

3. Accommodation services

When one travels to another city or country, one usually has different needs and demands for the destination one is travelling to. Trying to meet these needs and demands is what comprises the tourism industry. The tourism industry can be divided into main sectors; hospitality, attractions and event, transport, travel organizers and intermediaries and destination organization sectors. All of these sectors can be thought of as range of businesses and organizations involved in delivering the tourism product and the travel experience. Hotels of course are a part of the hospitality sector and as such are major essential supply components of tourism. (Middleton, Fyall & Morgan 2009:10-11)

A hotel is a place that offers its facilities and services for sale. The services can vary from just one to various combinations that can all be thought of as a part of the total market concept of the hotel. The basic total market concept consists of five elements as shown in figure 1.

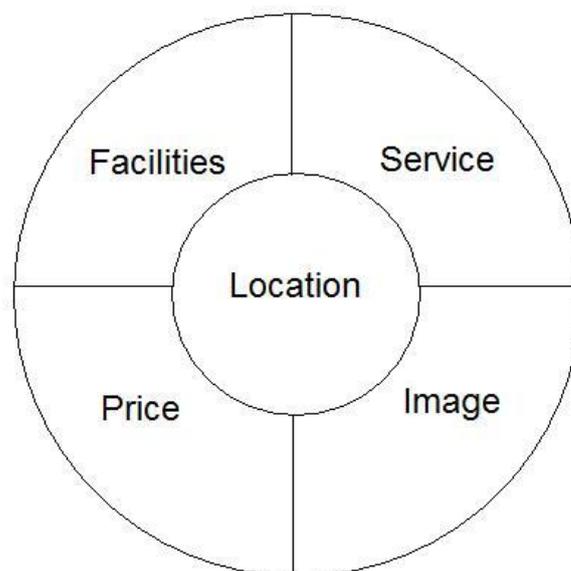


Figure 1 Market concept of a hotel. (Medlik & Ingram 2000:14)

Location is usually the main element, thus being in the center of the market concept circle, that the visitor takes into account when choosing a hotel. Location places the hotel geographically into a certain area; for example near a particular city or village. And if one wants to go to that specific city one has to choose the hotel within that area. Where the hotel is situated denotes the accessibility and convenience of the location, attractiveness of the surroundings and other factors that the visitor sees as appealing when choosing a hotel.

Facilities of a hotel include the bedrooms, restaurants, bars, function and meeting rooms and recreation facilities such as a gym, tennis court and swimming pool. Depending on what kind of hotel is in question the facilities vary in number, type and size. Different visitors have different needs from the hotel and its facilities.

The hotel services comprise the availability as well as the quality in which they are provided to the customers in the hotel facilities. A hotel can have services such as 24-hour front desk, concierge and room service. Depending on what kind of hotel is in question the services can vary on how formal or informal they are, the degree of personal attention and speed and efficiency.

The image of the hotel can be defined as how the hotel portrays itself to people and how the people perceive the hotel. The image is a mixture of location, facilities and services the hotel offers and how they market those elements but there are also such factors as the hotel's name and appearance included.

The price comprises the values that are given to the hotel through its location, facilities and image. The price has to indicate all those elements for if they do not or the price is some other way determined wrong it will only result in unhappy customers who feel like they did not get their money's worth.

All in all, these individual elements of the total hotel concept hold different level of importance for different people. One person may regard the hotel's location as essential and is prepared to accept only basic facilities and services to have it where as another person may think that the price is the paramount factor when staying in a hotel and is willing for example to give in a little on the location of

the hotel as long as the price is within the range of that particular person. (Medlik & Ingram 2000: 13-15)

3.1 Types of Hotels

Hotels answer to the demand of those millions of travelers each year who need a place to stay when visiting other cities and countries. That may be only for one night or a longer stay of week, even months with each visitor having different needs and expectations of the hotel's services. Some may only need a bed to sleep in for a night, some are coming for a big conference held in the hotel or some are coming to the hotel for an all-inclusive five-star holiday. (Medlik & Ingram 2000: 4)

To answer the different needs of the visitors, there are different types of hotels, some offering services targeted to a specific type of customers. Hotels can be referred to for example as luxury, resort, commercial, residential, transit or in many other ways. Each of these terms can be linked to what kind of hotel is in question, give an indication to the location of the hotel or of the main customer group that uses its services. (Medlik & Ingram 2000: 10-11)

Resort Hotels

A resort hotel is located in an optimal environment with attractive surroundings. The idea of a resort hotel is to offer a large mixture of services with entertainment and recreational activities in a way that everything a tourist may need on a vacation is right there in the resort. The tourist may never have to leave to the resort during the vacation. These kinds of all-inclusive holidays are typical for a resort hotel. The resorts can also have been built around a specific theme like a gambling resort or a spa resort.

Commercial hotels

Commercial hotels are usually located in a city center with its services targeted for business travelers, convention attendees and vacationers. The location of the hotel is convenient for these types of travelers who can get to the hotel easily and get to know the city they are in.

Transit hotels

Transit hotels can be divided into two; airport and motor hotels. These hotels are located, as the name already indicates, near airports and main motorways. Each of them has similar characteristics for their primary importance for a tourist is their convenient location when the tourist is going somewhere and needs a hotel room on the way. So the main pull factor is not the hotel, but the destination the tourist is going to. The transit hotel serves as a pit stop on the way.

Residential hotels

Residential hotels are usually for long-term visitors who are in town for example for business for a longer period of time. On that account the hotels are not usually targeted for tourists, but they may also have some rooms designated for tourists staying only a shorter time period.

