



Religious Tourism and Its Contribution to Socio-Economic Development in Andhra Pradesh: An Analytical Study with Special Reference to Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, Srisailam Temple, and Vijayawada Kanaka Durga Temple

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Abstract

Religious tourism is an important and continuous segment of travel in Andhra Pradesh because it links faith, culture, local mobility, community livelihoods and public infrastructure. This study examines the socio-economic contribution of religious tourism in Andhra Pradesh with special focus on Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, Srisailam Temple and Vijayawada Kanaka Durga Temple. A descriptive and analytical research design was adopted by using both primary and secondary data. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 174 respondents, including pilgrims, local residents and service providers. Secondary information was compiled from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India, official temple websites, tourism statistics and relevant published sources. Percentage analysis, weighted mean score, expenditure estimation, district-wise tourist visit comparison and a one-sample proportion z-test were used for interpretation. The findings show that religious tourism contributes to employment generation, local business activity, accommodation services, transport, prasadam and food services, shopping, cultural practices and infrastructure development. The primary survey indicates that 66.09 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that religious tourism creates employment and income opportunities for local people. At the same time, crowding, waiting time, accommodation shortage, high prices and language-related difficulties remain major concerns. The study concludes that religious tourism can become a stronger tool of inclusive and sustainable development when temple administration, local bodies and tourism departments coordinate sanitation, digital services, skill development, crowd management and responsible destination planning.

Keywords: Religious Tourism; Pilgrimage Tourism; Socio-Economic Development; Andhra Pradesh; Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam; Srisailam Temple; Kanaka Durga Temple.

I. INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism is more than a journey undertaken for worship. It also represents the movement of people, resources, culture and services around sacred destinations. In India, pilgrimage centres have traditionally functioned not only as spiritual spaces but also as local economic centres. Around a major temple, several activities are visible, including accommodation, transport, food services, flower and coconut vending, souvenir trade, guiding, parking, sanitation, security and cultural performance. These activities together create a destination-based religious tourism economy.

Andhra Pradesh has a strong religious tourism base because of its ancient temples, river-based sacred landscapes, festivals and ritual traditions. Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam receives very large pilgrim flows and functions through a highly organised institutional system. Srisailam is important as a Jyotirlinga and Shakti Peetha pilgrimage destination, while Vijayawada Kanaka Durga Temple on Indrakeeladri hill is strongly associated with the cultural and festival identity of Vijayawada. These three destinations therefore represent different dimensions of religious tourism: an internationally known pilgrimage institution, a sacred hill and forest-river shrine, and a major urban temple linked with festival tourism.

The present study analyses how these temples contribute to socio-economic development through employment, income circulation, infrastructure growth, local business expansion, cultural continuity and regional tourism development. It also identifies the practical problems faced by pilgrims and local stakeholders.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Studies on pilgrimage tourism generally emphasise that sacred travel produces religious as well as economic outcomes. Pilgrims spend on transport, accommodation, food, offerings, local products and rituals, and this spending creates direct and indirect income. Research on Indian pilgrimage centres also indicates that temple towns develop as service clusters where formal and informal employment grows around the sacred destination.

Tourism development literature highlights that destinations receiving high visitor inflow require planning for carrying capacity, sanitation, traffic regulation, waste management, accommodation, interpretation, safety and community participation. In the absence of such planning, pilgrimage centres may experience congestion, price exploitation, pollution and excessive commercialisation. Hence, religious tourism needs a balanced development approach that protects the spiritual and cultural atmosphere while strengthening local livelihoods.

Government tourism statistics show that Andhra Pradesh has recorded strong domestic tourist movement in the post-COVID period. Ministry of Tourism data indicate that domestic tourist visits to Andhra Pradesh increased from 192.72 million in 2022 to 254.71 million in 2023. District-level data for Tirupati, Nandyal and NTR districts also confirm the importance of the selected temple regions within the state tourism system.

III. NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant because religious tourism remains one of the most stable forms of domestic tourism. Even when other travel segments fluctuate, pilgrimage travel often continues due to faith, family customs, festivals and vows. In Andhra Pradesh, religious tourism supports the livelihoods of organised as well as unorganised workers such as hotel operators, lodge owners, transport providers, priests, flower sellers, small traders, prasadam units, restaurants, cultural performers, cleaning workers and government service agencies.

The study is also relevant for policy and destination planning. Large pilgrim flows create pressure on roads, sanitation, accommodation, waste disposal and crowd regulation. An analytical study of benefits and problems can help in preparing practical measures for sustainable and inclusive religious tourism development.

