



Western Cape
Government

**QUALITY AND SERVICE EXCELLENCE
IN TOURISM IN THE WESTERN CAPE:
HOW TO GUIDE**

“Those tourist attractions which do not stand out will give way to those characterised by greater authenticity, educational value, emotional experience, and high standards.”

- KOWALSKA & OSTRĘGA

“For all organisations, the delivery of high-quality products and services is essential. The consequences of failure grow ever more significant in today’s world of increasing customer and stakeholder expectations, regulatory oversight and use of social media to broadcast success or failure.”

- THE CHARTERED QUALITY INSTITUTE



How to use this guide

- Section 1 contextualises why quality assurance is an important component of the Western Cape's long-term tourism strategy, Tourism Blueprint 2030
- Section 2 describes the policy framework governing quality and service excellence
- Section 3 explores the concept of quality in tourism
- Section 4 explains what service standardisation is
- Section 5 describes the official tourism grading process
- Section 6 outlines a step-by-step process for incorporating service quality in your business
- Section 7 contains tips on how attractions can improve service quality
- Section 8 explains the importance of recognition of service excellence

1. INTRODUCTION

FOR THE SPEED READER

- The Western Cape has a comprehensive long-term vision and roadmap for the growth and development of a sustainable and competitive destination
- The roadmap prioritises the customer experience
- Quality and service excellence is a core element of building district distinctiveness
- We know which experiences need to be developed to strengthen regional iconicity
- Global forces and trends continuously shape what consumers expect from the destinations and individual businesses. The long-term trend is that travellers are looking for transformational experiences where quality and excellence is associated not just with world-class service but with the delivery of meaningful, unique encounters and one-of-a-kind experiences.



“The Western Cape has a comprehensive long-term vision and roadmap for the growth and development of a sustainable and competitive destination.”

Why quality and service excellence are important to destination Western Cape

VISION

“To boldly build a thriving visitor economy that increases its contribution to the provincial economy while creating a sustainable and competitive destination for years to come.”



Tourism Blueprint 2030, the Western Cape's destination management and marketing framework, aims to build a sustainable visitor economy that has a positive impact on job creation, local investment, infrastructure and citizen pride in the province.¹

Tourism Blueprint 2030 aims to:

- Renew focus on domestic markets
- Improve the ease of doing business for tourism businesses
- Raise the global profile of Destination Western Cape
- Identify and develop tourism infrastructure
- Drive geographic spread of tourism benefits throughout the province
- Grow visitor numbers and yield
- Prioritise tourism development growth within each district across the province
- Improve customer experiences (quality and service excellence)

The customer experience has therefore been identified as a critical element in achieving the vision of Tourism Blueprint 2030.

Delivering high-quality service by skilled staff is imperative for maintaining the Western Cape's competitiveness with other destinations.

Good service is vital to the success of any tourism business, and the first step to improving service quality is to make it a priority.

Incorporating service quality into every part of your business – from your overall vision and strategy, to practical aspects like staff training, customer service and workplace systems and procedures – will keep your business competitive and help it to grow.

This toolkit has been compiled to guide you on the journey of delivering service excellence.

BUILDING DISTRICT COMPETITIVENESS

There are things that the Western Cape are already world-class in – our nature, outdoor, action and adventure offering, our fine dining, our events and many more, but there are also opportunities to strengthen our offering and build regional competitiveness at the district level. By offering world-class and distinctive experiences our regions can build iconicity. This requires that the needs of the traveller must be placed at the heart of the work that the industry does.

Regional distinctiveness requires that all role-players in the tourism value chain develop signature experiences that consistently exceed the customer experience.

This toolkit not only explores the role of quality assurance at the individual product level but similarly also at the destination level.

1. To download tourism blueprint 2030:
[visit www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/western-cape-tourism-blueprint-2030](http://www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/western-cape-tourism-blueprint-2030)

TOURISM BLUEPRINT 2030: THE OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP REGIONAL DISTINCTIVENESS

Cape Town Metropolitan Municipality

- Quality art experiences and art routes
- Converting the CBD into an attraction
- Iconic experiences linked to the country's former struggle heroes
- Formalisation of Signal Hill as an attraction
- Developing iconic purpose-built township visitor attractions

Overberg District Municipality

- Hiking experiences for the European and Northern American markets
- Creating year-round marine viewing experiences
- Turning Clarence Drive into a world-famous hyper-local gastronomy route
- Creating high-quality cultural and heritage experiences

West Coast District Municipality

- Attracting a new generation traveller to parks
- Increasing the profile of West Coast Fossil Park and !Khwatla San Heritage Centre
- Developing unique gastronomical experiences

Central Karoo District Municipality

- Turning the Central Karoo into a destination as opposed to an en route stop over
- Developing Astro tourism as a niche offering
- Positioning the Swartberg Circle Route as one of the most magnificent scenic drives in the world
- Creating an arresting interactive land art installation to build iconicity
- Converting Matjiesfontein, can result in increased visitor spend on food and beverage and make it one of the most Instagrammable villages in South Africa.

Garden Route District Municipality

- Positioning the Swartberg Circle Route as one of the most magnificent scenic drives in the world
- The maximization of the yield from the Cango caves

- Enhanced culture and heritage experiences in Oudtshoorn
- Ethical animal experiences
- Develop and position farm parks as visitor attractions, mainly for the domestic market
- Branding the Garden Route District as the active-outdoor region of the Western Cape.

Cape Winelands District Municipality

- The maximisation of wine tourism
- Differentiating small towns along the R62 through offering iconic experiences.
- Developing an iconic viewing platform at Kanonkop, Montagu.
- Offering gastronomy experiences for multi-generational groups and the Halal tourist market
- Curated small-town museums that provide high-quality experiences
- To use Stellenbosch and Franschhoek as a base to explore the Cape Winelands District
- Bainskloof, a classic mountain pass route that can act as the gateway to Tulbagh, Ceres and Worcester
- Position the Cape Winelands district as the centre of cycling
- Build a flagship stop at the entrance of the Drakenstein Correctional Services, and leverage the iconic "last mile" to freedom for Former President Nelson Mandela.



GLOBAL TRENDS AND YOUR BUSINESS

Global trends and forces are reshaping the traveller of tomorrow. These shifts have implications on what services and quality standards tourists expect.

- Many travellers are thinking differently about where and how they want to travel.
- Travellers are looking for tourism offerings that engage them on an emotional level.
- Tourists are looking beyond packaged tours from big companies and opting for more unique or tailor-made tourism products and experiences.
- Lifestyle choices are driving the demand for adventure, for example the global rise of cycling and mountain biking.
- Technology is a catalyst for the trend in experiential tourism.
- Travel media that provide experiential tourism content are thriving.
- Travellers are increasingly opting to use locals outside of the tourism industry (for example, non-professional tourist guides or formal tourism accommodation providers).
- Hotels are increasingly offering more than just accommodation but also becoming holistic experiences in themselves.
- Experience seekers are looking to engage with influencers and experts e.g. academics from a university doing specialist tours.

LOCAL AND GLOBAL FORCES AND TRENDS

Read more:

Tourism Blueprint 2030: Chapter 3: Forces and Trends

www.westerncape.gov.za/general-publication/western-cape-tourism-blueprint-2030

Fluxtrends

www.fluxtrends.co.za

ITB - World travel trends report

www.itb-berlin.com

Skift Travel IQ

www.skift.com

World Tourism Organisation

www.unwto.org/unwto-tourism-dashboard

WTM London - Global trends report

hub.wtm.com



2 THE POLICY FRAMEWORK GOVERNING QUALITY AND SERVICE EXCELLENCE

FOR THE SPEED READER

- Consumer rights are constitutionally enshrined rights
- Various legislative and planning documents define and give legal form to the nature of these rights and their relevance to the tourism industry
- Service excellence is prioritised in both the national and provincial tourism strategies
- In the Western Cape, the Western Cape Office of the Consumer Protector is mandated to support consumers with protecting their rights

Quality assurance in tourism is rooted in a legislative framework that recognises the rights of consumers.



POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR SERVICE QUALITY

The most important legislation to note:

- **The Tourism Act (72 of 1993)**, section 18, gives the Minister the powers to establish a grading and classification scheme in respect of accommodation establishments.
- **The Constitution (1996):** The Bill of Rights enshrines the rights of all – including consumer rights.
- **White Paper of Tourism Development and Promotion (1996)** emphasises critical success factors for the development of the tourism industry including globally competitive practices - by offering quality services and value for money; an industry that is innovative and responsive to customer needs; a focus on product enhancement and diversity; and effective tourism training, education and awareness.
- **The Skills Development Act (1998)** aims to expand the knowledge and competencies of the labour force in order to improve productivity and employment. One of its main aims is to improve the delivery of services.
- **The Consumer Protection Act (2008)** outlines key consumer rights, including:
 - Right to equality in the consumer market and protection against discriminatory marketing practices;
 - Right to privacy;
 - Right to choose;
 - Right to disclosure of information;
 - Right to fair and responsible marketing;
 - Right to fair and honest dealing;
 - Right to fair, just and reasonable terms and conditions;
 - Right to fair value, good quality and safety; and
 - Right to accountability by suppliers.



- The **National Tourism Act (2014)** includes as objective the promotion of quality tourism products and services.
- The **National Tourism Sector Strategy (2017)** has the visitor experience as pillar three with the outcome to “Provide quality visitor experiences for tourists (both domestic and international) to achieve customer satisfaction and inspire repeat visitation.”
- Lastly, as mentioned **Tourism Blueprint 2030 (2021)** emphasizes the need to improve customer experiences in terms of quality and service excellence.

