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The Offer of Tourist Routes to Increase Tourist Stay in Hotels

Abstract

Tourism has an important economic, social and cultural impact. There has been an increasing number of tourists and offer of touristic places and accommodation. According to the World Tourism Organization there were 1235.2 million of international tourists' arrivals around the world in 2016, representing an increase of 3.9%. In Portugal in particular, where this study took place, the number of guests have increased 9.8% from 2015 to 2016. Within the tourism sector, hotels need to innovate their product/services offer, to remain competitive. This is particularly important in the context of a highly seasonal tourism, like the religious tourism in Fátima, Portugal. Driven by faith, tourists visit Fátima, mainly on the festivity days. Though, the rest of the year, there are few tourists. In order to respond to the religious tourism seasonality, hotels in Fátima, in an effort to enrich tourists' experience and knowledge about the region and to lengthen tourists' stay, might offer, as a complement to their core product-service, tourist routes, e.g. heritage, nature, living culture, and gastronomic experiences. The aim of the current research is to understand whether the offer of hotels' tourist routes, as a complement to their main product-service, would lead to increase the stay of tourists at the hotel and therefore, the hotel turnover. Quantitative data were collected. A survey instrument was applied in 2016 to tourists accommodated at four and three star hotels, in Fátima, Portugal. Thirty valid questionnaires were collected (77% from foreign tourists and 23% from Portuguese tourists) and analysed through descriptive and inference statistics. The results showed that: a) hotels should offer tourist routes as a complement to their core product-service, mainly those of churches/sanctuaries, museums, monasteries and castles, nature, culture, heritage and gastronomy; b) there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the hotels' tourist routes offer and the increase length of tourists stay. The results contribute to the knowledge as well as provide important insights for hotel managers in seasonal religious accommodation, suggesting that the offer of tourist routes can increase hotels' turnover.

keywords: Tourist routes, Product-service differentiation, Turnover, Religious tourism; Hotels; Fátima-Portugal.

1. Introduction

The tourism expansion has been continuous in the last decades, being one of the sectors with a greater growth in the world (Fonseca, 2015). As reported by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), there were in 2016, 1235.2 million arrivals of international tourists, representing an increase of 3.9 % compared with previous year. The tourism sector plays an increasing and important role as a major enhancer of economic, social and cultural dynamism of a country. In Portugal, the tourism sector has strongly contributed for the country development. In 2016, the number of guests increased 9.8% compared to 2015. In 2015, 10.175 million international tourists visited Portugal, being almost its entire population (10.36 million, as stated in the World Bank). In 2016 the total turnover from the tourism sector were \$12.606 million (UNWTO, 2016) contributing for the Portuguese economic growth in terms of GDP, as well as employability. In 2015, the contribution of the Travel & Tourism sector (hotels, restaurants, travel agencies, airlines and passenger transport services) for the Portuguese GDP was €11.3 billion, representing 6.4% of the Portuguese GDP (Perez, 2016). According to the World Economic Forum – WE-FORUM (2015), there are several factors that positively contribute to the development of the Portuguese tourism sector, namely:

- It is a safe country, with good infrastructures in terms of hygiene and health, business environment, labour work, qualified human resources, and wide-ranging use of communication and information technologies;
- Stable political conditions, international openness, competitive prices, sustainable environment and prioritization of travel and tourism;
- Infrastructures regarding air and land transports, and tourist services; and
- Cultural and natural resources.

Portugal ranks 15th among 141 countries, in the world ranking. It scores 4.6 on a scale of 1 to 7 (WE-FORUM, 2015). Nevertheless, the contribution of the tourism to the economy, depends on the quality and on the revenue

of the tourism offer (UNWTO, 2016). Therefore, the offer of tourist routes as a complement to the hotel product/service, could have a strong impact on the tourist decision-making process. It can help the tourist to decide the choice of the hotel and the length of stay.

This study aims at identifying tourist places of Fátima (Portugal) that could be included in the hotels' tourist route offer. It aims at understanding whether the offer of hotels' tourist routes, as a complement to their main product-service, would influence the tourists' hotel choice and would lead to increase the stay of tourists at the hotel and therefore, the hotel turnover.

First, the paper starts to present the tourism sector in Portugal. Second, it presents a theoretical background of the religious tourism in Fátima city, and the integration of tourist routes as a complement to the hotel product/services offer. Based on the Literature reviewed, hypotheses are deduced and the conceptual model is presented. It follows a description of the methodology used and the results obtained. At last, the results are discussed and the conclusions are presented.

