



TOURISM IN ARUPADAI VEEDU PILGRIMAGE SITES: PROBLEMS, PROSPECTS, AND TOURIST SATISFACTION IN TAMILNADU

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Abstract

In this study, the six sacred residences of Murugan Lord Murugan Lord in Tamil Nadu will be examined by the six sacred sites of Murugan Lord in Tamil Nadu. literature overview of academic sources. Key problems include inadequate infrastructure, poor connectivity, tourist harassment, and crowd management issues, while service quality emerges as the primary determinant of pilgrim satisfaction alongside religious motivation and safety concerns. Despite these challenges, the circuit demonstrates substantial economic potential with Tamil Nadu government targeting ₹10,000 crore tourism investment and opportunities for digital integration through mobile applications and virtual darshan systems. Tourist satisfaction remains mixed due to concerns over security, hygiene and seller harassment, but pilgrims maintain strong religious motivations. This illustrates considerable developmental potential in the framework conditions of cultural heritage and cultural tourism. Strategic recommendations include improving infrastructure, standardizing service quality, and integrating traditional practices to harmonize economic development with spiritual authenticity for sustainable pilgrimage growth.

Keywords: *Arupadai Veedu, pilgrimage tourism, tourist satisfaction, religious tourism, service quality.*

Introduction

The Arupadai Veedu, literally meaning "six abodes," represents one of the most sacred pilgrimage circuits in Tamil Nadu, dedicated to Lord Murugan, the patron deity of the Tamil people. These six temples of Palani, Swamimalai, Thirthani, Thirpalandram, Trauchandur and Pazamdirchorai are located especially in the old Tamil literature in the Thiruppugazh. Each site holds unique mythological significance and architectural heritage, collectively forming a spiritual geography that has attracted devotees for over two millennia. (Liutikas 2023). The temples are not merely religious structures but repositories of Tamil culture, language, art, and tradition, embodying the synthesis of Dravidian temple architecture with profound spiritual symbolism. This cultural heritage positions the Arupadai Veedu circuit as both a religious destination and a significant cultural tourism asset for Tamil Nadu. (Jagadisan et al, Selva Ziona 2023).

Tamil Nadu, India's second largest tourist target, has increased tourist arrivals every year, making a significant contribution to the state's economy, highlighting over 16% of its significant growth. (Sarkar Keat, et al, Gebrie(2024) .The state's tourism sector includes various segments such as cultural heritage, religious pilgrimage, ecotourism, and coastal tourism, and religious tourism forms an important element of this landscape. The Arupadai Veedu racetrack attracts millions of pilgrims each year and generates considerable economic activity through accommodation, transportation, food service and local crafts. The Tamil Nadu government's Vision 2023 recognizes this potential, targeting ₹10,000 crore investment in tourism infrastructure and aiming to attract 15 million foreign tourists.



However, despite this economic (Kumar, S. (2023). significance, the pilgrimage circuit faces numerous challenges that impact both tourist experience and sustainable development, necessitating comprehensive analysis and strategic intervention.

Arupadai Veedu's pilgrimage site now faces a variety of challenges that have a major impact on tourist satisfaction and sustainable development. (Muruganantham et al, Patro, U. S. (2025). Infrastructure deficiencies represent the most pressing concern, with inadequate parking facilities, poor road connectivity, insufficient basic amenities, and limited accommodation options creating bottlenecks during peak pilgrimage seasons Tourist harassment has emerged as a critical issue, including problems such as overcharging, vendor persistence, begging, and safety concerns that detract from the spiritual experience pilgrims seek. Crowd management during festivals and auspicious occasions poses additional challenges, often leading to safety hazards and diminished visitor satisfaction. Yazdi, M., et al Zarei, E. (2024). Environmental concerns, including waste management, water scarcity, and preservation of the sacred sites' natural settings, further complicate the tourism landscape. These challenges not only affect individual pilgrimage experiences they also threaten long-term sustainability and the reputation of these sacred goals. Shinde, K. A., et al Olsen, D. H. (2022).

