

## Budget Hotels' Online Guest Reviews Regarding Customer Satisfaction

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### Abstract

The tourism industry is an industry that uses services as its products, yet the services themselves are intangible. There are many different aspects to the tourism industry and one of them is accommodation, which includes hotels. Most hotels face similar issues in their operations and business, and technology is one way to listen and respond to complaints from guests. Technology has helped many industries to grow and flourish in the modern age. The tourism industry is one of the industries that relies heavily on technology. Hotels use technology for reservations, payments, room smartcards, taking orders at restaurants, and many other things. Travel search engines are the main reference for guests, other than the official website of the hotel. This paper aims to study the factors and level of customer satisfaction in a budget hotel in Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia, based on guests' online reviews. This research was conducted by analysing the secondary data gathered from booking websites. Using the data selected from the travel search engine, it is hoped that the findings can measure the level of customer satisfaction at this budget hotel and provide methods of improvement for future business operations.

**Keywords:** Guest; Satisfaction; Budget; Hotel; Online; Website; Malaysia.



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### 1. Introduction

Tourism has become one of the world's largest and fastest growing industries (Suratman, n.d). Many countries have been working hard to boost their economies by strengthening many sectors. One of the industries that receives support and encouragement from the government is the tourism industry. The tourism industry in Malaysia has been designated as one of the prioritized sectors by the government in the 9th Malaysia Plan (Fakhrul and Abdullah, 2012). According to the Borneo Post, domestic tourism has received a boost from Tourism Malaysia. This effort is part of a collaboration between Tourism Malaysia and Sarawak Tourism Board. The main markets for Malaysian tourism are the neighbouring ASEAN countries (Suratman, n.d). There has recently been an increase in demand within the tourism industry and this changing landscape has led to the growth of many businesses in this industry (Amnatcharoenrit, 2013). Some of these businesses are related to accommodation, food & beverage, transportation, and attractions. There are additionally many types of tourism packages that have become popular in such areas as adventure and nature, city tours, culture and heritage, cycling and biking, and sports tourism. There are likewise various types of tourists, each with different needs and expectations. According to Cohen (1972), they are four types of tourists which are the drifter, the explorer, the individual mass tourist, and the organized mass tourist. Businesses have helped the tourism industry to expand every year. In terms of accommodation, many people look for a comfortable place with basic facilities. Kaur *et al.* (2014), notes that people coming for work or business prefer to stay at budget hotels for a night or two. Budget hotels are in the lowest tier of hotels. They only provide basic services and facilities such as a television, air conditioner, comfortable bed, daily room service and amenities. Some of these budget hotels have even upgraded their facilities. The rates are affordable though they only provide the guest with the basics. Most tourists such as backpackers and millennials find that budget hotels are the best place to stay during their trip. Millennials who have limited financial resources find staying at this kind of hotel a great way to save money.

The boom in budget hotels can also be attributed to low-cost airlines (Cherdchamadol and Sriboonjit, 2013), whose low rates are similar in concept to those of budget hotels. People who are travelling on a tight budget will use this type of accommodation and airline in order to save money. According to Skytrax World Airline Awards, Air

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Asia based in Malaysia won the Best Low-Cost Airline for 2015, overtaking nine other low-cost airlines. Many new budget hotels can be seen every year in most urban areas like Kuala Lumpur and Shah Alam, Selangor.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction can be achieved once the customers' needs and expectations are fulfilled. As the tourism industry is an intangible service industry, customer satisfaction in this industry is different compared to other industries that make tangible products (Wbjaj *et al.*, 2018). However, fulfilling the needs and expectations of the customer is not easy and requires businesses to consider many variables, particularly those that deal with the emotional component, for example, how a customer's anger, happiness, pleasure, irritation, or disappointment may affect his or her experience of a service (Riadh, 2009). In the tourism industry, it is all about welcoming new customers and gaining repeat customers. Previous studies show that customer satisfaction will most probably have direct and indirect impacts on business results (Katukurunda *et al.*, 2018). Hotel operators who are able to understand the customer's needs make better profits than others who fail to understand and satisfy their customers (Barsky and Nash, 2002). This can be proven by the studies conducted by Anderson *et al.* (1994), Yeung *et al.* (2002), and Luo and Homburg (2007) that mention the effects of customer satisfaction on profitability – a high level of customer satisfaction can be used in marketing to promote business. Having a high level of customer satisfaction can also generate more sales. According to Smith (2015), there are four keys to customer satisfaction which are the overall satisfaction measure (emotional), loyalty measurement (affective and behavioural), a series of attribute measurements (affective and cognitive) and intentions to repurchase measurements (behavioural measures). These days, one of the challenges for managers in the hotel industry is to provide and maintain customer satisfaction (Dominici and Guzzo, 2010). Satisfying a customer is regarded as the cheapest means of product and service promotion because positive word of mouth or product and service recommendations from satisfied customers are likely to increase positive post-purchase behaviour (AlBattat *et al.*, 2017; Mihaela, 2014).

### 2.2. Types of Hotels

Around the world, the type of accommodation might be different in each country depending on its geography, economy and culture. Some types of hotels might be available in Europe, while others are not. According to The Hotel Proprietors Ordinance Chapter 158, 'hotel' refers to an establishment held out by the proprietor as offering sleeping accommodation to any person presenting himself who appears able and willing to pay a reasonable rate for the services and facilities provided. According to a report by the Research Department of the Caribbean Tourism Organization, hotels are systematically rated by several establishments such as the Automobile Association (AA) and its American counterpart the (AAA) as well as the Michelin tyre company's Michelin Red Guide and other mobile guides. Several popular classification systems also appear in the same report, including the Official Hotel and Resort Guide (OHRG), AA rating system (British System) and Caribbean National/Regional Classification Systems.

### 2.3. Differences Between Luxury Hotels and Budget Hotels

In the tourism industry, accommodation is important for the tourist. Accommodation is the first thing that will be searched for by tourists once they reach their destination. There are many types of accommodation such as resorts, motels, hostels, homestays, and hotels. Within hotels, there are two types, which are luxury hotels and budget hotels.

