The physical environment quality of the theme hotels in Malaysia: Are guests satisfied?

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ABSTRACT

Trends in accommodation are a part of the traveler's lifestyle, seeking valuable experiences during their stay. The phenomenon of theme hotels has become a trend in Malaysian accommodation. Unique physical architecture design made a special accommodation in a theme hotel. Physical environment quality is an important attribute that influences guest satisfaction by meeting their needs and expectations. Two primary dimensions, i.e., surrounding indoor and guestroom, were identified for the physical environment quality. Data were obtained from a questionnaire distributed randomly to 400 respondents in five selected theme hotels, and 375 completed questionnaires were returned. However, 360 were appropriate for further analysis. This study was analyzed using Exploratory Factor Analysis and multiple regression analysis. The results show that hotel ambiance and facility aesthetics significantly influence indoor dimensions. The guestroom's cleanliness significantly influenced guest satisfaction with the guestroom dimensions. Findings could assist the management of theme hotels and employees in improving their physical environment quality to ensure guests' satisfaction. Limitations and future research recommendations are presented.

1. INTRODUCTION

The lodging industry has continuously evolved in response to changing guest preferences. Lifestyle preferences significantly influence guests' needs and preferences, driving the demand for theme hotel options. Theme concept is a trend that contains various ranges, most apparent in theme parks (Brochado et al., 2015; Leea et al., 2011; Sha & Tang, 2015; Yıldız, 2023). A theme hotel is any other lodging facility providing guests with memorable experiences and feelings (Oktavio et. al., 2023). The whole concept of the hotel is focused on a single specific theme, and with the optimal combination of theme, services, design, and offer, it contributes to fulfilling guests' needs for new experiences. These theme hotels are becoming a tourist attraction, including storytelling in the entire business model and design; they develop a feeling of hospitality and welcome through an emotional relationship

with guests, where guests are not merely passive observers but get actively included in the hotel story by co-creation (Sun et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2013; Yıldız, 2023).

Theme hotels have become increasingly unique and more attractive. The concept of uniqueness is not new in the lodging industry. For example, the Capsule Hotel was first introduced in Osaka, Japan, in 1979. The idea of this capsule hotel is to provide a basic place to stay for guests and travelers who do not need the services usually offered by conventional hotels, and other countries have begun following this concept. The theme hotels reflect a desire for uniqueness and memorable experiences for the hotel guests, and this trend has influenced the development of various innovative lodging concepts globally, including Malaysia (Ahmad, June 27, 2015; Mei, 2013; Wong, August 3, 2013). Figure 1 shows examples of theme hotels in Malaysia.
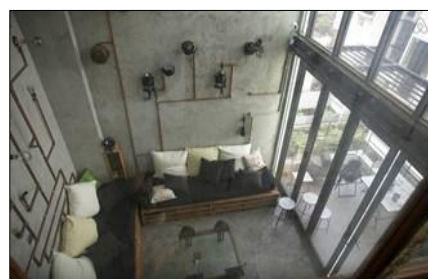

Container Hotel, Selangor

The Kabin, Selangor

Time Capsule, Pahang

Steampunk Loft, Kuala Lumpur

Capsule Hotel

UFO Capsule

Figure 1. Examples of Theme Hotels in Malaysia
Source: TripAdvisor, Facebook, and Google Websites and Ahmad (June 27, 2015)

Each theme hotel is uniquely designed to create a unique experience. These theme hotels have a comprehensive design that is recognizable, in part or as a whole design, of a specific idea, distinctive features, and compelling images that distinguish them from other types of hotels, and they offer attractive alternatives to guests who do not want standardized or indifferent hotel products (Hung et al., 2013; Hung et al., 2015; Lee, 2011; Oliveira, 2020; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Pullman & Robson, 2007; Sun et al., 2021; Xiao et al., 2013).

The theme hotels are believed to be about exterior and interior design, reflected in each element observable or accessible by guests. A theme hotel uses concept, architectural style, decoration, services, uniqueness, and other atmospheric surroundings, such as history, local culture, cities, nature, and fairytales, connecting guests with unique and person-specific experiences centered around that theme. For instance, cabins and time capsule hotels have theme, concept, style, uniqueness, and differentiating features, including design, art, and appeal. The guests might be attracted and influenced to explore their unique surroundings, creating valuable and memorable experiences for hotel guests, which is significant in tourist destinations. Hence, the theming concept is an appealing condition for potential guests looking to stay (Bonn et al., 2007; Chan, 2012; Chang & Lin, 2022; Holjevac, 2003; Hung et al., 2015; Meng & Choi, 2018; Nangah, 2016; Wan, 2013; Xiao et al., 2013).

Problem Statement

Hotels differentiate themselves based on product and service attributes to fulfill the guests' needs (Wong & Mohamed, 2022). The theme hotel concept has the potential for its unique products and services (Luturlean & Anggadwita, 2015). A distinctive brand is an experience for the guests. Many hotels are starting to differentiate their brand by doing something unique with how they design, layout, or outfit their property. Hotels aim to create a positive and memorable experience for their guests, fostering guest satisfaction, loyalty, and positive word-of-mouth recommendations. The ability to consistently meet and exceed these expectations is crucial for the success of any hotel in the competitive hospitality industry. Physical environment quality is considered one of the essential factors in the hotel setting and part of the marketing strategy to generate the hospitality domain; thus, using physical instruments such as urban design, layout, building, and lighting could attract potential guests (Bitner, 1990; Clemes et al., 2018; John et al., 2013). A hotel's primary function is to provide comfortable accommodations, including cleanliness, comfort, ambiance, amenities, and facilities. Simultaneously, comfort is the minimum requirement for hotel guests, each promising comfortable accommodation (Brochado et al., 2015; Chang & Lin, 2022; Clemes et al., 2011; Lockyer, 2005a; Xiao et al., 2013). A theme hotel offers guests much more than the basic minimum requirements.

