

Tourist satisfaction with Temazcal in Cozumel

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Jesús López Ruiz

Romano Gino Segrado Pavón

María de Jesús Moo Canul
romanogino@hotmail.com

UNIVERSIDAD DE QUINTANA ROO, COZUMEL QUINTANA ROO, MÉXICO



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— *Abstract* —

In Mexico, the temazcal bath is part of the historical uses and customs and is also promoted as a tourist activity for relaxation and stress release. The general objective of this study was to reveal the most important factors associated with tourist satisfaction after the temazcal experience on the island of Cozumel. The quantitative method was applied, with a survey of temazcal users on the Cozumel island, in 2018. As a result, the contrasting combination allows for achieving a high level of satisfaction. Marketers will be able to design and promote appropriate strategies for this market segment.

Keywords:

Temazcal; tourism; experience; satisfaction; Cozumel.

Satisfaction is relevant for people because regardless of the positive or negative character it implies, it influences present and future decisions. In the tourism sector, positive experiences contribute in multiple ways to the people's satisfaction and psychological well-being; they are a competitive advantage for destinations, make visitors repeat their stay, they help recommendation to spread word of mouth, get a greater probability of loyalty, and commercial benefits.

Measuring the level of satisfaction is crucial for the success of the tourism service (Chen *et al.*, 2011; Meng *et al.*, 2008), especially in a context of competition between destinations, since it allows prioritizing strategies and actions linked to the strengths and weaknesses detected, to contribute to the established objectives. For Alegre and Cladera (2009), it is an important factor for the consolidation of long-term commercial relationships because it contributes to the attractive image of the destination and reduces investment in tourism promotion.

In the case of SPA tourism [Latin acronym *Salus Per Aqua* (Frost, 2004)], it is considered a new trend in the international market (Mak *et al.*, 2009), with wide popularity and accelerated growth worldwide (Kamata and Misui, 2015; Okech, 2014) due to demographic changes, longer life expectancy, and social aging. In this sense, evaluating satisfaction allows us to quickly improve products and services, to achieve more memorable and pleasant experiences.

Within this market segment, in Mexico, the temazcal (literal translation "house of sweat") is a form of traditional spa that combines the steam bath with aromatic herbs and aboriginal rituals, integrating contrasting stimuli for the five senses in a healthy and pleasant environment. According to Cohen and Bodeker (2008), the main attraction is the experience of relaxation, stress release, or general well-being.

This tourist activity has been incorporated in various destinations, among which is Cozumel, as part of the transition towards the provision of services that involve experiences (Gilmore and Pine II, 1998) to complement the main tourist products and services. However, despite the breadth of research regarding the satisfaction associated with the spa as a tourist activity (Anaya-Aguilar *et al.*, 2021; Meng *et al.*, 2008; Perić *et al.*, 2018), for the temazcal, there are few studies linked to the satisfaction of tourists.

The service of a temazcal is more than simply the steam bath since it involves providing a rewarding and joyful experience, as well as a bodily utility, which can be difficult to achieve due to the multiple factors involved, cultural aspects, language, experiences, expectations, beliefs, among other aspects related to tourists, where the level of satisfaction is an indicator of effective and efficient service, as well as a reference to retain or attract new users, while dissatisfaction may cause lack of loyalty, the breakdown of the

business relationship or the absence of recommendation for the service or the company. Thus, market segmentation through the most important characteristics for a specific segment can be part of a strategy refined for marketing, and meet tourists' needs comprehensively and with a higher level of quality.

Determining the main attributes that contribute to tourists' satisfaction also helps to have the elements to provide a differentiating image and consolidate a brand value that can be associated with the destination (Tung and Ritchie, 2011). It will also facilitate the products and services' design for the market segment and will allow influencing the return decision (Huh *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, the research question was: What are the most important factors associated with tourists' satisfaction after the temazcal experience on the Cozumel Island?

The study's overall objective was to reveal the most important factors associated with tourists' satisfaction after the temazcal experience on the Cozumel Island. Therefore, this study contributes to the academic literature on tourism with the analysis of tourism satisfaction in an innovative segment, in addition to the fact that for business decision-making, it provides information for the design of marketing strategies to create the conditions that facilitate a high level of satisfaction and increase visits.

