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Tourism to Tirupati - An Empirical Study

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ABSTRACT

The pilgrimage is a journey undertaken for betterment of the spiritual knowledge and peace. The flow of people to places of religious importance in India has increased in the last couple of decades tremendously with availability of modern means of travel, like the road transport, railways and air travel, increase in accommodation facilities, growth of Information and Communication Technology that provides vast information about the places, and the like. The tourism in Andhra Pradesh is mostly considered as pilgrimage and heritage tourist destination. The present study consisted sample size of 300 pilgrim tourists to Tirumala, carried to capture their perception, preferences and satisfaction with various services and facilities available in Tirupati and Tirumala and to measure the level of satisfaction with respect to transportation facilities in the temple town, Darshan / seva availability, accommodation, information and communication, prasadam, availability of TTD merchandise and behavior of TTD staff, volunteers and local vendors. The results indicate respondents' satisfaction towards accommodation, transportation, hygiene and quality of food available at temple town; few concerns were found over security of pilgrims' valuables and belongings, and behavior of staff and local vendors towards the pilgrims.

KEYWORDS: Spiritual knowledge, Information and Communication Technology, seva availability, transportation, prasadam.

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INTRODUCTION

Travel for religious purposes has been there from the most ancient times. All religions have their Holy places and places of worship. Such places are called by different names like Devalaya (House of God) Temple, Church, Masjid and Gurudwara which mean a building for religious prayers and house for communal worship. The pilgrimage is a journey undertaken for betterment of the spiritual knowledge and peace. According to the World Tourism Organization, an estimated 300 to 330 million pilgrims visit the world's key religious sites every year. According to the U.S. Office of Travel and Tourism Industries, Americans traveling overseas for "religious or pilgrimage" purposes has increased from 491,000 travelers in 2002 to 633,000 travelers in 2005 (30% increase). Travel or pilgrimage to religious places in India is considered an integral part of her culture and tradition. India is a land of pilgrimage. In our society, the pilgrimage journeys performed to God's grace and to learn moral values and to get respect in the individual community. Within the holy space human beings are given the chance to transcend themselves when they come face to face, in contemplation, with the divinity. The pilgrimage, instead of diminishing in our apparently ever more secular, scientific and technologically oriented world, is experiencing considerable growth. This is true in all religions.

Pilgrim Tourism in Andhra Pradesh In the post-independence taking into consideration the economic and social potentialities of tourism industry, both the state and Central Government have taken certain positive steps in order to develop the tourist industry, because the domestic tourism promotes local peace, harmony and friendship among us. The growth and size of domestic tourism would relatively depend on per capita income, size of population, economic growth rate, cost of travel and existence of national attraction of the country. The flow of people to places of religious importance in India has increased in the last couple of decades tremendously with availability of modern means of travel, like the road transport, railways and air travel, increase in accommodation facilities, growth of Information and Communication Technology that provides vast information about the places, and the like.

Table 1: Top 7 States / Union Territories in domestic tourists (2010)(in millions)

States	UTs Domestic Tourists
Andhra Pradesh	155.8
Uttar Pradesh	144.8
Tamil Nadu	111.6
Maharashtra	48.5
Karnataka	38.2
Madhya Pradesh	38.1
West Bengal	21.1

Source: States / UTs Tourism Department

The tourism in Andhra Pradesh is mostly considered as pilgrimage and heritage tourist destination. The centuries old glorious temples and colorful religious festivals attract millions of domestic as well as foreign tourists. The statistics reflect that the top 7 states with regard to inflow of

domestic tourists in India during 2017, Andhra Pradesh has the distinction of first position having attracted 155.8 million tourists followed by Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu. In the last few years Andhra Pradesh has achieved a remarkable goal by touching the highest figures i.e. around more than six times during 2000-2016.

Table2: Inflow of Domestic and Foreign Tourist in Andhra Pradesh during 1993-2009 (in millions)

Year	Domestic	Growth Percentage	Foreign	Growth Percentage
2000	20.67		47200	
2001	30.28	22.8	48700	3.2
2002	30.93	19.8	84100	72.6
2003	30.35	-14.7	63600	24.3
2004	30.68	9.8	94400	48.4
2005	30.84	4.3	78976	16.3
2006	40.23	10.1	86310	9.3
2007	40.80	13.4	78713	8.8
2008	50.25	9.3	67147	14.7
2009	60.33	20.5	210310	213.2
2010	70.41	17	479318	127.9
2011	80.97	20.6	501019	4.5
2012	90.35	4.5	560024	11.7
2013	110.17	19.4	669617	19.5
2014	120.79	14.5	769724	14.9
2015	130.26	10.37	789180	2.46
2016	150.74	12.48	795173	0.75

Source: TIOs/DTO's/ATO's/AAI of Dept. of Tourism, Govt. of Andhra Pradesh.

Tirupati is one of the most ancient and spectacular places of pilgrimage in India. It is situated in Chittoor District in southern Andhra Pradesh. The town owes its existence to the sacred temple of Lord Sri Venkateswara situated on the Tirumala Hill adjoining it. With a history that dates back to over twelve centuries, the temple is the jewel in the crown of ancient places of worship in southern India. Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) maintains twelve temples and their sub-shrines in the Tirumala-Tirupati area. TTD provides a wide range of facilities to make pilgrimage a unique spiritual experience. Tirumala Sri Venkateswara temple is the popular as the most ancient pilgrimages spot in India. Tirupati is the richest and most visited religious tourist center in the world followed by the Vatican City. Sri Venkateswara temple, located on the 7th peak of the Tirupati Hills is well known as the Lord's presidency over Venkatachala. Tirupati is well connected by road and rail to all the major cities of Andhra Pradesh, adequately connected by air. The sanctum sanctorum houses the splendid idol of Lord Sri Venkateswara. Thousands devotees of Lord Vishnu travel this temple to seek the blessings.

