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# Preferences of Accommodation: a Descriptive Study in the South of the State of Sonora, Mexico

**ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** To identify the lodging preferences of users (to define the comfort level preferences of tourists/consumers) of southern Sonora, considering their perceptions, which allows to improve strategies to satisfy the user's needs in the future.

**Methodology:** The research was descriptive and quantitative. The participants were between 18 and 60 years old, of every socioeconomic level, gender, occupation, and level of education. The sample comprised 300 from the region of Sonora in Mexico.

**Findings:** Regarding the methodological contribution, this research presents an instrument to collect the opinions of the accommodation users, which is expected to be replicated in other studies on a larger population scale. This research is empirical and collects the opinion of a group of people, showing their preferences regarding the factors and characteristics they consider when choosing a type of accommodation. In addition, companies operating in this field could define their competitive advantages considering the results of this research.

**Value Added:** The article points to a practical solution of the knowledge of preferences of users of different accommodation modalities and identifies which were most frequently selected by the respondents.

**Recommendations:** Research shows the existence of significant differences between family and other companies. Therefore, it is advisable to look for the specifics and, as a consequence, potential sources of competitiveness in specific markets, of which the tourist market is important.

**Key words:** accommodation, tourism in Mexico, guest preferences, consumer satisfaction

**JEL codes:** Z31, Z30

## Introduction

Monrgenrot, cited by Ramos & Barrera (2011), defines tourism as “People who move from their home temporarily to stop in another place to satisfy their vital and cultural needs; or to satisfy other needs only as consumers of economical or cultural goods and services. Business that offers accommodation services first started from people’s social relationships. From the socioeconomical point of view, tourism is classified into three types: a) luxurious tourism, b) mass tourism, and c) social tourism” (Ramos & Barrera, 2011).

Tourism companies must reckon with employees who have quality service culture to accommodate guests, search for the total customer satisfaction in every interaction with the client, and consider his or her desires, needs

and expectations. Customer service depends on a few aspects: behavioral, personal experience, politeness, attitude and technical such as materials handling, working system and foreign language knowledge (Báez, 2009). Tourism in Mexico faces important challenges such as: sustainability, highly competitive environment, and social responsibility. The Tourism Sectorial Plan 2013–2018 established five objectives: 1) to transform tourism and to straight collaboration schemes; 2) to explore the competitive advantages that it offers; 3) to facilitate the finance and investment and protest generation of public and private investment; 4) to motivate tourist promotion to contribute to the market's diversity; 5) to promote the sustainable development of tourist destinations increasing the social and economic benefits to the receptive communities (Financiero, 2018). In the case of Mexico, especially the last of these objectives seems to be important. In this field there is a lot to do, and – what is stressed – sustainable development should be an important component of the state tourist policy (Zawistowska, Dębski & Górská-Warsewicz, 2014, p. 77).

Mexico's natural attractions attract both domestic and foreign tourists. These natural places of interest include a great variety of places such as beaches, forests, rivers, archeological sites among many others. Regarding the accommodation and units of accommodation registered in Sonora, it shows that in Cajeme municipality (December 31<sup>st</sup> 2016) there were 2036 accommodation types of which 1545 were hotels, 434 motels, 20 camping sites, camps and recreational hostels, 10 pensions and guest houses and 27 in apartments and furnished houses with hotel services. Also, there were 47 registered lodgings in Sonora: 30 hotels, 12 motels, one camping, camps and recreational hotels, three pensions and guest houses, 27 in apartments and furnished houses with hotel services (Comisión de Fomento al Turismo del Gobierno del Estado, 2017). This research was carried out in the south of Sonora, where 300 surveys were completed with the objective of finding out the preferences of different options.

