

SAFETY AND SECURITY PRACTICES AMONG HOTELS IN TERENGGANU: PERSPECTIVES FROM HOTEL MANAGERS

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Abstract

Safety and security practices are essential in the hotel and tourism industries for centuries. With the extreme competition among hotels to accomplish guests demand patterns, hoteliers has configure their hotel's safety and security systems to deliver exemplary hospitality. Limited study has highlighted issues with regards to hotel safety and security systems especially from operators/ manager's point of views. Thus, the objective of this research paper is to explore perceptions of hotel safety and security managers' on the relative importance of safety and security facilities. In-depth interviews with eight (8) hotel managers and assistant managers of Security Department were entrenched. They came various hotels in Kuala Terengganu, however the hotel's names were not revealed for anonymity purposes. Four (4) themes were derived from the interview that consists of employee's safety and security training; need for female guest floors, well-equipped fire prevention systems and closed-circuit television system (CCTV). The findings also discovered that managers perceived uniformed security guard, emergency lighting systems and access of guest key to activate the lifts to guest floors as essential element in hotel safety. This finding served as a platform to assist hotel managers in comprehends their guest needs. This can also lead to customer satisfaction and image reputation. The managerial implications, recommendations and scope for future study are presented in the end.

Keywords: Safety, Security systems, hotel managers

1.0 INTRODUCTION / BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Confidence Index reported that Malaysia is ranked among the 10th most attractive destination worldwide (Abdullah, 2015). It highlights that Malaysia economy is developing and encouraged many foreign investors to do business in Malaysia. These positive scenarios affect hotel and tourism sectors. Additionally, a report of Tourism Malaysia in 2017, has witnessed the number of tourist arrival recorded at 25.95 million arrivals (Tourism Malaysia, nd). Tourism in Malaysia as one of the top five contribution to the national economy is targeting to receive 38 million of tourist which worth RM168 billion by the year 2020 (Abdulah, 2015). Currently, 1.2 billion tourists travel the world as highlighted by Makeeva, Maloletko and Egorova (2017). People travel for several reasons be it inbound or outbound; leisure, visiting friends and relatives (VFR), business, health, treatment, shopping, conference, incentive travel, education, sport, cultural, fraternal and other travels (Khan, 2014).

Safety and security are vital aspects among travelers and essential for all tourism destinations advancement. It is normal feeling skepticism while you are on vacation especially when it comes to safety and security concerns. It's more so if travellers are visiting unfamiliar tourist destinations and first timers travellers. This is perhaps because of inadequate insight and information on the new destination that travelers intend to visit, in comparison to information they have on their own places. The number one thing that crossed their mind will definitely be potential detriments and violence. For instance, the detriments and violence includes felony, assassination, road hazards, burglary, abductions and other crimes (Anuar, Bookhari & Aziz, 2010).

Travelers stipulated these two interconnected elements of safety and security in daily life. They might not be able to comprehend between "safe" and "unsafe" areas or behaviours. Eventually, travelers will not visited any potential harmful destinations. The image of a tourist destination can be tarnish if travelers felt unsafe and this can lead to a reduced number of tourists (Anuar *et al*, 2010). Safety appeared to be among the four (4) prominent factors that influence travelers to choose a hotel when they travel at any destination besides cleanliness, service and facilities (Anuar, Musa, Khalid & Anderson, 2017). Moreover, a study conducted by Chan and Lam (2013) highlighted guest perceptions towards hotel safety and security systems. In addition, another study conducted by Kwornik (2003) addressed on the importance of security systems from guests perspectives. Furthermore a recent study conducted by Ghaderi, Saboori and Khoshkam (2017) highlighted the interconnected variable of security and international tourist arrivals. It measured 29 developed and 45 developing countries from the period of 2006–2012. The findings highlighted that three components of security: social, economic and political and tourism were positive and significant in developed nations while it is not related and insignificant in developing countries. However, limited empirical evidences had been done especially from the hotel managers perspectives (Ghaderi *et al*, 2017; Enz, 2009). Therefore, this study requires an empirical evidences in order to explore the hotel managers perceptions with regards to safety and security elements in their hotels. It will definitely assist hoteliers in upgrading their services and facilities to attract more travelers come and stay at their hotel.