According to Sherman (2007), luxury hotels are distinguished by their large size, tasteful aesthetics, cleanliness, high-quality food, and prime location, as well as the privacy and security they afford and service marked by faultless personal attention. He also mentions that the luxury segment continued growing between the 1980s and early 1990s in spite of intermittent recessions. The idea of personalized service in luxury hotels has been redefined again by hoteliers of several luxury establishments around the world (Sherman, 2007).

While luxury hotels have a wide variety of services available to guests, budget hotels offer more basic accommodation. Luxury hotels offer rooms full of amenities. On the other hand, budget hotels may offer small rooms with basic amenities such as towels, drinks, a television and a comfortable bed. Luxury hotels may offer a free shuttle, but this is not available at a budget hotel. Luxury hotels may offer some facilities such as a swimming pool, gymnasium and spa that will not be available in budget hotels for several reasons, possibly including limited space or funds. Several restaurants and cafés are available in luxury hotels. Some budget hotels only have a small café while others do not have one at all. Luxury hotels offer personalized service which means the hotel's employees will check you in and see you to your room. This service is not available in budget hotels as they only have a limited number of staff. In addition, luxury hotels feature top-of-the-line facilities, which are often upgraded (Fishbourne, 2011), whereas some budget hotels might not change or upgrade their facilities.

### 2.4. Budget Hotels

When it comes to budget hotels, the keywords that will come to mind are 'basic, cheap and simple'. These keywords are also part of the characteristics of budget hotels. According to Teng (2010), budget hotel rates are cheaper than those of luxury hotels. Jones and Lockwood (2002), mentions that rooms are offered at lower prices with two- to three-star standards of accommodation and limited facilities and services. Some budget hotels do not provide breakfast or other meals. In addition to this, budget hotels have lower operating costs because they do not offer catering services or have multiple restaurants. In the United Kingdom, *Whitbread* has become the largest

budget hotel chain. In the United States, budget hotels first started to appear in the 1920s. In China, the annual growth rate of economy hotels has remained above 70% since 2003 and there was a 214.46% rise in the number of properties in 2005. The locations of budget hotels are usually along highways. According to *The Moscow Times*, budget hotel Ibis Moscow Paveletskaya is considered to be one of the most profitable hotels in Moscow (Luhn, 2011). As reported by *The Huffington Post*, Lawton Court Hotel in the United Kingdom is rated as the best budget hotel in the world by TripAdvisor. Moreover, Premier Inn and Travelodge are growing by 10% per year in the United Kingdom. In China, economy hotels first sprung up in big cities on the east coast of China (Zhang *et al.*, 2013), where they now represent 60 percent of the market. In Malaysia, on the other hand, budget hotels are currently available in most cities and districts. Some of the successful budget hotel chain operators in Malaysia are EV World Hotel and My Home.

## 2.5. Word of Mouth

According to Cvent (2013), ‘word of mouth’ is an unofficial way of communication between people regarding a product or service. It is a powerful method of communication that spreads information faster than any other medium. Word of mouth is an effective method as it links people together who have similar interests and opinions. Nowadays, word of mouth may be verbal or non-verbal. According to Mikoluk (2013), verbal communication uses spoken words to deliver a message – this is also known as face-to-face communication. Non-verbal communication includes body language, gestures, graphics, written material, and articles related to the delivering of the message.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Research Design

In order to conduct this study, a descriptive study was used in which the researcher did not interact with the correspondents, a methodology on the lines of studies involving data collection that do not change the research environment, but simply use existing records. Descriptive research involves gathering data that describe events and then organizing, tabulating, depicting, and describing the data collection (Glass and Hopkins, 1984). This helps the researcher to describe and explain any factors that relate to customer satisfaction of budget hotels based on booking website reviews. This type of study also explains and shows how important the booking website is to budget hotel operators and customers. It also offers ideas and recommendations to current and future researchers for improvements to budget hotels.

### 3.2. Population, Sample Area and Sampling Size Malaysia

Malaysia is a country located in Southeast Asia. The country was formed in September 1963 and included the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak. Malaysia covers an area of about 329,758 sq km and has a population of 22 million. Malaysia consists of three main ethnicities which are Malay, Chinese and Indian. There are other minority ethnic groups too, mostly in Sabah Sarawak. Malaysia has many beautiful tourist attractions in each state. There are many national parks, including in Pahang, Sarawak and Sabah. Marine tourism can be explored on Perhentian Island, Tioman Island, Langkawi Island and Sipadan Island. This research has been conducted in *Selangor Darul Ehsan*, one of the states in Malaysia. According to Tourism Selangor, Selangor was declared as a state on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2005. It was first established in 1766. The major attractions in Selangor are located in Klang. Klang is well known for its heritage sites and royal city. This study focussed on a specific district near to Klang called Shah Alam, previously known as Sungai Renggam. Shah Alam is the main city of Selangor Darul Ehsan. There are many types of accommodation available here ranging from luxury to budget hotels.

### 3.3. Data Collection

#### 3.3.1. Secondary Data (Content Analysis)

This study primarily relies on secondary data. Content analysis was used in order to interpret the data and reviews made by previous guests. Content analysis is analysis of data that has already been collected by another person or other sources. Mehmetoglu and Dann (2003), define it as “a multidisciplinary unobtrusive measure for systematically classifying and making inferences from the manifest and denotative content of any type of human communications”. In addition, it is a method to classify written or oral materials into identified categories of similar meanings (Moretti *et al.*, 2011). Qualitative content analysis is considered a way of analysing qualitative descriptive studies (Sandelowski, 2000). That is why it is called secondary data. This method focusses more on evaluating the text (i.e. qualitative data) and converting it into quantitative data. Several budget hotels in the area of Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, were selected and researched. After that, several booking websites such as *agoda.com* and *booking.com* were used to find and evaluate previous guests’ reviews based on their experience.