Theme hotels are influenced to create an outstanding guest experience; therefore, the uniqueness of the hotel building may attract tourists or guests to explore and experience it, so anything a hotel can do to provide a novelty factor will be advantageous (Holjevac, 2003; Luturlean & Anggadwita, 2015; SiteMinder, n.d.). The theme hotel itself creates differentiation among competitors in the lodging industry. However, some architectural features, unplanned or inconsistent visuals, can confuse potential guests. The hotel managers planned, refurbished, and refurnished their physical surroundings to attract potential guests; however, lousy design may change their experience (Fowler et al., 2007; Hung et al., 2013; Lee, 2011; Pine & Gilmore, 1999). The following are some examples of reviews about the physical environment quality of some theme hotels from TripAdvisor:

"It's is quite and old place, however the staff try their level best to keep the place clean and tidy. I like how the rooms and pools are clean. Have to love that it is within a small forest with the ambient sound of the nearby river. Would recommend!" (Azhar Dahalan, Nov 2023)

"Upon arrival, the environment looks abit bad. The room looks dirty and smell bad. The bathroom looks abit bad. I know we can't expect must but at least need to be maintain in a good way. We paid for barbecue set and all of it looks so dirty and rusty. It's not safe to use it. There is a room with bathtub and it doesn't look like in the website. It's totally different from the website and in person. We immediately check out and couldn't refund the full amount." (Govinth C May 2023)

"The resort was clean, nice and spacious. Breakfast offered with a wide variety of food. The staff were friendly and helpful. The location is just perfect. Perfect the serice was good and kindly and friendly." (Excursion35645876301, Jun 2023)

"From arrival the outside paint was peeling from the side of the building the sounding well was like a war zone. We were taken to our rooms well as soon as we opened the door you could smell the damp mould was coming up the walls wall paper was peeling off the wall... the only redeeming factor was the receptionist was very helpful and apologetic. Our rooms were definitely not superior... nothing like the photos". (Mark S, 22 July 2022)

We really like the Venezia cabin with its private pool. Nice, clean room with spacious bathroom. A revolving staircase adds uniqueness. The Kabin is ideal for a break from the hustle and bustle of the city. Near the beach yet surrounded by greenery! We rented bicycles to explore the area around the resort. Yummy food served at a very reasonable price. Love that floating breakfast! With friendly and helpful crews we will definitely be back. Thank you The Kabin!" (Nabihah, March 2021)

"Apart from the friendly solo staff, the stay was inconvenient and noisy from the construction next door which went on until late hours. The door was difficult to lock and I had to scan the card at least 3 times every time I webt in or out of the room which was a hassle. There were ants crawling on my bed as it was located outside. The only plus were the food stalls nearby. It wasn't such a bad place if they had paid more attention to all these little problems which had accumulated and became a big problem. Can definitely do better with the right management team." (sean88888, April 29, 2019)

"Comfortable stay, nice location, just that the shared toilet on the top floor need to be more hygiene, too many mosquito. overall a good stay; its always our choice to getaway from busy day. keep it up". (jolD2332KO, October 3, 2018)

"The place is serene but the room was just so-so. Just got back from the kabin. We had a pleasure stay there for our family day. We stayed in Hamburg cabin...it was nice and acceptable but not that clean. The bed sheets look dull and got stained a lil here and there. In the morning outside at the veranda, there was a unpleasant smell (sewer smell) probably something wrong with thr sewerage system..or needs cleaning up/unload by Indah Water...however we like the swimming pool, it was clean and we enjoyed it...thanks!" (Akmar Y, December 2018)

A place which built in nature place. I just finished my trip with my family, this is a very nice and relax place for family, you can bring your own food there for cook or BBQ, all the tools will be provided." (Kelvin C, Aug 2018)

The bed itself is quite comfy..but there's no tv at the capsule...the service was just ok..the bathroom was bad...a bit dirty..the hotel location is good..near the monorail..there's some restaurant around the hotel..below my expectation." (BartosJr, Dec 2017)

"The shared bathrooms also pretty dingy and not very clean. 3 out of 5 showers in our block were not working correctly". (Anonymous, March 2016)

"The space is too small, a bit poor ventilation. The hole design to see stars is not in good condition. No private hanger for capsules resident to hang towel and clothes. Owner is not in the homestay, but maid is politely serve customer." (Teow Y, December 2015)

"This room is nice, because local issues indeed very difficult to find parking, first: Linen, very thick, let us sleep. I'm not comfortable, second: Heavy Decoration affects the eyes" (Xiiaoy Wong, February 10, 2015)

From the guest reviews, it can be claimed that the physical environment quality is the primary impression attribute that might attract tourists or guests to stay in the theme hotel; therefore, to meet guests' satisfaction, the services and the physical design must fulfill their needs and expectations.

Although the importance of physical environment quality in the hospitality service setting has been addressed (Kartika et al., 2019), more studies are needed to investigate how guests perceive satisfaction with the physical environment quality of theme hotels. A measurement instrument to evaluate the quality of the physical environment needs to be developed. Therefore, developing a reliable and valid scale to measure theme hotels' physical environments may be necessary to understand guests better. As a result, this study will explore physical environment quality dimensions that influence guest satisfaction, focusing on theme hotels in Malaysia.

Addressing the research problem, one research objective (RO1), i.e., to examine the relationship between physical environment quality (i.e., surrounding indoor and guestroom dimensions) and the guests' satisfaction in a theme hotel, is formulated for this study.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Physical Environment Quality

The physical environment quality is a primary dimension of service quality, similar to the tangible dimension of SERVQUAL, but the physical environment quality aspects have a broader meaning (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Clemes et al., 2011; Clemes et al., 2018; Dabholkar et al., 1996). The physical environment was introduced by Kotler (1973) and has also been referred to as Atmospherics. When purchasing, hotel guests may respond to factors beyond tangible products or intangible services (Kotler, 1973).

The physical environment quality is assumed to be a form of nonverbal communication through available and visible environmental factors such as lighting, color, layout, furniture, and decoration (Bitner, 1992). The surrounding physical environment quality in which the service delivery occurs notably impacts guests' overall perceptions of service quality. One of

the hotel qualities of guests' perception during their stay is physical surroundings; the outdoor and indoor physical environments are created to attract guests and cause them to stay longer (Bitner, 1990, 1992; Clemes et al., 2011; Clemes et al., 2009; Ju et al., 2019; Kozinetsa et al., 2002; Sim et al., 2006).