## Current State of Knowledge

Tourism, according to Barrón & Castro (2015), has become a very important sector in the economic field because of its international expansion. The World Tourism Organization (Barrón & Castro 2015) claims that this field contributed 9% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (UNWTO Highlights..., p. 3) worldwide, generating one of every 11 jobs, besides, according to the OMT (Barrón & Castro 2015) the income corresponding to a 6% of the international exportations. Similarly, the Mexican Institute of Competitiveness, A.C. (IMCO), states that tourism in Mexico contributes with 9% to the GDP and employs 7.3% of the population, besides being the fourth source of international currencies (IMCO, 2013). The sector with the greatest participation was the one related to temporary accommodation services and preparation of food and beverages, representing 67% of the national total in 2008.

Lazzari *et al.* (2010) carried out a field empirical investigation in six universities in Argentina, aimed to learn the tourist destinations visited by students during the summer of 2009, the means of transport used, the type of accommodation, and the influences on their choice. They gathered information from 2,426 young people. The results were that 84.45% of the students traveled, and 78.87% of them did it within their own country, and only 21.13% traveled abroad. The majority of those who chose to travel within the same country chose to stay in the homes of relatives and friends, rent a house or an apartment. The lowest percentage was for those who decided to stay in a hostel or in a private home. The main influences on the type of accommodation young people chose were mainly the opinions of friends or were influenced by their parents. A smaller percentage was influenced by public agencies, travel agencies and by the Internet. The highest percentage of those who traveled abroad decided to stay in hotels, apartments or rented houses, and the lowest percentage was lodged in hostels, cabins and camps. In this case, the greatest source of influence young people received while choosing the type of accommodation was from their parents, and the

lowest percentage was from advertising of official agencies, tourism and travel agencies or from the Internet. A study on travel preferences in various countries was conducted, for example by Debski and Nasierowski (2017). The results showed that the preferences and motives behind organising the trip by young people from different countries (Poland, Canada and Trinidad and Tobago) are very similar (Dębski & Nasierowski 2017). The study was based on the fact that this sector represents the economy of a country, as well as of a region. The main research question was: What are the lodging preferences of tourists in the South of Sonora?

Young people, due to the increase in their importance, are becoming a more and more intensively researched group of consumers on the tourist market. It is indicated that the so-called millennials will be the largest segment by 2020 (Santos et al., 2016). They have a number of specific features that make it possible to still recognize that there is a research deficit in this area. Persons under 30 leave more often to a larger number of destinations than their predecessors. They dawned experience and information, which is associated with a strong use of the internet. (Vukic, Kuzmanovic & Stankovic, 2015). During their travels, young people depart from mass tourism. They want to be perceived as explorers (Leask, Fyall & Byron, 2014).

The study also analyzed a group of students. Prayag and Del Chiappa (2014) prove that age and gender influence consumer purchasing decisions. They emphasize that hotel managers should create commitment and relations with young clients using on-line communication tools (Prayag & Del Chiappa, 2014). An instrument or factor for building loyalty should be the hospitality of the facilities, and also in principle their employees. There is a specific advantage of family businesses, giving them uniqueness (Presas, Munoz & Guia, 2011, p. 270). Furthermore, hotel managers should remember about investing in employees' satisfaction, that may result in consumer satisfaction (Veleva, 2009).

Recreation is something that every person must be entitled to enjoy, especially when their daily work duties reach a point where they need to

take a moment to rest. That is why, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, international tourism organizations have promoted all around the world to take advantage of magical places, to visit other countries, to learn different cultures. This situation promotes tourism, which includes those activities carried out by people during their trips and visits in other places than their usual environment, with a diversity of actions aimed to do business, and other reasons such as rest and relaxation (Aguayo, 2018).

Under the precept of tourism other concepts come up in order to satisfy the needs of accommodation and other people needs during the time they stay in a place as visitors. For example, housing is considered to be a temporary residence, offered to those who do not own the place where they stay during their visit in the place of destination. (Ficapal & López, 1996).