| Populations                  | Number of Tourists who Stayed in Shah Alam             |
|------------------------------|--|
| Sampling Method              | Non-probability Sampling Method (Convenience Sampling) |
| Data Collection              | Secondary Data (Content Analysis)                      |
| Population                   | Malaysia   |
| Focussing Area (Sample Area) | Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan                        |
| Type of study                | Qualitative study                                      |

## 4. Discussion

**Table-1.** Number of guests from each country that stayed in a budget hotel in Seksyen 13, Shah Alam. Data: [www.agoda.com](http://www.agoda.com)

| Area/Country | TOTAL |
|--------------|-------|
| Malaysia     | 291   |
| Singapore    | 31    |
| Thailand     | 4     |
| Sri Lanka    | 2     |
| USA          | 3     |
| South Korea  | 2     |
| Australia    | 3     |
| Japan        | 2     |
| Indonesia    | 13    |
| Taiwan       | 1     |
| China        | 5     |
| Switzerland  | 1     |
| Netherlands  | 1     |
| Philippines  | 1     |
| Others       | 2     |
| TOTAL        | 362   |

There are many budget hotels in Seksyen 13, and one of the most recognised by tourists is the Alami Garden Hotel. Though it is a budget hotel that provides only basic amenities, most of the tourists that stayed here from 2011 until December 2015 were from many countries. The total number of guests was 362. The country of origin with the highest number of guests was Malaysia at 291, followed by the neighbouring countries of Singapore at 31 and Indonesia at 13. Five guests were from China and a fewer number came from the USA and other Asian countries such as Thailand, Taiwan, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka. There were two guests with unknown identification that have been listed here as "Others." Malaysian guests dominated the budget hotel register, comprising 80.4% of all guests. Singaporeans and Indonesians made up 9% and 4% respectively. China and Thailand were each at 1%, while the rest of the countries were below 1%. The table above shows that local tourists still accounted for the largest group of guests who stayed at this budget hotel in Section 13, Shah Alam. However, due to certain factors, the number of guests from other countries is expected to increase in the future.

**Table-2.** Type of Guests at the Budget Hotel Each Year, Section 13, Shah Alam. Data: [www.agoda.com](http://www.agoda.com)

| Years | Type of Guests      |                     |                     |         |                 |        | Total |
|-------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------|-----------------|--------|-------|
|       | Families            |                     |                     | Others  |                 |        |       |
|       | Business Travellers | With Young Children | With Grown Children | Couples | Solo Travellers | Groups |       |
| 2011  | 2                   | 1                   | 1                   | 2       | -               | 1      | 7     |
| 2012  | 26                  | 12                  | 15                  | 26      | 12              | 9      | 100   |
| 2013  | 50                  | 18                  | 10                  | 21      | 7               | 9      | 115   |
| 2014  | 32                  | 10                  | 5                   | 15      | 3               | 2      | 67    |
| 2015  | 33                  | 7                   | 8                   | 14      | 8               | 2      | 72    |
| Total | 143                 | 48                  | 39                  | 79      | 30              | 23     | 362   |

The table above shows the number of guests that stayed at the Section 13 budget hotel each year from 2011 to 2015. These data were collected from Agoda.com and determined the sales of the hotel from year to year. The types of guests that stayed at this hotel were *business travellers*, *families with young children* and *families with grown children*, *young couples*, *solo travellers* and *groups*. In 2011, there were only seven guests in total, meaning that seven guests booked their accommodation at the hotel through the website. Most probably, there were many people who booked their accommodation using this website in that year. However, only some of them wrote their comments on the website. In 2012, the number of guests who used this website to book this hotel increased for all types of guests. The highest numbers in this year were for *business travellers* and *young couples*, followed by *families with grown children* and other types of guests. In 2013, the number increased the most for *business travellers*. The numbers were much more different compared to the previous two years. Guest numbers for *solo travellers*, *families with grown children* and *young couples* in 2013 dropped from 2012. In 2014, the number of guests who booked the hotel and left reviews on Agoda.com dropped more than in previous years. In this year, numbers for all types of guests decreased, bringing the total to just 67 with the following breakdown of percentages of guest types: 47% for *business travellers*, 15% for *families with young children*, 7% for *families with grown children*, 22% for *couples*, 4% for *solo travellers* and 9% for *groups*. Lastly in 2015, some types of guests increased while others decreased. For the most part, there were only small changes in the number of guests of all types: 46% for *business travellers*, only 10% for *families with young children* and 11% for *families with grown children*. As for the other types of guests, *couples* were at 19%, *solo travellers* at 11% and *groups* at 3%. Overall, the highest numbers of guests during these five years fell under *business travellers*, followed by *couples* and *families with young children*. Out of a total of 362 guests,

about 40% were *business travellers*, 22% *couples*, 13.2% *families with young children*, 11% *families with grown children*, 8% *solo travellers* and 6.4% *groups*.

**Table-3.** Total Number of Guests for Each Type. Data: [www.agoda.com](http://www.agoda.com)

| Type of Guests               | Number of Guests | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Business Travellers          | 143              | 40             |
| Families with Grown Children | 39               | 11             |
| Families with Young Children | 48               | 13             |
| Couples                      | 79               | 22             |
| Solo Travellers              | 30               | 8              |
| Groups                       | 23               | 6              |
| TOTAL                        | 362              | 100            |

One of the booking websites used to collect secondary data was Agoda.com. This is one of the most popular sites that people use to book their hotel in Malaysia. The table above shows the guests at the Alami Garden Hotel in Shah Alam divided across six categories: *business travellers*, *families with grown children*, *families with young children*, *couples*, *solo travellers*, and *groups*. 362 represents the total number of guests from November 2011 until the end of December 2015. Differences were found in the number of guests for each type of guest. *Business travellers* had the highest number of guests at 143 or 40% out of a total of 362 guests, followed by *couples* at 79 or 22% of all guests. *Families with young children* came to 48 guests at 13% of all guests while *families with grown children* had 39 guests at 11%. *Solo travellers* made up 30 guests at 8% in that period while *groups* comprised 23 guests at only 6% overall.