NATIONAL TOURISM SERVICE EXCELLENCE STRATEGY

The National Tourism Service Excellence Strategy offers strategic direction to the sector with the intention of improving service levels in the tourism value chain. The long-term strategic goal of the National Tourism Service Excellence Strategy is to provide the country with an opportunity to transform the sector into a globally competitive destination of choice. This can only be achieved, once the attitudes and perceptions of the industry’s employees, employers and the general public have changed.

The strategy comprises of five pillars, namely:

- Research and information
- Upskilling service delivery
- Public awareness
- Measuring and monitoring service standards, and
- Consumer feedback systems.

Read more:

National Department of Tourism. 2010. National Tourism Service Excellence Strategy.
www.tourism.gov.za



QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE NATIONAL TOURISM SECTOR STRATEGY

The National Tourism Sector Strategy has as its vision “Inclusive and Quality Growth of the South African Tourism Economy”. Pillar three, the visitor experience, has as its outcome statement to “Provide quality visitor experiences for tourists (both domestic and international) to achieve customer satisfaction and inspire repeat visitation”.

The provision of experiences that are distinctive, environmentally friendly, authentic and deliver unique stories and outstanding services to tourists at all stages of their journey is key.

This pillar includes enhancements to elements of the visitor experience across all visitor touch points. Included in this pillar, as it also has critical bearing on the visitor experience, is the development of excellent tourism skills and service levels with a special emphasis on soft skills, and the “poor quality of trained tourism officials” is mentioned.

Pillar four, destination management, includes a section under ‘standards, guidelines and quality assurance’. Standards and guidelines establish required levels of performance. They also manage specific operational risks and establish best practices.

Read more:

National Department of Tourism. 2017. National Tourism Sector Strategy (NTSS) 2016 – 2026.

www.tourism.gov.za

OFFICE OF THE CONSUMER PROTECTOR

The Western Cape Office of the Consumer Protector is mandated to act as a consumer protection agency within the province by virtue of the provisions of national and provincial legislation.

The Office of the Consumer Protector is aimed at providing access, information, education and compensation to consumers within the province who may experience consumer related disputes.

Toll free number: 0800 007 081

THE RIGHTS OF CONSUMERS

Read more:

The Consumer Protection Act: Your guide to consumer rights & how to protect them
www.westerncape.gov.za/other/2020/OCP/consumer_protection_act_booklet.pdf

3. QUALITY IN TOURISM

FOR THE SPEED READER

- The concept 'quality in tourism' means many, overlapping things
- Quality tourism is about the delivery of both tangible and intangible components
- Quality tourism is mostly subjective in nature
- Quality tourism is about ethics and overlaps with sustainability, social responsibility, accessibility and fair trade
- Both for individual businesses and destinations, quality assurance in tourism is a professional tool, a management model and a marketing tool – all three dimensions must be considered
- An emphasis on quality and service excellence has benefits for the tourist, business, the destination and host communities
- Quality assurance is vital to addressing South Africa's declining destination competitiveness particularly in drops in training and customer orientation as reported by the World Economic Forum
- Quality in tourism is about anticipating the needs of the traveller
- Measuring satisfaction must focus on the traveller's intention to return, the traveller's recommendations to others, as well how they perceive the reputation of a destination.

1. WHAT IS QUALITY IN TOURISM?²

Quality is a necessary ingredient for organisations and tourism destinations seeking to gain recognition in the market, locally, nationally or globally.

Today it is a factor that influences competitiveness and a characteristic that visitors appreciate and demand.

In the context of tourism, quality does not consist only of producing “zero defects” and meeting basic requisites; it also signifies care, innovation and excellence. It is not merely a matter of meeting customer expectations but of surpassing them. What is required in the case of a business is the committed leadership of management; for a tourism destination, it is a matter of achieving the critical mass needed to be representative of, and foster commitment and coordination among, the public and private entities concerned.

The many meanings of the term ‘quality’

Quality is an intrinsic aspect of any good, product or service. It is a common factor that defines commonly accepted social standards. It is therefore logical that the term should be used so often, and to mean such varied things.

2. Adapted from World Tourism Organisation, 2017





One term, many meanings

In the global literature on quality and quality assurance, the term 'quality' often carries, overlapping, yet equally valid meanings:

- When considered from a material standpoint, quality is associated with price, exclusivity, top-of-the-line supply and, to some extent, luxury. It is frequently used to indicate products for the high-income market segments
- As a synonym for a client-centred approach, the concept of quality relates to the degree of satisfaction and the extent to which services and products meet customer expectations and needs. In this usage, quality is a subjective term and may be perceived differently for any given product, service or client
- As a term specifying the characteristics of a product or service, quality takes on a more precise meaning that is recognizable and measurable and allows for objective ranking, as in the case of hotel classification
- With reference to production processes, quality is understood in more technical terms, as a system or set of practices necessary to bring a product or service in line with applicable standards. In that sense, quality represents a tool for improving management
- As an economic term, quality is defined in terms of product characteristics, production costs and sales price. Mentally, tourists link price, category and quality, so they will be ready to pay a reasonable supplement for a product if its quality is superior

Dimensions of quality

The definitions set out above are all to some extent imprecise when it comes to identifying the elements that make a product or service a quality product or service.

When it comes to evaluating a customer's satisfaction, the customer has needs and expectations in respect of a series of characteristics, tangible and intangible. In the case of largely functional products, such as air transport, aspects such as comfort, service, duration, connectivity, timetables, frequency of flights, etc. shape perceptions and carry greater weight in the choice of airline and purchase of tickets.

In the case of less technical products, as well as most services, which are often undifferentiated until they are consumed, the perception of quality is associated with intangible and aesthetic components. For products that consist of an experience, such as tourism packages and destinations, the intangible components are generally the ones that can create a strategic advantage. Brand image, the manner in which a service is provided or recommendations (by travel critics, family members or in the social networks) all shape the customer's perception.

The quality of a tourism product or service is experienced in a highly subjective way, as a function of expectations and perceptions that are difficult to isolate. Both must be continuously considered to understand the quality processes of a service.

Quality of the tourism destination

Customers are the ones who establish their level of satisfaction by returning to buy more. Quality means giving customers what they want at the lowest possible cost. It seems like a simple definition but embodies two seemingly opposing precepts. The first ("giving customers what they want") calls for a client-oriented approach; the second ("at the lowest possible cost") calls for effective, competitive and profitable management.

The World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) introduced quality of tourism services as part of its work programme in 1991, at that time defining it "as the result of a process that implies satisfaction of every need, request or rightful expectation of consumers in respect of products and services, at an acceptable price, and under

mutually agreed contractual conditions, including implicit underlying factors like hygiene, accessibility, authenticity and concerns about the human and natural environmental consequences of the tourism activities.”

In this definition, quality:

- Cannot exist without the harmonious and active participation of all the factors that contribute to the tourist’s experience
- Must result from constant effort to limit the activity’s deficiencies and failures
- Is fundamentally and directly related to the activity’s human and personal dimensions, which are mainly intangible and thus largely subjective
- Responds to a fair price as an exchange for fulfilling basic and vital needs of people, which is determined by social and environmental limits
- Requires common and irrevocable criteria and the convergence of mandatory requirements and self-regulation
- Incorporates rights for both final and intermediate consumers governed by contracts or transparent mechanisms regarding promotion
- Results, in the case of a destination, from collective effort
- Cannot be judged solely from the perspective of customer satisfaction, but also in terms of the activity’s social, economic and environmental effects.

UNWTO nowadays defines quality of a tourism destination as “the result of a process which implies the satisfaction of all tourism product and service needs, requirements and expectations of the consumer at an acceptable price, in conformity with mutually accepted contractual conditions and the implicit underlying factors such as safety and security, hygiene, accessibility, communication, infrastructure and public amenities and services. It also involves aspects of ethics, transparency and respect towards the human, natural and cultural environment.”

The above definitions by the UNWTO underscore the fact that quality in a tourism destination is about three things at once:

- Quality assurance is a professional tool
- Quality assurance is a management model
- Quality assurance is a powerful marketing tool

As UNTWO emphasises, quality should form part of management, as well as planning, with the ultimate aim of improving performance and characterising and adapting the supply of products and services and strengthening competitive variables for the destination.

Linking quality to sustainability and accessibility

In quality tourism, there can be no quality without ethics. Responsibility and an attitude of doing things well and respecting both people and the environment are matters of ethics. Here is where quality, sustainability, social responsibility, accessibility and fair trade all come together. This call on responsible tourism, is enshrined in the White Paper on Tourism (1996).

As UNWTO argues, quality in tourism is inherent to the intimate sphere of the person. In tourism we sell not only functional but also experiential, emotional and symbolic utilities. This exceeds the usual concept of a consumer product and gives tourism an important moral dimension. Material purchases can be refunded or changed, but the experience of not having quality in tourism cannot. This is what makes the tourism product so delicate and special: tourist dissatisfaction is very difficult to rectify.

In that sense, a destination that tolerates inequality, prostitution or abusive trade, or that does not protect local heritage, or where activities are not planned on a sustainable basis, irrespective of how attractive its resources might be, cannot be considered a quality destination. Quality interacts with other areas of concern that are related to tourism: sustainability and accessibility.