2. The religious tourism of Fátima

As stated in the Nacional Tourism Strategic Plan (PENT), 2013-2015, Portugal shows countless competitive factors that influence the choice of the tourists' destination. These factors are:

- Heritage and religious routes, like in Braga, Guimarães, Porto, Lisbon, among others;
- Fátima as a place of pilgrimage of the Marian worship;
- Vast and diverse historical and cultural heritage;
- Popular culture and genuine traditions;
- Cultural and landscape diversity;
- Accommodation in a quality and varied rural environment;
- Hospitality.

The tourism in Portugal could be associated to the Sun and Sea Trips; to the Religious and Cultural Tourist Trips; Short Term City Trips; Golf trips; Nature Tourism Trips; Nautical Tourism Trips; Health Tourism trips; Gastronomy and Wines trips (PENT, 2013-2015).

The current study was carried out in the city of Fátima, a place of pilgrimage and Marian worship. Therefore, it was analysed, the Religious Tourism which falls within the *Religious and Cultural Tourist Trips* category. Fátima is one of most emblematic and religious cities of Portugal. Its notoriety is mainly associated with Our Lady apparitions to the three little shepherds, i.e. Lúcia (1907-2005), at that time with 10 years old, and her cousins, Francisco Marto (1908-1919) and Jacinta Marto (1910-1920), with 9 e 7 years old respectively. The apparitions occurred between May 13th and October 13th 1917 in Cova de Iria (Fátima), and were considered as the religious phenomenon more important of the XX century. The apparitions had a strong impact on the dynamics of the Portuguese religious practice and on the development of the city. In 1922 there was only one shop, and in 1970 were already 180. The accommodation also rose sharply: in 1920 there was only one accommodation unity, in 1940 there were 57, and in 1981 the number increased to 558 units. Currently, there are several hotels that are able to accommodate the region tourist flows. As the religious festivities take place in a specific date, there is only a large turnout in these periods. Between the months of May and October and specifically on the 12th and 13th, there is a large number of pilgrims that move to the city to keep their promises. When the 12th and the 13th match with a Saturday or Sunday, there is an extraordinary number of pilgrims in Fátima (Santos, 2006).

The Hotels located in Fátima depend on the religious tourism phenomenon, and are affected by its seasonality. In Portugal, the tourism with religious destination account for seven million people per year, from which, five million have as main destination, the city of Fátima (Diário de Notícias, 2009). Nevertheless, there is a decrease on the number of faithful from year to year (Lusa, 2015). According to the National Statistical Institute, there is an average decrease in the length of tourist stay in Fátima, i.e. from 2013 to 2014, they stayed 1.7 days, and in 2015, they stayed 1.6 days. Therefore, it is crucial that Fátima exploits new tourist offers to lengthen tourist's accommodation stay. Hotels should develop competitive strategies based on product/service differentiation. To accomplish it, hotels might add to the religious tourism experience, tourist routes (Kartal, Tepeci and Atli, 2015). Fátima is embedded in a region surrounded by an historical and cultural heritage. These are important tourist resources that can be incorporated in the tourist routes to attract millions of visitors.

3. The religious tourism and the integration of tourist routes in the product/service offer – the impact on the hotel choice, the lengthen of tourist stay and the hotel turnover

The religious tourism concept, is a voluntary, temporary and unpaid trip (Santos, 2006). The inherent motives are mainly of religious nature, but could also be cultural or other kind. Tourists travel to participate in events with a significant religious meaning, to get to know other manifestations of faith, or to visit religious figures who manifest mystical feelings or arouse faith, hope and charity to believers (Maio, 2003). Religious tourism is strongly related with tourism and cultural heritage (Kurmanaliyeva et al, 2014), being crucial the existence of a harmonious and dependent relationship between the local community and the tourist (Kartal, Tepeci e Atli, 2015). Most of the “religious buildings, like basilicas, cathedrals, monasteries, convents and temples have, in general, an historical and cultural value that complements its value as a place of worship” (Vieira 2000, p. 131). The tourist visit is motivated by the curiosity of these places in a cultural perspective (Ministry of Economy and Employment, 2013). Tourists show a strong tendency to participate in sightseeing and visit places with recreational purposes, stimulating curiosity, pleasure and entertainment (Nyaupane, Timothy and Poudel, 2015). The religious tourism does not only involve the religious/spiritual motives of the visitor, but also the curiosity for the historical, cultural, heritage, artistic and natural places. Taking in consideration that the tourist is driven not only by the religious motives but also by tourism appeals, the cities that hold places of a spiritual nature should also explore other non-spiritual tourism attractions.