**Table-4.** Total Number of Guests for Each Type. Data: [www.priceline.com](http://www.priceline.com)

| Type of Guests               | Number of Guests | Percentage (%) |
|------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Business Travellers          | 56               | 27             |
| Families with Grown Children | 7                | 3              |
| Families with Young Children | 27               | 13             |
| Young Couples                | 28               | 14             |
| Solo Travellers              | 43               | 21             |
| Groups                       | 14               | 7              |
| Senior Travellers            | 31               | 15             |
| TOTAL                        | 206              | 100            |

The table above shows the number of guests that stayed at the selected budget hotel in Shah Alam based on data from Priceline.com, another booking website we chose to look at. Differences in the number of guests in each category were observed on both Agoda.com and Priceline.com. Both websites also differed with respect to factors such as information about the hotel, pricing, facilities and number of reviews. On Priceline.com, guests were divided into seven types while Agoda.com mentioned only six types of guests.

On Priceline.com, there were about 56 *business travellers*, making up 27% out of the 206 total number of guests recorded, followed by 43 *solo travellers* at 21% of all guests. 15% of the total number of guests were comprised of 31 *senior travellers*, a category that was not included on Agoda.com. *Young couples* made up 28 guests and *families with young children*, 27 guests. These two types had almost the same number of guests. The last type, *families with grown children*, also had the least number of guests at only 7 guests. However, the total number of guests for families might be more as they come in groups, while only one person will actually book the hotel using this website.

**Table-5.** Number of Guests According to Country of Origin. Data: [www.agoda.com](http://www.agoda.com)

| Area/Country | Type of Guests      |               |       |                     |               |                 |        |
|--------------|---------------------|---------------|-------|---------------------|---------------|-----------------|--------|
|              | Business Travellers | Families      |       |                     | Others        |                 |        |
|              |                     | With Children | Grown | With Young Children | Young Couples | Solo Travellers | Groups |
| Malaysia     | 114                 | 33            |       | 39                  | 68            | 23              | 14     |
| Singapore    | 12                  | 2             |       | 7                   | 4             | 2               | 4      |
| Thailand     | 2                   | -             |       | -                   | -             | -               | 2      |
| Sri Lanka    | 2                   | -             |       | -                   | -             | -               | -      |
| USA          | 2                   | -             |       | -                   | -             | 1               | -      |
| South Korea  | 2                   | -             |       | -                   | -             | -               | -      |
| Australia    | 2                   | -             |       | -                   | 1             | -               | -      |
| Japan        | 1                   | -             |       | -                   | -             | 1               | -      |
| Indonesia    | 3                   | 2             |       | 1                   | 4             | -               | 3      |
| Taiwan       | 1                   | -             |       | -                   | -             | -               | -      |
| China        | 1                   | -             |       | -                   | 2             | 2               | -      |
| Switzerland  | -                   | -             |       | -                   | -             | 1               | -      |
| Netherlands  | -                   | 1             |       | -                   | -             | -               | -      |
| Philippines  | -                   | -             |       | 1                   | -             | -               | -      |
| Unknown      | 1                   | 1             |       | -                   | -             | -               | -      |
| TOTAL        | 143                 | 39            |       | 48                  | 79            | 30              | 23     |

The table above shows the number of guests over the same five-year period organized according to type and country of origin. As researchers, we were not expecting to see such a wide range of countries represented among guests at a small, low-cost budget hotel such as the Alami Garden Hotel. The data above show that *business travellers* had the highest number of guests by far at 40%, followed by *young couples* at 22% and *families with young children* at 13%. *Families with grown children* also chose this budget hotel for their accommodation along with *solo travellers* and those travelling in groups. As mentioned in the table, *business travellers* from Malaysia dominated the budget hotel demographic at 114 guests since 2011, followed by their counterparts from Singapore at 12 guests. Indonesia only had three guests of this type. Other countries such as Thailand, Sri Lanka, the USA, South Korea and Australia each had two guests, while Japan, Taiwan and China each had one guest. No records for Switzerland, the Netherlands and the Philippines were available. These three countries were still listed as they had data for other types of guests.

The second type of guest was *families*, which were divided into *families with grown children* and *families with young children*. Malaysia surpassed other countries in the former category with 33 guests since 2011, followed by Singapore and the Netherlands. Unfortunately, the origin of one person was recorded as unknown since the data did not mention where he or she came from. *Families with grown children* accounted for 11% of the 362 total number of guests at this hotel, out of which 9% were from Malaysia while the other 2% were from other countries. At 39 guests, Malaysians still made up the largest cohort in the category of *families with young children*, followed by Singapore at 7 guests. The total number of guests of this type was 48. In the six countries of Thailand, Sri Lanka, the USA, South Korea, Australia and Japan, no guests were recorded under either category of family.

The other three types of guests were *young couples*, *solo travellers* and *groups*. At 79 guests recorded between 2011 and 2015, *young couples* had a higher number of guests than *families*. Even the number of local guests was higher at 68. Singapore and Indonesia each had four guests of this type, while China and Australia only had two guests and one guest respectively. The number of guests was not available for other countries. All in all, *young couples* comprised 22% of the total number of guests.

The next types of guests were *solo travellers* and *groups*. There were 23 *solo travellers* from Malaysia, two each from Singapore and China, and only one each from Switzerland, Japan and the USA. Overall, 30 guests of this type spent their nights at the budget hotel from 2011 to 2015. *Solo travellers* represented only 8% of the 362 total number of guests. Within *group travellers*, 14 guests left reviews on the website, but the number of guests of this type might be higher than the number of those who entered in reviews. 14 Malaysians out of the 23 total number of guests in this category stayed at the Alami Garden Hotel during this period. Other countries represented among *group travellers* were Singapore, Thailand and Indonesia.

Based on the data above, *business travellers* dominated the total number of guests. There was an 18% difference between the total number of guests from the categories of *business travellers* and *young couples* respectively. On the other hand, the percentage difference between both types of *families* was only 2% with most of the guests coming from Malaysia and Singapore. Lastly, a small difference of 2% could be seen between the number of guests for *solo travellers* and *groups* respectively.

