
CORE SERVICE QUALITY IN TOURISM IN RAMNAD DISTRICT

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Abstract

Tourism is the act of travel for leisure purposes and also refers to the provision of services in support of this act. It is a composition of activities, services and industries that deliver a travel experience, transportation, accommodation, eating, drinking, establishment, shops, entertainment, activity facilities and other hospitality services available for individual or groups travelling away from home. It also encompasses travel for pleasure during holiday, health, business, trade, pilgrimage, social and educational purposes etc. Global experts have predicted that in the 21st century, the global economy will be driven by three major service industries viz., Technology, Telecommunication and Tourism. According to the experts, Tourism would capture the global market and become the largest industry in the world.

Keywords: *Tourism, World Trade Organization, employability, cultural bondages, GDP, Core Service Quality*

The development of tourism as an industry had to wait for long time until the early 20th century. Today, tourism has become a white collar, environment friendly industry and one of the largest and faster growing industries employing the largest number of labour force. According to the World Trade Organization (WTO) more than 700 million tourists travel internationally every year spending more than 300 billion US dollars, accounting for eight per cent of the total world exports, 30 per cent of international trade in services and more than one billion jobs. Tourism as an industry is a high priority one in

terms of employability, exchange earnings and eco-friendliness. Its potential is great considering the nature of human activities today and the transnational cultural bondages evolving world over.

Tourism is one of the rapidly growing industries in the present day world, influencing societal, governmental and academic circles, Emerging trend of tourism opens door for many, especially in the developing world. Tourism industry needing comparatively lesser import content can bear promise to the countries and regions of the world, which are otherwise economically backward to afford large scale investment in other capital-intensive industrial sectors. As a service industry, tourism has a flexible character, having capability of accommodating people skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled. Tourism is an ever expanding service industry with latent vast growth potential and has, therefore, become one of the crucial concerns of not only the nation but also of international community as a whole. In fact, it has come up as a decisive link in gearing up the pace of socio-economic development world over; there by it has come to weigh significantly in the growth strategies of the developed countries and also the developing ones. It is being perceived as an important instrument of economic

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development. Most of these countries have sought the answer in development through the tourist recreation industry by exploiting their historic-social-cultural and environmental resources.

Need for the Study

Tourism industry plays an important role in the development of Indian economy. It earns more income to the Government. Ramanathapuram district occupies a unique place among the tourist centers of India. There are several places of climate, natural scenery, social, cultural, historical and religious significance. Tourism in Ramanathapuram district has been contributing to the overall growth of district. Sri Ramanathaswamy Temple, Annai Indira Gandhi Road Bridge, Dhanuskodi, Ariyaman Beach, etc. are the main attractive places of Ramanathapuram district. Tourism brings in its wake a spurt of employment opportunity directly and indirectly to many people.

It connects social, cultural religious and economic factors. Hence there is a need to focus all these factors which are related to tourism industry in Ramanathapuram district. This study has made an attempt to assess service quality in the tourist spots at Ramanathapuram district.

Reviews

Punita Soni (2013), the paper highlights the operational issues, opportunities and challenges of service industry in India. This paper also takes into consideration the importance of quality of services in service industry. Interview session is conducted with consumers of various services to collect primary information. Journals and internet is used as secondary sources of information.

Sherap Bhutia (2014) stated that tourism stimulates improvements to local transportation, communication and other basic community infrastructure in West Bengal. The paper provides a theoretical framework for tourism development in West Bengal and their associated issues and concerns. The success of tourism depends on the ability of destination to engage in sustainable use and conservation of vital resources. West Bengal has improved its share in international tourism receipts during the course of past decade i.e. from about 3.36 per cent in 2000 to about 5.88 per cent in 2012 of foreign tourists visiting India.

Sibi and Anjaney Swamy (2015) "Tourism Industry has embraced many positive changes in the recent years. The conventional mass tourism centers have made way for new eco-friendly destination that helps sustainable tourism development. Tourism in the state of Kerala is going through such a phase as it focus shifts from the traditionally popular sites like Munnar, Thekkady, Alappay, Kovalam etc. to Wayand, Varkala, Nellyampahy, Bekkal, Wagamon etc." The results of the study bring to light the potential tourism market for Wayanad Tourism. The experts' views point out the present tourism scenario in Wayanad and the major challenges faced by Wayanad tourism, especially indigenous tourism.

Ranjani R. and Asothai T., (2016) studied factors motivate the tourist for tour and preferring Tamilnadu. They have found that significant attitudes of tourists, visited in different place of Tamilnadu. As per the tourist opinion is most of them are fully satisfied about tourism places in Tamilnadu. Based on the findings, appropriate suggestions have been made for increasing the tourists' satisfaction.