Why quality in tourism is critical for South Africa and the Western Cape

“Combined with declining quality of tourist service infrastructure (6th to 32nd), South Africa is in danger of further erosion of its advantages. The nation’s traditional lead on human resources also narrowed, with refined education data showing a lower level of primary education enrollment and broad drops in training and customer orientation metrics.”

- World Economic Forum, Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report (2019)

South Africa is losing ground to competing destinations in Africa. This was highlighted in the World Economic Forum Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019. In all aspects of the index: business environment, safety and security, health and hygiene, human resources and labour market, ICT readiness, the prioritisation of travel and tourism, international openness, price competitiveness, environmental sustainability, air transport infrastructure, ground and port infrastructure, tourist service infrastructure and natural resources, the country is outranked by its African peers such as Mauritius, Seychelles, Rwanda and Tanzania. It is only in cultural resources and business travel that the country leads other African countries ranking 23rd globally.

Lastly, tourists cite service quality as the third most likely cause of bad experiences (after 'personal safety' and 'safety and security') when departing Cape Town International Airport.

Read more:

World Economic Forum. 2019. The Travel & Tourism Competitiveness Report 2019 Travel and Tourism at a Tipping Point.
www3.weforum.org

World Tourism Organisation. 2017. Practical Guidelines for Integrated Quality Management in Tourism Destinations – Concepts, Implementation and Tools for Destination Management Organisations, UNWTO, Madrid.
www.e-unwto.org



2. THE BENEFITS OF QUALITY TOURISM

Delivering quality in tourism holds benefits for the tourist, businesses as well as the destination more broadly.

According to UNWTO the benefits are:

Benefits for the tourists

- Quality tourism anticipates the customer's needs and expectations during the design phase of products, packages and services – quality is therefore built into the experience
- Quality reduces the uncertainty and vulnerability that travel generates and instills confidence with the traveller even before the trip
- Quality provides a guarantee of professionalism and after-sales attention

Benefits for the tourism business

- An emphasis on quality helps businesses design better products and services that are better adapted to demand and therefore better at securing sales and building loyalty
- Quality allows for higher prices
- Improvement of the work environment through professionalisation and clarity in the distribution of tasks and identification and commitment and convergence of objectives among collaborators and providers
- Increased efficiency and a reduction of so-called 'non-quality costs'
- Quality assurance, when certified, constitutes a complementary instrument for promotion and marketing
- Businesses benefit from being part of a destination that is associated with quality

Benefits for the destination

- Quality improves a destination's image and positioning
- Quality increases its capacity to compete against other destinations
- Quality guarantees a stronger position for destinations in their high-pressure contract negotiations with operators
- Quality involves agents and other industry partners, contributing to a stronger, more cohesive business environment
- Quality brings substantial changes to management and planning

- Quality and service excellence programmes offer an effective alternative to enacted legislation
- Quality in tourism generates direct benefits for local communities
- Quality and service excellence programmes allow a significant share of implementation and monitoring costs to be transferred, reducing the financial burden for taxpayers.

Destination quality in Sub-Saharan Africa

The World Bank (2013) argues that the competitiveness of a destination is ultimately based on its ability to continue to offer a quality experience. It notes however that in the case of Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA):

- Primary tourism assets are expensive to access, poorly managed, and deteriorating.
- Numerous tour operators consider service standards to be particularly low, resulting in a disappointing visitor perception of value for money.
- Long-haul visitors expect the quality of the experience to match the cost.
- Even in well-known destinations, public reinvestment in tourism attractions is often insufficient to maintain and improve attraction quality. Other tourism assets are deteriorating or lie dormant due to lack of access, operational and management know-how, signage, marketing, or funding.
- Just 10% of hotel rooms meet international standards (although half of these are in South Africa)

Quality and the customer³

There is no perfect product or destination that will satisfy all customers.

Quality in the sense of customer satisfaction is built according to customers' needs, not their latest whims or demands, which can go in and out of fashion.

Planning and purchasing a trip to a destination implies a series of customer expectations. To meet expectations, which combine the need to have with the wish to have, we must first focus on needs.

3. Adapted from World Tourism Organisation, 2017



Customer expectations are generated by a combination of aspirations, mental images (iconography), promotional information, recommendations, competitor behaviour and the customer's travel experience, motivations and available resources.

Customer dissatisfaction results from bad experiences at the destination as well as failures to live up to expectations, which are often unrealistically high.

Visitor satisfaction as a measure of quality

Customer satisfaction allows us to establish a preliminary measure of quality, but one that is imprecise, because it is associated, as we have seen, with subjective expectations.

It is possible to obtain a high number of satisfied customers if expectations are low. This is what happens in destinations that, despite having compelling tourism attractions, do not offer enough information about the destination and complementary products or activities. Tourists sometimes lower their own

expectations as a safeguard against disappointment. Artificially inflated expectations, on the other hand, can lead to dissatisfaction at the best of destinations.

Similarly, the absence of complaints is not synonymous with satisfaction, just as indifference is not the same as dissatisfaction.

A more precise measure has to do with the destination's prescriptive capacity: intention to return, recommendation, reputation.

Recommendations clearly represent a qualitative measure of satisfaction, since when customers get what they want, have requested and paid for they do not feel any need to communicate the fact, as they would if not satisfied. Dissatisfied customers tend to communicate their experience to at least three times as many people as satisfied customers do.

Various studies show that the medium-term cost of dealing with a dissatisfied customer is on average six times greater than the cost of attracting a new customer, counting all of the costs of attending to the problem or complaint, compensating the customer and the damage done in terms of image.

According to various studies, an average of 96% of customers do not communicate their complaints, but simply choose different providers or destinations the next time, while always sharing their dissatisfaction with people they know. Research has shown that a satisfied consumer shares his or her experience with an average of six people, while a dissatisfied customer does so with at least 11. Nowadays, if they also make their complaints public via social networks the impact is unpredictable.

The reason for not expressing their dissatisfaction may be associated with a lack of confidence in the response capacity of the provider, who is thus deprived of the information needed to improve. In the case of destinations, the problem is even worse, since the person responsible for dealing with customers in a destination, unlike an organisation, is not identifiable.

How complaints are dealt with is probably the most common problem in customer

service. From the time the customer perceives the problem up to the time it becomes a serious threat to the viability of the destination or organisation, the tourist goes through several states of mind, ranging from emotional to rational. If an incident is resolved quickly, between 82% and 95% of the customers having complained about it return. In only 1% of non-quality situations is the relationship with the customer irrecoverable. A complaint is the best opportunity to improve matters and, if adequately addressed, can increase customer loyalty.

It can be estimated, based on the costs of attracting a new customer, that a complaint can cost anywhere from around USD 1,370 to USD 15,000, depending on how far the negative information has penetrated through to potential customers.

Loyalty-creation

The objective in creating loyalty is to transform occasional customers into regular customers, and these into promoters. Various studies have shown that recommendations are the most important source of guidance in making purchases (44%), as compared to others under the control of providers: the media (25%), advertising (24%), direct selling and other sources (7%).

Destinations, as well as providers can also cultivate customer loyalty. Captive demand nurtured developed in this way can be an asset for some destinations: the European Union's Eurobarometer, which measures the attractiveness of major tourism destinations for Europeans and their intention to visit them, always ranks Italy, France or Spain among the top choices.

Perception of different levels of quality

Customers perceive the quality of services in an individualised, subjective and evolving manner. Such perceptions differ from those derived from measuring and verifying processes objectively.

In order for customers to experience quality or excellence in services, their created expectations must be surpassed. Quality can thus be measured in terms of the difference between customers' expectations about a service and their perceptions of it once received. This requires the identification and evaluation of differences

('gaps') between the different quality levels, to be minimised through a system of continuous improvement with the goal of zero-defect service.

Quality levels are determined by the objectives of an organisation or destination (programmed quality), internal measurements of progress toward those objectives (realised quality), customer expectations (expected quality) and perceptions about the components of a product's quality (perceived quality) as a final measure of satisfaction.

The intersection between expected and delivered or perceived quality is what we call "objective quality". Achieving objective quality is the purpose of any systematic quality management programme.

On the other hand, providers' or destinations' efforts that are not valued by customers, and that are derived from a mistaken interpretation of needs and expectations, are defined as "superfluous quality". Far from being appreciated by customers, they generate unnecessary costs and are difficult to produce consistently. They can even be a cause of dissatisfaction. Hotels, for example, as a result of the recent crisis in the sector, have reviewed and discontinued many unnecessary amenities – chocolates, newspapers, gifts, etc. – which are clear examples of superfluous quality.

When and how does a deficiency in service quality appear?

If customers' needs and expectations were always stable over time organisations and destinations could just achieve excellence in quality and maintain it indefinitely. But that is not how it works.

Each customer's perceptions and expectations are different and always changing, depending on mood, external factors, value received for the price paid and actual consumption of the product. There is also the association phenomenon, in which a surprise feature of one product or service generates expectations about others.

While expectations are generic, higher priority tends to be given to some aspects of quality over others, depending on the type of tourism or service and the market

segment concerned. For example, younger tourists, anxious to experience life and more willing to sacrifice comfort, are also more sensitive to such aspects as sustainability. Families, on the other hand, prefer destinations offering activities for all age groups and guaranteeing security. The senior segment appreciates comfort and is more inclined to travel to certain destinations based on travel company, climate, language, or available assistance.

