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### **Visitors’ Travel Experience in Lubbock, Texas and their Satisfaction with the Lubbock Preston Smith International Airport**

This study assessed visitors’ satisfaction with the facilities and amenities provided by the Lubbock Airport, their experience, and the attractions they visited during their stay in Lubbock, Texas. A total of 137 visitors were interviewed, majority of the visitors were satisfied with services provided by the airport. Most used the Internet (63%) to book the trip; the overall assessment of the airport was positive. The majority (85%) were satisfied or very satisfied with their dining and shopping experience in Lubbock. Attractions and entertainment were not the focus of the trip for most visitors.

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## **Introduction**

An examination of economic trends demonstrates the importance of the hospitality industry internationally, nationally and in the State of Texas. The World Travel and Tourism Council reported the travel industry employed about 17 million individuals in the United States, representing 12% of the total employment (World Travel & Tourism Council, 2005). In Texas, the direct travel spending in 2003 was \$41.2 billion generating almost 477,000 jobs (Texas Tourism Report, 2004). Texas ranks third among all states in share of travel spending; only California and Florida have a greater market share.

Airports serve an essential role in the travel and tourism industry. Koldowski (2004), managing director of Pacific Asia Travel Association, in his report to the Strategic Intelligence Center in Bangkok regarding the new International Suvarnabhumi Airport, emphasized the importance of airport infrastructure to tourism development. He stated that a successful tourism industry needs a successful airport. The availability of easy access to air travel is not only important to travel and tourism but to all businesses in general. One important social contribution an airport brings to the community is by enhancing the quality of life for the local residents. Airport facilities and amenities are an important feature for travelers choosing air travel. The services provided by an airport from curbside check-in to the food service vendors are factors affecting the travelers' decision in choosing this mode of transportation. Research will help the airport administration better understand their customers. The number of boarding passengers ultimately translates into revenues funding the operations of an airport.

This project was a collaborative effort among three entities: the Lubbock Convention and Visitors Bureau (LCVB), the Lubbock International Airport (LIA), and the Restaurant, Hotel, and Institutional Management Program (RHIM) at Texas Tech University. The

purpose of the project was to conduct a survey of users of the LIA. The goal was to help both the LIA and the LCVB to:

- 1) determine how satisfied visitors who use the LIA are with the facilities and amenities provided at the LIA,
- 2) determine how satisfied visitors who use the LIA are with their experience and the attractions they visit during their stay in Lubbock,

## **Methodology**

### **Instrument**

A questionnaire for use in interviewing residents of Lubbock and non-residents who used the Lubbock Preston Smith International Airport was developed for this project and pilot tested in November 2005. Personnel at the LCVB and the LIA assisted with the piloting of the instrument with experts in the field. The questionnaire included items on demographics, expenditures, future travel plans, and customers' satisfaction with their trip to Lubbock and the airport. This paper reports the findings for non-resident users of the airport only.

### **Sampling procedure**

The population for this project was the visitors to Lubbock that use the LIA. The survey site was at the LIA. No names or identifying information were gathered. Survey Interceptor Guidelines were developed to assure consistency of interviewers in collecting and logging data. A time frame for interviewing was created to obtain a stratified random sample of non-resident airport travelers. Visitors to Lubbock were interviewed as they departed the Lubbock Preston Smith International Airport between December 2005 and March 2006. Respondents were selected at random on the landside and the secure (gate) side of the airport and interviewed by Texas Tech University undergraduate and graduate Restaurant, Hotel and

Institutional Management (RHIM) and Hospitality Administration majors. A total of 137 provided usable information: 60% were male and 40% were female.

## Results

Questions for visitors/non--residents to Lubbock were designed to provide information to the Lubbock Convention and Visitors Bureau (LCVB). These questions ranged from why they visited Lubbock, to their overall impression of Lubbock. Table 1 shows the results of visitor-related questions. Most respondents visited Lubbock for business (43.07%), followed by visiting friends or relatives (28.47%), and Other (17.52%). Approximately one-third of the visitors stayed in a hotel. Seventy percent of the respondents spent \$300 or less during their visit.

Table 1 - Visitor Related Results

	No. of Respondents	%
<b>Why were you in Lubbock?</b>		
Business	59	43.07
Conference or Meeting	3	2.19
Convention	3	2.19
Texas Tech University Related Business	5	3.65
Visiting Friends or Relatives	39	28.47
Other	24	17.52
No Response	4	2.92
<b>Where did you stay during your visit to Lubbock?</b>		
Hotel	49	35.77
With friends or relatives	5	3.65
Other	44	32.12
No Response	39	28.47
<b>How much did you spend in Lubbock during this trip?</b>		
Under \$100	43	31.39
\$101 - \$150	5	3.65
\$151 - \$200	21	15.33
\$201 - \$250	10	7.30
\$251 - \$300	13	9.49