(Medlik & Ingram 2000: 10-13)

3.2 Hotel Products

A typical hotel nowadays offers firstly sleeping accommodation but also food and beverage services. The bedroom itself is of course the most distinctive product of a hotel for that is the primary function of the whole accommodation industry; to offer visitors a bed to sleep in. Depending on what kind of hotel is in question the hotel can also offer other services for example in a form of recreational facilities and meeting and conference rooms. Aside from accommodation services that usually are strictly meant only for the hotel's residents other services and facilities are made available also to non-residents.

There are requirements that usually reflect the main customer demand; sleeping accommodation, food and drink for individual customers as well as for organized groups. These four requirements relate to accommodation, restaurant, bar and they function as the principal hotel products. (Medlik & Ingram 2000: 15-17)

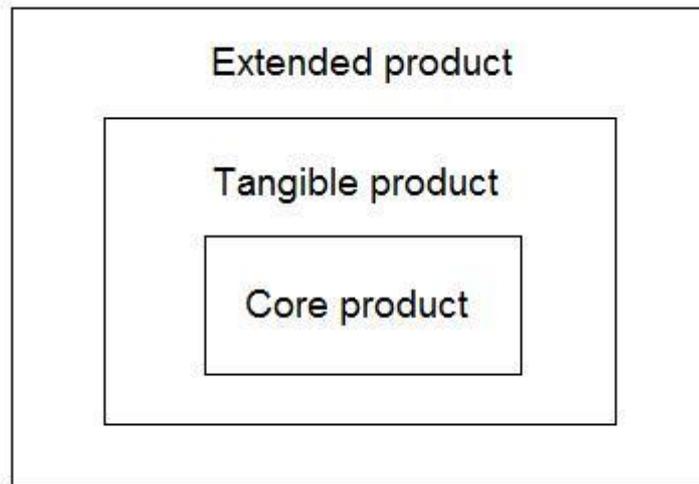


Figure 2: Defining the hotel product (Bowie & Buttle 2004: 117)

When defining a product an important distinction can be drawn between the core product, the tangible product and extended product. As shown in figure 2 the product is a combination of all of them, one supporting the other.

The core product delivers the main benefits that the customer is seeking. In hospitality industry the core product usually is the sleeping accommodations. But as different customers have different needs it is always up to the customer to define what the core product is.

A Tangible product consists of all the physical elements that are necessary so that the core product can be delivered to the customer. The tangible product includes product features such as the size and range of facilities, design and quality and service standards.

If the core product is for example a convenient location to enjoy a good night's sleep the tangible products can be a comfortable bed, en-suite bathroom and a TV.

Extended products are composed of intangible elements of the product. Many times it is the intangible elements that make the same class hotels different from each other and they are also the elements these hotels compete with among each

others. The intangible elements add value, differentiate hotels from each other and are meant to provide the customer with additional benefits. The extended product includes elements such as the people; how well the staff is trained and how well they do their job, accessibility including opening hours and after sales service meaning for example how well the hotel handles a complaint. Also nowadays more and more important has become elements such as atmosphere, brand image and corporate ethics.

(Bowie & Buttle 2004: 116-118)

3.3 Classification systems of hotels

The need for hotel classification systems has been growing along side with the growth of tourism itself and as more information and technology has become available for all people. With easier information access and wider exposure for services and products, travelers now have certain expectations when selecting travel arrangements and accommodations. A hotel classification system ensures that the hotel the traveler has chosen meets minimum standards of accommodation, facilities and service. Even though there is no universal classification rating in place, there is a range of systems that are accepted and widely used in most parts of the world. Most classification systems are based on criteria that consider such factors as hotel size by room account, facilities, convenience or amenities, quality of service and food and beverage service. Various symbols and letters, with the most popular being the star rating system, usually portray ratings. (Gee 1994: 385-386)

One star *

One-star hotels are limited in their services; most of them do not have on-site restaurant and limited hours may apply to public access and front desk services. The rooms are very basic and generally small. The rooms may not have a private bathroom or in-room telephone.

Two star **

Two-star hotels are identified by basic and clean accommodations, with some business services (typically without meeting rooms). On-site restaurants have limited menus and typically consist of continental breakfast service. The rooms are comfortable and they typically include telephones and a TV. Room service and baggage service are usually not included.

Three star ***

Three-star hotels are usually more upgraded and they include more spacious rooms with quality amenities. The other on-site services include a restaurant with the possibility for evening dining and possibly even a pool and a small fitness center. Meeting and conference facilities for business groups and other functions are sometimes available.

Four star ****

Four-star hotels are very upscale accommodations, offering excellent restaurants, fine dining, bars, lounges, and complete room service. Other on-site services include valet parking, concierge services, fitness center and several spacious and well-maintained pools. Excellent business centers and meeting facilities are usually present. Inside the rooms high quality linen, bedding, flooring and amenities are used.

Five star *****

Five-star hotels are characterized by the best in luxury, service, location, fine dining and exceptional convenience and comfort. Generally offered are special guest access to golf courses, luxury spa services on site, the latest in fitness center and gym facilities, tennis courts, and several multiple-purpose pools, concierge services and complete hotel services. High quality can be seen throughout the hotel; the rooms, lobbies and other facilities. The service quality is also very high with professional staff and many 24h services like room service. Excellent business centers and meeting facilities are usually present in the larger properties.

(Homepage of Area Travel Inc, 3.11.2010)

Hotel star ratings are general quality indicators and should be seen only as broad guidelines in measuring a hotel's general quality, amenities, and customer satisfaction; ratings are not meant to be perfectly precise. Due to differing parameters and criteria used, for example a five-star hotel can mean different things in different countries. (Gee 1994: 411-412)