The business tourist values such aspects as accessibility, mobility at the destination and professional service; holiday travellers appreciate information, uncrowded attractions, professional guides, reasonable prices for excursions to tourism attractions, etc. For meetings industry tourism the destination's attractiveness, the adequacy of space and security are essential. For rural tourism, assistance, sign posting, hospitality, and supply of local activities are the prime considerations.

Gaps are mismatches between planning, expectations and perceptions, fundamental aspects of customer satisfaction; their measurement will establish the scope of action for efforts to improve. Basic steps to reduce such gaps include segmenting the market and understanding which attributes are most appreciated by customers, as well as their current perceptions and satisfaction levels.

The most important quality gaps result from three causes:

1. Not knowing what users actually expect
2. Faulty or non-existent standards for work goals and performance, or lack of commitment, and
3. Poor delivery.

Information communicated through the media, social networks and discussion groups can be a powerful influence in creating expectations. The publication of imprecise or inaccurate information generates expectations that can exceed the user's actual experience.



4. STANDARDISATION

A hiker wearing an orange shirt, grey shorts, and a hat stands on a wooden boardwalk in a lush green forest. The background is filled with dense foliage and tall trees.

FOR THE SPEED READER

- The international gold standard for service excellence is ISO 9001
- Organisations and individuals can pursue international certification aligned to ISO 9001
- SANS 1197 is the national standard for Tourism Service Excellence
- Excellent service requires norms and standards that are applied across the five service areas: marketing, product development, service delivery, follow up and service recovery.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPANTS IN THE TOURISM VALUE CHAIN TO ADOPT AND APPLY STANDARDS AND NORMS AND COMPLY WITH LEGISLATION.⁴

Nowadays, standards are needed for any organised activity. Standardisation is intended to establish solutions in repetitive situations by developing, disseminating and adopting uniform criteria.

One of the consequences of globalization is that productive processes worldwide are standardised, so that every company that wants to make incursions into a foreign market has to conform to internationally recognised standards to be accepted. Administered officially, the objective of standardisation is to create reference points for producers and customers as to commercial processes in response to market demand. Standardisation provides guidance in relation to a geographical, functional or even abstract area (e.g. symbols, terminology, testing procedures). Internationally standardised signposting for tourists is a good example.

In the case of companies, as well as destinations it is a process of defining operational or product specifications.

We standardise processes, products and services on a voluntary or mandatory, internal or external basis to validate and assure their quality; protect consumers, public health and the environment; promote the efficiency of organisations; and facilitate commercial exchange. Whether it be a self-regulated or mandatory process depends on how critical the need is: from the standpoint of sanitation, having a food hygiene system may be a basic mandatory requirement, whereas standardising the quality of restaurant service is not.

Particularly when part of a self-regulated process, standards are established by committees composed of authorities, specialists, industry representatives and consumer representatives; they are subsequently subjected to public consultation prior to final publication.

Current practice of standardisation in tourism

Many years have had to pass in order for there to appear to exist what we might call a “global awareness” about quality in tourism. After more than two decades of fragmented and uncoordinated national initiatives, and of models always stymied by the same difficulties, we may soon see the publication of the first international standards for hotels, active tourism and signposting.

For destinations standardisation is much more complex. So many activities could be covered that the challenge is to maintain focus.

Standardisation has been a controversial topic for the tourism sector, often rejected out of fear of repeating experiences with the inflexible, inconsistent and obsolete classification and categorisation systems now in place. Tourism companies tend to regard standardisation as detrimental to the added value of their own brands and differentiation, and as an additional regulatory burden.

While the interests of large tourism groups have influenced the posture of developed countries, emerging tourism destinations, with less know-how in this area, have looked to standardisation to offset inadequate legal structures for the regulation and marketing of their incipient tourism supply.

4. Adapted from World Tourism Organisation, 2017



STANDARDS

What is ISO?

The International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) is an independent, non-governmental organisation with a membership of 165 national standards bodies. Through its members the ISO brings together experts from all over the world to share knowledge and develop voluntary, consensus-based, market relevant International Standards that support innovation and provide solutions to global challenges.

Standards for tourism and related services are developed by ISO Technical Committee 228. This committee oversees the “standardisation of the terminology and specifications of the services offered by tourism service providers, including related activities, tourist destinations and the requirements of facilities and equipment used by them, to provide tourism buyers, providers and consumers with criteria for making informed decisions” (ISO).

In recent years, the committee has expanded the ISO standards for tourism to focus on sustainability in tourism operations. This is in recognition of the fact that quality is no longer confined to just a focus on the expectations of the customer but rather that quality is ultimately a question for all stakeholders - anyone who has an interest in the success of what an organisation does. Investors, employees, suppliers and members of the wider society are stakeholders too.

Read more at www.iso.org

Global service standards: ISO 9001

The international gold standard for service quality is the implementation of a quality management system (QMS) based on the international standard ISO 9001.

ISO 9001 (Quality Management Systems – Requirements) is the most popular standard for management systems, applied worldwide in all fields.

The standard is based on a number of quality management principles including

a strong customer focus, the motivation and implication of top management, the process approach and continual improvement. These principles are explained in more detail in ISO’s quality management principles. Using ISO 9001 helps ensure that customers get consistent, good-quality products and services, which in turn brings many business benefits.

The ISO 9001 quality management system can assist businesses (big and small) to:

- Assess the overall context of the organisation to define who is affected by the organisation’s work and what they expect from the organisation. This will enable the enterprise to clearly state its objectives and identify new business opportunities.
- Put the organisation’s customers first, making sure it consistently meets their needs and enhance their satisfaction. This can lead to more repeat custom, new clients and increased business for the organisation.
- Work in a more efficient way as all the organisation’s processes will be aligned and understood by everyone in the business or entity. This increases productivity and efficiency, bringing internal costs down.
- Meet the necessary statutory and regulatory requirements.
- Expand into new markets, as some sectors and clients require ISO 9001 before doing business.
- Identify and address the risks associated with the organisation.

Read more about ISO 9001:2015

ISO 9001:2015 for Small Enterprises - What to do?

This handbook provides small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with guidance on developing and implementing an effective quality management system based on ISO 9001:2015 – *Quality management systems – Requirements*.

Read more at www.iso.org



International certification

Organisations and their staff interested in implementing ISO 9001:2015 can consider using accredited training providers and can also pursue certification. Many become members of the Chartered Quality Institute which typically entails undergoing certification through the International Register of Certificated Auditors. IRCA is the world's original and largest international certification body for auditors of quality management systems.

Read more at www.quality.org

National standards

SANS 1197: Tourism Service Excellence

The standard was developed in 2012 to develop a measuring tool that can assist tourism organisations to benchmark themselves.

The purpose of the standard is:

- To introduce generic standards for planning, developing, implementing and improving service excellence in the tourism value chain
- To introduce specific minimum requirements for the performance of organisational measurement and for the monitoring of service standards in the tourism value chain
- To introduce a trustworthy service standard that includes credible marketing, quality products and excellent service, and
- To introduce a performance system that enables effective monitoring and evaluation

According to the 'Management and administration' clause senior management should provide evidence of its commitment to the development and implementation of quality management systems and to continually improving their effectiveness by:

- communicating the importance of meeting customer, statutory and regulatory requirements
- establishing a quality policy
- ensuring that quality objectives are established
- conducting management reviews
- ensuring the availability of resources, and
- ensuring that performance management and management of business operations are put into place in order to ensure that customer service is the focal point of the whole organisation, and ensure that new employees receive training on the business customer service model by participating in the induction programme.

The application of norms and standards

Excellent service will be provided if norms and standards are applied in the following focus areas:

- marketing
- product development
- service delivery
- follow up; and
- service recovery.

Marketing

The organisation should consider the accuracy of the information that is provided when marketing its products and should pay attention to the following aspects:

- Consistency of the message
- Accuracy and accessibility of information
- Constant updating of the message and material
- Research and evolve in order to meet the needs of guests
- Honest and truthful information
- Market sensitive versus inoffensive marketing

The organisation should ensure that the messages in the various media are inoffensive and do not infringe on the constitutional rights of others.

Products

The organisation should ensure that the product that is delivered matches the planning and specifications of the product that was marketed, especially in the following respects:

- Quality - The organisation should ensure that the products it provides are of an acceptable quality and match or exceed expectations
- State of repair
- Flexibility versus choice
- Facilities
- Value for money
- Universal accessibility - The organisation should ensure that guests have easy access to the facility and should provide alternative means of access (see SANS 1162)
- Safety and security
- Continual training
- Information management: Confidentiality and privacy
- Environmentally friendly products
- Non-discriminatory access to products and services
- Adherence to grading criteria

Service delivery

The organisation should ensure consistent delivery of service in line with the prescribed processes and outcomes in the following way, and ensure that it does not depend on individual staff members:

- Professionalism/upskilling/training - The organisation should ensure that all staff members are continually trained and upskilled in a variety of service proficiencies, which will result in a quality service offering.
- Value for money
- Professional interaction
- Guest-focused attitude
- Guest-centred processes - The organisation should ensure that set systems and processes are in place which will result in quality of service and will ensure consistency when dealing with guests.
- Efficient service recovery
- Service excellence-orientated organisational behaviour
- Constructive peer reviewing

Monitoring, evaluation and continual improvement

The organisation should consistently monitor, evaluate and continually improve the level of product and service provision against the following criteria:

- Consistent collection and evaluation of information
- Accuracy of information
- Revision and evaluation of monitoring tools
- Feedback systems
- Reporting medium of stakeholders
- Rewards and awards system

To buy the standard visit www.sabs.co.za

SANS 1162: Responsible tourism

The National Department of Tourism in partnership with tourism stakeholders and the private sector, particularly the accreditation agencies developed the South African National Standard (SANS 1162: 2011). Prior to the development of the SANS 1162, there were various schemes certifying the sustainability of tourism businesses utilising different sets of criteria (standards). Some of the schemes offered certification for only one of the three fundamental elements of responsible tourism.

