

Importance-Performance Analysis of Dive Shop Programs

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Purpose

The Mesoamerican Barrier Reef System adjacent to the coastal destination of Akumal, Mexico is a primary attraction for many visitors because it provides a superb context for snorkeling and scuba diving. In 2004, 5.5 million Americans participated in snorkeling and 1.5 million Americans participated in open-water scuba diving (National Sporting Goods Association, 2005). The purpose of this study was to examine dive shop clients' perceptions of program characteristics in terms of their importance in the decision-making process compared to their post-program evaluations. Items were categorized into four attribute categories: facility (e.g., location of dive shop), equipment (e.g., condition of equipment), programs (e.g., variety of activities), and guides/staff (e.g., courteous). Findings will be shared with management to promote a better understanding of program characteristics most important to clients.

Methods

Data were collected in May, 2005 at three dive shops in Akumal. Surveys were administered to program participants in two phases. First, respondents ($N = 90$) evaluated the importance of 21 characteristics when choosing a dive shop. Upon conclusion of the program (e.g., guided scuba dive, snorkeling excursion, catamaran outing), participants evaluated the dive shop's performance on those same 21 characteristics. An importance-performance analysis (IPA) was used to compare the before and after means for each item. Consistent with other IPA studies, a five-point Likert scale was employed (Oh, 2001). Importance and performance means were treated as coordinate pairs and plotted on a grid. Martilla and James' (1977) four quadrants were then overlaid: "Keep Up the Good Work" (high importance, high performance), "Possible Overkill" (low importance, high performance), "Low Priority" (low importance, low performance), and "Concentrate Here" (high importance, low performance).

Results

Fifteen of the 21 characteristics fell into the "Keep Up the Good Work" quadrant. Three characteristics fell into the "Possible Overkill" quadrant: variety of equipment, variety of activities, and multilingual staff. No characteristics fell into the "Low Priority" quadrant. Three characteristics fell into the "Concentrate Here" quadrant: reef ecology and responsible use, environmental messages in activity, and educational component in activity.

Conclusions

Application of IPA to these data showed that Akumal dive shop clients are generally satisfied with their programs. However, the three characteristics that merit further programmatic attention (i.e., those characteristics in the "Concentrate Here" quadrant) all relate to reef conservation. A principal components analysis of another section of the data revealed a conservation factor as explaining the highest percentage of total variance, which implies that respondents were relatively consistent in their concern about valuing the reef for conservation. Therefore, dive shops should demonstrate a strong environmental ethic and include conservation messages in their programs. Future tourism development depends upon proper reef management.

Applications of the Research

Results of this IPA will be shared with managers of the three dive shops. We will recommend that they augment the environmental interpretation component of their programs. Although data were collected in Mexico, the finding that increased program attention should be given to conservation messages could be applied to any coastal destination. The survey instrument developed for this study could also be utilized in other destinations.

References

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