



## Services Quality In Religious Tourism With Reference To Navagraha Temples In Thanjavur District

Mr. A. Arockkia Joseph Jerald<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. N. Periyasami<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1\*</sup>PhD. Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, 608 002.

<sup>2</sup>Professor, Department of Commerce, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, 608 002

*\*Corresponding Author: Mr. A. Arockkia Joseph Jerald*

*\*PhD. Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Annamalai University, Annamalai Nagar, 608 002.*

<i>Abstract</i>	
	<p>This research delves into the realm of Religious Tourism Service Quality, specifically focusing on the Navagraha Temples in the culturally rich Thanjavur District. As the oldest form of tourism, religious pilgrimage has witnessed substantial growth in recent years. The study employs the World Tourism Organization's standards to assess safety, hygiene, accessibility, transparency, authenticity, and harmony in the context of these temples. Using a structured questionnaire and statistical analysis, the research unveils pilgrims' perceptions of service quality across various dimensions and establishes correlations with overall satisfaction. The findings provide valuable insights for practitioners, temple management, and policymakers in enhancing the religious tourism experience in this region.</p>
<p><b>CCLicense</b> CC-BY-NC-SA 4.0</p>	<p><b>Keywords:</b> <i>Navagraha Temples, Tourism Quality Standards, Pilgrimage, Service Quality Dimensions, World Tourism Organization, Religious Tourism Experience.</i></p>

### INTRODUCTION

In the intricate tapestry of human experiences, religion emerges as a catalyst, driving individuals on both emotional and physical odysseys. This intersection of faith and travel gives rise to pilgrimage, a dynamic and prevalent form of contemporary travel in India. Socio cultural philosophers delve into the spiritual facets of journeys, traversing characteristic lands and mingling with diverse populations, thereby uniting a multifaceted society. Tamil Nadu, steeped in history, unfolds as a landscape where civilizations and philosophies coalesce, dotted with shrines narrating tales of spirituality, artistry, and cultural richness. The study, against this cultural mosaic, unfolds the narrative of Religious Tourism Service Quality, centering its exploration on the Navagraha Temples nestled in the historically significant Thanjavur District.

### TOURISM QUALITY STANDARDS

The World Tourism Organization (WTO) 2003 outlines six paramount standards that underpin decision-making in crafting and marketing tourist products or services. These standards, distilled from the essence of the article, encompass:

1. **Safety and Security:** Ensuring that tourism products or services pose no threats to consumers' life, health, or well-being, even in adventure tourism scenarios. These standards are often legally mandated, encompassing aspects like fire prevention regulations.

2. **Hygiene:** Mandating that accommodation facilities, irrespective of class, prioritize both safety and cleanliness. Food safety standards, a legal obligation, apply universally across diverse establishments, ranging from street vendors to high-end restaurants.
3. **Accessibility:** Requiring the removal of physical, communication, and service barriers to ensure inclusivity for all individuals, regardless of natural or acquired differences, including people with disabilities.
4. **Transparency:** A pivotal element for establishing legitimacy in expectations, demanding accurate information about the product's characteristics, coverage, and total price, fostering consumer protection.
5. **Authenticity:** Acknowledging the challenge of achieving subjective authenticity in a commercial world, recognizing its cultural determinants and the need for uniqueness to stand out from similar offerings.
6. **Harmony:** Emphasizing sustainability in both environmental and socio-economic terms, asserting that maintaining tourism sustainability requires managing impacts and upholding the quality of tourism products and markets.

**IMPLICATIONS:** These standards, as delineated by the WTO, serve as a compass for crafting and delivering tourism experiences, aligning the industry with principles of safety, inclusivity, transparency, cultural authenticity, and sustainability.