Tourism businesses and consumers find it extremely difficult to evaluate the credibility of certification schemes and to determine whether the certification criteria were in line with national policy in the absence of national minimum standards for responsible tourism. SANS 1162 was therefore developed with the sole objective of establishing a common understanding of responsible tourism. By developing a single set of standards to be applied throughout South Africa, NDT and SABS have also harmonised the different sets of criteria that were used for certifying the sustainability of tourism businesses.

The standard consists of 41 criteria divided into the following four categories:

- Sustainable operations and management
- Economic criteria
- Social and cultural criteria
- Environmental criteria

To buy the standard visit www.sabs.co.za



5 . GETTING OFFICIALLY GRADED

FOR THE SPEED READER

- The Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) is responsible for implementing South Africa's official star grading scheme
- The following facilities can become graded: hotel accommodation, guest accommodation, self-catering accommodation, caravan and camping, backpackers and hostels, game/ nature lodges and venues.
- A five-star grading system is used ranging from 1-star to 5-star premium.

THE GRADING SYSTEM

The Minister of Tourism established a national grading system for tourism in the form of the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa (TGCSA) to maintain and enhance the standards and quality of tourism facilities. This grading system promotes:

- The objectives of the Tourism Act
- The national tourism sector strategy
- Excellence in the provision of tourism facilities
- An easy and trusted way for tourism customers to know what they are getting.

This system of the TGCSA makes provision for the use and display of insignia, which includes a depiction of a star or number of stars. The TGCSA is the only officially-recognised organisation in South Africa that can authorise tourism facilities to display any form of stars, literally “putting the stars where they belong”. The TGCSA is an internationally-recognised brand that stands for quality assurance of tourism-related facilities in South Africa. Stars are also globally recognised as a benchmark of quality that tourism consumers can trust when staying at accommodation establishments.

There are many advantages to being graded by the TGCSA. Once your establishment has been graded by an accredited grading assessor you can display the TGCSA star insignia, and be instantly recognised by visitors as a venue of quality providing service excellence. By promoting TGCSA Star Graded establishments, the Western Cape can position itself as a province which provides quality assurance, optimal value for money and ensure ‘customer expectation’ is met.

Which facilities can become graded?

- Hotel accommodation
- Guest accommodation
- Self-catering accommodation
- Caravan and camping
- Backpackers and hostels
- Game/ Nature lodges
- Venues

Grading criteria

The TGCSA's grading criteria is reviewed on a regular basis. The most recent revision was in April 2019 when the following enhancements were introduced:

- Aligned to international best practice, the Star Grading Levels of 1 to 5 Stars have been augmented with the introduction of a 5 Star “Premium” level. This aspirational level, reserved for the most luxurious products offerings in South Africa, allows for the recognition of exceptional 5-star properties
- Three new categories have been introduced to cater for Small Hotels, Boutique Hotels and Apartment Hotels.
- Meetings, Exhibitions and Special Events Centres (MESE) has been renamed VENUES.

The Grading Council conducts assessments based on a set of pre-defined criteria. Assessment and scoring are based on standard criteria and includes building exterior, bedrooms, bathrooms, public areas, and general facilities. Category specific criteria includes dining facilities, general service and service, housekeeping services, additional facilities, and responsible environment.

Read more:

Detailed core grading requirements are contained in the TGCSA Grading Criteria Booklet available at www.tourismgrading.co.za



The process of becoming graded



The TGCSA Grading Process

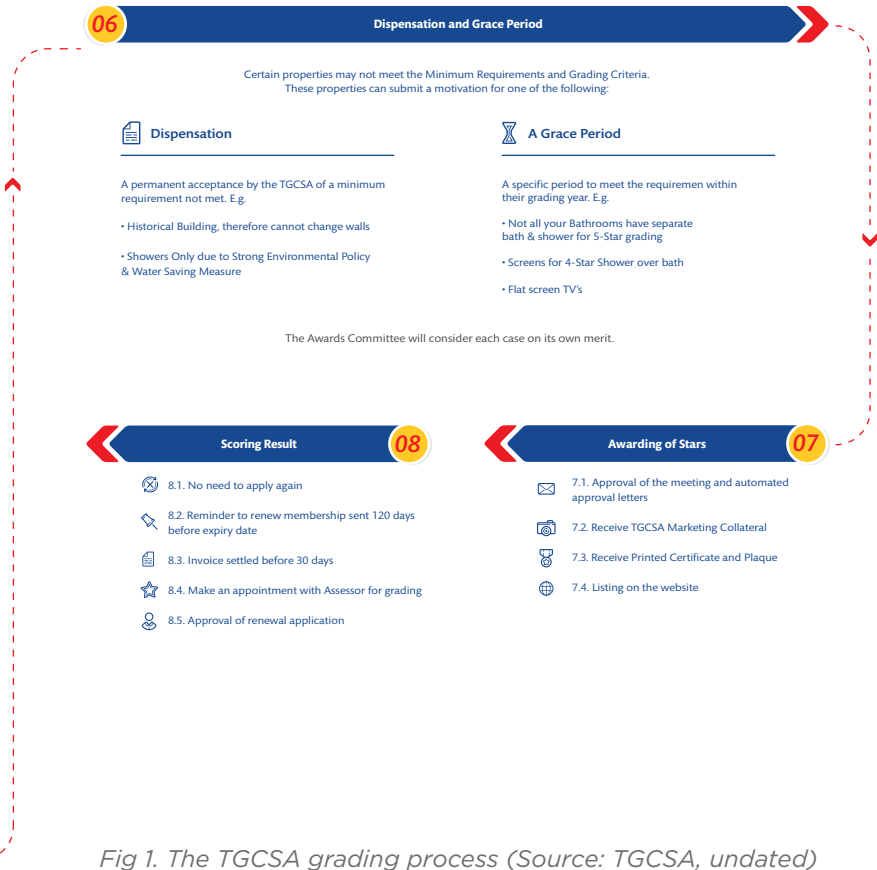


Fig 1. The TGCSA grading process (Source: TGCSA, undated)

6

INCORPORATING SERVICE DELIVERY INTO YOUR BUSINESS

FOR THE SPEED READER

- The service quality process is a 9-step process that begins with placing service quality at the core of the organisation's vision statement and ends with the ongoing review and revision of quality.
- SERVQUAL is a useful model for measuring service quality.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Quality management means understanding that customer satisfaction must extend to all the organisation's activities, and not just the ones involving contact with the final or external customer. The concept must also extend to internal customers, which consist for an enterprise of departments, providers and personnel, and for a destination, of agents, employees, other government departments and local society.

Achieving satisfactory levels of quality means planning and carrying out processes correctly. Products or services are made to satisfy customers by constantly improving processes, so new organisational models (in both companies and destinations) must be aimed at process management. Such a process-centred approach breaks down barriers, reinforces the core business concept, improves workflow, optimizes resource use, promotes teamwork and improves internal communication.

Incorporating service quality into every part of your business - from your overall vision and strategy, to practical aspects like staff training, customer service and workplace systems and procedures - will keep your business competitive and help it to grow.



The service quality process is a 9-step process:⁵

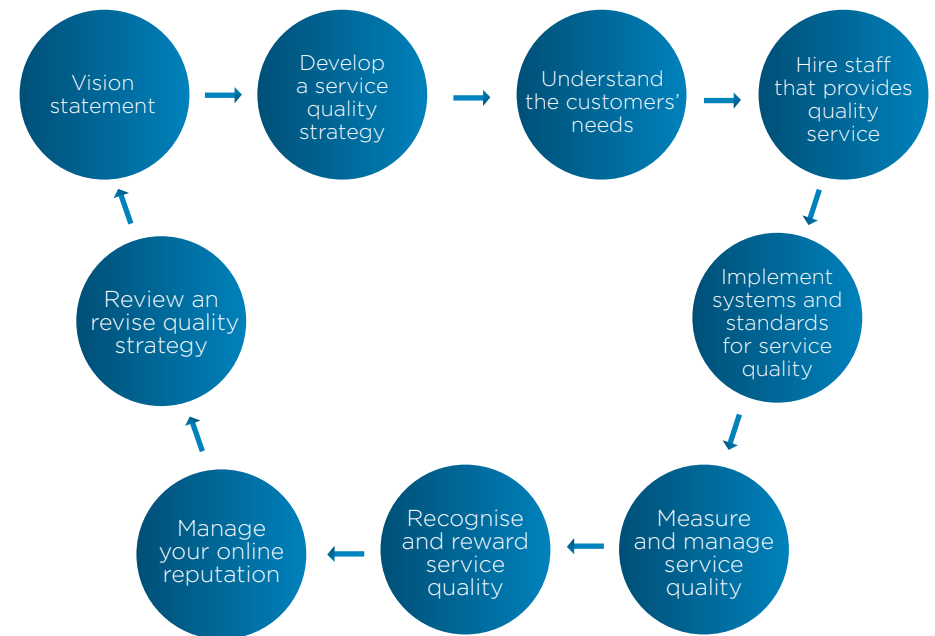


Fig 2: The service quality process (source: Martin, Tamzin, BIZXNET, 2019)

Step 1: Write a vision statement for your business

Every business should have a vision, and by incorporating service quality into your vision (and vision statement) you clearly identify it as a core business value. Having a clear vision for service quality will help you:

- define the direction and strategy of your business
- make decisions based on an overarching philosophy
- maintain a constant focus on delivering your service promises
- prioritise service when allocating resources
- respond quickly to changing situations and market needs.

