Tourism Services in Kashmir: Perspective of Foreign Tourists

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Abstract: *Due to the complexity and globalization of today's competitive business environments in tourism, quality has become one of the most important sources of competitive advantage. For tourism enterprises, it is no longer sufficient just to maintain a business now; it is also necessary to have systematic processes to manage quality and to gain and maintain competitive position. High quality tourism services attract large number of tourists and ensure tourist retention. Tourist retention provides higher profit contribution in terms of repeat visits. Besides, the need for delivering quality tourism services arise due to the fact that foreign exchange earnings in this industry has a high added value which contributes to the growth of the GDP of an economy. Therefore, in view of the growing importance of service quality for successful tourism promotion and development of the economy, present study is an attempt to measure the perceptions of foreign tourists in Kashmir. Based on data gathered, with the help of a self-developed and statistically tested research instrument, from three hundred sixteen (316) respondents, the study concludes that by and large foreign tourists are satisfied with tourism services but an improvement is needed in all dimensions to improve the overall quality of tourism services.*

Keywords: Tourism Service Quality, Tourist's Expectations and Perceptions, Dimensions of Tourism Services, Kashmir Valley.

Introduction

Tourism has become the fastest growing industry in the world for the past 50 years, and today it is the world's largest industry relating to employment, foreign exchange earnings and overall economic development of several countries. It is one of the most important civil industries of the world contributing about 10% to the world's GDP (Abhyankar and Dalvie, 2013). Tourism provides opportunity for poverty alleviation and holds the key for creation of rural wealth. It can provide impetus to other industries through backward and forward linkages and can generate huge revenue earnings for the nation.

Tourism sector holds immense potential for Indian economy. India, a developing and an emerging market economy, is experiencing a substantial growth in tourism sector. During the year 2011, the number of Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs) in India reached the level of 6.29 million, registering a growth of 8.9% over the FTAs of 5.78 million in 2010. The growth rate of 8.9% in tourist arrivals in India was almost double the growth of 4.4% in tourist arrivals worldwide. The tourism sector in India, therefore, has fared quite well vis-à-vis the world. Foreign Exchange Earnings (FEE) from tourism in India during 2011 were $16.56 billion as compared to $ 14.19 billion in 2010, showing a growth of 16.7% (Government of India, 2012). India has experienced a growth in the tourism sector mainly because of its rich culture, beautiful

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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 very high potential of growing at a lightning speed (Abhyankar and Dalvie, 2013).

For the sustenance and promotion of tourism industry, it is necessary to enhance its service efficiency. In today's competitive business environment, tourism service providers must find ways to make their services stand out among their competitors. To achieve this, they must understand their customers' needs – and then set out to meet these needs (Nadiri and Hussain, 2005). Among all customer demands, quality service has been increasingly recognized as a critical factor in the success of any business (Parasuraman, et. al., 1988; Gronroos, 1990; Kandampully, 2000; Yilmaz, 2009). Palmer (2001) also suggested that customer service quality is a crucial source of distinctive competence and is often considered a key success factor in sustaining competitive advantage in service industries. Research has extensively revealed that service quality leads to customer loyalty and attraction of new customers, positive word-of-mouth, employees' satisfaction and commitment, enhanced corporate image, reduced costs and increased business performance (Berry, et. al., 1989). Higher levels of service quality produce higher levels of customer satisfaction, which in turn lead to higher levels of customer patronage (Amin and Isa, 2008; Lien, 2010). Thus, attention to delivery of a higher level of service quality is an important strategy by which service organizations can position themselves more effectively in the market place.

In view of the above cited literature and the growing importance of service quality for successful tourism promotion and development of the economy, present study is an attempt to measure the perceptions of foreign tourists about tourism service quality in Kashmir and to offer suggestions, on the basis of study results, to make tourism services more effective and efficient.