2.0 LITERATURE STUDY

Enz (2009) postulated that safety includes taking care of hotel employees and guests from any accidents and death probability. On top of that, safety covers employees and guests on the risks of involving in accidental slips, falls, cuts, burns and so forth, as well as protecting hotels facilities. Moreover, security department of the hotel is responsible to monitor any unknown entries/ individuals from several hotel entrance other than the lobby such as through stairways, emergency exits or staff entrances (Ellis & Potter, 2005). Several academicians from various part of the world had tackled safety and security studies since the 1990s (Pizam, 1999; Shellum, 2003; Kwornik, 2006; Ling & Zheng, 2008; Enz, 2009; Ghaderi *et al*, 2017). Pizam (1999) reported the felonious characteristics and violent acts and summarized the differential effects of such attributes on tourism demand. Additionally, George (2003) discovered several personal factors liked nationality and previous experience of crime that affect respondents' perceptions of safety and security. Furthermore, Ling *et al* (2008) summarized the intrinsic foretelling between hotel security systems and the supportability of science and technology. Moreover, Enz (2009) postulated interesting findings in identifying differences for safety and security amenities supplied in various hotel segments. Recent study by Ghaderi *et al* (2017) highlighted the differences between developed and developing countries on the effect of indexes of security.

2.1 Safety and Security Features

The intense competitions among hotels have witnessed hoteliers to furnish high quality products and services as an avenue to captivate and maintain their customers (Anuar *et al*, 2017). Hence, several

traditional and sophisticated safety and security features had been adopted with the main focus to improve their positions in the market place as listed in table 1 below. Kilic and Okumus (2005) highlighted that hoteliers have installed electronic locks, fire sprinklers, smoke detectors and closed circuit televisions (CCTVs) in order to improve safety. Furthermore, collaboration efforts with government bodies had also been done in accomplishing ways for a safety and healthier hotel environment (Shellum, 2003). In addition, hotels also addressed on the importance of emergency lighting and power systems especially when blackout situations happened (Kwortnik, 2006). Additionally, Middle Eastern hotels applied X-ray machines and metal detectors to impede guests from transporting any threatening goods or bombs (Brown, Carlyle, Salmerón & Wood, 2006). The frequently fire and emergency management training had been imposed regularly in hotels with the primary concern to educate the hotel employees.

Table 1. Hotel Safety and Security Features (self compiled by researchers)

ITEMS	SOURCES
Electronic card-locking systems	Biagini (1993): Okumus (2005)
Deadbolt locks, primary locks and peephole to guest room doors	Bach & Pizam (1996)
Emergency master keys/cards for manager on duty, engineering and security	Shellum (2003)
Security personnel 24/7 complete with uniform	Shellum (2003)
Emergency lighting and power systems	Kwortnik (2006)
Fire sprinklers, smoke detectors, closed circuit televisions (CCTV)	Kilic & Okumus (2005)
X-ray machines and metal detectors	Brown <i>et al</i> (2006)

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This research paper adopted interview as methodology of the study. Eight (8) hotel security managers/ assistant managers had been approached as a sample for this study. This interview was conducted primarily to examine hotel manager's perceptions with regards to safety and security elements in their hotels. Consent was endorsed once they agreed to be interviewed. All the respondents came from various hotels from Terengganu with the chosen justifications the hotels were located in Kuala Terengganu area, three-five star rated hotels, have in-house security department at their hotel incharge of all safety and security matters and listed among the 63 hotels in Terengganu that registered with Malaysian Association of Hotels Terengganu Chapter (MAH, 2016). Among the 63 hotels that were tabulated by MAH, only 30 hotels applied in-house security departments while the rest of the hotels outsourcing it. All respondents were approached through e-mails and contacted via phone calls to participate in this study. From the effort, twenty two (22) hotels expressed hesitant to engage in this study due to person in charge was not around, peak period for hotel occupancy as well as clashes with staffs training and event activities. Thus, only eight (8) hotels co-operated in this study and they are identified as Hotel A, B, C, D, E, F, G and H. All the information obtained during the interview session was strictly treated with private and confidential. Hotel's names were not exposed for anonymity reasons.

