

# THE NEED OF BACKPACKING TOURISTS IN NON-STAR HOTELS: INSIGHTS FROM GORONTALO CITY, INDONESIA

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**Abstract:** Gorontalo is a transit city for foreign tourists that will continue their trip to Togeian islands, or for tourists coming from Togeian islands that will continue the trip to Manado, Makassar, or Jakarta. Foreign tourists who opt to transit in Gorontalo prefer non-star hotels as their accommodation option. This study aimed to analyze the guest's needs from five kinds of dimension, i.e., tangible dimension, empathy dimension, reliability dimension, responsiveness dimension, and assurance Dimension. The present study integrated a qualitative and a simple quantitative method as the research design. The data were directly collected by field observation; questionnaires distributed to the tourists were employed to collect the main data, while the supporting data were extracted by interview and documentation. As based on the findings, the backpackers' needs for basic tangible goods involve food three times a day, a heat pump water heater, and laundry service. In accommodating the needs, the hotels can cooperate with third parties, particularly regarding food three times a day and laundry service. Moreover, the intangible service-oriented needs comprise empathy, reliability, responsiveness, and assurance. As based on the questionnaire, the respondents showed good responses and suggested improvements in several aspects, particularly on the intangible needs.

**Keywords:** *backpacking tourism; need; non-star hotel*

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism in today's era has emerged as a potential economic sector for the government to focus on in ensuring the welfare of its citizens. Indonesia's concerns in tourism sector have been going for several years. Tourism is seen as an alternative renewable source for the national income in lieu of non-renewable sources such as lead, coal, oil, or gas. The preference to focus on tourism sector will, in turn, generate a snowball effect on the development of other supporting sectors to optimize the flow of the economy

(Barata, 2003).

In recent years, the government has released a development program of ten emerging tourism destinations to ensure that all potential tourism objects are developed simultaneously and that the tourists are not heavily concentrated in tourism spotlights such as Bali (Gondokesumo, Caroline, & Wijaya, 2018). The program offers different tourism destinations that feature various natural or cultural spotlights of Indonesia. The focused destinations offer as much

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tourism potentials as the featured regions in Indonesia. Therefore, the development of such destinations is expected to boost the exposure of Indonesian tourism abroad and to support the economic development of the region. That said, the tourism development of a region must have destinations with an appeal to the foreign and local tourists, such as tourism attractions, facilities, accessibility, human resources, image, and reasonable price.

Gorontalo province is among the provinces in Indonesia with serious concerns about tourism development. The province comprises five regencies and one city; the regions are Pohuwato regency, Boalemo regency, North Gorontalo regency, Bone Bolango regency, Gorontalo regency, and Gorontalo city. The development of the tourism sector in the region was started in 2007 by the provincial government through the Office of Tourism. The rise of tourism sector in the region was due to the high potentials of natural objects as well as cultural richness. Each region in the province has its own tourism potentials that are generally nature-based. The destinations comprise, among others, Olele diving site and Nani Wartabone National Park in Bone Bolango, Biluhu beach in Gorontalo regency, and Pulo Cinta site in Boalemo.

In addition to the site for incoming tourists, Gorontalo province is also a transit site for tourists coming from Central Sulawesi or North Sulawesi. Gorontalo city is the capital of Gorontalo province; it is located right at the edge of Tomini bay area. As the capital, Gorontalo city features supporting facilities for tourism activities. It is equipped with the presence of various types of accommodations, ranging from star to non-star hotels, transportation facilities, scheduled ferry port, and numerous culinary attractions. The concentrated facilities and infrastructure persuade the tourists to stay in the city, even though their tourism destination is located outside the city. The number of tourists staying in Gorontalo city is presented in the following table.

Table 1. *Incoming foreign tourists staying in Gorontalo City in 2015-2019*

Year	Incoming Foreign Tourists	Staying Foreign Tourists	% Staying Foreign Tourists
2015	2706	2007	74.16
2016	2774	1050	37.85
2017	2925	1998	68.31
2018	2825	1791	63.40
2019	2825	2002	70.89

Source: BPS-Statistics Indonesia of Gorontalo Province (2018)

The table indicates a fluctuating trend of numbers of tourists visiting and staying in Gorontalo from 2015-2019, in which 2015 has seen the highest percentage of staying tourists. However, the percentage tends to decrease in the next years. In terms of numbers of visiting tourists, 2019 has seen the highest number of tourists as compared to 2015-2016. During the year, the percentage of staying tourists in the city is 70.89%.