Review of Literature
The attention to service quality from the customer's perspective is considered as the most important developments in the tourism industry (Fache, 2000; Nadiri and Hussain, 2005). The importance of providing quality tourism services is being recognized as a way to expand and maintain a large and loyal customer base for long-term success. According to Zabkar et. al., (2009), service quality is positively related to visitors' satisfaction and visitors' behavioral intentions. As per Clemes, et. al., (2009), satisfied tourists form favorable behavioral intentions to revisit or return to the same place when they experience higher levels of service quality that produce a favorable image. As stated by Kandampully, et. al., (2009), consistent quality of service creates and sustains the image of a destination which ultimately results in tourists' loyalty. So, tourists' loyalty is dependent on the destinations ability to consistently deliver service quality. Stressing on the importance of service quality on tourists' satisfaction and behavioral intentions, Chaipakdee and Wetprasit (2010) suggested that service quality would be the key in increasing tourists' satisfaction and reducing tourists' complaints and is a significant predictor of behavioral intentions. In order to study the role of service quality in tourist's revisit and in the development of tourism industry, Haghkah et al., (2011), revealed that service quality has a significant, direct and positive relationship with satisfaction of tourists, their intent to return and eventually with the development of tourism industry in a region. Thus, quality improvement must be seriously concerned as a useful instrument in achieving competitive advantage, as a strategy to reduce uncertainty and improve the results of tourist organizations (Postma and

Jenkins, 1997). Therefore, it is very important to know the quality of service, the destination is offering to tourists.

Service quality is linked to the concepts of expectations and perceptions (Parasuraman, et. al., 1985, 1988; Lewis and Mitchell, 1990). According to Oliver (1981), expectation can be defined as prior estimations made by consumers while receiving service and perceptions as consumers' beliefs concerning the service received. Customers' perceptions of service quality result from a comparison of their before-service expectations with their actual service experience. Generally, tourists have expectations after selecting a destination for a holiday and that their perception/satisfaction levels during and after their holiday period are functions of their expectations (Korzay and Alvarez, 2005; Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Huh, et. al, 2006). After comparing the expectations with perceived performance of the destination, destination's service quality can be considered. 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 classed as bad, poor or deficient, if it does not meet them (Vazquez et al., 2001).

Research hypothesis

The above cited literature gives rise to following testable hypothesis:

H1: There is a significant difference between tourists' expectations and perceptions.

To study the gap between expectations and perceptions, Parasuraman, et. al., (1985, 1988) presented the SERVQUAL scale, which became the most popular instrument for measuring service quality. The instrument contained 22 items for assessing customer perceptions and expectations regarding the quality of service. Each item is consisted of two statements – one for expectation and the other for perception. A level of agreement or disagreement with a given item is rated on a Likert-type scale and the level of service quality is represented by the gap between perceived and expected service. The SERVQUAL instrument is based on five service quality dimensions, namely tangibles (physical facilities, equipment and personnel appearance), reliability (ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately), responsiveness (willingness to help customers and provide prompt service), assurance (knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to gain trust and confidence) and empathy (providing individualized attention to the customers). The instrument has been revised and extensively used in a variety of service settings such as banking, credit card services, telecommunication services, repair and maintenance (Alkhattab and Aldehyyat, 2011). But, despite its wide usage, it has been subjected to several criticisms on theoretical and operational aspects (Carman, 1990; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Babakus and Boller, 1992; Teas, 1994). However, in the tourism and hospitality industry, a number of studies have used SERVQUAL instrument and suggested its applicability (O'Neill et. al., 2000; Atilgan et. al., 2003; Andaleeb and Conway, 2006; Gonzalez et. al., 2007; Namkung and Jang, 2008; Martinez and Martinez, 2008; Hurst et. al., 2009; Markovic and Raspor, 2010; Bhat, 2012; Bhat and Qadir, 2013b; etc.). In addition to that Augustyn and Ho (1998) claimed that the SERVQUAL model was of the utmost importance for defining the real meaning of customer satisfaction in the tourism industry. 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. Thus, SERVQUAL is seen as the most appropriate model for measuring service quality in the hospitality industry.

