

**Seven important attributes that deliver the luxury
experience in Auckland's five-star hotels**

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Abstract

This study set out to answer the question, “what attributes of luxury hotels in Auckland do guests consider important when giving a five-star online rating on TripAdvisor?” The findings revealed seven important factors: personalised service, efficient staff, comfortable rooms, high standard of cleanliness, central location, facilities for relaxation and enjoyment, and beautiful ambience. These factors were present in both phases of the two-phase mixed-methods approach using netnography and semi-structured interviews. It was expected that the findings would reveal these important attributes, however, they extended understandings of luxury hotels beyond tangible aspects (e.g. cleanliness, central location), by indicating that experience is important in luxury hotels. Two original models on luxury hotel attributes are presented. The first framework, the Important Hotel Attributes (IHA) model (Figure 6), shows how the significant attributes of luxury hotels are interconnected. This model shows that guest perceptions, as well as benchmarking, influence how luxury hotel guests consider each attribute. The second framework, the Attributes Delivering the Luxury Experience (ADLE) model (Figure 7), is a blueprint of factors that lead to a luxury hotel experience. This adds new knowledge by defining high service quality as the combination of important attributes that bring satisfaction. These attributes were revealed as dynamic and supporting each other to provide satisfaction. Positive emotions were associated with the attributes of luxury hotels, and were key to delivering a holistic luxury hotel experience.

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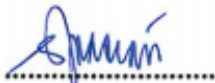
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Attestation of Authorship

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.



Sarah A. Mascariñas

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Ethics approval was granted by Auckland University of Technology, Ethics Committee, on 25th February 2019 and given the approval number 19/62.

Chapter One: Introduction

This study explores the attributes of Auckland's luxury hotels. This chapter firstly introduces the background to the study. Secondly, the problem statement highlights the scant amount of research that has focused on luxury hotel attributes from the guests' perspectives, despite New Zealand's flourishing tourism industry. Then, four research objectives that aim to address the gap in literature are explained, and the methodology and an overview of the thesis are briefly presented. Finally, the terms of reference are defined.

1.1 Background of the study

Tourism is flourishing in New Zealand, and Auckland's hotels are benefitting in a myriad of ways. Auckland is the leading region, with 585,000 guest nights in September 2018, up 6.1% from the previous year (Stats NZ, 2018). However, by 2025, Auckland will need at least 4,300 new hotel rooms (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, n.d.), which is a significant increase in demand from its four hotels in 1844, the Royal Hotel being the first (Christoffel, 2010). To maintain relevance in the highly competitive yet lucrative market, Auckland's luxury hotels need to promote a good online reputation and demonstrate hospitableness, as their guests are savvy international travellers and expect the very best.

1.1.1 The growth of the luxury hotel segment

Among the various hotel classifications, luxury hotels offer superior quality to guests who expect the "very best" (Walker, 2017). The Boston Consulting Group (2017) revealed that in 2017, global consumers spent USD663 billion on experiential luxury market, with almost 80% of that (USD515 billion) spent on hotels and exclusive vacations, a 9.5% increase from the previous year. The experiential luxury segment is forecast to account for almost two-thirds of the total luxury market by 2022.

New Zealand's luxury accommodation segment, as with the global market, is expected to continue growing. Luxury Tourism New Zealand (2017) stated that spending on luxury accommodation increased by 141%, up by 42% over the five-year period ending in March 2017. A strategy targeting luxury guests was developed by the Government in 2013, ensuring that its hospitality segment stays at the forefront of the luxury market ("Premium," 2017).

1.1.2 Development of five-star hotels in Auckland

Auckland currently boasts the highest concentration of high-end hotels (Fitch Solutions, 2019). In 2021, the city will host two high profile events: the 36th America's Cup, and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (Penn, 2017), which will attract prominent personalities seeking first class accommodation. More four and five-star hotel brands are scheduled to open: Park Hyatt by the end of 2019, Pullman Auckland Airport in 2021, and Ritz Carlton in 2022 ("Auckland hotel pipeline," 2018).

Luxury hotels demand the highest price (Walker, 2017), so luxury guests may have higher expectations because they pay a premium. Luxury hotels in New Zealand are in a highly competitive yet lucrative market. If they want to satisfy their guests, they need to be aware of how to meet or exceed their guests' expectations. As their guests are generally sophisticated international travellers ("Premium," 2017), these hotels need to remain relevant by promoting a good online reputation and demonstrating a high standard of hospitality. Therefore, this study is primarily focused on the main considerations that guests have when staying in Auckland's luxury hotels. Understanding what guests are looking for is important if luxury hotels want to maintain a competitive edge.

1.2 Problem statement

This study explores the research question:

What attributes of luxury hotels in Auckland do guests consider important when giving a five-star rating on TripAdvisor?

When data were collected for this research, Auckland had seven luxury hotels. Such limited options for high-end accommodation present Auckland with untapped opportunities, but also represents a weakness in failing to capitalise on the lucrative luxury travel market. This also draws attention to parallel realities in terms of scant research, as reflected in Chu, Tang, and Luo's (2016) review of luxury hotel research from 1994 to 2013, which included just one academic journal article from New Zealand. Previous literature on New Zealand's luxury hotels mainly focused on sustainability (Cheyne & Barnett, 2001), human resources (Brien, Ratna, & Boddington, 2012; Haynes & Fryer, 2001), and experience (Harkison, 2016, 2018). Only one study has explored the attributes of luxury hotels in Auckland (Harkison, 2016). Therefore, this study's four research objectives aim to address this gap by identifying these attributes.

1.3 Research purpose

This study's first objective was to gain insights into how luxury hotel guests generally perceive and understand the attributes of a hotel. The second objective was to identify the most important factors, and the third objective was to understand why they are important. The final objective was to provide an understanding of these attributes to hotel management, as Auckland is expecting more luxury hotels to open ("Auckland hotel pipeline," 2018).

The findings of this research are valuable, as they position luxury hotels to anticipate and meet (or exceed) guest expectations to maintain a competitive advantage. The practical implications may also guide management to uphold or augment luxury hotels' online reputations. In addition, this study adds to the existing body of literature on hospitality studies, and presents directions and suggestions for future research.

1.4 Methodology

This was an interpretivist qualitative study using a mixed methods approach in data collection and analysis. Phase one employed netnography, using TripAdvisor as a data source. A total of 456 online reviews were gathered from postings made between December 2018 and March 2019, which was this study's timeline. The contents of these were analysed to reveal the hotel attributes that guests found significant, which facilitated in formulating the questions for Phase two. The second interview phase was required for an in-depth exploration into why the attributes were important. Interviews were conducted with 16 participants from three luxury hotels (until no new themes were discovered) and data were analysed thematically. Part of the interviews asked guests how they defined a luxury hotel or what came to mind when "luxury hotel" was mentioned. In answering these questions, the guests' perceptions and expectations were illuminated as they narrated their lived experiences of staying in an Auckland luxury hotel.

1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis is presented in seven chapters. Following the introduction, key concepts covered in literature are reviewed in Chapter two, which establishes the theoretical background to this research topic. In Chapter three, the interpretivist qualitative research philosophy employed is explained first, after which the methods of data collection and analysis are discussed. The findings from each of the phases are explained separately, with the first phase findings in Chapter four and the second phase findings in Chapter

five. These are discussed in Chapter six by comparing and contrasting the findings with the extant literature. Finally, Chapter seven revisits the research question, provides a summary of the findings, explains the implications of the findings, presents the limitations and suggestions for future research, and presents concluding remarks.

1.6 Scope and terms of reference

This research uses the terms “attributes,” “beautiful,” “emotion,” “experience,” “hospitality,” “guest satisfaction,” “luxury hotel,” and “luxury hotel experience” throughout. For the purpose of this research, these terms are defined as follows.

Attributes

Factors that identify a travellers’ hotel selection. The priorities that the guests place on these factors determine their satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the hotel (Cadotte & Tugeon, 1988).

Beautiful

Quality environment of both external (location) and internal (décor, etc.) aspects that elicit emotional well-being, which enhances guest satisfaction and promotes guest retention (Han, Moon, & Hyun, 2019).

Emotions

The profound feelings expressed by consumers as they connect with their luxury experience (Danziger, 2005).

Hospitality

The act of hospitableness seen as an experience co-created between guests and staff (as it is staff who look after the guests’ welfare) (Harkison, 2016).

Guest satisfaction

That which elicits compliments when expectations are met or exceeded (Dittmer, 2002).

Luxury hotel in New Zealand

A five-star hotel with facilities and services that are amongst the best that New Zealand has to offer (Qualmark, 2019a).

Luxury hotel experience

An extraordinary and memorable experience, “enveloping the guest, engaging their senses in order for them to embrace something unique“ (Harkison et al., 2018, p. 240).

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter begins with an overview of hospitality and hospitableness. It then explains the luxury concept and the development of luxury hotels. This is followed by detailing the characteristics and experience of luxury hotels, and a discussion of guest satisfaction. Next, online channels for guest feedback are explained, including the hotel attributes that are common in online reviews. The chapter concludes by highlighting the gap in the knowledge of Auckland's luxury hotel attributes.

2.2 Hospitality and hospitableness

It is important to review how hospitality is defined, its scope, and the progress of hospitality research, as this study belongs to the hospitality discipline and aims to contribute new knowledge to it. The literature indicates the challenge in attempting to give a singular definition to hospitality. Hospitality is the provision of services to people who are away from home (Chon & Maier, 2010; Ninemeier & Perdue, 2008). This definition conveys the idea that the basic elements of hospitality are food, beverage, and lodgings. However, some researchers include leisure and gaming in the scope of the hospitality industry, aside from food, beverage, and accommodation (Knowles, 1998; Reisinger, 2011). Walker (2017) incorporated the segments of travel, lodging, event management, restaurants and managed services, and recreation as part of the hospitality industry.

2.2.1 Advancement of hospitality studies

Interest in hospitality has gained scholarly advancement (Rivera & Pizam, 2015), with Morrison (2018) concluding that the future of hospitality studies is one that is intellectually diverse and consciously inclusive of different methods. As reflected in its overlaps with tourism, hospitality studies are found in different disciplines, each of which frames hospitality in rather distinct ways (Brotherton, 1999). Thus, hospitableness, or the act of being hospitable, is often used to define hospitality (Brotherton, 1999). Lashley (2015) stated that authentic hospitality is borne out of a desire to be hospitable to others without expectations of reciprocity or compensation. Hospitality can be viewed from a historical perspective, as an honourable obligation, whereby social courtesies are extended to accommodate and protect a stranger in one's home (King, 1995; O'Gorman, 2007a). Derrida (2005) encapsulated hospitality as a

political concept embracing citizenship and immigration, stating two positions: welcoming a stranger into one's home, and welcoming a foreigner into a country that is not his or her own. Anthropologists have also approached hospitality by its cultural roots, drawing attention to how kinships and hostilities are developed (Selwyn, 2000). Regardless of how hospitality is framed, definitions share the common theme of stating that the priority is the guest-host relationship.

Studies that are centred on the business aspects of hospitality reject this guest-host relationship, arguing that a provider-consumer relationship is more relevant, as the exchange is focused on economic rather than on social motives (Aramberri, 2001; Lugosi, 2009). In the commercial realm, it is viewed as the exchange of food, drink, and accommodation (Brotherton, 1999; Walton, 2000), being further recognised as an experience (Hemmington, 2007), because hospitality occurs in people's lived experiences (O'Gorman, 2007b). Harkison (2016) further defined hospitality as the act of hospitableness seen as an experience co-created between guests and staff, as it is the staff who look after the guests' welfare. Experiences lead to guest satisfaction, as guests find a greater need for personalisation, comfort, and genuine encounters (Ariffin et al., 2018).

Apart from the on-going debate about perception, scope, or definition, hospitality, in relation to its work and organisations, has also been identified by scholars as a major topic of inquiry. For example, hotels have served to highlight labour issues such as the unequal power relations in career structures (Mooney, Ryan, & Harris, 2017). Ritz-Carlton's best practices have been used as models of organisational behaviour (Alsabbagh & Ahmad, 2013; Michelli, 2008), and hospitality service skills (or hospitableness) are applied in health care management (Zygourakis, Rolston, Kliot, Treadway, & Chang, 2014). Additionally, the process flow of McDonalds was extended by Ritzer (2019) to reflect the behavioural tendency of society to rationalise. More recently, literature has highlighted how hospitality companies have captured customer engagement in promoting experience as a product (Harkison, 2016). These are just a few illustrations of how hospitality studies and research on aspects of hospitality have extended to other sectors of the economy (Rivera & Pizam, 2015).

2.2.2 Hotels as more than accommodation providers

A hotel is a component of the hospitality industry that provides accommodation (lodgings) to guests. Walker (2017) offered its most simplistic description, as a place with rooms for people to sleep in when they are away from home. While this may be

true in essence, people have different requirements of lodging arrangements. For some, these extend beyond the provision of a bed to include other facilities. Kim, Kim, King, and Heo (2019) explained that hotels have a two-fold purpose, to satisfy both the physical expectation of providing a good product (the room) and the psychological expectation of good service (appropriate “delivery” of the room). Hotels are part of the hospitality industry and have the goal of meeting and exceeding the expectations of guests (Barrows, Powers, & Reynolds, 2012; Zygourakis et al., 2014). It is likely under this premise, that hotels have evolved to accommodate the different preferences of guests, not just as a product, but also with an expected level of service (Kotler, Bowen, Makens, & Baloglu, 2017).

2.2.3 The absence of a universal hotel rating system

Hotels are commonly classified by location, size (number of rooms), types of services, or rate (price). Although hotels in some countries, such as New Zealand, are rated for quality by their government agencies (Qualmark, 2019a), there are two well-known private organisations that publish rating guides (Leung, Au, Liu, & Law, 2018; Ninemeier & Perdue, 2008; Walker, 2017). These are *The tour book of the American Automobile Association* (AAA) and the *Forbes travel guide* (formerly *Mobil travel guide*).

Table 1 summarises the rating guides of AAA, Forbes, and Qualmark. The first column reflects the rank, with the five-star/diamond level (including luxury hotels) at the topmost tier. The second column shows the diamond rating of the AAA classification. The star ratings for the *Forbes travel guide* are in the third column, and the last column is for New Zealand’s Qualmark.

Table 1: Hotel grading systems

Rank	Diamond Rating (AAA)	Star Rating (<i>Forbes travel guide</i>)	Star Rating (New Zealand's Qualmark)
5.	Hotels showing an impeccably high level of sophistication and excellence, in terms of both facilities and operations. These hotels tend to exceed guest expectations. The physical attributes of the hotel are striking and luxurious.	Hotels that are considered to be one of the best in the country. These elite hotels rank superior in every area of the rating system, as compared to the other hotels.	Hotels with facilities and services that are amongst the best that New Zealand has to offer.
4.	Hotels that display high levels of service and hospitality, with much attention to detail, and offering upscale facilities and a variety of other amenities. They give the guests what they need, even before the guests ask.	Hotels are characterised as luxurious, with much attention to detail. The guests' comfort and convenience are of utmost concern. They are considered to be outstanding hotels worthy of a special trip.	Hotels that consistently provide high levels of facilities and service to guests.
3.	Hotels offering considerable upgrades in amenities, services, and facilities, which ensure a comfortable stay. Physically, these hotels have good curb appeal, design, and landscaping.	Hotels that are considered to be excellent, offering an excellent accommodation experience.	Hotels offering good to very good facilities and services.
2.	Hotels that satisfy the requirements of one-diamond, with added enhancements in room décor and additional furnishings. These hotels offer more than the basic lodging needs.	Hotels that satisfy the requirements of one-star, with the added offering of a restaurant, swimming pool, and room service. They are considered to be very good hotels.	Hotels that exceed the minimum requirements of guests.
1.	Hotels meeting minimum requirements. They are clean, comfortable, and well maintained.	Hotels that offer good, better than average, yet modest accommodations.	Hotels with facilities and service that meet the minimum requirements of guests.

Source: Data in columns 2 and 3 from Ninemeier and Perdue (2008), data in column 4 from Qualmark (2019a).

2.3 The concept of luxury

The literature on luxury hotels provides a contextual understanding of this study's research topic. The topic "luxury" appears to be multi-discursive, with various interpretations when applied in different contexts and cultures (Francesco & Roberta,

2019). This means that what one person perceives as a necessity, can be viewed as a fulfilment of desire by another person. Historically, luxury traces its roots to the early development of capitalism, when people had the means to buy more than their needs (Armitage & Roberts, 2016). Luxury products were therefore purchased not merely for their functional purpose (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). It was from this shift in consumer preferences, that the hospitality industry responded with luxury hotels (Sturken, 2018).

2.3.1 The development of luxury hotels

Luxury hotels were elevated from what was once primarily a product-based focus, to prioritising the creation of memories, which ushered in exceptional experiences for guests (Harkison, 2016; Knutson & Beck, 2003; Sturken, 2018). In a luxury hotel, the enjoyment of service is enhanced through consumer experience, instead of just through consumption (Danziger, 2005). Therefore, value goes beyond the utility of service in luxury hotels (Hennigs, Wiedmann, Klarmann, & Behrens, 2015).

There does not seem to be a universal rating system or general definition in classifying luxury hotels. As previously suggested, the rating guides of AAA, Forbes, and New Zealand's Qualmark, place five-diamond/star honours on just the *crème de la crème* of hotels, which represent the highest level of sophistication and class (Ninemeier & Perdue, 2008; Qualmark, 2019a). Luxury hotels are recognised as excellent hotels of the highest standards (Peng & Chen, 2019). Thus, one can argue that the five-diamond/star classification applies to luxury hotels. An obvious difference is the superiority of product in relation to the size of accommodation, space allocation, and the quality of furnishings (Dittmer, 2002). However, in luxury hotels, the physical differences are transcended with supplementary features, with what Harkison (2016) referred to as "opulence" (p. 108) in exhibiting both tangible and intangible features.

Ritz-Carlton, the luxury brand of Marriott International, was the first hospitality company to be given the recognition of achieving excellence, by observing quality improvement programmes (Nixon & Rieple, 2010). The values and philosophy that Ritz-Carlton operates upon are specified in its "Gold Standards," which encompass six areas, namely the organisation's credo, motto, three steps to service, service values, the 6th diamond, and the employee promise (The Ritz-Carlton, n.d.). Most notable amongst these core principles is Ritz-Carlton's simple motto: "We are ladies and gentlemen serving ladies and gentlemen," which sets the elegant standard of behaviour expected (Alsabbagh & Ahmad, 2013).

2.3.2 Common attributes of luxury hotels

It has been stated that luxury hotels are classified as excellent hotels with the highest standards. Their common characteristics, as stated in the literature, are well-trained and highly engaging staff (Bagnera, 2017; Cetin & Walls, 2016), quality service delivery (Bojanic, 1996; Qu, Ryan, & Chu, 2000; Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011), high quality facilities and amenities (Barrows et al., 2012; Knutson & Beck, 2003; Walls, 2013), premium prices (Harkison et al., 2018; Kimes & Ho, 2018), and a luxury hotel experience (Harkison, 2016; Low, 2012). These are discussed in the next section, and the luxury hotel experience is explained separately in the following section (Section 2.4).

Attribute 1: Carefully trained staff

Luxury hotels are exceptional hotels that facilitate memorable experiences, through carefully trained staff who are intuitive, engaging, and passionately eager to deliver service above and beyond the guest's expectations (Walker, 2017). The staff's service encounters with guests usually begin with structured and often rehearsed sequences of verbal exchange (Scerri, Jenkins, & Lovell, 2017). However, the staff are able to build guest relationships by being flexible and varying the reaction depending on the situations that may occur in encounters (Walls et al., 2011). This adaptability, perhaps effected by training, seemingly suggests that the staff are a critical component of luxury hotels (Harkison, 2016).

The amount of time staff are able to spend with guests is crucial in providing a personalised encounter, which may bestow a higher level of esteem for a luxury guest (Hung, 2018; Low, 2012). The ratio between employees and guests is high (Barrows et al., 2012; Brien et al., 2012), making it conducive for well-trained and efficient staff (Chon & Maier, 2010) to be highly engaging and interactive with guests (Harkison et al., 2018). Engagement refocuses the mindset of "what tasks employees do," into an experience mindset prioritising "how the tasks are performed" (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

Attribute 2: High quality service

Quality service is synonymous with luxury hotels (Kim et al., 2019; Walls et al., 2011). Guests clamour for more personalisation, which luxury hotels are able to provide (Danziger, 2005). This kind of customised service can only begin by knowing about the guests (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). With an experience mindset, quality service is recognised as distinctive service (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), and is customised (Hung, 2018). This means that service is geared towards excelling at every opportunity

(Walker, 2017). Luxury hotels excel in fitting the needs of the guests to the services that they provide (Harkison 2016; Kimes & Ho, 2017).

Service quality is the most significant factor affecting the selection of luxury hotels (Low, 2012). A high level of service is standard for luxury hotels (Kim et al., 2019). Service, not the product, has the most impact on guests' perceptions about their experience (Cetin & Walls, 2016), and has a positive a positive impact on satisfaction in luxury hotels (Allan, 2016; Madar, 2014). However, when service standards fail in meeting guest expectations, service failure can be attributed to staff's inexperience or unprofessionalism (Al-alak, 2011; Ekiz, Khoo-Lattimore, & Memarzadeh, 2012). It appears also that disparity in the emphasis of attributes, between hotel employees and guests, can also affect the delivery of service (Cetin & Walls, 2016; Hussain & Khanna, 2019) (guest satisfaction with service quality in luxury hotels is discussed in Section 2.5).

Attribute 3: *Beautiful* environment

This study considered the aesthetic appeal of luxury hotels as "*beautiful*." "*Beautiful*" refers to a quality environment with both external (location) and internal (décor, etc.) aspects that elicit emotional well-being, enhancing guest satisfaction and promoting guest retention (Han, Moon, & Hyun, 2019). Luxury hotels are considered to be the very best hotels in the world, and are not restricted to a particular location. They can be in a resort area, at the heart of a city, or in a secluded place.

Physically, luxury hotels are exquisite, featuring upscale décor and furnishings, while offering a full range of services and amenities (Barrows et al., 2012). At the forefront of thinking about the hotel design is the desire to offer guests comfort, so attention is particularly given to artistry and product quality (Walker, 2017). Hospitality managers seem to recognise aesthetics as part of the appeal of luxury hotels (Low, 2012). Thibaud (2002) cited this psychophysical manifestation as the instrument by which perceptions of ambience can be measured. He explained it further by stating that ambience is the "immediate sentiment and bodily feeling, attributing value to the aesthetic side" (p.4). Although seemingly depicting extreme opulence, Armitage and Roberts (2016) stated that luxury is "neither economic nor materialistic but psychological, stimulating and energetic" (p. 11).

Attribute 4: Premium pricing

Luxury hotels are known to cater to every need of guests and typically charge higher than average room rates (Cetin & Walls, 2016; Walker 2017). Premium prices are

justified by providing the highest level of products and services (Ninemeier & Perdue, 2008; Wu & Yang, 2018). Harkison et al. (2018) found that a premium price is likely to be accepted if a hotel's facilities and amenities are of the highest quality, the staff display high levels of interaction and engagement with their guests, and lastly, the hotel is able to make guests feel at home while still presenting a "wow factor." This finding supports the findings of Hennigs et al. (2015), who observed that guests are willing to pay the premium price associated with luxury hotels, when they recognise the value of the design and service delivery. The perceived value is what matters most in luxury hotels (Kimes & Ho, 2018).

2.4 Luxury hotel experience

Luxury hotel guests are more discerning than others, with higher expectations (Qu et al., 2000). Distinctive to luxury hotels is the notion that luxury accommodation is complemented by luxury experience (Harkison, 2016). Hence, luxury hotels are redefining themselves as sources of memories, rather than as mere service providers (Knutson & Beck, 2003). A luxury experience is extraordinary, "enveloping the guest, engaging their senses in order for them to embrace something unique" (Harkison et al., 2018, p. 240). Sturken (2018) described the unique memorable experiences that luxury hotels create for their guests, as meaningful, memory-making, and authentic.

2.4.1 The appeal of a luxury hotel experience

It is common practice for luxury hotels to employ brand storytelling to convey what their brand stands for (essence), and to integrate it into its offerings (Wu & Liang, 2009). This effectively ushers in a story-based experience for guests (Ryu, Lehto, Gordon, & Fu, 2018), which provides a smooth and meaningful interface between guests, products, and employees. Crafting memorable experiences is linked to a luxury hotel's destination, immersing guests in a city's unique offerings (Sturken, 2018). For example, luxury guests may no longer be satisfied with enjoying traditional ramen in a Japanese luxury hotel. Instead, providing a memorable experience may require guests being taught the art of ramen making by a master chef, before their meal. Authenticity is a paramount ingredient of experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

Danziger (2005), in explaining luxury consumption (of which luxury hotel stays are a part), stated that the yearning to expand one's insight through experiences, addresses the need for self-actualisation. In customising services, experiences are generated, which consequently leads to transformation (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). Furthermore, experience

is co-created, and it is the staff who play the pivotal role in what may be unique to luxury accommodation (Harkison et al., 2018). This experience is facilitated by personal engagement, constantly providing outstanding service from the time of a guest's arrival until departure. Service in luxury hotels includes an enduring connection with guests, as it provides emotional attachment (Peng & Chen, 2019). Thus, an enjoyable stay usually becomes a memorable experience (Pine & Gilmore, 2011).

2.4.2 Personal and subjective nature

The physical environment of luxury hotels and human interaction (with other guests or employees) constitutes the guest experience (Cetin & Walls, 2016). Walls et al. (2011) suggested that the personal characteristics of guests (personality, travel experience, expectation, sensitivity) and trip-related factors (purpose of trip, type of travel companion, nature of hotel product) have an impact on the luxury experience. The multiplicity of these dimensions influence how people perceive their experiences (Pine & Gilmore, 2011). As such, every guest perceives an experience differently. Therefore, experience is highly personal and subjective (Danziger, 2005); individual interpretation of experiences differ, so individuals will not have the same experience (Walls et al., 2011).

2.4.3 Positive emotions

A distinguishing factor of the experiential market, to which luxury hotels belong, is how experiences bring profound feelings to consumers (Danziger, 2005). The aesthetic appeal of a luxury hotel generates excitement (Su & Reynolds, 2019). It appears that the quality environment of luxury hotels, as discussed earlier (Section 2.3.2), illuminates the relationship between luxury and embodiment (Armitage & Roberts, 2016). Low (2012) explained it further by explaining, "central to hospitality is its experiential nature, and in a luxury setting the experience is enhanced and embodied through elements such as 'fresh' towels, 'crisp' linen and 'soft' pillows" (p. 188). These sensory elements act as emotional drivers (Han et al., 2019; Thibaud, 2002). It appears that pleasure is experienced in luxury hotels, which is a key motivator in decisions to select (Wu & Yang, 2018). In addition, positive emotions generate hotel attachment, a conduit for repeat stays (Peng & Chen, 2019).

2.5 Guest satisfaction in experiencing luxury hotels

Guest satisfaction in luxury hotels produces a positive effect, as pleasure (Low, 2012). This means that satisfied guests are more likely to feel positively about their experience.

As luxury hotel guests are more discerning than others, they tend to have higher expectations (Leung et al., 2018; Qu et al., 2000), thus, satisfaction is achieved when guests can compare their experience positively with a previous one (Lai & Hitchcock, 2017). Travellers, on a repeat visit, draw their expectations from what is familiar to them during their past stays (Lai & Hitchcock, 2017). In the experience construct proposed by Knutson and Beck (2003), satisfaction is part of the post-experience stage, in which guests respond positively when either “confirming-disconfirming” or “comparing-to-ideal” an experience. Lastly, in comparing customer satisfaction between first time and repeat visitors, Lai and Hitchcock (2017) revealed that experiencing something new would make first time visitors more likely to be easily satisfied. They further explained that visitors, who experienced satisfaction during their first stay, are more likely to return, motivated by the familiarity of what has now become their accustomed standard. Therefore, service perception is formed from past experiences, which influences satisfaction.

