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The role of excellent service in enchasing the appeal of Tomok Tourism Village, Samosir Island, North Sumatera

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Abstract

Purpose - The purpose of this study is to explore the role of excellent service in improving the tourist experience in Tomok Tourism Village, located on Samosir Island, North Sumatra. It aims to identify how service quality can enhance the attractiveness of the village for visitors.

Methodology/Design/Approach - The study uses interviews, observations, and a literature review, focusing on both business operators and visitors to gather insights on the impact of service quality on tourism satisfaction.

Finding - The study found that friendly, prompt, and professional service plays a significant role in enhancing tourist satisfaction and encouraging repeat visits. High-quality service directly influences tourists' overall experience and their likelihood of returning.

Originality/Value - This research provides valuable recommendations for village managers to improve service standards, which could help attract more tourists to Tomok Village. It emphasizes the importance of excellent service in creating a positive and lasting impression on visitors.

Keywords excellent service, appeal, Tomok Tourism Village, Samosir Island, tourist satisfaction

Introduction

Tourism plays a vital role in the economic and cultural development of many regions across the globe, offering a unique opportunity for local communities to showcase their heritage, traditions, and natural beauty. In Indonesia, the tourism industry has become one of the fastest-growing sectors, with destinations like Samosir Island in North Sumatra becoming increasingly popular. Specifically, Tomok Tourism Village, located on Samosir Island, stands out for its rich Batak culture, traditional music, dance performances, and historical sites like the Tomb of King Sidabutar (Thelen & Kim, 2024). This village, with its deep historical and cultural significance, has the potential to become a premier destination for both domestic and international tourists. However, while Tomok's natural and cultural assets are undeniably attractive, the quality of service provided to visitors plays a crucial role in enhancing their overall experience and, ultimately, the village's appeal as a tourist destination.

The success of any tourism destination is heavily reliant on the level of satisfaction experienced by visitors, which is directly influenced by service quality. A well-managed tourist site offering excellent service characterized by friendliness, promptness, and professionalism can significantly In the case of Tomok Tourism Village, improving service quality has become a press-

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ing need. While the village attracts visitors with its unique cultural and historical offerings, there is a gap in meeting the expectations of modern tourists who demand more than just scenic beauty or historical insights (Bi & Yang, 2023). They seek comprehensive experiences that include excellent service, seamless communication, and professional management. This gap between visitor expectations and the service provided poses a challenge for Tomok Village to establish itself as a competitive tourism destination in Indonesia.



Figure 1. One of object destination in tomok village

In the context of Tomok Village, a key issue that has emerged is the lack of standardization in service delivery across various touchpoints. Tourists, both domestic and international, are often left with a mixed impression due to inconsistent service levels in areas such as hospitality, cleanliness, and responsiveness. Many tourism stakeholders, including local business operators, may not have the necessary skills or training to meet these modern demands (Chan et al., 2024). This issue, if left unaddressed, could hinder Tomok's potential for sustainable tourism growth. Therefore, this study aims to explore how excellent service can enhance the appeal of Tomok Village by improving the overall visitor experience. The objective of this research is to identify the role of service quality in driving tourist satisfaction and loyalty, and to provide recommendations for local tourism operators and policymakers on improving service standards to attract more visitors.

Previous studies have extensively documented the relationship between service quality and tourist satisfaction in various contexts. For instance, research on rural tourism in Malaysia highlights how service quality in hospitality and management positively correlates with higher levels of visitor satisfaction, leading to repeat visits. Similarly, studies conducted in high-altitude destinations like the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau reveal that the quality of services, alongside natural

attractions, plays a critical role in determining tourist loyalty (Quevedo et al., 2021). Moreover, the development of rural tourism destinations often depends on the integration of local culture with high service standards, as seen in studies exploring tourism in ancient villages in China.

However, much of the literature focuses on destinations that are either fully urbanized or primarily rural with limited integration of cultural tourism. Few studies examine how service excellence can act as a bridge between cultural heritage and modern tourism demands. This gap in the literature indicates the need for further exploration into how service improvements can support the appeal of culturally rich, yet service-limited destinations like Tomok Village. Moreover, while many studies emphasize the importance of physical infrastructure and marketing, there is limited research on how soft skills — such as hospitality training, communication, and customer care — directly affect tourist experiences in culturally significant rural destinations (Gocer et al., 2024).