With regards to participants' selection, researchers adopted purposive sampling. Security group of managers were favored because of their comprehensive knowledge in dealing with safety and security features at their hotel. It is notably well known that one-on-one in-depth interviews signifies comprehensive data as reported by Plano Clark and Creswell (2008). Though the interview process is time consuming, costly and labor intensive, but the data that it brings worth doing. The interviewees' characteristics for each hotel were identified in table 2. The interview session were conducted

approximately between forty-five minutes to one hour. These semi-structured interviews adopted sets of questions from previous researchers as a guideline to conduct this study. Audio-visual tapes were used to record the interview and later transcribed verbatim, reviewed thoroughly and summarized into themes, categories and concepts.

Table 2. Interviewee's Characteristics (self-compiled by researchers)

HOTEL & INTERVIEWEES POSITION	GENDER
Hotel A, Security Manager	Male
Hotel B, Asst. Security Manager	Male
Hotel C, Asst. Security Manager	Female
Hotel D, Security Manager	Male
Hotel E, Asst. Security Manager	Female
Hotel F, Security Manager	Male
Hotel G, Security Manager	Male
Hotel H, Security Manager	Male

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Attempts had been done to explore hotel manager's perceptions with regards to safety and security matters at their hotel. Four (4) themes were derived from the interview that consists of employee's safety and security training; need for female guest floors, well-equipped fire prevention systems and closed-circuit television system (CCTV). The findings also discovered that managers perceived uniformed security guard, emergency lighting systems and access of guest key to activate the lifts to guest floors as essential element in hotel safety features. This finding served as a platform to assist hotel managers in comprehends their guest needs. This can also lead to customer satisfaction and image reputation.

4.1 Employees Safety and Security Training

Findings displayed that all respondents recognized that employee's safety training is essential in the implementation of safety and security practices in their hotel. The objective of giving training is to remarkably impose employee awareness on the right procedures of conducting certain thing. One respondent highlighted that; *"We should teach and prepare our employees for any emergency matters. For example, if our Front Office Assistant faced suspicious guests upon check-in, they can immediately report it to our security staffs. This will be very helpful because we already train our employees to do that –to be aware of any suspicious individuals, be it guests or conference customer"*. Another respondent postulated, *"All the safety and security procedures that hotel practiced need to be regularly reminded to all employees in staff training"*. The respondent highlighted that frequent briefings conducted in security department should be extended to all departments as well. Through frequent training, information among all employees can be disseminating efficiently. Furthermore, another respondent portrayed that, *"Frequent training will improve hotels productivity. For example, on the do's and don't of operating certain machines in laundry operations"*. Vigorous efforts can be seen at certain hotel ensuring their internal customers satisfy by spending on external speakers to give training with regards to safety and security implementation. However, almost 50% of the respondents (4 out of 8 participants) argued that employees received lesser trainings due to limited budgets. Researchers therefore strongly recommended that trainings should be provided to employees since safety and security features are serious issues that cannot be neglected or taking lightly. By giving training it will definitely benefit the employees and

management in the long run. It can tarnish the hotels reputation and image if accidents occurred at hotel organization without appropriate safety regulations (Anuar, Sumarjan & Mohd Radzi, 2017). The best way to determine what types of safety benefits are best for the employees is simply by asking them. Not only does this increase employee satisfaction but it also builds employees engagement and loyalty to the organization.