2.5.1 The positive impact of service quality on guest satisfaction

High service quality is one of the common attributes of luxury hotels (see Section 2.3.2). The relationship between service quality and guest satisfaction has been extensively explored by scholars. For example, satisfaction is significantly influenced by service quality in luxury hotels (Lu et al., 2015), which can lead to guest retention (Lai & Hitchcock, 2017), and is a predictor of guest satisfaction (Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Ramseook-Munhurrin & Naidoo, 2011).

2.5.2 SERVQUAL: Model that measures service quality

There is a perceived challenge for hospitality companies in determining service quality objectively because service is intangible (Knutson, Stevens, Wullaert, Patton, & Yokoyama, 1990). The importance of service quality to guest satisfaction has been the main focus of a number of studies. Amongst the models, SERVQUAL (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988) is arguably one of the most recognised service quality measurement instruments, as it has been widely adopted across different sectors, such as banking (Liang & Pei-Ching, 2015; Ramseook-Munhurrin & Naidoo, 2011), healthcare (Al-Neyadi, Abdallah, & Malik, 2018), and tourism and hospitality (Ganiyu, 2016; Pomegbe, Dogbe, Sarsah, & Otoo; 2019). This model has also served as the theoretical basis of a number of luxury hotel studies (Allan, 2016; Debasish & Dey, 2015; Madar, 2014).

The SERVQUAL model identifies five dimensions of service quality, namely reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy, and responsiveness in measuring satisfaction (Parasuraman et al., 1988) (Figure 1). It is still applied in many research studies, despite criticisms from authors, who question the generalisability of the dimensions and its psychometric properties (Carman, 1990; Cronin & Taylor, 1994; Lam, 1997). Knutson et al. (1990) adopted the SERVQUAL model for the lodging industry (LODGSERV), and the LODGSERV index provides support for Parasuraman et al.'s (1988) five generic constructs of service quality. In identifying specific service gaps, Angur et. al. (1999) and Dey (2015) determined that SERVQUAL offered greater practicality, while Curry and Sinclair (2002) found it useful for understanding consumer priorities and assessing service performance. Other researchers have also established the reliability of the model in their studies (e.g. Al-Neyadi et al., 2018; Lonial, Menezes, Tarim, Tatoglu, & Zaim, 2010; Marković et al., 2013).

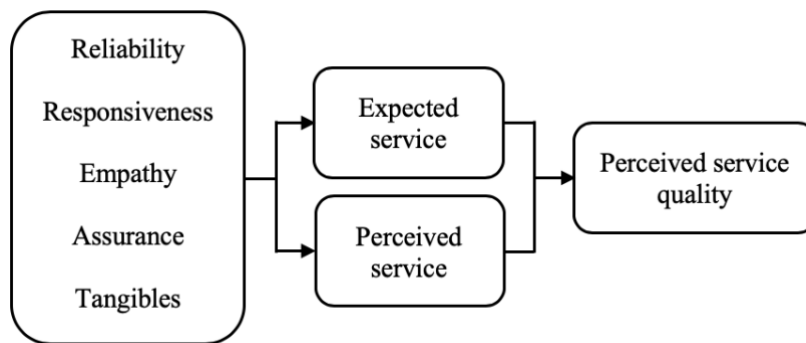


Figure 1: SERVQUAL Model (Parasuraman et al., 1988). Reprinted from “Service Quality Measurements: A Review,” by A. R. Ghotbabadi, S. Feiz and R. Baharun, 2015, *International Journal of Academic Research in Business and Social Sciences*, 5(2), p.276. Copyright 2015 by Human Resource Management Academic Research Society.

2.6 The prevalence of online guest feedback

As the current study uses netnography as a research method in Phase one, it is important to understand the emergence of online reviews. The conventional way of collecting feedback is to ask a guest to fill in a comment card. Now, online review sites are the prevalent channel for guest feedback (Ekiz et al., 2012), with 90% of general managers reviewing information from online review sites daily (Torres, Adler, Behnke, Miao, & Lehto, 2015). Typically, online reviews solicit ratings first with a star value (with five as the highest) and a written comment (Banerjee & Chua, 2016). A hotel receiving a five-star rating in an online review is commonly recognised as excellent and of high quality (Filiari, Raguseo, & Vitari, 2018). Online ratings are considered highly trustworthy, and show high levels of integrity (Dickinger, 2011). Therefore, a hotel's

online reputation is regarded with great importance (Garrido-Moreno & Lockett, 2016). Online reviews are far more reaching than are others, seemingly having more permanence, and omnipresence on the internet.

2.6.1 Comparisons of different online review sites

Hotel online review sites include TripAdvisor, Booking.com, Agoda, and Ctrip. TripAdvisor is considered the most relevant online review site for hotels (Garrido-Moreno & Lockett, 2016; Torres et al., 2015). As one of the world's leading online travel sites, it provides a platform for posting online reviews on accommodation experiences. According to *TripAdvisor Strategic Insights & Oxford Economics* (2017), global tourism in 2017 was valued at USD5.29 trillion, with TripAdvisor contributing USD546 billion.

Popular online review sites, such as TripAdvisor, also provide their own star rating for hotels listed on their websites, usually with their own proprietary algorithms. Leung et al. (2018) found that TripAdvisor's proprietary ratings was identical with the travellers' star ratings. In comparing Booking.com and TripAdvisor, Bandi and Hämmerli (2018) identified TripAdvisor as the source with the highest perceptions of credibility and trust. They further stated that users comply more with the suggestions given on a TripAdvisor review because they trust its usefulness. These reasons suggest that TripAdvisor is a meaningful source of data, and therefore, is considered appropriate for this study. The data collection process using TripAdvisor as a source is explained in Chapter three.

2.6.2 TripAdvisor as a data source for research

Several research studies have utilised TripAdvisor as a meaningful source of data. The significant findings from some of these studies suggest both theoretical and practical implications for hotel management, in relation to brand equity (Soler & Gémard, 2017), brand loyalty (Litvin & Dowling, 2016), customer profile (Banerjee & Chua, 2016; Chang, Ku, & Chen, 2017), effects of extreme ratings (Filieri, Raguseo, & Vitari, 2018), a hotel's offline popularity (Xie, Chen, & Wu, 2016), management response behaviour (Xie, Kwok, & Wang, 2017), power distance (Gao, Li, Liu, & Fang, 2018), and numerical ratings (Tsao, Chen, Lin, & Ma, 2018). On the other hand, there are a few scholars who note the potential for manipulation of online reviews posted on TripAdvisor (e.g. Gössling, Hall, & Andersson, 2018; Mayzlin, Dover, & Chevalier, 2014; Schuckert, Liu, & Law, 2016).

2.7 Hotel attributes that are common on online reviews

This study employs a two-phased mixed methods approach: netnography and semi-structured interviews. Phase one uses TripAdvisor online reviews in identifying the significant attributes. The second interview phase provides in-depth understanding on why the attributes are important for luxury guests. The attributes of luxury hotels have been discussed previously (see Section 2.3.2). Table 2 summarises the common hotel attributes revealed by a number of studies that used TripAdvisor as a data source. The third column provides a definition, and the relevant authors are identified in the last column.

Table 2: Common hotel attributes and their definitions

No	Hotel Attribute	Definition	Authors
1.	Cleanliness	Cleanliness is part of the multi-sensory cues that influence guest experience. It appears consistently amongst the hotel attributes that guests consider important and is therefore a mitigating factor in providing guest satisfaction.	Dinçer & Alrawadieh, 2017; Kim et al., 2019; Lockyer, 2002; Zaman, Botti, & Thanh, 2016.
2.	Facilities	Physical facilities enhance guest comfort and relaxation.	Chon & Maier, 2010; Dittmer, 2002.
3.	Location	It is the actual location of the hotel that is an unchangeable attribute and a determining factor that contributes to guests' satisfaction.	Bagnera, 2017; Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014; Li, Law, Huy, Rong, & Zhao, 2015; Liu, Law, Rong, Li, & Hall, 2013; Lockyer, 2005; Yang, Mao, & Tang, 2018.
4.	Room	The style of a hotel room and its facilities are core attributes contributing to customer satisfaction. The room is therefore an essential part of providing a positive customer experience.	Alrawadieh & Law, 2019; Bagnera, 2017; Liu et al., 2013; Sanchez-Franco, Navarro-Garcia, & Rondan-Cataluña, 2016; Slevitch & Oh, 2010.
5.	Staff	It is the attitude, knowledge, or skill that an employee demonstrates while interacting with guest that imparts professionalism, attentiveness, customisation, and a positive attitude.	Bagnera, 2017; Cetin & Walls, 2016.
6.	Service	Bagnera (2017) defined service as “amenities, and conveniences offered by hotels ... e.g., room upgrade, late check-out” (p. 6), which is a perceived value that in recent years has been considered by guests as an important hotel attribute.	Bagnera, 2017; Bojanic, 1996; Li et al., 2015.

No	Hotel Attribute	Definition	Authors
7.	Value for money	Value is the relationship between price and quality in which the latter is dependent on the guest's perception, and therefore facilitates satisfaction. In luxury hotels, the perceived balance between premium prices and luxury experiences creates value.	Bagnera, 2017; Bojanic, 1996; Liu et al., 2013; Lu, Berchoux, Marek, & Chen, 2015; Wu & Yang, 2018.

2.7.1 The subjectivity of hotel attributes

Data in Table 2 suggest that hotel attributes seem to satisfy guests in different ways. Similarly, guests' perceptions of the importance of each of the attributes vary, according to Ap and Sandiford (1998) and Kim et al. (2019). Furthermore, these authors also posited that purpose of travel, gender, income, and frequency of luxury hotel stays are influencing factors.

As such, it is likely that the attributes of luxury hotels are perceived and emphasised differently (Francesco & Roberta, 2019). The subjectivity of perceptions about hotel attributes is supported in the literature. Some of the findings stated that staff were the most important attribute (e.g. Banerjee & Chua, 2016; Qu et al., Ryan, 2000). However for Indian guests, service was the most praised aspect (Baber & Kaurav, 2015) as it was for Brazilians (Limberger, Anjos, Meira, & Anjos, 2014). Russian travellers in Hong Kong hotels seemed to value location the most (Tolkach & Tse, 2016). On the other hand, research by Zaman et al. (2016) showed that cleanliness, value for money, and location were top priorities for Parisian guests. Guests in Portugal suggested that service and room were the most notable attributes (Pacheco, 2017), and hotel guests in New Zealand considered location and price as the top attributes (Lockyer, 2005).

In the context of luxury hotels, guests in the United States (USA) suggested that value for money does not have an impact, and instead considered rooms and overall variables as critical attributes (Bagnera, 2017). In contrast, Chinese (Wu & Yang, 2018) and Taiwanese guests (Lu et al., 2015) seemed to recognise value for money as an important consideration. For Malaysian guests, room, staff, service, and location were the most significant attributes (Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014). Guests from the USA considered cleanliness, bed, and service to be their top priority in luxury hotels (Kim et al., 2019). The current study determines which hotel attributes of luxury hotels in Auckland guests consider important.

2.8 The gap in knowledge about Auckland's luxury hotel attributes

Reviewing literature on hospitality and hospitableness is important, as this study aims to contribute new knowledge to hospitality research. This chapter has explained the development of the luxury concept and the growth of luxury hotels in Auckland, as the city prepares for more tourist arrivals in the future. It has also reviewed common hotel attributes in the extant literature, and discussed guest satisfaction, and online reviews.

Studies that have focused on luxury hotels in New Zealand have explored sustainability (Cheyne & Barnett, 2001), human resources (Brien, Ratna, & Boddington, 2012; Haynes & Fryer, 2001), and experience (Harkison, 2016, 2018). Only three studies to date have examined hotel attributes; two of these considered hotels across all segments (Lockyer, 2002, 2005), and one was specific to luxury hotels (Harkison, 2016).

There is much to be gained by understanding luxury hotel guests in Auckland and in New Zealand generally. Findings from past studies seem to be consistent with the subjective nature of the hotel attributes. In addition, perceptions of guest satisfaction differ, due to the personal nature of a luxury experience. It appears that guest perceptions and expectations are contributing factors to a positive stay experience. Therefore, identifying what attributes matter to Auckland's luxury hotel guests may be important. Furthermore, it is likely that knowledge can be obtained by comparing or contrasting the findings of the current study with results from past studies. Therefore, the current research is timely.

This study aims to help overcome the sparseness in the literature, by identifying the hotel attributes that are specific to the luxury market in Auckland. A lack of scholarly interest in the New Zealand luxury segment is apparent, especially in comparison to that of other countries. This study answers the call of Chu et al. (2016), who undertook a review of two decades of luxury hotel research. The authors made an appeal for future researchers to employ more qualitative methods for understanding the luxury hotel segment better, which this research addresses. The best method is not to prioritise attributes (Lockyer, 2002). Lockyer (2005) revised the prioritisation approach by analysing in-depth primary data to gain a better understanding of the complexity of how guests view attributes. Therefore, this study has two phases, which are discussed in Chapter three. In employing a two-phase approach, the study responds to Lockyer (2002) and Chu et al.'s (2015) recommendations to combine different types of analysis for a more profound interpretation of the findings.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This study is divided into two phases using a mixed methods approach: netnography and semi-structured interviews. The themes gathered for Phase one were the basis for Phase two's interview questions. This chapter begins by firstly explaining that this is an interpretive qualitative study. Secondly, the population and the use of purposive sampling are explained. Thirdly, the methods of data collection and analysis for each phase are presented separately. Then, ethics, the positioning of the researcher, and trustworthiness are discussed, followed by the researcher's personal reflection. The chapter concludes with a summary of the main points.

3.2 Research philosophy

It is important to understand research philosophy as it is this that guides the research process. A research philosophy is defined as the structure of beliefs and assumptions that dictates how research is conducted (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2012). It generally stems from how the researcher sees the nature of reality (ontology), the relationship of the researcher and respondents, the nature of knowledge (epistemology), and the roles of values and ethics in conducting the research (axiology) (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Pringle & Booysen, 2018). These inevitably influence how a researcher understands the question, the methods used in collecting data, and the interpretation of the findings (Creswell, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

Positivism and interpretivism are two of the major research philosophies. Positivism advocates that knowledge is gained from the application of the natural laws of science (Bryman, 2016). A positivist stance considers knowledge to be objective, and therefore can be tested through scientific methods (Pringle & Booysen, 2018). In contrast, interpretivism advocates that knowledge is gained by making sense of people's subjective opinions of their experiences (Ghauri & Gronhaug, 2010; Patton, 2002). An interpretivist stance acknowledges that the world is seen according to the meanings created by humans (Walliman, 2011). Interpretivism is considered appropriate to this study, which seeks to understand Auckland's luxury hotel attributes from the guests' perspectives.

3.2.1 Interpretivist research

The researcher recognised that guests' perceptions are multifaceted and therefore subjective. Interpretivism maintains that a phenomenon can be explained as multiple actualities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It was this researcher's role to listen and then interpret the meanings and explanations given by the luxury hotel guests (see Pringle & Booysen, 2018). As such, the researcher throughout the process of data collection and analysis in both phases, wrote down reflections, observations, questions, and notes in a journal.

The interpretivist research philosophy used in this study dictated the methods and techniques. Induction is consistent with interpretivism (Walliman, 2011). Thus, the data collection and analysis in this research were simultaneous, taking advantage of the inductive approach. Data collected from TripAdvisor were a "springboard" providing specific themes from which to formulate questions for the second interview phase. Induction starts with data collection to explore a phenomenon, and generalises from the specific to understand the context and meaning of the research question (Saunders et al., 2012).

3.2.2 Qualitative research design

This section explains the qualitative research design of a two-phase mixed methods approach, netnography and semi-structured interviews, to explore luxury hotel attributes in depth. Creswell (2009) referred to research design as the decision the researcher makes on how to study a topic. It is a flexible set of guidelines connecting the researcher's theoretical philosophies (which in this case is the interpretivist philosophy), first to the strategies or procedures of inquiry, and then to the methods of collecting data (Creswell, 2007). The strategies (or procedures of inquiry) detail how data are collected, analysed, and interpreted. Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods are commonly presented as the three different types of designs (Bryman, 2016). Table 3 shows the relationships between philosophy, research design, and strategies or procedures of inquiry.

Table 3: Relationship between philosophy, approach, research design, and strategy

Philosophy	Approach	Research Design	Strategy or procedures of inquiry
Interpretivist / constructivist	Inductive	Qualitative	Narrative / ethnography / phenomenology / grounded theory
Positivist / postpositivist	Deductive	Quantitative	Experiments / surveys
Pragmatic	Abductive (Combination)	Mixed methods	Sequential / concurrent / transformative

Source: Data in columns 1, 3, and 4 adapted from Creswell (2009), data in column 2 adapted from Saunders et al. (2012).

This study, a qualitative research design with a mixed methods approach, used content analysis for the TripAdvisor online reviews in Phase one, and thematic analysis for the semi-structured interviews in Phase two. Interpretivism, as the organising theoretical framework of this study, guided the research process in employing the most suitable design.

Phase one sought to identify important hotel attributes from online reviews in TripAdvisor. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to obtain more meaningful and in-depth understandings of the attributes guests considered important when staying in Auckland's luxury hotels. Interviewing guests allowed the researcher access to participants' subjective perceptions. This study relied on the researcher's interpretations, placing emphasis on the context and in the careful definition of words, and considered rich descriptions to be valuable (see Bryman, 2016; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

3.3 Population

Data collection cannot begin without identifying the population. The population determines where the samples will come from (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As discussed in Chapter two, there appears to be no universal rating for classifying luxury hotels. As luxury hotels are recognised to be excellent hotels of the highest standard (Peng & Chen, 2019), this research considered guests in five-star hotels as the populations for both phases.

Qualmark classifies hotels as five-star or luxury when they offer "facilities and services amongst the best on offer in New Zealand" (Qualmark, 2019a.). Under the Qualmark classification, there were seven five-star hotels in Auckland at the time of this research. These were Cordis Auckland, Hilton Auckland, Hotel Grand Windsor MGallery by

Sofitel, Pullman Auckland, Skycity Grand Hotel, Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour, and Stamford Plaza Auckland (Table 4) (Qualmark, 2019b).

Table 4: Auckland five-star hotels

No	Hotel Name	Category	Rooms	F&B outlets
1.	Cordis Auckland	5	411	1
2.	Hilton Auckland	5	165	1
3.	Hotel Grand Windsor MGallery by Sofitel	5	79	1
4.	Pullman Auckland	5	340	1
5.	Skycity Grand Hotel	5	320	7
6.	Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour	5	171	1
7.	Stamford Plaza Auckland	5	284	2

3.4 Sampling

The next step after identifying the population is to establish the sample. A sample is simply the unit of analysis used in the research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The two basic types of sampling strategies are random sampling (also called “probability”) and purposive sampling (or non-probability) (Bryman, 2016). Random sampling is used when the study seeks findings exhibited by the wider population (Bryman, 2016; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Generalisability increases with sample size (Bernard, 2013). Purposive sampling is used when the research seeks findings that demonstrate the shared characteristics of a population (Saunders et al., 2012), generally in qualitative research (Patton, 2002). Quality samples are relevant samples that provide the most understanding of the research topic (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This qualitative study considered purposive sampling to be well suited as it explored luxury hotel attributes.

3.5 Phase one: Netnography, using TripAdvisor online reviews

This study used two methods of data collection and analysis. This section deals with the first phase, and the following section discusses Phase two. Kozinets (2002) termed “netnography” as a qualitative research method that uses online communications, such as reviews posted on the internet. In this section, TripAdvisor as a data source for Phase one is explained first. Then, sampling, data collection method, and data analysis in the first phase are discussed.

3.5.1 TripAdvisor as a data source

As explained in Chapter two, hotels generally receive feedback through online reviews that display a star value (five being the highest) followed by a textual description (Banerjee & Chua, 2016). A comment card that guests fill in was the traditional way for hotels to get feedback from their guests. Now, most online travel agencies, such as TripAdvisor, offer customers a platform to post online reviews of their stay experiences

(TripAdvisor, Inc., 2016). A hotel receiving a five-star rating in an online review is commonly recognised as excellent and of high quality (Filieri et al., 2018). Hotel management value online reviews, with 90% of general managers reviewing information from review sites daily (Torres et al., 2015).

Chapter two presented a comparison of the different online review platforms that included Booking.com, Agoda, and Ctrip. The literature suggested that TripAdvisor is likely to offer a higher perception of credibility and trust. It also provided evidence that TripAdvisor has provided past studies with significant results; these studies offered both theoretical and practical implications for the hotel industry. This may explain why hotels consider TripAdvisor to be the most relevant of the online review sites (Torres et al., 2015). In addition, Berezina, Bilgihan, Cobanoglu and Okumus (2016) considered TripAdvisor to provide the most travel-related reviews. One can argue that TripAdvisor provides a meaningful source of data. From a practical perspective, data extracted from TripAdvisor can be filtered to include only five-star ratings, which were of interest to this study. Therefore, using TripAdvisor as a data source was considered suitable for this research.

3.5.2 Purposive sampling using criterion selection

The samples for Phase one were Qualmark five-star TripAdvisor ratings posted about five-star hotels in Auckland. Consistent with purposive sampling, the online reviews were chosen using a criterion-based selection, to ensure that they represented or possessed the typical characteristics of the group being explored (see Walliman, 2011). The samples had four characteristics, as summarised in Table 5. Online reviews that did not display all of these characteristics were excluded from the study.

Table 5: Criteria for samples

No	Characteristics
1.	Online review posted on TripAdvisor
2.	Posting was for a Qualmark classified five-star hotel in Auckland
3.	Posting was a five-star online review
4.	Online review was posted between December 2018 and March 2019 inclusive

3.5.3 Data collection

To maximise data collection for Phase one, online postings were selected during the summer months (i.e. 1st December 2018 to 31st March 2019), which are typically considered as the peak season (Stats NZ, n.d.) and coincided with this study's timeline. Peak season suggests higher guest occupancy and provided a higher probability of online reviews being posted as compared to low season, which has fewer guests.

A total of 456 five-star online reviews were collected in Phase one (Table 6). The data were organised in chronological order, with the latest review appearing on top. Codes were assigned to each hotel and online review to maintain confidentiality.

Table 6: Five-star online reviews of Auckland's luxury hotels

No	Hotel Name	December 2018	January 2019	February 2019	March 2019	Total
1.	Cordis Auckland	27	35	31	24	117
2.	Hilton Auckland	16	16	16	16	64
3.	Hotel Grand Windsor MGallery by Sofitel	13	15	11	8	47
4.	Pullman Auckland	11	17	10	17	55
5.	Skycity Grand Hotel	7	6	7	10	30
6.	Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour	15	21	6	10	52
7.	Stamford Plaza Auckland	18	31	21	21	91
Total reviews per month		107	141	102	106	456

3.5.4 Data analysis: content analysis

The TripAdvisor online reviews were analysed by content. The occurrence of the established and emerging key words were identified, and colour-coded manually using Microsoft's Word program. Manual coding was considered appropriate for this study as it made the most sense to the researcher in terms of ease of use and organisation. Then the frequencies of occurrence were tabulated using Microsoft Excel to identify the hotel attribute's importance (Appendix C). Although seemingly simplistic, both Microsoft's Word and Excel programs were effective for categorising the themes, and accomplished the requirement of isolating the frequency of factors that contributed to a five-star rating on TripAdvisor. They were effective tools for conducting the content analysis, which focused on the organisation of themes, and identified core consistencies and meanings (see Patton, 2002).

Chapter two identified the hotel attributes common in online reviews. These are: value for money (Lu, Berchoux, Marek, & Chen, 2015; Wu & Yang, 2018), room (Limberger et al., 2014; Pacheco, 2017), location (Tolkach & Tse, 2016), service (Baber & Kaurav, 2015), facilities (Chon & Maier, 2010; Dittmer, 2002), cleanliness (Dinçer & Alrawadieh, 2017; Zaman et al., 2016), and staff (Banerjee & Chua, 2016; Qu et al., 2000). This study considered the same common hotel attributes as the key words. This research used open coding, whereby new themes that emerged, such as ambience, and expressions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction with specific attributes, were not discarded, but included in the analysis. To maintain consistency when confronted with

voluminous data, a qualitative codebook was developed, showing the list of codes. Two academic experts were asked to review the codes to ensure objectivity. Figure 2 presents an example of the coding for the first phase of the study.

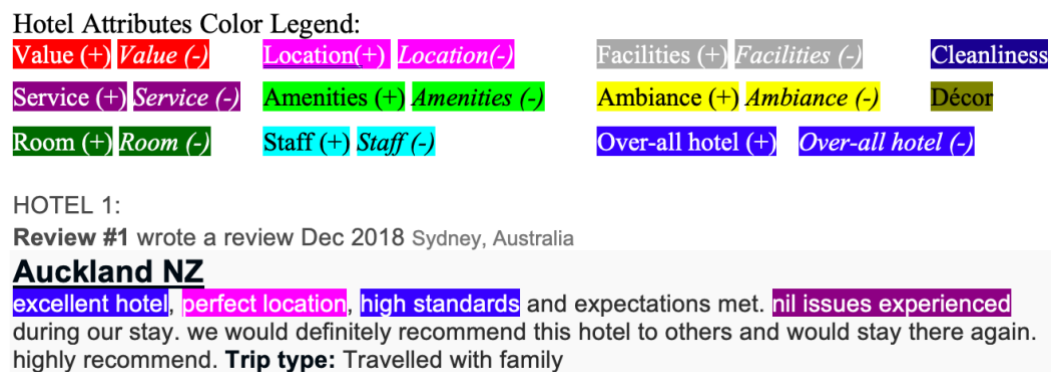


Figure 2: Sample of coding for Phase one

3.6 Phase two: Semi-structured interviews

To gain a meaningful understanding of the attributes of luxury hotels in Auckland that guests consider important when posting on TripAdvisor, semi-structured interviews were conducted in Phase two. This section explains the data collection and analysis of this interview phase.

3.6.1 Purposive sampling

As in Phase one, the Qualmark classified five-star luxury hotels in Auckland were the population for this study (i.e. Cordis Auckland, Hilton Auckland, Hotel Grand Windsor MGallery by Sofitel, Pullman Auckland, Skycity Grand Hotel, Sofitel Auckland Viaduct Harbour, and Stamford Plaza Auckland). Phase two also used purposive sampling. Auckland's luxury hotel guests were identified as the relevant participants and were approached for the second interview phase of this research. As luxury hotel guests, they had core experiences that fit the study's criteria.

3.6.2 Data collection

The semi-structured interviews in Phase two focused on understanding the guests' perceptions of luxury hotel attributes. The themes analysed from Phase one became the basis for the interview questions in Phase two. Consistent with interpretivism, interviews are the most common form of collecting data in qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To maintain a focus on the themes that could be meaningful for this study, an interview guide was prepared (Appendix B.a) and a pilot of the interview was tested. The pilot interview took place in a hotel coffee shop to simulate the environment for future interviews. It was also recorded to check for potential nuisances, such as background noise and other disturbances. Based on the feedback

from the academic experts and the results of the pilot interview, adjustments to the interview guide were carried out.

Prior to the interviews, emails were sent to the general managers (Appendix B.d) of the seven luxury hotels to explain the study and seek approval to interact with the guests; three gave their consent. The luxury hotel guests that voluntarily participated were provided with a Participant Information Sheet (Appendix B.b) as well as a Consent Form (Appendix B.c). They were interviewed within the period of their stay at the luxury hotel, with interviews lasting from 15 to 30 minutes per participant. Codes were assigned to maintain confidentiality.

Interviews were conducted to the point of data saturation, when further interviews no longer surrendered new knowledge. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006) stated that the emergence of new themes may become infrequent after 12 interviews. At this point, additional coding is no longer possible. Data collection for this research stopped when no new or relevant data emerged.