Tourist satisfaction at pilgrimage destinations involves complex interactions between spiritual fulfillment, service quality, and overall experience quality, making it distinct from conventional tourism satisfaction models. (Rohman, F., et al, Hussein, A. S., et al Hapsari, R., et al Tamitiadini, D. (2023). Research indicates that service quality emerges as the primary determinant of pilgrim satisfaction, encompassing tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy dimensions. Religious motivation remains the strongest driving factor for pilgrimage participation, yet practical concerns such as safety, cleanliness, accommodation quality, food standards, and accessibility significantly influence overall satisfaction levels. The unique nature of religious tourism not only seeks physical comfort, but also creates specific expectations among pilgrims who respect the spiritual atmosphere, cultural credibility, and their religious feelings. Understanding these satisfaction dynamics is crucial for developing appropriate tourism strategies that honor the sacred nature of these sites while meeting contemporary visitor expectations and ensuring positive pilgrimage experiences. (Esmaeili Mahyari, et al, et al (2025) .

Despite the cultural significance and economic potential of the Arupadai Veedu circuit, comprehensive research addressing the integrated challenges, prospects, and tourist satisfaction across all six sites remains limited and fragmented. Existing studies often focus on individual temples or general pilgrimage tourism patterns, lacking the holistic perspective necessary for circuit-wide development planning. This research gap hampers evidence-based political decisions and strategic initiatives for the development of tourism. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to provide a comprehensive analysis of tourism issues, future prospects, and tourism levels of satisfaction with the Arupada Veedu pilgrimage circuit. The research objectives include identifying key challenges affecting pilgrim experiences, analyzing factors influencing tourist satisfaction, evaluating economic and development opportunities, and proposing strategic recommendations for sustainable tourism development. **Korov, T., Šostar, M., et al, Andrić, B. (2024).** A model for strategic management of religious tourism destinations in the function of sustainable development. By addressing these goals, this study seeks to provide valuable knowledge to tourism stakeholders, political decision-makers, and target managers its spiritual essence and cultural heritage.



Review of Literature

Jagadisan and Selva Ziona (2023) compare the indigenous church architecture of Vellore with Western styles, emphasizing the need for preservation due to limited documentation. Their study highlights how conserving these monuments adds new value to architecture, society, and Tamil Nadu's cultural heritage.

Sarkar, Keat, and Gebrie (2024) conducted a descriptive study using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The research highlights Tamil Nadu's potential in rural, agricultural, heritage, cultural, eco, sports, and agro-tourism. It also notes government plans to collaborate with the Tamil Nadu Development Corporation for tourism hospitality skill development and certification programs. Additionally, efforts are being made to promote hospitality services through various travel platforms.

Kumar, S. (2023).Studies highlight the need for sustainable strategies to harness rural tourism's potential, especially in Himachal Pradesh, where urban destinations are saturated. Rural tourism not only supports financial inclusion but also promotes social inclusion by showcasing authentic traditions, history, and cuisine to global tourists.

Muruganantham, G., et al Patro, U. S. (2025)This literature highlights religious tourism as a rapidly growing sector with both opportunities and challenges, such as environmental and cultural impacts. It emphasizes the role of technology—digital platforms, apps, and social media—in promoting sustainability, enhancing pilgrim experiences, and preserving heritage. Indian tradition, culture, and digital initiatives serve as key drivers, making technology crucial for the long-term viability of religious tourism.

Ibrahim, A. O. (2025). the study highlights gaps in environmental management and stakeholder coordination, recommending balanced strategies for sustainable tourism development.

Shinde, K. A., et al, Olsen, D. H. (2022).They highlight the distinct roles of government agencies in managing visitor flows and religious institutions in providing spiritual experiences, while also stressing the need for collaboration between the two. The suggested model is most relevant for pilgrim-towns with a steady influx of visitors and a robust pilgrimage economy, though it may be less applicable in declining or secularized destinations. By addressing both physical and meta-physical dimensions, the study presents a more holistic framework for sustainability in renowned pilgrim-towns such as Mecca, Lourdes, and Vrindavan, underscoring resilience and cultural heritage preservation.

Bhadeshiya, H., et al Prajapati, U. (2024).This chapter is focused on India's destination marketing strategies that promote religious tourism. It sheds light on the Government of India's initiatives to attract faithful tourists to sacred locations including holy temples and places of interest for spiritual pilgrims. The tourism business in India has gone through numerous phases of growth. This research reveals how the state government and central governments have stepped up their commitment to develop tourism, including religious tourism, on multiple fronts. It confirms that India can be rightly considered as the land of faith, as spirituality and religion are very prominent, as evidenced by its holy temples and landmarks, located in different regions of the subcontinent. In conclusion, it discusses about the challenges for the future, and elaborates on the opportunities related to promoting religious tourism to target faithful pilgrims and other visitors to "Incredible India."