The arrival of foreign tourists to Gorontalo is mainly due to the appeal of natural tourism objects so that the tourists can stay and transit for one or two days before continuing their trip to Togean Island by sea transportation twice a week on Tuesday and Friday. Foreign tourists who opt to transit in Gorontalo prefer non-star hotels as their accommodation option. At present, there are 51 non-star hotels in Gorontalo. Most of the tourists transiting in Gorontalo are from European countries. TFS (2011) as cited in Menuh (2016) states that backpacking tourists are mostly from the Europe countries (59%), such as France, Germany, Scotland, England, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Dutch, and Slovenia. European tourists have a high interest in traveling by backpacking; this is supported by the love of Europeans for things related to culture; European people also appreciate local culture. Backpacker tourists have a tendency to travel independently, not restricted by the time set by the travel agent or agency. They also tend to look for low-cost accommodation, travel for a long time, and seek different experiences from other mass

tourism. This is in line with Pearce (1990) as cited in Riati et al. (2020) that describe backpackers as independent tourists that prefer flexible schedules, long duration, cheaper accommodation, and the opportunity to join other independent tourists in the destination.

Compared to other regions in Gorontalo province, Gorontalo city offers large numbers of comfortable and affordable accommodations as an attractive option for backpacker tourists to stay. Backpacker tourists prefer non-star hotels to rest and just store their belongings because the costs are cheaper and they generally have a limited budget for accommodation. In addition to the needs of room facility, the backpackers also require other service needs during their stay in non-star hotels. The accommodation could prepare to fulfill these needs so that tourists do not have to go to other places, even in simple and affordable service.

Nevertheless, service quality is one of the important points to be considered (Harapan, 2015). According to Kahnali and Esmaeili (2015), service quality is one of the critical factors that influences customer satisfaction and purchasing decision. This study aims to analyze the guest' needs from five kinds of dimension theory by Pasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988), i.e., tangible dimension, empathy dimension, reliability dimension, responsiveness dimension, and assurance dimension.

According to Pasuraman et al. (1988), reliability is the degree to which a promised service is performed dependably and accurately. Further, responsiveness is the degree to which service providers are willing to help customers and provide prompt service (Pasuraman et al., 1988). Moreover, assurance is the extent to which service providers are knowledgeable, courteous, and able to inspire trust and confidence (Pasuraman et al., 1988). Pasuraman et al. (1988) also add that empathy refers the degree to which the customers are offered caring and individualized attention, while tangibles is the degree to which physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel are adequate.

## **METHOD**

The study integrated quantitative and qualitative descriptive methods as the research design. The non-numerical data were composed in the form of a written description. The numerical data were presented in table and elaborated descriptively. The data were collected by questionnaire, interview, and documentation. The questionnaire was distributed to non-star hotels that receive backpacking tourists, while interviews were conducted by involving all members of the hotel management. There were 75 backpackers involved as the respondents of the research. Documentation data were acquired from relevant sources by online searching on hotel booking sites to look for the opinions of tourists who stayed. The consent has been informed to all of the participants in written form.

## **RESULTS**

Hotels are one of the service industries in the tourism sector; the existence of hotels is increasingly important because hotels provide auxiliary accommodation facilities such as bedrooms, meeting rooms, restaurants, sports facilities, and others (Bartono & Rufifino 2010; Sudarso, 2016). Such facilities are the essential needs for the tourists. In terms of facilities, the hotels are classified into star and non-star hotels. Non-star hotels do not have as many facilities as star hotels. Despite that, the hotels must provide best services to persuade tourists from using their services again and recommending them to their friends.