Numerous studies have investigated the physical environment quality within hospitality settings. However, the existing instruments such as LODGSERV (Knutson et al., 1990), DINESERV (Stevens et al., 1995), DINESCAPE (Ryu & Jang, 2008), TANGSERV (Raajpoot, 2002), and HOLSERV (Wong et al., 1999), may not fully capture the physical environment dimensions relevant to theme hotels. In general, hotels do not have a theme concept. LODGSERV and HOLSERV measure guests' perceptions of service quality in lodging settings. TANGSERV, DINESERVE, and DINESCAPE are designed to evaluate restaurant patrons' perspectives regarding physical environments quality in restaurant service settings. Secondly, LODGSERV, HOLSERV, and DINESERV dimensions, i.e., Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance, and Empathy, are similar to the SERVQUAL developed by Parasuraman et al. (1988). Parasuraman et al. (1988) claim that the SERVQUAL scale is applicable across a broad spectrum of services. However, the SERVQUAL model and measurement ignores the differences between different types of service settings. Scholars (for example, Brady & Cronin, 2001; Clemes et al., 2018; Dabholkar et al., 1996) have strongly suggested that service quality is multi-dimensional to assess the service quality comprehensively. Furthermore, SERVQUAL has identified only 22 pairs of items to measure service quality; however, each theme hotel has different building design, unique architecture, and attractive designs, and the items in the tangible dimension cannot capture and fully explain the uniqueness of the theme hotels. Scholars suggest that using the SERVQUAL items as a standard measurement scale for all services is inappropriate and recommend that measures be designed for specific service industries. Based on these arguments, it can be concluded that the dimensions of the physical environment quality for this study adapted from previous studies designed to measures and tailored to the theme hotel setting to help better measure the guests satisfaction of theme hotel.

Based on previous studies, two primary dimensions of physical environment quality, i.e., surrounding indoor and guestroom dimensions, are identified and discussed.

Surrounding Indoors Dimensions

In order to provide high overall comfort services to guests, a hotel must offer exclusive amenities, valued facilities, good treatment service, entertainment, a comfortable indoor environment, safety, and reliability as the guest is willing to pay more because of the services (Asadi et al., 2011). The hotel's surroundings have indirectly created great importance for

guest satisfaction (Jysmä, 2012). Eight sub-dimensions were identified for surrounding indoors as follows:

a. Ambient and Facility Aesthetics

Ambient in servicescape is defined as the overall or total construct of environmental dimensions rather than a single component (Bitner, 1990). Ambiance refers to a delightful general atmosphere and stylish interior, including background characteristics of the working environment (e.g., in a hotel), and can be affected by temperature, lighting, noise, music, scent, spatial layout, and equipment with their functionality having the ability to facilitate the performance (Bitner, 1990).

Facility aesthetics can be essential in creating specific themes. Chang (2016) stated that aesthetics refers to consuming a physical setting in facility aesthetics. Aesthetic, alternatively, refers to a unique architectural and interior design; thus, it believes they are unique and different because of how they are furnished and theme. Furthermore, the aesthetic approach can be found in the relationship between people and built environments. (Bitner, 1990; Holjevac, 2003; Mcintosh & Siggs, 2005; Ryu & Han, 2011). Boley and Nickerson (2013) claimed that aesthetics enhance the experience and beautiful viewer. Bougoure and Neu (2010) studied hedonic congruity, which involved experiencing aesthetic attributes, i.e., visual aesthetics and directly towards the image. Besides attracting, one marketing strategy influences people to spend more (Chang, 2016).

b. Interior Design

Ryu (2005) claimed that the findings indicate that color influences the positive environment. It enhances the atmosphere. Pictures, paintings, plants, flowers, ceiling decoration, and wall decoration may also affect the physical environment as perceived quality of other aspects of interior design (Ryu, 2005). Orth et al. (2012) categorized furniture, painting a wall and ceiling as a complex-shell design determined to be natural, harmonious, and overall archetypical and representative.

c. Exterior Design

Exterior design relates to external variables: signs, building size and color, location, and parking (Ryu, 2005). Henderson (2011) studies heritage hotels by stating that the building is marketed as an urban sculpture of unique architecture reflecting the theme and as a picture of exterior design. Wakefield and Blodgett (1996) found that the exterior influences the response of tangible and intangible aspects in the recreational center.

d. Hotel Building Design

Ritzer and Stillman (2001) indicated that the built environment carried through into the rest of the operations. Henderson (2011) added that customers' attractiveness is positive towards the building and locations. Modern architecture concepts display the uniqueness

of the setting of the building (Chang & Teo, 2009). Horng et al. (2011) indicated that buildings are selections in customers' minds when selecting a place. Chang (2016) supported the idea that individuals have more control over their choice of exterior fixtures, décor of restaurants, hotels, shops, building culture, and the environment. The building displays art as a design concept (Henderson, 2011).

e. Layout and Design

Pleasing surroundings, such as lighting, layout, and decor, enhance overall satisfaction (Ryu, 2005). Heung and Gu (2012) revealed that customer willingness to pay influences layout, employee factors, ambiance, facility aesthetics, and the window's view. Layout and interior design factors can be equally crucial in quality perception (Raajpoot, 2002).

f. Facilities

Price, facilities, amenities, and experience influence guests' purchase decisions (Shanka & Taylor, 2004). Customers evaluate the quality of the product and service personnel formed from the facility (Greenwell et al., 2002). Customer perception is based on physical facilities such as security, parking, and room technology (Clemes et al., 2011).

g. Amenities

In the lodging industry, amenities are addressed to meet the guests' needs (Almanza et al., 2000). Narayan et al. (2008) revealed that hygiene, amenities, security, and value for money are points of reference in service quality that customers are concerned about. In addition, amenities of internet connectivity and money exchange facilities have become the main priority for guests in selecting their stay (Narayan et al., 2008).

h. Cleanliness

Cleanliness was influential in the hospitality industry (Clemes et al., 2018; Mohi, 2012). Guest demand and hotel selections are hygiene and cleanliness factors besides other characteristics; thus, this indicates that cleanliness is the main criterion the guests are most concerned about (Barber & Scarcelli, 2010; Dolnicar & Otter, 2003; Lockyer, 2005b).

Guestroom Dimensions

Rutes et al. (2001b) claimed that the guestroom leaves a more lasting impression on the lodging than any other hotel space, such as in the lobby, the restaurants, or the service space. Kuijsters et al. (2014) claimed that hotel guestrooms are commonly found as homes of a particular cultural group. Designers should employ a good design in hotel guestrooms so that the guest leaves an excellent, memorable stay (Oktavio et al., 2021).