IV. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Andhra Pradesh has many prominent religious tourism destinations, but it is necessary to assess how major temples such as Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, Srisailem Temple and Vijayawada Kanaka Durga Temple contribute to socio-economic development. The problem also concerns the extent to which economic benefits reach local communities and whether existing infrastructure is adequate for increasing pilgrim movement.

V. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine the role of religious tourism in Andhra Pradesh.
- To analyse the socio-economic contribution of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, Srisailem Temple and Vijayawada Kanaka Durga Temple.
- To study tourist and pilgrim arrivals and temple-related economic activities using available secondary data.
- To analyse employment, income generation and expenditure patterns through primary survey data.
- To identify the major problems experienced by pilgrims at selected religious destinations.
- To suggest measures for sustainable and inclusive development of religious tourism in Andhra Pradesh.

VI. HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

- H0: Religious tourism has no significant impact on socio-economic development in Andhra Pradesh.
- H1: Religious tourism has a significant impact on socio-economic development in Andhra Pradesh.

VII. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The geographical scope of the study is restricted to three major religious tourism destinations in Andhra Pradesh: Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam in Tirupati district, Srisailem Temple in Nandyal district and Vijayawada Kanaka Durga Temple in NTR district. The subject scope covers pilgrimage flows, socio-economic benefits, employment, income generation, expenditure pattern, local business benefits, infrastructure development and pilgrim-related problems.

VIII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study follows a descriptive and analytical research design. The descriptive component explains the nature and role of religious tourism, while the analytical component interprets primary survey responses and secondary tourism statistics.

Data Sources

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire from 174 respondents. The respondents included pilgrims and local stakeholders associated with temple tourism. The questionnaire covered gender, age, education, occupation, income, purpose of visit, frequency of visit, trip expenditure, perceptions of employment generation and problems faced during travel.

Secondary data were collected from the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India; official websites of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams, Srisailem Devasthanam and Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam; Andhra Pradesh tourism sources; published reports; newspaper reports; and religious tourism websites.

Sample Size and Sampling Method

The sample size of the study is 174 respondents. Convenience sampling and purposive sampling were used because the research focuses on pilgrims and stakeholders connected with selected temple destinations.

Study Area

The study area consists of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, Srisailem Temple and Vijayawada Kanaka Durga Temple. These destinations were selected because of their religious importance, high pilgrim inflow, regional economic relevance and visibility in Andhra Pradesh tourism.

Tools for Data Analysis

The tools used for analysis include percentage analysis, tabulation, graphical representation, weighted average, mean score, expenditure estimation, district-wise comparison and a one-sample proportion z-test for hypothesis testing.

IX. PROFILE OF SELECTED RELIGIOUS TOURISM DESTINATIONS

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam is one of the most prominent temple institutions in India. Its development role is visible through pilgrim management, accommodation, laddu prasadam production, transport linkages, tonsuring services, donations, annadanam, health services, employment and charitable activities. TTD provides darshan, accommodation, sevas and other pilgrim services on a large institutional scale. The 2024-25 budget estimate of Rs. 5,142 crore, along with hundi offerings, prasadam receipts, darshan receipts, accommodation receipts, kalyanakatta activities and engineering works, reflects the economic significance of this temple institution.

Srisailem Temple

Srisailem is an ancient sacred destination associated with Lord Mallikarjuna Swamy and Goddess Bhramaramba. It has religious importance as both a Jyotirlinga and a Shakti Peetha destination. The temple attracts pilgrims from Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Karnataka, Maharashtra and other states. The destination supports hotels, choultries, transport services, sevas, prasadam distribution, local shops and allied tourism services. Its location near the Krishna River and Nallamala landscape also gives it a religious and nature-based tourism character.

Vijayawada Kanaka Durga Temple

Sri Durga Malleswara Swamy Varla Devasthanam, popularly known as Kanaka Durga Temple, is located on Indrakeeladri hill in Vijayawada. The temple is a major urban religious tourism centre and is especially important during Dasara, Bhavani Deeksha and other festivals. The official temple website provides information on darshan, sevas and pilgrim facilities. Recent development discussions highlight the need for improved access roads, parking, sanitation, accommodation and crowd management because of rising devotee movement.

X. SECONDARY DATA ANALYSIS

Table 1: Tourist Footfall in Andhra Pradesh, 2019-2023

Year	Domestic Tourist Visits in Andhra Pradesh	Foreign Tourist Visits in Andhra Pradesh
2019	237,051,508	280,356
2020	70,828,590	67,591
2021	93,277,569	27,551
2022	192,716,721	165,845
2023	254,706,328	60,426

(Source: Ministry of Tourism Tourist Footfall data.)