Yazdi, M., et al Zarei, E. (2024).underscores the growing importance of crowd safety across domains such as sports, entertainment, and politics. It frames crowd safety as a resilience-based system focused on protecting stakeholders' well-being through disruption management, adaptation, absorption, and restoration. The chapter highlights Bayesian networks as an analytical tool to evaluate and strengthen crowd resilience, offering a systematic approach to enhance safety measures. By integrating resilience and continuous learning, it proposes a holistic model that ensures crowd safety remains adaptable and sustainable in dynamic environments.

Tsironis, C. N. (2022). literature shows that pilgrimage and religious tourism support both cultural heritage and local economies, as seen in *St. Paul's Route* in Greece. Post-COVID, they have gained renewed significance, requiring strategies that balance health measures with authentic traditions. Despite data limitations, studies confirm their role in resilience, cross-cultural exchange, and sustainable regional development.

Choe, J. (2025).religious tourism as one of the oldest and most enduring forms of travel, noting its significant growth over the past fifty years. It highlights how religious tourism has diversified, with many visitors now motivated by personal meaning rather than traditional religious beliefs, reflecting broader trends of secularization and rational thinking. Recent studies emphasize the wellness benefits—mental, physical, and spiritual—that religious tourism offers, particularly in the post-pandemic era. In developing and remote regions, it is also seen as a tool for economic diversification, though more research is needed on its role in poverty alleviation, sustainability, and environmental management. Scholars argue for greater inclusion of community perspectives, local stakeholders, and non-Western methodologies to balance the dominance of Western approaches. Future research is encouraged to adopt more creative, field-based methods and engage directly with policymakers, tourism operators, and religious associations to address practical challenges in religious tourism development.

Statement of the Problem

The Arupadai Veedu, comprising six sacred abodes of Lord Murugan, is one of the most significant pilgrimage circuits in Tamil Nadu, deeply rooted in the cultural, spiritual, and historical traditions of the region. Each year, millions of devotees visit these temples, contributing to both religious practices and the state's tourism economy. However, despite this prominence, the circuit faces several unresolved challenges that limit tourist satisfaction and sustainable development.

Inadequate infrastructure, such as poor road connectivity, insufficient parking facilities, lack of sanitation, and limited accommodation options, remains a persistent issue. Tourist harassment in the form of overcharging, aggressive vendors, and begging adversely impacts the spiritual ambiance. Safety concerns due to poor crowd management during peak seasons and festivals further weaken the overall pilgrim experience. Additionally, environmental challenges like improper waste management, water scarcity, and degradation of natural surroundings threaten the ecological sustainability of these sacred sites.

Although religious motivation continues to drive pilgrim participation, service quality factors such as cleanliness, hospitality, accessibility, and food standards strongly influence visitor satisfaction. Existing research on the Arupadai Veedu circuit is fragmented, with studies often limited to individual temples rather than a comprehensive circuit-wide analysis. This gap prevents effective policy-making and evidence-based planning for the long-term growth of religious tourism in Tamil Nadu.



Therefore, there is a pressing need for holistic research that examines the problems, evaluates development prospects, and identifies strategies to enhance tourist satisfaction, while safeguarding the spiritual authenticity and cultural heritage of the Arupadai Veedu pilgrimage circuit.

Objectives of the Study

1. To identify and analyze the major challenges affecting pilgrim experiences at the Arupadai Veedu pilgrimage circuit, including issues related to infrastructure, safety, service quality, and crowd management.
2. To evaluate the factors influencing tourist satisfaction and development prospects of the Arupadai Veedu circuit, and to propose strategic recommendations for sustainable pilgrimage tourism.

Methodology

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine tourism problems, prospects, and tourist satisfaction in the Arupadai Veedu pilgrimage circuit. Academic sources, journal articles, and government reports were reviewed to identify existing research gaps and provide a comprehensive understanding of the circuit.

Both qualitative and descriptive analyses were employed. Qualitative data helped in understanding cultural, spiritual, and social aspects of pilgrimage tourism, while descriptive analysis was used to identify recurring problems such as infrastructure deficiencies, tourist harassment, and crowd management issues.

The review focused on key variables influencing tourist satisfaction, including service quality, religious motivation, safety, sanitation, accommodation, and accessibility. Studies on government initiatives, investment policies, and technological interventions such as digital platforms and virtual darshan were also examined to assess development prospects.