Six sub-dimensions were identified for the guestroom dimensions, i.e., guestroom ambiance and facility aesthetics, guestroom interior design, guestroom amenities, guestroom facilities, guestroom layout and design, and guestroom cleanliness.

a. Guestroom Ambience and Facility Aesthetics

The ambiance is essential for lighting, which needs to be designed to create an inviting visual aesthetic of the room's surroundings (Rea, 2000; Verma & Plaschka, 2003). Therefore, in adjustable lighting, the designer evaluates the influence of color temperature to satisfy the perceived values and expectations (Kuijsters et al., 2014). The same goes for research casinos; ambiance generates a casino environment (Wan, 2013).

b. Guestroom Interior Design

Guests will be attracted to the well-decorated environment with an attractive artifact, and the interior décor positively affective satisfaction when gambling in casinos (Lam et al., 2011). From the restaurant perspective, the eating space must be good as the market trends grow and the competition where people become more aware of design and ambiance (Bhatia, 2003).

c. Guestroom Amenities

Guests booking a hotel is not just about finding a place to sleep. It is about providing themselves with a getaway with features that will make the guests' stay a pleasant and memorable experience. Amenities are essential in hotel guestrooms. Hotel room amenities are the premiums, or extras, offered by those selling accommodations to guests (Expedia Group, n.d.; Warehouse Hotel, 2019). Amenities usually include anything in the guestroom beyond a room and bathroom basics, varied by type of property and rating of the hotels. Amenities are also provided for guests staying at the hotel for short- and long-term stays, making their stay much more enjoyable. The theme hotel offers amenities in the guestroom, such as toiletries, bathroom linens, drinking facilities like coffee and tea, and WiFi.

d. Guestroom Facilities

Kobyak and Lvovna (2015) found that the most critical factors in in-room facilities are essential requirements (e.g., TV facilities, closet space, data ports, and minibars) that score in the higher factor. Kim et al. (2006) indicated that most students prefer a room dining facility with bars and perimeter tables that make them seated and social.

e. Guestroom Layout and Design

Guest evaluates the room layout and design based on the room features, including bathroom, technology, furniture, closet, and amenities (Verma, 2011). Minimal space is a great space saver; for example, the dining room table does not have to be separated by several people around it (Connolly & Lee, 2006).

f. Guestroom Cleanliness

Cleanliness is the main attribute of any accommodation (Aksoydan, 2007; Asmayadi, 2015; Brochado et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2011; Lockyer, 2002). The management's challenge is the limited time available for room cleaning; most microorganisms survive long. This

includes the room surface textiles (Kirsch & Stroia, 2015). The decision patrons select is the place's cleanliness, followed by location (Lockyer, 2005a; Threevitaya, 2003).

Guest Satisfaction

Satisfaction can be identified through guest expectations and experience, resulting in positive things (Luturlean & Anggadwita, 2015). Han and Ryu (2007) findings revealed that customer satisfaction is due to the perceived value that they look at. Guests can determine their satisfaction with only physical or services that satisfy them and extend their stay (Kandampully & Suhartanto, 2000). Different guests express diverse satisfaction for similar service encounters because guest satisfaction is evaluated based on personal views such as culture and previous experience, and it could impact the expectations of one's next purchase decision (Sanchez-Gutierrez et al., 2011; Ueltschy et al., 2004).

Development of Proposed Research Framework and Research Hypotheses

Hotels are designed to provide comfort and services; guests will pay for exclusive amenities, treatment, and entertainment. Studies have shown that the physical environment has a significant influence on guest satisfaction (see Ali et al., 2023; Atkinson, 1988; Clemes et al., 2018; Countryman & Jang, 2006; Han & Ryu, 2009; Jang et al., 2011; Jysmä, 2012; Ryu & Han, 2010; Ryu & Han, 2011; Ryu & Jang, 2007; Ryu et al., 2012). Guest satisfaction can be determined by the core of the hotel products (Ogle, 2009). The guest also values the hotel's comfortable indoor environment, safety, and reliability (Asadi et al., 2011). The relationship between the two dimensions and guest satisfaction is illustrated in Figure 2.
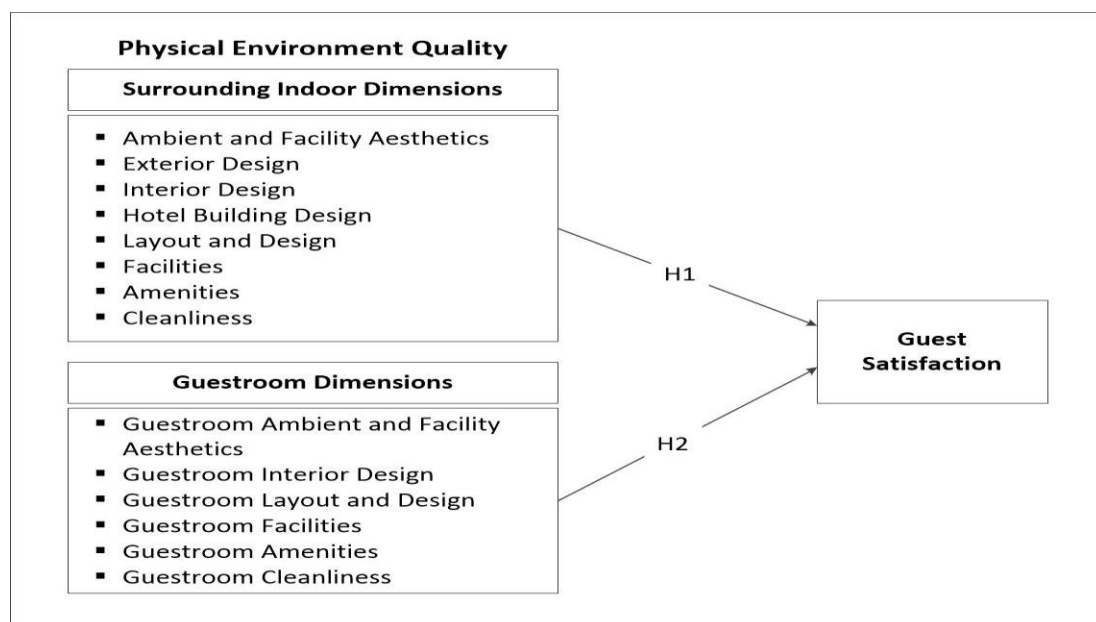