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Sanjay J., Bhayani and Sheetalba N. Rana, (2016) pointed out during the past decade, services have increasingly assume an important role in the Indian Economy. Hotels are major service industry which contribute maximum through tourism in terms of foreign exchange earnings and it also helpful for increasing GDP of India. For this increasing trends in GDP and foreign exchange earnings in India, the tourism also play vital role.

Objectives of the Study

1. To assess the socio-economic status of tourists and their tourism behaviour
2. To measure the level of service quality in the tourist spots at Ramnad district;

Research Design

This research study has adopted descriptive research design to examine the service quality in the tourists spot available in Ramanathapuram district.

Nature and Source of Data

This study is based on both primary and secondary data. Secondary data is drawn from the Bureau of Immigration and Ministry of Tourism, Commissioner of Tourism, Chennai. Primary data is collected from tourist visitors using a well-structured questionnaire.

Data Collection Instrument

A well structured interview schedule was used to collect the primary data from the tourists. The schedule consists of two parts. The first part of the schedule covers the profile of the tourists and the second part the core service quality in Ramnad District

Core Service Quality In Tourist Potential (Csq)- Variables Included

The core service quality in tourism is based on the service quality factors developed by Parasuraman et al., (1985);

Carman (1990) and Harrington and Akehurst (1996). The identified service qualities in the hospitality industry are reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles. The core service quality in tourists' potential in the present study has been measured with the help of 27 variables drawn from Tam (2000) and Williams and Buswell (2003). The variables in core service quality in tourism are presented in Table 1.

Table . 1 Variables in Core Service Quality in Tourists Potential (CSQ)

Sl.No.	Variables in CSQ	Sl.No.	Variables in CSQ
1.	Sincere interest in problem solving	15.	Service by appropriate personnel
2.	Pleasant, friendly personnel	16.	High quality food
3.	Easy contact	17.	Prompt response to tourists requests
4.	Meeting the tour schedule	18.	Availability of information documents and notes
5.	Modern vehicles and equipments	19.	Right at first time
6.	Fluent and understandable communication	20.	Cultivation of friendly relationship
7.	No sudden increase in tour cost	21.	Instill the tourists' confidence
8.	Easy location	22.	Insisting on error free services

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| 9. | Provision of adequate information | 23. | Physical appearance of tour escorts |
| 10. | Competent tour and hotel escorts | 24. | Provision of information on local entertainment |
| 11. | Appealing accommodation facilities | 25. | High quality lodges and hotels |
| 12. | Services delivered on time | 26. | Keeping promises |
| 13. | Advice on how to use free time | 27. | Willingness to help tourists |
| 14. | Understanding of specific needs | | |

The tourists are asked to rate the above said variables at five point scale according to their order of expectation and perception.

Pilot Study and Reliability of Variables in the Construct

A pilot study was conducted to validate the schedule and to confirm the feasibility of the study. The preliminary investigation is done on research instrument pertaining to tourist visitors. The schedule was administered among 20 visitors of ten tourist spots to understand the usability of the schedule as well as to identify improvement areas. Content Validity and reliability were checked. The Cronbach alpha value in respect of 27 variables included in this pilot study is 0.7356 which is greater than 0.6, the minimum threshold for content validity.

Sampling

The sampling technique used for this research study is judgement sampling method. In total, 10 tourist spots were identified with the help of the tourist officials in this district on the basis of the tourists' arrivals. The determined sample size of 180 is equally distributed to all ten tourist spots for the equal representation from all tourist spots.

Tools for Analysis

Apart from the Mean, Standard Deviation and Coefficient of variation, the statistical techniques used in this study for analyzing the data are as follows:

1. Independent T-test and
2. Factor Analysis

Descriptive Statistics

The dominant gender among the tourists is male whereas the dominant age group among the tourist is 30 to 40.00 and 40.01 to 50 years. The important residence of the tourist is Tamilnadu whereas the dominant level of education among the tourists is under graduation and school level education. The important occupation among the tourists is private and Government employment whereas the dominant marital status of the tourist is 'married'. The dominant monthly income among the tourist is Rs.10,000 to 20,000 and above Rs.30,000.

Core Service Quality in Tourism at Ramnad District

The levels of expectation, perception and the gap on the core service quality in tourism have been discussed below.

