

# A Study on Potential and Prospects of Pilgrimage Tourism in Puducherry

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## Abstract

Pilgrimage tourism is an ancient form of tourism, which involves a journey to a sacred, holy, divine, religious or pilgrimage places or destinations for seeking of blessings, fulfilment of religious vows or personal faith, belief and affinity with a deity or divine. Furthermore, pilgrimage destinations play a crucial role for rejuvenation of mind, body and spirit of the tourist. Thereby, enhances the peace, tranquillity, health and wellbeing of the pilgrimage tourist. This paper aims to study the potential and prospects of pilgrimage tourism in Puducherry, due to existence of a variety of pilgrimage tourist destinations with rich culture, heritage and spiritual significance. Further, pilgrimage tourism plays a significant role in economic growth, inclusive growth and sustainable development in Puducherry, which ultimately benefits the local community peoples and various stakeholders in Puducherry.

**Keyword:** Pilgrimage Tourism, Spiritual Tourism, Economic growth, Inclusive growth, Sustainable Development

## Introduction

India is one of the world oldest civilization and still having civilizational continuity and connectivity in terms of Arts, Architectures, literatures, philosophies, Astronomy, Astrology, Medicine, Yoga, Meditation, various religious and spiritual practices / traditions. Since time immemorial, India has been a famous pilgrimage destination, due to its vibrant and diverse religious, cultural, heritage and spiritual significance. The religions such as Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism and Sikhism are originated from India and flourished in worldwide. Moreover, diverse religious and spiritual practises are considered as pull factor for attracting large of tourist to India from different religious and sects. Furthermore, peoples of different religious beliefs and faiths are harmoniously living in India for many centuries such as Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Zoroastrianism, etc., As a result of diverse religious practices, various pilgrimages, sacred and spiritual places / destinations are available in the length and breadth of India.

The Union Territory of Puducherry is one of the famous tourist destinations in South India for its spiritual significance, cultural heritage, French architecture and serene beaches. The destinations in Puducherry are having potential for spiritual / pilgrimage tourism and also offer business opportunities to the various stakeholders and immense possibility for boosting local economy.

## Pilgrimage Tourism:

Pilgrimage tourism is an ancient form of tourism, which involves a journey to a sacred, holy, divine, religious or pilgrimage places or destinations for seeking of blessings, fulfillment of religious vows or

personal faith, belief and affinity with a deity or divine towards attainment of spiritual growth, moksha, mukti, devotion, penance, self-realization, inner transformation, quest for truth, life and existence. Furthermore, pilgrimage destinations play a crucial role for rejuvenations of mind, body and spirit of the tourist. Thereby, enhances the peace, tranquillity, health and wellbeing of the pilgrimage tourist. And, some intense spiritual seekers or sanyasis, yogis or saints travel to certain specific pilgrimage destinations or shrines or temples for elevation of the human consciousness into higher dimensions, experiencing of metaphysical and transcendental state, realisation of true self, ultimate reality and attainment of spiritual enlightenment.

### **Objective of the Study**

1. To study the potential and prospectus of pilgrimage tourism in Puducherry
2. To analyse the employment opportunities through pilgrimage tourism.
3. To examine the infrastructure facilities available for the pilgrimage tourists.
4. To study satisfactory level of pilgrimage tourists visiting Puducherry.
5. To study the merits and demerits of pilgrimage tourism in Puducherry.

### **Scope of the Study**

The main focus of the study is to find out the potential and prospectus of pilgrimage tourism in Puducherry and also explore the infrastructure, amenities and other facilities available for the tourist at the destination.