Figure 2. Research Framework

Kotler (1973) stresses that human beings' physiological responses include experience, satisfaction, and dissatisfaction. Bitner (1990) revealed that ambiance is one of the dimensions that reflect physical response. Studies of the physical environment expand widely toward facility aesthetics and added value in uniqueness as a quality feature that might satisfy the guests and lead to memorable experiences (Mcintosh & Siggs, 2005; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1994). Facility aesthetics reflect the hotel's first impression of the guests (Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996). As stated by Azis and Che Ahmat (2022), when guests arrive at a hotel, they will have their first impression of the hotel's ambiance, and they will be aware that they will be satisfied with the delightful ambiance of the hotel. Personal guest preferences judge exterior and interior design because of the property's attractiveness (Ransley & Ingram, 2001). The building influences guest satisfaction (Asmayadi, 2015; Henderson, 2011; Lai & Yik, 2012). An external variable of building design is essential in impacting guests' consideration of tangible quality (Raajpoot, 2002). Guest satisfaction can be evaluated based on expectations and service behavior (Clow & Vorhies, 1993). Layout positively affects guest satisfaction in perceived service and excitement levels (Bitner, 1990; Ryu, 2005). The facilities in the lodging industry influence end-user satisfaction (Lai & Yik, 2012). Thus, regarding perceived quality and satisfaction, room design and amenities are factors that guests evaluate (Kim, 2007). Guest satisfaction towards cleanliness is the most significant ranking attribute the customer is concerned about in their particular place to stay (Avecilla, 2024). Customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction can be caused by hygiene and cleanliness (Barber & Scarcelli, 2010; Dolnicar & Otter, 2003; Ikiz & Masoudi, 2008; Lockyer, 2002, 2005b). These findings all support the significant link towards customer satisfaction. Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: *There is a significant relationship between the surrounding indoor dimensions (i.e., ambiance and facilities aesthetics [H_{1a}]; exterior design [H_{1b}]; interior design [H_{1c}], hotel building design [H_{1d}], layout and design [H_{1e}]; facilities [H_{1f}]; amenities [H_{1g}]; and cleanliness [H_{1h}]) of the guestroom's physical environment quality and guest satisfaction in the theme hotel*

The hotel environment and guestroom contribute to guest satisfaction in the lodging industry. A few researchers adapted the study focusing on the guestroom features towards guest satisfaction (Brochado et al., 2015; Ingram, 1996; Khoo-Lattimore & Prayag, 2016; Millar & Baloglu, 2011; Ogle, 2009; Prayukvong et al., 2007; Rutes et al., 2001a; Verma, 2011). Guestroom ambiance and facility aesthetics have exposed the room's physical facilities to determine customer satisfaction (Heide et al., 2007; Kuijsters et al., 2014). Guestroom design has enhanced the concept of the room and influenced the guests to stay longer (Bilgihan et al., 2016; Orth et al., 2012; Rutes et al., 2001a). Guestroom facilities give good reputation

services to the guests as the demand for high-quality hotel services increases (Kobyak & Lvovna, 2015). Besides the demand for additional facilities, guests are willing to pay for those amenities that include in-room entertainment technology (Bilgihan et al., 2016). Cleanliness is the foremost important attribute in the hotel industry. It influences guests to stay longer and satisfy their preferences (Barber & Scarcelli, 2010). Thus, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H2: *There is a significant relationship between the guestroom dimensions (i.e., ambiance and facilities aesthetics [H2a]; interior design [H2b]; layout and design [H2c]; facilities [H2d]; amenities [H2e]; and cleanliness [H2f]) of the guestroom's physical environment quality and guest satisfaction in the theme hotel*

3. METHODOLOGY

This study focuses on attractively designed budget theme hotels. The creation of a theme is determined fundamentally by a concept design and not by luxurious facilities or a high level of service (Bonn et al., 2007; Kirby & Kent, 2010; Lo, 2010; Xiao et al., 2013). Out of 12 theme hotels selected around Peninsular Malaysia, only five hotels were granted permission: (1) Container Hotel, Selangor; (2) The Kabin, Kuala Selangor; (3) Time Capsule, Pahang; (4) Steampunk Loft, Kuala Lumpur, and (5) The UFO Capsule, Kuala Lumpur. These theme hotels have been chosen because of the building's design and architecture.

After the hotel manager granted the permission letter, the questionnaires were distributed to guests over 18 who stayed in the theme hotel. Hotel guests aged under 18 years were excluded from the sample because it was expected they might encounter difficulties in interpreting the questionnaire (Clemes et al., 2011; Mohi, 2012). This study adopted the convenience sampling form because it collects data from the population who are conveniently available to answer (Hair et al., 2020). The questionnaire was developed based on published studies and tailored to the setting (see Table 2). All items were measured on a seven-point Likert Scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Measuring items were organized into four sections, i.e., Sections A (Surrounding Indoor Dimensions), B (Guestroom Dimensions), C (Guests' Satisfaction), and D (the demographic profile). The questionnaire is designed in bilingual Bahasa Malaysia and English; since English is not Malaysia's mother tongue, it is intended to avoid the tendency to misunderstand the sentence and its meaning, which could still occur. The draft questionnaire was done using validity and reliability procedures. Draft questionnaires were distributed to 15 hospitality academicians to gain valuable opinions from experts' perspectives. All feedback was considered to improve the draft questionnaire. After an amendment was made to the draft questionnaire, a pilot test was performed on 30 guests with experience staying in a theme hotel. Cronbach alpha's results

for the pilot test for all the dimensions and construct range from 0.612 to 0.921, indicating internal consistency.

The decision on sample size is determined by exploring three sampling methodologies. Firstly, it is based on the number of measuring items for the Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA). The minimum sample size for the EFA is at least a 1:5 ratio and a more satisfactory ratio of 10:1; the minimum sample size is 360 (72 items X 5 respondents) (Hair et al., 2013; Pallant, 2016). Secondly, it is based on Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sample size table. However, no published statistics exist on the number of theme hotel guests. Therefore, using the Krejcie & Morgan (1970) table is difficult. Lastly, it is based on an unknown population since no published statistics exist on the number of theme hotel guests. Based on an unknown population, a minimum of 384 respondents are required (ProjectRegards Admin, 2019). Based on these three methodologies, the minimum sample for data collection is approximately 384 respondents.

