



PERCEPTION AND SATISFACTION OF PILGRIMS DURING THE LOCKDOWN (COVID-19) – WITH REFERENCE TO TEMPLES OF DINDIGUL AND MADURAI DISTRICTS

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Abstract

Covid 19 Pandemic that begun in March 2020 and still has its impact on the normal activities of human beings all over the India. Various sectors of economic development were hit by the unprecedented situation, where tourism is of no exemption. Tourism is a mixture of social, cultural and economic characters which paves the movement of people from place to place as defined by United Nations World Tourism Organization. There are different kinds of tourism namely Adventure tourism, Business tourism, Cultural tourism, Cruise tourism, Eco tourism, Leisure tourism, Medical tourism, Religious tourism, Sports tourism, Wellness tourism, Wildlife tourism etc. Pilgrimage tourism is a part of religious tourism, which involves the movement of people for peace and mental relief. Large numbers of tourists visit pilgrim centers to fulfill their religious customs. Pilgrims throng the pilgrimage centers more during the festival seasons, which have good influence on the environment. The current study analyses the perception and satisfaction of such pilgrimage tourists in the districts of Dindigul and Madurai districts in the midst of Covid 19 Pandemic.

Keywords: Tourism, Pilgrimage Tourism, Satisfaction and Covid-19.

Prologue and Problem

Tourism has been defined in various ways but may be thought of as the relationship and phenomena arising out of the journeys and temporary stay of people travelling primarily for leisure and recreational purpose. Tourism is thus a multifaceted activity and geographically complex one as different services are sought and supplied at different stages from the origin to the destination. Tourism today is an important factor in the world trade with international dimensions as a component of national economics, as a contributor to receipts-expenditures and balance of payments of different countries, as a means of foreign exchange earnings, as a provider of employment, as a powerful factor of development and so forth and has been considered as the fourth dimension of modern economics. The tourism industry is growing at a very fast rate throughout the world. Tourism worldwide is a \$ 3700 billion industry. This includes both internal and external tourism. In US and Europe internal tourism is about 85 per cent of the business. The foregoing is also true about China in a big way. Egypt, Thailand and other countries in Africa and Asia have 80 per cent external tourists. Internal tourism in these places is small.

India being a vast and diverse country has something to offer to everyone (Gill, 1996, P.10). In India, the great Himalayas gives tremendous opportunities for mountain tourism or adventure tourism. It provides great challenges and difficulties to mountaineers. In the Southern part of the country there is Indian Ocean which gives opportunities to beach tourism and attract large number of foreign and domestic tourists. In the North West there is Thar Desert with Aravalis mountains range. It is highly suitable for desert tourism and heritage tourism. In this way India has very rich natural resources like geographical and cultural diversity, forests, lakes, mountains, rivers and rivulets, sacred shrines, historic monuments and hospitable people, which are necessary for thriving tourism activity (Singh, 2002). The practice of pilgrimage in India is so deeply embedded in the cultural psyche that the entire subcontinent may actually be regarded as one grand and continuous sacred space. Earliest sources of information on the matter of sacred space come from the Rig Veda and Atharva Veda. While the act of pilgrimage is not specifically discussed in these texts, mountain valleys and the confluences of rivers are spoken of with reverence, and the merits of travel to such places are mentioned. Following the Vedic period the practice of pilgrimage seems to have become quite common, as is evident from sections of the great epic, the Mahabharata (350 BC), which mentions more than 300 sacred sites spanning the subcontinent. Hindus call the sacred places to which they travel as tirthas and the action of going on a pilgrimage as tirtha-yatra. The Sanskrit word tirtha means river ford, step to a river, or place of pilgrimage.

In Vedic times the world may have concerned only those sacred places associated with water, but by the times of the Mahabharata, tirtha had come to denote any holy place, be it a lake, mountain, forest, or cave. The number of pilgrimage sites in India is extremely large but some primary pilgrimage sites include the four Dhams, the Seven Sacred cities and their primary temples. In India all temples, Gurudwaras, Mosques and

Churches are considered sacred places. As is evident from the list these sites are not related with one religion only and therefore, they attract people of different religions for pilgrimage. Further, many of such places are visited by pilgrims of various religions. It is worth mentioning that India has many important religious places which are quite popular at national level. Some of these places are well known at the international level as well.

The COVID-19 significantly impacts the global economic, political, socio-cultural systems. Health communication strategies and measures (e.g. social distancing, travel and mobility bans, community lockdowns, stay at home campaigns, self- or mandatory-quarantine, curbs on crowding) have halted global travel, tourism and leisure. Being a highly vulnerable industry to numerous environmental, political, socio-economic risks, tourism is used to and has become resilient in bouncing back from various crises and outbreaks (e.g. terrorism, earthquakes and the like). The world nations are finding their own ways overcoming the situation. In India, through various measures are being in place to ensure rehabilitation of pilgrimage tourism. Based on the various issues observed in pilgrim centers in the current Covid 19 Pandemic situation, this research has been undertaken in identifying the solution to the following research objective;

1. To analyse the perception and satisfaction of pilgrim tourists in the Dindigul and Madurai districts the current Covid 19 Pandemic.

Literature Samples

Kiran Shinde (2011) draws attention to the structural differences between different segments within the industry including obligatory religious travel (ritualistic), pilgrimage, spiritual tourism, heritage tourism, and festival tourism by examining aspects such as products offered, services required, major driving forces, organizers and managers, and modes of operation in religious tourism. A spiritual tourist has been defined as “someone who visits a specific place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual meaning and/or growth, without over religious compulsion, which could be religious, non-religious, sacred or experimental in nature, but within a Divine context, regardless of the main reason for travelling” as defined by (Haq and Jackson 2009). Vijayanand (2013); McGrath (1999) describe the importance of pilgrimage travel as an a social phenomenon. The term “pilgrimage tourism” is travel to a sacred place. It is one of the most significant forms of religious behavior.