Sample Profile

The study has been carried out at Kashmir – an important tourist destination of India that has been a place of attraction for tourists since centuries. Its lush green forests, sweet springs, perennial rivers, picturesque, alpines scenery and pleasant climate have made it an internationally acclaimed tourist destination. During the year of 2012, the valley has reported the visit of 19,29,765 tourists. By applying simple random sampling technique, a total of 316 foreign respondents has been chosen, who visited Kashmir Valley in the months of Jan to May 2013. All important demographic characteristics like; age, gender, education, income, occupation, length of stay, purpose of visit and number of visits were taken into consideration while seeking responses from the foreign tourists regarding their expectations and perceptions about the quality of tourism services in Kashmir. The profile of the respondents was deemed to be distributed fairly around all the possible categories.

As far as the gender of the respondents is concerned, it was distributed fairly with 64.2 percent males and 35.8 percent females. Significant number of respondents (29.7 percent) belonged to the age group of 31-40 years followed by 28.8 percent in the age group of 41-50 years. Lowest participation of respondents (14 percent) belonged to the age group of above 51 years followed by the age group of up to 30 years (27.5 percent). Respondents with graduation were largest in number (62 percent) followed by post graduates (26.3 percent) and the remaining (11.7 percent) were undergraduates. Respondents with monthly income of above Rs 61,000 were highest in number (28.2 percent) followed by the respondents having monthly income of Rs 21,000-40,000 (26.9 percent), whereas respondents having monthly income up to Rs 20,000 were lowest in number (19.9 percent) followed by respondents having monthly income of Rs 41000-60000 (25 percent). Majority of the participants belonged to service class (52.2 percent) followed by business (24.7 percent) and the remaining were professionals (23.1 percent). Respondents who stayed for 1-6 days in Kashmir were highest in number (44.6 percent) followed by those who stayed for 7-12 days (36.1 percent) and those who stayed for more than 19 days were the least (7.6 percent) followed by those who stayed for 13-18 days (11.7 percent). Most of the participants were leisure/holiday tourists (74.7 percent) followed by pilgrimage tourists (10.1 percent) whereas tourists visiting to friends/relatives were the least (3.2 percent) followed by tourists for business purpose (5.4 percent) and the remaining (6.6 percent) were sports tourists. Majority of the respondents were first time visitors (64.2 percent) followed by second time visitors (26.0 percent) while as least number of respondents were fourth time visitors (2.5 percent) followed by third time visitors (7.3 percent).

Research Methodology

In order to measure the foreign tourists' expectations and perceptions regarding the quality of tourism services in Kashmir, a modified SERVQUAL instrument proposed by Bhat and Qadir, (2013b) was used. Expectations and perceptions were measured by a self-administered questionnaire. The original items were slightly modified to suit the present research setting. The questionnaire for the study consisted of two parts: part first contained 32 items for measuring foreign tourists 'expectations and perceptions on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1='strongly disagree' to 10='strongly agree.' The second part was designed to capture respondents' demographic characteristics, which included age, gender, income, occupation, level of education, purpose of visit, length of stay and number of visits. All the statements in the questionnaire were worded positively as suggested by Parasuraman et. al., (1994) and arranged alphabetically to later identify the underlying expectation/perception dimensions by using factor analysis. The

data received from the questionnaires were then put into the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 19.0 and analyzed using exploratory factor analysis and reliability tests.

Exploratory factor analysis was performed on the 32 expectation/perception attributes included in the questionnaire in order to determine the underlying dimensions of tourism services. R-mode Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation and Eigen value equal to or greater than 1 was used. The approach was to retain items with factor loadings of equal to or above 0.50 (Hair et. al., 1998), which meant for exclusion of 3 items (Q3, Q17 and Q24). The dropped questions were labeled as: comfortable recreational facilities; professional, polite and competent service personnel; and, provision of information about local events and entertainment respectively. Hence, factor analysis got completed in 8 iterations and 5 factors were emerged as dimensions of tourism services consisting of 29 items with 67.94% Explained Variance. Each of the 5 factors was labeled according to the items loaded onto it. Factor 1 was named as Tangibility; Factor 2 as Assurance; Factor 3 as Reliability; Factor 4 as Responsiveness; and, finally Factor 5 as Empathy. Highest variance was observed on Tangibility (17.37) followed by Assurance (16.33) and as such these two dimensions are considered as the most important determinants of tourism service quality.