Two analysis procedures were conducted for this study: 1) EFA aims to identify the relevant dimensions proposed in the proposed research framework, and 2) multiple linear regressions to test H1 and H2 and address RO1 (Hair et al., 2013; Pallant, 2016; Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This is a cross-sectional study; 400 questionnaires were distributed to guests in the five theme hotels. Three hundred seventy-five questionnaires were returned; however, 15 responses were invalid for the further procedure, resulting in a 360 (93.75%) usable response rate meeting the minimum sample size suggested by EFA calculations. Respondents' demographic profiles are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profiles (N=360)

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Gender			**Length of Stay**		
Male	153	42.5	One night only	93	25.8
Female	207	57.5	Two nights	193	53.6
			More than two nights	74	20.6
Age			**Country of Origin**		
18-22	39	10.8	South-East Asia	322	89.4
23-27	125	34.7	Others	38	10.6
28-32	90	25.0			
33-37	62	17.2	**Purpose of Travelling**		
38-42	27	7.5	Business	13	3.6
Over 43	17	4.7	Leisure	314	87.2
			Visiting families and relatives	11	3.1
			Others	22	6.1

Appendix 1 itemized the source of the measuring items in the questionnaire and provided items' means and standard deviation distributions. The mean and standard deviation are the most common descriptive statistics for interval and ratio-scaled data (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016).

Result for Section A: Surrounding Indoor Quality Dimension

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test result is 0.885, which is considered excellent and indicates that applying factor analysis is appropriate (Kaiser & Rice, 1974). The Bartlett's Test significance p=.000 (p<.05); therefore, this test satisfied the assumption that a correlation existed between the variables measured. The eigenvalues for surrounding indoor dimensions result from 57.004% of the total variation in the data set; 50% is considered acceptable for social science research (Chinna, 2015). The factors that show an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 can be kept for further examination in EFA (Hair et al., 2013; Pallant, 2016).

All items are highly loaded on a single factor, indicating an adequate unidimensionality. Most did not load on the eight sub-dimensions as initially planned. All factor loadings for the items retained are above 0.50; factor loading values ranged from 0.519 to 0.789. Each factor was renamed according to the leading sub-dimensions describing all the items, and hypotheses were then re-labeled (Hair et al., 2013; Pallant, 2016). Hotel Exterior & Interior Design (Factor 1; H_{1a}); Hotel Ambience (Factor 2; H_{1b}); Hotel Building Design (Factor 3; H_{1c}); Hotel Layout Design (Factor 4; H_{1d}); Hotel Facilities (Factor 5; H_{1e}); Hotel Cleanliness (Factor 6; H_{1f}); and Hotel Theme (Factor 7; H_{1g}) (see Table 2).

Table 2. EFA Result for Section A

Items Code	Item Description	Component						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A11	attractive interior design	.688						
A7	stylish exterior design.	.651						
A9	exterior themed characteristics	.622						
A13	the arrangement is attractive.	.523						
A6	wall décor is visually appealing	.523						
A14	design does not look crowded.	.519						
A1	excellent ambiance		.686					
A2	lighting creates a warm atmosphere		.637					
A4	fashionable colors		.637					
A5	paintings/pictures are attractive		.789					
A3	appealing scent		.600					
A15	tastefully decorated corridor.			.649				
A25	good use of open space			.605				
A17	modern concept building			.602				
A22	functional layout				.706			
A23	choices of room type				.658			
A20	easy layout to move around				.591			

Items Code	Item Description	Component						
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
A35	safe deposit box (front desk)					.715		
A27	24-hour front desk					.615		
A32	receptions counter with telephone desk					.565		
A26	provide Wi-Fi					.773		
A34	24-hour business centre					.565		
A36	clean and well-maintained						.623	
A38	clean surrounding interior						.606	
A39	clean common toilets						.780	
A16	unique building							.640
A8	eye-catching design							.569
	Cronbach α	0.751	0.627	0.611	0.614	0.508	0.566	0.501

The remaining items were subjected to a reliability test. Cronbach's alpha scores range from 0.501 to 0.751, with values above 0.60 indicating the reliability and consistency of the variables in the exploratory study (Churchill, 1979). Factors 5 to 7 exhibit below the recommended threshold; however, those factors are retained for further use. Plausible reasons for low-reliability scores are that the factor only has a few items. Another reason is that it comes from a different origin sub-dimension, thus requiring future development of additional measures to represent the concept (Hair et al., 2013).

Testing Hypothesis 1

Table 3 reports that the guests are satisfied with the surrounding indoor dimensions of theme hotels in Malaysia. The Surrounding Indoor dimensions can explain 42.9% $\left(R^2 = .429, F = 37.728, p < .001\right)$ of the relationship with Guest Satisfaction. The result shows that Hotel Ambiance & Facility Aesthetics $\left(\beta = .233, p < .001\right)$ are the most significant predictors of Guests' Satisfaction in theme hotels in Malaysia, followed by Hotel Cleanliness $\left(\beta = .200, p < .001\right)$, Hotel Building Design $\left(\beta = .166, p < .001\right)$, Hotel Theme $\left(\beta = .156, p < .05\right)$, Hotel Layout Design $\left(\beta = .145, p < .05\right)$, and Hotel Exterior & Interior Design $\left(\beta = .092, p < .10\right)$. This result addresses RO1 and partially supports H1.

Table 3. Result of Testing Hypothesis 1

Model 1	Beta Loading	Sig.	Assessments
Dependent variables: Guest satisfaction			
a. Hotel Exterior & Interior Design	.092*	.085	H_{1a} Supported
b. Hotel Ambience & Facility Aesthetics	.233***	.000	H_{1b} Supported
c. Hotel Building Design	.166***	.001	H_{1c} Supported
d. Hotel Layout Design	.145**	.002	H_{1d} Supported
e. Hotel Facilities	-.057	.197	H_{1e} Rejected
f. Hotel Cleanliness	.200***	.000	H_{1f} Supported
g. Hotel Theme	.156**	.002	H_{1g} Supported

Note: ***Significant at 1% level; **Significant at 5% level; *Significant at 10% level

Result for Section B: Guestroom Quality Dimensions

Exploratory Factor Analysis

The KMO result value is 0.900, which implies that factor analysis should be applied appropriately. The Bartlett's Test significance $p = .000 (p < 0.05)$; this test satisfied the assumption that there were correlations between the variables measured. All factors with an eigenvalue greater than one are considered significant, and the total variation is 59.304%. Initially, 34 items were proposed for six sub-dimensions. However, EFA formed five sub-dimensions for the Guestroom dimension (see Table 4). All items are highly loaded on a single factor, indicating an adequate unidimensionality. All items retained above 0.50. Factor loading values ranged from 0.514 to 0.862. Each factor was renamed and re-labeled: Room Cleanliness (Factor 1; H_{2a}); Room Interior Design (Factor 2; H_{2b}); Room Facilities (Factor 3; H_{2c}); Room Layout Design (Factor 4; H_{2d}); and Room Ambience & Facility Aesthetics (Factor 5; H_{2e}). The remaining items were subjected to a reliability test. Cronbach alpha scores ranged from 0.504 to 0.855.