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON RELIGIOUS TOURISM:

1. **Joppe, Martin, & Waalen (2001) and Stone (1990):** Emphasize the profitability of service providers hinging on meeting customer expectations. The article underscores the need for destination managers and marketers to identify the attributes of travel packages that align with pilgrims' expectations, providing benefits, perceived value, and satisfaction (McKercher et al., 2003).
2. **Vukonis (1998):** While acknowledging the substantial growth in religiously motivated travel, the literature points to a glaring gap. Notes the lack of comprehensive information about pilgrims, their motivations, and behaviors. Digance (2003) and Triantafillidou et al. (2010) further stress the dearth of data regarding pilgrims' needs, wants, and desired experiences.
3. **Aleen (2010) and Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell (2006):** Highlight religious tourism as a growing phenomenon with great potential, underscoring the need for academic exploration and practical enhancements. Timothy and Olsen (2006) contribute by characterizing religious tourism as the oldest form, predominantly motivated by spiritual reasons.
4. **Timothy and Olsen, (2006):** Religious tourism has great potential as a growing phenomenon that would benefit from academic advances and applied improvements (Aleen, 2010; Collins-Kreiner & Gatrell, 2006). As Timothy and Olsen (2006) noted, "Religiously motivated travel including pilgrimage has grown tremendously during the past fifty years". About 240 million people travel every year to several major pilgrimage destinations, particularly Christians, Muslims, and Hindus (Jachowski, 2000).
5. **Rojas and Camerero (2008):** The article meticulously reviews the landscape of religious tourism, shedding light on its historical significance and the evolving patterns in contemporary times. Emphasize the increasing importance of marketing in religious, heritage, and cultural tourism, pointing out that providers in this domain often neglect the study and measurement of service quality.

In summary, the literature review encapsulates the dynamic nature of religious tourism, its rapid growth, and the critical need for a deeper understanding of pilgrims' perspectives to enhance the overall quality of religious services. The identified gap underscores the untapped potential for more nuanced studies in this unique niche of tourism.

### DISCERNIBLE GAP

A discernible gap emerges as the literature review unveils a scarcity of comprehensive information regarding the motivations and behaviors of pilgrims, essential insights that could empower destination managers to design more effective pilgrimage packages. This void in understanding the expectations and perceptions of pilgrims suggests an untapped reservoir of knowledge within the religious tourism domain. Bridging this gap becomes pivotal for both service providers and temple management to enhance the quality of religious services and ensure a more satisfying pilgrimage experience for the growing number of participants in this unique form of tourism.

### **SIGNIFICANCE OF NAVAGRAHA TEMPLE TOURISM:**

Navagraha Temple tourism holds profound significance in Hinduism, contributing to both spiritual and cultural dimensions. The Nine Planets, or Navagrahas, including Surya (Sun), Chandra (Moon), Mangal(Mars),Budha(Mercury), Brihaspati (Jupiter), Shukra ( Venus), Shani (Saturn), Rahu( North Lunar Node) and Ketu ( South Lunar Node) are believed to influence human destiny in Hindu astrology. Pilgrims visit these temples in the Thanjavur District seeking religious experiences and divine intervention for a harmonious life.

Tamil Nadu, known as the land of temples, boasts a rich history dating back several thousand years. The state is a treasure trove of ancient shrines, each narrating its unique tale of spiritual, artistic, and cultural accomplishments. Among these, the Navagraha Temples stand out, attracting thousands of devotees. The pilgrimage to these temples is not merely a physical journey; it symbolizes a deep spiritual quest, aligning with the ethos of Hinduism that emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals with celestial forces.

The significance of Navagraha Temple tourism extends beyond religious rituals. It encompasses cultural exploration, offering visitors a glimpse into the historical and artistic heritage of the region. As pilgrims embark on this sacred journey, they contribute to the preservation and perpetuation of traditions, making Navagraha Temple tourism a cultural pilgrimage intertwined with spiritual fervor.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Service Quality attained many new dimensions in its long journey, but the literature related to Religious Service Quality is very little. The lack of information about pilgrims visiting Navagraha Temples in Thanjavur district of Tamilnadu in terms of their expectations and perceptions of services delivered in Temple and during their journey. Majority of the pilgrims visits maximum 7 to 9 Navagraha temples in a day, typically through tour package provided by a public or private transport. This research makes an attempt to find tools to investigate the problems faced by the Pilgrims, and to evaluate Religious Service Quality in Thanjavur District.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:**

1. Investigate various dimensions related to Religious Tourism Service Quality.
2. Prioritize these dimensions based on pilgrims' perceptions visiting Navagraha Temples in the Thanjavur District.
3. Assess the impact of religious service quality on pilgrims' satisfaction.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The methodology of this research is based on the survey responses of pilgrims who have visited more than 5 Navagraha Temples in the Thanjavur District. A structured questionnaire was distributed to 398 pilgrims, out of which 390 were considered fully usable for analysis. The Likert Scale was used to measure the indicators of pilgrims' perceptions towards Religious Service Quality. This scale involves a series of questions or statements to which the respondents indicate their level of agreement or disagreement, providing numerical responses.