3.6.3 Participant profile

There were 16 interview participants. Half were between the ages of 35 and 54 years old. The majority were New Zealanders (56%), followed by Asians (32%), represented by participants from Indonesia, Singapore, Japan, and Thailand. North American residents (16%) were from the USA and Canada, and there was one Chilean participant (6%).

None of the participants travelled only once a year. They either travelled more than four times a year (50%) or between two and four times (50%). No distinction was made on the nature of the trip (i.e. business or pleasure), as the study's interest was on the overall frequency of travel.

3.6.4 Data analysis: thematic analysis

Data were analysed using thematic analysis, which Clarke and Braun (2014) defined as a research method in which patterns (themes) across a dataset are identified. The steps of thematic analysis conducted in this research are discussed next.

Step 1: Data familiarisation: transcription of verbal data

Data analysis in Phase two commenced with the preparation of the interview transcripts. This research used verbatim transcriptions so the researcher could better recollect the interview context when comparing the transcript with the post interview notes. Self-

transcription was also utilised, immersing the researcher in the data, consequently increasing familiarity.

Step 2: Generation of initial codes

Each transcript was read thoroughly before manual coding started to obtain the overall understanding and feeling of the interview. Firstly, notes were written stating what the data presented and what the researcher found interesting in the data. Next, initial codes were manually assigned to the transcripts. Text was labelled according to content to ensure that context was not lost in the coding process. Open coding was employed whereby the data were “allowed to speak”. Interesting aspects of the data that were relevant to the research topic were identified, such as experience, as they may have formed the basis of repeated patterns (themes). Figure 3 below presents an example of the coding for Phase two of this study.

Interview Transcript

Interviewee: Just the whole experience. Um the total package, like I said the feel of the hotel was like stepping back in time. Generous room space. So, the ambience ticks all the right places. Plus, the level of service was beyond this world. You can see that the staff cares for you... genuinely cared. Just the whole experience was... (pause) unforgettable. Just pure delight.

CODES

+ overall experience
Historical ambience
Spacious room
Ambience
Exceptional service
Caring staff
Memorable stay
Feeling happy

Figure 3: Sample of initial coding for Phase two

Step 3: Searching for potential themes and sub-themes

In Step three, a thematic map was used to visually guide the researcher in sorting the codes into potential themes and sub-themes. Clarke and Braun (2014) explained that the researcher in this stage of thematic analysis considers how the codes, themes, and different levels of themes (i.e., main overarching themes and sub-themes within them) relate to each other. The codes, potential themes, and sub-themes were iteratively analysed. This means that the codes and themes were combined, modified, trimmed, or deleted to determine an analytical fit. Figure 4 provides an example of how the codes were analysed to search for potential themes and sub-themes in the second phase of this study.



Figure 4: Sample of coding for potential themes and sub-themes

Step 4: Reviewing themes

The potential themes were thoroughly reviewed. Firstly, the coded data within a potential theme were checked for coherence of meaning. Then, each potential theme was examined for its accuracy in reflecting the meanings shown in relation to the whole data set. Clarke and Braun (2014) stated that the researcher at the end of this stage already has a good grasp on what the different themes are, how the themes fit together, and the overall story the themes tell about the data they represent. Figure 5 shows an example of the themes in this stage of Phase two.

Theme	Sub-Theme	Codes
Attributes	Room	room quality, spacious room, comfortable room, quality room, room with view, quiet room, beautiful room
Attributes	Location	location, city centre, central, access to transportation, able to walk around, convenient location, near food places, is the conference venue, near offices

Figure 5: Sample themes

Step 5: Defining and naming themes

Final refinements on the thematic map were made. Individual themes were identified by defining what each theme was all about (and what each theme was not about), in accordance with Clarke and Braun's (2014) suggestion that themes should be named

succinctly, immediately giving the reader a sense of what the theme is about. As with Phase one, two academic experts were consulted to review the themes to ensure objectivity.

3.7 Research ethics

Before starting this research, an ethics application was submitted and subsequently approved by AUT's Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (Appendix A.a). Confidentiality was adhered to at all times, either by using codes or by marking identifying names and locations with XXX. All data and signed forms have been secured in a locked cabinet in the primary research supervisor's office and will be destroyed after six years.

AUTEC was informed of this researcher's employment in one of Auckland's luxury hotels. By declaring the potential conflict of interest, transparency was maintained, which reinforced this research's goal to adhere to ethical considerations in all areas of the study (see Pittarello, Leib, Gordon-Hecker & Shalvi, 2015). However, only two of the six luxury hotels invited to participate gave consent. Thus, it was necessary to submit an amendment to the ethics application in order to ensure that data saturation was achieved, by making it less likely that data could be identified as coming from a particular hotel (see Fusch & Ness, 2015). Strategies to mitigate the potential conflict of interest were approved by AUTEC (Appendix A.b). A third-party recruiter was used to limit any unethical behaviour arising from bias or perceived manipulation that the part-time employment of this researcher may have presented (see Feldman & Halali, 2019). Therefore, with the mitigating strategy in place, it was possible for this research to have three luxury hotels as data sources.

3.8 Positionality of the researcher

In the beginning of this chapter, it was discussed that the researcher's ontology, epistemology, and axiology influenced the research process. Pringle and Booysen (2018) stated that authors should practise self-reflection and use a reflexive approach to "clearly identify, construct, critique and articulate their positionality" (p. 30). In doing so, awareness of the positionality aided in executing the positionality. Creswell (2009) referred to this process as reflexivity. This researcher has been a hotelier since 2001 and may have unrecognised and unintended biases. However, in conducting the study, care was used to ensure that the voice of the participants were presented truthfully.

3.9 Research trustworthiness

Generally, in the conduct of any research, prospective readers need to be able to establish that the results are trustworthy. This study adhered to the concepts of truthfulness posited by Lincoln and Guba (1985) involving credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Firstly, trustworthiness is often referred to as “intellectual rigour” employed in the research to ensure that the findings are credible (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To demonstrate the themes’ validity, sample quotes from each phase are presented in Appendix D. Interviews for Phase two were audio-recorded so the researcher could maintain a point of reference during the transcription process to ensure that the perceptions of participants were presented accurately. Secondly, there are two findings chapters for this study (Chapter four and Chapter five), which contain rich, thick descriptions of the findings to ensure transferability. Thirdly, two academic experts reviewed the codes, themes, and preliminary findings to ensure dependability. Finally, to address confirmability, qualitative journal notes (audit trail) were written in order to provide detailed documentation of every step of the research process. The researcher was reflexive by stating her philosophical interpretivist orientation (Section 3.2) and providing a statement of positionality (Section 3.8). By identifying both the philosophical orientation of this study and positionality of the researcher, any bias, disposition, and assumption that this research may pose are openly presented, thereby dispensing with potential ambiguity.

3.10 Summary

This was a qualitative interpretivist study using a mixed methods approach: netnography and semi-structured interviews, in two phases. The themes in Phase one were the basis for the interview questions in Phase two. Data analysis was challenging, as Phase one data were subjected to content analysis, while the interview data from Phase two were thematically analysed. However, the data collected were rich and contributed to meaningful understandings that addressed the research question. Findings from the online reviews collected in Phase one are explained in Chapter four, and in Chapter five for the second interview phase.

Chapter Four: Phase one findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the findings of guests' Trip Advisor reviews. The content analysis revealed that service, staff, room, location, facilities, over-all hotel, amenities, ambience, cleanliness, value for money, and décor were the attributes that luxury hotel guests considered important when giving a five-star online rating on TripAdvisor. Each of the attributes is explored in turn.

The positive factors are discussed first, followed by the negative comments. Affirmative words, such as “excellent,” were regarded as expressions of guest satisfaction. On the other hand, negative descriptions, such as “terrible,” were considered as expressions of guest dissatisfaction. Both cleanliness and décor registered only satisfaction, while room and location received the most complaints. Table 7 summarises the hotel attributes gathered in Phase one.

Table 7: Frequency of attributes commented on in reviews

Hotel Attribute	Satisfaction (count)	Dissatisfaction (count)	Total (count)
Service	956	28	984
Staff	780	7	787
Room	659	60	719
Location	367	51	418
Facilities	355	16	371
Over-all hotel	341	3	344
Amenities	225	5	230
Ambience	117	4	121
Cleanliness	118	0	118
Value for money	55	22	77
Décor	45	0	45

4.2 Service

The findings revealed that guests considered service as the most important attribute in Auckland's luxury hotels. Its importance was demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, guests providing online reviews commonly used descriptive words to illustrate service quality and service consistency. Secondly, they described specific actions to express their service satisfaction and dissatisfaction. When service dissatisfactions in luxury hotels were conveyed, these were negated either by service recovery or by observed improvement in service.

4.2.1 Service quality

Online reviews contained favourable narratives about the service quality. Guests used descriptive words such as “professional,” “excellent,” and “personalised.” As described by guests in the online reviews:

“The service was professional, attentive, thoughtful and it was fun.” (Review 6)

“...their attention to detail and thinking ahead.” (Review 161)

“Exceptional customer service.” (Review 238)

“...blown away by the level of service...” (Review 291)

“Excellent service, could not fault anything.” (Review 379)

“The service is very personalised...” (Review 412)

Frequent guests expected to receive consistent service. Their previous stays were the benchmark for their service expectations. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“I have stayed at XXX a number of times and have had a very consistent level of service, which has always been very good...” (Review 187)

Guests also compared the service quality of one luxury hotel with that of another. Some guests stated that the service of Auckland’s luxury hotels was superior as it exceeded their expectations. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“We have stayed in some of the best hotels in the world. The service at this hotel exceeded just about every one we have stayed in...” (Review 277)

4.2.2 Service that led to satisfaction

Guests cited specific service actions to convey their satisfaction. Guests claimed that service addressing unusual circumstances made an impact. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“...thank you... for assessing my needs in a difficult situation.” (Review 330)

Service surprise was another area of guest satisfaction. Several online reviews mentioned “guests of the day.” These guests were usually commemorating milestone moments, such as birthdays and anniversaries, and the luxury hotels provided various treats to celebrate the occasions. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“...able to get early access to our room... we were the guests of the day!... upgraded... free breakfast, and two complimentary drinks... chocolate ganache and a complimentary note in our room in honour of our honeymoon!” (Review 300)

Early check-in, as one of the service surprises, enhanced guest comfort. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“...we were able to get check-in early, have a quick nap, order room service, and get ready for the wedding – all before noon.” (Review 60)

A room upgrade was also amongst the service surprises that delighted luxury hotel guests. This allowed the guest to enjoy a better room at no additional cost. In most cases, upgraded guests got extra benefits such as club access. As described by a guest in an online review:

“We were upgraded... Had the best time... in the lounge.” (Review 105)

4.2.3 Food and beverage service

Service in luxury hotels was also mentioned in relation to food and beverage. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“Breakfast buffet/ala carte filled the bill with good service.” (Review 246)

The majority placed considerable importance on both presentation and taste of the meal. Food preparation was considered as a positive contributor to service. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“Beautiful meals experienced... beautifully presented, and the taste did not let down the build up by presentation. Great service.” (Review 142)

4.2.4 Quality service contributed to a positive stay experience

Service in luxury hotels contributed favourably to the stay experiences of guests. Consequently, guests commented that good service enhanced the over-all appeal of luxury hotels. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“The best hotel in Auckland!... my experience was amazing – From a cheerful greeting... to a very efficient check-out... food was also amazing! Breakfast had a good selection... dinner... was wonderful! Room service was super efficient...” (Review 268)

4.2.5 Service recovery

Service recovery also reflected the high quality of service in luxury hotels. The application of appropriate and timely service recovery alleviated what could have been a service failure. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“I did arrive late... room... was unavailable... arranged some coffees... we didn’t have to wait too long... We also were given a midday checkout which was ideal.” (Review 365)

Guests provided positive affirmations in relation to acceptable service recovery, and the luxury hotels were still given a five-star rating on TripAdvisor. As described by a guest in an online review:

“It was our wedding anniversary which I mentioned during booking... upgraded to a deluxe room... given us two single beds, slightly annoyed I went back to the front desk. The staff apologies (sic)... and upgraded us to the Club, thanks guys you made our day.” (Review 77)

4.2.6 Service failure

Service failures were also expressed by luxury hotel guests. A lack of service offerings, especially in relation to food and beverage, was the most common feedback, although this did not hinder guests from giving a five-star rating in their online reviews. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“Maybe a little more extensive choice of breakfast range & services at Executive Lounge would make the stay perfect.” (Review 193)

Service failure was in slow service. In some cases, the negative service quality was a result of external factors. However, the luxury hotel guests recognised that the service rendered was nonetheless acceptable. As described by a guest in an online review:

“Whilst we had to wait 30 minutes for our food it was very good when it arrived...” (Review 69)

The findings suggest that in luxury hotels, the staff were a critical aspect of service recovery, and is discussed in the next section (Section 4.3.3). As described by a guest in an online review:

“There was a bit of a queue for checkout... but to be expected due to the time of the morning and the team dealt with it all very efficiently. I will be staying again.” (Review 247)

A few guests showed dissatisfaction with the hotel staff when there was a breakdown in service. These guests specified under-staffing as a cause. As illustrated by guests in the online reviews:

“...there was definitely a lot of confusion among the staff, and it was clearly understaffed...” (Review 133)

“...the staff seemed overwhelmed at the volume of visitors and were slow to refresh items in the buffet area...” (Review 291)

Certain service failures in luxury hotels were not a deciding factor for repeat stays. However, guests appreciated any service improvement that was observed during their stay. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“It is nice to see that breakfast service has significantly improved since our last stay and is now efficient, friendly and the buffet nicely presented.” (Review 139)

4.2.7 Summary of the service attributes

Luxury hotels provided high service quality that is consistent, and facilitated surprises (e.g. room upgrade), which led to guest satisfaction. Consistency was deemed important as comparisons were drawn with the service received during past visits. Some guests observed a breakdown of service due to under-staffing. When service failed, guests found the service recovery acceptable and still gave a five-star rating on the online

reviews. Over-all, quality service contributed favourably to the stay experience and was the most important luxury hotel attribute.

4.3 The staff in luxury hotels

The majority of guests also regarded staff as important. The staff characteristics as well as their different roles were highlighted by guests in their online reviews. The guests expressed positive emotions about their staff interactions.

4.3.1 Staff characteristics

The online reviews mentioned the staff attributes that were desirable to the guests. These were personality, skill, or general characteristics as listed in Table 8 below.

Table 8: Desirable luxury hotel staff attributes

Personality		Skill		General Characteristics	
Accommodating	Pleasant	Attentive	Proactive	Amazing	Good
Approachable	Welcoming	Competent	Professional	Awesome	Impressive
Caring		Discreet	Unobtrusive	Brilliant	Lovely
Cheerful		Efficient		Delightful	Superb
Courteous		Exceptional		Excellent	Terrific
Friendly		Helpful		Fabulous	Wonderful
Generous		Knowledgeable		Fantastic	
Kind		Presentable		Great	

Among the staff attributes, the guests highlighted the staff's personalities most. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“...we were welcomed at the front desk by a wonderfully cheerful attendant... Everyone we met at the hotel was warm and friendly. We will be back to enjoy more of the Kiwi hospitality!” (Review 262)

The majority of guests associated the staff closely with good service; most appreciated a pleasant attitude. Friendliness was the most desired staff attribute, followed by helpfulness. As described by a guest in an online review:

“The staff had provided an amazing service... he is very friendly and approachable.” (Review 355)

4.3.2 Staff deliver quality service

The guests acknowledged that the exceptional service in luxury hotels was because of the staff. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“Service +++. We got lost on our way... spoke to the concierge (Mr. R.) who told us to wait where we were and he would come get us!... Mr. R. has customer service skills +++... He is a great example of how things should be done!” (Review 319)

4.3.3 Staff as the problem solver

In some cases, the guest was the source of conflict. Some reviews detailed the challenging requests that guests were making. As described by a guest in an online review:

“Mr. H called around about 6 rental car companies... on the day of pick up... in peak season to find me a great deal... made all the difference to me on my short holiday... brilliant!” (Review 338)

Staff involvement was also critical in conflict resolution. Service recovery was explained in Section 4.2.5. Guests recounted what the staff did to mitigate their disappointment. The solutions presented by the staff were acceptable as the guests expressed delight, as highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“...Ms. L returned with blankets and said she would try to get us another room. Well not only did she try she did... This was great customer services and it was why we enjoyed our stay...” (Review 349)

However, there were times when a guest required the assistance of staff in solving a problem not caused by the hotel, and guests were delighted when the staff were able to help. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“...Ms. L went above and beyond our expectations in resolving a problem with the shuttle transfer (booked by ourselves, not the hotel). Definitely 5-star experience from her.” (Review 339)

4.3.4 Guest emotions following staff engagement

Most guests expressed the positive emotions they felt when they interacted with the staff, as listed in Table 9.

Table 9: Summary of guest emotions

Feeling...			
At home	Like great friends	Safe	Welcome
Comfortable	Not lonely	Special	Well rested
Important	Relaxed	Spoiled	

The findings show that “feeling welcomed” was the most mentioned, followed by “feeling at home” and “feeling special.” Guests associated the emotions they felt with their stay experience in Auckland’s luxury hotels. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“I felt like a king... Every single person working in this hotel made me and my wife feel so special...” (Review 118)

Guests appreciated it when the staff recognised them. Personal interactions between guests and staff was a dominant factor of the stay experience in luxury hotels. As stated by guests in the online reviews:

“Amazing staff... never have been treated so well in a hotel in my life (and I travel more than I live at my home!), everybody seemed to know my name!” (Review 423)

“I have never in my life been treated with this kindness and respect from the staff and I was made to feel like I was a Queen, I cried (sic) when I left as I was going to miss the service and the team.” (Review 79)

However, personal interaction went beyond recognising guests by name. Staff in luxury hotels paid particular interest to responding to the intimate details of a guest’s stay through personal touches. As described by a guest in an online review:

“We had the most fantastic time here, made extra special by the fabulous staff... we found a lovely floral arrangement, chocolates and balloons recognising our anniversary.” (Review 163)

The guests gave credit to the staff for making their stay experience memorable. As highlighted further by the same guest in an online review:

“...while the hotel is fabulous, the people who work here are outstanding... Our stay at Hotel XXX will remain as a travel highlight in our memories forever. Mr. A and Ms. C, thank you so much for your exceptional hospitality.” (Review 163)

4.3.5 Summary of the staff in luxury hotels

The findings revealed that perceptions about whether service was good or bad depended on the staff’s performance. The majority of the guests acknowledged that the exceptional service in luxury hotels was because of the staff. Good staff were praised for their positive attitudes and were described by guests as friendly and helpful. The majority of guests expressed the positive emotions they felt when they interacted with the staff and noted that their personal interactions with the staff made their stay experiences memorable.

4.4 The luxury hotel room

The room was another hotel attribute that guests considered important in luxury hotels in Auckland. This section begins by discussing the room facilities. The bed was considered as the most important facility, followed by room amenities and the bathroom quality. Next, the quality of the luxury room is presented, and dissatisfaction explained.

4.4.1 Room facilities

Table 10 lists the room facilities mentioned by luxury hotel guests in the online reviews.

Table 10: Summary of room facilities

Adaptors	Balcony	Lounge access	Safe	USB outlets
Amenities	Bathtub	Rain shower	Sound system	Wireless internet
Air conditioning	Bed	Refrigerator	Television	

The findings suggest that room facilities, specifically a comfortable bed, mattered most to luxury hotel guests. This was followed by room amenities and then by the bathroom. The room was considered as a component of a positive stay in luxury hotels. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“Excellent, spacious and spotless room with the comfiest king-sized bed! Great amenities, rain shower and a bath, it all made for a perfect and very relaxing stay.” (Review 56)

4.4.2 The importance of the bed

The findings revealed that a comfortable bed was a key feature in all of Auckland’s luxury hotels. It was also the most considered room facility by guests. The importance of the bed is further highlighted by guests in the online reviews:

“... The bed – oh the bed, it was so comfortable that we didn’t want to get out of it... We stayed so comfortable throughout the night...” (Review 453)

“... Our bed and pillow will sink you to sleep as soon as you lay on it...” (Review 266)

“... Loved their amazing beds, best night sleep in ages...” (Review 185)

“... Bed was like sleeping on a cloud...” (Review 428)

4.4.3 In-room amenities

In-room amenities were the second most mentioned facility in the room. Table 11 lists a sample of amenities typically provided in luxury hotel rooms in Auckland.

Table 11: Room amenities typically provided in luxury hotels in Auckland

Bathrobes	Coffee and tea	Nibbles	Slippers
Bottled water	Ear plugs	Pillow menu	Soda
Branded toiletries	Lush towels	Quality linen	

As stated by guests in the online reviews:

“... Our room also came with free snacks, and soda, including coffee and tea...” (Review 266)

“...and it was nice to have a coffee machine in the room. The bathroom had beautiful Hermes toiletries...” (Review 287)

“...their accessories (shampoo, lotion, etc) with their signature scent is divine...” (Review 50)

“The room had all the amenities and so much more. Absolute comfort and crisp linen!” (Review 30)

“... The linens were upscale and were very soft... So nice to have big towels...” (Review 293)

“... I definitely loved the super comfortable cotton bathrobes...” (Review 313)

“...we had a well-stocked fridge and a coffee maker... and fluffy dressing gowns and slippers.. with complimentary toiletries...” (Review 249)

4.4.4 The quality of the luxury hotel room

In general, guests appreciated the quality of the luxury rooms as evident in the descriptions compiled in Table 12.

Table 12: Describing luxury hotel rooms in Auckland

Acceptable	Comfortable	Modern	Stylist
Beautiful	Compact	Outdated	Top-rated
Charming	Cool	Private	Well-appointed
Classic	Functional	Quiet	Well-laid out
Clean	Luxurious	Spacious	Well-lit

Results indicated that “spaciousness” was most mentioned, followed by “cleanliness,” “top-rated,” and “beautiful.” Several guests provided descriptions of the aesthetic appearance of the room, alluding to the high quality materials and décor in their rooms. One guest who enjoyed a luxury hotel room expressed appreciation in an online review:

“...spotlessly clean, charming, beautifully-appointed... luxurious textiles throughout... and the warm colour palette... the thoughtful detail of the jewellery box on the bedside table and the delightful china teacups and teapot in the room...” (Review 447)

Results suggest that Auckland’s luxury hotel rooms brought enjoyment, restfulness, relaxation, and happiness to guests. Most found the rooms comfortable and felt enticed to stay-in. As highlighted by one guest in an online review:

“... The room was fabulous: quiet, well appointed, and very comfortable... would have been very happy to have spent most of my time in the room which is saying something as I generally don’t like spending much time in hotel rooms.” (Review 192)

4.4.5 Unsatisfactory luxury hotel rooms

The room also accrued the most dissatisfaction amongst the attributes. While quality and size of the bathroom were positively regarded by most guests, some dissatisfaction was also expressed in this area. Safety was raised as a concern. As described by a guest in an online review:

“... Now I very rarely use a bathtub (since I have had a hip replacement and have to exercise extreme caution getting in and out of the things)...” (Review 260)

In addition, maintenance issues caused disappointment. However, this did not compromise a five-star rating from the guests. As narrated by one guest in an online review:

“... The bathroom... was a bit problematic... the shower will leak all over the floor if you don’t aim the head appropriately. The tub was large and nice, but the knob was loose and difficult to use... the heating and cooling system is

antiquated and needs an update. Even with the issues, this is a lovely hotel and we would be happy to stay there.” (Review 133)

A few setbacks dealt with the design issues of the luxury hotel rooms. Some guests mentioned the lack of privacy. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“...we were not pleased with our first assigned room... room is directly in front of the pool... you are staring directly at people swimming... This was not the view we wanted...” (Review 124)

Others commented on the limited storage spaces. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“...The downside is that... storage space is limited, there is hardly any space for hanging items...” (Review 301)

Room noise was another displeasure expressed by the luxury hotel guests. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“...overlooking a road and it was a little noisy...” (Review 275)

However, the hotel was not faulted, and the re-stay intention was not diminished. As described by a guest in an online review:

“...there is some noise from a nightclub nearby but you are in the middle of New Zealand’s largest city and you must expect the noises associated with such great location...” (Review 454)

Despite this, the luxury hotels anticipated such problems and the guests were provided with earplugs as part of the service recovery. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“... We were upgraded to the 7th floor... We took earplugs! It was much quieter up there but you could still hear it... I would defo (sic) recommend this hotel but you need to stay on one of the higher floors – and/or take earplugs...” (Review 429)

4.4.6 Summary of the luxury hotel room

Overall, luxury rooms were recognised by guests to be of a high standard due to their facilities, amenities, and aesthetic appeal. The findings revealed that a comfortable bed was a key feature in all of Auckland’s luxury hotels. It was also deemed to be the most important room facility. Despite expressing dissatisfaction with the room because of noise and maintenance issues experienced, guests maintained that they would stay in luxury hotels again, finding the service recovery acceptable.

4.5 The significance of location

Generally, guests regarded Auckland's luxury hotels positively in terms of their locations. The majority wrote that the close proximity of the hotels to shops, restaurants, and attractions was convenient. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“... The location is a perfect base for an inner-city Auckland experience...”
(Review 443)

In addition, being near the city's transport centres also made guests appreciate the accessibility of the hotels' locations. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“... The location is close to transportation: trains, buses and ferries...” (Review 422)

4.5.1 Nature of stay

The guest's purpose of stay determined the suitability of the luxury hotel's location. The close proximity of the hotel to venues where they could see a concert or a show, go sightseeing, attend a conference or event, go on a cruise, or even get married, made for an appealing location. As described by guests in their online reviews:

“...20 min walk to spark arena, which is perfect...” (Review 11)

“...close proximity to Arena and Theater ...” (Review 375)

“...hotel has many restaurants and bars nearby if you're looking for alternate options, and is close to a range of tourists activities...” (Review 9)

“...was at a function one night at the conference centre so decided to make life easy and stay upstairs. Easy stay!” (Review 245)

“perfect location for cruisers... collected our bags and walked to check into our room...” (Review 121)

“it was our wedding night- we popped to the registry office in the afternoon...”
(Review 242)

4.5.2 Guest perception on central location

Opposing opinions were provided on whether a hotel was centrally located or not. On one hand, guests highlighted the interesting sites and dining options available within walking distance of their hotel. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“... The hotel is located across the street from XXX... Across the street from the Hotel XXX is XXX... walk down the whole way to the wharf... and pass by all the ethnic eateries along the way... it is very walkable. We would stay here again with no qualms.” (Review 95)

On the other hand, other guests considered the same luxury hotel's central location differently. Those who did not appreciate the centrality of the location expressed dissatisfaction. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“... The drawback for me was that it’s about a 20-25 brisk walk to the waterfront, and I did not find retail and restaurant choices closest to the hotel very appealing.” (Review 88)

4.5.3 Guest preference on location

Some guests conveyed their preference on what was attractive to them in terms of location. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“... We enjoyed staying out of the main hub of the city and walked to/from the main central area in approximately 20-30 mins... a few hills along the way, but it didn’t bother us... found lots of small eating places nearby...” (Review 95)

For these guests, a fair compromise was made between the location of the luxury hotel being close enough to the city proper, yet far enough away to enjoy some quiet. As explained by a guest in an online review:

“...everything is walkable in Auckland. While in the heart of downtown, it was also a little off the beaten track so it is quiet and peaceful...” (Review 231)

4.5.4 Benefits of a good location

The findings also suggested that for some luxury hotels in Auckland, the location afforded the hotel an added advantage. Guests recognised that a waterfront location was attractive. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“... The harbour in Auckland is one of the most scenic with countless sailboats and yachts, and this Hotel is right in the middle of it...” (Review 158)

The location of a luxury hotel by the water enhanced the ambience and added positively to the stay experience. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“... They make excellent use of their location, with lots of windows and glass walls in the bar and the restaurant located above, so the harbour becomes part of the experience in good weather...” (Review 133)

4.5.5 Drawbacks with the location

However, location also added negatively to the stay experience (room noise was discussed in Section 4.4.5). Aside from the noise, construction made access to the hotel challenging. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“... Unfortunately there are building works... so we found it tough to get to the hotel using the GPS from the airport...” (Review 368)

Despite this, some luxury hotel guests felt that the stay experience in their hotel was still generally positive. As explained by a guest in an online review:

“...location is so central, quiet, even with the road works they were not an issue despite other reviews...” (Review 376)

Other hotel attributes negated the undesirable effects of the construction making the stay experience still positive for a few guests. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“...construction work everywhere in the city and driving around was hard, the atmosphere and staff at Hotel XXX made up for it...” (Review 397)

4.5.6 Modes of transport

For most guests, walking was the preferred means of transport. The locations allowed guests to make short trips within various areas of interest. As described by a guest in an online review:

“... Hotel is the middle of all the action. Walking distance to all the interesting places... No need to take a taxi anywhere ...” (Review 266)

To add to guest comfort and enhance convenience, one luxury hotel offered complimentary shuttle services to their guests, eliciting appreciation. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“... The courtesy bus was definitely a great benefit, given the hilly nature of Auckland...” (Review 26)

4.5.7 Guest perceptions of walking to the hotel

The findings revealed contention amongst some luxury hotel guests with what they considered easy walking. Despite referring to Auckland’s hilly terrain, several guests maintained that walking uphill was not a problem. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“... We opted to walk up... It was a good workout as it is mostly uphill but doable for people in moderately good shape...” (Review 223)

To the contrary, other guests regarded the natural terrain to be impeding, which caused disappointment for these guests. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“...is very steep, I tried once walking from XXX Street to the hotel, although it is not very far, it required lots of energy... I walked downhill...in 10 minutes. Well, walking back uphill, is a different story...” (Review 183)

4.5.8 Summary of the significance of location

In general, the locations of the luxury hotels were deemed as central for their convenience and accessibility. Walking was expressed by the majority as their preferred mode of transport. The findings also indicated that the location’s appeal was influenced by perception and preference, as guests expressed differences in their notions of centrality. The few disappointments aired by guests in relation to locations, such as noise and construction, were not attributed to the hotels.

