

Visitor satisfaction hits 18-month low

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Front-line employees of the tourism industry should be encouraged to improve their service, an academic says

Visitors were less satisfied with their time in Macau in the third quarter of this year, mainly because they were less impressed by the heritage and shops, the results of a survey show.

The tourist satisfaction index compiled by the Institute for Tourism Studies tourism research centre fell to 69.4 points out of 100 in the third quarter from 71.5 in the second.

The last time the reading was so low was in the first quarter of last year, when it was 68.8.

The third-quarter reading is slightly below the long-term average of 70.0 since the index was first compiled in 2009.

For the third-quarter survey, researchers asked 1,222 visitors about their satisfaction with and expectations of various aspects of their visits.

The survey found 25.9 percent of respondents came to Macau to shop. But the index of satisfaction with shopping was one the chief drags on the main index.

The shopping index fell to 67.8 points in the third quarter from 71.5 in the second. The latest reading was the lowest since the fourth quarter of 2011, when the reading was 64.1.

Events remained the most satisfactory experiences for tourists, although the index of satisfaction with events fell by 1.5 points to 74.2. However, the survey found that attending events was not among the three main purposes of visiting Macau, which were shopping, seeing the heritage and eating out.

Progress neutralised

Visitors were less happy with hotels and the heritage, the indexes of satisfaction with these aspects being lower than the main index. The index of satisfaction with hotels fell to 68.5 points from 73.9, the latest reading being the second-lowest on record.

Visitors were least impressed by tour guides and tour operators, the index of satisfaction with tour guides and tour operators falling to 61.9 points from 68.8.

"These results indicate that while there have been sustained overall improvements in Macau tourism products and services in the past four years, there has also been consistent deterioration which, altogether, neutralises any progress made," the tourism research centre said.

The centre urged the tourism industry and government "to identify, pinpoint and address the underlying factors that inhibit the long-term and sustained delivery of a positive and favourable visitor experience."

University of Macau assistant professor of gaming and hospitality management Glenn McCartney said more research was needed to find out where Macau would stand as a destination for tourists in a few years from now.

"This is just one survey about service quality – which is good to have – but it is not enough to have a real idea about the industry as a whole," Mr McCartney told Business Daily.

"We are not very active in doing these studies, and we have to do more research to understand the pulse of the industry".

Corrective actions

He said the products and services available did not match the expectations tourists had upon arrival, which might have pushed the satisfaction index lower.

"Macau still has a lot to offer, especially inside the new integrated resorts, but the main problem lies with training of the front-line staff," he said.

The survey results published since the index was first compiled show that Macau has not improved much in the past five years.

"We have to put corrective actions into place," Mr McCartney said.

He said effort had to be made to solve labour problems.

"How do you have a workforce that delivers quality? Macau has challenges there, because we have restrictions on imports that should be looked at," he said.

"We have to incentivise the front-line staff – from retail to taxi and bus drivers – so that we are able to improve service quality," Mr McCartney said. "That will only happen when we decide on what corrective actions should be introduced."

Gambling attraction fading

A study of visitors by the Institute for Tourism Studies tourism research centre has found that the proportion of visitors that come to Macau primarily to gamble has shrunk during the course of this year. Of 1,222 visitors that the tourism research centre surveyed in the third quarter, 7.9 percent acknowledged that the primary purpose of their visits was to gamble.

The proportion was 8.2 percent in the first quarter and 9.5 percent in the second. The centre's index of satisfaction with gaming fell to 70.0 points in the third quarter, 3.0 points less than in the second, the latest reading being the lowest since the first quarter of last year.