



A STUDY ON FACTORS INFLUENCING SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT, TAMIL NADU

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Abstract

Spiritual tourism is an important component of Indian tourism industry as India is a land of spirituality endowed with many places of worship, pilgrim centers, religious monuments etc., Tirunelveli district of the Tamil Nadu is also blessed with many search places. However, spiritual tourism in this district has not been paid due attention by the government and the researchers. The avenues for the spiritual tourism in this district are not fully explored and the deficiencies and problems are not much assessed. In spiritual tourism a tourist seeks peace of mind and a sense of spiritual satisfaction. Even though the visitors to the spiritual tourist spots of Tirunelveli are satisfied with peaceful atmosphere, they experience the unfriendliness of the local people, they are dissatisfied with the basic infrastructures like sanitation and drinking water facilities, lack of cleanliness and exploitation by the local vehicle operators. If these problems are addressed properly and enough publicity is given the spiritual tourism avenues of the Tirunelveli shall be explored to the optimum level.

Key Words: Spiritual Tourism, Tourists, Satisfaction and Problems.

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Introduction

Tourism is a fast growing industry which has vast and inexhaustible potentials to enhance national income, foreign exchange reserves and opportunities of employment to the growing millions or the countries³. The size and economic significance of travel and tourism have attracted the attention of many countries in actively promoting tourism as a way to stimulate their economies. The World Tourism Organization (WTO) has recognized the potential of tourism sector for the purpose of poverty alleviation by increased

job creation, consequently, many developing countries are improving their tourism planning and developments approaches (Manoj Edward et al., 2007).

Tourism has emerged as an instrument for employment generation, poverty alleviation and sustainable human development. Tourism promotes international understanding and gives support to local handicrafts and cultural activities. It is an important segment of the country's economy, specially in terms of its contribution towards foreign exchange earnings, generation of



additional income and creation of employment opportunities.

India is probably the only country that offers various categories of tourism. These include history tourism, adventure tourism, medical tourism (ayurveda and other forms of Indian medications), spiritual tourism, beach tourism (India has the longest coastline in the east) etc. Pilgrimage is a spirit a guiding force, unifying the divinity and humanity; i.e. it is a search for wholeness. Ultimately the wholeness of landscape and its sacred and symbolic geography creates a *faithscape* that encompasses sacred place, sacred time, sacred meanings, sacred rituals and embodies both symbolic and tangible psyche elements in an attempt to realise man's identity in the cosmos. The act of spiritual journey, activities, experiences of companionship is itself a ritual, which has transformative value, a reinterpretation of the idea of "experience".

Statement of the Problem

Tirunelveli district is the important spiritual centre. It is located in the southern tip of India. Spiritual tourism is an important component of Indian tourism industry as India is a land of spirituality endowed with many places of worship, pilgrim centers, religious monuments etc., Tirunelveli district of the Tamil Nadu is also blessed with many search places. However, spiritual tourism in this district has not been paid due attention by the government and the researchers. The avenues for the spiritual tourism in this district are not fully explored and the deficiencies and problems are not much assessed. An in-depth study on the spiritual tourists, spiritual tourism avenues, spiritual tourism amenities and spiritual tourism issues and problems in the districts will help to promote spiritual tourism in the district in specific, and the tourism industry in general.

Objectives of the Study

- 1) To study the factors influencing spiritual tourism and the pattern of visits by the tourists.
- 2) To trace out the specific problems of spiritual tourism in the study area.

Methodology

Tirunelveli spiritual tourism centre of Tirunelveli district has been taken as the area of study. This study is based on primary data. The data are confined to the financial year from April 2022 to March 2023. Universe of the present study is infinite. It is decided to use convenient sampling method. Originally it was planned and data was collected from 120 sample respondents. There were three categories of respondents for the study, viz. foreign tourists, other state tourist and domestic tourists. The size of the sample was restricted to 20 foreign tourists, 40 other state tourist and 60 domestic tourists without considering their age, sex, class, country, religion and income. Different statistical tools such as simple percentage analysis, Garrat ranking techniques, and Factor analysis are suitably used in the study.