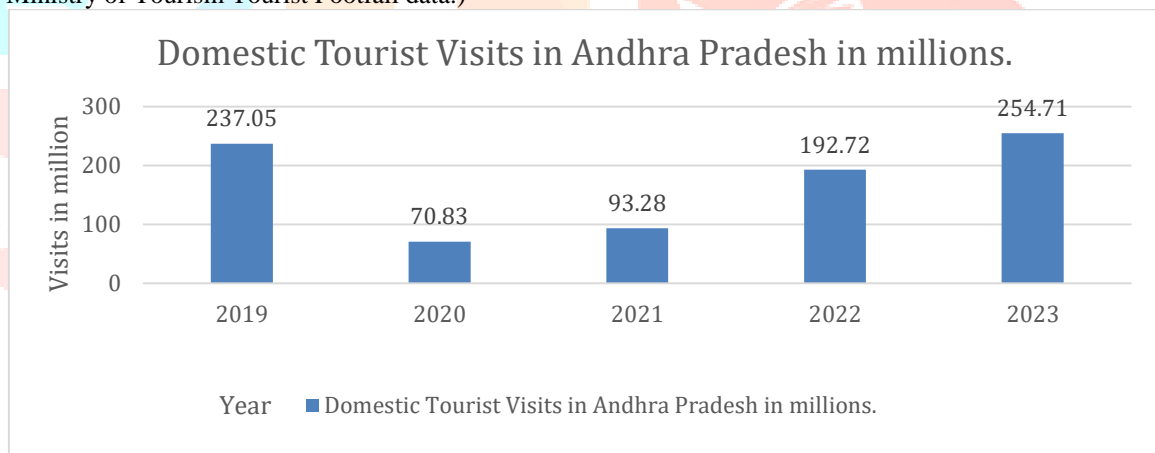


Figure 1. Domestic Tourist Visits in Andhra Pradesh, 2019-2023.

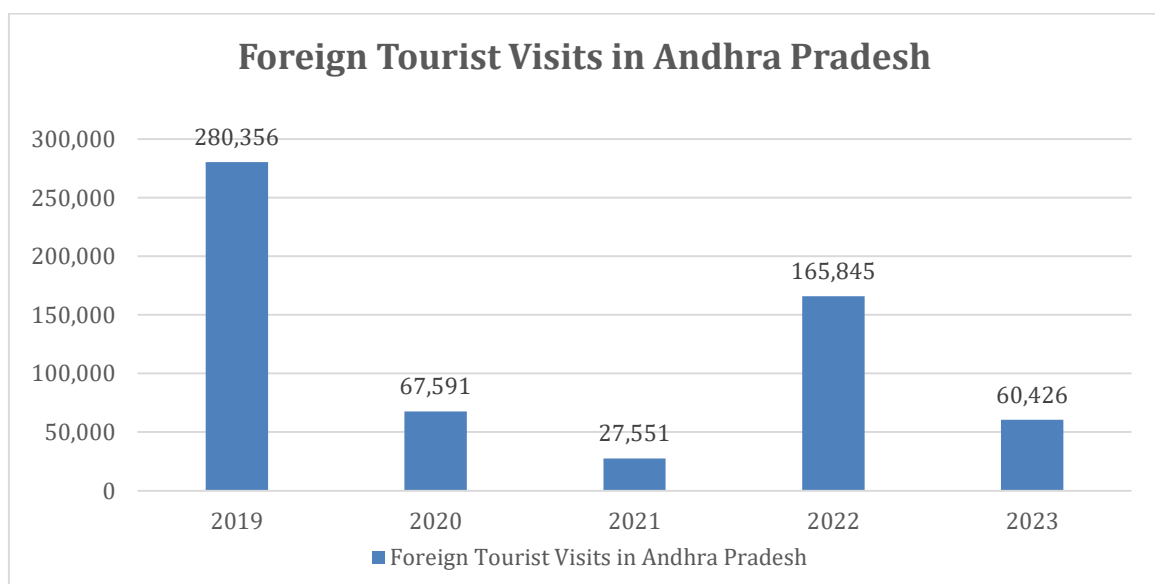


Figure 2. Foreign Tourist Visits in Andhra Pradesh, 2019-2023.

Interpretation: The data show a sharp decline in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic period, followed by a strong recovery in 2022 and 2023. Domestic tourist visits increased by 32.17 per cent from 2022 to 2023 and reached 7.45 per cent above the 2019 level. This trend demonstrates the resilience of domestic tourism, in which religious tourism forms an important component.

Foreign tourist visits in Andhra Pradesh declined from 2,80,356 in 2019 to 67,591 in 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The lowest foreign tourist visits were recorded in 2021 with 27,551 visits. In 2022, foreign tourist visits improved to 1,65,845, but the number again declined to 60,426 in 2023. This indicates that foreign tourism recovery remained uneven when compared with domestic tourism.