**Table-6.** Overall Guest Satisfaction Rating at Selected Budget Hotel in Shah Alam Based on Booking Website

| Factors                     | Rating    |             |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-------------|
|                             | Agoda.com | Booking.com |
| Value for Money             | 7.2       | 6.6         |
| Location                    | 6.9       | 6.6         |
| Staff Performance           | 7.1       | 7.3         |
| Hotel Condition/Cleanliness | 7.6       | 7.1         |
| Room Comfort/Standard       | 7         | 6.8         |

On most booking websites, guests will usually leave comments and rate the hotels they stayed at. The table above shows the average ratings given by guests based on certain factors that indicated how satisfied they were with the selected budget hotel in Shah Alam. These ratings were collected from two major booking websites: Agoda.com and Booking.com. Both featured different ratings and numbers of guests that booked the selected budget hotel. On Agoda.com, guest ratings were not higher than 8 out of 10. The highest rating was given for hotel condition and cleanliness at 7.6 out of 10. The second highest rating went to value for the money that the guest paid for their accommodation, followed by staff performance or treatment of the guest, and then room comfort at 7 out of 10. Finally, guest ratings of the location of the hotel were the lowest at 6.9 out of 10.

Booking.com showed different ratings than the ones found on Agoda.com. However, both sites have similarities in terms of factors that resulted in guest satisfaction. Guests that booked through Booking.com rated value for money at 6.6 out of 10. The same rating could be seen for location of the budget hotel. The highest rating on Booking.com went to staff performance. Next, hotel condition and cleanliness was rated at 7.1 out of 10. Lastly, room comfort was rated at 6.8 out of 10 which is a little bit below the rating found on Agoda.com.

**Table-7.** Guest Satisfaction Rating on Different Travel Booking Websites

| Travel Booking Website | Agoda.com | Booking.com | Google Review | Priceline.com |
|------------------------|-----------|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| Rating                 | 6.9       | 6.8         | 3.8           | 6.8           |

The table shows guest satisfaction ratings from four different travel booking websites. Most of the websites are familiar to many online users. Agoda.com had the highest satisfaction rating at 6.9 out of 10. Booking.com and Priceline.com shared the same rating of 6.8. Since Google Review is more difficult to find and seldom used, it was no surprise that its guest satisfaction rating was much lower at 3.8. In conclusion, the familiarity and popularity of the travel booking website played a major role in the rating of the hotel. The easier the website was to use, the higher the rating was for the hotel and the greater the likelihood of a guest booking, staying at, and leaving a good review for the hotel.

**Table-8.** Ratings for Each Factor According to Each Type of Guest

| Factors                         | Type of Guests      |                     |                     |         |                 |        |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------|-----------------|--------|
|                                 | Business Travellers | Families            |                     | Others  |                 |        |
|                                 |                     | With Young Children | With Grown Children | Couples | Solo Travellers | Groups |
| Value for Money                 | 7                   | 7.6                 | 6.7                 | 7.3     | 7.5             | 7.2    |
| Location                        | 6.6                 | 7.4                 | 7.2                 | 7.4     | 6.4             | 6.3    |
| Staff Performance               | 6.9                 | 7.2                 | 6.5                 | 7.5     | 7.6             | 7.2    |
| Hotel Condition/<br>Cleanliness | 7.2                 | 8                   | 7.9                 | 8       | 7.8             | 7.7    |
| Room<br>Comfort/Standard        | 6.8                 | 7.5                 | 6.9                 | 7.1     | 7.1             | 7.2    |

Most types of guests gave a similar rating for the first factor, value for money, which did not go below 7 out of 10 except for *families with grown children*. The second factor of location refers to how easy it was for guests to find the hotel, especially when they were a first-time traveller to the area and only knew the hotel through the travel booking website. For this factor, both *business travellers* and *solo travellers* gave the hotel a rating of 6.6 and 6.4 respectively. The location of the selected hotel was a bit isolated but near to a commercial area. Staff performance is also considered an important factor in producing a high level of guest satisfaction. Like the other factors, staff performance was not rated below 6.0 which meant most of the staff provided good hospitality to their guests. As for the next factor, it is hoped that guests were not confused when making their reviews between room comfort and standard on the one hand, and hotel condition and cleanliness on the other. The scope of hotel condition and cleanliness extends to the lobby, parking lot, facilities, and restaurants as well as ambience and environment. This factor was rated higher compared to previous factors: most guests gave a rating of 7.9 to 8.0. Lastly, room comfort and standard received the lowest rating from most guests, with the highest rating for this factor given by *families with young children* at 7.5. As this was a budget hotel, guests were not expecting luxurious standards like those enjoyed at full-service hotels.

#### 4.1. The Relationship Between Year and Number of Guests

The register of the selected budget hotel in Shah Alam shows a different number of guests from the online review. The actual number of guests that stayed at the hotel might be different according to the hotel's system. Online guest reviews only indicate the number of guests that booked the hotel through the website. Moreover, different websites account for different numbers of guests as people have their own particular preferences for selecting which website to book from. For example, Agoda.com and Priceline.com each have different numbers of guests in their records since in Malaysia, people use Agoda.com more often.

From 2011 onwards, the number of guests at the Alami Garden Hotel was on the rise, especially for business travellers. The selected budget hotel was built in 2010 and started receiving guests the following year. There was only a small number of guests in the first year as many people still did not know about the hotel. As mentioned earlier, a low number of guests in the data does not necessarily mean that the hotel is unrecognised or unprofitable since travel booking websites only record the number of people who booked the hotel online. Some guests prefer walk-in bookings. In its first year, the selected budget hotel was not as well-known as it is today.

The number of guests continued to increase through 2012. Business travellers and couples had the same number of guests check in at the selected budget hotel. From our analysis, it is clear the boom in offices and shops nearby resulted in an increasing number of business travellers coming to this hotel. *Couples* included both married couples and couples of the same gender that came for business, visiting children or relatives, or other purposes.