Result and Discussion

Factors Influencing the Visit to Spiritual Tourism in Tirunelveli

There are various factors influencing the people in their spiritual tour. In order to identify the most important factor and the factors that explain correlation within a set of observed variables and to reduce the data, to identify the number of factors that explain the variance observed in a much larger number of manifest factors, Factor Analysis is used. In other words, the Factor Analysis technique was used to reduce the long list of factors influenced by the tourists in their interest and decisions into meaningful factors. There are several methods available for Factor Analysis. However, the principle Factor method with 'Rotation' is the mostly used factor analysis technique. Factors matrices are rotated to interpret them adequately as the original factor matrices are arbitrary. Thus a major goal rotation is to obtain meaningful factors that are as consistent as possible from analysis to analysis. Rotated factor matrix is one of the final outcomes of a factor analysis and it is a table of co-efficient that expresses the ratios between the variables and the factors. The sum of the sequence of the factor loading of the variables is called communalities (h^2). The communalities of a factor are its common factor variance. The

communalities value indicates the power of a variable to explain the factors all together. The higher communalities represent the degree of variable explaining the factors are higher.

The Eigen value of the factor indicates the degree of the factor which explains the variables all together. Higher the Eigen values, higher the intensity of the factors explaining variables together. The factors with factor loading of 0.50 or greater are considered as significant factors and the factors with less than 0.50 common variations with the rotated factor pattern are too weak to report. In the present study also the principal factor analysis method with Varimax Rotation with Kaiser normalization has been used to identify the significant set of influencing factors.

The rotated factor matrix for the variable relating to factors influenced by the tourist is given in table 3. The table gives the loadings received by the factors under f1, f2 f3, f4 and f5 which represents the ratings of the respondents such as ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘natural’, ‘disagree’, ‘strongly disagree’, having the score values of 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1 respectively.

In this study Factor Analysis is applied for identifying the factors influencing the visit to spiritual tourism in Tirunelveli and the results are given below.

In order to find out the appropriateness of this analysis Kaiser Meyer Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity are used and the results are shown in Table .

Table: 1 - KMO and Bartlett’s Test

Description	Value
KMO Measures of sampling adequacy	.678
Bartlett’s test of Sphericity	-
App. Chi-square value	1706.578
df	91
Sig.	.000

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The KMO value is very high (0.678). Similarly, the Bartlett’s test rejects the null hypothesis i.e., the variables are not related as the approximate chi-square value is 1706.578 at 91 degrees of freedom which is significant at 1 per cent level

of significance. Thus factor analysis may be considered as an appropriate technique.

The results of Principal Component Analysis to extract the number of variables are given in Table 2.

Table: 2 - Principal Components Analysis

Compo-nents	Extraction Sums of Squared Loading			Rotated Sums of Squared Loading		
	Total	Percentage of Variable	Cumulative Percentage	Total	Percentage of Variable	Cumulative Percentage
1	7.230	38.865	38.865	4.514	24.266	24.266
2	3.466	18.635	57.500	3.511	18.875	43.141
3	2.085	11.211	68.711	2.837	15.250	58.391
4	1.513	8.133	76.844	2.365	12.712	71.103
5	1.106	5.948	82.792	2.174	11.689	82.792



From the Table 2 shown, it is clear that five factors can be extracted together which account for 82.792 per cent of the total 15 variables. Hence 15 variables are summated to five factors by losing nearly 33 per cent of data.

The table 3 presents the Rotated Component Matrix table by using Varimax Method which is used to assign factors which have higher loadings.

Table: 3 - Factor Analysis: Factors Influencing Spiritual Tourism

	Factors	F ₁	F ₂	F ₃	F ₄	F ₅	H ₂
Inner Drives for Peace and Leisure'	Search for Peace	.895	.146	.079	.026	.202	.352
	Influences of Religions Leaders /Guides	.881	.029	.135	.086	.227	.505
	Religions Customs and Obligations	.718	.168	.393	.204	.092	.805
	Availability of Time for Leisure	.600	.110	.336	.029	.384	.961
Environme ntal Influences'	Desire for Coastal Actualisation	.086	.882	.058	.076	.140	.645
	Interest in Travel and Tour	.065	.879	.002	.017	-.091	.641
	Economic Wealthiness	.054	.659	.272	.174	.184	.880
Religi ous Faith	Personal Religions Faith	.243	.132	.939	.043	.067	.857
	Personal Life Style	.243	.132	.939	.043	.067	.962
Supportive Personal Background'	Membership Group Influence	.032	.067	.239	.874	-.012	.845
	Reference Group Influences	.015	.018	.011	.808	.191	.682
	Availability of Surplus Income	.086	.258	.163	.709	-.429	.742
	Availability of Loan	.076	.469	.079	.478	-.394	.263
Real Tour	Free from Family Responsibility	.463	.149	.116	.009	.847	.672
	Peer Group Influences	.463	.149	.116	.009	.847	.481

Source: Field Survey

Table 3 clearly shows that in the first column the variables namely, 'search for peace, 'influences of religions leaders / guides', 'religions customs and obligations' and 'availability of time for leisure' have higher loadings of 0.895, 0.881, 0.718 and 0.600 respectively and it can be suggested that factor one is the combination of these four factors and have the variance of 24.266 per cent and it can be named as 'Inner Drives for Peace and Leisure'.

