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HEALTH AND WELLNESS TOURISM – THE IMPACT OF QUALITY SERVICE ON CLIENTS' SATISFACTION

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The purpose of the present study is to analyse the impact of service quality in the levels of satisfaction of the clients of units of Health and Wellness Tourism, considered by P.E.N.T. (2006-2015) as one of the most important markets for the future of tourism in Portugal. On recognising the increase of the number of people interested in having leisure times with quality, becomes evident and necessary that the supply should give special attention to this question, as an answer to the needs and wishes of consumers, as well as the fulfilment of their satisfaction levels. The methodology used in this study consists of the review of the literature and in the analysis of statistic data. On the other hand, the empiric research is based on the interpretation of surveys administrated to the users of some thermal units and hotels with Spa facilities situated in the Portugal region, well-known by its thermal and touristic potential. By means of this study we intend to contribute to the development of the Health and Wellness touristic organizations, as well as to increase their quality service. This perspective is seen as a determinant factor in what concerns to the competitiveness which allows the regional development of the inner regions of Portugal, where this kind of touristic offer can mainly be found. These objectives lead to a final goal: to give the Units of Health and Wellness Tourism a deeper knowledge of the market, so that they may define a proper supply to the needs, wishes and attitudes of their market targets, looking for a better use of their potentialities.

1. Introduction

The growth of Health Tourism in Europe is clear and it is due to a number of social circumstances, such as the increase of the citizens and to the population oldness and its lifestyles. In the Portuguese case, this growth is also due to the publication of new legislation related to the way how Therms work, making the distinction between Health Thermalism and Wellness Thermalism by giving the thermal institutions the possibility of developing a varied offer, to make possible the complete use of health potentialities, wellness and tourism in those institutions. In the context of increasing offer and competition, the units of Health and Wellness Tourism appear as a study area demanding a special attention from the investigators and agents of the touristic sector.

2. Methods

The main objective of this study consists of evaluating the impact of the service quality on the satisfaction of the clients of Health and Wellness Tourism units. This study is also aimed at

attaining the specific goals: identify the profile of users of the inquired units, analyzing their behavior while travelling; identify the attributes that please more and that are more emphasized by the users of the Health and Wellness Tourism units, evaluating the global performance of product/service; determine how this performance influences the quality of the service perceived and analyze how the after consumption behavior constitutes a consequence of the satisfaction, aiming at the fidelity of clients.

The empiric data were obtained through surveys. The model of investigation is based on the conceptual model SERVQUAL presented by Parazuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985) aimed evaluating service quality perceived by clients in the sector of hotel lodging, constituted by 5 dimensions. Necessarily, this model was adapted according to the nature and characteristics of the reality of Health and Wellness Tourism. The scale used to analyze the quality service was reduced to the more significant dimensions perceived in the studied units (*attendance*, *assurance* and *tangibles*).

This study is also based in the IPA (Importance-Performance Analysis) model created by Martilla and James in 1977 (Ennew *et al.*, 1993), also modified according to the objectives of this study. The survey was distributed to 400 users of those units, with a rate of answer in the percentage of 64,5%, making a total of 258 valid surveys.

3. Results

Analyzing the dimensions of quality of service of users we verified that the aspects related with *attendance*, such as the ability of the employee to perform accurately and dependably, the employee's willingness to help the customer and provide prompt service as well as their capacity to provide individualized attention are the aspects that give more satisfaction to the users of the studied units.

The results obtained also show that service quality comes before satisfaction. It was also verified that satisfaction has a direct effect on the fidelity of the user, as its effect on the intentions of behavior are much more important than service quality. The results of the study confirmed the influence of satisfaction in the purchase intention is greater than service quality according to Baker and Crompton (2000).

Relatively to IPA analysis, we verify that all the attributes are concentrated on the area of the critical forces, in which the importance and the performance attain high levels, calling the attention and motivating the Health and Wellness units managers' to profit the competitive advantage. This aspect strengthens what was previously said about the high level of satisfaction the users have in the conditions and services offered by those units. From this analysis must still be emphasized that the "Relation quality / price", the "Quality of complementary services (lodging and leisure)" and the "Geographic localization (quality of transports and accessibilities)" are attributes that, in spite of being in a comfortable situation, belong to the area risk/opportunity and are in its threshold, which means that Health and Wellness Tourism units managers has to concentrate efforts to improve the performance of these attributes because they are important to the clients.

4. Conclusions

Service quality and satisfaction have been critical concepts in the fields of tourism and leisure, as well as in the field of marketing once they may be utilized as indicators of productivity, constituting a guarantee to reach the organizational objectives with success.

However, these concepts haven't systematically applied yet to health and wellness tourism that's why this study has got an exploratory character.

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