TOURIST SATISFACTION

There is no unanimous definition of the concept of "satisfaction" (González *et al.*, 2007) due to the subjectivity that is inherent in the phenomenon, but there is consensus that it is a personal evaluation or interpretation, partial or total, usually loaded with a positive or negative meaning, related to an emotional or external stimulus, linked to a product, service or experience, which can be combined with personal history, social and cultural tourists.

Multiple theoretical models have been proposed to explain tourists' satisfaction (Bigné and Andreu, 2004; Kozak *et al.*, 2005; Maunier and Camelis, 2013), although the application of the cognitive-affective model is the most widespread in the scientific literature (Weaver y Lawton, 2011; Žabkar *et al.*, 2010). It explains the phenomenon based on the product or service efficiency or performance and the combination with affective (emotional) psychological factors that imply a judgment or evaluation whose result is positive (conformity or satisfaction) or negative (dissatisfaction or dissatisfaction) after the experience.

To summarize, this model suggests that satisfaction arises as a combination between tourists' knowledge and emotions at the end of an experience related to the product or service linked (Kotler and Keller, 2012). Thus, factors such as price, colors, time, distance, and quantity, are

combined with feelings, memories, impressions, and details, for a multi-dimensional approach, in which the result must be considered, but also each of the parts and all as a whole. The context described recognizes the paradox of a high level of satisfaction that arises from poor performance or poor service, or vice versa, attributable to the eminently psychological and personal character of the associated judgment.

In the case of the spa, according to Campón-Cerro *et al.* (2020) and Lee *et al.* (2012), tourist experiences linked to water correlate positively with satisfaction, by stimulating feelings of well-being, relaxation, and rejoicing. For Alén (2018), satisfaction is a partial or indirect predictor of behavioral intent, while dissatisfaction is a motivator to switch products or services and negative word-of-mouth comments (Su and Hsu, 2013). On the other hand, positive satisfaction influences the intention to visit again (Han *et al.*, 2017), favorable comments, and the perception of value in the experience (Abubakar and Mavondo, 2014; Maunier and Camelis, 2013).

The subjective, individual character and the environment of the experience make measuring satisfaction a process without a single scale, due to the combination of attributes such as cleanliness, kindness, trust, communication, activities, and amenities, which are common in spa and temazcal centers, although proposals for systematic measurement have been made in this regard (Lagrosen and Lagrosen, 2016; Lo *et al.*, 2015; Silvestri *et al.*, 2017) according to the bibliographic review carried out.

Several studies have been published that analyzed the factors that attract tourists to spas. An example is the research of Rodrigues *et al.* (2020), who performed a content analysis, using specialized software, of 1254 comments from tourists on web pages. As a result, the key attributes for satisfaction are the steam room, the staff, the room, the location, and the pool.

Another example is the research of Han *et al.* (2018) which analyzed the relationship between loyalty, experiences, and satisfaction in the spas of Thailand, through a survey of 558 visitors. A factor analysis was performed with factors such as price, variety of services, treatments, therapists, and collaborators, facilities. As a result, it was established that product characteristics, experiences, and satisfaction are related and contribute to satisfaction and loyalty to the destination.

A study in Greece (Weaver and Lawton, 2011) evaluated 207 clients from ten spa centers related to the variables that influence satisfaction. The survey was designed based on the SERVQUAL model, and a factor analysis was applied whose result establishes that attention, service confidence, food, comfort, honesty, and empathy are the aspects that allow to better predict the level of satisfaction. Similarly, the study of Tsai *et al.* (2012) revealed that service, trust, and especially the environment, influence satisfaction and recommendation.

Consequently, to understand tourists' satisfaction of their temazcal experience, we designed a questionnaire, adapted the items and their wording so that they could reflect the products and services' characteristics associated with the destination of Cozumel.

METHOD

The case study was applied in two temazcales of Cozumel, whose main economic activity is tourism, which in 2019 showed an economic spillover of \$ 1,272,200,000 US dollars (SEDETUR, 2020). The tourist infrastructure of this destination includes an international airport, three international cruise terminals, a maritime terminal for vehicle ferries, and another maritime passenger terminal. There are 66 registered lodging establishments, with an offer of 4 701 rooms available (SEDETUR, 2020). There are also more than 800 companies providing tourist services, 423 craft shops, and 225 food and beverage service establishments [restaurants, cafes, ice-cream shops, nightclubs, discos, and bars, among others] (INEGI, 2017). In the health tourism sector, there are five temazcales (field observation, 2019) that provide services.