In light of these gaps, this study addresses the following research questions: How does the quality of service in Tomok Village affect tourist satisfaction? What specific service areas need improvement to better cater to both local and international visitors? And how can the village integrate excellent service with its cultural and natural attractions to boost its overall appeal? By addressing these questions, this research aims to provide actionable insights that can help Tomok Village enhance its competitiveness in the tourism industry, ensuring that its cultural heritage is complemented by top-notch service standards (Lukoseviciute et al., 2024).

This study on Tomok Village will contribute to the existing body of tourism literature by offering a focused analysis on the intersection of service quality and cultural tourism in a rural setting. The findings are expected to provide a framework for improving service standards in culturally rich, rural destinations, ensuring sustainable growth and long-term visitor loyalty. By bridging the gap between traditional attractions and modern service expectations, Tomok Village has the potential to become not just a place of historical interest, but a top-tier destination that meets the diverse needs of contemporary tourists.

Method

This study aims to explore the role of excellent service in enhancing the appeal of Tomok Tourism Village, Samosir Island, North Sumatra, focusing on the impact of service quality on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. A qualitative and quantitative mixed-method approach was employed to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the tourist experience in Tomok Village. The following sections outline the research design, target population, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques used in this study (Hussain et al., 2024).

The research was conducted in Tomok Tourism Village, located on Samosir Island in North Sumatra, Indonesia. Tomok is well-known for its rich Batak culture, traditional music, dance performances, and significant historical landmarks, such as the Tomb of King Sidabutar. The village receives a growing number of tourists, both domestic and international, making it an ideal location for this study on service quality and its influence on tourism.

The study was carried out over a two-weeks period from December 2023 until January 2024, coinciding with the peak tourist season. This timing was chosen to capture a wide range of tourist experiences and ensure sufficient data from both first-time and repeat visitors. The target population included tourists visiting Tomok Village during this period, as well as local business operators such as tour guides, souvenir sellers, and local hospitality service providers.



Figure 2. Souvenir market in tomok village

Research Design

A cross-sectional study design was adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. The study aimed to examine the perspectives of both tourists and service providers regarding the quality of services in Tomok Village, with a focus on how service improvements could enhance the overall tourist experience. This design allowed the researchers to gather immediate and relevant data across different aspects of service quality, including hospitality, responsiveness, and professionalism.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprised two main groups:

1. Tourists visiting Tomok Village during the research period, including both domestic and international tourists.
2. Local service providers, including hospitality workers (e.g., hotel staff, restaurant employees), tour operators, and souvenir vendors.

A non-probability sampling method was employed to select participants from both groups. For tourists, convenience sampling was used, where respondents were approached randomly during their visit to Tomok. A total of 150 tourists participated in the survey. Additionally, purposive sampling was used for the local business operators to ensure that key stakeholders, such as those involved in direct tourist services, were included. A total of 20 local business operators were interviewed.

Data Collection

In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with local service providers to gain insight into their understanding of service quality and its importance in tourism. The interviews explored the challenges they face in delivering excellent service and their views on what improvements could enhance the overall tourist experience. These interviews lasted between 30 to 45 minutes and were recorded with participants' consent.

Observational Data

Researchers also conducted non-participant observations during the study period to document tourist interactions with service providers, the general atmosphere in Tomok Village, and the quality of available facilities. This method provided additional qualitative data that complemented the survey and interview findings, offering a more comprehensive view of the service landscape in the village.

Variables and Measures

The study focused on the following key variables:

1. **Service Quality:** This included friendliness, responsiveness, professionalism, and overall tourist experience.
2. **Tourist Satisfaction:** This variable measured the overall contentment of tourists with their visit, focusing on their perception of the service received.
3. **Tourist Loyalty:** The likelihood of tourists recommending Tomok Village to others or revisiting the location in the future.

Data Analysis

Qualitative Analysis

The data from the interviews were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach. The interview transcripts were reviewed, and key themes related to service challenges, opportunities for improvement, and local perspectives on tourism were identified. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the service quality issues from the perspective of local stakeholders.

Observational Data Analysis

The observational data were analyzed by categorizing the notes based on specific service quality indicators, such as friendliness and professionalism of staff, cleanliness of facilities, and tourist engagement. The data were then compared to the survey and interview findings to identify consistencies and discrepancies in service quality perceptions.

Findings and discussion

Participant Description

The study involved two key groups: tourists visiting Tomok Tourism Village and local service providers. A total of 150 tourists participated in the survey, with 65% domestic visitors and 35% international tourists. Among the domestic visitors, a large percentage (70%) were from other regions in Sumatra, while the rest hailed from Jakarta and Java. The international tourists primarily came from neighboring countries such as Singapore and Malaysia. In terms of demographics, the majority of respondents (60%) were aged between 25-40 years, with a roughly equal gender distribution (Guo et al., 2024).