5. Adapted from Martin, Tamzin, BIZXNET, 2019

Step 2: Develop a strategy for service quality

Once your business has a strong vision statement for delivering quality service, you will then need an overall strategy to guide your business and staff towards this vision.

Your strategy should explain 'how' you will achieve your vision, and include all the practical steps you need to take in order to achieve and sustain high quality customer service.

Ask yourself a series of key questions about your business to generate ideas. For example:

- What aspects of our service are the most important to help us meet, and even exceed, our customers' expectations? Being friendly? Professional? Reliable? Surprise and 'wow' factor? Recovering well if we make mistakes? Fairness to all customers?
- What would an ideal customer experience with our business look and feel like? What do we need to improve to achieve this on a regular basis?
- What areas of customer service can we do better than our competitors?

As part of your strategy, you should also set concrete targets and goals, and timelines for achieving them.

Step 3: Understand your customers' needs

While there are general principles of good customer service, tourism businesses can serve a diverse range of customers from all over the world whose needs may vary.

Having a detailed understanding of who your customers are will help you identify their needs and develop ways to improve customer service standards for your business.

There are different ways to research your customers, including:

- surveys
- focus groups

- brand, price and concept testing
- mystery shoppers.

Having an understanding of your market and your competitors can also drive you to improve service standards.

Step 4: Hire staff that provide quality service

Your staff are the public face of your business and are responsible for delivering quality service to your customers. Finding the right people for your business can be the difference between good and bad service, a good and bad experience, and, ultimately, the success or failure of your business.

Take the time to understand exactly who you need before you start the recruitment process. This will save you time and money in the long run.

Leadership within your staff is equally important. Good managers with the right management style, and who lead by example, will help set service quality standards for your entire workplace.

Step 5: Implement systems and standards for service quality

Systems, standards and procedures explain, in writing, the things your staff should do and the way they should do them - in line with your overall vision, strategy and goals. By using systems and standards for service quality as part of your everyday operations, service is more likely to be delivered consistently and naturally.

You can write work procedures and standards into your business plan, staff training programme and your customer service programme.

Step 6: Measure and manage service quality

Once you have systems and standards in place for service quality, it's important to regularly measure and manage the results. This helps make sure they meet your expectations.

Different tools you can use to measure service quality include:

- customer research (e.g. feedback cards, surveys and forums)
- customer complaints policy
- market research
- benchmarking
- tourism customer review sites (e.g. TripAdvisor)
- social media sites (e.g. Facebook and Twitter).

After you have measured your service quality you should manage the outcomes and incorporate them into your day-to-day operations. Some ways to do this include recognising and rewarding your staff, and revising your documentation and training.



USING SERVQUAL TO MEASURE QUALITY SERVICE

The SERVQUAL (SERvice QUALity) model was developed in the mid 1980's by well-known academic researchers in the field of services marketing, namely Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry. As is indicated by the name of this model, SERVQUAL is a measure of service quality. Essentially it is a form of structured market research that splits overall service into five areas or components. The five areas are:

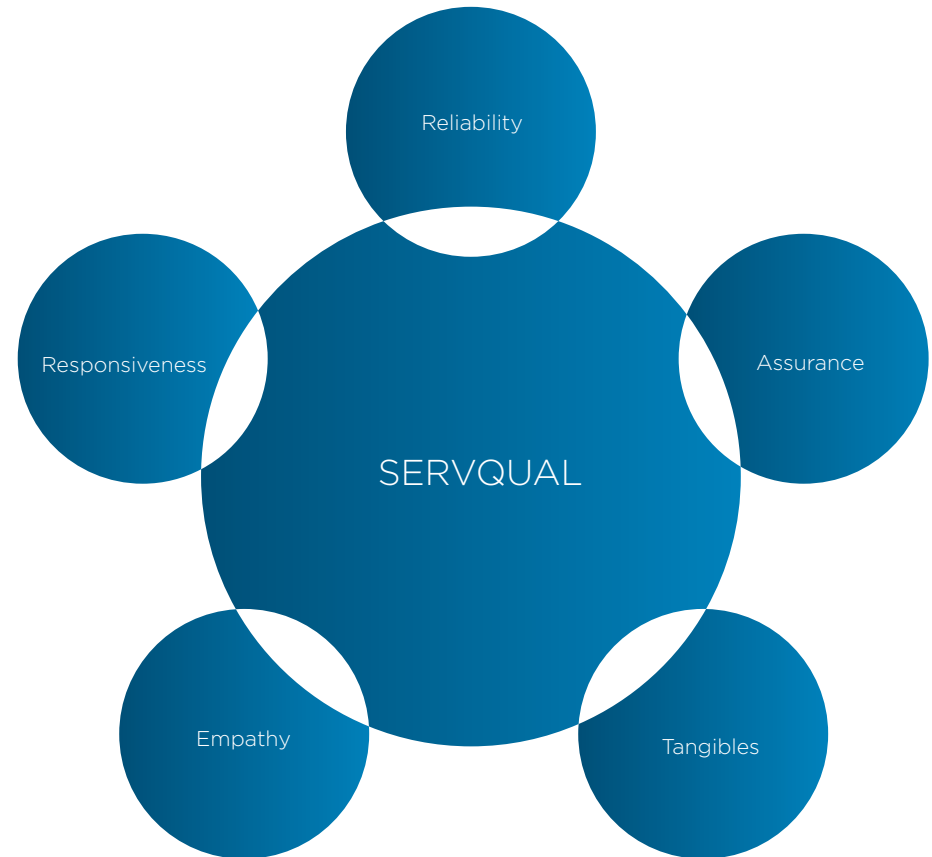
- **R**eliability
- **A**ssurance
- **T**angibles
- **E**mpathy
- **R**esponsiveness.

Together the five elements make up the word RATER hence the model is also known as the RATER model. According to the original academic journal article:

- **Reliability** is the firm's ability to perform the promise service accurately and dependably
- **Assurance** is knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence
- **Tangibles** refers to physical facilities, equipment and appearance of personnel



- **Empathy** is caring and individualised attention paid to customers
- **Responsiveness** is the firm's willingness to help customer and provide prompt service



*Fig 3: The five elements of the SERVQUAL MODEL
(source: www.marketingstudyguide.com)*

When the SERVQUAL model was originally developed and researched it consisted of 22 questions under the five RATER dimensions.

“Incorporating service quality into every part of your business - from your overall vision and strategy, to practical aspects like staff training, customer service and workplace systems and procedures.”

THE SERVQUAL QUESTIONNAIRE IS SPLIT INTO TWO MAIN SECTIONS

1. Respondents are asked about their expectations of the ideal service firm in that service category.

In this case, the questions would be reworded to state a particular industry, such as banking, or hotels, or education. There is no reference to a specific firm at this stage; instead respondents are asked about the ideal firm to deal with. This is done to frame expectations for that service category and to establish a benchmark for comparison. By working through the RATER elements, it can be seen that there would be significant differences in expectations across service industries. For example, for banking firms, assurance would be important, for medical firms, empathy would be important, and for hotels, tangibles would be important.

2. Respondents are then asked about the service quality delivery of specific firms in that industry.

This approach provides the researcher with:

- A comparison of perceived service quality levels between competing firms,
- The difference between expected and delivered service quality for each firm, and
- The ability to drill down to the 22 questions to determine where a specific firm is performing above/below expectations or competitor quality levels.

The elements that are assessed by the 22 questions are illustrated below:

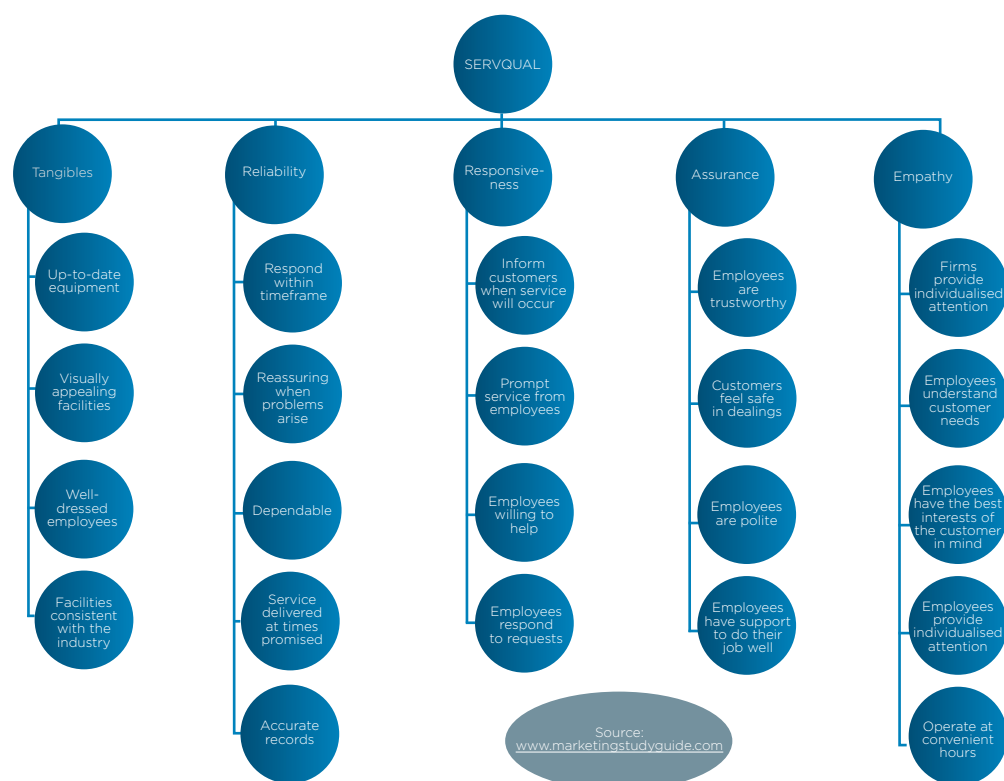


Fig 4: The service elements explored by the SERVQUAL questionnaire (Source: www.marketingstudyguide.com)