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Expectation on Core Service Quality in Tourists Potential in Ramnad among the Tourists

The level of expectation on core service quality in tourist potential has been measured by the mean score of the 27 variables in it among the tourists. The mean score of each variable among the tourists, its standard deviation and co-efficient of variation have been computed separately. The results are given in Table 2.

Table 2 Core Service Quality (CSQ) in Tourists Potential: Tourists' Expectation

Sl.No.	Variables in CSQ	Mean Score	Standard deviation	Co-efficient of variation (in %)
1.	Sincere interest in problem solving	3.0417	0.9325	30.66
2.	Pleasant, friendly personnel	3.1983	0.8208	25.66
3.	Easy contact	3.0226	0.8114	26.84
4.	Meeting the tour schedule	3.0137	0.8269	27.44
5.	Modern vehicles and equipments	3.0027	0.8394	27.95
6.	Fluent and understandable communication	3.2468	0.9089	27.99
7.	No sudden increase in tour cost	3.1297	0.9044	28.89
8.	Easy location	3.2789	0.8267	25.21
9.	Provision of adequate information	3.3884	0.8329	24.58
10.	Competent tour and hotel escorts	3.0291	0.8217	27.13
11.	Appealing accommodation facilities	3.2012	0.8164	25.50
12.	Services delivered on time	3.1667	0.8307	26.23
13.	Advice on how to use free time	3.2109	0.8204	25.55
14.	Understanding of specific needs	3.1367	0.8096	25.81
15.	Service by appropriate personnel	3.1243	0.8406	26.90
16.	High quality food	3.1091	0.9069	29.17
17.	Prompt response to tourists requests	3.2355	0.9028	27.90
18.	Availability of information documents and notes	3.2688	0.8094	24.76
19.	Right at first time	3.1344	0.8409	26.83
20.	Cultivation of friendly relationship	3.1452	0.8518	27.08
21.	Instill the tourists' confidence	3.1081	0.8304	26.72
22.	Insisting on error free services	3.1236	0.8079	25.86
23.	Physical appearance of tour escorts	3.2624	0.9108	27.92
24.	Provision of information on local entertainment	3.4391	0.9277	26.97
25.	High quality lodges and hotels	3.1689	0.9244	29.17
26.	Keeping promises	3.1045	0.9136	29.43
27.	Willingness to help tourists	3.2073	0.8648	26.46

*Significant at five per cent level.

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The highly expected variables in CSQ by the tourists are provision of information on local entertainment and provision of adequate information since their mean scores are 3.4391 and 3.3884 respectively. Among the tourists; the higher consistency in the expectation are seen in the case of provision of adequate information and availability of information documents and notes since its co-efficient of variation are 24.58 and 24.76 per cent respectively.

Important Core Service Quality Factors

The score of 27 variables in core service quality of tourism have been included for Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) in order to narrate the variables into factors. Initially, the validity of data for EFA is confirmed using the KMO measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Both these tests satisfy the data for EFA since the KMO measure of sampling adequacy is greater than 0.6 and the chi-square value is significant at five per cent level. The included EFA results in five core service quality factors. The Eigen values and per cent of variation explained by the CSQ factor is summarized in Table 3

Table 3 Core Service Quality Factors (CSQFs) in Tourism

Sl.No.	CSQFs	Number of variables in	Eigen value	Per cent of variation explained	Cumulative per cent of variation explained
1.	Reliability	8	5.2991	19.62	19.62
2.	Responsiveness	6	4.8682	18.03	37.65
3.	Tangibles	6	4.7969	17.77	55.42
4.	Assurance	4	3.2804	12.14	67.56
5.	Empathy	3	2.9561	10.94	78.50
KMO measure of sampling adequacy: 0.7502			Bartlett's test of sphericity: chi-square value: 76.83		

*Significant at five per cent level.

The important core service quality factors identified by the EFA are reliability and responsiveness since their Eigen values are 5.2991 and 4.8682 respectively. The per cent of variation explained by these two factors are 19.62 and 18.03 per cent respectively. The next two core service quality factors noticed by EFA are tangibles and assurance since their Eigen values are 4.7969 and 3.2804 respectively. The per cent of variation explained by these two factors are 17.77 and 12.14 per cent respectively. The last factor narrated by EFA is empathy since its Eigen value and the per cent of variation explained are 2.9561 and 10.94 per cent respectively. The narrated five core service quality factors explain the variables in core service quality to an extent of 78.50 per cent.