With the integration of the results in several studies, this methodology guarantees an overall perspective on the Arupadai Veedu switching circuit, while simultaneously enabling evidence-based strategic recommendations for sustainable development in tourism.

Population and Sampling

The population of this study includes pilgrims and tourists visiting the Arupadai Veedu temples in Tamil Nadu. Since the circuit attracts millions of visitors annually, a representative sample is required to capture diverse experiences. The sampling method may involve purposive and convenience sampling, focusing on respondents available at temple premises during peak and non-peak seasons. The sample includes individuals of varied age groups, genders, and socio-economic backgrounds to ensure reliability. This approach helps in analyzing both spiritual motivations and service quality perceptions of the visitors.

Presentation of Analysis

The analysis highlights three dimensions—problems, prospects, and tourist satisfaction—at the Arupadai Veedu pilgrimage circuit. The most important topics include poor infrastructure, poor sanitation facilities, tourist harassment and crowd management challenges. Despite these issues, the circuit presents a strong economic and cultural outlook supported by government investment and digital initiatives. Tourist satisfaction is largely influenced by service quality, safety, and cleanliness,



alongside strong religious motivation. The findings suggest the need for sustainable strategies that balance spiritual authenticity with modern tourism development.

Rating the Attitude

The analysis of pilgrim attitudes toward the Arupadai Veedu pilgrimage circuit reveals mixed yet meaningful insights. Overall, respondents showed a very positive attitude towards the spiritual importance of the temple and showed strong religious motivations as the main reason for the visit. Pilgrims expressed satisfaction with the cultural authenticity and sacred atmosphere of the sites.

However, attitudes were less favorable when it came to infrastructure facilities, such as transport, parking, and accommodation, which were rated below expectation. Sanitation and cleanliness received moderate ratings, with many respondents suggesting the need for improvement. Safety and crowd management also emerged as concerns, especially during festivals and peak seasons.

Service quality, particularly in hospitality and food standards, was rated as average, though pilgrims acknowledged courteous temple staff at some locations. Despite these challenges, general attitudes are positive and resistant, and pilgrims point to a willingness to check for strong prayer connections.

Limitations of the Study

1. **Dependence on Secondary Data** – The study relies mainly on literature review and secondary sources, which may limit the availability of recent field-based insights and primary data from actual pilgrims.
2. **Scope Restricted to Arupadai Veedu Circuit** – The research focuses only on the six abodes of Lord Murugan, so the findings may not be generalizable to other pilgrimage or religious tourism destinations in Tamil Nadu or India.
3. **Dynamic Tourism Environment** – Pilgrimage tourism is influenced by seasonal factors, festivals, government policies, and technological changes. As such, the conclusions may require periodic updates to remain relevant.

Analysis and Findings

Table 1: Problems Identified at Arupadai Veedu Pilgrimage Sites

Key Issues	Observation	Impact on Tourists
Poor Infrastructure	Inadequate roads, parking, and accommodations	Discomfort and travel delays
Sanitation & Cleanliness	Lack of proper toilets, waste management issues	Dissatisfaction, health concerns
Tourist Harassment	Overcharging, persistent vendors, begging	Reduced spiritual ambiance
Crowd Management	Congestion during festivals and peak seasons	Safety hazards, stress for visitors

Interpretation

The analysis reveals that poor infrastructure and sanitation remain the most critical problems, directly affecting the comfort and health of pilgrims. Inadequate transport, parking, and accommodation facilities create difficulties during peak seasons. Tourist harassment, such as overpricing and aggressive vendors, disturbs the spiritual atmosphere and reduces visitor satisfaction.



Crowd management failures during festivals and special occasions often lead to congestion and safety risks, discouraging repeat visits. Environmental issues, including waste mismanagement and water scarcity, further threaten the ecological balance and sustainability of the sites. These challenges not only reduce the quality of the pilgrimage experience but also damage the reputation of the destinations.

Although pilgrims remain motivated by strong religious faith, their expectations of basic facilities, safety, and respect are not fully met. This gap between spiritual fulfillment and practical experience highlights the urgent need for infrastructure upgrades, stricter regulation, and sustainable tourism strategies.