The concept of pension (low standard hotel without or with few conveniences) is also considered, and it is as a place of the low category with few inhabitants who share the cleaning chore in a common way (tourist has to clean after themselves) (Vera, López, Marchena & Antón, 1997). Another preferred accommodation is a guest house, considered as a small shelter, sometimes with a family environment, where a person stays temporally, paying an agreed price (Rivas, 2008). In the case of a hotel, it provides tourism services of accommodation and dining, with or without complementary services, which, according to Melgosa (2007), does not have the adequate facilities for the preparation and consumption of food within the accommodation unit. According to Paniagua (2014), a hotel concept is still an open facility that offers tourist accommodation, in addition to other services such as food and parking. It is located in a building with homogeneous areas that offer security, comfort and surveillance.

Another type of accommodation are apartments which are associated with a dwelling and can be small, medium or large that integrates a building in which there are other similar dwellings (Melgosa, 2007). Some people use it as a place to stay, a trailer park that is a semi-permanent or permanent area, where mobile homes are located. Trailer parks are equipped with water,

energy, cafeteria and recreational areas that allow, in delimited areas, the parking mobile homes (Vera, López, Marchena, & Antón, 1997).

There are many options of accommodation, from the hostel, that is an establishment of commercial character that facilitates the lodging, with or without a dining room, and other complementary services, to the hotel with all kinds of services (Melgosa, 2007). In the case of youth hostels, they were created for young people, and they have certain admission requirements, related to age, sex, and possession of an international credential. They have a minimum of functional facilities and are rented for a limited period of time, maximum three days, at very low prices. Some of them have food and beverages or facilities to prepare food (Ficapal, 1996).

Finally, the agritourism is understood as “the tourist services provided on farms. This activity is complementary to the main agrarian activity” (Melgosa, 2007). The necessary conditions for tourist attractions to be visited and enjoyed by the tourist are transportation, complementary services and basic infrastructure (Ficapal, 1996).

To sum up, in practice you can find a lot of different types of accommodation facilities, starting with large hotels offering thousands of places and a very wide range of complementary services, ending with a system of renting rooms or suites, for which the development of platforms such as Airbnb has had a very strong influence. As a result, their functioning and sources of concessiveness as well as buyers’ preferences are the subject of many scientific studies. However, it is worth to deepen the knowledge about research focusing on consumer preferences in individual regions.

## Methodology

The research was descriptive and quantitative, the data were analyzed without manipulating, and it was not experimental. The participants were between 18 and 60 years old, of every socioeconomic level, gender, occupation, and level of education. The sample comprised 300 (entities of knowledge) from the region

of the South of Sonora in Mexico. The survey was divided into 2 sections: the first has general information about the respondents and consists of 7 items, and the second includes information about the types of accommodation with a total of 10 items, where the respondents could consider more than one option according to their preference. For the response options in the second section, the respondent was asked to answer on a scale from one to five, where one was the least important and five the most important according to their perception. The objective of the survey was to identify accommodation preferences in the southern region of the state of Sonora in Mexico.

The procedure was as follows: (1) collection of bibliographic sources for the development of the contextual framework, (2) confirmation and validation of the survey, (3) application and systematization of the survey, (4) presentation and interpretation of results.

## Results

Below are the findings of the research that aims to identify the accommodation preferences of users of southern Sonora, so that the perception of each of the respondents was considered.

Descriptive analysis of general information: about 67% of the respondents were female and 33% were male. Regarding the ages of the respondents, it was observed that 60% were in the range of 18-25 years, 13% between 26-35 years, 13% between 36-45 years and 14% were about 46 years and older. According to the socioeconomic level, 3% considered that their level was low, 77% consider that it was average, 18% that it was medium-high and just 2% that it was high. When it comes to their level of education, 6% of respondents had basic education, 29% had middle high education and 61% had higher education, and the rest had a postgraduate level of education. The participants of the study were characterized by a high level of diversity. Due to the size of a sample, it should not be considered as representative, but certainly enough to formulate preliminary conclusions.



Descriptive analysis of the information about accommodation types: Table 1 shows the different types of accommodation that customers use when traveling for leisure or recreation reasons.