2013 saw an increase in the number of all types of guests. Business travellers increased to 50 guests and other types of guests also increased. Many business travellers were now coming to know about this budget hotel that was located near a commercial centre as well as many highways. Twice a year, a local private university would also hold its convocation ceremony. The analysis conducted showed that this was a major reason why the number of families with young and grown children increased: families would come together to celebrate their children's academic success and this hotel, whose location was very near to the university, became their first choice for a place to stay during their visit.

In 2014 and 2015, the number of guests who booked this hotel through a website decreased for all types of guests. However, according to the guests' reviews on the travel websites, the selected budget hotel remained in good business and gave its guests a good experience. The reason why the number of guests dropped is mostly because people from many places already knew about this hotel through word of mouth. In addition, people could easily park their car in front of the hotel and walk in to the lobby to check in. Even though the number of guests decreased after

2013, this did not affect the hotel's business or guest satisfaction as mentioned in the guests' reviews on multiple travel websites.

#### 4.2. The Relationship Between Number of Guests and Country of Origin

According to the data gathered from many travel websites, there were many people from different countries who booked rooms and checked in at the selected budget hotel since 2011. The highest number of guests were Malaysians, followed by Singaporeans, Indonesians and other nationalities from the ASEAN region and Europe as well. Local people easily learned about this hotel due to several factors: familiarity with the roads and highways leading to the hotel, thereby allowing them to find the exact location of hotel as mentioned on the website; the Alami Garden Hotel's reputation for catering to the needs of their guests, especially those who were Muslim; its strategic location near the commercial centre; and its reasonable rates for the area.

In addition to receiving a high number of local visitors, this budget hotel also received guests from other countries. The analysis conducted has shown that its location was an important factor in determining how the hotel was able to attract guests from other regions or countries. The hotel itself is located in a shopping area that consists of several blocks, most of which include offices, business areas, printing shops, restaurants, cafes, insurance companies and international companies. Also, only a 50-meter walk away is Worldwide Holdings Berhad, a huge glass building that houses many local and international companies including some showrooms for car manufacturers such as KIA Motors.

Worldwide Business Park, Section 13 is a premier commercial building built by Worldwide Holding Berhad. Its main office is located in Section 13, Shah Alam, Selangor Darul Ehsan, Malaysia. This company was founded in 1965 and still remains strong until today. The commercial building can be easily seen and accessed from the federal highway. The booming development of the commercial centre has resulted in an increased number of hotels and restaurants along with taxi and bus services. That many companies open their offices here has become one of the reasons why foreign guests choose to stay at the selected budget hotel.

#### 4.3. The Relationship Between Overall Guest Satisfaction Rating and Travel Booking Website

Nowadays, there are a variety of travel booking websites, which may sometimes be used more or less based on region or country. Some of the most well-known travel booking websites are Agoda.com, Booking.com and Priceline.com as cited in the above tables. In Asia and especially Malaysia, Agoda.com has become a major resource for reviewing and booking hotels. Guest reviews are important in determining the level of hospitality and types of services offered by hotels since people trust and make their decisions based off the comments made by previous guests. According to [Reza and Samiei \(2012\)](#), online WOM (word of mouth) communications have a significant impact on subjective norms, perceived behavioural control, and intention to travel. In addition, travel experience has a significant impact on using eWOM and TPB constructs. Online guest reviews on travel booking websites are a kind of electronic, non-verbal word of mouth. Interpersonal influence and word of mouth are ranked as the most important information sources when a consumer is making a purchase decision. These influences are especially important in the hospitality and tourism industry, whose intangible products are difficult to evaluate prior to their consumption ([Litvin et al., 2008](#)).

The data in the pie chart show that the highest ratings by guests were collected from Agoda.com. Out of over 300 total guests who booked through this website, 6.9% left reviews. All of them mentioned that they would come back to this hotel in the future. Some of the guests were even repeat customers who had stayed in the selected budget hotel before. On Agoda.com, it is possible to see a guest's country of origin. Positive feedback is collected based on the online guest review. In addition, several external factors such as ease of use and variety of languages available has helped boost the popularity of Agoda.com over other travel booking websites. This result also relates to the previously mentioned data that show the relationship between number of guests and country of origin. The easier the website is to use, the higher the number will be of foreign customers who visit the site and leave a review.

Priceline.com and Booking.com each had a 6.8% rate of guest reviews. Local people still reserved hotels via Booking.com, but its ease of use was not at the level of Agoda.com. Priceline.com is another travel booking website that has the selected budget hotel in its system. Even though there are many travel booking websites around the world, only some websites feature the selected budget hotel. Some websites do not have this hotel or any reviews of it left by previous guests.

Google Review only had a 3.8% rate of guest reviews. Google Review is not widely used since reviews can be rated and accessed by anybody, even non-guests.

#### 4.4. The Relationship Between Factors and Level of Guest Satisfaction

There are many factors that can contribute to the level of guest satisfaction. Several previous researchers have listed several factors that result in guest satisfaction. Such factors appear on travel booking websites such as Agoda.com and Booking.com and include room comfort, hotel condition, staff performance, location and value for money. Cleanliness, price, location, security, customer service, aesthetics and decor, opportunities for relaxation, standard of services, appealing image, and reputation are all recognized as decisive factors by travellers in assessing the quality of a hotel ([Ananth et al., 1992](#); [Atkinson, 1988](#); [Barsky and Labagh, 1992](#); [Cadotte and Turgeon, 1988](#); [Knutson, 1988](#); [McCleary et al., 1993](#); [Rivers et al., 1991](#); [Wilensky and Buttle, 1988](#)).

Both Agoda.com and Booking.com take into account the same factors, making them easy to analyse and compare with each other. The graph shows that Agoda.com has a higher rating than Booking.com in all factors. Of the 362 total number of guests that booked the selected budget hotel through the website, 7 percent said that room comfort was important for them and some reviews, left mostly by Muslim guests, mentioned that the room size needed to be enlarged so as to have extra space to perform prayer.