Table 1: Factor Analysis Results and Reliability Coefficients (n=316)

Item No.	Elements of tourism services	Factors				
		F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
V16	Well dressing and neat appearance of service personnel (e.g., tour and hotel escorts).	.772				
	Unspoiled nature and pollution free atmosphere.	.724				
V20		.720				
	Aesthetic, clean and attractive destination.	.710				
V1	Safety and security to tourists.	.710				
V2	Hygienic and high quality food and beverages.	.686				
V21	Appealing accommodation facilities.	.661				
V23	Appropriate location of facilities and equipments.	.557	.872			
V28	Modern and technologically relevant vehicles.		.835			
V12	Trustworthiness and honesty of the service personnel.		.797			
V4	Willingness of the service personnel to help tourists and advise on how to use free time.		.737			
V11	Fluent and understandable communication skills of the service personnel.		.577			
V6	The behaviour of other participants (local people and others) is not bothersome.			.854		
				.714		
V18	Behaviour of service personnel instills tourists' confidence.			.637		
				.576		
	Providing service/s at the promised time.			.553		
V22	Easy access to service personnel when needed.			.549		
	Insisting on error-free services.			.518		
	Performing services right the first time.				.816	

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Code	Description				Loading 4	Loading 5
V2	Providing correct and accurate information to tourists.				.679	
V5	Uninterrupted telecommunication services.				.658	
V7	No sudden increase in tour cost.				.640	
V2 7	Cultivation of friendly relationship with tourists.				.513	
V1 0	Tour operators/tour guides act on participants' suggestions.					.756
V9	Sincere and keen interest in solving the problems of tourists.					.749
V1 5	Tourists being served quickly by the appropriate personnel.					.651
V1 3	The service persons do not neglect tourists' services when they are busy.					.547
V3 1	Individual attention to tourists.					
V3 0	Best tourist interest at heart.					
V2 9	Providing diversified service based on tourists' needs.					
V3 2	Proper health care to tourists.					
V2 6						
V1 9						
V2 5						
V8						
V1 4						
Eigen Values Percentage of Total Variance Cumulative Percentage of Variance Cronbach's Alpha Number of Items Per Factor		10.279 17.374 17.374 .7848	3.278 16.332 33.706 .7945	3.212 13.521 47.227 .8397	2.673 11.582 58.809 .7845	2.301 9.139 67.948 .7614

Table 2: KMO and Barlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Samping Adequacy	0.927
Barlett's Test of Sphericity (Approx. Chi-Square)	4264.958*
Cronbach's Alpha	0.949

*1% Significance Level

Furthermore, a reliability analysis was performed to test the reliability of the scale and inner consistency of extracted factors. For this purpose, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated. The coefficients of the extracted factors ranged from 0.761 to 0.839 that are well above the minimum value of 0.60, which is considered acceptable as an indication of scale reliability (Hair et. al., 2006). Thus, these values suggest good internal consistency of the factors. Moreover, Cronbach's alpha value for the overall expectation/perception scale is 0.949 and indicates its high reliability. The suitability of factor analysis was validated with the help of Bartlett's Test of Sphericity that revealed a Chi-square at 4264.958 (p<0.000 at 1% level) and confirmed that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy was also performed that showed KMO= 0.927 i.e., higher than the suggested value of 0.6 (Tabachnik and Fidell, 2001).