**Table 1. Type of accommodation preferred by respondents**

Type of accommodation	Answers	Percentage
Pension	16	5.4%
Guest´s house	26	8.7%
Hotel	213	71.2%
Apartaments	57	19.1%
Trailer Park	1	0.3%
Hostel	7	2.3%
Youth hostel	4	1.3%
Agrotourism	3	1.0%
Other	92	30.8%

Source: elaborated by the authors.

As shown in table 1, the type of accommodation with the greatest preference for users in the South Sonora was a hotel with 71% of preference (according to consumer preferences the bestseller in South Sonora was a hotel with 71% of votes); next most common answer was other with 31% and the last one was apartment with 19% of preference. In Mexico, people are used to traveling and to staying in relative’s houses, since it helps family bonding and also it means economic savings on lodging. Taking into account the specifics of the sample – a significant share of people with higher education and rather affluent – the advantage of hotels as an accommodation should not be surprising. At the same time, however, the obtained result indicates the relatively high requirements of respondents and can potentially be a proof of the importance of comfort during the journey.

**Table 2. Factors that influence the selection of accommodation type**

Factors	Answers	Percentage
Comfort of the room	231	28.7%
Tourist attractions of the region	175	21.7%
Good service and / or attention from the staff	158	19.6%
Tranquility and silence	110	13.6%
Hospitality	132	16.4%
Total	806	100.0%

Source: elaborated by the authors.

According to the results based on table 2, the factor with the greatest influence on the selection of the type of accommodation is the room's comfort, followed by the tourist attraction of the place to be visited. This result remains due to an earlier application (or that means: result from the past surveys; Or – I am not sure) Comfort is important, so respondents choose primarily hotels, and therefore, facilities with the highest possible standard. It is also worth paying attention to the second result. Attractions of the region primarily affect the choice of destination, but it can be assumed that the participants of the study were also important to the object's location, affecting the availability of these attractions, which is also associated with the convenience of rest.

**Table 3. Factors that influenced the level of user satisfaction during their stay**

Factors	Answers	Percentage
Cleaning	264	29.9%
Adequate price-quality ratio	203	23.0%
Relations with staff	112	12.7%
Accommodation climate	175	19.8%

Access to additional attractions	128	14.5%
Total	882	100.0%

Source: elaborated by the authors.

The next question in the questionnaire concerned the factors of satisfaction with the stay in a given accommodation facility. As it was presented in table 3, the cleanliness was most often indicated. The right price / price ratio is in the second place, which is worth paying attention to. Respondents do not necessarily have to get the highest quality, but do not want to overpay. Only in third place was the availability of additional attractions offered by the facility. It can be assumed that for participants of the study the key element of the stay is the issue of accommodation and not spending time and recreation in the facility, which is only an added value. The last place was the relationship with the service or owners. It can be assumed that the owners may be an important element of building a competitive advantage of family businesses, but on the other hand, as the answers show, respondents are not necessarily interested in entering into any relationship with these people. Guest preferences for staying in smaller accommodation place such as hostel or guest house facilities are shown in table 4.

**Table 4. Preference to staying in a hostel or guest house**

Preference	Answers	Percentage
The size of the accommodation (capacity for few guests)	94	15.3%
Lower Price	160	26.0%
Family environment	67	10.9%
Good service	151	24.6%
Comfort of the room	143	23.3%
Total	615	100.0%

Source: elaborated by the authors.

Table 4 shows the greatest attractiveness that users find when they have stayed in a hostel or guest house, is the lower cost or lower price, compared to others, followed by good service and the comfort of the rooms. It can be assumed that smaller objects (entities) in most cases offer lower comfort of stay. This is greatly confirmed by the price expectations of the respondents. It may be surprising that despite this, people expect comfort of the room and a high level of service. At the same time, it is worth noting the relatively low assessment of the significance of the family nature of this type of enterprises, which, as pointed out earlier, could be important for building their competitiveness.