In order to attract and retain customers, hotels need to be able to fulfil customer needs, who are no longer interested only in a room, but look also for entertaining activities to occupy free time (Ariffin, Maghzi and Aziz, 2011). The hotels should take in consideration the different needs of the different targets (Almeida, 2003). Therefore, it is important to understand the tourist motives to visit sacred places, in order to create and manage recreational tourist activities (Drule et al, 2012). It is also important to understand the impact of the integration of tourist routes in the hotel product/service offer in Fátima and the impact on the tourist hotel choice. From these considerations, the following research hypothesis is formulated:

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between the offer of tourist routes by the hotels located in Fatima and the choice of those hotels by tourists.

The tourist product is defined as a physical object, a service, a benefit (Sanib et al., 2013) or an idea (Dutse and Ayuba, 2015). Thus, a product could have tangible or intangible features (Lopes, 2014). In the hotel industry, the tourist product is constituted by three components, namely, *the main product, the current product, and the extended product* (Zou and Cavusgil, 2002 in Naidoo, Ramseook-Munhunrrun and Seetaram, 2011). The first, is associated with a set of benefits that the consumer needs, which in this case, is the accommodation, i.e., the sales of rooms, as well as the meals supplied in the hotel. The second, is associated with the quality standard offered and the design specifications. The third, i.e. *the extended product*, is about the importance of the differentiation of the services provided, contributing to the consumer expectations increase (Zou and Cavusgil, 2002 in Naidoo, Ramseook-Munhunrrun and Seetaram, 2011). Based on previous definitions, the tourist routes are attached to *the extended product*, being included in the hotel product/service dimension.

The tourist route (or itinerary) is “the production of a set of activities and attractions that stimulates the articulation between distinct areas and serve as a stimulus to the economic development through tourism” (Briedenhann and Wickens in Baptista and Maia, 2010, p. 2, 3). According to Tocquer and Zins (1999), the geographical attributes like beaches, mountains, water falls, climate, natural landscapes, tourist infrastructures (hotels, restaurants, air transports) establish the tourist product. Those attributes when combined are difficult to implement and replicate by competitors (Lindon et al, 1999). First, because its formation is influenced by human and psychological behaviors (Tocquer and Zins, 1999) and second, because trip motivations may differ from tourist to tourist and from tourist destination to tourist destination (Kozac, 2002). The factors inherent to the development of tourism in each region are related to individual factors, namely: the search for new experiences, the will to get to know new cultures and learn with the uniqueness of each one, and the personal satisfaction or ambition. Yet, beyond individual factors, the attractiveness of each tourist destination, i.e. the natural, cultural and/or social attributes are of extremely importance and influencers of its choice. Tourist routes should focus on the unique features of each region and on the local experiences (Esteves, Fernandes and Cardoso, 2014).

Firms must be able to innovate and differentiate their products/services by associating them with local and regional culture (Cañizares and Guzmán, 2008 in Maia and Baptista, 2011). In Fátima, the offer of religious tourist products/services could be combined with the offer of tourist routes activities. Hotels, in addition to the rooms and meals offered, should reinforce their relationships with the tourism sector (travel agents, sports, entertainment and leisure) and take the greatest possible advantage of the synergy created to increase competitive advantage. In doing so, they enable the creation of a greater commercial dynamism, influencing the customers' decision-making process, their satisfaction, as well as lengthen the tourists stay. Hotels also increase their reputation, credibility and profitability. Thus, tourist routes may contribute to the hotels success, in a short, medium and long-term, depending on the kind of activity they implement (Figueiredo, 2013).

The incorporation of tourist routes in the hotel offer, may length the tourist stay and consequently increase the hotel's turnover (Maia and Baptista, 2011). Based on the above statements the following research hypotheses are presented:

Hypothese 2: There is a positive relationship between tourist routes and the increase length of the tourist stay.

Hypothese 3: There is a positive relationship between tourist routes and the increase of hotel turnover.

Based on the theory and research objectives, a conceptual model was defined and is showed in Figure 1.