Results of the Study

In order to achieve the above stated objectives, expectations and perceptions were measured on a ten point Likert Type (strongly disagree/strongly agree) scale. To determine the service quality gaps (service quality = perception-expectation), mean scores were computed separately for foreign tourists' perceptions and expectations. Independent sample t-test was also performed to test the hypothesis. The results are shown in Tables 3-7.

Overall Service Quality

In order to determine the foreign tourists' overall Expectation and Perception gap related to tourism services, mean scores averaged on all dimensions were calculated separately followed by independent t-test.

Table 3: Expectation and Perception Scores Averaged on all Dimensions

Dimensions of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation	Service Quality	'p' Value*
Tangibility	Expectation	7.16	1.1	0.32	0.00
	Perception	7.48	0.9		
Assurance	Expectation	7.13	1.0	0.54	0.00
	Perception	7.67	0.9		
Reliability	Expectation	7.12	1.0	0.42	0.00
	Perception	7.54	0.9		
Responsiveness	Expectation	7.19	1.1	0.54	0.00
	Perception	7.73	0.9		
Empathy	Expectation	7.03	1.0	0.37	0.00
	Perception	7.40	1.0		
Overall Service Quality (Averaged on all dimensions)	**Expectation**	**7.13**	**1.0**	**0.44**	**0.00**
	Perception	**7.57**	**0.8**		

significant (p<0.05) at 5% level

The results of such an analysis (Table 3) indicates significant difference (p<0.05 at 5%) in foreign tourists' expectations and perceptions in the overall and across all dimensions of tourism services. Moreover, the data reveals that Kashmir Valley is exceeding the expectations of tourists on overall quality of tourism services (0.44). The analysis clearly shows higher levels

of tourism service quality as is reflected by the respective SERVQUAL scores on all dimensions of tourism services – Tangibility (0.32), Assurance (0.55), Reliability (0.42), Responsiveness (0.54), and Empathy (0.38) respectively.

Dimension-Wise Analysis

Tangibility dimension

The data on Table 4 reveals that Kashmir Valley is marginally exceeding the expectations of foreign tourists on Tangibility (0.32) which suggests improvement in the physical aspect of tourism services. Its element-wise analysis brings to light that Valley is exceeding the expectations of foreign tourists relatively more on 'safety and security to tourists (0.84)' followed by 'aesthetic, clean and attractive destination (0.56)' while as it falls below the expectations of tourists on 'modern and technologically relevant vehicles (-0.04)'. Its' service quality score is relatively low on 'unspoiled nature and pollution free atmosphere (0.02)' followed by 'hygienic and high quality food and beverages (0.12)' and 'appealing accommodation facilities (0.30)'.

Table 4: Expectation and Perception Scores on Tangibility

Elements of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	'p' Value*
1. Well dressing and neat appearance of service personnel (e.g., tour and hotel escorts).	E	7.32	1.39	0.34	0.00
	P	7.66	1.44		
2. Unspoiled nature and pollution free atmosphere.	E	6.88	1.54	0.02	0.90
	P	6.90	1.66		
3. Aesthetic, clean and attractive destination.	E	7.12	1.60	0.56	0.00
	P	7.68	1.43		
4. Safety and security to tourists.	E	7.15	1.45	0.84	0.00
	P	7.99	1.42		
5. Hygienic and high quality food and beverages.	E	7.38	1.39	0.12	0.31
	P	7.50	1.50		
6. Appealing accommodation facilities.	E	7.18	1.34	0.30	0.00
	P	7.48	1.30		
7. Appropriate location of facilities and equipments.	E	7.16	1.41	0.41	0.00
	P	7.57	1.40		
8. Modern and technologically relevant vehicles.	E	7.07	1.44	-0.04	0.75
	P	7.03	1.39		
Overall Tangibility Scores (Averaged on all elements)	**E**	**7.16**	**1.10**	**0.32**	**0.00**
	P	**7.48**	**0.98**		

Significant (p<0.05) at 5% level

Assurance dimension

Relatively higher service quality score (0.54) on assurance (Table 5) indicates that the service personnel of Kashmir Valley are exceeding the expectations of tourists significantly (p<0.05) and are credible and courteous. Its' element-wise analysis shows highest SERVQUAL score on

'Trustworthiness and honesty of the service personnel (0.96)' followed by 'willingness of the service personnel to help tourists and advice on how to use free time (0.67)', whereas relatively low SERVQUAL score is reported on 'fluent and understandable communication skills of the service personnel (0.15) followed by 'friendly behaviour of other participants (0.27)'.