In addition, 20 local service providers were interviewed, representing various sectors such as hospitality, tour guiding, retail (souvenirs), and food services. These business operators were all local residents with varying levels of experience in the tourism industry, ranging from one to over ten years. The participants in this group were predominantly middle-aged, with 75% aged between 35-50 years.

The survey revealed that service quality in Tomok Village was rated moderately satisfactory by the tourists, with an overall satisfaction score of 3.5 on a five-point Likert scale. When broken down by specific service attributes, tourists expressed the highest satisfaction with the friendliness of local service providers (mean score of 4.2), reflecting the warmth and hospitality

commonly associated with Indonesian culture (Sharma et al., 2024). However, responsiveness and professionalism scored lower (mean scores of 3.0 and 2.8 respectively), indicating areas where tourists felt improvements were needed.

Among international tourists, the satisfaction with service quality was notably lower compared to domestic tourists. This discrepancy appeared to be linked to issues of communication barriers and the lack of professional standards, such as delays in service and limited knowledge of foreign languages. Many international visitors expressed frustration over the difficulty in receiving accurate information and navigating the village without sufficient signage or guidance (Qiu et al., 2024).

Across both domestic and international respondents, friendliness emerged as the most valued aspect of service quality in Tomok. Tourists noted that the welcoming nature of the locals significantly enhanced their overall experience. This finding aligns with existing research suggesting that positive human interactions are central to visitor satisfaction in culturally rich destinations.

Despite the positive feedback on friendliness, professionalism and responsiveness were identified as significant weaknesses in Tomok's service delivery. For example, tourists reported long waiting times at restaurants and delayed responses to requests at local accommodations. Similarly, international tourists highlighted the lack of language proficiency as a key barrier, particularly for non-Indonesian speakers. This finding suggests a need for targeted training to improve service efficiency and responsiveness (Zhao et al., 2024).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between service quality (friendliness, responsiveness, professionalism) and tourist loyalty (intention to revisit and recommend the destination). The results indicated that friendliness had a significant positive effect on loyalty ($p < 0.01$), while responsiveness and professionalism had weaker, but still significant, effects ($p < 0.05$). These findings suggest that while tourists appreciate the friendly and welcoming atmosphere of Tomok Village, a higher level of professionalism and responsiveness is necessary to secure repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth recommendations (Çiftçi & Çizel, 2024).

Interviews with local business operators highlighted a lack of formal training as the main reason for the service gaps identified by tourists. Many operators admitted that they had learned their skills informally or through family businesses, without any professional development in customer service or tourism management. Interestingly, local operators also expressed a strong desire to improve their service standards, acknowledging that tourism training programs could significantly enhance the competitiveness of Tomok as a destination (Sgroi, 2022). These insights confirm the need for structured, formal training in hospitality and tourism services to elevate the quality of service delivery in the village.

2. Discussion

The findings from both the survey and interviews point to a clear conclusion: while friendliness and local hospitality are critical strengths of Tomok Tourism Village, there is a significant need to improve professionalism, responsiveness, and language skills. This aligns with similar studies conducted in rural tourism destinations, where service quality is often the determining factor in tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Hussain et al., 2023). The high level of friendliness ensures that tourists feel welcome, but the inconsistent service standards may detract from their overall experience and willingness to return. As tourism continues to grow in Tomok, especially among international visitors, improving service delivery will be essential to maintain competitiveness (Woosnam et al., 2024).

The gap between tourist expectations and service delivery reflects a broader issue seen in many emerging tourism destinations, where the natural and cultural attractions are strong, but service infrastructure lags behind (Sun et al., 2013). This is particularly evident in rural tourism settings, where local operators often lack the resources or access to training that would enable them to meet the expectations of modern tourists. In Tomok, the challenge lies not only in maintaining the warmth and cultural richness that attract tourists but also in professionalizing the service delivery to ensure a seamless and satisfying visitor experience (Le Hong & Hsu, 2024).

Interestingly, the results also show a disconnect between international and domestic tourists. While domestic visitors are generally more forgiving of service inefficiencies, perhaps due to cultural familiarity, international tourists have higher expectations regarding efficiency and communication. This suggests that any improvement strategies must consider the differing needs of these two groups, with a particular emphasis on multilingual services and more structured service delivery for international visitors.