### **Methodology**

Both primary and secondary data were used for this study. Primary data is the data collected through questionnaires and interview method. Secondary data refers to the information or facts from sources such as websites, magazines, journals, books, etc.,

### **Literature Review**

Pilgrimage tourism is one of the largest and dynamically developing sectors of external economic activities. Its high growth and development rates, considerable volumes of foreign currency inflows, infrastructure development, and introduction of new management and educational experience actively affect various sectors of economy, which positively contribute to the social and economic development of the country as a whole (Vijay anand, 2013). The interest in pilgrimage tourism has affected a number of industries around the world (Elsner, 1992). Tourism development causes increased use of infrastructure like, road lines, railway stations, accommodation facilities, drainage and sanitation facilities etc. need to be enhanced immediately for faster tourism development (Ravi Bhushan Kumar, 2014). In tourism marketing, almost all authors agree that pilgrimage tourists play the most significant role; hence, marketers always try to learn the attitude and behavior of pilgrimage tourists to effectively design and offer their tourism packages (Josan, 2009). Puducherry is considered as one of the Religious, Peaceful and booming weekend destinations and has the immense potential to strengthen the local economy besides opening employment opportunities. Puducherry has a distinct spiritual vibration that cannot be felt anywhere else in India. The blend of spiritual aura, Colonial heritage, Tamil Culture and the cosmopolitan flair of many nationalities is an additional advantage to this spiritual land (K. Selvam, 2019).

**Pilgrimage Tourism in Puducherry**

Puducherry has an immense potential to develop as a pilgrimage tourism destination. The spiritual traditions of this spiritual land attract huge number of spiritual / pilgrimage tourist from domestic and foreign countries. Puducherry is blessed with variety of spiritual / pilgrimage destinations such as temples, churches, mosques and spiritual centres such as Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville and Jeeva Samadhis of siddhars / saints in Puducherry, which considered as pull factor for attracting large number of pilgrimage / spiritual tourist to the various destinations of Puducherry. The famous pilgrimage tourism destinations in Puducherry are stated in Table 1.

**Table 1: Famous Pilgrimage Tourism Destinations in Puducherry**

Sl.No.	Famous Pilgrimage Tourism Destinations in Puducherry
1	Manakula Vinayagar Temple
2	Sri Dharbaranyeswara swamy Devasthanam Sri Saneeswarabhadgavan Sthalam, Karaikal
3	Vedhapureeswarar Temple
4	Sri Kokilambal Thirukameswarar Temple, Villianur
5	Kasiviswanthar Temple, Thirukanchi
6	Gangai Varaga Natheeswarar Temple, Thirukanchi
7	Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus
8	Nostre Dame De
9	Church of Our Lady of Lourders, Villianur
10	Church of Our Lady of Good Wealth, Ariyankuppam
11	Jamia Mosque
12	Meeran Mosque
13	Muhammadia Mosque
14	Sri Digambar Jain Temple

Further, the festivals such as Masimagam festival at Puducherry beach and Masimagam festival at Sankaraparani River near Thirukanchi Kasi Viswanathar temple and Gangai Varahanatheeswarar temple witnessed huge gathering of pilgrims / devotees and also assemblage of various temples deities or idol for holy dip in the respective river and ocean water for ceremonial bath. This is considered one of grandest religious festival in Puducherry. In addition, the Villianur Car festival, Veerampatinam Car festival and Villianur Madha Grand Car precession are also an important festival in Puducherry and witnessed huge congregation of pilgrims / devotees from various places. These festivals and fairs play a significant role towards promotion and development of pilgrimage tourism in Puducherry.

Besides, Government of Puducherry has taken various initiatives / projects pertaining to the development of spiritual / pilgrimage tourism in Puducherry. The details of the ongoing projects are stated in Table 2. These projects were initiated towards development of various destinations in Puducherry and unlocking the potentials of spiritual / pilgrimage tourism in Puducherry. Thereby, enhances the employment and business opportunities to the various stakeholders in Puducherry and dev-

elopment of local economy.