As based on the research findings, New Melati Hotel and Jambura Inn are among the most preferred non-star hotels in Gorontalo. Both hotels receive high ratings and positive comments from tourists. The location of both places is quite strategic; New Melati Hotel is located in front of the city town square, near to minimarkets, food stalls, and other convenience stores. Meanwhile, Jambura Inn is located in Universitas Negeri Gorontalo, a strategic place that is near to

food stalls and convenience stores. Guests staying in both hotels are worry-free about their daily needs and food as they can easily access the stores that sell their daily needs at affordable prices.



Figure 1. Front look of Jambura Inn

New Melati Hotel was awarded Guest Review Award from Traveloka.com with a score of 7.9, while Jambura Inn was awarded the same title from Booking.com with 9.5. The questionnaire was distributed to hotels to be handed to guests who came. The assessment was carried out by using the quality of service indicators to find out the guests' needs during their stay and the comparison between guests' expectations with those provided by the hotel. Service quality is the level of excellence expected and the management effort of the level of excellence to meet customer expectations (Tjiptono, Chandra, & Adriana, 2008; Ivancevich, Konopaske, & Matteson, 2005). On top of that, Usrama (2003) opines that service quality is the opinion of attitude on the comparison of expectation and results. From the questionnaire distribution, the study collected the questionnaire from 75 respondents.



Figure 2. Front look of New Melati Hotel

### Tangible dimension

Tangible dimension refers to those that can be seen physically, such as buildings and other physical facilities. As the findings indicate, Jambura Inn and New Melati Hotel continue to strive to improve their physical facilities and facilities in order to improve their tangible services.

Table 2. Data of tourists' needs of physical (tangible) facilities

Types of Needs	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Food and beverages	35	46.66
Room facilities	16	21.33
Other facilities		
Laundry	13	17.33
Travel agent/Taxi counter	11	14.66
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>75</b>	

Source: Data processed by author

The above table suggests that the tourists in both hotels require food and beverages service. About 46.66% of the respondents need the service of food three times a day. Such an aspect is the most-requested need by the tourists since both hotels are non-star hotels, where the food and beverage facilities are quite limited. On top of that, 21.33% of the guests request for heat pump water heater in bedroom facilities. Further, 14.66% of the guests request transportation services that enable the tourists to travel to the airport, seaport, or to tourist destinations. Regarding this request, the hotels mediate the guests with third-party service providers. There is no specific counter to book travel shuttles or to acquire further information. About 17.33% of the respondents also emphasized the need for laundry services since most of the backpackers only pack limited clothing. The need was not met successfully by the hotels

as there is no specific laundry service provider in the hotels.

Based on the results, it is concluded that the tangibles dimension of both hotels is still inadequate. There are many guests who complained about the lack of fulfillment of their needs during their stay. This shows that the tangibles dimension of the hotels has not been able to satisfy the demands of the staying guests.

**Empathy dimension**

The empathy dimension is a form of genuine and personal care to the customers/guests to indicate that they are special and that their needs are understood. Below are the data results obtained by the author regarding the valuations given by the guests who stayed in Jambura Inn and New Melati Hotel from the empathy dimension.

Table 3. *Data of guests' needs on the empathy dimension*

<b>Empathy-related Questions</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Provide care and service genuinely to the guests who come to stay	26	35,00
Always offer help to the guests	15	20,00
Always greet the guests	23	30,00
Capable of communicating well to the guests	11	15,00
<b>Total of Respondents</b>	<b>75</b>	

Source: Data processed by the Author

The table above depicts that both hotels have a suitable empathy dimension, with 35.00% of respondents saying that the hotels provided genuine care and service to the guests. Such is also in terms of hospitality—30.00% of respondents said that the staff greeted the guests at all times.

**Reliability dimension**

The reliability dimension is the capability of a company to provide services according to consumers' expectations regarding speed, punctuality, sympathy, and the likes. The reliability dimension can be measured through the data results obtained by the author as an attempt to find out guests' complaints about their needs in New Melati Hotel and Jambura Inn, as shown below.