To address these challenges, several practical recommendations emerge from the findings:

Training Programs: Local service providers would benefit from formalized training in hospitality and tourism, particularly in areas such as customer service, professionalism, and language skills. Training could be conducted by tourism authorities or through partnerships with hospitality schools, offering both basic and advanced programs to suit the varying needs of business operators.

Improved Infrastructure: Investment in tourist infrastructure is critical. This includes not only physical amenities like signage and visitor centers but also digital tools such as mobile apps or websites that provide accessible information in multiple languages. Such tools could help bridge the communication gap and improve the overall visitor experience (Schlesinger et al., 2020).

Community-Based Approaches: Engaging the local community in service improvement initiatives would be crucial (Rajaratnam et al., 2014). Community-led programs that encourage locals to take ownership of tourism development, while ensuring that the cultural integrity of the village is maintained, could lead to more sustainable and high-quality service delivery.

One limitation of the study is the relatively small sample size, particularly for international tourists, which may affect the generalizability of the findings. Future studies could expand the sample size to include a more diverse group of international visitors, and perhaps extend the study period to capture data during different seasons. Additionally, as the study is specific to Tomok Village, the findings may not fully generalize to other rural tourism destinations, although similar challenges are likely to be present in other locations with comparable cultural and natural attractions (Maziliauske, 2024).

Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the role of excellent service in enhancing the appeal of Tomok Tourism Village, located on Samosir Island, North Sumatra, and its impact on tourist satisfaction and loyalty. The findings show that while Tomok's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty are significant attractions, the quality of service provided plays an equally crucial role in shaping tourists' experiences. Friendly interactions with local service providers emerged as a key factor in visitor satisfaction, particularly for domestic tourists, while professionalism and responsiveness were identified as areas needing significant improvement, especially to meet the expectations of international visitors.

The gap in service standards—such as delays, lack of multilingual support, and inconsistency in professional conduct—hinders Tomok’s potential as a competitive tourist destination. The study concludes that improving service quality through targeted training and infrastructure development is essential to boost tourist loyalty, encourage repeat visits, and elevate Tomok’s status as a cultural tourism hub. Quality service, alongside Tomok’s unique cultural offerings, can significantly enhance the village’s appeal and contribute to sustainable tourism growth.

Suggestion

To address the challenges identified in the study, it is recommended that local stakeholders in Tomok Tourism Village focus on implementing tourism training programs aimed at enhancing professionalism, responsiveness, and customer service skills. This training should emphasize areas such as language proficiency, problem-solving, and time management, with a particular focus on international visitor expectations. Training programs could be delivered through partnerships with local tourism authorities and hospitality schools.

Additionally, improving tourism infrastructure is essential. This includes upgrading physical facilities, such as installing clear signage and providing visitor information centers, as well as introducing digital tools such as mobile apps in multiple languages to assist tourists in navigating the village and accessing relevant cultural and historical information.

For local government and tourism policymakers, this study highlights the need to prioritize service quality improvements in Tomok Village as part of broader tourism development plans. Investment in capacity-building programs for local business operators, alongside infrastructure upgrades, would create a more professional and welcoming environment for both domestic and international tourists. Furthermore, it is recommended that tourism policies integrate service quality standards into their certification processes for local businesses, ensuring consistency and raising the overall visitor experience.

On a broader scale, the findings from Tomok Village have implications for rural tourism development in Indonesia. As cultural and rural destinations increasingly attract global visitors, tourism policies must shift towards ensuring professional service delivery while maintaining the authenticity of local cultural experiences. Local government agencies should collaborate with tourism operators to establish service quality benchmarks that reflect the expectations of modern tourists, balancing these with the preservation of cultural integrity.

Limitation of Study and Future Research

The study was conducted during the peak tourist season, which may not reflect the service challenges faced during off-peak periods. Future research could expand the study to cover different times of the year to assess the consistency of service quality. Additionally, this research focused primarily on tourist and service provider perspectives; future studies could include local government stakeholders to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the systemic challenges in service delivery.

Another limitation is the relatively small sample size of international tourists, which may limit the generalizability of findings to all foreign visitors. Further research could focus on a larger and more diverse sample of international tourists, including those from non-Asian countries, to assess whether service expectations and satisfaction levels vary across different cultural groups. Expanding the study to other rural tourism destinations could also provide a comparative analysis, helping to identify best practices for improving service quality in similar settings.

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Consent for publication

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Author contributions

AMS conceptualized the study, collected data, and analyzed improved the quality of the manuscript.

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