### **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Reliability and Validity Analysis:**

The study conducted a rigorous examination of reliability and validity to ensure the robustness of the research findings. Utilizing statistical correlation indicators and criteria, the inter-item correlations demonstrated a commendable range, spanning from 0.328 to 0.625 for all examined indicators. The Cronbach's Coefficient values for various dimensions, such as Amenities, Food, Logistics, Security, Personal Information, Distractions, Information Center, Hygiene, and Pilgrims Satisfaction, consistently indicated high reliability. These results affirm the consistency and dependability of the dimensions used to gauge religious service quality, establishing a solid foundation for the subsequent analysis of pilgrims' perceptions.

**Descriptive Statistics:**

Dimensions	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Rank
Information Center	390	1.00	5.00	1.2282	8
Personal Information	390	1.00	5.00	1.4598	7
Logistics	390	1.00	5.00	1.8263	6
Hygiene	390	1.17	4.67	1.8538	5
Security	390	1.33	5.00	1.9658	4
Food	390	1.00	5.00	2.1265	3
Amenities	390	1.78	4.78	2.1282	2
Distractions	390	1.00	5.00	2.3492	1

Source: Primary Data

**DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS ANALYSIS:**

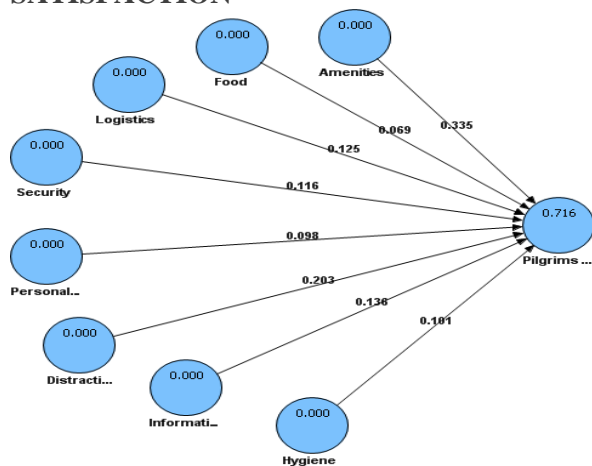
The study delved into eight dimensions of Religious Tourism Service Quality, evaluating pilgrims' satisfaction at Navagraha Temples. The dimensions, including Amenities, Food, Logistics, Security, Personal Information, Distractions, Information Center, and Hygiene, were meticulously ranked based on mean values. The Information Center received the lowest mean value, placing it at the 8th rank, while Distractions claimed the top position. Security and Food secured the 4th and 3rd places, respectively. Notably, Amenities attained the 2nd position. The overall average mean value for all dimensions combined was 1.867225. Interestingly, Information Center, Personal Information, Logistics, and Hygiene scored below the average mean, emphasizing potential areas for improvement. The comprehensive descriptive analysis provides valuable insights into the nuanced levels of pilgrim satisfaction across diverse dimensions at Navagraha Temples.

**DISCUSSION OF DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS FINDINGS:**

The comprehensive analysis of descriptive statistics offers valuable insights into pilgrim satisfaction dimensions at Navagraha Temples. Distractions emerged as the top-ranking dimension, suggesting a noteworthy positive perception among pilgrims. Security and Food secured favorable positions, emphasizing their importance in shaping the overall satisfaction experience. In contrast, the Information Center and Personal Information dimensions ranked lower, signaling potential areas for enhancement. The nuanced rankings shed light on specific aspects that contribute significantly to pilgrims' overall satisfaction and those that may require targeted improvements.

**IMPLICATIONS:**

The findings from the descriptive statistics hold critical implications for temple management, policymakers, and service providers. Understanding the significance of each dimension in influencing pilgrim satisfaction allows for strategic interventions. Strengthening amenities, optimizing logistics, and enhancing information services could elevate the overall religious tourism experience. Addressing the identified gaps in lower-ranking dimensions becomes imperative for fostering a more holistic and satisfying pilgrimage journey. These implications guide stakeholders in prioritizing resources and efforts to align with the nuanced expectations and preferences of pilgrims visiting Navagraha Temples.