The variables included in reliability are services delivered on time, investing on error free services, easy contact, right at first time, easy location, no sudden increase in tourist cost, keeping promises and meeting the tour schedule whereas in the case of responsiveness, these variables are prompt response to requests, provision of adequate information, willingness to help tourists, advice on how to use free time, sincere interests in problem solving and provision of information on local entertainment. The tangible factor consists of appealing accommodation

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facilities, availability of information documents and notes, high quality food, modern vehicles and equipments, physical appearance of tour escorts and high quality lodges and hotels whereas the assurance includes competent tour and travel escorts, increase the tour confidence, fluent and understandable communication and service by appropriate personnel. The empathy factor includes the understanding of specific needs, cultivation of friendly relationship and pleasant, friendly personnel.

Expectation on CSQ Factors in Tourist Potential among the Tourists

The level of expectation in CSQFs in tourists' potential among the tourists has been measured by the mean scores of variables in each CSQF. The mean scores of each CSQF in tourists' potential among the tourists, its standard deviation and coefficient of variation have been computed and presented in the table 4

Table 4 Level of Expectation on CSQFs in Tourist Potential

Sl.No.	Variables in CSQ	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Co-efficient of variation (in %)
1.	Reliability	3.1925	0.8069	25.27
2.	Responsiveness	3.2688	0.9361	28.64
3.	Tangibles	3.1639	0.8281	26.17
4.	Assurance	3.1798	0.8014	25.20
5.	Empathy	3.1649	0.8907	28.33

The Table 5.4 shows the mean scores of expectation on each CSQFs among the tourists and its standard deviation and co-efficient of variations. The highly expected CSQFs by the tourists are responsiveness and reliability since their mean scores are 3.2688 and 3.1925 respectively. The lesser expected variables in CSQFs are tangibles and empathy since its mean scores is 3.1639 and 3.1649 respectively. The higher consistency in the level of expectation is seen in the case of assurance since it's co-efficient of variation is 25.20 per cent.

Level of Perception on CSQFs in Tourists Potential among the Tourists

The level of perception on CSQFs in tourists' potential among the tourists has been derived by the mean score of the variables in each CSQF. The mean score of each CSQFs among the tourists, its standard deviation and co-efficient of variation have been computed separately. The results are given in Table 5

Table 5 Level of Perception on CSQFs in Tourist Potential

Sl.No.	Variables in CSQ	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Co-efficient of Variation (in %)
1.	Reliability	2.7208	0.5286	19.43
2.	Responsiveness	2.7134	0.8135	29.98
3.	Tangibles	2.8697	0.7023	24.47
4.	Assurance	2.5142	0.6126	27.37
5.	Empathy	2.5889	0.7378	28.49

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The highly perceived CSQFs in tourist potential among the tourists are tangibles and reliability since their mean scores are 2.8697 and 2.7208 respectively. Among the tourists, the lesser perceived factors are assurance and empathy with a mean score of 2.5142 and 2.5889 respectively. The higher consistency in the perception CSQFs have been noticed in the case of reliability since its co-efficient of variation in 19.43 per cent.

Gap between the Perception and Expectation on CSQFs in Tourist Potential at Ramnad

The gap between the level of perception and expectation on various core service quality factors in tourist potential at Ramnad has been found out to exhibit the level of deviation from these two. The negative score indicates that the level of perception on CSQFs is not up to the level of expectation on CSQFs. The mean score of the gap in each CSQFs, its standard deviation and coefficient of variation have been computed separately. The results are given in Table 6

Table 6 Level of Gap between Perception and Expectation on CSQFs in Tourist Potential

Sl.No.	Variables in CSQFs	Mean Score	Standard Deviation	Co-efficient of variation (in %)
1.	Reliability	-0.4717	0.1782	37.78
2.	Responsiveness	-0.5554	0.1683	30.30
3.	Tangibles	-0.2942	0.1011	34.26
4.	Assurance	-0.6656	0.1482	22.26
5.	Empathy	-0.5760	0.0673	11.68

*Significant at five per cent level.

The negative score is identified in the case of all CSQFs among the tourists. It reveals that the level of perception on CSQFs is not up to the level of expectation among the tourists. The higher negative gap is noticed in the case of assurance and empathy since their respective mean scores are -0.6656 and -0.5760. The higher consistency in the gap is seen in empathy since its co-efficient of variation is 11.68 per cent.

Concluding Remarks

There is a high scope for promoting tourism in the district since the tourism potential availability in this district is higher. However the level of satisfaction on this availability among the tourist is lesser. It is because of the negative servqual regarding the core factors. The levels of perception on service qualities are lesser than the level of expectation on it. All these problems and service qualities affect the tourists' potential in future. Hence, the tourism department should take care of these aspects in order to promote the tourism in Ramnad district.

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