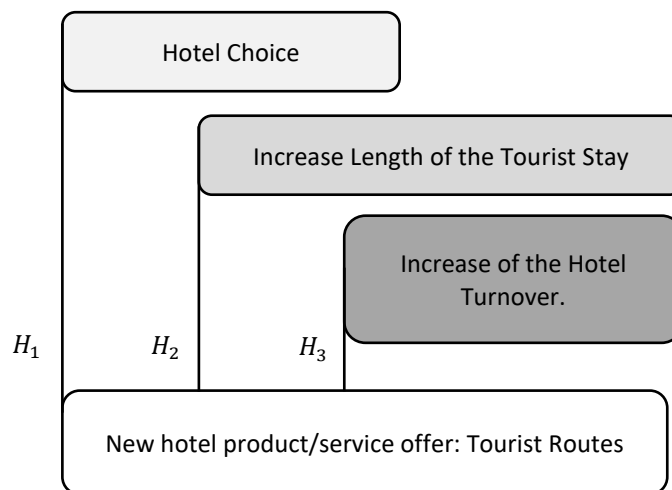


Figure 1: The Conceptual Model

4. The Methodology

As the aim of the study was to analyse the relationships among variables in a particular moment in time, a correlational and cross-sectional (Fortin, 2009) study, was carried out. Data were gathered through a survey instrument. The survey instrument is composed of close and open questions and it is divided in three parts: the first part, relates to the tourist visit/stay and the motives that lead to the choice of the religious tourism in Fátima; the second part regards to the introduction of a new tourism service, i.e. the tourist routes in hotel product/service offer in Fátima and the third part, analyses the tourist socio-demographic profile. The tourists were asked to identified among the following routes (castles, monasteries, museums, churches/sanctuaries, natural parks, beaches, wine caves, radical sports, musical entertainment, cultural and historical experiences, gastronomic experiences), which ones they would be most interested in experiencing. They were also asked to indicate whether they would be willing to buy those routes that they identified. Additionally the tourists were asked to indicate whether the tourist routes offered by the hotel would influence their decision to stay in the hotel. In order to rank the importance of the tourists' answers, a Likert Scale of 5 points (1 – Totally disagree to 5 – Totally Agree) was used. Furthermore, the tourists were asked to identify for how long they would be willing to extend their stay and how much they will be willing to pay more for the tourist routes offer, compared to their current spending. Ordinal variables were used to measure the increasing tourist length of stay (no day; 1 day, 2

days, 3 up to 4 days, 5 up to 6 days and more than 6 days) and the increasing payment value (less than 10%, between 10 to 15%, between 16 to 20%, between 21 to 29%, between 30 to 50%, more than 51%). The questionnaire starts with an introduction that explains the goals of the research, and assures the anonymity and confidentiality of the data collected.

A pilot study was conducted to the hotel reception's employees to test the comprehensiveness as well as the clarity of the questions. Minor changes were carried out in the questionnaire according to the employees' feedback. A non-probabilistic sampling, i.e. a convenience sample was applied. The hotels were chosen due to the openness of the hotels' CEO to conduct the research. The questionnaire was applied to all tourists accommodated in 3 hotels (one hotel of 4 star, and two hotels of 3 star) during July and September 2016. The questionnaire was asked to be fulfilled at the tourists' check-in or check-out. The questionnaires were applied in hard copy, in 5 different languages (Portuguese, Spanish, Italian English and French). To validate the translated questionnaire, two approaches were followed: (1) Linguistic validation, where the equivalence of concepts in the questionnaire (the 'language'), were validated and (2) the cultural validation, where the concepts were mapped to the target culture (e.g. for appropriateness of wording, potential misinterpretation due to different ways of thinking). The information gathered was transcribed to IBM SPSS Statistics 24.

To characterize the tourist profile and the socio-demographic variables and to identify the places and experiences that could be included in the tourist routes, descriptive statistics (absolute and relative frequencies, mean and standard deviation) were carried out. To test the research hypotheses, statistical assumptions were verified for reliability (confidence interval of 99%). Correlation coefficient of Pearson and Spearman and the Mann-Whitney test were conducted. A level of significance of 1% was defined.

Thirty valid questionnaires were collected from the target population, i.e. tourists staying at three hotels of 3 and 4 star located in Fatima. From those 30 tourists, 76.7% ($n = 23$) are foreigner and 23.3% ($n = 7$) are Portuguese. Regarding socio-demographics, most tourists are male ($n = 18$; 60%) and the most frequent age, is in the group from 40 to 49 years ($n = 9$; 30%). Regarding qualifications and employability status, 13 (43.3%) have a higher degree, and most ($n = 23$; 76.6%) are employed or self-employed. Concerning the tourist characteristics, 19 (63.3%) of the respondents were visiting Fátima for the first time. From the tourists that have already visited Fátima ($n=11$), 10 (90.9%) indicated that they are always staying in the same accommodation type, being that, 4 (40%) choose four star hotels and 6 (60%) three star hotels. Most of the tourists ($n = 7$; 63.6%) revealed that on average, stay one night. Faith, curiosity, relaxing expectations and meeting new places and cultures, are the motives that drive them to get to know Fátima.