Table 2: Domestic Tourist Visits in Selected Temple Districts, 2022 and 2023

Selected Temple Region/District	DTV 2022	DTV 2023
Tirupati District (TTD/Tirumala region)	34,933,095	42,002,161
Nandyal District (Srisailem region)	4,479,281	13,429,000
NTR District (Vijayawada Kanaka Durga region)	5,011,276	29,655,254

(Source: Ministry of Tourism Tourist Footfall Data.)

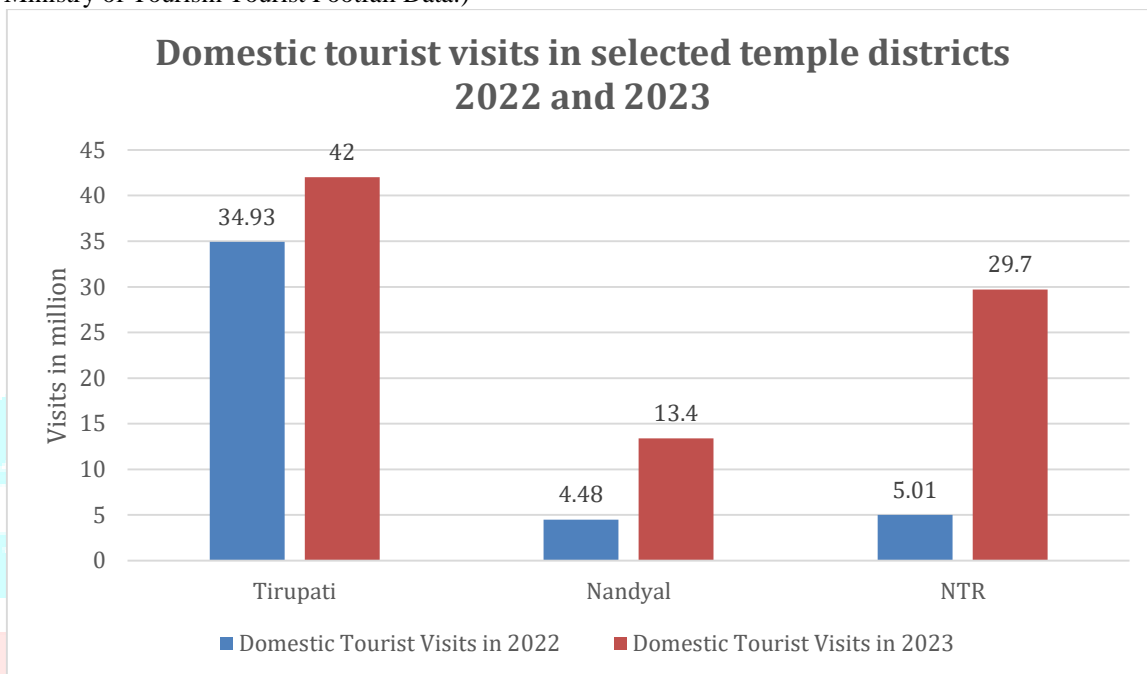


Figure 3. Domestic Tourist Visits in Selected Temple Districts, 2022 and 2023.

Interpretation: Tirupati recorded the highest domestic tourist visits in both years, increasing from 34.93 million in 2022 to 42 million in 2023. Nandyal also showed notable growth from 4.48 million to 13.4 million. NTR district recorded a sharp increase from 5.01 million to 29.7 million. Overall, all the selected temple districts registered strong growth, showing the rising role of religious tourism in Andhra Pradesh.

XI. PRIMARY DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Primary data were collected from 174 respondents. The following tables present the respondent profile, travel behaviour, expenditure pattern and perceived socio-economic impact of religious tourism.

Gender

Category	No. of Persons	Percentage
Male	92	52.87%
Female	82	47.13%

Interpretation: Male respondents accounted for 52.87 per cent and female respondents accounted for 47.13 per cent, indicating reasonably balanced participation in the survey.

Age Group

Category	No. of Persons	Percentage
Below 20 years	18	10.34%
21-30 years	35	20.11%
31-40 years	40	22.99%
41-50 years	45	25.86%
Above 50 years	36	20.69%

Interpretation: The largest age group was 41-50 years with 25.86 per cent, followed by the 31-40 years group with 22.99 per cent. This shows strong pilgrimage participation among middle-aged respondents.

Educational Qualification

Category	No. of Persons	Percentage
School Level	15	8.62%
Intermediate	30	17.24%
Undergraduate	32	18.39%
Postgraduate	20	11.49%
Ph.D. / Research Scholar	25	14.37%
Un-educated	52	29.89%

Interpretation: The sample represents different education levels. The highest share was recorded among uneducated respondents at 29.89 per cent, followed by undergraduate and intermediate groups. This confirms that religious tourism attracts people across educational backgrounds.