**MODELING RELIGIOUS TOURISM SERVICE QUALITY DIMENSIONS WITH PILGRIMS SATISFACTION**

The above diagrams shows that dimensions Amenities, Food, Logistics, Security, Personal Information, Distractions Information Center and Hygiene were considered to identify its direct impact towards prediction of pilgrim's satisfaction. The dimensions considered for the study predicts 18.7 %. The cut off criteria for the predictions is above 15 %. The path considered in the above model is formative. No reflective dimensions were considered in the model. The path value should be above .10, which is the required cut off criteria.

#### PATH LOADINGS:

Sl.No	Dimensions	Pilgrims Satisfaction
1	Amenities	0.235286
2	Food	0.058601
3	Logistics	0.115135
4	Security	0.106188
5	Personal Information	0.097826
6	Distractions	0.202815
7	Information Center	0.135738
8	Hygiene	0.101122

Source: Primary Data

#### Path Loadings Analysis: Unveiling Pilgrim Satisfaction Dynamics

##### 1. Amenities (0.235286):

Amenities stand out with the highest path loading, indicating a robust positive correlation with pilgrim satisfaction. This suggests that pilgrims place significant importance on the quality and availability of amenities, showcasing their pivotal role in shaping a satisfactory religious tourism experience.

##### 2. Food (0.058601):

The path loading for Food, while positive, is comparatively lower, signifying a weaker influence on pilgrim satisfaction. Although it contributes positively, stakeholders may explore opportunities for enhancing the food-related offerings to amplify overall satisfaction levels.

##### 3. Logistics (0.115135):

Logistics demonstrates a moderate positive correlation with pilgrim satisfaction, underscoring the importance of well-organized and efficient logistical aspects in contributing to a positive temple visit experience.

##### 4. Security (0.106188):

Security exhibits a positive correlation with pilgrim satisfaction, emphasizing the significance of ensuring a secure environment. While the path loading is moderate, maintaining and enhancing security measures can positively impact overall satisfaction.

##### 5. Personal Information (0.097826):

The path loading for Personal Information is moderate, implying a modest impact on pilgrim satisfaction. Improving the provision of relevant and personalized information could contribute to a more enriched religious tourism experience.

##### 6. Distractions (0.202815):

Distractions emerge as a dimension with a strong positive correlation, indicating their influential role in pilgrim satisfaction. Efforts to minimize distractions and create a focused, serene atmosphere can significantly enhance overall satisfaction.

##### 7. Information Center (0.135738):

The Information Center exhibits a positive correlation, though not as strong as some other dimensions. Strengthening the Information Center's role and offerings could positively impact pilgrim satisfaction, emphasizing the need for effective communication channels.



**8. Hygiene (0.101123):**

Hygiene demonstrates a moderate positive correlation with pilgrim satisfaction. While not the strongest influencer, maintaining cleanliness and hygiene contributes positively to the overall perception of religious tourism service quality.

This path loadings analysis unravels the intricate dynamics of pilgrim satisfaction, offering valuable insights for stakeholders to tailor interventions and enhancements for a more gratifying temple visit experience.

**DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS FROM PATH LOADINGS ANALYSIS**

The path loadings analysis sheds light on the nuanced dynamics influencing pilgrim satisfaction in the context of Navagraha Temples. Among the dimensions, Amenities emerge as a potent driver, exerting a substantial positive influence on overall satisfaction. Distractions also play a pivotal role, underscoring the need to minimize disruptive elements for a focused and serene pilgrimage experience. While Food and Personal Information exhibit more modest impacts, Logistics and Security contribute positively, emphasizing the importance of a well-organized and secure environment. The Information Center, though influential, could benefit from strengthened roles and offerings. Hygiene, while a contributor, indicates that maintaining cleanliness is a moderate factor in shaping satisfaction. These findings provide a roadmap for stakeholders to tailor strategies, ensuring pilgrims encounter an enriched and satisfactory journey during their visit to the sacred Navagraha Temples.