This big and commodious temple is covered by picturesque Tirumalai range. Pilgrims from all over the planet come to the Temple throughout the year. The temple is surrounded with the fabulous 'gopuram' or tower. The 'Vimana' or Cupola beyond the sanctum is shining with gold plate and is called as "the Ananda Nilayam". The main importance of the temple is the idol of Lord

Venkateswara or which has the figures of both Vishnu and Shiva, preserving and destroying aspects of the Hindu trinity Gods. This is revered temple city, in the Chittoor district of Andhra Pradesh. One can view the majestic Tirumala Hill at an altitude of 3200 ft beyond sea level in its backdrop. The destination is splendid and the architecture of the temple is somagnificent. The Brahmotsavamfair here is regarded to be the biggest festivals. Indians and even foreigners travel TirupatiBalaji during this time. Tirupati-Tirumala, with its celebrated Venkateshwara shrine, receives over 3 crore pilgrims annually and is the single largest contributor to Andhra Pradesh's total tourist inflow figures.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The overall objective of the research was to capture devotees' perception, preferences and satisfaction with various services and facilities available in Tirupati and Tirumala andTo measure the level of satisfaction of respondents with respect to transportation facilities in the temple town, Darshan/ seva availability, accommodation, information and communication, prasadam, availability TTD books, CDs, Calendars etc and behavior of local vendors in particular.

METHODOLOGY

The study is basically a survey based research, which was done in three stages viz., Desk Research, preparation of Interview schedule and the Field work. For collection of primary data, a sample size of 300 was arrived picked by convenience and random sampling techniques. Data relating to devotees perception was collected through structured interview schedules and personal discussions. Secondary data is gathered from publications of TTD, Text books, journals, newspapers and web sources. The respondents' views and level of satisfaction could have been influenced by their most recent experience, from which generalizations must be drawn with great caution.

RESPONDENT PROFILE

About 28% of respondents are below 30 years of age, 22% between 31-45 years, 26% between 46 years to 55 years, and the rest are above 55 years. Male and female respondents are 47 and 53% respectively, 41% hailing from other states. Persons from other than Andhra Pradesh represent Tamilnadu (17%), Karnataka (14%), and the rest from other parts of the country. Most of the respondents (65%) are visiting the divine shrine 2nd time or more, but still finding new procedure/ system/ development in every visit, which shows the how TTD administration responds to keep pace with the needs of ever increasing number of pilgrim tourists to the most sought after spiritual destination. Very few respondents (12%) visited the 7 Hills through tour operators (both government- APTDC, and private operators). Only 30% came to the hills with prior arrangement for accommodation, 35% said they did not require accommodation as pilgrims amenities centres are helpful in fresh up, bath etc, but the sizeable 35% required accommodation, had to stand in line for

the same. About 20% came to the hills by walk, 55% reached by RTC buses and 25% came by private vehicles.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

About 25% respondents very well about other tourist spots in tirumala and temples in and around tirupati is excellent, 25% felt they have very good knowledge, 30% said average, while 20% admitted it's poor.

Three fourth of devotees who stayed at TTD guest houses, cottages and choultries were satisfied with accommodation. Interestingly higher percentages (84 percent) of the devotees staying in TTD choultries were satisfied with the accommodation. The research study shows that most of the devotees staying in TTD choultries belong to lower socio economic classes (SEC). This segment of the devotees finds free choultries affordable and convenient. A correlation between duration of stay and satisfaction with accommodation shows that devotees staying for longer duration are relatively less satisfied. This was because the longer the stay, the shortcoming on the housekeeping and hygiene aspects were more pronounced. Also the need to re-book the accommodation creates some discomfort. Experience of respondents largely is diverse in terms of darsanam, availability of prasadam, tonsure and the like which is very much influenced by the day of interviewing, time etc.

About 65% of respondents feel that the transportation facility from different places to tirupati, and from tirupati to tirumala is adequate or very much adequate, while the rest see some room for betterment. The sanitation and public conveniences are very much satisfactory to about 76% of respondents, while the overall satisfaction towards price, variety, hygiene and quality of food is 63%. Majority of respondents (55%) perceive that the information centres are easily approachable and they get required information. TTD stalls selling books, CDS, calendars and the like are accessible and availability of required is satisfactory to over 65% of respondents. A vast majority (85%) feel physically secured during their stay in the temple town, while many (55%) expressed concern for security of belongings and valuables. Some found the behavior of TTD employees/ volunteers towards pilgrims to be indifferent at various points of contact say at Tonsure, cloak room, room allotment, vacation, shoe-keeping, cell phone deposit and the like. The behavior of local vendors towards pilgrims, and prices they charge for the products/ services also leaves some room for concern.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Tirumala, the divine abode of lord Sri Venkateswara, attracts millions of tourists to Andhra Pradesh from places across the state, country and the world. Practically, it may not be possible to provide highly personalized services to all the tourists, however, better care could be and must be

taken to make the pilgrim experience more divine and cherishing. The following suggestions could help towards the endeavour.

Measures should be taken to provide darshan, accommodation, prasadam in more transparent manner, with a common devotee in mind, eliminating any room for middlemen to play mischief.

Travel Packages to visit to nearby temples and places of importance within the town and Chittoor district must aggressively promoted, even in collaboration with private vehicle operators.

Security should be tightened up to ensure safety of pilgrims' valuables and belongings.

TTD staff and volunteers must properly trained and sensitized to serve the pilgrims with smile and empathy.

Demanding tips from the pilgrims must be discouraged by strong action.

Local vendors must be sensitized to deal with pilgrims decently, and conduct business on fair terms.

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