4.6 Guest perceptions of hotel facilities

The facilities that luxury hotels in Auckland offered to guests are summarised in Table 13.

Table 13: Luxury hotel facilities

Bar	Club lounge	Gym	Parking	Room service	Steam room
Business centre	Conference	Jacuzzi	Pool	Sauna	Taxi rank
Casino	Elevator	Lobby	Restaurant	Spa	Water station

Over-all, guests were satisfied with the facilities in luxury hotels because of the quality and options provided. Most guests expressed the view that the facilities were complete and well-maintained. As stated by guests in the online reviews:

“...the property has all the facilities that you need...” (Review 182)

“... Facility is superb...” (Review 277)

Having excellent facilities allowed the guests to indulge themselves in a variety of activities. Most enjoyed using the facilities because it gave them positive feelings, such as “feeling relaxed.” As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“... For anyone wanting to be pampered... enjoy the spa, sauna and swimming pool...” (Review 89)

4.6.1 Food and beverage facilities

The findings indicated that amongst the facilities in luxury hotels, the guests utilised the restaurants most. Guests appreciated excellent dining facilities, remarking that the meals were of high quality because of the good presentation and taste. As described by a guest in an online review:

“... Dinner at the XXX Restaurant was excellent, my very first Pork Belly which just melted in your mouth and then a main of Snapper – just beautiful... We had the most beautiful dessert like off the final of Masterchef...” (Review 297)

Aside from the food, the restaurants’ service and ambience were also noted to be above standard. Guests appreciated the restaurant by describing the service they received when dining (Section 4.2.3) or by commending the staff who served them (Section 4.3). As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“High Tea Heaven! Wow... It was excellent with a huge array of very tasty morsels. Service was outstanding as was the ambience and food. The china was beautiful and the whole place oozes charm and luxury...” (Review 440)

Most guests recognised that their positive dining experiences in the restaurants of luxury hotels enhanced their stay experience. As explained by a guest in an online review:

“...wonderful restaurant added to the experience. The XXX restaurant was a great experience... A quality hotel.” (Review 42)

4.6.2 Facilities for recreation and relaxation

Aside from the restaurants, the guests were also provided with facilities for recreation and relaxation such as a pool and spa. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“...nice facilities. Pool, gym and the proper Finnish sauna were a wonderful reason to stay at the hotel too!...” (Review 358)

As with the restaurants, the recreational facilities were of high quality, and guests declared that they were well-maintained. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“...also enjoyed the use of the fitness centre and all equipment was clean and in excellent working order...” (Review 313)

A relaxing view also made the facilities more appealing. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“...spend many hours in the pool and spa as the sun went down, just lovely...” (Review 33)

4.6.3 Attractiveness of certain facilities

Access to some facilities, such as the executive or club lounge, was only given to eligible guests. These luxury guests listed all the perquisites they received and regarded them as added treats. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“The Club Lounge experience and all its benefits was outstanding... Cosy breakfast space, afternoon tea and evening drinks and canapes, all backed by efficient staff.” (Review 32)

For other guests, being able to use a facility exclusively was attractive. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“... The complimentary spa and sauna, which you could book for private use, added to experience...” (Review 442)

Luxury hotels also allowed their guests to use their facilities to freshen up, which was greatly appreciated by many reviewers. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“... The hotel gets further top marks from us for enabling us to take a last shower before our very late overnight flight to Hong Kong. We were eternally thankful for that small but generous privilege.” (Review 225)

4.6.4 Dissatisfaction with the facilities

A few comments relating to dissatisfaction were expressed about the facilities (Table 7). One source of disappointment was elevators, which were insufficient in accommodating the volume of guests. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“...elevators which somehow seem extremely small and are just two of them, so you may end up waiting for elevators during busy hours...” (Review 160)

Another concern for some guests was the absence of an executive lounge that their hotel brand did not provide in Auckland. However, they noted that they received acceptable compensation for this lack. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“... Although there is no lounge, the Hotel XXX privileges were still awarded in the form of additional drink vouchers...” (Review 139)

Also, the size of the facilities, particularly the gym, pool, and bar, disappointed some guests. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“...a gym that has enough equipment to get in a workout but the space is a little tight...” (Review 28)

4.6.5 Summary of guest perception of hotel facilities

The guests recognised when the facilities were complete and well maintained. The majority expressed that having various facilities for recreation and relaxation enhanced their stay experiences. Amongst the facilities, the guests utilised the restaurants the most. The dissatisfaction expressed was mostly in relation to the size of the pool, gym, and spa as well as the capacity of the elevators.

4.7 Other hotel attributes that luxury guests considered important

Amenities, ambience, cleanliness, value for money, and décor are the other hotel attributes that guests considered important when staying in Auckland’s luxury hotels. These will be explored in turn.

4.7.1 Amenities

The luxury hotels offered amenities as listed in Table 14.

Table 14: Amenities received by guests

Balloons	Children’s welcome kit	Electric bike	Personalised card
Bottle of champagne	City map	Flowers	Smart phone
Bottle of wine	Confections	Fresh fruit	Tapas
Breakfast voucher	Drink voucher	Hotel magazine	Wireless internet

The findings revealed that amenities were particularly effective for highlighting guest celebrations such as birthdays, anniversaries, or honeymoons. Most guests discussing these, mentioned that receiving personalised amenities produced positive emotions such as “feeling special.” As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“...the care and attention that the staff paid to making our first wedding anniversary special really went above and beyond. Our room had balloons, a

“happy anniversary” letter from the desk clerk and team, and a bottle of wine on ice to celebrate the occasion.” (Review 399)

Returning guests were also usually treated to confections, which they liked. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“... The little extras with the welcome fruit platter, turndown service including tea and chocolate... was an excellent touch...” (Review 293)

The findings also showed that some of the luxury hotels in Auckland provided amenities that were unique to their property. The guests wrote positively about using these hotel-specific amenities. As described by guests in the online reviews:

“... And there was something that I had never encountered before in a hotel – they have a complimentary smart phone that you can take with you as you go around the city...” (Review 18)

“... The best part about the stay was the use of the electric bikes around Auckland. We rode them around for a few hours and had a great time seeing all of the site.” (Review 41)

“... Almost most impressive was the in-room Hotel XXX Magazine, great little articles & interviews, an impressive global footprint...” (Review 190)

The provision of wireless internet was common to all luxury hotels in Auckland. However, even though this was complimentary, a few guests expressed dissatisfaction with the slow speed. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“...internet was a bit slow at the start but the IT manager was on the case and has fixed the problem swiftly...” (Review 139)

4.7.2 Ambience

The findings suggested that the ambience in luxury hotels enhanced the stay experience of guests. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“...little touches both in the room and around the hotel gives you the sense that a lot of thought has gone into making this hotel a pleasure to stay at...” (Review 412)

Some guests described the ambience by stating their emotions. As described by a guest in an online review:

“... I turned to my husband and said “Wow! This place is fancy!”... all I could think was wow!!...” (Review 10)

They illustrated how luxury hotels in Auckland used several elements, such as the décor, choice of materials, and signature fragrances, to achieve a positive ambience. As explained by a guest in an online review:

“... I loved the décor... dark wood, a beautiful reflective pool in the center of the lobby, pretty granite tiles on the walls, big open windows... lanterns lit along the indoor walkways in the evenings... I felt absolutely special staying here...”

Little touches like the kiwi juice in the reception area, the different “Hotel XXX fragrances” wafting through the lobby...” (Review 293)

Several luxury hotels in Auckland employed live entertainment to set the mood. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“... People were enjoying high tea with a pianist playing on our arrival which definitely set a great atmosphere!” (Review 56)

Some luxury hotels have locations that provide a good view (i.e. by the marina) (see Section 4.5.4). Most stated that a waterfront view influenced the ambience of the hotel positively. As described by a guest in an online review:

“...views over the harbour are truly what makes this place so special...” (Review 165)

On the other hand, external factors such as construction within the luxury hotel’s location (Section 4.5.5) affected ambience negatively.

4.7.3 Cleanliness

The guests provided adjectives to describe levels of cleanliness as listed in Table 15.

Table 15: Adjectives used to describe the cleanliness of luxury hotels in Auckland

Above standard	Crisp	Immaculate	Spotlessly clean
Always clean	Exceptionally clean	Impeccably clean	Super clean
Amazingly clean	Extremely clean	Perfectly clean	Tidy
Clean	Fresh	Pristine	Very clean

Cleanliness did not register any dissatisfaction from the guests (Table 7). Room cleanliness (Section 4.4.4) was the second most mentioned factor by the guests. In addition, the facilities of luxury hotels were described as clean (Section 4.6). As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“The hotel is immaculate... Everywhere is immaculately clean...” (Review 444)

Guests stated that as luxury hotels were clean, they were able to enjoy themselves there. As highlighted by a guest in an online review:

“...bathroom is so clean I enjoy having a soak in the huge bath!...” (Review 267)

They also expressed positive emotions about being in a clean place. As mentioned by a guest in an online review:

“...the room was cleaned impeccably. It was a delight to return from out sightseeing adventures to such an immaculate hotel room...” (Review 146)

The cleanliness standard was still upheld even with the ongoing construction near some of the hotels. As explained by a guest in an online review:

“Even though Auckland is STILL going through road works in front of the Hotel, the staff... keep the front tidy even while dust is piling up in the street! The rooms are a great size and very clean...” (Review 333)

4.7.4 Value for money

The findings suggested that some of the luxury hotel guests benchmarked hotels to choose the best deal. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“The Hotel had the best downtown rate of all luxury hotel choices, on the day of booking with Booking.com...” (Review 324)

Several guests considered Auckland’s luxury hotels to be pricier than most hotels. As described by a guest in an online review:

“... The price is not for the faint-hearted...” (Review 174)

However, when guests received the combination of the hotel attributes that mattered to them, they perceived the price in luxury hotels as “worth it.” The high quality of the hotel attributes precipitated a positive stay experience which justified the price for most guests. As illustrated by a guest in an online review:

“...they fail to disappoint!... great value for money and I would highly recommend staying here.” (Review 238)

In addition, the incremental offerings in luxury hotels, such as food and beverage, mini-bars, or massage services, were considered by some guests to be reasonably priced. As stated by a guest in an online review:

“...also had the high-tea. Fabulous and well-priced...” (Review 443)

On the other hand, some guests deemed the prices expensive, but the price did not negatively affect their stay experience. As mentioned by one guest in an online review:

“... Buffet breakfast was a bit more expensive than usual but there was so much choice for everyone...” (Review 20)

For a couple of guests, package inclusions were attractive and increased their acceptance level of the price. As described by a guest in an online review:

“...boy what a bargain - \$290 a night which gave us parking, club buffet breakfast, high afternoon tea, evening canapes and drinks and a \$60 daily in-house dining credit...” (Review 45)

4.7.5 Décor

The décor in Auckland’s luxury hotels received only positive comments from guests. As noted in Section 4.7.2, décor enhances the ambience of luxury hotels. As illustrated by one guest in an online review:

“... Loved the art deco style... Lots of lovely touches around the place – we particularly enjoyed the ornate crockery in the rooms!” (Review 426)

Guests described the décor as “stylish,” “detailed,” “beautiful,” “elegant,” and “festive.” Guests mentioned that the luxury hotels decorated extensively during seasonal holidays such as Christmas. As highlighted by one guest in an online review:

“...staying during the Christmas season and the hotel was dressed appropriately – gorgeously decorated trees and a life-sized gingerbread sleigh that kids were dying to get their hands on...” (Review 50)

4.7.6 Summary of other attributes guests considered important

Summing up this section, guests did not express any dissatisfaction with cleanliness and décor. Guests associated amenities, ambience, cleanliness, value for money, and décor with the other attributes. For example, amenities such as confections were referred to as part of service surprise. Also, cleanliness was mentioned in both rooms and facilities comments. When guests remarked positively about these attributes (e.g. amenities, ambience, etc.), they expressed positive emotions such as “feeling special” or “wow.”

4.8 The luxury hotel experience

The attribute “over-all hotel” refers to the general descriptions given by the guests of luxury hotels and their stay experiences in general (Table 16).

Table 16: Adjectives used to describe luxury hotels in Auckland

Amazing	Exceptional	Magnificent	Small	Stylish
Beautiful	First class	Modern	Special	Well-appointed
Classy	Great	New		

The guests described their luxury hotel in general. They detailed the specific attributes that were important for them and stated that these met their expectations. As mentioned by one guest in an online review:

“excellent hotel, perfect location, high standards and expectations met. nil issues experienced during our stay...” (Review 1)

Generally, luxury hotels were deemed great places to stay in Auckland as they provided the hotel attributes that mattered to the guests. As explained by one guest in an online review:

“Perfect location. Very friendly and attentive staff. The rooms are large and super clean. Beds are comfortable. Great facilities pool/spa. Restaurants are tasty. Good place to stay for families or couples...” (Review 370)

4.8.1 A positive stay experience

Almost all of the guests described their luxury hotel stay experiences to be positive, as listed in Table 17.

Table 17: Adjectives used to describe luxury stay experiences in Auckland

Awesome	Consistent	Flawless	Memorable
Best	Excellent	Hotel renovation during stay	Very pleasant
Comfortable	Faultless	Luxurious	Wonderful

In addition, the over-all hotel attributes evoked positive emotions in relation to luxury hotel stay experiences of the guests. Table 18 summarises the emotions expressed.

Table 18: Emotions associated with the over-all hotel attributes

Appreciative	Delighted	Impressed	Pampered	Well-rested
Did not want to leave	Enjoyed	In awe	Relaxed	Wish to
	Home away from home	Love	Satisfied	stay longer

It has been highlighted throughout this chapter how the different hotel attributes worked together and made the luxury hotel guests feel positive. As illustrated by one guest in an online review:

“...felt like home – but way more luxurious!... had a hard time leaving it... room was beyond comfortable and I really enjoyed using the spa facilities... The hotel staff... genuinely caring for my well-being and enjoyment... never felt lonely the entire time I was there...” (Review 191)

As guests enumerated their important attributes, they also identified their stay experience as favourable. As stated by one guest in an online review:

“Excellent!... very friendly and professional staff, great room, very clean, perfect location... We had very pleasant experience!” (Review 418)

Feeling good emotions and distinguishing their stay experience positively, most guests recommended their luxury hotels on the online reviews. They also declared their intentions to stay again, and some guests even congratulated the luxury hotels for their great work. As stated by one guest in an online review:

“... Kudos to one of the best hotel experiences we have experienced! Way to go Hotel XXX...” (Review 146)

Several guests concluded that the luxury hotels in Auckland were amongst the superior hotels in this category. As highlighted by one guest in an online review:

“One of the best boutique luxury hotels in Asia Pacific... Not many placed (sic) in APAC measure up to Hotel XXX. Keep up!” (Review 432)

Lastly, the findings showed some dissatisfaction expressed by guests in terms of their hotel generally. Guests recognised the need to continue with on-going renovation during their stay in the luxury hotel. As mentioned by one guest in an online review:

“...The hotel is undergoing renovations, but work only commences 10-4pm (sic)...” (Review 173)

However, the dissatisfaction expressed with the hotel generally, did not contribute negatively to the stay experience.

4.8.2 Summary of the luxury hotel experience

Guests expressed that they felt good and identified their stay experiences to be favourable when they received the combination of hotel attributes they considered important. Construction disruption in the hotels was a disappointment for some but, significantly, participants believed their stay experience was positive.

4.9 Summary

The hotel attributes of service, staff, room, location, facilities, over-all hotel, amenities, ambience, cleanliness, value for money, and décor were generally considered positively by guests. The findings indicated that hotel attributes are influenced by guest perceptions and benchmarking. Service appears to be the most important attribute in Auckland's luxury hotels. Certain attributes also exhibited close associations with each another. Service and staff, room, cleanliness and amenities, location and ambience, and ambience with décor are examples of these connected attributes. Disappointment was expressed with all the attributes except cleanliness and décor. The room, followed by the location, incurred the most expressions of dissatisfaction from the luxury hotel guests. However, the combination of attributes working well together generally made the guests feel positive and contributed to a positive stay experience.

Chapter Five: Phase two interview findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the second phase, the interviews with guest participants. Firstly, the summary of participants' visits to luxury hotels is presented. Then, the seven luxury hotel attributes, namely service, staff, room, cleanliness, location, facilities, and ambience are discussed. Thirdly, the ways attributes evoked emotions and influenced guests' stay experiences are explained. Next, a model of factors that guests consider important is presented, followed by the chapter's conclusion.

5.2 Summary of participants' visits to luxury hotels

Participants either stayed two to four nights (38%), or five to seven nights (38%) in their luxury hotel. Of all participants, 25% were long stays, with more than seven nights per stay. The majority (81%) were repeat guests. It is also worthwhile noting that this did not represent the number of nights that the participants stayed in Auckland's luxury hotels at the time of the interviews. Table 19 summarises participants' visit details.

Table 19: Summary of participants' visits to luxury hotels

No	Gender	Age group	Country	Frequency of travel (yearly)	Average nights	Stay pattern
1	Female	65-74	New Zealand	More than 5 times	5-7 nights	Repeat
2	Female	65-74	New Zealand	2-4 times	7+ nights	Repeat
3	Female	55-64	New Zealand	2-4 times	2-4 nights	Repeat
4	Female	45-54	New Zealand	More than 5 times	5-7 nights	Repeat
5	Female	45-54	New Zealand	More than 5 times	2-4 nights	Repeat
6	Female	45-54	Chile	2-4 times	7+ nights	First time
7	Female	35-44	Thailand	More than 5 times	5-7 nights	Repeat
8	Female	35-44	United States	2-4 times	2-4 nights	First time
9	Female	25-34	Indonesia	2-4 times	7+ nights	First time
10	Male	65-74	New Zealand	More than 5 times	5-7 nights	Repeat
11	Male	65-74	New Zealand	2-4 times	7+ nights	Repeat
12	Male	35-44	New Zealand	More than 5 times	2-4 nights	Repeat
13	Male	35-44	New Zealand	2-4 times a year	2-4 nights	Repeat
14	Male	55-64	Japan	More than 5 times	2-4 nights	Repeat
15	Male	45-54	Singapore	More than 5 times	5-7 nights	Repeat
16	Male	23-34	Canada	2-4 times a year	5-7 nights	Repeat

5.3 Quality of service

The quality of service in luxury hotels was the strongest theme expressed by interview participants. The majority said that quality service came to mind when they thought of luxury hotels. Most of them mentioned that luxury hotels provided better service when they compared hotels. As illustrated by a luxury hotel guest:

“Just um... quality of service, quality of care... quality is better than normal, just above. A level I suppose that is higher than what is standard. Quality in luxury hotels are I should say higher than most hotels, otherwise they wouldn't be luxury at all.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

Service quality was also stated as one of the primary reasons for participants to book at a luxury hotel. High quality of service was their preference and an influencing factor in their stay purchase decision. As illustrated by a luxury hotel guest:

“It is five or six-star service... That's the kind of place I like to stay because I always want that kind of service. In my business that's the kind of service we want to provide to my customer as well.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

5.3.1 Benefits of good service

Several participants explained how service affected their stay experience. These participants further explained that good service in luxury hotels contributed positively to their experience. As highlighted by a luxury hotel guest:

“Because if you actually don't have good service, it puts your experience off. Yeah, you can't enjoy your stay. You go out with a negative...” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

Some participants expected a high quality of service in luxury hotels. As such, it provided them with some peace of mind. As explained by one hotel guest:

“Better service... the idea that you walk in the front door and you never need to worry about anything. You can just relax and you know you are being taken-care of. And you don't need to be afraid of the hotel screwing everything up... and it's all about making sure that you get everything you need, and everything you want. Um... the highest level of service.” (Luxury Hotel Guest L)

5.3.2 Guest perception on service

Most participants were frequent travellers and frequent guests of luxury hotels. They explained that their perceptions of service were influenced by benchmarking against past experiences. As explained by a luxury hotel guest:

“(I am from) Singapore. So our expectations are a little bit higher for the service in luxury hotels. Singapore has many luxury hotels and we travel a lot... we tend to stay in luxury hotels. We tend to compare which ones have better service.” (Luxury Hotel Guest K)

An interesting finding was that some participants expressed different perceptions, particularly on the speed of service, although service was generally considered good in luxury hotels. A few participants, particularly the elderly and some women, desired a slower pace. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“I think it depends. Other countries like India, in Asia like in my country, Thailand and Bali in Indonesia, service is less in a hurry. I think guests are served better with no rush. I think here, people are busy, so (they are) more (in a) hurry. It is good still. Just different but still good.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

On the other hand, the majority of male participants cherished the faster service offered by Auckland’s luxury hotels. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“Um... good service. Ah (it is) quick. I come here always so they know me. Fast service so (I find that to be) good.” (Luxury Hotel Guest N)

5.3.3 Room upgrades

The majority of participants, many of whom were regular guests of the hotel they were staying in, received room upgrades. They stated that their status as frequent guests was recognised upon check-in. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“They gave me free upgrade. So ah... um... I checked in, and the staff remember me from before I was here. And she said, “Welcome back Mr. T.” (It was) very nice and (the employee was) smiling. She said I was upgraded. Very good ah... nice, um... (I feel) happy. They want I (sic) come back.” (Luxury Hotel Guest N)

All expressed the positive emotions they felt in being upgraded. Delight was the strongest emotion felt. Several participants also stated that the room upgrade provided other benefits such as lounge access. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“...on occasions, am delighted with upgrades and am delighted with you know the facilities within the room with those upgrades.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

5.3.4 Providing amenities

Guests deemed the amenities of luxury hotels as trivial things that mattered to them. Most participants mentioned that the amenities distinguished a luxury hotel from other hotels. As described by a guest:

“All the luxuries that you get um... you know the extras, the little extras they provide...” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

They explained that receiving amenities made them feel valued by the luxury hotels. Aside from that, some noted that amenities were provided for their convenience such as receiving a welcome drink when waiting for their room to be ready. As highlighted further by the same luxury hotel guest:

“...like when we checked in a few days ago, we were served the welcome drink. We got a nice welcome platter which I find lovely. WIFI is fast, we connected easily. So yeah, um... those little things matter.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

Not all of the luxury hotels served welcome drinks. For those that did, the participants experienced positive emotions such as “feeling impressed.” They commented that the welcome drink added a special touch to their arrival. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“One thing that particularly impressed me was that little welcome drink that we got. And so those little things like that sometimes just makes a difference.” (Luxury Hotel Guest I)

5.3.5 Knowing the guest’s preferences

A few participants were frequent business travellers that patronised branded hotels. They appreciated how the luxury hotel supplied their preferences regardless of the hotel’s location. These regular guests found the service consistency reassuring. As described by a guest in an online review:

“They are very good with that. It makes me feel like they know how to take care of me. I do not need to ask... I just thought that every time I stayed in the hotel I always get five bottles. I maybe asked it before but from then on it was what I have. Like my home away from home.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

Further highlighting that this kind of service is what makes the luxury hotel exceptional:

“Things like that, little things, they remember. Like wow... and it is a small thing but that (is) what makes the hotel stands out. They remember.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

5.3.6 Service accuracy

In most cases, knowing the guest’s preferences ensured personalised service. In other cases, service accuracy provided a unique service advantage for luxury hotels. Several participants detailed the effectiveness of anticipated service in making them feel important. They were full of excitement when narrating their luxury hotel experience. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“I made a booking at an expensive hotel... to get into the hotel I had to knock on a door. And, ah... they opened the door and said, “Mr. P we have been expecting you.” ... They knew (me) even though I hadn’t introduced myself, they knew, they knew who I was...” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

The service accuracy provided a “wow” factor that made a lasting impression with these participants. They acknowledged that it contributed to their memorable stay experience. As further narrated by the same luxury hotel guest:

“... because of the time of my booking or something like that. But I was very impressed. I was blown away... it was very personable. I felt like they know me. So yeah, it was a great time.” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

5.3.7 Extra mile service

Most guests mentioned that luxury hotels excel in going the extra mile for their guests.

As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“My luggage missed the connection... they followed up for me. I think if it was a normal hotel that I stayed in I would not have received that kind of service... When it arrived, it was taken straight to my room... So things like that, luxury hotels are great at.” (Luxury Hotel Guest L)

One participant specified how the luxury hotel provided service to address mundane tasks associated with travel. As highlighted by the participant:

“They asked if I wanted my luggage unpacked. So (the service was) very nice.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

5.3.8 Service failure

While the service attribute was generally considered positive, service failures were experienced, and a few participants expressed disappointment on receiving bad service.

As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“If service is not there it spoils your whole day...” (Luxury Hotel Guest K)

Food and beverage was an area of concern for some participants. The food quality was a recurring issue raised. As narrated by a couple staying in a luxury hotel:

“I think the breakfast could be better here... I mean when the food isn’t eatable then it’s a disaster... The hash browns were uneatable, the sausages were too spicy, and the bacon was like budget bacon.” (Luxury Hotel Guests D and E)

When the same participants were asked if this experience would stop them from coming back, the availability of other dining options was the luxury hotel’s saving grace. As they explained:

“Oh no. No. We can always have breakfast somewhere else. There is plenty of breakfast just here.” (Luxury Hotel Guest D and E)

However, some service failures prompted a few of the participants to stop patronising a particular luxury hotel and to shift their preference to another luxury hotel. They deemed the service recovery actions unacceptable. In these instances, benchmarking was an influencing factor in comparing the service attribute across luxury hotels in Auckland. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“...we got there... and they still send us to the bar to go have a drink because the room wasn’t ready. There are four of us... and the drinks were for two people... I will stay over here (rather) than the XXX.” (Luxury Hotel Guest H)

5.3.9 Summary of quality of service

In general, good service was recognised as a positive contributor to the stay experience. Most participants considered the high quality of service as the strongest attribute of Auckland's luxury hotels as it was personalised and consistent. Some participants also discussed variations in service preference, particularly relating to speed. Their preferences stemmed from benchmarking the service they had received from previous luxury hotel experiences.