Occupation

Category	No. of Persons	Percentage
Student	40	22.99%
Employee	25	14.37%
Business	27	15.52%
Homemaker	40	22.99%
Agriculture / Labour Work	42	24.14%

Interpretation: Agriculture and labour workers formed the largest occupational category at 24.14 per cent, while students and homemakers each accounted for 22.99 per cent. This reflects the mixed social and occupational profile of pilgrimage participants.

Monthly Income

Category	No. of Persons	Percentage
Below Rs. 10,000	40	22.99%
Rs. 10,001-Rs. 25,000	37	21.26%
Rs. 25,001-Rs. 50,000	34	19.54%
Rs. 50,001-Rs. 1,00,000	38	21.84%
Above Rs. 1,00,000	25	14.37%

Interpretation: The income profile shows participation from lower, middle and higher-income groups. Therefore, pilgrimage travel is not restricted to one income category.

Purpose of Visit

Purpose	No. of Persons	Percentage
Religious worship	45	25.86%
Fulfilment of vows	40	22.99%
Festival participation	39	22.41%
Family pilgrimage	15	8.62%
Cultural interest	10	5.75%
Tourism and leisure	25	14.37%

Interpretation: Religious worship was the leading purpose of visit with 25.86 per cent, followed by fulfilment of vows and festival participation. This confirms that faith remains the principal motivation for religious travel.

Frequency of Religious Visits

Category	No. of Persons	Percentage
First time	30	17.24%
Once a year	45	25.86%
Twice a year	40	22.99%
More than twice a year	34	19.54%
Only during festivals	25	14.37%

Interpretation: About 68.39 per cent of respondents visit religious destinations at least once a year or more often. This indicates repeated travel demand in religious tourism.

Trip Expenditure

Category	No. of Persons	Percentage
Below Rs. 2,000	20	11.49%
Rs. 2,001-Rs. 5,000	30	17.24%
Rs. 5,001-Rs. 10,000	35	20.11%
Rs. 10,001-Rs. 20,000	45	25.86%
Above Rs. 20,000	44	25.29%

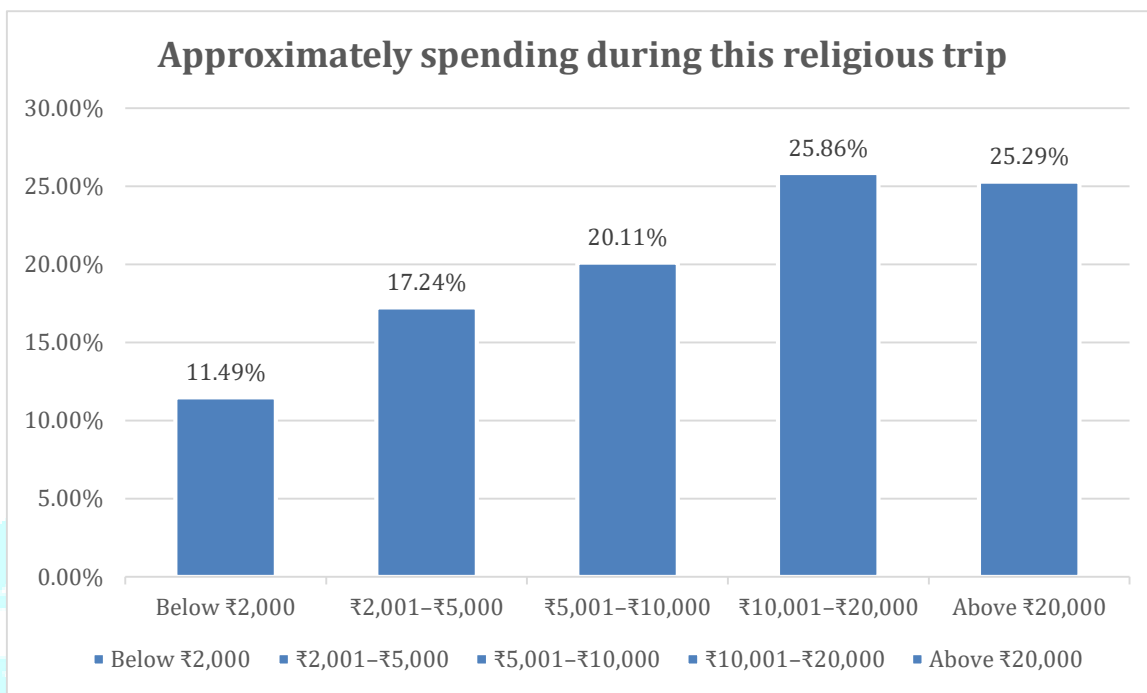


Figure 4. Approximate Spending by Pilgrims During the Religious Trip.