Vargheese Antony Jesurajan and Varghees Prabhu (2012) reiterate that the level of satisfaction of the visitors is the main factor that determines the post-visit behavior and attitude towards the tourism centre’s as well as the tour decisions. Visitors’ satisfaction level is mainly based on the various facilities and support systems available in the tourism centers and the comfort and convenience they experience there. The image of a tourist destination is an impression that a person holds about a state in which they do not reside as stated by (Adarsh Kumar Aggarwal, Meenal Guglani and Raj Kumar Goel 2008).

Research methodology

The study is analytical and descriptive in nature. The Primary data is gathered from the pilgrims as sample respondents through interview schedules from pilgrim places of Madurai and Dindigul districts. Other required data has been collected from various websites, magazines, journals and theses. The study focused on the pilgrims visiting the places like Palani and Sirumalai of Dindigul and Meenakshi Amman Temple and Tirupparankunram. The sampling technique adopted is convenience sampling, because the population is infinite and selected based on accessibility. The following statistical tools have been applied for the analyses:

1. Simple Percentage analysis
2. Analysis of Variance

Analysis and Discussion

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Classification	Dindigul		Madurai	
	No of Respondents	Percentage	No of Respondents	Percentage
Gender				
Male	63	63	56	56
Female	35	35	44	44
Transgender	02	02	00	00
Age (Years)				
Below 25	26	26	37	37
26 – 40	38	38	25	25
Above 40	36	36	38	38
Residence				
Within Tamilnadu	89	89	87	87
Outside Tamilnadu	11	11	13	13
Mode of transportation				
Public transportation	23	23	19	19
Own vehicle	77	77	81	81
Days spent at the location during lockdown (Covid 19)				
1 Day	63	63	74	74
2 Days	32	32	18	18
More than 2 days	05	05	08	08
Total	100	100.0	100	100.0

Source: Compiled and calculated using primary data

Dindigul

The above table represents the demographic profile of the respondents who are the pilgrims of Dindigul district. Out of 100 samples selected 63 respondents are male, 38 Respondents are between 26-40 years of age, 89 respondents are belonging to the state of Tamilnadu, 77 respondents used their own vehicle to reach the location and finally 63 respondents would stay at the location for one day.

Madurai

In case of the demographic profile of the respondents who are the pilgrims of Madurai district, out of 100 samples selected 56 respondents are male, 38 Respondents are above 40 years of age, 87 respondents are belonging to the state of Tamilnadu, 81 respondents used their own vehicle to reach the location and finally 74 respondents would stay at the location for one day.

Perception of Tourists

H₀₁: The difference of perception of pilgrimage tourist towards the selected pilgrim places during the Covid 19 pandemic in the selected districts with their demographic profile is insignificant.

Table 2: ANOVA		
	Dindigul	Madurai
Calculated value	39.14	1.38
Sig.	0.00	0.00
Remark	Significant	Significant
Result	Null-hypothesis rejected at 1% level	Null-hypothesis rejected at 1% level

Source: Primary data

The Table 2 depicts the analysis of the association between perception of pilgrimage tourist towards the selected pilgrim places in the Dindigul and Madurai with their demographic profile. The analysis states that the calculated value of 39.14 in Dindigul which is significant (0.00) at 1 per cent level and the calculated value of 1.38 in Madurai which is also significant (0.00) at 1 per cent level. This concludes that the null hypothesis is rejected and concluded that difference of perception of pilgrimage tourist towards the selected pilgrim places in the Dindigul and Madurai with their demographic profile is significant.

Satisfaction of Tourists

H₀₂: The difference of satisfaction of pilgrimage tourist towards the selected pilgrim places during the Covid 19 pandemic in the selected districts with their demographic profile is insignificant.

Table 3: ANOVA		
	Dindigul	Madurai
Calculated value	15.78	26.05
Sig.	0.01	0.00
Remarks	Significant	Significant
Result	Null-hypothesis rejected at 1% level	Null-hypothesis rejected at 1% level

Source: Primary data

The Table 2 depicts the analysis of the association between satisfaction of pilgrimage tourist towards the selected pilgrim places during the Covid 19 pandemic in the Dindigul and Madurai with their demographic profile. The analysis states that the calculated value of 15.78 in Dindigul which is significant (0.01) at 1 per cent level and the calculated value of 26.05 in Madurai which is significant (0.00) at 1 per cent level. This concludes that the null hypothesis is rejected for Dindigul and Madurai and concluded that difference of satisfaction of pilgrimage tourist towards the selected pilgrim places during the Covid 19 pandemic in Dindigul and Madurai with their demographic profile is significant.

Conclusion

COVID-19 resulted in numerous socio-cultural, economic and psychological impacts on various pilgrimage tourism stakeholders. The present analysis is not exhaustive in terms of the COVID-19 impacts, while impacts may not be uniform across all the factors of the same tourism stakeholder group. Consequently, the pandemic has created a 'fertile' new context whereby tourism researchers can conduct research with valuable end-user benefits. Based on the study, the services offered in selected places of Dindigul and Madurai were studied and the levels of perception and satisfaction of the pilgrims were measured. The hypotheses were tested in the study. On overall analysis, it is found that the pilgrim centers need improvement in certain areas via; safety, security, social distancing and accommodation. The authorities concerned must have take effective actions as the awareness among the public deteriorating as the days passes. The provision of sanitizers and maintaining social distances are the ways to get the pilgrims feel safe and secure and keep them away from the spread of disease eventually.

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