Satisfaction index: Only 10% in survey were tourists

I refer to the letter "Why sales staff treat tourists better" by Mr Kenneth Lim Chi Shen (my paper, April 11).

Referring to the 2007 Customer Satisfaction Index conducted by the Institute of Service Excellence at Singapore Management University (Ises), the writer asked whether Singapore's score had been boosted by the high ratings the tourists surveyed gave, and if Ises could reveal the breakdown of locals and tourists surveyed.

He also surmised that these tourists would generally have patronised more high-end establishments in Singapore.

A total of 22,349 questionnaires were completed for the survey last year, of which 2,159 questionnaires (less than 10 per cent of all respondents) were completed by tourists.

The 10 per cent tourist respondents would not be sufficient to bring up the overall satisfaction score.

In addition, in the questionnaires for the hotel sub-sector, respondents had given their ratings for a diverse cross-section of hotels, from budget hotels to international brand names.

The survey findings and background to the Index can be found in the press release at www.smu.edu.sg/news_room/press_releases/2008/20080407.asp in SMU's website.

If the writer has additional questions or observations, we invite him to contact or write to Ises at the following address:
Institute of Service Excellence
S'pore Management University
50 Stamford Road, #04-97
Singapore 178899.
He can also e-mail us at ise@smu.edu.sg or call us at 6828-0111.

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To the letter "Why sales staff treat tourists better" by Mr Kenneth Lim Chi Shen (my paper, April 11).

Why sales staff treat tourists better

Kenneth Lim Chi Shen

Like many Singaporeans, I was surprised to learn that Singapore scored 68.7 out of 100 on the Customer Satisfaction Index, in the survey conducted by the Institute of Service Excellence (ISE).

I am also not surprised that a Straits Times (ST) straw poll later of 50 locals found 42 of them (an overwhelming 84 per cent) saying that the score was clearly too high.

Chances are many of us would have a myriad of anecdotal accounts of bad service to share.

So why is there a contradiction between the ISE survey results and the ST straw poll findings?

Firstly, I note that the ISE surveyed an impressive number of 12,000 locals and tourists.

The ST straw poll, on the other hand, covered only 50 locals. If the 50 were well chosen across a spread of demographic, income and educational sectors, the poll can still reveal useful information.

One can only surmise that it was the tourist segment that had boosted the score for the ISE survey. If the score of 68.7 was boosted by the tourists' high opinion of our service, the question then becomes why do they have a better opinion of our local service standards?

Could it be that sales and service staff generally treat tourists more warmly than they do to locals? This bias could be due to a variety of reasons, including the colonial hangover, the tourists' bigger spending power and even their perceived politeness compared with the more demanding locals.

It should also be pointed out that tourists generally patronise the more established shops in the city, and apart from their tour guides and hotel staff, they have limited contact with Singaporeans.

They are thus less likely to encounter the wide and differing range of sales and service staff at our heartland malls, for example.

It would be good if the ISE could reveal the breakdown of the number of locals and tourists polled, and whether these foreigners stayed at five-star hotels and shopped in Orchard Road.

Nevertheless, the discrepancy in the findings of the ISE survey and the ST straw poll should be a timely reminder to our sales and service sectors. They should not rest on their laurels. A lot more needs to be done in terms of staff training and motivation - before our little red dot can be truly considered a world-class city.