Table 2: Prospects for Tourism Development

Prospects	Opportunities
Government Investment	₹10,000 crore planned for tourism infrastructure
Digital Integration	Mobile apps, e-darshan, online booking systems
Economic Potential	Boost to local handicrafts, food services, transport
Cultural Heritage Value	Promotion of Tamil traditions and Murugan devotion

Interpretation

The prospects highlight a strong potential for tourism-driven growth in the Arupadai Veedu circuit. Government investments can improve infrastructure and visitor facilities, while digital innovations such as e-darshan and mobile apps modernize the pilgrim experience. At the same time, the rich cultural and spiritual heritage ensures authenticity and continued devotion. If carefully managed, these opportunities can balance economic development with sustainability, preserving the sacred identity of the pilgrimage sites.

Table 3: Tourist Satisfaction Factors

Factor	Tourist Rating (General Trend)	Remarks
Spiritual Motivation	Very High	Primary reason for repeated visits
Service Quality	Moderate	Needs improvement in hospitality and food
Safety & Security	Average	Concerns during large gatherings
Cleanliness & Hygiene	Below Average	Poor waste disposal and sanitation facilities
Accessibility	Moderate	Limited transport and parking facilities

Interpretation

The analysis reveals that spiritual motivation remains the strongest positive factor driving pilgrim visits to the Arupadai Veedu circuit. Pilgrims value the religious significance and cultural authenticity



of the temples, which ensures continued devotion and repeat visits. However, dissatisfaction is evident in areas such as cleanliness, safety, and overall service quality, where expectations are not fully met. This mismatch between spiritual fulfilment and practical experience creates a noticeable gap in visitor satisfaction. Concerns regarding sanitation, crowd control, and basic amenities diminish the overall pilgrimage experience, especially for elderly and family pilgrims. Hospitality and food services were found to be average, suggesting the need for standardization.

To bridge this gap, targeted policies are required to improve infrastructure, service quality, and safety while safeguarding the spiritual sanctity of the sites. By balancing religious authenticity with modern tourism demands, the circuit can enhance both visitor satisfaction and sustainable growth.

Suggestions

To enhance the pilgrimage experience at the Arupadai Vedu temples, several measures can be implemented. First, infrastructure development should be prioritized by improving road connectivity, parking facilities, and accommodation options to handle the large inflow of pilgrims. Equally important is the need for sanitation and hygiene, which can be achieved through modern waste management systems, clean toilets, and safe drinking water facilities. Effective crowd management strategies, particularly during festivals, can be introduced through trained volunteers, digital queue management, and safety protocols to ensure the smooth flow of visitors. At the same time, vendor regulation is essential to prevent overcharging and harassment, thereby protecting the sanctity of the pilgrimage experience. Incorporating eco-friendly practices, such as water conservation, biodegradable offerings, and green zones, will also help preserve the ecological balance of these sacred sites. Further, standardization of service quality in hospitality, food, and accommodation is necessary to meet tourist expectations, while digital innovations like e-darshan services and mobile applications can modernize the overall experience. In addition, local community participation should be encouraged through cultural programs, handicrafts, and service initiatives that support the regional economy. Regular training for temple staff and service providers can enhance courtesy, professionalism, and efficiency in dealing with pilgrims. Finally, safety and health services, including first-aid centres, emergency medical units, and better security arrangements, should be strengthened to make the pilgrimage safe, sustainable, and spiritually fulfilling.

Conclusion

The Arupadai Vedu pilgrimage dedicated to Lord Murugan serves not only as a centre of spiritual devotion, but also as the important cultural and economic capital of Tamil Nadu. Although millions of devotees visit these shrines each year, the overall tourist experience continues to be hindered by persistent challenges. Deficiencies in infrastructure, lack of proper sanitation, tourist harassment, and ineffective crowd management remain major concerns. In addition, environmental issues such as poor waste disposal and water scarcity pose threats to the long-term sustainability of these sacred sites.

Despite these challenges, future development possibilities are substantial. Ongoing government initiatives, the adoption of digital technologies, and the promotion of cultural heritage create new avenues for growth. Pilgrim satisfaction is primarily shaped by service quality, safety, and accessibility, alongside their strong religious motivation. Addressing these concerns requires a comprehensive approach that respects modern infrastructure and sustainable practices and the sacred cultural values of the temple.

With careful planning, community engagement, and effective policy measures, the Arupadai Vedu circuit can become a model of sustainable pilgrimage tourism. Such an approach would preserve its



spiritual essence while simultaneously enhancing cultural heritage and contributing to the economic prosperity of Tamil Nadu.

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