**Table 5. Opinion of users regarding the factors they more often consider when staying in a hostel or guest house**

Opinion	Answers	Percentage
High quality of services	115	26.4%
High level of trust	75	17.2%
Open to listen guests ´ needs	68	15.6%
Good communication between staff and guests	67	15.4%
Hospitality	111	25.5%
Total	436	100.0%

Sours: elaborated by the authors.

Regarding the opinion about the factors that are most frequently considered in the accommodation choices of hostels or guest houses are the quality of service with a 26% followed by hospitality with a 25.5%, as one of the factors with the most influence for the residents surveyed. This result confirms that despite the fact that guest houses are smaller and have less potential, respondents expect high quality from them. On the other hand, it may be based primarily on the quality of service, which in such facilities may be less professional than in large facilities, but at the same time may be

associated with greater involvement of the owners. This should be reflected in the feeling of hospitality which was also indicated by the respondents.

**Table 6. Opinion on the factors that are most frequently considered in the case of hotels**

Opinion	Answers	Percentage
High quality of services	210	38.0%
High level of trust	90	16.3%
Open to listen guests´ needs	65	11.8%
Good communication between staff and guests	62	11.2%
Hospitality	126	22.8%
Total	553	100.0%

Source: elaborated by the authors.

Interesting conclusions, which constitute a logical supplement to previous considerations, are provided in table 6, in which respondents assessed selected features in relation to hotels. Compared to smaller facilities, they clearly have higher quality expectations (38% of indications). The results indicate that hotels are perceived as higher-quality objects. This does not mean that smaller entities do not have their advantages – they were rated higher in other categories. Factors such as hospitality, reacting to the needs of guests or trust are a consequence of the organizational culture in the company. In the case of a micro enterprise, it is strongly determined by the involvement and attitude of the owners, which determines the question about(which proves) the importance of the “family nature” of accommodation establishments for their image in the eyes of respondents. The question of trust is particularly important. Literature indicates that this factor is the basis for building all relationships. It is also a factor of influence on consumers, being defined as customers’ conviction about the credibility and integrity of the seller (Morgan & Hunt, 1994).

**Table 7. Characteristics related to a family business that offers hosting services**

<b>Characteristics</b>	<b>Answers</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Dedication	196	34.5%
Low level of professionalism	73	12.9%
Profit's approach	88	15.5%
Personal contact with the client	122	21.5%
Limited amount of services	89	15.7%
Total	568	100.0%

Source: elaborated by the authors

A preliminary answer to the previous question about the importance of the “family character” of enterprises was sought in the last question in the questionnaire, which concerned features attributed to family businesses providing accommodation services. It contains both positive and negative traits. The respondents valued positive most: the owners’ involvement and direct contact with the client. This was confirmed by some of the conclusions contained in previous considerations. In the respondents’ answers, there were also weaknesses of small family enterprises, such as low professionalism or a limited number of additional services. These features, however, received significantly lower indications. It is also worth paying attention to a quite significant negative characteristic of a strong attitude towards profit, which appeared in responses given by respondents. This is related to the specificity of small family businesses on the accommodation market. The company’s revenues automatically become the family’s income, which may translate into an excessive desire to maximize them, especially in a short period of time – even at the expense of long-term benefits related to customer satisfaction.

## Final remarks

The findings show that the best consumer's choice of different types of accommodation was a hotel (the research shows that the bestseller from different types of accommodation was a hotel). In the case of the smallest accommodations such as the guest house, the main attractions that users mentioned were the low cost and good service and the factors that are considered while making the decision whether to stay in this type of place or not were the quality of services and hospitality. The same was observed for hotels where the user prefers a place with quality services and hospitality. Finally, the preferred characteristics, according to the (customers' needs) when talking about a family company offering hosting service, were the dedication that the family has to the business and the personalized contact with the clients, which is why these types of organizations can pursue actions, related to improving the corporate image of the business and strengthen relationships with customers. An important aspect of the considerations is the issue of the importance of the family nature of enterprises providing accommodation services. The issue of family enterprises and the specifics of their functioning is the subject of a number of studies covering many areas of research.

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