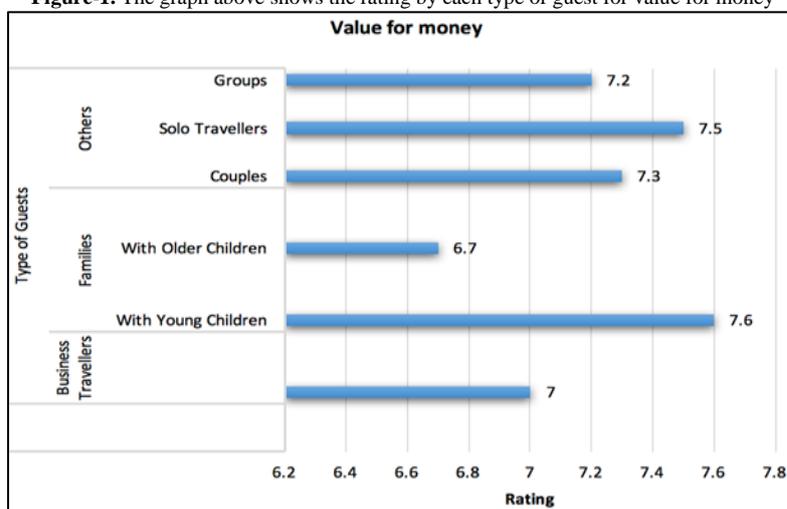
The highest ratings were given for hotel condition and cleanliness at 7.6 out of 10. The previous data show that most guests came from Malaysia, which has a Muslim majority. The same guests who valued room comfort also placed a premium on cleanliness, thus indicating that the two factors are correlated. Out of all the factors, cleanliness was the most important for guest satisfaction. Staff performance also played a major role in determining customer satisfaction. Good and well-trained staff will provide the best hospitality and services to guests.

Location is also considered one of the factors that contributes to the level of customer satisfaction. The selected budget hotel was located in a strategic location, near to a commercial area, shopping mall, restaurants, and the entrances to and exits from many highways such as Federal Highway, New Klang Valley Expressway (NKVE), South Klang Valley Expressway (SKVE) and Port Klang.

The last factor that will contribute to the level of guest satisfaction is value for money. Even for budget hotels, people still weigh the quality of their accommodation with how much they must pay for it. The ratings showed that this budget hotel was worth it and balanced in its ranking according to the other factors that contribute to customer satisfaction. Most of the reviews left by previous guests mentioned that the room rates were reasonable based on what they received throughout their stay at the hotel.

#### 4.5. Ratings for Each Factor According to Each Type of Guest Value for money

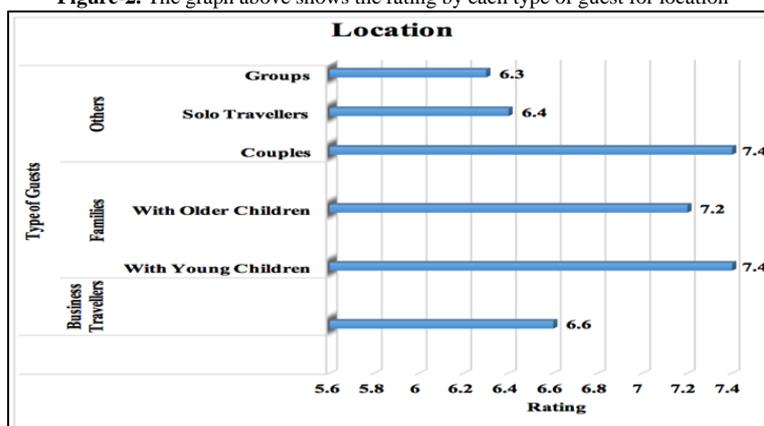
Figure-1. The graph above shows the rating by each type of guest for value for money



Families with young children are most concerned about value for money. From the data, we can conclude that this type of guest really cared about what he or she paid and what he or she received. The data show that the guest's expectations were met. If the hotel did not reach their expectations, the ratings would have been lower. This budget hotel has several rooms for families, each of which can accommodate around 4-6 persons. This can be considered as the reason that families with young children were satisfied with what they received. As the guest reviews show, this budget hotel has been hosting families with young children since its opening in 2011 until today.

#### 4.6. Location

Figure-2. The graph above shows the rating by each type of guest for location

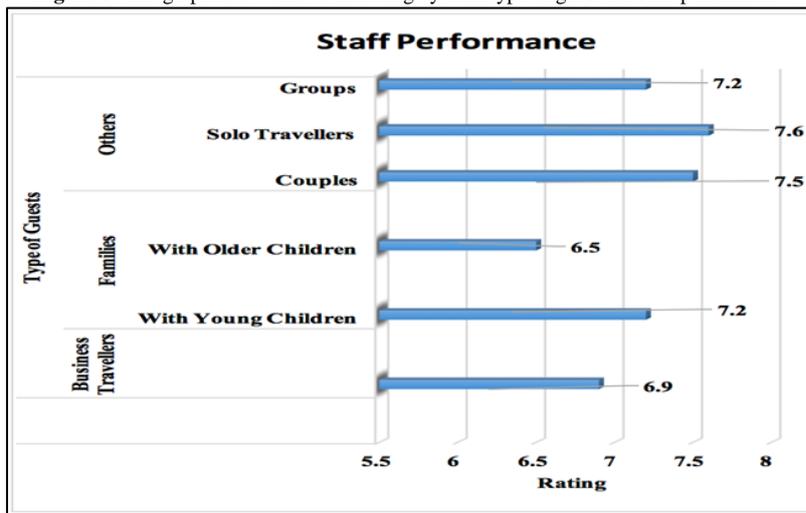


The next factor that contributes to the level of customer satisfaction is location, which refers to how easily guests are able to find and reach the hotel. Again, families with young children rated this factor as important. In addition, the location of the budget hotel must be central and convenient. Those who come with a large number of people like families and groups tend to look at the location of the budget hotel to determine whether it is easily accessible or isolated from places they want to go to. Families with young children may rate location as important for several reasons: the hotel is isolated and too far from souvenir shops, supermarkets, cafés or restaurants; there are limited parking spaces; and public transport is seldom available, making it hard to get to other places.