Table 4. *Data regarding guests' needs on the reliability dimension*

<b>Reliability-related Questions</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
The appearance of the hotel facilities is in accordance with the kinds of services provided	15	21,00
Trustworthy and reliable	26	34,00
Staff provide service as promised	23	31,00
Convey information about promos and discounts clearly	11	14,00
<b>Total of Respondents</b>	<b>75</b>	

Source: Data processed by the Author

The table above shows that both hotels fulfill the reliability dimension as 34.00% of the respondents answered that these hotels aligned with their wishes in that they are trustworthy.

**Responsiveness dimension**

The responsiveness dimension is a company's ability to provide quick and precise services when fulfilling guests' needs and handle and overcome complaints well.

The responsiveness dimension emphasizes staff's speed in responding to demands, questions, and complaints regarding guests' needs.

Data obtained by the author concerning the responsiveness dimension possessed by Jambura Inn and New Melati Hotel are as follows:

Table 5. *Data regarding guests' needs on the responsiveness dimension*

<b>Responsive-ness-related Questions</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
The hotel is ready to provide services for 24 hours	23	30,00
Always be willing to help the guests	33	45,00
Respond to guests' demands quickly	19	25,00
<b>Total of Respondents</b>	<b>75</b>	

Source: Data processed by the Author

The table above shows that both hotels could meet the responsiveness dimension from the staff side with their readiness to help the guest. It is according to the number of respondents amounting to 45.00%.

### **Assurance dimension**

The assurance dimension is the guarantee and certainty obtained from the staff's courtesy, the management's ability to increase the guests' trust, and good communication paired with the knowledge possessed by the staff. In short, this dimension can be interpreted as the management's knowledge and hospitality to gain the guests' trust. Below are the data obtained by the author concerning assurance dimension found in Jambura Inn and New Melati Hotel.

Table 6. *Data regarding guests' needs on the assurance dimension*

<b>Assurance-related Questions</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Guests feel safe to leave their precious belongings in their rooms	30	40,00
Guests feel safe when transacting with the hotel staff	26	35,00
Guests feel safe to use hotel facilities	19	25,00
<b>Total of Respondents</b>	<b>75</b>	

Source: Data processed by the Author

The table above shows that both hotels could fulfill the assurance dimension in that guests felt safe leaving their precious belongings in their rooms, just as in the responses given by 40,00% of the respondents.

Besides researching using the survey method and distributing questionnaires, the author also used interviews to strengthen the questionnaire results—which were obtained first—regarding the needs of backpacker tourists while staying at non-star hotels in Gorontalo City.

According to the interview done with some staff in Jambura and New Melati Hotel, most of the guests staying at both hotels complain about the unavailability of food and beverage three times a day—not only breakfast, but they also need lunch and dinner at the hotel. If the guests need lunch or dinner, they have to wait longer due to the staff's slow response.

On the other hand, the guests are quite satisfied with the service of both hotels in terms of providing information about things related to tourism, such as tourist

destinations, culinary delights, souvenirs, and public transportation.

## DISCUSSION

### Tangible dimension

Tangible is one of the important contributing factors to customer satisfaction in the off-line context (Fang, Lu, & Dong, 2021). According to the data regarding tangible dimension, there are three kinds of guests' needs that are most required by the guests staying in New Melati Hotel and Jambura Inn, each of which is needed by 46.66%, 21.33%, and 17.033% of the guests.

Guests who need to eat three times to survive are as many as 46.66%. However, both hotels only provide breakfast due to the shortage of labor to fulfill said need. In this regard, the hotel should provide additional food and beverage services at the hotel. The hotel may prepare affordable room service by cooperating with food and beverage services near the hotel to ease and speed up the service.

As many as 21.33% of the guests need not only food but also heat pump water heaters. Both hotels only provide some heaters in certain room types with limited service time, which is at 06.00—09.00 AM and available again at 05.00—08.00 PM. Both hotel managements should provide the heat pump water heater facility in all room types for 24 hours. However, the managements have to increase the room rate during the guests' stay at the hotel.

Laundry is needed by 17.33% of the guests because the majority of the guests who stay are foreign guests who only bring a few items with them. That being said, the hotels do not provide laundry service. Both hotels should cooperate with laundry companies near them to make it easy for the guests so that they feel served while having their needs be met.