5. The Results

Regarding the places and experiences that could be included in the tourist routes, the results showed that tourists are interested in churches/sanctuaries ($M = 3.93$; $SD = 0.94$), cultural and historical experiences ($M = 3.80$; $SD = 0.89$), museums ($M = 3.73$; $SD = 0.79$), gastronomy ($M = 3.63$; $SD = 1.10$), natural parks ($M = 3.63$; $SD = 0.89$), monasteries ($M = 3.60$; $SD = 1.30$) and castles ($M = 3.47$; $SD = 1.25$).

Regarding the length of stay, 36.7% ($n = 11$) of the tourists revealed that they will not extend their stay to enjoy the tourist routes, while 40% ($n = 12$), said that they will, for one night and 23.3% ($n = 7$) for two or more nights. Most of the tourists ($n = 16$; 53.3%) are willing to pay more than 10% to benefit of the tourist routes offer, while 46.7% ($n = 14$), are willing to pay less than 10%.

The Pearson correlation test revealed (Table 1) that there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the hotel's tourist routes offer and the tourist hotel choice ($r = .58$; $p < .01$). That means that, the greater the degree of agreement with the hotels to offer tourist routes, the greater the impact on the hotel choice by the tourists. Therefore, Hypothesis 1 is empirically supported.

The Spearman correlation test showed that (Table 1) there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the tourist routes offer and the increase length of tourists stay in hotels ($\rho = .88$; $p < .01$). Thus, the greater the degree of agreement with hotels to offer tourist routes, the greater the length of stay of tourists in the hotels. Thus, Hypothesis 2 is empirically supported.

The Spearman correlation test also showed that (Table 1), there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the tourist routes offer and the increase of the hotel turnover ($\rho = .63$; $p < .01$). Thus, the greater the degree of agreement with hotels to offer tourist routes, the greater the hotel turnover. Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is empirically supported. According to Cohen criteria, all the correlation tests obtained are classified as high (Pallant, 2013).

Table 1: Pearson and Spearman correlation test

	Hotel Choice	Increase Length of the Tourist Stay	Increase of the Hotel Turnover
Hotel Tourist Routes Offer	.58**	.88**	.63**

** $p < .01$

The Mann-Whitney test revealed, see Table 2 ($U = 30.5$; $p < .01$) that tourists that are willing to pay 10% or more for the tourist routes, have greater levels of agreement (*Mean Rank* = 20.59), compared to those that are willing to pay less than 10% (*Mean Rank* = 9.68).

Table 2: Mann-Whitney test

	<i>Mean Rank of Agreement with Hotels to Offer Tourist Routes</i>	U	p
Pay 10% or more for the Tourist Routes	20.59	30.5	.000**
Pay less than 10% for the Tourist Routes	9.68		

** $p < .01$

6. Discussion

The churches/sanctuaries, cultural and historical experiences, museums, gastronomy, natural parks, monasteries and castles are the places/experiences that the tourists are most interested in a tourist route offer in Fátima. These results corroborate Peña et al (2016), Kozac (2002) and Kamau et al (2015). They also revealed that tourists identified cultural, natural and gastronomy experiences as the most important.

The results also revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between:

- Tourist routes offer and the choice of the hotel. The greater the degree of agreement with the hotels to offer tourist routes, the greater the impact on the hotel choice by the tourist;
- Tourist routes offer and the tourist increase length of stay in hotels. The greater the degree of agreement with the hotels to offer tourist routes, the greater the length of stay of tourists in the hotels, which corroborates some findings of Figueiredo (2013). He stated that tourist routes could contribute to the hotel success in a short, medium and long-term;
- Tourist routes offer and the increase of the hotel turnover. The greater the degree of agreement with the hotels to offer tourist routes, the greater the hotel turnover. These findings support Figueiredo (2013) and Maia and Baptista (2011). They showed that the implementation of tourist routes in the hotel product/service offer, generates an active, interactive and evolutionary process with gains to the engaging parts: hotels, tourists and places.

7. Conclusion

The incorporation of tourist routes in the hotel offer, is important for hotels' product/service differentiation. Tourist routes may include religious, cultural, heritage and nature places or experiences. The hotels that offer tourist routes as a complement to their core product/service, are more likely to attract and retain tourists and therefore to increase its turnover. Portugal has good climacteric conditions, as well as rich heritage, providing great places/experiences that could be included in the hotels' tourist routes.

The current study has some limitations. The small size of the sample i.e. 30 tourists, limits the generalisation of the findings obtained. Further research should be conducted not only in Fátima to a wider number of hotels, but also to other religious tourist places in Portugal, and to other countries. A broader quantitative survey would be advisable to strength the results attained.

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