Table 4. EFA Results

Item Codes	Items Descriptions	Component				
		1	2	3	4	5
B34	clean private showers and toilets	.706				
B32	clean towels provided	.668				
B31	clean bedsheets, pillowcase	.660				
B33	clean floor	.643				
B28	comfortable pillow and blanket	.633				
B9	pleasing colour scheme	.547				
B27	well supplied with basic amenities	.521				
B20	decorative lamps		.619			
B19	interesting art wall décor		.581			
B15	clear signage and availability information.		.570			
B18	good floor surface		.565			
B16	stylish and cozy room		.514			
B22	high, plain ceiling decorations		.795			
B26	supplied electrical devices			.694		
B25	good Wi-Fi connection			.607		
B23	effective room locking system			.527		
B24	provide luggage rack			.655		
B10	acceptable space				.848	
B11	space that easily moves around				.862	
B8	high-quality furnishing					.749
B21	fancy windows					.553
B6	natural light over/by the bed					.631
B2	good-condition electrical devices					.589
	Cronbach α	.855	.668	.586	.833	.504

Testing Hypothesis 2

Table 5 reports that the guests are satisfied with the Guestroom Quality Dimensions of theme hotels in Malaysia. Guestroom Quality Dimensions explained 39.8%

$\left(R^2 = .398, F = 46.817, p < .05\right)$ of the relationship with Guests' Satisfaction. Three of the five sub-dimensions are significant to the Guests' Satisfaction in the theme hotels in Malaysia. Room Cleanliness significantly influences Guests' Satisfaction $\left(\beta = .345, p < .001\right)$, followed by Room Ambiance & Facility Aesthetics $\left(\beta = .204, p < .001\right)$ and Room Interior Design $\left(\beta = .186, p < .001\right)$. Thus, this result addresses the RO1 and moderately satisfies H₂.

Table 5. Result of Testing Hypothesis 2

Model 1	Beta Loading	Sig.	Assessments
Dependent variables: Guests Satisfaction			
Room Cleanliness	.345***	.000	H₂ₐ supported
Room Interior Design	.186***	.001	H₂ᵦ supported
Room Facilities	.009	.851	H₂ᵨ rejected
Room Layout Design	-.041	.342	H₂ᵨ rejected
Room Ambience & Facility Aesthetics	.204***	.000	H₂ₑ supported

*Note: ***Significant at 1% level; **Significant at 5% level; *Significant at 10% level*

5. CONCLUSION

This study extends prior research on the significance of physical environment quality and guest satisfaction in theme hotels in Malaysia. A comprehensive literature reviews that spans multiple fields—including hospitality, service marketing, social science, architecture, and design—offers a deeper understanding of these factors.

Based on the findings, the implications of this study can be summarized from both academic and practical perspectives. This study contributes to the empirical study on guest satisfaction with physical environment quality in the lodging industry, specifically in theme hotels in Malaysia. The study integrates literature from hospitality and building disciplines to identify relevant physical environment quality dimensions and sub-dimensions for the study context. Initially, the study considered the SERVQUAL model but acknowledged its limitations, especially the generic dimensions, which may not apply to every service industry.

This study highlights the importance of physical environment quality in predicting guest satisfaction from an overall perspective, demonstrating that the dimensions and sub-dimensions in Figure 2 are related to guest satisfaction in theme hotels in Malaysia. It focuses on two main dimensions and their sub-dimensions: Surrounding Indoor dimension (Hotel Exterior & Interior Design, Hotel Ambience & Facility Aesthetics, Hotel Building Design, Hotel Layout Design, Hotel Facilities, Hotel Cleanliness, and Hotel Theme) and Guestroom dimension (Room Cleanliness, Room Interior Design, Room Facilities, Room Layout Design, and Room Ambience & Facility Aesthetics) in theme hotels in Malaysia. The study provides evidence of guest satisfaction with the quality of their physical environment in these unique

accommodations. The relationship between the two dimensions (Surrounding Indoor and Guestroom) and guest satisfaction is illustrated in Figure 2. The findings indicate that both dimensions positively affect guest satisfaction, making them good predictors for staying in theme hotels. The study reveals that aspects of the surrounding indoor environment and guestroom dimensions significantly predict guest satisfaction, aligning with findings from other studies.

From a practical standpoint, the study offers several recommendations for management to enhance the quality of the physical environment for guests in theme hotels. Guests in this industry have high expectations for service quality, and improving the physical environment can significantly boost guest satisfaction. Understanding guest preferences enables managers to create a comfortable ambiance, enhancing overall guest satisfaction.

The study provides a platform for those managing theme hotels to reposition themselves in the market and better understand the factors influencing guests' choice of theme hotels. It offers opportunities for innovative development to gain a competitive market advantage and implement successful service marketing strategies. By addressing areas needing improvement based on guest feedback, management can better meet guests' needs and preferences, leading to increased demand for theme hotels and positively contributing to a country's economic growth.

In summary, this study extends the study on physical environment quality and guest satisfaction in theme hotels, offering valuable insights and recommendations for academics and practitioners in the hospitality industry. The interdisciplinary approach ensures a well-rounded perspective on how various physical environment qualities influence guest satisfaction. This broadened view enables hotel managers to implement more effective strategies tailored to meet the diverse expectations of their guests, ultimately enhancing the overall guest experience and satisfaction in theme hotels.

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Study

This study adds to the body of knowledge of the physical environment quality in the hospitality discipline, focusing on two dimensions in theme hotels in Malaysia; however, it has several limitations. Recommendations for future studies are also provided to overcome this limitation.

The first limitation relates to the dimensions and sub-dimensions of physical environment quality. There are three primary dimensions proposed by Brady and Cronin (2001), i.e., Interaction Quality, Physical Environment Quality, and Outcome Quality when measuring service quality and satisfaction. However, this study did not cover all three primary dimensions. Thus, future studies could add interaction quality and outcome quality with their

appropriate sub-dimensions when measuring theme hotels. Furthermore, future studies may adapt this study research framework, add other constructs such as perceived value and behavioral intention such as re-patronage and word-of-mouth, and examine these constructs in the theme hotel setting. Therefore, the comprehensive research frameworks could enhance understanding of the guests' satisfaction when measuring the theme hotel setting in the future.