5.4 The luxury hotel staff

The majority of the participants praised the staff by describing their positive characteristics. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“I think the staff are exceptional right from the very beginning. The way they greet you, the concierge is so lovely. And authentic. There is a perfect balance here for me between warm and welcoming and friendly.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

In addition, most referred more to skill rather than the personality, detailing how the staff delivered the service. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“I guess friendliness and willing to help out, answering questions, get things done. Front of house is just efficient. There is always someone there straight away to help.” (Luxury Hotel Guest J)

Efficiency was constantly mentioned by most participants. They conveyed their appreciation that the staff knew how to do their job well, and were well-trained. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“The staff will never say ‘no.’ They always, they always find a solution. The staff are efficient, and they know their job.” (Luxury Hotel Guest L)

A few participants declared expectations of high staff quality in luxury hotels. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“I mean I guess the staff are fantastic but that's what they do.” (Luxury Hotel Guest Q)

5.4.1 Staff influences service

The findings revealed that most participants recognised the importance of the staff in luxury hotels by saying that the staff's performance was the hotel's performance. For these guests, the staff represented their first impression of the hotel. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“First person you meet is always a good indication of what the hotel is going to be like... I think without the staff the hotel will not be good. In luxury hotels I think you can see how good they are. It really shows.” (Luxury Hotel Guest J)

All of them said that the staff influenced the service in luxury hotels. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“Staff needs to know what they are doing. Service will not be good if the staff are not good. So almost linked those two. Service and staff.” (Luxury Hotel Guest K)

5.4.2 Staff engagement

Several participants emphasised the importance of the manner in which staff approached them. A good balance of skill (professionalism) and personality (friendly) was favoured by participants. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“Interaction is important as well... The staff here are professional yet friendly, it is a good mix.” (Luxury Hotel Guest G)

Most expressed that they felt the staff’s genuine concern during their interactions and identified their personal interactions with staff as authentic. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“Here, the staff is really sincere and are not just doing it for the sake of doing it. Ah... in this hotel, you can tell they like what they are doing. It shows. They like dealing with their guests.” (Luxury Hotel Guest K)

One participant provided cues for authenticity in saying:

“Staff very good. Obviously eye contact by the staff means they care for you.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

The staff encounters delivered quality connections with the participants. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“You just feel like it’s home away from home. Nothing is too much of a bother for the staff to do.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

This resulted with participants expressing positive emotions in relation to their staff interactions. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“Another ah... reason is how is the personal interaction of the people who works there. The interaction that is good towards us makes us happy” (Luxury Hotel Guest C)

5.4.3 Feeling cared for by the staff

The luxury hotel staff made the participants feel positive. When the staff delivered quality service, all participants expressed the view that the staff looked after them with great care. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“When we arrived yesterday, so basically the person that was by the door, ah, he is great. He made sure that we got parked. We got valet parking anyway. So he just moved the taxi forward so there was available parking for us. So that made it convenient, being looked after even before we stepped out of the car.” (Luxury Hotel Guests I and J)

Participants felt that they were being treated with high regard. Recognition mattered to them. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“And so the person, the doorman, whenever they opened they knew us by name. And they would say like, ‘Welcome back Mr. & Mrs. C and you know they know you. It was very personable.” (Luxury Hotel Guest F)

Recognition was particularly significant for those on repeat stays. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“The Hotel XXX know me... remembers me, and I find that delightful.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

5.4.4 Summary of the luxury hotel staff

The majority of participants described the staff as efficient. They agreed that the staff delivered great service. There was consensus amongst them on the genuineness of their staff engagement, and this made them feel “taken cared of” during their stays in luxury hotels.

5.5 Room quality

Almost all of the participants viewed luxury hotel rooms favourably when referring to their quality and size. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“The room was very beautiful. There was a very nice view.. quiet, spacious. It doesn’t have to be huge, but it should have enough space to breathe.” (Luxury Hotel Guest L)

Some participants described how the rooms added to the over-all appeal of the luxury hotel. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“When you walk into the room and you see that it’s all perfectly laid out. It’s really nice going, yeah, (I) am in this cool place.” (Luxury Hotel Guest G)

For most, the room quality made them feel positive. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“You feel good when you walk in and the rooms are comfortable.” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

The room was thought of by most participants as their personal space when staying in luxury hotels. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“The room. (Because) that’s where I’ll spend most of my time.” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

5.5.1 Bathroom quality

Aside from the room quality, the participants expected the bathroom quality to be of a comparable high standard. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“The bathroom is really important. I hate staying in a hotel where the bathroom and the facilities and amenities in the bathroom are not up to par.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

The shower quality was given emphasis by most men. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“Usually like in the morning, the shower is super power pressured and you’re half asleep and you just get blasted.” (Luxury Hotel Guest G)

Further signifying that enjoying a quality shower in the morning sets their day, one luxury hotel guest explained:

“I think in the room the shower should have good pressure. It’s very nice to have a great shower in the morning to prepare you for the day.” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

However, bathroom size was a stronger consideration for women, as mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“The bathrooms were probably bigger than my lounge. (It had) generous room space.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

5.5.2 Quality beds

The majority mentioned the significance of a quality bed. They all agreed that the bed was an important room facility in luxury hotels. The bed linen and pillows were specified as components of the bed. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“The sheets are beautiful when you go to your bed. The bed and pillow are very important for me.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

Several participants conveyed the notion that the beds in luxury hotels were a significant factor in making the rooms feel comfortable. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“...bed, pillows, they give you a very comfy feeling. It makes you feel better, ah comfortable in your stay.” (Luxury Hotel Guest K)

A comfortable bed for most, helped them have a good night’s sleep. Restfulness was important for them. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“I guess the number one thing would be a good bed. It has to be comfortable that you get a good night’s sleep. I guess you are not home, but you still want to be able to sleep well. I suppose the hotels like this one have really good beds. It’s one of those that I have the most comfortable sleep away from home.” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

A few participants compared the bed quality in the luxury hotels with that of lesser rated hotels. These participants considered the beds in luxury hotels to be of superior quality,

and that the better bed quality in luxury hotels was their preference. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“(Referring to a less quality hotel) It’s called XXX... We were crippled. The bed was shocker... It’s not really a soft bed, it’s just a nice comfortable bed. These beds here are very good. Perfect. Number one.” (Luxury Hotel Guests D and E)

Benchmarking the bed quality of luxury hotels affected the future stay experience of these participants. As illustrated further by the same luxury hotel guests:

“I think the bed is important... if they are not comfortable, they are not going to come back. There is one hotel that we don’t go to because of the beds...” (Luxury Hotel Guests D and E)

However, the same participants also acknowledged that the beds in luxury hotels were preferred. As illustrated by the same luxury hotel guests:

“I think it was just for us though (because) our son goes there all the time and he loves it. I suppose for some people it will be alright, but it wasn’t (for us) you know...” (Luxury Hotel Guests D and E)

5.5.3 A comfortable room

Most participants wanted their rooms to be comfortable. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“...how comfortable the room is. Relaxation.” (Luxury Hotel Guest B)

A few of them emphasised the pillows, which made the room comfortable for them. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“And the room too... very comfortable. Eh... a lot of pillows. Very comfortable. Not usual. Usually you find a couple of pillow and normal pillow good pillow but this one is not usual. Very very nice pillows for me... very very nice room.” (Luxury Hotel Guest C)

For some, a comfortable room meant being well-appointed. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“The room you stay in is complete. They give you more than just the basic. Ah... even the fine details I suppose, the TV in the room is the flat screen those things usually (sic).” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

Almost all of the participants disclosed that the rooms in luxury hotels were their home away from home. They said they enjoyed their rooms the same way they would at home. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“Having the ability to plug your laptop into the TV um... a lot of rooms don’t have Netflix set up or something like that so when you are up there and when you are watching that for the evening and just bringing your device and watching your Netflix. There might be some movies like that, that are halfway through when you go there, and you just want an hour to be able to relax into the night.” (Luxury Hotel Guest G)

Also, a comfortable room afforded the participants restfulness. Most spoke about the importance of rest in having a good stay experience. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“To be able to sleep... If you don’t have a good room, if you don’t have a good night’s sleep in a good, quiet and comfortable room then it doesn’t matter... If you can’t get a good night of rest then you can’t have a good stay in a hotel.”
(Luxury Hotel Guest L)

5.5.4 A clean room

A clean room was also significant for all participants. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“The cleanliness of the room itself. I am a clean freak. Sometimes, you know I wipe the remote control and hairdryer with the wet wipes. Yeah, I do that, I just have to make sure that it’s clean.” (Luxury Hotel Guest B)

The findings showed that they all expected the rooms in a luxury hotel to be clean. Sleeping in a clean room was appealing for all. A few participants compared the cleanliness of the rooms in luxury hotels with those of lesser rated hotels. These participants established that luxury hotels had higher standards of room cleanliness. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“Number one would be that the room is clean. Yeah. It is really nice going to a clean room. I have stayed in one (hotel) in the past (not luxury hotel) when you pulled back and like there’s hair in the sheets so things like that hmmm... (makes a disgusted face), have these sheets been changed? To actually see a very clean room is nice.” (Luxury Hotel Guest G)

5.5.5 In-room experience

Most of the participants talked about their positive in-room experience in luxury hotels. Participants said that the room facilities were supported by quality amenities, which augmented their stay experience. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“The room’s just so comfortable. The bed and you can choose your pillows. You know the little things that makes all the difference like the bed, pillow, those shampoos and soap in the shower. You know it’s quality.” (Luxury Hotel Guest J)

Most women found the high quality of the amenities appealing. They stressed the importance of using products that are the same or better than what they normally use. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“The little bits that are in your room are the type of products that you would want to use other than the feeling that you are using liquid blowing soap.”
(Luxury Hotel Guest A)

The men focused more on in-room facilities. As one luxury hotel guest explained:

“The room experience is really important for me. So it has to have a good bed and good shower pressure then (I) am happy.” (Luxury Hotel Guest G)

The participants’ preferences as well as the nature of stay influenced their perceptions of the in-room experience. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“A couple of months ago, we got this romantic package at Charlie hotel. That really sticks in my mind how good it was... how relaxing it was... it was just to get away and yeah it was really good for that. The in-room movies. Nice robes, that was something I liked.” (Luxury Hotel Guests I and J)

The majority of participants associated good emotions with their positive stay experience. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“Oh wow. (The suite room) was so big. Beautiful. Big nice bed. Sleep (was) very nice and ah... the bathroom (is) big with (a) tub. (I was able) to relax in a bath with nice smell of soap and bath gel. So (it was) very nice.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

5.5.6 Disappointment with the room

A few participants expressed their dissatisfaction with the rooms, as they compared their luxury hotel experiences. For one participant, the comparison was based on the in-room amenities received from a boutique hotel in the USA. As stated by the participant:

“...we had like a wonderful basket of goodies and um... that one was a good one. That was very nice.” (Luxury Hotel Guest F)

In this instance, the room amenities of the luxury hotel in Auckland were considered inferior to those provided by the hotel in the USA. As mentioned by the participant:

“I mean, well they had those complimentary drinks and stuff like that in their mini bar. So we looked in there it was like two sodas and a frozen bottled water. And I am like yeah, no.” (Luxury Hotel Guest F)

Another participant also benchmarked two of Auckland’s luxury hotels. This participant found one hotel to have better rooms than the other. However, the participant expressed acceptance of the inferior room due to other attributes such as cleanliness of the room and the quality of amenities, which were deemed more important than room style. As described by the participant:

“The rooms here like especially the bathrooms are outdated. But it’s clean. The towels are nice, the robes are good. You know, it’s fine.” (Luxury Hotel Guest Q)

5.5.7 Summary of room quality

In general, luxury rooms were considered positively by most participants, due to the high standards of room facilities, amenities and cleanliness. The bed was the most considered room facility and was distinguished for its superior quality. The majority

signified the importance of a comfortable room and a relaxing in-room experience. It was revealed that a positive in-room experience contributed to a positive stay experience for the guests. A few participants benchmarked hotels, and their perceptions and preferences influenced the appeal of the luxury room.

5.6 Cleanliness is expected in luxury hotels

Room cleanliness was discussed in Section 5.5.4. This section explains the over-all cleanliness in luxury hotels, which all participants expected to be of the highest possible standard. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“The highest level of cleanliness.” (Luxury Hotel Guest L)

One participant talked about travelling to a country that she considered was not known for its cleanliness. This participant expressed satisfaction that the luxury hotel there had a high standard of cleanliness. As stated by the participant:

“(The luxury hotel was) very clean. (It was) not what I expected (in the country I travelled to), but (the luxury hotel was) very clean.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

5.6.1 A clean hotel made the guests feel good

Everyone expressed feeling positive when staying in a clean hotel. They concurred that the cleanliness in luxury hotels was relaxing. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“(The) hotel (is) very clean. Business people can relax in (a) clean hotel. So (it is) important also.” (Luxury Hotel Guest N)

Retired couples were candid in sharing that they looked forward to having a break and liked being spared from doing household chores. For these participants, this was reason enough to stay in a luxury hotel. As described by one such participant:

“For me it’s cleanliness. We want to relax and if it is dirty, we can’t do that. That’s why we stay in a hotel so we can’t be bothered with cleaning.” (Luxury Hotel Guests I and J)

5.6.2 Summary of expected cleanliness in luxury hotels

Everyone expected luxury hotels to be clean. All participants expressed that the cleanliness of luxury hotels was relaxing. For a few participants, cleanliness was sufficient reason to book at luxury hotels as they saw this as a break from having to do their household chores.

5.7 Central location

All participants considered the locations of luxury hotels favourably due to their centrality. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“The location being in the centre.” (Luxury Hotel Guest C)

They also said that the locations of luxury hotels were convenient and easily accessible. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“The location here is convenient, everything is just near.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

Most participants appreciated the accessibility of luxury hotels’ locations. Easy access to transport and dining venues were important to several participants. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“Well here, because of the distance, in the city also, (there are) many places to eat here. Important. Easy to get taxi, just outside or walk to. In (the) city, all (is) near.” (Luxury Hotel Guest C)

The prime locations of luxury hotels meant that transportation was not a necessity for most. However, some guests reasoned that if they required transportation, it was readily available when needed. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“You don’t need a lot of transport to go around. It saves you a lot of time if you got a good location. It also means that if you want transport and you want it urgently, it is at the front door.” (Luxury Hotel Guests D & E)

5.7.1 Walking as the preferred mode of transport

Almost all of the participants expressed their preference to walk. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“Because when we travel, we don’t drive or anything like that. And so we need to be near transportation, near places where there’s lots of food, or a mini mart something like that. So we can just walk.” (Luxury Hotel Guest F)

They talked about how easy it was to walk around from their luxury hotels. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“Easy to go around, (I) can walk. It’s good.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

Sometimes they just wanted to do something that was fun. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“In the city, it is easy to go around. I like to walk. (They) have places that are near to eat. It is close to nice restaurants. You (can) enjoy after (the) meeting.” (Luxury Hotel Guest N)

Other times they needed to work:

“It’s fairly close to where I need to be. I just walk to work. I only want to walk.” (Luxury Hotel Guest Q)

5.7.2 Nature of stay determined guest preference

The nature of the stay also determined the appropriateness of the location for all participants. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“Good location for what we wanted.” (Luxury Hotel Guest J)

Those on leisure trips revealed that luxury hotels were near shopping districts. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“... and location even that. I can easily do my retail therapy.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

Although all of the luxury hotels were considered by participants to be in the central area of Auckland, some compared the locations based on the proximity of their hotel to their areas of interest. Participants who were returning guests used their previous experience to determine their preferred location. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“Well, there is another one over there the XXX, but the location is a bit out. I stayed there also before, but I will still choose here.” (Luxury Hotel Guest K)

Those on business trips stated that the close proximity of the luxury hotels to some of their places of work was appealing. As explained by luxury hotel guests:

“Sometimes the office arrange meetings so (it’s) good for business. So convenient. Good location. Also near the office of people I am meeting so (it is) easy for them to come here also.” (Luxury Hotel Guest N)

“Actually it is a business trip. It is in the city centre and it is convenient to (for) the customer visit.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

All of the participants who were business travellers expressed their preference not to commute. They wanted to be spared the nuisances of travelling, such as driving in heavy traffic. They expressed feeling positive emotions because they found the convenient location relaxing. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“I suppose you can relax. The convenience of these hotels makes it feel that way. The office is nearby so there is no commute.” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

5.7.3 Summary of central location

All participants recognised that luxury hotels have central locations, as they were convenient and accessible. Everyone stated their preference to walk, although most noted that transport, if required was readily available. Most participants expressed the view that the luxury hotels they were staying at suited their location preference. The nature of their stay influenced the participants’ preferences.

5.8 The facilities in luxury hotels

Most participants mentioned that luxury hotels were complete hotels in offering the facilities they required. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“Just great facilities. The hotel is complete. There is a gym and everything.”
(Luxury Hotel Guest P)

In addition, the facilities in luxury hotels were perceived by participants to be of high standards. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“Quality. (It is) just not for the sake of having something. They really make it a point to be above typical. You see that in... what they provide.” (Luxury Hotel Guests I and J)

The majority of participants affirmed their satisfaction with the facilities provided. A variety of dining options was mentioned by most to be appealing. Several signified their appreciation for the gym, the pool, and the spa regardless of their nature of stay. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“I think it’s having great facilities. Facilities that are very nice, like a nice pool, ah... many restaurants also.” (Luxury Hotel Guest C)

They declared that having different facilities was convenient. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“It’s just easy staying in a luxury hotel. It has everything I need.” (Luxury Hotel Guest G)

5.8.1 The dining facilities

Food and beverage were amongst the facilities that the majority considered essential. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“Many huge restaurants. The food (was) good. Many and good. Good to look at. And also delicious.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

The availability of dining options held some appeal to several participants. Those staying for several nights expressed appreciation at having a variety of food and beverage offerings. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“I think the food offerings, the variety of food offerings here is particularly attractive so at any given time I can go to the restaurant one or restaurant two or you know go across to the restaurant three. That to me is attractive.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

The participants also associated the quality of the food and beverage offerings with the service. Most referred to either the staff or the service when describing the dining facilities. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“Room service was very good. We did not do restaurant, but everything was just good. Consistent. Actually, the breakfast was very good now that I remember it. Very good food, very good service.” (Luxury Hotel Guest L)

A few participants highlighted the executive lounge. These participants expressed disappointment when the luxury hotel they were staying at did not have a lounge. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“We stayed in this hotel where we stayed in their executive floor and it got a lounge, so we got to enjoy those. It was quite nice. We can just relax with a good view and enjoy all the food and drinks that was made available to us.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

5.8.2 The facilities make the stay enjoyable

Most participants said that the facilities in luxury hotels made their stay enjoyable. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“Facilities just adds extra to your stay. Like as I said, we enjoyed the spa here and at the other one the lounge with the free drinks and food. Those add up and makes your stay better.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

These participants remarked that the facilities allowed them to do a range of activities. They expressed positive emotions associated with being able to pursue their interests while staying in luxury hotels. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“She likes swimming, she needs a pool, ah... good food, she especially loves food. Because of the facilities of the luxury hotel. This one (restaurant is) very good, and also (the) Italian (is) very good. Because our daughter wants to do a lot of things to enjoy. Pool and food, places to eat for our daughter.” (Luxury Hotel Guest C)

There were those that viewed their stays in luxury hotels as a time to “get-away.” This view was also shared with the business travellers. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest on a work trip:

“I feel like it makes you feel like you are on a holiday. You come back to the hotel and you can have a massage or be lazy at the pool. I suppose those things. And the food is good as well.” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

Some of the facilities granted the participants exclusive use, such as the spa. A few participants said that exclusivity enhanced their enjoyment. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“The spa was good. We enjoyed enjoying it to ourselves so that was nice.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

A few said that their comfort was made a priority when they were still able to use the facilities despite having checked-out. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“Their facilities like even when you checked out, you can still use the spa before you fly back. Even if you already checked out. You can use the facilities before going to the airport.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

5.8.3 The convenience of having the facilities

Almost all of the participants recognised that the facilities in luxury hotels offered convenience in addressing their needs. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“It had everything on the ground floor, all the breakfast, the restaurant, everything. The lift was fabulous because we didn’t have to wait for it. The bar was very good. They also had a bus... They had everything.” (Luxury Hotel Guests D and E)

Most participants commented that they found it appealing to have the different facilities “in-house.” They said that there was no need for them to leave the hotel to pursue their interests such as dining. For them, this made their stay relaxing and comfortable in luxury hotels. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“Yes, relaxation and no going out right... Just convenience and comfort with everything the hotel is able to offer.” (Luxury Hotel Guest B)

The conference facilities were attractive to participants on business trips. They spoke about the convenience of not having to commute. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“I don’t need to go anywhere. From my room I just go down, have breakfast then go to my meeting. No need to worry on traffic.” (Luxury Hotel Guest N)

The business participants also explained that having conference facilities in luxury hotels meant they could easily go up to their rooms to rest. These participants explained that the convenience made them feel positive towards the hotel, as their stay was easy and relaxing. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“My convention is here so I come right down to work and then come up to rest.” (Luxury Hotel Guest G)

Some disclosed that having a combination of in-house facilities to cater for work as well as for enjoyment made staying in luxury hotels appealing. It was important for these participants to relax after work. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“Absolutely fantastic. We had functions here. So we have done a few and again the experience has always been great. The day spa is just lovely. When I stay for work, I pretty much still want to relax after work is done. That’s why I like being in a luxury hotel. It makes me feel relaxed and calm.” (Luxury Hotel Guest H)

5.8.4 Comparing luxury hotels based on facilities

The majority of participants compared their luxury hotel experiences with each other in terms of the facilities they offered. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“Probably the facilities at the Hotel XXX are better. The spa is just bigger and here you need to book for it as well.” (Luxury Hotel Guest J)

In comparing luxury hotels, some participants were expressive about not feeling disappointed when a facility was not offered because there were other attributes that mattered more to them. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“This hotel is more boutique so it’s not quite big. I quite like boutique (hotels). I am not always into the big corporate ones. They don’t have that special floor here, but the service is at par.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

5.8.5 Summary of facilities in luxury hotels

The majority of participants talked about the completeness of luxury hotels in the facilities they offered. They mentioned that the facilities allowed them to do a range of activities that made their stay convenient and enjoyable. Disappointment with the facilities were expressed when a few participants compared facilities across luxury hotels. However, this did not contribute to a negative stay experience.

5.9 Quality ambience

Ambience was referred to by most as the feeling projected by a luxury hotel. Several participants conveyed the feeling that luxury hotels evoked positive emotions. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“It has to be ambience. The feeling of a luxury hotel is just different. There is a level of sophistication, and just ease which is cool.” (Luxury Hotel Guest G)

All participants provided picturesque descriptions of luxury hotels. They commonly gave an account of the surroundings, and some also highlighted the décor used. As illustrated by luxury hotel guests:

“The glass lifts were on the outside. When you came out of the lift, the lifts came down into the foyer and it was like massive waterfalls and garden and breakfast area. All over it came out a skylight. Five stories right in front of you spread out. It was massive.” (Luxury Hotel Guests D and E)

There was consensus amongst the participants that the ambience in luxury hotels appealed to their senses, particularly those of touch, sight and smell. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“(There is) quality of the environment. I am able to have sensorial delight because usually everything looks and smells beautiful.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

Some stated that the ambience in luxury hotels is reflective of their high standards, adding that they felt positive towards the hotel as a result of the good ambience. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“When the place is beautiful, you feel happy.” (Luxury Hotel Guest C)

All participants said that the pleasant ambience of luxury hotels enhanced their stay experience. Some recalled the unique ambience that made their luxury hotel stay unforgettable. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“There were maids running around in these little dark outfits in white petticoats and feather dusters... so everything was truly unexpected. I’ve never stayed in a hotel like that... So the ambience ticks all the right places.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

5.9.1 Ambience as the sum of experience

An interesting finding that emerged was that ambience was expressed by a few of the participants as the sum of their luxury hotel experience. Their perception affected how they defined ambience. These participants explained that the physical attractiveness of the hotel, the staff’s performance, and the delivery of service, were factors that influenced their perceptions of ambience. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“So for instance, the service was really bad or the staff were really bad or the décor was bad then the ambience would be diminished.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

They denoted ambience as a feeling or a mood. It is the physical characteristics that makes the hotel feel positively. As described by a luxury hotel guest:

“I think in terms of luxury (hotels), when you step into a place and it feels special, then you feel special.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

However in explaining further, they also included the service and the staff. Both service and staff were recognised by these guests to influence how they felt during their luxury hotel stay. As further explained by the same luxury hotel guest:

“So ambience I think is also reflective of the décor, and the staff and the service that you actually get. So for me, that (arms envelopes demonstrating a circle)... is part of ambience.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

These participants emphasised that ambience encompassed their luxury hotel experience. They recognised that the service and the staff were contributors to the stay experience. As illustrated by a luxury hotel guest:

“Ambience for me accounts for the whole package I guess. Like you have quality service, staff and the experience becomes great. Ambience includes those two for me. If the service or staff is not okay then ambience is affected, the whole experience isn’t as good.” (Luxury Hotel Guest H)

5.9.2 Summary of quality ambience

The participants generally articulated that ambience is the positive feeling brought about by the aesthetically pleasing surroundings of luxury hotels. Everyone recognised that good ambience augmented the stay experience in luxury hotels. They were a few

participants that considered the addition of service and staff in their perception of ambience. For these participants, service and staff influenced their stay experience as well, so therefore for them, these were part of ambience.

5.10 Guest emotions in luxury hotels

The participants conveyed either positive or negative emotions about luxury hotel attributes. There were more participants who felt positive and very few who felt negative. The emotions felt by luxury hotel guests are presented throughout the discussions in this chapter, and are explained in detail next.

5.10.1 More positive emotions felt

Happiness was the dominant emotion experienced by most participants when staying in luxury hotels. The majority mentioned that they felt happy when they were recognised. Recognition for participants occurred during their positive interactions with the staff such as when checking in. Recognition was also described by participants in the form of receiving room upgrades, amenities, or quality service. Several participants also mentioned that they were delighted with the quality rooms because these assured them of having a comfortable stay. As explained by two luxury hotel guests:

“Happy. You know you will be comfortable. It is just convenient staying in a place that well offers everything.” (Luxury Hotel Guests D and E)

Some female participants valued the feeling of being safe. They mentioned that the luxury hotel’s central location as well as the facilities provided feelings of safety. For these participants feeling safe enabled them to relax and enjoy their trip. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“Safety. In my travels, I usually do it alone. So right, if I am new to a country, I do like to feel that I am safe so I can relax and be able to enjoy.” (Luxury Hotel Guest B)

Another female guest shared the same sentiment in saying:

“For some country, yes for safety issue. The hotel is in the city, so transportation is easy. It feels safe. Everything is in place. (There is) triple security so I feel very safe.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

It was also important for participants to feel relaxed during their time in luxury hotels, regardless of the nature of their stay. This was explained in earlier sections such as on the room experience (Section 5.5.5), central location (Section 5.7), nature of stay determined guest preference (Section 5.7.2), and a clean hotel made the guests feel good (Section 5.6.1).