Simply put, the questionnaire is aimed at understanding five key gaps in respect of service:

- **Gap 1:** Difference between what customers expect and what managers think they expect.
- **Gap 2:** Difference between the management's perceptions of customer expectations and the quality specification of the service.
- **Gap 3:** Difference between service quality specifications and the actual quality.
- **Gap 4:** Difference between the quality of service provided and what is communicated to the customer about the service.
- **Gap 5:** Difference between a customer's expectation of the service and the perception of the experience.



The relationship between these gaps are illustrated below:

CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY

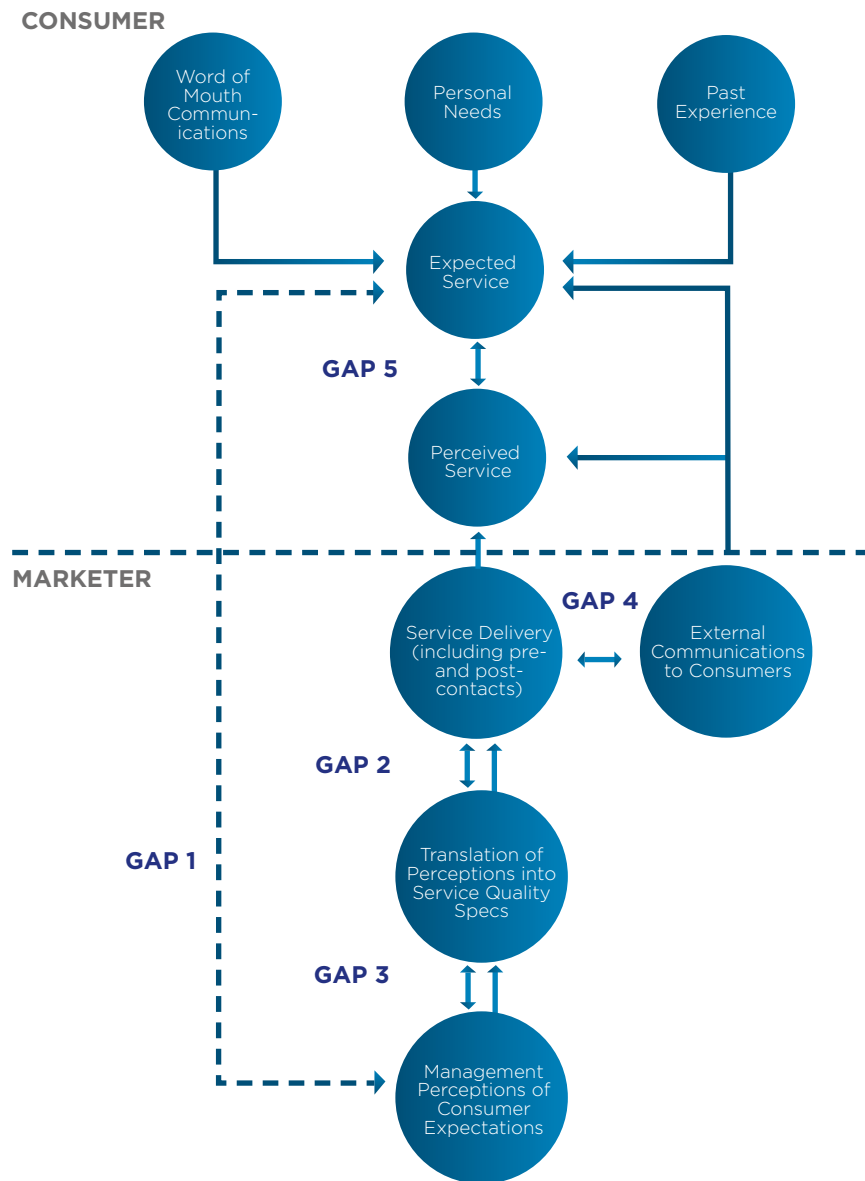


Fig. 5 The SERVQUAL model
(Source: www.marketingstudyguide.com)





Step 7: Recognise and reward service quality

Recognition and reward are important tools for ensuring ongoing service quality in your business. Look for ways to recognise and reward both your staff and your customers.

Recognise and reward your staff

Recognition can be planned or spontaneous. Examples of planned recognition include:

- regular staff performance reviews
- pay bonuses or gifts for reaching targets
- time off (in lieu for full-time staff, or a break for casual staff)
- employee-of-the-month awards.

Spontaneous recognition might include:

- passing on positive feedback from customers and management to staff
- thanking staff when they do a good job
- surprising your staff with morning or afternoon tea.

Recognise and reward customers

As well as recognising and rewarding your staff, it's important to recognise customer feedback, whether it's positive or negative, and thank them for their contribution to your business. For example, you may choose to reward certain customers with discounts.

Step 8: Manage your online reputation

Social media and online review services such as TripAdvisor can greatly impact your online reputation and your bookings. An important part of your customer service is how you encourage, manage and respond to online reviews.

Strategies to climb the ranks of TripAdvisor:

- provide remarkable service
- be true to your brand
- be honest
- mobilise the team
- offer great value
- do it with passion every day
- empower your staff
- reduce negative reviews
- listen to your guests
- encourage guests to leave a review.

Using online reputation management software

"Online reputation management is a fundamental strategy for running a successful tourism business in the twenty-first century. 70% of consumers look at up to 20 reviews in their holiday planning process (Tnooz), 33% will change their choice based on reviews (World Travel and Tourism Corporation) and 53% of consumers won't book a hotel with no reviews."

www.tourismtribe.com



Reputation management software allows businesses and brands to manage customer reviews and other feedback from a single place. This means having the opportunity to not only view feedback and be alerted to new reviews, but also the ability to respond to customers, amplify positive feedback and limit the damage from negative reviews.

While the concept of reputation management itself is extremely valuable, it can be time-consuming and difficult to keep on top of. Reputation management software helps with this by automating certain tasks. The centralised nature of the software also cuts out the time taken to switch between different review platforms. There are many software solutions available on the market so do your research first. (Source: <https://www.revfine.com/reputation-management-software/>)

Step 9: Review and revise service quality

Service quality is not something to achieve and then forget. You should regularly review and revise your business's service quality to make sure you maintain a high standard. It's a good idea to repeat certain steps from this 9- step process on a regular basis. Make sure you are constantly working to improve service quality. Incorporate any improvements that result from your reviews into your business plan, workplace systems and standards and staff training programmes.

SERVICE QUALITY CHECKLIST

1. Vision

Do you have a vision for your business?

Have you written a vision statement for your business?

2. Strategy

Is service quality incorporated in your business plan?

Have you held a strategy workshop with key employees?

3. Customers' needs

Have you researched your customers' needs?

Have you analysed what your competitors are doing?

4. Suitable staff

Do you have the right people delivering service quality for your business?

Do you have managers that lead by example and value customer service details?

5. Systems and standards

Have you implemented systems to streamline your business?

Have you set service quality standards that your staff should aspire to?

6. Measure and manage

Have you measured the success of your service quality by using customer and market research?

Have you run a competition that encourages customers to give you feedback?

7. Recognise and reward

Have you recognised and rewarded staff who have achieved service quality excellence?

Have you rewarded customers who have provided valuable feedback?

9. Review and revise

Have you made changes to your service quality based on customer feedback?

Have you set a date to review and revise your service quality?



7 QUALITY ASSURANCE FOR ATTRACTIONS

FOR THE SPEED READER

- South Africa does not have an official grading scheme for attractions.
- Attractions can however apply the VisitEngland National Code of Practice for Visitor Attractions as guidelines for improving quality at attractions.



At present there is no grading scheme for the grading of attractions in South Africa. VisitEngland however has a national code of practice for visitor attractions that can be applied to the South African context.