Different types of guests have different needs. Business travellers, who comprised the highest number of guests, said that this budget hotel was located in a strategic location as it was near to the commercial area that consisted of a variety of businesses. NAZA TTDI Tower, another commercial building near Worldwide Business Park, is just five minutes' walking distance from the hotel. Next to the hotel is *Pusat Zakat Selangor*, which is under *Majlis Agama Islam Selangor*, a government body.

#### 4.7. Staff Performance

Figure-3. The graph above shows the rating by each type of guest for staff performance

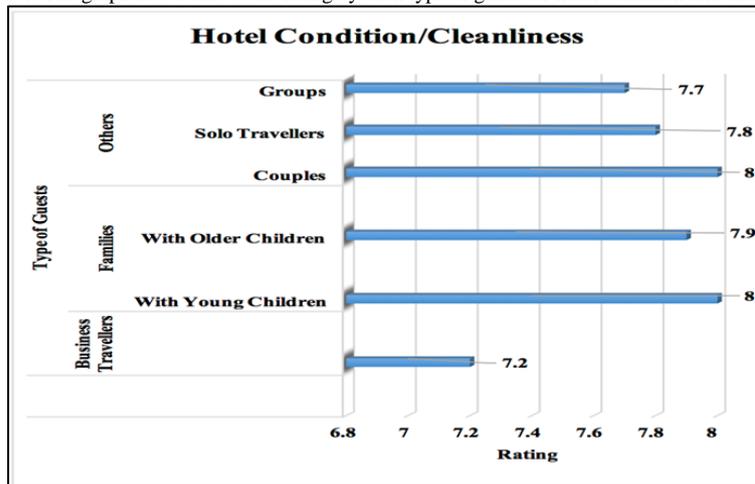


The graph above shows the staff performance ratings of each type of guest. As mentioned earlier, different types of guests have different needs, thus resulting in different ratings from each of them. Solo travellers had the highest rating at 7.6 out of 10. They found that staff performance and the way services are delivered were important for them. Solo travellers are travelling alone and sometimes need more attention and assistance from the staff. The hotel staff play important roles in helping guests in case they need anything at any time. The hotel staff also serve to ensure the safety of solo travellers as they are on their own. Groups, couples and families with young children, however, found staff performance to be just average. Budget hotels usually only have a small number of staff with limited job scope.

Families with grown children were less concerned about the way staff performed their jobs. They gave the lowest rating for staff performance at 6.5. Nonetheless, the average rating given for staff performance across all types of guests was relatively high at 7.1.

#### 4.8. Hotel Condition and Cleanliness

Figure-4. The graph above shows the rating by each type of guest for hotel condition and cleanliness



The graph above shows the rating of each type of guest based on how he or she viewed the hotel’s condition and cleanliness as contributing positively or negatively towards his or her experience. Families with young children and couples each gave the highest ratings at 8 out of 10. These types of guests might see this factor as particularly important due to their concern about hygiene, especially for their children. The families with young children in this sample had children mostly under six years old. For this age demographic, the cleanliness of their food, toys, and environment is of the utmost importance. Families with grown children gave a rating of 7.9, a mere 0.1 points lower than the rating given by their counterparts with young children.

Solo travellers also gave a very similar rating for hotel condition and cleanliness of 7.8 out of 10. This type of guest also found this factor important, especially with regard to the cleanliness of the restaurant and hotel lobby. The average rating for groups was 7.7. Groups did not leave many written reviews for any of the factors, so only their numerical ratings could be analysed as part of the data.

Business travellers were much less concerned about hotel condition and cleanliness and rated this factor at only 7.2 out of 10, the lowest rating across all types of guests. There are many possible reasons for this. First, since business travellers are travelling for work purposes, they prioritize having a comfortable place to sleep, reliable wi-fi and phones, and accommodation that is near their office or a commercial area. The selected budget hotel provided high-speed internet for its guests. On weekdays, work hours are mostly from around 8am to 6pm, so business travellers will spend only limited time at the hotel.

These varying ratings help explain how the needs of each of the types of guests differed from one another, especially depending on the purpose of their visit. Some guests come for work and others for leisure.

#### 4.9. Room Comfort and Standard

Figure-5. The graph above shows the rating of each type of guest for room comfort and standard



The above figure clearly shows that families with young children saw room comfortability as important for them. Ratings for room comfort and standard were generally high, indicating that the guests’ expectations were reached, if not exceeded. The comfortability of the hotel rooms takes into account several aspects such as the comfortability of the bed, amenities and facilities, and the atmosphere and ambience of the room. Most families with young children, even those under six years old, were pleased with the room standard.

The average rating given by business travellers was 6.8 out of 10, which means that the comfort level and standards of the room did not really reach their expectations. Businessmen and businesswomen tend to come from wealthier and more highly educated backgrounds, so the way they judged the quality of their hotel rooms was different from other types of guests. There are many hotels in Shah Alam, including luxury hotels. However, since the Alami Garden Hotel was the nearest one to the commercial area, it might have been the only option for the business travellers.

Other types of guests such as groups, solo travellers and couples gave similar ratings for room standard. The room standard was acceptable for them and met their expectations. The hotel has big rooms that can accommodate groups of up to 5-6 people as well as medium-sized rooms suitable for couples and with the same amenities. Lastly, there are a few rooms with single beds that are suitable for solo travellers. We can see that this budget hotel is trying to meet their guests’ needs and expectations. The guest reviews from several years ago are different compared to the ones we find today. Some of the guests are repeat customers. From their reviews, we can see that the hotel management has made many improvements.

#### 5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to find out what factors contributed to guest satisfaction based on booking websites. Booking websites have become a major platform for many people to book their accommodations and flights. Therefore, budget hotel owners must take into consideration data gathered from booking websites in order to gauge and

understand the level of guest satisfaction at their hotel. It is hoped this study can benefit many people within the tourism industry, including youth who often use budget hotels as their preferred accommodation, tourism students, academicians, and budget hotel owners as well as potential entrepreneurs who would like to launch their own budget hotel businesses in the future.

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