Interpretation: The expenditure data show that 51.15 per cent of respondents spent more than Rs. 10,000 during the religious trip. Based on class mid-points, the estimated average trip expenditure is about Rs. 12,428 per respondent. This spending supports transport, food, accommodation, offerings, local shopping and allied services.

Employment and Income Opportunities

Category	No. of Persons	Percentage
Strongly Agree	60	34.48%
Agree	55	31.61%
Neutral	30	17.24%
Disagree	15	8.62%
Strongly Disagree	14	8.05%

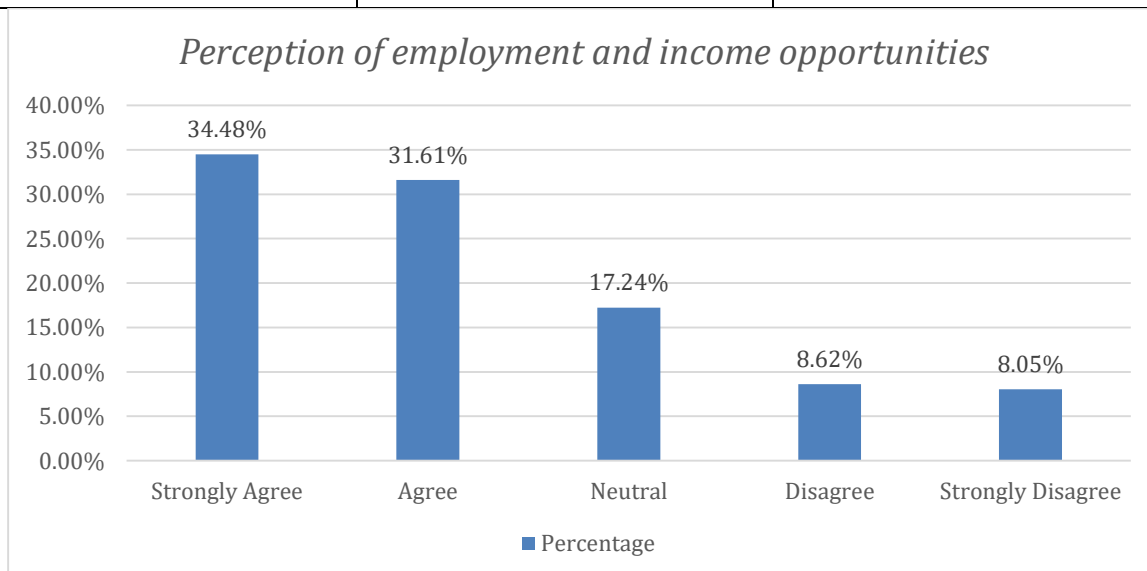


Figure 5. Perception Of Employment and Income Opportunities.

Interpretation: About 66.09 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that religious tourism creates employment and income opportunities for local people. The weighted mean score is 3.76 on a five-point scale, indicating a positive perception.

Major Problems Faced

Category	No. of Persons	Percentage
Heavy crowd and long waiting time	40	22.99%
Difficulty in accommodation	34	19.54%
Transport and parking problems	10	5.75%
Sanitation and cleanliness issues	15	8.62%
High prices near temple areas	25	14.37%
Language barriers	30	17.24%
Commercialisation of religious places	20	11.49%