Secondly, the dimensions are multi-dimensions; they vary depending on the service setting (Brady & Cronin, 2001; Carman, 1990; Channoi et al., 2018; Clemes et al., 2018; Dabholkar et al., 1996). There are many other potential dimensions to improvise and adapt to, such as security, privacy, and waiting time. Thus, future studies could add these dimensions when measuring the guests' satisfaction when staying in theme hotels.

Lastly, this study's sampling method is geographically limited and is not widely represented. This study examined only five theme hotels in three states, where the sample may not adequately represent the whole population of the guests of theme hotels, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should assess theme hotels in various locations and other states, which can generalize the findings. Furthermore, this study only focuses on theme hotels; therefore, the findings may not be generalized to other types of lodging industry.

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7. APPENDIX

Appendix A: Descriptive Statistics for All Items (N=360)

Items	Statements	Source(s)	Mean	Std Dev
	Surrounding Indoors Dimensions			
Ambiance and Facility Aesthetics				
A1	excellent ambiance.		5.64	.665
A2	lighting creates a warm atmosphere.		5.14	1.258
A3	appealing scent.		5.93	.822
A4	fashionable colors.		5.98	.804
A5	paintings/pictures are attractive.		5.91	.592
A6	the wall décor is visually appealing	(Asadi et al., 2011; Asmayadi, 2015; Bitner, 1990; Brochado et al., 2015; Clemes et al., 2011; Heide & Grønhaug, 2006; Khosravi et al., 2014; Kozinetsa et al., 2002; Lockyer, 2002, 2005b; Stroebele & De Castro, 2004)	5.74	.744
Exterior Design				
A7	stylish exterior design.		5.70	.749
A8	eye-catching design		5.74	.757
A9	contain exterior-themed characteristics		5.75	.779
A10	inviting hotel entrance design.		5.80	.803
Interior Design				
A11	attractive interior design.		5.84	.793
A12	presence details of the decor.		5.78	.800
A13	furniture arrangement is attractive.		5.90	.810
A14	design that does not look crowded.		5.68	.798
A15	tastefully decorated corridor.		5.72	.790
Hotel Building Design				
A16	unique building.		5.89	.834

Items	Statements	Source(s)	Mean	Std Dev
A17	modern concept building.		5.94	.823
A18	impressive building architecture.		6.03	.805
A19	high-quality building hotel.		6.09	.784
Layout and Design				
A20	easy layout to move around.		5.31	.830
A21	signage that is easy to follow.		5.71	.643
A22	functional layout		5.54	.707
A23	choices of room type.		5.54	.683
A24	convenience location.		5.79	.678
Facilities				
A25	good use of open space.		5.55	.726
A26	provide WiFi.		6.11	.734
A27	24-hour front desk		5.51	.757
A28	easy to access parking area.		5.24	.829
A29	ample parking area.		5.20	.787
A30	large communal/social area.		5.54	.658
Amenities				
A31	modern elevator.		5.15	.802
A32	receptions counter with telephone desk		5.01	.812
A33	provide sweets/drinks at the reception counter.		5.61	.941
A34	24-hours business center		5.04	.954
A35	safe deposit box (front desk).		4.83	1.032
Cleanliness				
A36	clean and well-maintained.		5.71	.886
A37	clean exterior appearance.		5.93	.803
A38	clean the surrounding interior (e.g., carpet, windows, floor, and furniture).		5.83	.785
A39	clean common toilets.		5.78	.861
Guestroom Dimensions				
Room Ambience & Facility Aesthetics				
B1	appealing modern decoration.		5.64	.721
B2	good-condition electrical devices		5.90	.822
B3	good temperature control.		5.84	.803
B4	agreeable level of noise.		5.48	.914
B5	comfortable bed.	(Asmayadi, 2015; Barber & Scarcelli, 2009; Bilgihan et al., 2016; Clemes et al., 2011; Clemes et al., 2009; Kirsch & Stroia, 2015; Kobyak & Lvovna, 2015; Lockyer, 2002, 2005b; Nangah, 2016; Wakefield & Blodgett, 1996)	5.92	.911
B6	natural light over/by the bed.		5.66	.866
B7	modern equipment.		5.82	.829
B8	high-quality furnishing.		5.64	.813
Room Layout Design				
B9	pleasing color scheme.		5.96	.837
B10	acceptable space.		5.29	1.030
B11	space that easily moves around.		5.20	1.067
B12	accommodating arrangement.		5.64	.784
B13	room privacy.		5.71	.851
B14	size of the room would be enough.		5.52	.973
B15	clear signage and availability information.		5.82	.830
Room Interior Design				
B16	stylish and cozy room.		5.65	.851

Items	Statements	Source(s)	Mean	Std Dev
B17	style of furnishing.		5.72	.798
B18	good floor surface.		5.82	.838
B19	interesting art wall décor.		5.85	.821
B20	decorative lamps.		5.77	.816
B21	fancy windows.		5.72	.879
B22	high plain ceiling decorations.		5.32	.965
Room Facilities				
B23	effective room locking system		5.80	.858
B24	provide luggage rack		5.42	.953
B25	good WiFi connections.		6.13	.858
B26	supplied electrical devices		5.96	.813
Room Amenities				
B27	well supplied with basic amenities.		6.05	.785
B28	comfortable pillow and blanket.		6.09	.733
B29	provide a necessity hanger/hook.		5.39	.973
B30	provided mini bar		5.09	1.237
Room Cleanliness				
B31	clean bed linen (e.g., bedsheets and pillowcases)		5.92	.812
B32	clean towels are provided.		6.04	.822
B33	clean floor.		5.95	.825
B34	clean private showers and toilets.		5.95	.836
Guests Satisfaction				
C1	This theme hotel has a good physical environment that matches its themed image.		6.14	.759
C2	Overall, I am satisfied with the physical environment of this theme hotel.	(Asmayadi, 2015; Clemes et al., 2011; Clemes et al., 2009)	5.96	.744
C3	Overall, I am satisfied with this theme hotel's guestroom's physical environment.		6.01	.757
C4	Overall, this theme hotel has exceeded my expectations		6.10	.791
C5	I made the right choice by choosing to stay at this hotel.		6.19	.782