\$301 or more	27	19.71
None	15	10.95
No Response	3	2.19
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How many people are you reporting for?		
1 Person	87	63.50
2 Persons	23	16.79
3 Persons	4	2.92
4 Persons	1	0.73
5 + Persons	1	0.73
No Response	21	15.33
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How many nights did you stay?		
0 night	24	17.52
1 night	23	16.79
2 nights	26	18.98
3 nights	26	18.98
4 - 9 nights	17	12.41
10 + nights	4	2.92
No Response	17	12.41

Visitors were also asked to rate their satisfaction on several items including hotel accommodations, dining experience, attractions, shopping, and their overall experience. The results are shown in Table 2. These activities were ranked using a Likert type scale of 1 = Very Dissatisfied to 5 = Very Satisfied. Mean score for each of the item were also tabulated. Attractions received the lowest satisfaction rating and also had the highest “No Response” or “N/A” (Not Applicable). This might be expected because over 43% of the visitors reported the purpose of their trip was for business.

Table 2- Visitors’ Satisfaction Rating of Lubbock Attractions and Entertainment

Percentage	Hotel	Dining	Attractions	Shopping	Overall
Very Dissatisfied	0.73	1.46	0.00	0.73	0.73
Dissatisfied	1.46	0.73	0.00	1.46	0.00
Neutral	5.84	9.49	1.46	2.92	12.41
Satisfied	18.98	36.50	10.95	11.68	35.04
Very Satisfied	17.52	32.85	3.65	13.87	40.88
No Response/ NA	55.47	18.98	83.94	69.34	10.95
Mean Score	4.15	4.22	4.14	4.19	4.30

Majority (62.21%) of the visitors (n=137) indicated they booked their travel on the Internet. The Southwest Airlines Website was by far, the most often used site (41 respondents = 30%). As expected, very few purchased their ticket directly at the airport (1%).

Most visitors (40%) were dropped off at the airport; 32% used a rental car; 13% drove and parked their vehicles. Therefore, the question of satisfaction with the parking at the airport was met with no response/non applicable by about 52% of those interviewed. Those who responded were satisfied or very satisfied (83%) with airport parking.

Most of the respondents were satisfied with the facilities and services provided at the LIA, with “experience within the terminal” receiving the highest rating with a mean score of 4.42; and the “parking facilities” received the lowest rating with a mean score of 4.06. Table 3 shows the combined satisfaction rating of airport services.

The visitors were asked to give their satisfaction rating on amenities at LIA. Most respondents were moderately satisfied with the food court. The visitors rated both the food court high (mean score of 3.99) and their satisfaction with the bar high (mean score of 4.23). The visitors also gave a high rating to the retail/gift shop (mean score of 4.04). Table 4 shows the visitors’ satisfaction ratings of airport amenities.

**Table 3** Visitors’ Satisfaction with Airport Facilities and Services

Percentage	Parking	Parking to Terminal	Shuttle Service	Experience with Terminal	Baggage Claim
Very Dissatisfied	1.46	2.19	0.73	2.19	0.73
Dissatisfied	5.11	2.19	4.38	1.46	2.19
Neutral	5.84	5.11	13.14	7.30	4.38
Satisfied	12.41	15.33	21.90	28.47	19.71
Very Satisfied	23.36	32.85	57.66	56.93	35.77
No Response/ NA	51.82	42.34	2.19	3.65	37.23
Mean Score	4.06	4.29	4.34	4.42	4.40

Table 4 – Airport Amenities Satisfaction Rating

Percentage	Food Court	Bar/Lounge	Retail/Gift Shop
Very Dissatisfied	0.73	0.00	0.00
Dissatisfied	2.19	0.00	0.73
Neutral	11.68	5.11	8.76
Satisfied	25.55	7.30	13.14
Very Satisfied	17.52	10.22	11.68
No Response/ NA	42.34	77.37	65.69
Mean Score	3.99	4.23	4.04

## Conclusions

Visitors to Lubbock departing from the LIA reported that they were there for business (45%), to visit friends or relatives (29%), with the remainder for a conference or meeting (8%), or for other reasons (17.5%). The majority (85%) were satisfied or very satisfied with their dining and shopping experience in Lubbock. Attractions and entertainment were not the focus of the trip to Lubbock for visitors; 79% did not visit an attraction or entertainment venue during their visit. The dining experience in Lubbock was rated slightly higher than the attraction visiting experience. During the interview, visitors to the LIA indicated that they were mostly satisfied with the services provided by LIA. Findings also showed most of the visitors used the Internet (63%) to book the trip.

The overall assessment of the airport was positive, however, it was difficult to draw any conclusions about the satisfaction level with the Food Court, Bar and Retail/Gift Shops, given the number not responding and “Non Applicable” responses. Findings were reported to LIA personnel to assist with decision-making for renovation of the airport facility. Ultimately the findings will benefit Lubbock Convention and Visitors Bureau customers who prefer air travel.



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