From the second column it can be seen that the variables of 'desire for coastal actualisation', 'interest in travel and tour' and 'economic wealthiness' have higher loadings

with a variance of 18.875 and it can be combined and called as 'Environmental Influences'.

The third column shows that the factors 'personal religions faith' 0.939, and 'personal life style' 0.939 have high loadings and are summated and named as 'Religious Faith'.

The fourth factor namely 'membership group influence', 'reference group influences', 'availability of surplus income' and 'availability of loan' are combined together to be called as 'Supportive Personal Background'.

In the last column only two variables i.e. the 'free from family responsibility', (0.847) and



‘peer group influences’ (0.847) which have higher loading are included and named as ‘Real Tour’.

Thus 15 factors are reduced into five variables and are given different names by using factor analysis. Thus ‘Inner Drives for Peace and Leisure’, ‘Environmental Influences’, ‘Religious Faith’, ‘Supportive Personal Background’ and ‘Real Tour’ have been identified as the factors influencing the coastal tourism.

Problems Faced by Spiritual Tourists

Sometimes spiritual tourists met some problem at the time of tour. Table 4 reveals the problems that have been faced by the spiritual tourists. Giving weight to various problems, it is explained. 1 – Rank =5 points, 2

$$\text{Present Position} = \frac{100(R_{ij} - 0.5)}{N_j}$$

where,

R_{ij} – Rank given for the i^{th} reason by j^{th} respondents

N_j – Number of factors ranked by j^{th} respondents

Following table 4 shows that Garrett mean score of each problem:

Table: 4 - Garrett Mean Score

Problems	Garrett Ranking Mean Score	Rank
Pollution / Lack of cleanliness	27.31	I
Beggars nuisance	19.78	V
Exploitation by taxi/ vehicle operators	20.07	IV
Inadequate information	20.62	III
Lack of good local guidance	22.22	II

It is inferred from table 4 that among the various problems met by the spiritual tourists at the time of tour, pollution / lack of cleanliness is the major problem. Next comes lack of good local guidance. Inadequate information is another problem that has been faced by the tourists. Exploitation by taxi / vehicle operators and beggars’ nuisance is the

– Rank =4 points, 3 – Rank=3 points, 4 – Rank=2 points and 5 – Rank= 1 point

On the basis of the points given and ranks obtained, the total rank of each problem was calculated. The total rank thus derived by the total number of respondents for each problem to arrive at a rank. Among the five factors given in the schedule, the one, which had the highest mean score, was identified as the major problem faced by the tourists at the time of tour.

Calculation of Garrett Mean Score

Now the Garrett Ranking Technique was employed and arrived the major problem was arrived at. The Garrett Ranking Technique was adopted to identify the major problem. The formula for calculating Garrett Ranking Technique was

least problem faced by the spiritual tourists at the time of tourism.

Suggestions

1. The central and state Governments, must have special attention and invest in large to develop the infrastructure for utilising the spiritual tourism spots and occasions in Tiruchendur centre.



2. Tourism information must be updated often. The websites must give enriched informations with catchy phrases. Specific toll free numbers can be used for easy access of information by the spiritual tourists.
3. Lack of cleanliness and beggars' nuisance are the most important problem faced by the spiritual tourists in the study area. Therefore, the Government authorities especially the local authorities should pay special attention on their inconveniences and make necessary arrangements to correct them.
4. It is suggested that the exploitation by the local transport operators is to be checked by strict enforcement of rules and licensing mechanism by the Government, especially the local Government authorities.
5. The tourism department should take necessary steps to promote less popular spiritual tourist centers in an around Tirunelveli district like Nellaiapper Temple, Athankarai Pallivasal, Antontyar Church, Uvarithrough intensive publicity.

Conclusion

In spiritual tourism a tourist seeks peace of mind and a sense of spiritual

satisfaction. Even though the visitors to the spiritual tourist spots of Tirunelveli are satisfied with peaceful atmosphere, they experience the unfriendliness of the local people, they are dissatisfied with the basic infrastructures like sanitation and drinking water facilities, lack of cleanliness and exploitation by the local vehicle operators. If these problems are addressed properly and enough publicity is given the spiritual tourism avenues of the Tirunelveli shall be explored to the optimum level.

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