Table 5: Expectation and Perception Scores on Assurance

Elements of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	'p' Value*
1. Trustworthiness and honesty of the service personnel.	E	7.30	1.28	0.96	0.00
	P	8.26	1.15		
2. Willingness of the service personnel to help tourists and advise on how to use free time.	E	7.12	1.30	0.67	0.00
	P	7.80	1.21		
3. Fluent and understandable communication skills of the service personnel.	E	7.29	1.21	0.15	0.12
	P	7.44	1.28		
4. The behaviour of other participants (local people and others) is not bothersome.	E	6.68	1.56	0.27	0.02
	P	6.95	1.54		
5. Behaviour of service personnel instills tourists' confidence.	E	7.27	1.49	0.66	0.00
	P	7.93	1.39		
Overall Assurance Scores (Averaged on all elements)	**E**	**7.13**	**1.08**	**0.54**	**0.00**
	P	**7.67**	**0.91**		

Significant (p<0.05) at 5% level

Table 6: Expectation and Perception Scores on Reliability

Elements of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	'p' Value*
1. Providing service/s at the promised time.	E	7.27	1.44	0.55	0.00
	P	7.83	1.46		
2. Easy access to service personnel when needed.	E	7.27	1.24	0.46	0.00
	P	7.24	1.24		
3. Insisting on error-free services.	E	7.05	1.37	0.25	0.02
	P	7.30	1.42		
4. Performing services right the first time.	E	7.14	1.28	0.55	0.00
	P	7.69	1.24		
5. Providing correct and accurate information to tourists.	E	7.07	1.42	0.76	0.00
	P	7.83	1.31		
6. Uninterrupted telecommunication services.	E	6.77	1.56	-0.25	0.04
	P	6.52	1.55		
7. No sudden increase in tour cost.	E	7.24	1.43	0.63	0.00
	P	7.87	1.44		
Overall Reliability Scores (Averaged on all elements)	**E**	**7.12**	1.08	**0.42**	**0.00**
	P	**7.54**	0.92		

Significant (p<0.05) at 5% level

Reliability dimension

The data on Table 6 shows significant difference (p<0.05) in tourists expectations and perceptions on reliability. Positive mean difference (0.42) indicates that Kashmir Valley is exceeding the expectations of tourists on reliability dimension. Element-wise analysis of the said dimension reveals lowest service quality score on 'uninterrupted telecommunication services (-0.25)' followed by 'insisting on error free services (0.25)'. Although, relatively higher service quality score is observed on 'provision of correct and accurate information to tourists (0.76)' followed by 'no sudden increase in tour cost (0.63)' and 'providing service/s at the promised time (0.55)'.

Responsiveness dimension

Data on table 7 reveals service quality score of 0.54 on responsiveness dimension, which indicates that the service personnel of Kashmir Valley provide prompt services to tourists. Further, positive mean scores indicate that Kashmir Valley is significantly (p<0.05) exceeding the expectations of tourists on all elements of responsiveness. Specifically, higher service quality has been reported on 'cultivation of friendly relationship with tourists (0.81)' followed by 'sincere and keen interest in solving the problems of tourists (0.75)'. However, relatively low service quality score is observed on 'tour operators/tour guides act on participants' suggestions (0.22)' followed by 'tourists being served quickly by the appropriate personnel (0.45)'.