5.10.2 Negative emotions

Some negative emotions were expressed by a few participants with their luxury hotel experience. The disappointment was with food quality as well as with unacceptable service recovery, which was discussed earlier. A few participants felt embarrassed about not knowing how to operate their room facilities. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“We had a bit of trouble with operating the TV here and the AC (air conditioning). There were just no instructions. We didn’t bother ringing up. We didn’t want to feel like idiots not figuring out how to do such a simple thing.” (Luxury Hotel Guests I and J)

These participants explained that having information readily available for them would have solved the issue. As further mentioned by the same luxury hotel guest:

“It would be helpful to place in information like that in the room. That bit was lacking. Compendium. Instruction. Information. I mean information should be on there.” (Luxury Hotel Guests I and J)

5.10.3 Summary of guest emotions in luxury hotels

All participants mentioned that the attributes that evoked their emotions when staying in luxury hotels were mainly positive, and the majority expressed happiness as the dominant emotion. It was also important for the participants to feel relaxed. However, some negative emotions were experienced when the attributes disappointed participants.

5.11 The luxury hotel experience

Most participants conveyed the idea that staying in luxury hotels was an experience. They articulated their expectation that luxury hotels offered more than the basic provisions of typical hotels. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“Uh... for the experience. And to stay sort of when you know, do things for yourself. Sometimes it’s nice to stay in a little bit extra just for a bit... the whole experience” (Luxury Hotel Guest H)

Participants had either a positive luxury hotel experience or a negative one. A positive emotion related to a positive stay experience. This led most participants to act favourably towards the hotels either through a recommendation, expressing the desire to stay again, or stating their preference for luxury hotels. However, a negative stay experience made some participants act unfavourably towards the hotel. These participants mentioned that they would not recommending the hotel and would not stay there again. In addition, the experience of a luxury hotel connoted the corollary function of price: a favourable stay experience made the price of a luxury hotel acceptable.

Therefore, the price of luxury hotels is discussed first, followed by a discussion about the influence of the stay experience on the perception of the price.

5.11.1 Acceptance of the high price of a luxury hotel

All participants deemed luxury hotels as expensive. As simply stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“I mean for me luxury hotels just mean more expensive.” (Luxury Hotel Guest F)

Those on business trips mentioned that their rank in the company could have been considered when their staff booked them into luxury hotels. They also implied that junior staff were accommodated in lower rated hotels. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“I suppose I have a senior role at work... there are cheaper hotels that they book as well.... (But for me), it’s this one. I come here from time to time, usually three times a year.” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

Leisure travellers remarked that sales promotions were made available to experience staying in luxury hotels more affordable. They explained that they looked for deals that allowed them a weekend stay-over. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“I mean even if it’s luxury, but it’s priced well. They’ve got deals you know. Deals for you to experience it... Like now, the price we paid wasn’t that bad.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

5.11.2 A memorable luxury hotel experience

The majority of participants described the memorable experiences they had in luxury hotels. These experiences were associated with the positive emotions felt during their stay. As stated by one luxury hotel guest:

“Just the whole experience was... (pause) unforgettable. Just pure delight.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

All participants described their positive emotions by referring to the attributes that mattered to them. As described by another luxury hotel guest:

“Ah yes, everything just perfect. People, staff very very good. Good food. Very very nice room. (I felt) like a king.” (Luxury Hotel Guest C)

Consequently, the participants associated the positive emotions felt with a positive stay experience. As mentioned further by the same luxury hotel guest:

“(I) can never forget. (It was) really wow.” (Luxury Hotel Guest C)

All participants with a positive stay experience commented that the high price was offset by the attributes that luxury hotels provided. As illustrated by one luxury hotel guest:

“(It) is easy to go around. (I) can walk. It’s good. Balance with the cost. Hotel is good. It is complete so the price is okay.” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)

Also, some articulated that the benefits of staying in luxury hotels as compared to the other hotels, outweighed the higher price. As described by one luxury hotel guest:

“So the rate is not much different from usual. Just 20% different, 30%. But you get very good service. (It) makes business people happy... The hotel is complete and better. (It) makes my meetings easy. So yes, okay (with) higher price. (It is) worth it.” (Luxury Hotel Guest N)

Participants compared prices and stated that the higher price of luxury hotels was less significant when receiving good service. As highlighted by another luxury hotel guest:

“You can find cheaper hotels that’s for sure. But you don’t get the things you get in luxury hotels with those prices like good service. So for us, it’s worth the price.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

Almost all relayed that their positive experiences made staying in luxury hotels worth it. As explained by one luxury hotel guest:

“It was good value for money... We enjoyed our stay immensely. I don’t think you can pay enough money to be able to relax. We had a great time here.” (Luxury Hotel Guests I and J)

For others, memorable experiences that were unforgettable made a luxury hotel stay good value for money. As illustrated by two luxury hotel guests:

“You remember good experiences.” (Luxury Hotel Guests D and E)

Memorable experiences were priceless for some participants. As highlighted by one luxury hotel guest:

“And with that start, everything else was just perfect. Just spectacular. It was way worth (more) than what I paid for. Just perfect really. I suppose nothing could go wrong after that. The price didn’t matter.” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)

Positive experiences led the participants to act favourably towards the luxury hotels. As mentioned by one luxury hotel guest:

“I would go back there in a heartbeat if I could. Just delightful memories.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)

5.11.3 An unremarkable experience in a luxury hotel

While most participants experienced memorable stays, a few had unremarkable experiences in luxury hotels. One participant had an introverted personality and articulated a preference to stay in the room. As stated by this luxury hotel guest:

“Because I am kind of an introvert, I like to go to enclosed places... I have stayed in luxury hotels in the past as well, but nothing comes to mind. Sorry... (My stay) was okay. (I am) not really able to say anything else about it... I usually just call room service.” (Luxury Hotel Guest B)

For another participant, it was the company that booked the stay in the luxury hotel. This participant explained that personal trips did not involve hotel reservations as a preference. As mentioned by this luxury hotel guest:

“No, I probably won’t spend that much money on it. I don’t stay in hotels if I am paying for it myself.” (Luxury Hotel Guest Q)

A third participant commented that staying in a luxury hotel left something to be desired. For this participant, nothing differentiated the luxury hotel from the other hotels. As described by this luxury hotel guest:

“We didn’t see any difference except maybe they probably would overprice stuff. I guess you can say there was nothing special (about the stay), or (we) did not feel anything particularly. It was just a typical hotel.” (Luxury Hotel Guest F)

In this participant’s perception, the stay in the luxury hotel was equal to a hotel of a lesser rank. The participant considered the price of the luxury hotel significant. As further explained by this guest:

“No, no, this is just your typical hotel. It just happens to charge a lot of money to people... I mean I don’t stay in luxury hotels because I don’t feel they are worth it.” (Luxury Hotel Guest F)

This participant conveyed a refusal to recommend the hotel and did not express any desire to stay in the luxury hotel again. As stated by this luxury hotel guest:

“No. It’s too much (price) for what you get. What you get is not worth it. It’s a typical hotel.” (Luxury Hotel Guest F)

A fourth participant described a negative experience in a sister hotel in another location. The negative experience closely associated luxury hotels of the same brand. As a result, this participant voiced a preference for another luxury hotel in Auckland. As explained by this luxury hotel guest:

“You know what you are going to get when you walk in the door. So in Hotel two in another location, I got to my room, went up to put something in the rubbish bin and someone else’s McDonald’s was still in there. So they haven’t cleaned the you know... So for this luxury hotel, absolutely I will stay over here...” (Luxury Hotel Guest H)

5.11.4 Summary of the luxury hotel experience

Most participants expressed that the positive emotions they felt led to their positive stay experiences. On the contrary, negative emotions resulted in negative stay experiences

for a few participants. All participants expressed the association of price and the stay experience. When the stay experience was positive, the price was recognised to be value for money. This was the case for the majority of the participants. The opposite can be said for a few of the negative stay experiences.

5.12 Model of factors guests consider important

The model in Figure 6 presents the findings from the semi-structured interviews and shows the attributes that the participants considered important. These are: service, staff, room, cleanliness, location, facilities, and ambience.

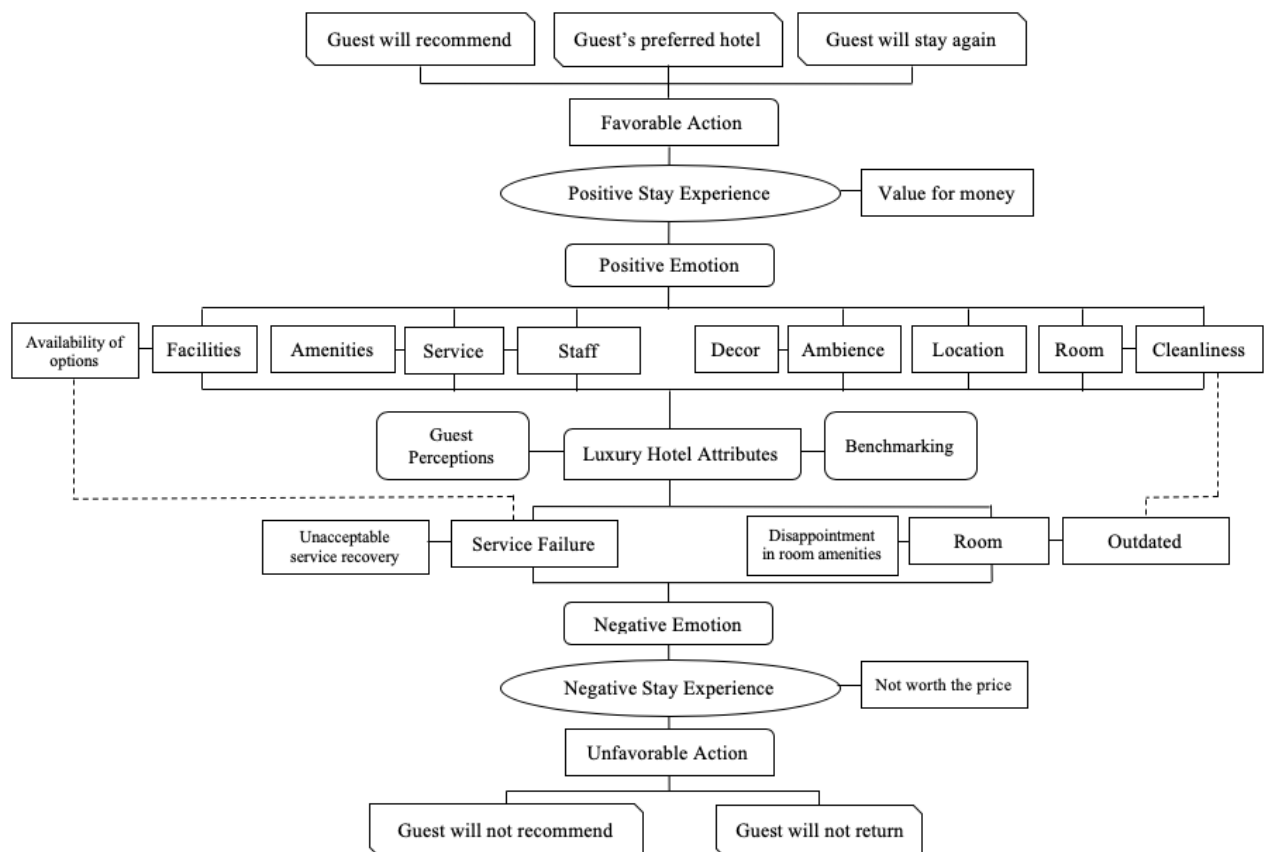


Figure 6: Important Hotel Attributes (IHA) model

The IHA model shows that guest perceptions as well as benchmarking influenced how the participants considered each hotel attribute. The attributes of luxury hotels generally made participants feel positive, which contributed to a positive stay experience. The participants then acted favourably towards the luxury hotel. On the other hand, negative emotions were recognised when the room and service were deemed unsatisfactory. These led to a negative stay experience which prompted some participants to act unfavourably towards the hotel. In the IHA model, the broken lines connecting the negative emotion brought about by an outdated room was offset by the cleanliness of the room. Similarly, a specific service failure was recovered by the availability of

options with the facilities that the luxury hotels provided. In this case, value for money was influenced by the stay experience. Generally, the prices of luxury hotels were considered expensive. However, a positive stay experience made participants consider the price of luxury hotels to be fair. The opposite was recognised when the stay experience was negative. Lastly, some of the hotel attributes were connected. Guests' perceptions of service, whether good or bad, were determined by the staff's performance. Guests were offered amenities as part of service delivery. Cleanliness enhanced the appeal of luxury hotel rooms, and décor was deemed a component of ambience.

5.13 Summary

Phase two findings indicate that service, staff, room, cleanliness, location, facilities, and ambience were the attributes that mattered most to the participants. The IHA model (Figure 6) presents these important attributes, which were recognised favourably, as they made the guests feel positive. For example, a comfortable room made the participants feel relaxed. However, the opposite was experienced when the attributes were considered unfavourably, such as when noise in the room disrupted sleep. In most instances of guest dissatisfaction, extrinsic factors such as service recovery, negated the unfavourable experience. In the example given, guests were either upgraded or given earplugs. Generally, participants felt positive emotions, describing their stay experiences favourably. Furthermore, the findings revealed that a positive stay experience made the guests accept the premium price of luxury hotels. Participants who were expressive about their pleasant experiences deemed the price "worth it." Therefore, price acceptance was dependent on the stay experience.

Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to discuss the combined findings from Phase one and Phase two of the study. Firstly, the similarities and differences between the findings of the two phases are highlighted. Secondly, the major themes are explained. Then, a theoretical model of the functions of the attributes that lead to a luxury hotel experience is presented. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary of the holistic experience that luxury hotel attributes brings to guests.

6.2 Overview of combined findings

As this study aims to determine the important attributes of luxury hotels, the findings are combined to reveal the common attributes, which were personalised service, efficient staff, comfortable rooms, high cleanliness standard, central location, facilities for relaxation and enjoyment, *beautiful* ambience, and price acceptance. Findings in both phases are consistent in that service was the most important attribute of luxury hotels. In addition, service and staff were connected with each other. All participants expected a high standard of cleanliness, and considered a comfortable bed as the most significant room facility because it afforded restfulness.

The TripAdvisor reviews and face to face interviews both reveal the subjective nature of luxury hotel attributes, as the guests placed different emphases on what they perceived as important. Despite the divergent preferences, the attributes evoked emotional responses, which determined the stay experience. This means that attributes considered important by participants made them feel positive, which led to a favourable experience.

In Phase one, personality was the most mentioned staff trait, maintenance issues caused room dissatisfaction, perceptions on central locations differed, construction caused dissatisfactions on the locations, and disappointment was expressed with the size of the facilities. In Phase two, efficiency was a highly praised staff trait, central location was perceived as safe by female guests, and the price of a luxury hotel stay was considered acceptable by guests when their stay experience was positive.

Table 20 summarises the differences and similarities between the findings of the two phases and reveals the attributes that participants in the study found important.

Table 20: Similarities and differences in the results of the two phases

Findings	Phase one	Phase two
The subjective nature of the luxury hotel attributes	√	√
The attributes evoked guest emotions which influenced the stay experience	√	√
Service (Section 6.3)		
Service was the strongest attribute	√	√
Service quality was high	√	√
Service was personalised	√	√
Staff (Section 6.4)		
Staff personality was mentioned frequently	√	
Skilfulness of staff was most mentioned		√
Staff engagement facilitated guest experience	√	√
Room (Section 6.5)		
Bed was the most mentioned room facility	√	√
The rooms were relaxing and comfortable	√	√
Maintenance and noise issues were experienced	√	
The room was outdated but clean		√
Cleanliness (Section 6.6)		
Cleanliness was very important	√	√
A clean hotel made the guests feel relaxed		√
Location (Section 6.7)		
Locations were central	√	√
Appeal of location was expressed in walking distance	√	√
Different perceptions were expressed on central locations	√	
Noise and construction were observed in some locations	√	
Location was deemed safe by female guests		√
Facilities (Section 6.8)		
Facilities enhanced guest comfort and relaxation	√	√
Food and beverage was the most considered facility	√	√
Dissatisfaction was expressed with variety of food offerings	√	√
Dissatisfaction expressed with the size of facilities	√	
Benchmarking of facilities	√	√
Ambience (Section 6.9)		
The luxury hotels had <i>beautiful</i> ambience	√	√
Value for money (Section 6.10)		
Value for money was a least considered attribute	√	√
Luxury hotel guests were deal seekers	√	√
Price as a corollary function of the stay experience		√

6.3 Personalised service

In both phases, guests were expressive about quality service being personalised, and considered the amenities were part of service delivery. They liked being addressed by their names because it made them feel appreciated. Luxury hotel companies know what their guests value (Kimes & Ho, 2018) and their service is customised to each guest's situation (Danziger, 2005; Pine & Gilmore, 2011). They excel in recognising guest preferences, adding personal effects that highlight milestone celebrations, or simply

going the extra mile for their guests (Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014). Personalised service acknowledges the need to make guests feel important (Hung, 2018). Consistent with past studies (e.g. Harkison 2016; Kimes & Ho, 2017; Pine & Gilmore, 2011), the findings reveal that guests voiced their satisfaction when receiving customised services such as arranging special meals that cater to their dietary requirements. Personalisation is a contributing factor of predicting guest satisfaction (Ariffin et al., 2018), as exemplified by participants who were delighted to receive handwritten cards and a cake to mark their special occasions.

The TripAdvisor reviews and face to face interviews indicated that one way hotels surpassed guest expectation was through service surprises such as early check-ins and room upgrades. Pine and Gilmore (2011) observed that the effectiveness in staging a surprise lies in exploiting the difference between what the guests perceived themselves to get and what they expected to get. Guests establish the quality of service by comparing the service received with the service expected (Chon & Maier, 2010). The combined findings demonstrate that guests felt positive when service exceeded their expectations. Taking early check-in for example, the room was not expected to be available at the time of the early arrival. However, when this expectation was surpassed, the service (i.e. early check-in) became a source of delight for guests. Guests were appreciative of the comfort that an early check-in gave them, concurring that delight is a consequence of receiving “extra mile” value enhancing service (Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014). For the guests, it meant that they could rest after a long flight so they saw an early check-in as a value enhancing service.

The personalised service in luxury hotels generally exceeded expectations, as guests mentioned on the TripAdvisor reviews that it was the best they had ever received. This corresponded to 88% of the participants deeming the service superior, as they made comparisons with hotels of other rankings. Findings in both phases recognise service as the strongest attribute, reinforcing Kim et al.’s (2019) assertion that service is a significant consideration for guests who choose to stay in luxury hotels. Participants reported that their stay decisions were based on the high service quality, which supports the statement of Walls et al. (2011) that luxury hotel guests prefer higher levels of service. This was exemplified by a guest who was delighted when the staff located his lost luggage, or by another participant who was offered to have her suitcase unpacked, as part of her arrival experience. These guests admitted that they would not receive such personalised service in lesser rated hotels.

6.4 Efficient staff

Findings in the two phases indicate that the staff were applauded for their friendliness and efficiency. This affirms Cetin and Walls' (2016) claim that the staff's positive attitude and skill are important to luxury hotel guests, and generate a high level of customer satisfaction (Bagnera, 2017). Accordingly, the two traits also affect guest experience (Verma & Jain, 2015). Guests in both phases spoke about positive emotions, such as happiness and "feeling relaxed," substantiating Peng and Chen's (2019) statement that luxury hotels affect emotional attachment for guests. The staff made the guests feel positive, which promoted positive stay experiences. For example, most guests in their online reviews stated that they felt welcomed, which is consistent with friendliness (attitude), the most mentioned staff characteristic in Phase one. On the other hand, Phase two results showed "feeling cared for" as the dominant emotion, which is consistent with efficiency (skill), the strongest staff characteristic in the second phase. With 81% of the interview participants being repeat guests (Table 19), stay pattern influenced the outcome of efficiency, the dominant staff trait. The participants, being regular guests, were expressive about the staff doing their jobs well, which supports Lai and Hitchcock's (2017) finding that frequent guests are concerned with having experienced staff that deliver prompt service to enrich their sense of luxury.

The findings of this study suggest that staff assume different roles or "identities" as a source of delight, aligning with Khoo-Lattimore and Ekiz's (2014) proposition that staff have strong personal interactions with guests, which influence satisfaction and hotel loyalty. The participants credited the staff with making their luxury hotel stay pleasant, as they were recognised consistently, not only by name, but also by being provided with their preferences. Staff engagement with guests affects luxury hotel experiences positively (Walls et al., 2011) because participants feel a personal and genuine connection with the staff. As guests are placing more importance on their social interactions with the staff (Cetin & Walls, 2016), luxury hotels strive to provide their guests with memorable experiences. Engagement takes a vital role in shifting from what tasks are done, to how the tasks are performed (Pine & Gilmore, 2011), making the guests the priority and the core focus. The staff vary their engagement with the guests (Scerri et al., 2017), and are intuitive in their service delivery (Walker, 2017).

As luxury hotel guests do not feel obliged to compete with others for guest service (Cetin & Walls, 2016), going beyond guest expectations requires a high staff-to-guest ratio (Harkison, 2016). Guests provide lower ratings for their luxury experience as

occupancy increases (Bagnera, 2017) since there is less disposable time for the staff to undertake highly engaging personal encounters with the guests. This study stresses the importance of staff engagement, as the findings in both phases suggest that experience is generated from social interactions. One participant pointed out that nothing was too much trouble for the staff and having well-staffed stations meant any concerns were immediately addressed. Participants further noted that they could determine the outcome of their stay from their first encounter with the staff at the moment of their arrival. Therefore, the findings indicate that staff play a vital part in facilitating a positive engagement in luxury hotels that contribute to a favourable stay experience for the guests.

6.5 Comfortable rooms

The room was a dominant theme in both phases. Of all participants, 69% said that the room was where they spent the most of their time (Table 19). Essential to luxury hotels is a guest room with high quality furnishings (Harkison, 2016). This means that more anticipation is placed on the in-room experience (Bagnera, 2017). Participants mentioned that they were able to relax in their rooms. Findings in both phases suggest that a comfortable bed was considered the most important room facility, supporting Kim et al.'s (2019) claim that luxury hotel guests attach the most significance to the bed. Luxury hotels invest in quality beds due to the importance their guests give them (Lu et al., 2015). Zaman et al. (2016) stated that the weight placed on sleep quality increases for longer stays. This is supported by the interview findings, as 62% of the participants stayed an average of five nights or more. They were expressive about the superior beds providing restfulness.

Past studies (Alrawadieh & Law, 2019; Gu & Ryan, 2008; Kotler et al., 2017; Slevitch & Oh, 2010) indicated that the room is a core attribute of any hotel. Slevitch and Oh (2010) explained this further that as the norm (i.e. all hotels provide rooms), the importance of the room may become insignificant until disappointment is experienced. This explains why the findings suggest that rooms in luxury hotels registered the most points of dissatisfaction, which is consistent with findings of previous studies (e.g. Berezina et al., 2016; Del Chiappa, Gallarza, & Dall'Aglio, 2018; Ekiz et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2013).

The combined findings, indicating that guests recognised service as the most important attribute, disagree with Alrawadieh and Law's (2019) assertion that the room is what

travellers consider the most significant hotel attribute. Findings in both phases also emphasised more the service quality, which challenges Sanchez-Franco et al.'s (2016) claim that intangible aspects, such as service and staff engagement, are mentioned less frequently than are the tangible features such as the guest rooms. It is worthwhile noting that the studies of Alrawadieh and Law (2019) and Sanchez-Franco et al. (2016) were not specific to luxury hotels, but included all types of hotels in exploring what attributes bring customer satisfaction. The divergence signifies the difference between guests using hotel of different ranks (Bagnera, 2017; Kim et al., 2019; Qu et al., 2000). The findings of this study suggest that service was a stronger attribute than on room, and thus provides support for Limberger et al.'s (2014) statement that guests of five-star hotels prioritise service, while guests of three-star hotels highlight the room more. Luxury hotel guests place more value on experience than on physical aspects (Cetin & Walls, 2016; Verma & Jain, 2015). Both Phase one and Phase two findings agree that luxury hotel guests are keener on the experiential aspect that service and staff bring, than they are on the tangible products (i.e. room). Therefore, the findings suggest that the intangible aspects of service and staff engagement enhance the stay experience more than do the physical aspects such as the room, which is why they (i.e. service and staff engagement) matter more to luxury hotel guests.

6.6 High cleanliness standards

Although cleanliness was a dominant theme in this research, the current findings suggesting that service quality was the most considered attribute, contradict the findings of an American study (i.e. Kim et al., 2019) and a Parisian study (i.e. Zaman et al., 2016) advocating cleanliness as the most important luxury hotel attribute. The variation in the New Zealand findings does not signify that cleanliness is not relevant for luxury hotels in Auckland. Rather, it highlights the fact that the attributes are subjective, as their perception and importance vary across cultures (Francesco & Roberta, 2019). In exploring luxury hotels in Taiwan, Lu et al. (2015) indicated that cleanliness is embodied in the service quality, while in the current study's findings, the participants considered service and cleanliness as separate attributes. In listing the attributes in order of first priority, the interviews revealed that 12% of the participants considered cleanliness as the most important attribute, compared with 25% that prioritised service. It has been suggested that cleanliness is one of the basic expectations of guests (see Liu et al., 2013). Cleanliness was a strong theme in both phases and received only satisfaction. The combined findings reveal that the standard of cleanliness was high,

being described by guests as “immaculate.” Interview participants often conveyed disgust, as they recounted previous hotel stays (not in luxury hotels) where the hotel room was dirty (e.g. hair strands on the sheets, uncollected rubbish in the bin, etc.). They further reported that, on the contrary, the cleanliness in luxury hotels made them feel good and staying in a clean hotel made the stay pleasant. As the participants often booked in luxury hotels as a way to treat themselves or to enjoy a weekend away from home, they were expressive about being unburdened with daily routines such as tidying up. A retired couple commented that staying in luxury hotels meant that they did not have to bother with cleaning, while a young businessman mentioned that “he feels cool” entering a room that was neat and organised. Cleanliness is part of the multi-sensory cues that influence the guest experience (Cetin & Walls, 2016; Walls et al., 2011). This is supported by the interview findings suggesting that having a clean environment in luxury hotels was relaxing for the guests.

6.7 Central location

As with past studies (Li et al., 2015; Yang et al., 2018), location was frequently mentioned by the guests. Ferreira and Boshoff (2014) stated that luxury hotels are typically located in a city’s central business district (CBD). Being situated in the CBD connotes premier locations that offer accessibility to the guests’ areas of interest, which is a prime motivator for staying in luxury hotels (Harkison, 2016). Participants mentioned that the locations of luxury hotels were attractive because these saved their time. They mentioned being able to move around easily, and found the number of dining and shopping options in close proximity convenient. The combined findings also consistently expressed the location’s appeal in terms of “walking distance,” affirming Khoo-Lattimore and Ekiz’s (2014) assertion that walking is the preferred mode of transport for luxury hotel guests. The prime location liberated the guests from dealing with traffic.

Business travellers found access to offices appealing while leisure travellers appreciated being near places of interest, confirming that the location’s attractiveness is influenced by the nature of stay (Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014). An interesting finding that emerged from the interviews, was that female participants considered luxury hotels to be safe, agreeing with Kim et al.’s (2019) contention that female luxury hotel users prioritise security more. The women stated that they usually travelled alone. Being in a new country, they liked to feel safe so they could relax and enjoy their trip. A city centre position signifies enhanced security (Peng & Chen, 2019). A central location also

indicates the convenience of local transport options for guests (Li et al., 2015). Findings in both phases identify a luxury hotel's central location as a contributor to guest satisfaction because of its convenience and accessibility, which is consistent with the findings of previous studies (e.g. Alrawadieh & Law, 2019; Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014; Liu et al., 2013; Yang et al., 2018).

6.8 Facilities for relaxation and enjoyment

Luxury hotels provide facilities for leisure and business. The findings show that the guests enjoyed using the gym, pool, spa, and restaurant. The participants were expressive about how the facilities made luxury hotels "complete," explaining further that there was no need to go out unless they particularly wanted to. The convenience of having facilities for guests' respite aligns with how facilities enhance guest comfort (Chon & Maier, 2010), which adds to the luxury hotel experience (Harkison et al., 2018). Guests took pleasure in doing on-site activities, which agrees with the statement that comfort is one of the contributing factors in predicting guest satisfaction (Ariffin et al., 2018).