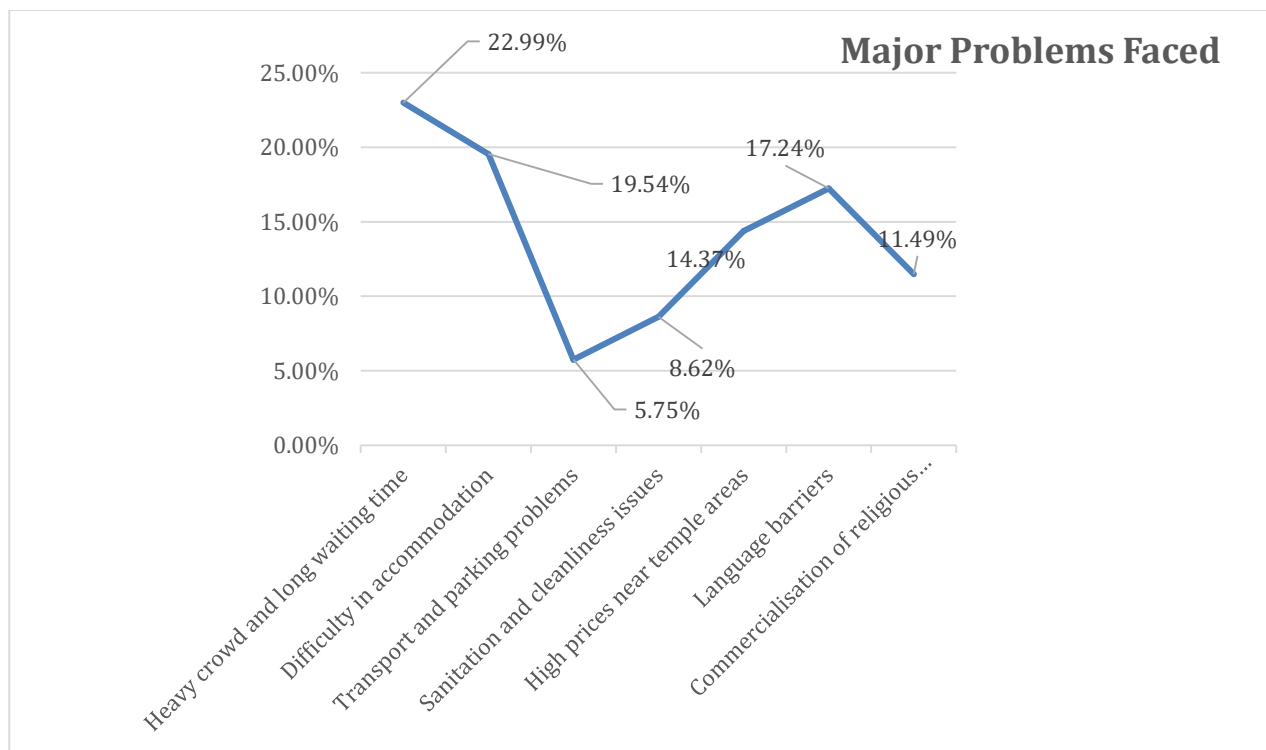


Figure 6. Major Problems Faced by Pilgrims.

Interpretation: Heavy crowd and long waiting time were the leading problems, reported by 22.99 per cent of respondents, followed by accommodation difficulty at 19.54 per cent and language barriers at 17.24 per cent. These findings show that service quality and pilgrim management require continued improvement.

XII. STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Expenditure Estimation

Expenditure Group	Respondents	Assumed Mid-point (Rs.)	Estimated Total (Rs.)
Below Rs. 2,000	20	1,000	20,000
Rs. 2,001-Rs. 5,000	30	3,500	105,000
Rs. 5,001-Rs. 10,000	35	7,500	262,500
Rs. 10,001-Rs. 20,000	45	15,000	675,000
Above Rs. 20,000	44	25,000	1,100,000
Total / Average	174	-	Total: 2,162,500; Average: 12,428

Interpretation: The estimated average spending of Rs. 12,428 per respondent indicates the ability of religious tourism to circulate money within the local economy. Although actual spending may differ according to distance, family size and income level, the result shows that pilgrimage travel creates demand for several destination services.

Mean Score for Employment and Income Perception

Response	Score	Respondents	Weighted Score
Strongly Agree	5	60	300
Agree	4	55	220
Neutral	3	30	90
Disagree	2	15	30
Strongly Disagree	1	14	14
Total / Mean	-	174	654 / 174 = 3.76

Interpretation: The weighted mean score of 3.76 is higher than the neutral score of 3.00. This shows that respondents generally perceive religious tourism as a source of employment and income opportunities.

Hypothesis Support through One-Sample Proportion Test

Parameter	Value / Result
Null Hypothesis (H0)	Religious tourism has no significant impact on socio-economic development in Andhra Pradesh.
Alternative Hypothesis (H1)	Religious tourism has a significant impact on socio-economic development in Andhra Pradesh.
Sample Size (n)	174 respondents
Positive Responses (Strongly Agree + Agree)	115 respondents
Observed Proportion (p)	115 / 174 = 0.6609 or 66.09%
Test Proportion / Neutral Benchmark (p0)	0.50 or 50%
Test Used	One-sample proportion z-test
Calculated z-value	4.25
Level of Significance	1% level
Statistical Result	Significant
Decision	Reject H0 and accept H1
Conclusion	Religious tourism has a significant positive socio-economic impact in Andhra Pradesh.

Interpretation: The hypothesis test shows that 66.09 per cent of respondents gave positive responses regarding employment and income opportunities created by religious tourism. The calculated z-value of 4.25 is statistically significant at the 1 per cent level. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This confirms that religious tourism has a significant positive socio-economic impact in Andhra Pradesh.