The research was descriptive, with quantitative data collection between 2017 and 2018. The technique used consisted of a survey through the application of an anonymous and confidential questionnaire, written in English, to determine the level of satisfaction, in a negative or positive sense, of the aspects involved in the temazcal bath. To avoid bias, the information collection was carried out following a standardized procedure, so that each person surveyed responded on equal terms.

A pilot test was carried out with 31 questionnaires, which allowed some minor corrections in some sentences. As a second pilot test, the questionnaire was applied in other temazcales of Cozumel, so slight modifications were made to generalize it and adjust it to the environment and facilities of the temazcales. The questions were carefully designed and drafted to avoid discomfort or incur any lack of morality, considering intercultural issues.

The questionnaire was designed to be applied quickly and at the end of the service to avoid delaying appointments and rejections since tourists usually have established schedules for different activities during their stay on the island. In all cases, verbal consent was always requested from the participants and the reason for the questionnaire was explained.

The exploratory factor analysis (EFA) orthogonal of maximum variance was applied to the results, which is frequently used for the development and validation of tests, especially in social areas (Méndez Martínez and Rondón Sepúlveda, 2012) due to its versatility in the exploration of the set of latent variables or common factors that explain the answers to the items of a test

(Lloret-Segura *et al.*, 2014). The KMO validation test was 0.731, and Barlett's sphericity was 0.0000, confirming the validity of the EFA.

The Cronbach's Alpha test was performed, which is a measure of validation of answers related to the same topic (Domínguez-Lara and Merino-Soto, 2015), whose result was 0.726 with ten items of Likert scale, so the set of items is considered valid. Data were analyzed with the statistical processing software JASP 0.14.

RESULTS

Of the 164 tourists who answered the questionnaire in 2018, 63% were women. The age range was between 18 and 66 years of age, predominating young people from 27 to 34 years, with 66 people (40%). 78% came from the United States, while the remaining 23% came from various countries, including Mexico and Canada. 50% have visited Cozumel on two or more occasions. Regarding the previous experience in the temazcal, 37 tourists (22%) indicated that they had previously participated in at least one session, although only 5% were in Cozumel.

Participants were asked about their motivations for participating in the temazcal session, and 71 people (43%) indicated that it was for "Detoxification and purification", 26 people (16%) chose the "Try something different" option, 12 (7%) people marked "Holistic spiritual activities" and 11 people (7%) pointed to "Release tension and relaxation." The rest of the responses were widely diverse. Participants were also asked about meeting expectations, and 99 tourists (60%) responded that "Exceeded my expectations", while 16 people (10%) indicated that they were "Met widely", while 45 people (27%) chose the option "Met expectations."

Regarding the tangible elements of the experience, 80 people (50%) answered that "the guide" is the prominent factor, while 35 responses (21%) pointed to "heat and steam" and 34 responses (21%) indicated "the environment." On the other hand, among the intangible elements the option "Aromas (copal and herbal tea)" received 47 responses (29%), while "Feeling of rebirth or rejuvenation" obtained 45 (27%). The "Feeling of relaxation" had 26 responses (16%), and "Exercises and dynamics during the session", had 21 responses (13%).

The explanation that the collaborators gave to the tourists before each of the experiences of the temazcal, was the aspect with the highest rating among the criteria to measure satisfaction descriptively, since it obtained a sum of 4.95/5, while the in-person service resulted in 4.93/5. Third, the guide, with 4.92/5 (see Table 1).

Table 1
Descriptive results of the temazcal satisfaction questionnaire

Item	Valid	Mean	Desv. Standard
Environment	164	4.762	0.441
Facilities	164	4.494	0.622
Guide	164	4.921	0.399
Explanation	164	4.951	0.364
Internet service	164	4.817	0.860
In-person service	164	4.939	0.652
Duration of experience	164	4.659	0.488
Fruits and beverages	164	4.860	0.365
Man of Fire	164	4.695	0.668
Road	164	4.671	0.792

To evaluate the underlying structure of the descriptive analysis, the EFA statistical test was applied, and tangible aspects (time, food, facilities, environment) were the most important factor (17%). As a second factor were complementary activities like the road and man of fire (14%). The third factor was the spirit of service, with personalized and online assistance (13%). The fourth factor was confidence, represented by the temazcal guide (12%). Together the four factors accounted for 56% of the total variance explained.