The facilities' desirability was influenced by guest preference, as the participants had different interests. A family on vacation stated that for them, having a pool was important as their daughter loved to swim, while female travellers revelled in using the spa to unwind after a busy day. Interview participants on frequent business trips explained that having meeting rooms meant they could simply go downstairs for work and go up to their room to relax, which supports Memarzadeh and Anand's (2018) finding that the convenience of on-site conference facilities facilitates repeat stays. However, this study adds to Memarzadeh and Anand's (2018) findings by stating that business travellers shared preferences with leisure guests, as both were attracted to the recreational facilities such as the pool, gym, and spa. These guests reported that even on work trips, they wanted to relax, and the facilities allowed them to do that.

Dining in the restaurants was frequently mentioned in the combined findings, which provide support for Khoo-Lattimore and Ekiz's (2014) claim that well-executed meal preparations enhance guest satisfaction and the stay experience. In addition, guests were expressive about being disappointed with the limited variety of food offerings, corroborating Harkison's (2016) statement on the expectation of luxury hotel guests for diverse food options.

The findings reveal that guests compared the facilities of different luxury hotels. As luxury hotel guests frequently travel both locally and abroad, preferences are shaped by the comparisons made of luxury hotels and their experiences (Harkison, 2016; Lai & Hitchcock, 2017). In the absence of a facility (e.g., not all luxury hotels have an executive lounge or a pool), guests tend to compare, concluding that although the stay experience in general was pleasant, the more complete luxury hotel was deemed superior. One participant recounted how it was memorable for her and her partner to have hors d'oeuvres and alcoholic beverages at the executive lounge of a competitor luxury hotel. The size of the facilities mattered to the participants as well. One couple pointed out that they preferred the larger spa that another luxury hotel provided. The findings therefore affirm that facilities enhance the stay experience in luxury hotels as they allow the guests relaxation and enjoyment.

6.9 Beautiful ambience

Beautiful ambience was another dominant theme, defined in this context as a luxurious environment encompassing high quality materials and décor. Participants eloquently expounded on ambience using descriptions such as “sensory delight,” indicating that ambience was commonly understood and widely recognised in luxury hotels. Findings in both phases suggest that ambience can be a physical representation, sensory cues that affect emotions, or an experience that contributed to satisfaction. Ambience was established on arrival with plush designs, mood lighting, carefully orchestrated music, and signature scents that pervaded the senses. An intangible yet distinctive feature of luxury hotels is staged in the psyche (Armitage & Roberts, 2016). The perceived physical environment consists of multi-sensory cues, which influence the over-all experience (Han et al., 2019; Walls, 2013), and is a predictor of guest satisfaction in luxury hotels (Jani & Han, 2014; Suh, Moon, Han, & Ham, 2015).

Participants described ambience in terms of feeling: an aura imbibed in luxury hotels. They were expressive about being in the presence of quality surroundings or a different level of sophistication. They mentioned that being in a beautiful place made them happy as well as “feeling relaxed” because everything looked and smelled beautiful. The combined findings, suggesting that luxury hotel guests liked staying somewhere beautiful, substantiate Wu and Yang’s (2018) claim that sensory pleasures drive stay decisions in luxury hotels.

6.10 Price acceptance

Price acceptance was amongst the dominant themes. Price is the assessment of value (Lockyer, 2005), and the concept of value is based on perception (Chon & Maier, 2010). Findings in Phase one identify value for money amongst the least considered luxury hotel attribute. However, the combined findings also reveal that luxury hotel guests benchmarked and looked for deals, and found package inclusions appealing, which aligns with Danziger's (2011) statement that luxury consumers are discount driven. This explains why room upgrades gave guests satisfaction. Upgrades were appreciated because they are seen as a deal, and therefore seen as a value.

Findings in both phases reveal that value for money was perceived positively when receiving quality that was superior, which confirms past studies stating that the premium price is justified because of the qualitative benefits associated with it (Bagnera, 2017; Wu & Yang, 2018). Therefore, higher priced luxury hotels are seen as "worth it." Guests that did not recognise any distinction in the luxury hotel expressed dissatisfaction with the price and reported a shift of preference to a hotel more economically priced, aligning with Harkison et al.'s (2018) and Qu et al.'s (2000) assertions that exceptional standards in luxury properties should set them apart. Luxury properties catering to experiential service produce the highest guest evaluations (Kimes & Ho, 2018).

The interview findings reveal that the higher price of luxury hotels, as compared to lesser ranked properties, were accepted because of the positive stay experiences they offer. This agrees with the findings of Harkison et al. (2018) and Kimes and Ho (2018), that luxury properties create value by giving guests memorable experiences. One participant calculated the price difference to be around 20% to 30% higher in luxury hotels. However, he assessed his stay as "easy," which made the more expensive price reasonable to him. This business traveller was expressive about how he valued the convenience that personalised service, efficient staff, central location, a clean hotel, and on-site meeting facilities afforded him. Value is perceived in terms of satisfaction (Lu et al., 2015), as luxury hotel guests are searching for encounters that will meet or exceed their expectations (Bagnera, 2017). Satisfied guests feel excitement and develop a strong bond with a luxury hotel (Peng & Chen, 2019). The participants commented that the price was immaterial when they described their experiences as "spectacular," "unforgettable," and "wow." Thus, feeling positive led to a positive stay experience and the acceptance of price. It is implied that the opposite is also true, and a negative

emotion is related to a negative stay experience. Finding the stay experience as a corollary function of price is a new discovery of this study. This means that a positive stay experience facilitates price acceptance, while a negative stay experience promotes price rejection.

6.11 The affective experience that luxury hotel attributes bring to guests

It was expected that the findings would reveal the important factors such as service and staff. However, this study has extended beyond knowing the tangible aspects (e.g. clean hotels, central location) focused on by most, by using the attributes as a springboard to understanding the complexity of the luxury hotel experience. There is scant literature on this, as only two scholars (Harkison, 2016, 2018; Lockyer, 2002, 2005) have explored the attributes of New Zealand hotels.

One could argue that it is not worthwhile looking at Lockyer's (2002, 2005) studies because of the 14-year interval and his research involving all hotel classes. However, theoretical implications might be drawn if time separation and area of focus influence the divergence of findings. The current findings, revealing that service was the most considered attribute by luxury hotel guests, contradicts Lockyer's (2005) findings that location and price are the main attributes of hotels across different categories. While it is tempting to ascribe the difference in the findings to the changing priorities of guests over time, a more plausible explanation is found in the disparities between guests across hotel rankings (Bagnera, 2017; Kim et al., 2019). This means that the attributes that are important to luxury hotel guests, such as service, are not the same as those for economy hotel guests who highlight the rooms more (Limberger et al., 2014). For luxury hotel guests, personalised service provides more meaningful experiences than does the room because they value social interactions.

While Lockyer (2002, 2005) explored all hotel classes, luxury hotels have been an area of focus for Harkison (2016, 2018) and Harkison et al. (2018), identifying facilities, staff, X-factors (exceptional standards that set luxury hotels apart), and monetary value as important considerations for luxury hotel guests. The findings of this research draw a parallel with Harkison et al.'s (2018) study, stating the same important attributes, although this study identified the X-factors as high cleanliness standards, personalised service, comfortable rooms, central location, and *beautiful* ambience: areas in which luxury hotels maintain first-class standards. This study also highlights how premium

prices are accepted when the stay experience is positive, whereas Harkison et al. (2018) elucidated on the cost of delivering luxury experiences in explaining monetary value.

The findings of this study indicate that the attributes are dynamic, each contributing to what the participants recognised holistically as high service quality, which Walls et al. (2011) contended is the preference of luxury hotel guests. The majority of participants, when describing high quality service, were expressive about receiving the “whole package,” which made them feel positive about their stay. The findings, therefore explicate further, that high service quality in luxury hotels encompasses a combination of the attributes that support each other, which are personalised service, efficient staff that engage with guests, comfortable rooms that are restful and relaxing, high standards of cleanliness, central location that is accessible and convenient, facilities that offer enjoyment, and *beautiful* ambience.

Every attribute is important, as the participants perceived them in totality, rather than individually. Generally, the attributes were judged to perform highly, eliciting guest satisfaction. They evoked guests' emotions, which influenced the stay experience. It is clear that the stay experience affects the acceptance of price in luxury hotels, which means that the premium price is received favourably as a result of a positive stay experience. The combined performance of the attributes therefore contributes to the holistic experience of staying in luxury hotels.

Pleasurable experiences and feeling positive emotions motivate guests to stay in luxury hotels (Wu & Yang, 2018). A previous study indicated that 89% of participants found luxury hotels pleasurable (see Low, 2012). These affirm the findings in both phases that guests deemed favourable experiences important. The participants were expressive about prioritising relaxation and restfulness. Luxury consumption, which includes luxury hotel stays, is perceived as desire, the extras in life that add more comfort and generate more meaning (Danziger, 2011), a perspective shared by participants who articulated that staying in luxury hotels was a treat or something they deserved.

The majority of participants (81%) were repeat guests (Table 19), attributing their revisit to the high service quality, which this set of findings defines as a combination of attributes that give guest satisfaction. This agrees with the findings of previous studies, that state that satisfaction establishes retention (e.g. Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014; Lai & Hitchcock, 2017). As satisfaction increases pleasure (Low, 2012), the stay experience was described as “wonderful,” “delightful,” or “spectacular.” Participants in this study explained that the higher level of service in luxury hotels meant they were assured of a

hassle-free stay and were at ease knowing that they were looked after, and at the same time, were able to enjoy themselves. They further explained that bad service, such as dirty rooms and unfriendly staff, sets off an unfavourable experience, which they were confident would not be the case in luxury hotels. Therefore, the combined findings support the idea that stay experience matters in luxury hotels and it is the combination of important attributes that is the key to delivering a luxury hotel experience.

Unlike previous models that used service quality to measure satisfaction, such as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1998), contemporary hospitality studies have presented frameworks of luxury hotel experience composed of physical environment and human interaction (Walls et al., 2011), and identified what and how luxury lodge and hotel experience is created (Harkison, 2016). This study builds on previous research by presenting a conceptual model (Figure 7) illustrating the affective experience that the important attributes bring to luxury hotel guests.

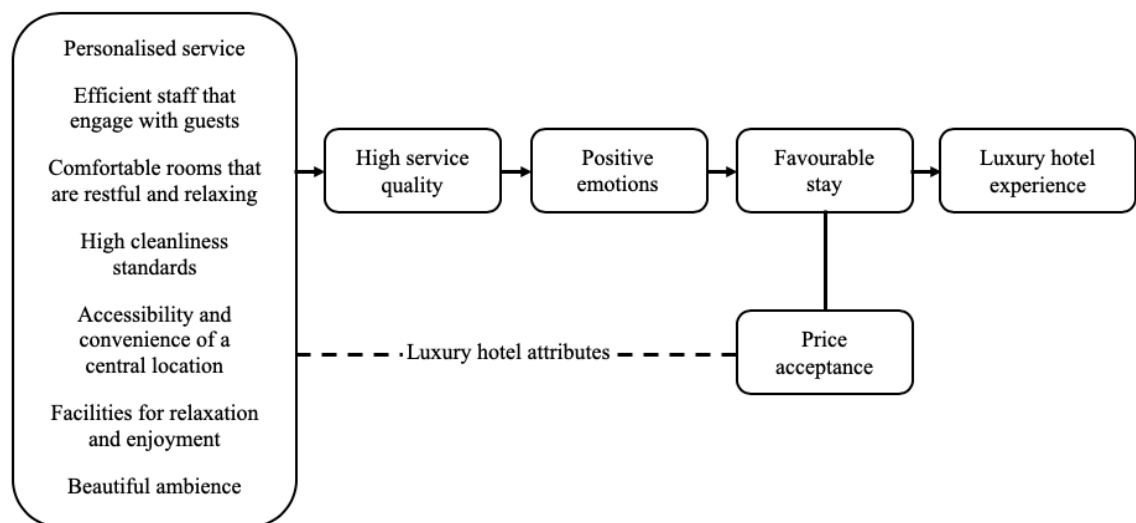


Figure 7: Attributes Delivering the Luxury Experience (ADLE) Model

6.12 Summary

In luxury hotels, the stay experience matters, which is brought about by a combination of attributes that bring guest satisfaction. Guests perceived high quality service as the “total package,” encompassing personalised service, efficient staff, comfortable rooms, high standards of cleanliness, central location, facilities that enhance relaxation and enjoyment, and *beautiful* ambience. Thus, they considered the price of luxury hotels acceptable when the stay experience was favourable. A framework of factors that lead to a luxury hotel experience is presented in the ADLE model (Figure 7).

While dominant themes (e.g. service, staff, etc.) were discussed by comparing and contrasting them with findings in the literature, some of the issues brought up (e.g. dissatisfaction) were not explored further in this research. However, it was deemed important to discuss the subjective nature of the attributes by relating the key findings to results of comparable past studies. The divergence and similarities amongst studies highlight that attributes are perceived and emphasised differently. The next chapter concludes the thesis by addressing the research question, the implications of the study, its limitations, and areas for future research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the significant attributes of luxury hotels in Auckland. In this final chapter, the research question is revisited, four key findings are explained, and the luxury hotel attributes, namely personalised service, efficient staff, comfortable rooms, high cleanliness standards, central location, facilities for relaxation and enjoyment, and *beautiful* ambience are reviewed. Next, this chapter highlights the theoretical contributions: the stay experience in luxury hotels matters to guests and a combination of important attributes is the key to delivering a luxury hotel experience. Thirdly, practical recommendations to the industry are outlined. Then, the limitations of this study and areas for future research are identified. The thesis concludes with some final remarks.

7.2 The research question revisited

This thesis set out to discover “what attributes of luxury hotels in Auckland do guests consider important when giving a five-star rating on TripAdvisor?” To gain an in-depth understanding, this study employed two phases: Phase one adopted a content analysis of TripAdvisor online reviews, after which semi-structured interviews were analysed thematically in Phase two. It was expected that the combined findings would reveal the significant attributes of luxury hotel guests, as this study treated each attribute as a separate dimension to be explored. However, the combined findings extend beyond knowing what the guests found significant in luxury hotels, as they indicate that the attributes are dynamic and support one another in delivering a holistic experience. Therefore, four key findings, which concern how luxury hotel attributes influence guest satisfaction on the stay experience, are summarised first. Then, the seven attributes that were discovered, namely personalised service, efficient staff, comfortable room, high cleanliness standards, central location, facilities for relaxation and enjoyment, and perceptions of *beautiful* ambience are reviewed next.

7.2.1 Four key findings on how luxury hotel attributes influence guest satisfaction

This section explains four key findings on how the luxury hotel attributes influence guest satisfaction, as satisfied guests expressed their luxury hotel stay experiences favourably. The first key finding concerns the subjective nature of the attributes. The

second key finding expounds on the attributes evoking guest emotions. The third key finding discusses the importance of service and staff engagement over room, and the last key finding explains that a positive stay experience makes the price of luxury hotels acceptable.

Firstly, the luxury hotel attributes were subjective. This means that a number of factors, such as culture, nature of stay, stay pattern, benchmarking, and guest perception, influenced how the guests considered the importance of each attribute. A family on vacation stated their preference for a pool as their daughter loved to swim, while most female guests enjoyed using a spa to unwind after a busy day. Business travellers found access to offices appealing, while leisure travellers appreciated being near places of interest. One participant explained that as a Singaporean, his standards were high, and he was expressive about comparing luxury hotels he had stayed in, as well as his stay experiences in them. Therefore, this study supports the notion that satisfaction in the stay experience is influenced by how guests place different emphases and preferences on the attributes.

The second key finding is that the attributes evoked guest emotions. This means that a combination of attributes was perceived favourably by the guests and these elicited guest satisfaction, which made the stay experience positive. For example, guests highlighted that efficient staff delivered quality service, which made them feel “taken cared of.” In addition, guests recognised the high standard of cleanliness in their comfortable rooms and commented that a clean room made their stay relaxing. The findings therefore affirm that complementary attributes, such as quality service and efficient staff, deliver a holistic experience that leads to guest satisfaction.

The third key finding is that service and staff were considered significantly more important than were the physical characteristics of luxury hotels, such as room and facilities; 25% of the participants ranked service as their first priority, 19% regarded staff as most important, while rooms and facilities as most significant each got 12%. The combined findings highlighted service quality and staff engagement more than in-room experiences, as guests placed greater importance on social interactions than on rooms. This shows that luxury hotel guests were keen on the experiential aspect that service and staff offer over the tangible products (i.e. a room). Therefore, the findings suggest that the intangible aspects of service and staff engagement enhance the stay experience more than do the physical aspects such as the room, which is why they (i.e., service and staff engagement) mattered more to luxury hotel guests.

The fourth key finding is that the price of a luxury hotel was received favourably as a result of a positive stay experience. Luxury hotel stays were perceived as “worth it” when guests received quality that was superior to that which was implied in the price. For luxury hotel guests, experiences that met or exceeded their expectations were seen as of value. For most, service that was personalised and efficient made their stay enjoyable, relaxing, and hassle-free. Thus, feeling positive led to a positive stay experience and the acceptance of the price. The opposite may also be true, in that a negative emotion is generated by a negative stay experience. Guests that did not recognise any distinction in the luxury hotel expressed dissatisfaction with the price and reported a shift of preference to a cheaper hotel. Thus, it is important for luxury hotels to maintain their first-class standards so that the stay experiences are not only positive but are also memorable. Revealing the stay experience as a corollary function of price rather than as an independent dimension is therefore a new finding of this study. This means that a positive stay experience facilitates price acceptance, while a negative stay experience promotes price rejection.

7.2.2 A review of the seven luxury hotel attributes

This section revisits the seven luxury hotel attributes that were discovered in the findings, namely personalised service, efficient staff, comfortable room, high cleanliness standards, central location, facilities for relaxation and enjoyment, and *beautiful* ambience. These complementary attributes contribute to guest satisfaction and a favourable stay experience, and are reviewed in the next sections.

Luxury hotel attribute 1: Personalised service as the strongest attribute

Service was recognised as the strongest attribute in Auckland’s luxury hotels. Of total participants, 88% deemed luxury hotel service superior as it exceeded expectations. The high service quality was the reason for repeat stays. It was personalised in that amenities were used as part of service delivery, such as providing cake with a handwritten card to celebrate anniversaries. Service was customised to the needs of the guests, for example, accommodating early check-ins so the guest could rest after a long flight. The higher level of service in luxury hotels meant that guests enjoyed their stays, as they felt at ease knowing that they were looked after. Participants were clear that bad service set off an unfavourable experience, which they were confident would not happen in luxury hotels. Therefore, the combined findings support the idea that service quality in luxury hotels contributes to a positive stay experience for guests and is a prime motivator for luxury stay decisions.

Luxury hotel attribute 2: Efficient staff that engage guests

Guests cited positive emotions, such as “feeling welcomed” and “feeling cared for,” in their staff encounters. Positive attitude (friendliness) and skill (efficiency) were important traits that guests recognised in staff. Repeat guests appreciated staff efficiency, as participants on revisits mentioned that the staff did their jobs well. They recognised their emotional connection with the staff to be personal and genuine, as the staff were credited with making their luxury hotel stay pleasant. Therefore, the findings indicate that staff play a vital part in facilitating positive encounters in luxury hotels that contribute to a favourable stay experience for the guests.

Luxury hotel attribute 3: Comfortable rooms that are restful and relaxing

The room experience was described as restful and relaxing, with 69% of participants spending most of their time in their rooms (Table 19). Men placed greater emphasis on shower pressure while women valued the bathroom size more. A comfortable bed was considered as the most important room facility. Of total participants, 61% stayed for an average of five nights or more (Table 19). They indicated the importance of sleep, so having a superior quality bed was of significance to their stay experience. Although most disappointments related to the rooms, such as maintenance issues, the room was nonetheless deemed of high quality because of the excellent furnishings, quality of materials, and décor. When guests voiced their complaints about the rooms, extrinsic factors, such as appropriate service recovery and room cleanliness, alleviated their dissatisfaction. Therefore, the findings suggest that a comfortable room contributes to a positive stay experience for the guests.

Luxury hotel attribute 4: High cleanliness standards

The high standard of cleanliness in luxury hotels met expectations, as the guests did not express any complaints in relation to this attribute. The participants stated that a clean hotel made their stay pleasant. Although cleanliness was generally recognised as an independent attribute (i.e. luxury hotels were clean), it also demonstrated supplementary characteristics; that is, cleanliness enhanced the physical appeal of other tangible attributes (e.g. rooms, facilities, and location). Guests appreciated a room with crisp, white, and newly washed bedlinen, facilities that were well-maintained, or locations with immaculate surroundings. One might argue that cleanliness is a requisite that must be given its required attention, otherwise, it will warrant dissatisfaction. Therefore, the findings support the notion that cleanliness is part of the multi-sensory cues that

influence the guest experience, as the clean environments of the luxury hotels were relaxing for the guests.

Luxury hotel attribute 5: Central location that is convenient and accessible

The central location of luxury hotels meant easy access, as transportation was readily available. The participants mentioned that they liked having the freedom to move around, and being able to walk to their areas of interests held great appeal. Walking was their preferred mode of transport. It could be posited that luxury hotel guests valued their time, so the desirability of a “walking distance” position meant they were spared the nuisance of traffic, which can be stressful. Business travellers considered it an advantage to be near corporate offices, while leisure travellers liked the close proximity of luxury hotels to shopping districts. Guests also indicated that being in the city centre was attractive because of the number of dining options that proliferate in the area. An interesting finding was that women viewed the locations as safe, which helped them enjoy their stay. Luxury hotels’ central locations are convenient, which made stays easy and enjoyable for guests. Therefore, the findings indicate that the convenience and accessibility of a central location contribute to guest satisfaction.

Luxury hotel attribute 6: Facilities for relaxation and enjoyment

Luxury hotels were identified as “complete” because of the number and high quality of facilities that were provided to guests. Participants enjoyed using the gym, pool, spa, and restaurant, as they were able to relax. The restaurant was the most utilised facility and disappointments were frequently expressed in the food because it was perceived to have limited variety. Having the facilities on-site allowed the guests to pursue what interested them, such as swimming. Business travellers found the conference centres convenient, as the meeting rooms facilitated their work transactions. One participant mentioned that from his room, he simply needed to go down to attend the summit and then easily go up to his room to relax. Another participant stated that, even for a work trip, having the facilities made it feel as if he were on holiday, as he took pleasure in being by the pool after his meetings. The findings therefore indicate that facilities enhance the stay experience in luxury hotels as they offer relaxation and enjoyment.

Luxury hotel attribute 7: *Beautiful* ambience that delights guests

The participants conveyed the idea that everything in luxury hotels smelled and looked ‘beautiful’. The *beautiful* ambience was described as the feeling of “sensory delight.” The luxury environment was accentuated by multi-sensory cues of plush designs, mood lighting, carefully orchestrated music, and signature scents that pervaded the senses.

Guests recognised the aura in luxury hotels as representing a different level of sophistication to lesser ranked hotels, which was magnified by the aesthetics of quality materials and décor. They were expressive about how they liked staying in such a beautiful place, as it made them feel happy and relaxed. Therefore, the findings suggest that sensory pleasures, provided by a *beautiful* ambience, drive the stay decisions in luxury hotels and are a predictor of guest satisfaction.

7.3 Theoretical implications

While it is important that attributes were identified, a significant original contribution of this study is how firstly, it highlights that experience matters in luxury hotels. Secondly, two models on hotel attributes were presented. The IHA model (Figure 6) is a framework that shows how the important attributes are linked to each other, and the ADLE model (Figure 7) is a blueprint of the seven hotel attributes that deliver a luxury experience. This is the first time these (and the following points) have been identified. High service quality in luxury hotels was defined as the combination of important attributes that complement each other, which is the key to delivering a luxury hotel experience. These attributes are dynamic and bring a holistic experience in a sequence that leads to guest satisfaction: if attributes are performed favourably, the guests feel positive emotions, and the stay experience is deemed favourable. The study emphasises the importance of hospitableness, whereby hospitality is seen as an experience co-created between guests and staff (see Harkison, 2016). This finding adds new knowledge to hospitality research on how the holistic experience, created by the attributes, distinguishes luxury hotels from other properties and substantiates the acceptance of price.

In undertaking a mixed methods approach, the combined findings demonstrate consistency (e.g. service was the strongest attribute) while the findings in each phase reveal interesting discoveries (e.g. women in the interviews cited the location of luxury hotels as safe) (Table 20). Although this is not a new approach in qualitative research, this study joins other studies that also employed a mixed methods approach, such as those by Low (2012) and Ryu et al. (2018), who examined brand images of luxury hotels, in advancing hospitality research.

The literature review showed that similar studies have explored luxury hotel attributes in the USA (Bagnera, 2017; Kim et al., 2019; Memarzadeh & Anand, 2018), Malaysia (Al-alak, 2011; Ekiz et al., 2012; Khoo-Lattimore & Ekiz, 2014), China (Gu et al.,

2008; Wu & Yang, 2018), Hong Kong (Qu et al., 2000; Tolkach & Tse, 2016), Brazil (Limberger et al., 2014), Portugal (Pacheco, 2017), Taiwan (Lu et al., 2015), and Turkey (Alrawadieh & Law, 2019). Literature on luxury hotels is scant in New Zealand, as while there are three studies that explore the attributes of hotels, only one was specific to luxury hotels (Harkison, 2016), as the other studies included all hotel categories (Lockyer, 2002, 2005). As the guests are from different nationalities, the findings are representative of the New Zealand luxury hotel market.

Findings of the current and previous studies have been compared and explained under each of the attribute's sections in Chapter six, indicating the cultural subjectivity of the attributes. As Auckland expects more visitor arrivals (New Zealand Trade and Enterprise, n.d.) and the hosting of more international events (Penn, 2017), such as APEC in 2021, luxury hotel management may be guided by this study, and customise their offerings to what their guests are looking for in their stay, in order to retain their competitive advantage. Industry recommendations are presented next.

7.4 Practical implications

This research provides practical implications for the luxury hotel industry in New Zealand. The findings of this study suggest that changing from a product focus to an experience mindset can give considerable benefits to management, as experience manifests as the distinctive edge of luxury hotels and the acceptance of the premium price paid by guests. Therefore, the following four recommendations are proposed to ensure that the over-all objective of guest satisfaction is always achieved.

Firstly, knowing the luxury hotel attributes that guest consider important (i.e. personalised service, efficient staff, comfortable rooms, high cleanliness standards, central location, facilities for relaxation and enjoyment, and *beautiful* ambience) can be useful for luxury properties. Guests expect high standards in luxury hotels (Qu et al., 2000; Walker, 2017). Therefore, these attributes can serve as a guide when formulating key performance indicators (KPIs) so that resource allocation is appropriate. With these seven attributes in mind, management needs to identify which are their areas of excellence to maintain, areas of strengths to highlight, and areas of weaknesses to improve on so that they sustain their first-class status. For example, a review on the websites of luxury hotels show that four out of the seven properties described central location rather broadly as “within easy reach” or “nearby access.” It may be useful for the marketing teams to take note that a great location, as expressed by participants,

means being able to walk to their places of interest, which they did, so this advantage should be exploited by explicitly detailing in their marketing channels which areas are within easy walking distance from their hotels.