VISITENGLAND NATIONAL CODE OF PRACTICE FOR VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

The owner and management of an Attraction have undertaken:

1. To provide in promotional materials an accurate description of the amenities, facilities and services of the Attraction.
2. To indicate on all such promotional materials any requirements for pre-booking and any significant restrictions on entry.
3. To welcome all visitors courteously and without discrimination in relation to gender, sexual orientation, disability, race, religion or belief. To respect the requirements of the Equality Act 2010 by making 'reasonable' adjustments to improve service for disabled people and make available an Access Statement describing the accessibility aspects of a visit to the Attraction.
4. To describe accurately and display clearly:
 - a) Any charges for entry including service charges and taxes where applicable and any additional charges for individual attractions or special exhibitions.
 - b) Dates and hours of operation, both opening and closing.
5. To provide in promotional materials for visitor enquiries a postal address, an e-mail address, a telephone number and a website address from which the detailed information specified in 1, 2, 3 and 4 can be obtained.
6. To hold a current public liability insurance policy or comparable Government indemnity, and to comply with all applicable planning, health, safety, fire and other statutory requirements and regulations.
7. To provide signage and orientation information as appropriate to the Attraction to assist visitors in understanding and enjoying the Attraction.
8. To consider the needs of visitors for whom English is not their first language and, as appropriate to the Attraction, to make arrangements that enable them to be adequately informed to enjoy their visit.
9. To manage the Attraction in such a way as to ensure visitor safety, comfort and service by sustaining a high standard of maintenance, customer care, courtesy and cleanliness.
10. To ensure that all staff who meet visitors can provide information and guidance about the Attraction, and are readily distinguishable as staff, whether employees or volunteers.
11. To have regard to the need to manage and operate the Attraction in a sustainable way.
12. To provide, as appropriate to the nature, scale and location of the Attraction, coach, car, motorcycle and bicycle parking, adequate toilets, and catering facilities. If any of these requirements cannot be made available on site, to provide information at appropriate points on where they can be found locally.
13. To deal promptly and courteously with all enquiries, requests, reservations, correspondence and comments from visitors and try to resolve any complaints on site at the time of the visit.
14. To provide a facility on site for comments to be recorded and to advise clearly the name and contact details (address, telephone and e-mail) of the person to whom comments by visitors should be addressed.

Assessing the quality of visitor attractions entails the detailed analysis of all the aspects through which the visitor will be engaging with the attraction, prior to arrival, during arrival, at the attraction and after the visit. The following guidelines come from the VisitEngland Visitor Attractions Quality Standard which can be downloaded at <https://www.visitenglandassessmentservices.com/downloads/>



Pre-arrival

As a start it is important for the attraction to assess the accuracy and clarity of information on the website and social media and any other printed material, such as a leaflet or brochure, to which the visitor may refer before visiting.

Where an attraction has an entrance fee, information needs to be provided so that potential visitors can access this before arrival. It is most likely that this information will be provided via web based media. It should include opening times and entrance prices. Any supplementary prices for exhibitions or extra activities and tours should also be made clear, as should seasonal variations in pricing. The prices advertised should not be exceeded on arrival. An Access Statement should be available as a downloadable word document for disabled visitors and others with access needs.

Arrival

This covers the overall visitor arrival, including signposting, parking and ease of access. Access roads, car parks, accessible parking bays, paths and steps must be appropriately surfaced and in sound condition. Where appropriate, areas must

have adequate lighting to ensure the safety of visitors. Initial signage should be well maintained with the opening times, the full range of prices and any restrictions to entry clearly displayed either outside the entrance or at the entry point.

The attraction

This looks in detail at the visitor experience, covering everything from quality of presentation and interpretation to signage and visitor information. The layout of the attraction should be designed to allow practical access to all areas, whether by free or directed flow, and assisted by clear and well maintained signage. The range of content should be appropriate to the accepted broad theme of the attraction. Where applicable, all exhibits or features should be effectively presented with the use of appropriate media, ensuring accurate interpretation.

All areas of the attraction should be in sound condition, with appropriate lighting to ensure a safe environment. Equipment needs to be safely maintained and working as intended. If a hearing loop is available, it should be in full working order and signage should be positioned where the loop is effective.

Cleanliness

This entails a detailed assessment of the cleanliness throughout the attraction, from the car park to the catering and retail outlets. A high standard of cleanliness needs to be maintained at all times across the attraction and within all ancillary facilities.

Toilets

The quality of toilets and range of facilities is an important element of the visitor experience, particularly for disabled visitors or visitors with young children.

When provided, toilet facilities should be in a suitable location and adequate for the size of the attraction. Toilet facilities must include toilet roll holders, sufficient paper and adequate hand washing and hand drying facilities. All toilet facilities should be well maintained and have adequate ventilation. Accessible toilet facilities should be provided where possible, and should be as well maintained as the other toilet facilities. Turning space within accessible toilets should be kept clear and not be used for storage.

Catering

The quality of the catering can be a crucial part of the visitor's enjoyment of the attraction. Décor, fixtures and fittings may be functional, but must be well maintained with all furniture in sound, stable condition and appropriate for the purpose intended.

Where seating is provided, there must be adequate circulation space, free of obstructions. Indoor seating areas should have adequate heating, ventilation and lighting. The food and beverage operation must comply with all legal obligations. Menu descriptions should be accurate and all prices should be displayed clearly.

Retail

Secondary spend is a vital source of income for an increasing number of attractions and a visitor shop, however small or large, is a key way to deliver additional revenue. Décor, furniture, fixtures and fittings should all be maintained in sound condition. All retail areas should be adequately lit. All prices should be clearly visible.

Staff

The staff at your attraction are a vital part of the visitor experience. All staff throughout the attraction will be taken into account, including those who proactively interact with visitors, such as staff in the main attraction, café and shop, as well as gardeners and technicians.

Staff do not need to wear a uniform or name badge, but they should be easily distinguishable from visitors and deal promptly and courteously with all visitors.

Additional resources:

Visit the African Association of Visitor Experiences and Attractions for additional resources and support.

www.aavea.org.za



8

RECOGNITION: LILIZELA AWARDS

FOR THE SPEED READER

- The Lilizela awards are aimed at recognising and rewarding tourism businesses who deliver world-class products and services. The awards are a good opportunity for businesses to showcase their journey to service excellence and benchmark their work against other organisations.



The Lilizela Tourism Awards recognise and reward tourism players and businesses who work passionately and with pride to deliver a world-class product and service and whose delivery grows South Africa's global destination competitiveness.

Entries can be made for the following awards:

Ministers Award

Recognises outstanding, unique, impactful people, events, organisations that have performed in a manner that urges the industry closer to the 2020 vision whilst demonstrating all the values which serve as guiding principles for the sector in how it relates to itself and its stakeholders. This award is given out at the discretion of the Minister of Tourism.

Service Excellence

This Focus Area has three Categories, and how well tourism products do in this area, will be based on guest feedback and judges' scores. Measurements have been put in place to allow the public to cast their vote. The categories are:

- Accommodation Awards (Based on the Accommodation Categories used by the Tourism Grading Council of South Africa, please see www.tourismgrading.co.za)
- Tourist Guides Awards (This encompasses Nature; Culture and Adventure)
- Visitor Experience Awards (This encompasses excellent service in experiences Roots and Culture; Culture and Lifestyle; Scenic Beauty; Action and Adventure; Wildlife Encounters; Marine Adventures; Lap of Luxury as well as Beach Experience)

Entrepreneurship - ETEYA

The Emerging Tourism Entrepreneur of the Year Award (ETEYA) was launched in 2001 at INDABA in Durban and is designed primarily to encourage and sustain the development of Small, Micro and Medium Enterprises (SMME's) within the tourism industry. This award is given to black (as defined in the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment Act) entrepreneurs, who operate small, micro and medium tourism or hospitality-related businesses. They must have been in operation for more than a year and less than 10 years, employ no more than 50 people and have a turnover of not more than R10 million a year.

Sustainable Development

Sustainable Development is one of the guiding principles of Tourism Development as encapsulated in the NTSS. The growth and development of the Tourism Sector is underpinned by the development and practice of sustainable business policies



and strategies in ensuring that the benefits of tourism continue to grow for generations to come.

These awards will recognise the businesses that have proven to incorporate these into their business operating models. The categories are:

- The Universal Accessibility Awards
- The B-BBEE Awards

Entry is free but there are certain requirements businesses need to fulfil for their application to be successfully processed:


- South African tourism business operating for a minimum of year
- Meet all the legal requirements for the type of business they operate
- Categories will cater for SME's and Large Enterprises where these levels of recognition are necessary.
- Each category, based on its particular business requirements will have criteria specific to it and the adjudication process supported by the relevant industry association. More comprehensive details of what the specific requirements are can be obtained from the application form of each category.
- All accommodation and MESE establishments must be graded by the TGCSA.

Adjudication takes place as follows:

- The Lilizela Tourism Awards are largely consumer based. 80% of the score that is given to the establishment is based on Consumer Reviews. These reviews are in the form of the votes from the Lilizela Tourism Awards website as well as the TripAdvisor score for that establishment.
- 20% of the score comes from the deliberations of the judges in that respective panel for the respective categories.
- In a case where there are no votes on the Lilizela Tourism Awards website, the TripAdvisor score makes up 80% of the total score, with the judges votes accounting for 20% of the score.
- In the rare case where an establishment does not have votes on the Lilizela Tourism Awards website, and no score on TripAdvisor, the judges' vote comprises the full 100% and is final.
- The adjudication panel is selected based on their vast knowledge of that particular category, and therefore are able to score an establishment based on that knowledge.

Read more at www.lilizela.co.za



A woman with short dark hair, wearing a white long-sleeved shirt and a grey apron, is crouching in a field of green plants. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. She is holding a bunch of green leafy plants. In the foreground, there are several bright orange carrots. The background is a lush green field with rows of plants, and a wooden fence is visible in the distance. The lighting is bright and natural, suggesting a sunny day.

“The awards are a good opportunity for businesses to showcase their journey to service excellence and benchmark their work against other organisations.”



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