**IMPLICATIONS OF PATH LOADINGS ANALYSIS**

The path loadings analysis offers actionable insights for stakeholders invested in the success of religious tourism services at Navagraha Temples. By recognizing the pivotal role of Amenities, efforts can be directed towards enhancing and diversifying facilities to elevate overall satisfaction. Mitigating distractions becomes imperative to create an environment conducive to spiritual focus. Strategic interventions in Food services and Personal Information provision can further refine the pilgrim experience. Prioritizing Logistics and Security measures ensures a seamless and secure pilgrimage journey. Strengthening the Information Center's role can amplify its impact on satisfaction. Additionally, addressing hygiene concerns is pivotal for maintaining pilgrim contentment. These implications guide a targeted approach for stakeholders, fostering an atmosphere where the spiritual journey aligns seamlessly with pilgrims' expectations and enhances their overall satisfaction.

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, the amalgamation of descriptive statistics and path loadings analysis offers a nuanced understanding of the dynamics shaping pilgrim experiences at Navagraha Temples. The reliability and validity assessments affirm the robustness of our study, instilling confidence in the derived insights. Descriptive statistics unravel the nuanced dimensions influencing pilgrim satisfaction, with amenities, food, security, and distractions emerging as key focal points. The path loadings analysis enriches this narrative, spotlighting the intricate relationships between these dimensions and overall satisfaction.

The pilgrimage journey is a tapestry woven with diverse threads of amenities, logistics, and security, all contributing to the pilgrim's spiritual voyage. The findings underscore the significance of addressing distractions and optimizing services, urging stakeholders to craft an environment where spirituality takes center stage. The implications drawn pave the way for strategic interventions, emphasizing the importance of amenities, hygiene, and information provision. It becomes evident that a harmonious blend of these factors propels pilgrim satisfaction, fostering not just a journey but a profound spiritual odyssey.

This study propels Navagraha Temple stakeholders, including temple management, policymakers, and tour operators, towards a conscientious approach. By aligning services with pilgrim expectations, they can not only meet but surpass the spiritual aspirations of the devotees, ushering in a realm where each temple visit transcends the physical to become a transformative and deeply satisfying pilgrimage experience.

**REFERENCES**

1. Alampay, R.B.A. (2003), "Visitors to Guam: modeling satisfaction, quality and intentions", dissertation, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI.
2. Burns, R.C., Graffe, A.R. and Absher, J.D. (2003), "Alternate measurement approaches to recreational  
Available online at: <https://jazindia.com>

- customer satisfaction: satisfaction-only versus gapscores”, *Leisure Sciences*, Vol. 25 No. 4, pp. 363-80.
3. Majid Heidari, Hamid Asna Ashari, Saeid Farahbakht and Saeed Parvaresh. Using the Analytic Network Process (ANP) In A Swot Analysis For The Development of Tourism Destination; Case Study: Kish Island, *International Journal of Management*, 5(6), 2014, pp. 21 - 31.
  4. Kozak, M. and Rimmington, M. (2000), “Tourist satisfaction with Mallorca, Spain, as an off-season holiday destination”, *Journal of Travel Research*, Vol. 38 No. 3, pp. 260-9.
  5. Ramesh U, Kurian Joseph. The Holistic Approach of Ayurveda Based Wellness Tourism in Kerala, *International Journal of Advance Research Management*, 3(2), 2012, pp. 29 - 39.
  6. Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1988), “SERVQUAL: a multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 64 No. 1, pp. 12-40.
  7. Prof. Shraddha chowdhary. Health Is Wealth: Medical Tourism Industry In India The New Revenue Generator; Case Study: Kish Island, *International Journal of Management*, 4(4), 2013, pp. 141 - 148.
  8. Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1994), “Alternating scales for measuring service quality: a comparative assessment based on psychometric and diagnostic criteria”, *Journal of Retailing*, Vol. 70 No. 3, pp. 201-30.
  9. Poon, W.C. and Low, K.L.T. (2005), “Are travellers satisfied with Malaysian hotels?”, *International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management*, Vol.17 No. 3, pp. 217-27. pp. 333-55.
  10. C.P. Sokhalingam, Dr.N.Mani Mekalai and Dr.Clement Sudhahar Entrepreneurial Approach to Tourism Development In Oman, *International Journal of Management*, 4(3), 2013, pp. 48 - 60.
  11. Yuksel, A. and Yuksel, F. (2001), “Comparative performance analysis: tourists’ perceptions of Turkey relative to other tourist destinations”, *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, Vol. 7 No. 4.