Secondly, the intangible characteristics of personalised service and staff engagement were of greatest significance to the participants. These two attributes should be showcased. They can be further improved by recruiting qualified professionals and updating staff skills with training (Bagnera, 2017; Cetin & Walls, 2016), as guests praised efficiency by recognising staff who knew how to do their jobs well. The hospitality industry is a “people” business (Harkison, 2016) and the luxury hotel is part of the experiential segment (Boston Consulting Group, 2017). At the core of both industries is the hotel employee and central to the luxury hotel experience is the guest-staff relationship (Cetin & Walls, 2016; Harkison, 2016). Management’s greatest investment should therefore be on their staff, as they have the biggest impact in delivering the experiential component of their business. Arrifin et al. (2018) stated that personalisation in luxury hotels, which emphasises the emotive dimension more than the functional aspect of service, is the luxury hotels’ competitive advantage. Therefore, managers should not be lured into cost-cutting measures with staffing, because with less disposable time, staff are unable to perform highly engaging personal encounters with guests. Management should keep in mind that what sets luxury hotels apart is human engagement, more than product quality, so they should ensure that the staff connect with guests at every opportunity, and are empowered to do so. It is not enough that the high staff-to-guest ratio is maintained. More important than the quantity is the quality of staff employed, who must be well-trained and anticipative of service requirements with great attention to detail.

Thirdly, although the findings reveal that the intangible features of service and staff engagement mattered more than did the physical attributes such as the room, the aesthetic appeal of the product should be maintained because multi-sensory cues drive stay decisions in luxury hotels (Armitage & Roberts, 2016; Han et al., 2019) and are a predictor of guest satisfaction (Jani & Han, 2014; Suh et al., 2015). This means that detailed care should ensure that the room is free from maintenance issues, facilities are well-maintained and in good working condition, and the physical environment is immaculate. Management should be careful not to prioritise product quality at the expense of highlighting human engagement, as the importance of the norms (i.e. all hotels provide rooms, all luxury hotels are clean, etc.) may seem insignificant until

disappointment is experienced (Slevitch & Oh, 2010). Attributes bring holistic experience. Therefore, managers should take advantage of the sensory delight that their beautiful hotels exhibit by strengthening it with personal interactions with the guests.

Lastly, guests considered the price of luxury hotels acceptable when the stay experience was favourable. On the contrary, those who did not recognise any distinction in the luxury hotel expressed dissatisfaction with the price and reported a shift of preference to a more economic hotel. This is significant because it shows that luxury hotels still need to justify the value that the expensive price commands (Harkison, 2016). Despite being costlier, luxury properties that cater to experiential service, register the highest guest evaluations (Kimes & Ho, 2018). This means that experience matters to luxury hotel guests, and they are willing to pay for it. One can argue that if lesser ranked properties start to provide comparable experiences with a disparity in the pricing, preferences for luxury hotels may weaken. Therefore, this can serve as a fair warning to management. It is not sufficient to highlight product quality, as for luxury hotel guests, value extends beyond the financial implications, and every effort should be exerted to ensure that the experience remains remarkable in luxury hotels.

7.5 Limitations of the study

The first limitation of this research was that the first phase only considered five-star online ratings posted during the peak months of December 2018 to March 2019, which coincided with this research's timeline. It is possible that guests from the off-peak season, or those that gave lower ratings, may have different profiles, which would result in different findings. Future studies can be inclusive of longer periods and can add online reviews regardless of ratings, so that a broader set of data is used for analysis.

The second limitation was the population size of the interview phase, which involved three out of the seven luxury hotels in Auckland. No data were collected from the guests of the four remaining luxury hotels that declined to participate. The unique characteristics and offerings from the non-participating hotels were therefore not explored. It would be worthwhile to conduct similar research in the future, extending the population. Findings of future research could then be compared to those of the current study to ascertain how the attributes remain constant or change.

Finally, this research was conducted in one city only: Auckland. It was a limitation of this study that luxury hotels in the other areas of New Zealand were not included. Future research can accommodate luxury hotels in other locations, such as Wellington

and Queenstown. It would be interesting to discover if the findings reveal similarities, or differences.

7.6 Areas of future research

Aside from the three areas of future research identified when discussing the limitations of the study, two further research opportunities were identified. Firstly, the influence of Hofstede et al.'s (2010) indulgence cultural dimension with the experiential facet of luxury hotels could be a fruitful topic of study. The cultural dimension of indulgence is defined as the willingness to indulge the desire of enjoying life (Hofstede et al., 2010). This perception is shared by luxury users (including luxury hotel guests) that view luxury consumptions (including luxury hotel stays) as the extras in life that add more comfort and find more meaning (Danziger, 2005, 2011). Hofstede et al.'s (2010) cultural dimensions, namely power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism, femininity, and short-term orientation, have significant influences on service quality (Pomegbe et al., 2019). However, the indulgence cultural dimension was excluded in Pomegbe et al.'s (2019) study. It would be worthwhile to explore the relationship between indulgence cultural dimension (Hofstede et al., 2010) and service quality in luxury hotels, as indulgence shows a significant contribution to guest satisfaction (Huang & Crotts, 2019).

Secondly, future research directions point towards exploring the high standard of cleanliness in luxury hotels in Auckland, as this attribute received no complaints from the guests. It would be rewarding to delve deeper into whether this is an area of excellence that luxury hotels in Auckland can boast of, because cleanliness is found to be a top complaint in other luxury hotels, such as in Jordan (Dincer & Alrawadieh, 2017) and Taiwan (Loo & Leung, 2018).

7.7 Personal reflection

My family and I used to have weekend getaways at a luxurious resort. I remember it to be a magical time. Each stay in that luxury resort was exciting and mesmerising. This fascination stayed with me. It was the reason I became a hotelier.

Arriving in New Zealand a year ago, I observed that luxury hotel operations are leaner, yet still guest-centred. I began to wonder what things mattered to the guests and if the guests were provided with what they wanted. It was an interesting topic for me.

Phase two proved challenging. I needed the hotel managers' consent. Their feedback was slow and constant follow-ups were made. My initial doubts about using a mixed

methods approach in data collection and analysis were heightened. Using secondary data seemed straightforward as it was less dependent on external factors. However, I was aware that interviews can provide “a rich source” of data. The mixed methods approach would give a better understanding of my research topic, which proved to be the case.

I enjoyed the interviews. It was wonderful to see the participants’ eyes sparkle as they recalled something memorable. They were articulate when probed and did not seem annoyed when asked to explain further. Although I would have liked the guests to give more of their time, they were nonetheless engaging. Fortunately, the collected responses from the participants were adequate in answering the research question.

In analysing the interviews, at first, I was so consumed with doing the process correctly, that I missed out on allowing the data to “speak freely.” I reread the “how to” of thematic analysis, asking myself, “what am I not getting?” In the end, I finally understood that it was going to be messy, exciting, and repetitive. I employed the method of using post-it notes to visually guide the clustering process. It was thrilling to discover the themes, as opposed to my previous confusion, because now they made sense!

Documenting the findings felt overwhelming because of the depth in both volume and quality of data. There was fear of overlooking something and a strong inclination to cover everything that was raised. Journaling reduced the feelings of anxiety. In hindsight, the mixed methods approach was very challenging, yet it proved insightful. A qualitative framework allowed me to better appreciate the rich interpretations of meanings, which the TripAdvisor online reviews on their own would have lacked.

7.8 Concluding remarks

This study adds an original contribution to knowledge by presenting two innovative models on hotel attributes. The first IHA model shows how the factors are connected to each other (Figure 6), and the second ADLE model is a blueprint of what makes the attributes lead to a luxury hotel experience (Figure 7). This study therefore advances hospitality research, as it extends beyond knowing what the guests find significant in luxury hotels, by indicating further that favourable attributes generate meaningful experiences: the distinguishing feature of luxury hotels.

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Appendices

Appendix A- Ethics Approval

Appendix A.a Initial approval



Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Auckland University of Technology
D-88, Private Bag 92006, Auckland 1142, NZ
T: +64 9 921 9999 ext. 8316
E: ethics@aut.ac.nz
www.aut.ac.nz/researchethics

25 February 2019

Tracy Harkison
Faculty of Culture and Society

Dear Tracy

Re Ethics Application: **19/62 A review of 5-star ratings on TripAdvisor for luxury hotels in Auckland, New Zealand**

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 25 February 2022.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Please ensure that the supervisor stores data and Consent Form securely and separately.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
2. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
3. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
4. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
5. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation, then you are responsible for obtaining it. You are reminded that it is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations is of a high standard.

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'K O'Connor'.

Kate O'Connor
Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: rwq1824@autuni.ac.nz

**Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)**

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17 July 2019

Tracy Harkison

Faculty of Culture and Society«Faculty»«Faculty»«Faculty»«AUTEC_Meeting_Date»

Dear Tracy

Re: Ethics Application: **19/62 A review of 5-star ratings on TripAdvisor for luxury hotels in Auckland, New Zealand**

Thank you for your request for approval of amendments to your ethics application. And the subsequent response to the conditions.

The amendment to the inclusion criteria related to the place of employment of the Primary Researcher is approved.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The offer of counselling may be removed from the Information Sheet.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

I remind you of the **Standard Conditions of Approval**.

6. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
7. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date, using form EA2, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
8. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period, or, upon completion of project, using form EA3, which is available online through <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
9. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics>.
10. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
11. Any unforeseen events that might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. If you require management approval for access for your research from another institution or organisation then you are responsible for obtaining it. If the research is undertaken outside New Zealand, you need to meet all locality legal and ethical obligations and requirements.

For any enquiries please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz

Yours sincerely,

Kate O'Connor
 Executive Manager
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: rwq1824@autuni.ac.nz

Appendix B- Tools

Appendix B.a Interview guide

1. Demographics (Student researcher to bring card for respondent to tick off answers)

What is your age?

24 and under___ 25-34___ 35-44___ 45-54___ 55-64___ 65-74___ 75 and above___

Please specify your country of origin. _____

What is the purpose of your travel?

Leisure___ Business___ Others_____ (please specify)

What is the average number of times you travel?

Once a year___ two to four times a year___ more than 5 times a year___

What is the average number of nights per stay?

One night___ two to four nights___ five to seven nights___ more than seven nights___

2. Do you ever use online review sites such as TripAdvisor when giving feedback on your hotel stays? Why?

3. Why do you stay in luxury hotels?

4. How do you describe a luxury hotel?

5. What emotions do you feel when you stay in luxury hotels?

6. What is an example of an amazing luxury experience?

7. Has an amazing experience happened in this stay?

8. How does this experience compare to your previous stays?

9. Here are some of the common things in luxury hotels that travellers mentioned in TripAdvisor to be important for them. Which for you are the most important?

(Student researcher to bring card for respondent to rank with 1 as most important)

Location, Facilities, Service, Staff, Amenities, Value for money, Ambience, Room, Cleanliness, Décor

10. Why do you consider this as most important?

11. Are there other things that are important to you that is not on the list?

12. Would you revisit this hotel? If so, why? If not, why not?

13. Would you recommend this hotel to family and friends? If so why? If not, why not?

Participant Information Sheet

**Date Information Sheet Produced:**

13 June 2019

Project Title:

A Review of 5-star Ratings on TripAdvisor for Luxury Hotels in Auckland, New Zealand.

An Invitation:

My name is Sarah Mascariñas, a postgraduate student completing my master's degree in International Hospitality Management at Auckland University of Technology. As a guest of a luxury hotel in Auckland, I would be very interested in interviewing you about your stay experience. Your participation in the research study is completely voluntary and your input will enable me to find out more about what hotel attributes guests of luxury hotels in Auckland find important. At any stage should you wish to withdraw from the research, you may do at any time without any negative consequences.

What is the purpose of this research?

The primary aim of the research study is to identify the hotel attributes that matter most to guests when giving a 5-star rating. Exploring this research question may help luxury hotel managers to better anticipate the expectations of their guests, such as yourself. The findings in my research may also provide suggestions to guide management in aligning their guest programmes towards what values most to the guests when staying in their hotels.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research study?

The research study endeavours to interview guests of luxury hotels in Auckland, New Zealand.

By participating in this research, you will be able to add to existing knowledge on the preferences of luxury hotel guests.

What will happen in this research study?

I intend to interview approximately 20 people. Your participation in this research study will require you to be interviewed on your experience as a guest in the luxury hotel in Auckland, New Zealand. It will take place at a time that will be suitable for both of us and may take about 30 to 45 minutes to finish. All interviews will be digitally recorded, and notes may be taken.

What are the discomfort and risks?

There are no anticipated risks for you by participating in this research study.

How will my privacy be protected?

All measures will be made to ensure that confidentiality of information is kept at all times. Likewise, said information shall only be used for the purpose of the study. Your name will be withheld in the data analysis and in all parts of the published research material.

What are the costs of participating in this research study?

The cost associated to you in participating in this research study would be the time spent in the conduct of the interview. It is estimated that the interview will take no more than 45 minutes. Should this be of concern to you, please feel free to get in touch with me so a more suitable alternative can be organised on your behalf.

How do I give my consent to participate in this research study?

You will be provided with a consent form detailing your rights as a participant. Your signature on the form will be required signifying your agreement to the terms as well as confirming your participation.

Will I receive feedback on the results of the study?

The consent form that will be provided to you gives you the option to either request for a summary of the research findings, or not. Should you tick 'yes', a copy of the finding's summary will be provided to you upon completion of the research study.

What do I do if I have concerns regarding the research study?

Any concerns related to the nature of the research study should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor:

Dr. Tracy Harkison, tracy.harkison@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext. 8491.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTECH, Kate O' Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, 921 9999 ext. 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research study?

Researcher's Contact Details:

Sarah Mascariñas

Email: rwq1824@autuni.ac.nz

Mobile Number: 0210 444 302

CONSENT FORM



Project Title: A review of 5-star ratings on TripAdvisor
for luxury hotels in Auckland, New Zealand

Project Supervisor: Dr. Tracy Harkison

Researcher: Sarah Mascariñas

- ☐ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated dd mm yy.
- ☐ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.
- ☐ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.
- ☐ I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged in any way.
- ☐ I understand that if I withdraw from the study then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.
- ☐ I agree to take part in this research.
- ☐ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one):

Yes* ☐
No ☐

*Should you tick yes, summary of the findings will be provided upon completion of the research study.

Participant's signature:

Participant's name:

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 25 February 2019, AUTEK Reference number 19/62.

Appendix B.d Letter requesting access

Email to luxury hotel general managers

(date)

(Name of General Manager)

General Manager

(Name of luxury hotel)

(Address of luxury hotel)

Dear (Name of General Manager),

My name is Sarah Mascariñas and I am pursuing my Master of International Hospitality Management at Auckland University of Technology. I am writing to you about my study that explores what hotel attributes matter most to luxury hotel guests in Auckland when giving a 5-star rating on an online review in TripAdvisor.

As one of the luxury hotels identified by Qualmark NZ, I hope that you will allow me access to interview a few of your guests about their stay experience. This will be voluntary. My intention is to sit in your lobby and approach guests to be interviewed with your approval. The findings of the research will be of value as it provides awareness, positions the hotel to anticipate and thereafter be able to meet (or exceed) the perceived expectations. In addition, the practical application in knowing these hotel attributes may guide management by aligning the findings of the study with strategic programmes in order to maintain or augment online reputation. Attached are the participants information sheet and consent form that will be provided prior to the interview. Rest assured that confidentiality will be adhered to at all times. The intended timeline for the interviews will start by May 22, 2019. Please contact me through my email address rwq1824@autuni.ac.nz.

This research is important. The tourism industry in New Zealand is robust with visitor arrivals expecting to reach 5.1 million tourists in 2024. In a report released by the government in 2017, visitor spending in the luxury accommodation market segment in the country increased by 141% in a 5-year period commencing in March 2012. This segment is also known to have a more discerning clientele engaging in social online platforms like TripAdvisor. Some research studies in countries like the US and China have revealed what guests consider as important when staying in luxury hotels. However, in the context of luxury hotels in Auckland, the hotel attributes that matter most to guests have not been explicitly examined. It will be interesting to find out what matters most to your guests.

The research study has been approved by Auckland University of Technology's Ethics Committee. Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Tracy Harkison, tracy.harkison@aut.ac.nz, +64 921 9999 ext 8491. Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEK, Kate O'Connor, ethics@aut.ac.nz, +64 921 9999 ext 6038.

Again, thank you for your time. I look forward to favourably hearing back from you.

Yours sincerely,

Sarah Mascariñas

rwq1824@autuni.ac.nz

+64 021 0444 302

Appendix C- Sample of analysis: Frequency of hotel attributes occurrence

	Total Reviews	Value		Room		Location		Cleanliness	Service		Staff		Facilities		Amenities		Ambiance		Overall hotel		Décor
		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	
GRAND TOTAL	456	55	22	659	60	367	51	118	956	28	780	7	355	16	225	5	117	4	341	3	45
	Total Reviews	Value		Room		Location		Cleanliness	Service		Staff		Facilities		Amenities		Ambiance		Overall hotel		Décor
		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	
December																					
Hotel 1	27	2	4	34	0	8	7	6	48	0	37	0	20	1	16	0	4	0	17	0	3
Hotel 2	16	1	1	33	5	18	0	2	32	4	29	1	10	0	5	0	3	0	12	0	1
Hotel 3	11	3	0	22	4	7	3	3	34	1	32	2	16	1	4	0	1	0	4	0	0
Hotel 4	7	2	0	9	0	5	0	2	17	0	10	0	5	0	1	0	1	0	4	0	0
Hotel 5	15	0	0	15	1	13	0	6	37	2	22	0	3	0	3	0	2	0	12	0	2
Hotel 6	18	5	2	15	1	9	4	3	31	0	26	1	17	1	9	0	3	0	4	0	1
Hotel 7	13	1	0	17	1	14	0	1	29	1	27	0	3	0	2	0	4	1	14	0	2
TOTAL	107	14	7	145	12	74	14	23	228	8	183	4	74	3	40	0	18	1	67	0	9
	Total Reviews	Value		Room		Location		Cleanliness	Service		Staff		Facilities		Amenities		Ambiance		Overall hotel		Décor
		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	
January																					
Hotel 1	35	5	0	48	4	12	8	8	66	1	63	0	40	1	31	0	10	0	28	0	6
Hotel 2	16	1	1	20	1	22	0	2	35	1	29	0	6	1	3	1	5	0	7	0	0
Hotel 3	17	0	0	36	0	11	0	5	40	2	35	0	15	0	16	0	1	0	13	0	1
Hotel 4	6	2	0	16	0	10	0	2	8	1	5	0	2	1	9	0	0	0	2	0	0
Hotel 5	21	2	3	57	8	31	1	1	54	2	35	2	10	4	26	1	4	0	25	0	7
Hotel 6	31	4	0	22	2	23	5	9	51	4	61	0	30	2	8	0	5	0	18	0	2
Hotel 7	15	0	0	14	5	10	1	1	35	0	33	0	5	0	6	0	10	0	18	1	5
TOTAL	141	14	4	213	20	119	15	28	289	11	261	2	108	9	99	2	35	0	111	1	21
	Total Reviews	Value		Room		Location		Cleanliness	Service		Staff		Facilities		Amenities		Ambiance		Overall hotel		Décor
		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	
February																					
Hotel 1	31	3	0	50	3	14	5	8	73	1	56	0	41	0	15	0	2	0	23	0	1
Hotel 2	16	1	0	27	1	16	0	3	27	2	28	0	5	1	5	0	15	0	13	0	0
Hotel 3	10	0	1	18	1	7	2	5	19	1	10	1	5	0	3	1	1	0	8	0	0
Hotel 4	7	0	1	11	0	5	0	2	15	0	12	0	8	0	6	0	1	0	3	0	2
Hotel 5	6	0	0	5	0	7	0	1	7	0	8	0	6	0	3	0	4	0	4	0	3
Hotel 6	21	2	0	17	3	23	4	8	25	1	16	0	14	0	0	0	4	1	23	0	1
Hotel 7	11	2	1	25	1	7	0	6	26	0	26	0	5	0	7	0	5	0	13	0	4
TOTAL	102	8	3	153	9	79	11	33	192	5	156	1	84	1	39	1	32	1	87	0	11
	Total Reviews	Value		Room		Location		Cleanliness	Service		Staff		Facilities		Amenities		Ambiance		Overall hotel		Décor
		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)		(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	(+)	(-)	
March																					
Hotel 1	24	6	4	25	2	16	3	13	69	0	35	0	36	0	8	0	4	0	17	0	0
Hotel 2	16	2	3	23	7	24	0	3	24	3	24	0	9	2	2	0	14	2	7	2	0
Hotel 3	17	5	0	17	3	9	3	6	59	1	37	0	15	1	7	0	9	0	14	0	1
Hotel 4	10	1	0	24	4	14	0	3	17	0	15	0	10	0	10	1	0	0	6	0	0
Hotel 5	10	3	0	21	1	11	1	4	25	0	8	0	6	0	6	1	3	0	9	0	1
Hotel 6	21	2	1	22	0	16	3	4	32	0	53	0	10	0	12	0	2	0	14	0	0
Hotel 7	8	0	0	16	2	5	1	1	21	0	8	0	3	0	2	0	0	0	9	0	2
TOTAL	106	19	8	148	19	95	11	34	247	4	180	0	89	3	47	2	32	2	76	2	4

Appendix D- Sample of quotes: Common themes revealed

Common Themes	Samples Quotes	
	Phase One TripAdvisor Comments	Phase Two Interview Replies
SERVICE	“Service provided was exceptional and personalized.” (Review 2)	“... what comes to mind (when thinking of luxury hotels)? Just quality of service, quality of care.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)
	“(We) could not fault the service.” (Review 49)	“In luxury hotels... service is better. We know we will be comfortable.” (Luxury Hotel Guests D and E)
	“(We were) made to feel welcome the moment we arrived. Suitcases immediately dealt with and a quick registration.” (Review 104)	“I stayed in this hotel last year, and I find this hotel provides very good service.” (Luxury Hotel Guest K)
	“I had some time for leisure activities and one included snapper fishing I was so pleased that the kitchen cooked up one of my catches for me on request.” (Review 213)	“Better service (in luxury hotels). The idea that you walk in the front door and you don’t need to worry about anything. You can just relax. You know you are being taken-care of. And you don’t need to be afraid of the hotel screwing everything up.” (Luxury Hotel Guest L)
	“...great customer service and it was why we enjoyed our stay at Hotel XXX.” (Review 349)	“(Service is my most important attribute) because if you (luxury hotels) don’t have good service, it puts your (guest’s) experience off. You can’t enjoy your stay. You go out with the negative.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)
STAFF	“What a wonderful hotel and employees Hotel XXX has!” (Review 98)	“The staff here are professional yet friendly, it is a good mix.” (Luxury Hotel Guest G)
	“...we were welcomed at the front desk by a wonderfully cheerful attendant... Everyone we met at the hotel was warm and friendly...” (Review 262)	“I think the staff are exceptional... The way they greet you, the concierge is so lovely. And (they are) authentic. There is a perfect balance here for me between warm and welcoming and friendly.” (Luxury Hotel Guest A)
	“The staff was so friendly and helpful and always with a smile.” (Review 293)	“Staff are amazing.” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)
	“...unlike the managers from other hotels, he is very friendly and approachable.” (Review 355)	“Here, the staff is really sincere... in this hotel, you can tell they like what they are doing. They like dealing with their guests.” (Luxury Hotel Guest K)
	“I want to take a moment to than a few people while staying at Hotel XXX. I would like to thank Ms. L and Mr. R. They both were the best...” (Review 349)	“First person you meet is always a good indication of what the hotel is going to be like... without the staff, the hotel will not be good. In luxury hotels, I think you can see how good they are. It really shows.” (Luxury Hotel Guest J)

Common Themes	Samples Quotes	
	Phase One TripAdvisor Comments	Phase Two Interview Replies
ROOMS	"I loved the... comfort of my luxury room. I wish I could stay one more day just to enjoy my room." (Review 8)	"... I spend a lot of time in the room. The room has to be comfortable..." (Luxury Hotel Guest A)
	"The room had all the amenities and so much more. Absolute comfort and crisp linen!" (Review 30)	"The in-room experience should be relaxing. If you have a good bed that makes it happen. Your hotel room is like your home, you stay there a lot." (Luxury Hotel Guest H)
	"Excellent spacious and spotless room with the comfiest king-sized bed!... it all made for a perfect and very relaxing stay." (Review 56)	"The room's just so comfortable. The bed and you can choose your pillows. You know the little things that makes all the difference like the bed, pillow, those shampoos and soap in the shower. You know it's quality." (Luxury Hotel Guest J)
	"...The room was fabulous: quiet, well appointed, and very comfortable..." (Review 192)	"The room (because) that's where I'll spend most of my time... It has to be comfortable that you get a good night's sleep. I guess you are not home but still you want to be able to sleep well. I suppose the hotels like this one have really good beds. It's one of those that I have the most comfortable sleep away from home." (Luxury Hotel Guest P)
CLEANLINESS	"... Everything was very clean..." (Review 27)	"(The most important for me is) cleanliness... because I am a clean freak." (Luxury Hotel Guest B)
	"... Hotel is... very clean..." (Review 198)	"(Staying in) luxury hotels have benefits... it's clean." (Luxury Hotel Guest E).
	"... road works in front of the Hotel 6, the staff... keep the front tidy even while dust is piling up in the street!..." (Review 333)	"We want to relax and if it is dirty, we can't do that. That's why we stay in a hotel so we can't be bothered with cleaning." (Luxury Hotel Guests I and J)
	"... The hotel is immaculate... Everywhere is immaculately clean..." (Review 444)	"...Your room is clean, as is the hotel. Luxury hotels have (the) highest cleanliness standards." (Luxury Hotel Guest P)
LOCATION	"... (The hotel has the) best location as (it is) close to activities for Auckland..." (Review 177)	"It's fairly central... They are (situated) in the right places." (Luxury Hotel Guest D and E)
	"Fantastic hotel in (a) great location..." (Review 184)	"It is just such a central place, (It) is so convenient." (Luxury Hotel Guest G)
	"Nice hotel with good location. (We) can walk..." (Review 214)	"(The luxury hotel's) location... provided good access to many places... The location is (in the) city proper so (it was) easy to walk around." (Luxury Hotel Guest K)
	"... Easy walk to many bars and restaurants..." (Review 302)	"The location here is convenient, everything is just near. We can walk around." (Luxury Hotel Guest M)

Common Themes	Samples Quotes	
	Phase One TripAdvisor Comments	Phase Two Interview Replies
FACILITIES	“Fantastic hotel... superb facilities... Dining room was excellent... the Spa/Pool/Sauna facility was the best I have ever seen...” (Review 34)	“It is just convenient staying in a place that well offers everything.” (Luxury Hotel Guest E)
	“... the facilities were great...” (Review 113)	“(They have) great restaurants. In this hotel they (also) have a spa you can use privately. (They) just great facilities that makes your stay better.” (Luxury Hotel Guests I and J)
	“... all hotel facilities... is just great...” (Review 135)	“I like the comfort that the luxury hotels offers such as gym, pool, a restaurant. I do not need to go out of the hotel to enjoy these facilities.” (Luxury Hotel Guest K)
	“Loved: the swimming pool, gym, and the spa... this place has almost everything to offer.” (Review 322)	“To be honest, it’s got everything... The facilities are good...” (Luxury Hotel Guest M)
AMBIENCE	“...ambience was lovely...” (Review 2)	“Hotel is beautiful. (It has) great ambience, and I feel peaceful looking at beauty, and being at something beautiful.” (Luxury Hotel Guest H)
	“...their signature smell that is so divine as soon as you walk into the lobby!” (Review 40)	“I mean it’s what you get in luxury hotels. The quality. I specifically like how they have transformed this old building into something so beautiful. I was told it’s a historic building and it’s just so beautiful. The ambience is just amazing.” (Luxury Hotel Guest L)
	“... The hotel and its décor is... very beautiful...” (Review 301)	“...beautiful place and the ambience is great...” (Luxury Hotel Guest O)
	“Really luxurious...” (Review 337)	“... the hotel looking beautiful. When you enter there is a how should I say this... ah presence... You are surrounded by quality when you arrive. You are engulfed by everything (that is) beautiful.” (Luxury Hotel Guest P)