Empathy dimension

Service personnel of Kashmir Valley have tourists' best interest at heart which is reflected by positive service quality score on empathy (0.37). The data (Table 8) clearly shows that service personnel in Kashmir Valley are exceeding the expectations of tourists significantly (p<0.05). Element-wise analysis of the said dimension reveals low service quality score on 'proper health care to tourists (-0.04)' followed by 'providing diversified service based on tourists' needs (0.45)' whereas higher service quality score is observed on 'best tourist interest at heart (0.59)' followed by 'individual attention to tourists (0.50)' respectively.

Table 7: Expectation and Perception Scores on Responsiveness

Elements of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	'p' Value*
1. Cultivation of friendly relationship with tourists.	E	7.28	1.43	0.81	0.00
	P	8.09	1.33		
2. Tour operators/tour guides act on participants' suggestions.	E	6.88	1.52	0.22	0.08
	P	7.11	1.70		
3. Sincere and keen interest in solving the problems of tourists.	E	7.20	1.40	0.75	0.00
	P	7.96	1.38		
4. Tourists being served quickly by the appropriate personnel.	E	7.30	1.33	0.45	0.00
	P	7.75	1.32		
5. The service persons do not neglect tourists' services when they are busy.	E	7.27	1.32	0.48	0.00
	P	7.75	1.36		
Overall Responsiveness Scores (Averaged on all elements)	**E**	**7.19**	**1.11**	**0.54**	**0.00**
	P	**7.73**	**0.99**		

Table 8: Expectation and Perception Scores on Empathy

Elements of Tourism Services	Group	Mean Scores	Standard Deviation	Mean Difference	'p' Value*
1. Individual attention to tourists.	E	7.12	1.30	0.50	0.00
	P	7.63	1.26		
2. Best tourist interest at heart.	E	7.16	1.21	0.59	0.00
	P	7.75	1.24		
3. Providing diversified service based on tourists' needs.	E	7.20	1.36	0.45	0.00
	P	7.65	1.33		
4. Proper health care to tourists.	E	6.64	1.52	-0.04	0.73
	P	6.60	1.53		
Overall Empathy Scores (Averaged on all elements)	**E**	**7.03**	**1.08**	**0.37**	**0.00**
	P	**7.40**	**1.02**		

Significant (p<0.05) at 5% level

Conclusion and Suggestions

The overall empirical results supported the proposed hypothesis. The current study has employed modified SERVQUAL instrument (proposed by Bhat and Qadir, 2013b) for determining foreign tourists' expectation and perception gap scores in relation to tourism services and identified five factors – Tangibility, Assurance, Reliability, Responsiveness and Empathy with 29 statements . From the data, it has been observed that most of the sampled foreign tourists came to Kashmir Valley with higher expectations and left the destination with higher perceptions. While comparing the sampled foreign tourists' expectations and perceptions, it can be concluded that Kashmir Valley exceeded the expectations of the tourists significantly.

The overall expectation and perception gap (SERVQUAL) score of 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. However, the present study supported the findings of Bhat and Qadir (2013b) who suggested improvement in tangibility and empathy dimensions where the service quality scores (0.32 and 0.37) are relatively low in order to improve the overall quality of tourism services. Quality of the tourism services is a comparison of prior service expectations with the post service experiences. Tourist expectations for the service are likely to rise when the service is not performed as promised. Therefore, in order to keep expectations from rising, tourism entrepreneurs must provide diversified services based on the individual needs of the tourists and must perform such services properly for the first time. They should monitor the quality of tourism services and evaluate the efficiency of the service personnel by performance appraisal techniques on a regular basis in order to avoid service failure and customer complaints.

The study provides good empirical and theoretical background for researchers, academics and tourism managers. However, it is subjected to several limitations. First, the study is only about the expectations and perceptions of foreign tourists excluding domestic tourists. So, a comparative study between foreign and domestic tourists should be the implication for future researchers to indicate which among the two belongs to highest expectation category. Second, quality of tourism services across demographic variables have not been studied as it is vital for tourism managers to know about the expectations of tourists based on gender, age, income, etc. Third, data gathered from different places where the survey was conducted have different characteristics which influenced the results of the current study.

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