The data from the research on the empathy dimension shows that both hotels are not yet capable of fulfilling said dimension considering the ability of the staff to provide help at all times and communicate with the guests, especially in English. It is evident in the empathy dimension table, with only 20.00% of the guests responding to the staff's agility in offering help, while

15,00% felt that the staff in both hotels could communicate well with them.

Therefore, it can be ascertained that there is a connection between the two problems above, which is the staff's inability to speak English well corresponds with their reluctance to offer help to the guests. In order to minimize this issue, the management should conduct internal English training and evaluate it through the *English day program*, which is certain days in a week where all staff must speak English. They have to communicate in English with the guests, among themselves, and with the management. The management can also facilitate the staff to receive English language training by inviting English instructors from the outside.

### Reliability dimension

The study shows that both hotels have a reliability dimension that is not in accordance with the guests' expectations. There were 14.00% of guests who felt they were not informed on the promos or discounts available at both hotels. The fact that these promotion policies are made by the management means that they have to inform the staff regarding these promotions every day through morning briefings. As such, the staff may acquire accurate information regarding the programs run by the hotel so that they can relay them to the guests.

Both hotels also fall short in another area, just as 21.00% of the respondents. That is, there are contrasts between facilities offered in both hotels' profiles (be it the one uploaded on the internet or the one printed in brochures) with how they are like in person. One of them is the water heater facility which is said to be available in all rooms, while in reality, not all rooms are equipped with it.

### Responsiveness Dimension

The study suggests that for the responsiveness dimension, 25,00% of the guests said that the staff did not serve the guests swiftly. For example, when guests needed mineral water, the staff responded to

that, but they took a long time to send it to the guests' rooms. It is because both hotels only have a limited workforce. The management may anticipate it by instilling understanding to the staff to serve the guests well, even though the service that they have to do may not necessarily be their job desk or responsibility. Like the example given, the front office worker can give the mineral water from the stock in the back office to quicken the service. The shortage of staff is not an obstacle for the hotel to provide proper and precise service. The size of the hotel, the number of rooms, and the hotel classification are proportionate to the need for labor. Accordingly, both hotels, being non-star ones, do not require a large amount of labor. Every staff member can carry out light tasks that do not have to be done by staff with special skills.

### **Assurance dimension**

Indicated in the study is that both hotels are yet to fulfill the assurance dimension, especially in the assurance to use hotel facilities. Only 25,00% of the respondents said that they felt safe using both hotels' facilities. The guests were concerned when using electrical facilities—electric sockets in the rooms that are not fastened to the walls being one of them. The chance of a short circuit happening is enormous if the management does not repair them. Another rather unsafe facility is the stairs leading to the second floor of the hotel. The floors of the steps located outside of the rooms are not equipped with a rubber mat that when it rains the floors become very slippery. The management should equip the stairs with an anti-slip mat so that they do not endanger the guests and the staff who use them.

### **CONCLUSION**

As based on tangible needs, backpacker tourists need to eat three times a day, have heat pump water heater in their rooms and do laundry. There are basic needs for guests staying at the hotel. To meet such needs, the hotels may provide services by cooperating with another party, especially regarding meals three times a day and the laundry service. As for other needs that are service-oriented, such as empathy, reliability,

responsiveness, and assurance dimensions, the aspects were considered as good, although some aspects need to be improved.

In principle, backpacker tourists' needs are not much different from those of ordinary tourists, such as the need to eat and drink as explained before—they need to have facilities, as well as food and beverage services, be available while they are at their destination. As said by Maslow, physiological needs have to be met first before moving on to other needs. For tourists, food and drink are physiological needs that need to be met, although the hotel that they are staying at is a non-star one with limited facilities and services. It is what sets it apart from star hotels: food provided by non-star hotels is fairly cheap, just as their other facilities, but without reducing the taste of the food itself. Thus, although both hotels are non-star, they should provide facilities and food and beverage services to meet the guests' needs. That is also the case with hot water facility and laundry service, both of which are these tourists' needs. All five dimensions of service explained above should be improved for a better result. Non-star hotels should apply all five dimensions of service to satisfy the guests.

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