4.2 Need for Female Guest Floor

Findings of this study also interestingly discovered that majority respondents expressed their concerns with female guests and highlighted on the needs to have female special floors. One respondent highlighted that; *“We received a lot of female business travelers checking into our hotel. We are very serious with their safety”*. Additionally, another responded highlighted that, *“Most of the female guests that check-in alone will request rooms located near the lift and at floors with other female and family guests”*. Moreover, another responded stressed that, *“All of us had been travelers ourselves right? I always put myself in my guest shoes. Being a guest, I’m sure we are looking for safety-first room whenever we stay at the hotel.”*. This finding demands a further exploration on the need for female guest floor since it can be part of lucrative hotel business strategies. This is in line with the literatures that indicated the existence of executive floors for female travelers in Novotel Atlantis Shanghai (Chan & Wong, 2006). Special amenities available at the floor include nail clippers, facial tissue, umbrellas, electronic irons, coat hangers, floral arrangements and a garment dryer (Chan *et al*, 2006). In conjunction with that also, local study conducted by Amir, Ismail and See (2015) reported that risk assessment should be organized before female travelers departing to any destinations, be it individual or in-group.

4.3 Well-equipped fire prevention systems

All respondents agreed that having a well-equipped fire prevention system is mandatory for their hotel as part of the safety and security features. One respondent highlighted that; *“All the hotel buildings are strictly follow government safety guidelines. The hotel guestrooms are also equipped with fire sprinkler incase it detect smoke inside the room”*. On top of that, another respondent reported that, *“We conducted fire safety training twice a year for our staffs. Incase of fire, our staffs know where to go and how to help evacuating our hotel guests”*. This indicates that all respondents recognize the importance of balancing between technology and procedures to minimize the causes of safety and security problems.

4.4 Closed-circuit television system (CCTV)

Safety and security has becoming a norm and impartial elements in daily life. Inspection cameras were available in many shopping malls; shops, restaurants, airports, railway stations, schools and even the application of motion detector and closed circuit television system (CCTV) are ordinary among hotels (Groenenboom & Jones, 2003). One respondent highlighted that; *“CCTV is the basic safety feature that hotel should invested off”*. This is supported by another respondent that expressed; *“There are several types of CCTV available in the market. Having one at your own hotel reflects your image to your guests”*. However, majority respondent agreed that 9/11 incidents had bombarded hotels safety and security to be more alert and tight. Hotel managers should make it necessary to enhance their hotel safety and security facilities. They should be prepared for uncertainty threats, as hospitality industry is very fragile. Hoteliers should set in mind that accidents and emergencies can happen anytime and anywhere. Moreover, security department should be treated importance as other front of the house department rather than isolating it since it’s back of the house department (Chan *et al*, 2013).

4.5 Other Safety Features

The findings also discovered that managers perceived uniformed security guard, emergency lighting systems and access of guest key to activate the lifts to guest floors as essential element in hotel safety features. From the findings, two respondents had highlighted the needs of uniformed security guards to be accessible 24 hours at the hotel as part of the hotel safety and security enhancement. Additionally, two respondents agreed that guests should not have access to all floors except for their room floor and general hotel facilities such as swimming pools, gym and restaurant. Moreover, installing emergency lighting systems is crucial especially when the hotels blackout. One respondent highlighted that; “*We are located in monsoon season area where blackout frequently happen especially during the rainy seasons. Therefore, it is appropriate to have emergency lighting systems*”.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORKS

Hotels generally need to be comprehensive, since it is a place to provide customers with accommodation, dining, entertainment, meeting and banquet. Hotels cannot neglect the essential of tangible aspects in determining safety and security systems. Thus, by addressing hotel manager’s perceptions towards the hotel safety and security features at their hotel, it may contribute to guest assessments of hotels service quality, indirectly increase the image and reputation of the hotel. Hotels can be unique from others by highlighting that they are safe through the entire comprehensive and well-documented safety and security systems. Successful tourism destination may benefit in term of the rise of tourist arrivals, investors, job opportunities enhancement and good image and reputation of the place (Amir *et al*, 2015). To conclude, this study highlights the importance of safety and security features from hotel manager’s perspectives. Future study can address the gap between hotel managers perceptions and what do guest perceive as importance with regards to safety matters. With this, they may have a comprehensive understanding on the key components to highlight their hotel and Malaysia as a safe tourism spot. Additionally, future research also may extend on other locations and star rating hotels to explore the safety and security patterns.

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