note: - E and P represent Expected and Perceived service

Also, insignificant difference ($p > 0.05$) in the quality of tourism services, on the said dimension has been observed between domestic and foreign tourists which indicates that both categories of tourists experienced same quality of services in the Valley. Element-wise analysis of the said dimension shows that both categories of tourists observed highest service quality on 'Trustworthiness and honesty of the service personnel (1.01 and 0.96 respectively)' followed by 'willingness of the service personnel to help tourists and advice on how to use free time (0.73 and 0.67 respectively)' whereas relatively low service quality has been observed on 'fluent and understandable communication skills of the service personnel (0.11 and 0.15 respectively)' followed by 'friendly behaviour of other participants (0.38 and 0.27 respectively)'.

Comparative Service Quality on Reliability

Table 6: Comparative Service Quality Scores on Reliability

Elements of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores		Service Quality	Standard Deviation	't' Value	'p' Value*
		E	P				
1. Providing service/s at the promised time.	Domestic	7.28	7.81	0.53	1.53	0.31	0.75
	Foreign	7.28	7.83	0.55	1.38		
2. Easy access to service personnel when needed.	Domestic	7.21	7.69	0.48	1.42	0.07	0.94
	Foreign	7.28	7.74	0.46	1.34		
3. Insisting on error-free services.	Domestic	6.96	7.06	0.10	1.44	1.61	0.10
	Foreign	7.05	7.30	0.25	1.29		
4. Performing services right the first time.	Domestic	7.12	7.58	0.45	1.40	1.04	0.29
	Foreign	7.14	7.69	0.55	1.27		
5. Providing correct and accurate information to tourists.	Domestic	7.05	7.81	0.75	1.27	0.04	0.96
	Foreign	7.08	7.83	0.76	1.20		
6. Uninterrupted telecommunication services.	Domestic	6.73	6.57	-0.16	1.54	0.83	0.40
	Foreign	6.77	6.52	-0.25	1.44		
7. No sudden increase in tour cost.	Domestic	7.33	7.84	0.51	1.40	1.39	0.16
	Foreign	7.25	7.87	0.62	1.26		
Overall Reliability Scores	Domestic	7.10	7.48	0.38	0.93	0.72	0.46
	Foreign	7.12	7.54	0.42	0.91		

*Insignificant ($p > 0.05$) at 5% level

Note: - E and P represent Expected and Perceived service

It is clear from Table 6 that insignificant difference ($p>0.05$) exists between service quality of domestic and foreign tourists in the overall and across all elements of tourism services on reliability dimension which denotes that both domestic and foreign tourists perceived same quality of service. Element-wise analysis of the said dimension reveals relatively low service quality score on 'uninterrupted telecommunication services (-0.16 and -0.25 respectively)' followed by 'insisting on error free services (0.10 and 0.25 respectively)' as reported by domestic and foreign tourists. Although, relatively high service quality has been observed on 'provision of correct and accurate information to tourists (0.75 and 0.76 respectively)' followed by 'no sudden increase in tour cost (0.51 and 0.62 respectively)' and 'providing service/s at the promised time (0.53 and 0.55 respectively)' as reported by both domestic and foreign tourists.

Comparative Service Quality on Responsiveness

Table 7: Comparative Service Quality Scores on Responsiveness

Elements of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores		Service Quality	Standard Deviation	't' Value	'p' Value*
		E	P				
1. Cultivation of friendly relationship with tourists.	Domestic	7.34	8.05	0.70	1.45	1.10	0.26
	Foreign	7.29	8.09	0.81	1.27		
2. Tour operators/tour guides act on participants' suggestions.	Domestic	7.00	7.25	0.24	1.38	0.17	0.85
	Foreign	6.89	7.11	0.22	1.22		
3. Sincere and keen interest in solving the problems of tourists.	Domestic	7.33	8.03	0.70	1.52	0.60	0.54
	Foreign	7.21	7.96	0.75	1.17		
4. Tourists being served quickly by the appropriate personnel.	Domestic	7.18	7.70	0.51	1.38	0.64	0.52
	Foreign	7.31	7.75	0.45	1.41		
5. The service persons do not neglect tourists' services when they are busy.	Domestic	7.22	7.69	0.46	1.39	0.22	0.82
	Foreign	7.28	7.75	0.48	1.28		
Overall Responsiveness Scores	Domestic	7.21	7.74	0.52	0.96	0.33	0.73
	Foreign	7.19	7.73	0.54	0.90		