Table 2
AFE of the temazcal satisfaction questionnaire

Items	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Uniqueness
Duration of experience	0.712				0.378
Fruits and beverages	0.601				0.634
Facilities	0.552				0.617
Environment	0.520				0.595
Road		0.972			-0.004
Man of Fire		0.486			0.557
In-person service			0.894		0.188
Internet service			0.424		0.754
Guide				0.983	0.003
Explanation					0.714

Note: made with Varimax rotation.

Finally, to know the participants' perceptions about the temazcal bath, the following question was asked: "How would you describe your expe-

rience after your temazcal session?" 37 people (23%) expressed the option "Reconnection with my interior and the environment"; 36 people (22%) marked "Deep Relaxation"; another 29 (18%) chose "Intense purification", while 22 users (13%) indicated "Difficult to describe in words".

DISCUSSION

In 2018, 164 questionnaires were carried out with a rating of 100%, to reveal the most important factors associated with tourists' satisfaction, after their temazcal experience on the Cozumel Island, through an exploratory factor analysis, which determined that some factors are more important from the tourist's perception and contribute more to their general satisfaction.

According to the results, the three main factors that influence satisfaction are tangible attributes (time, food, facilities, environment), complementary attributes (road and man of fire), and the attribute of the spirit of service (in-person and online assistance). As an isolated variable, the facilities received the lowest level of satisfaction, although it did not imply dissatisfaction on the part of tourists. These factors deserve careful monitoring to consolidate the favorable aspects and, in the counterpart, improve those attributes where deficiencies are perceived.

As a tourist attraction linked to well-being or health, temazcal is somewhat difficult to understand by most foreign tourists, since it is unknown to them, there is little information on the Internet about it, and, as in some cases, it has been distorted by turning it into a form of practices and spiritual beliefs to diversify the tourist offer.

As a theoretical contribution, the study expands the very limited literature on temazcal and satisfaction, by providing an explained understanding of the general factors that can be considered important in different aspects of a product or service (Petrick *et al.*, 2001), although the results should be interpreted with caution, since the convenience sample does not allow generalizations, but the results are useful and can influence the temazcales for their management strategies and marketing.

Among the practical implications for health tourism managers in temazcal, the results will help increase the satisfaction and loyalty of tourists, as well as increase the level of quality, by prioritizing and applying resources and capacities to improve the most critical factors. At the level of microenterprises, adequate and comfortable facilities, training for communication, commitment to service, and personalized treatment, are very important in the satisfaction level.

As a limitation, when analyzing attributes that are combined in time and space for a group of people, the possibility that there are interactions between the factors must be recognized, a situation that was not evaluated

in this research, since no shared variance was observed. However, in the practice of temazcal, one attribute might influence other attributes, such as, for example, the heat of the sauna and the taste of refreshing drinks. As a strength, it is highlighted that the exhibition was constituted by real tourists who had the complete experience of the temazcal, as well as with the entire team of collaborators who provided the services. Also, unlike other highly structured satisfaction questionnaires, this study emphasized simple and natural language, with descriptions adjusted to the uses and customs of the temazcal bathroom service.

For future research, it is advisable to evaluate the level of satisfaction, considering attributes such as expectations, price, value, service, quality, physical effects, enjoyment, the intention of repeating the experience, and the motivation to choose the activity. The validity of the SPAQUAL questionnaire for the temazcal bath could also be evaluated, with the adaptations corresponding to this activity.

CONCLUSION

This research provides knowledge about tourists' satisfaction of temazcal, and the results allow us to affirm that the activity represents a satisfactory experience for the users, where the most important factors that intervene are linked to the tangible attributes. Companies should use these features to increase quality and maximize satisfaction, support competitiveness, and foster loyalty.

The categories identified as significant for the satisfaction of the temazcal market segment provide information and help the systematic understanding of this experience at the theoretical level, while, at the practical level, management and facilities conditions can be improved, as well as strategies to expand the attractiveness of this activity and direct expectations towards the characteristics of the service.

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