XIII. DISCUSSION

The primary and secondary data together show that religious tourism is an important development force in Andhra Pradesh. Secondary data indicate high tourist visits in Tirupati, Nandyal and NTR districts, while primary data show that pilgrims spend on different services and recognise employment benefits. The selected temples support both direct and indirect economic activities. Direct activities include temple employment, darshan and seva management, prasadam production, accommodation, security, sanitation and administration. Indirect activities include hotels, restaurants, flower and coconut vending, transport, shopping, parking, local guiding, photography and cultural services.

Trumala represents the strongest institutional economic model among the selected destinations. Srisailam contributes through pilgrimage, accommodation, road transport and sacred landscape tourism. Kanaka Durga Temple contributes to the urban economy of Vijayawada, particularly during festival seasons, and its redevelopment proposals reflect the need to manage future demand.

However, the growth of religious tourism also creates pressure on destination infrastructure. Crowding, long waiting time, accommodation problems and language barriers affect the quality of pilgrim experience. Therefore, religious destinations require sustainable planning that protects the spiritual environment while improving visitor facilities and community benefits.

XIV. MAJOR FINDINGS

- Religious tourism in Andhra Pradesh generates employment in temple administration, hotels, transport, food services, shopping, sanitation, security and informal local trades.
- The selected districts are major tourism nodes: Tirupati recorded 42.00 million domestic tourist visits, NTR district recorded 29.66 million and Nandyal recorded 13.43 million in 2023.
- Primary survey data show that religious worship, fulfilment of vows and festival participation are the main motivations for temple visits.
- About 51.15 per cent of respondents spent more than Rs. 10,000 during their religious trip, showing a strong expenditure linkage with the local economy.
- The estimated average expenditure per respondent is Rs. 12,428, indicating that even short religious trips generate considerable local spending.
- A majority of respondents, 66.09 per cent, agreed or strongly agreed that religious tourism creates employment and income opportunities for local people.

- The weighted mean score for employment and income perception is 3.76, which is above the neutral score.
- Heavy crowd, long waiting time, accommodation difficulty, language barriers and high prices near temple areas are the major problems reported by pilgrims.
- TTD has a large institutional economic role through budget allocation, salaries, prasadam, accommodation and donations.
- Kanaka Durga Temple requires improved infrastructure because of high devotee flow and urban congestion around Indrakeeladri.

XV. SUGGESTIONS

- Introduce integrated crowd management through digital tokens, live queue information, shaded waiting areas and better festival-time route planning.
- Strengthen affordable accommodation near temples, particularly during peak seasons and festivals.
- Develop multilingual signboards, helpdesks and mobile information services in Telugu, Hindi, English and major South Indian languages.
- Promote local employment through skill training in hospitality, guiding, hygiene, digital payment handling, first aid and pilgrim assistance.
- Regulate prices near temple areas through display boards, grievance systems and periodic inspections.
- Improve sanitation, drinking water, toilets and solid waste management through temple administration and municipal partnerships.
- Encourage local products such as handicrafts, traditional foods, religious souvenirs and cultural performances through authorised vending zones.
- Use green mobility options, electric buses and organised parking to reduce congestion around temple areas.
- Create a temple tourism database with annual pilgrim arrivals, expenditure estimates, employment generated and local business indicators.
- Promote sustainable religious tourism by balancing spiritual atmosphere, heritage protection, environmental care and economic benefit to local communities.

XVI. CONCLUSION

Religious tourism plays a significant role in the socio-economic development of Andhra Pradesh. The study of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanam, Srisailam Temple and Vijayawada Kanaka Durga Temple shows that pilgrimage centres are not only sacred spaces but also engines of regional economic activity. They generate employment, support local businesses, encourage infrastructure development and preserve cultural traditions. The secondary data demonstrate the strength of tourist flows in the selected temple districts, while the primary survey confirms that pilgrims spend on a variety of services and perceive religious tourism as a source of livelihood.

At the same time, the study highlights that crowding, accommodation shortage, high prices and language barriers reduce the quality of pilgrim experience. Future development should therefore focus on sustainable infrastructure, inclusive local employment, digital services, sanitation, safety and cultural preservation. If religious tourism is managed carefully, it can continue to serve both spiritual needs and socio-economic development in Andhra Pradesh.

XVII. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The study is limited to three religious tourism destinations in Andhra Pradesh.
- The sample size is limited to 174 respondents.
- The primary data are based on respondent opinions and may include personal bias.
- Some temple-level annual data, such as exact yearly footfall and revenue break-up, are not uniformly available for all selected temples.
- The expenditure estimate is based on grouped data and assumed mid-points; therefore, it should be treated as an indicative estimate.
- The study mainly focuses on socio-economic aspects and does not provide a detailed environmental impact assessment.

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