*Insignificant ($p>0.05$) at 5% level

Note: - E and P represent Expected and Perceived service

Data in Table 7 reveals insignificant difference ($p>0.05$) on responsiveness dimension of tourism services between domestic and foreign tourists, which indicates that Kashmir valley provides same quality to both domestic and foreign tourists on the said dimension. Its' element wise analysis indicates that both categories of tourists received relatively better service on 'cultivation of friendly relationship with tourists (0.70 and 0.81 respectively)' followed by 'sincere and keen interest in solving the problems of tourists (0.70 and 0.75 respectively)'. However, both categories of tourists received relatively low quality service on 'tour operators/tour guides act on participants' suggestions (0.24 and 0.22 respectively)'.

Comparative Service Quality on Empathy

Table 8 clearly shows that the two categories of respondents (domestic and foreign) have reported satisfactory service quality (0.37 and 0.37 respectively) on empathy dimension of tourism services. Further, highly insignificant difference ($p>0.05$) has been observed in the quality of services perceived by domestic and foreign tourists.

Table 8: Comparative Service Quality Scores on Empathy

Elements of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores		Service Quality	Standard Deviation	't' Value	'p' Value*
		E	P				
1. Individual attention to tourists.	Domestic	7.06	7.55	0.49	1.27	0.15	0.88
	Foreign	7.13	7.63	0.50	1.12		
2. Best tourist interest at heart.	Domestic	7.14	7.78	0.63	1.29	0.52	0.59
	Foreign	7.16	7.75	0.59	1.08		
3. Providing diversified service based on tourists' needs.	Domestic	7.12	7.57	0.44	1.33	0.12	0.89
	Foreign	7.20	7.65	0.45	1.28		
4. Proper health care to tourists.	Domestic	6.79	6.70	-0.09	1.56	0.53	0.59
	Foreign	6.65	6.60	-0.05	1.53		
Overall Empathy Scores	Domestic	7.03	7.40	0.37	0.97	0.13	0.88
	Foreign	7.03	7.40	0.37	0.99		

*Insignificant ($p>0.05$) at 5% level

Note: - E and P represent Expected and Perceived service

Element-wise analysis of the said dimension reveals relatively low service quality on 'proper health care to tourists (-0.09 and -0.05 respectively)' followed by 'providing diversified service based on tourists' needs (0.44 and 0.45 respectively)' whereas relatively higher service quality has been observed on 'best tourist

interest at heart (0.63 and 0.59 respectively)' followed by 'individual attention to tourists (0.49 and 0.50 respectively)'.

VI. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The study employed modified SERVQUAL instrument (proposed by Bhat and Qadir, 2013b) for determining tourists' expectation and perception gap scores in relation to tourism services and identified five factors – Tangibility, Assurance, Reliability, Responsiveness and Empathy with 29 statements. The overall expectation and perception gap (SERVQUAL) score of domestic and foreign tourists (0.43 and 0.44) clearly indicates higher levels of tourism service quality. The results have confirmed that out of five tourism service dimensions, assurance and responsiveness dimensions are the significant contributors of overall tourism service quality. Also, the study brings to light that insignificant difference exists between service quality of domestic and foreign tourists in the overall and across all dimensions of tourism services indicating that both categories of tourists experienced same quality service in Kashmir. Therefore, the empirical results rejected the proposed hypothesis.

Though tourists perceived higher levels of service quality in Kashmir in the overall and across all dimensions of tourism services, yet tangibility and empathy dimensions reported relatively low quality service which indicates that Kashmir valley is lagging behind on these two dimensions. This finding, therefore, suggests that tourism entrepreneurs should invest more on physical aspect of tourism services like bringing modern and technologically relevant infrastructure; providing hygienic and high quality food and beverages; ensuring neat and clean environment and tidiness of staff; and, providing appropriate health care facilities. Besides, they should ensure that tourists receive diversified service, individual attention and proper care by improving the overall efficiency of the service personnel through appropriate training programs.

While the study provides good contextual for researchers, academics and tourism managers, it is subjected to several limitations. First, the results are based on gap scores which are influenced by expectations and perceptions. Tourists from different countries including domestic tourists have taken part in the research; their cultural differences might have affected the formation of expectations and post visit experience regarding tourism services in Kashmir. Second, the study is entirely based on the views and opinions expressed by the tourists and its accuracy and authenticity depends upon the tourists' trustworthiness towards responses. So, the findings of the study need to be applied with great care.

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