**Table 2: Projects pertaining to the development of Spiritual / Pilgrimage Tourism in Puducherry**

Sl.No.	Ongoing Project
1	Development of Kokilambal Thirukameswarar Temple, Puducherry
2	Development of Gangai Varaga Natheeswarar Temple, Puducherry
3	Development of Spiritual Park at Thiurnallar, Karaikal District, Puducherry
4	Development of Scared Pond at Thirunallar, Karaikal District, Puducherry
5	Development of Badra Kali Amman Temple, Karaikal District, Puducherry
6	Development of Sri Jadepureswarar Temple, Karaikal District, Puducherry
7	Development of Church at Puducherry

*Source: Website of Tourism Department, Government of Puducherry*

Government of India has taken various initiatives for the development of spiritual / pilgrimage tourism in India by introducing various flagship programs / schemes such as PRASAD Scheme (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive) focuses on developing and intensifying pilgrimage sites across india and Swadesh Darshan Scheme to develop a sustainable and responsible tourism destinations.

**Table 3: Government of India’s Schemes / Projects pertaining to spiritual / pilgrimage tourism in Puducherry**

Sl.No.	Schemes	Projects	Remarks
1	Swadesh Darshan	Development of spiritual circuit in Puducherry	Spiritual Circuit 2017-18
2	Swadesh Darshan 2.0	Puducherry and Karaikal	Out of 57 destinations selected from all over India, 2 destinations from Puducherry.
3	PRASAD Scheme (Pilgrimage Rejuvenation and Spiritual Augmentation Drive)	Sri Dharbaranyeswara Temple, Karaikal	Out of 29 new identified site under PRASAD Scheme from all over India, 1 destination from Puducherry.

*Source: Annual Report 2023-24, Ministry of Tourism, Government of India*

**Data Analysis and Interpretation**  
**Profile of Pilgrimage Tourist**

**Table 4: Profile of the Pilgrimage Tourist**

Variables		Percentage
Gender	Male	72.5
	Female	27.5
Age	Less than 20	8.8
	20-40	52.5
	More than 40	38.8
Nationality	Indian	87.4
	Foreign	12.6
Occupation	Government	21.2
	Private	31.2
	Student	17.5
	Business	18.8
	Others	11.2
Qualification	10 <sup>th</sup>	2.5
	12 <sup>th</sup>	11.2
	UG	46.2
	PG	35.0
	Doctorate	5.0
Income	Below 25000	19.2
	25000 - 50000	30.9
	50000 - 75000	22.3
	75000 - 100000	15.5
	Above 100000	12.1

*Source: Questionnaire*

It is inferred from this study, the proportion of the Male and Female respondents are in the ratio of 3:1. Male respondents dominated the female respondents in this study of pilgrimage tourism in Puducherry. A significant amount of middle age and old age peoples visited spiritual / pilgrimage destination in Puducherry. This study shows that 52.5% of the respondents belong to the age category of 20-40 and 38.8% of the respondents belong to the age category of more than 40. 87.4% of the respondents were domestic tourist and remaining was foreign tourist. 31.2% of respondent’s occupation in private sector and 21.2% respondent’s occupation in Government. 46.2% respondent’s qualification is UG and 35% of the respondent’s qualification is PG. The income level of the tourist in this study reveals that the tourists with regular income are interested to visit pilgrimage tourist destination in weekend and their spending / expenses in the destination is directly or indirectly contributing to the local community and local economy.

**Tripographic Profile of Pilgrimage Tourist**

**Table 5: Tripographic Profile of Pilgrimage Tourist**

		Percentage
Duration of Stay	1 day	26.2
	2 – 4 days	36.2
	Less than 1 week	20.8
	More than 1 week	16.8
Your accompanied with	Alone	6.2
	Family	48.8
	Partner	15.0
	Friends	30.0
Purpose of Visit	Holiday	35.0
	Causal	27.5
	Pilgrimage / Spiritual	21.2
	Others	16.2
Frequency of Visit	One	37.5
	Two	20.0
	Three	7.5
	Four	7.5
	More than Four	27.5

*Source: Questionnaire*

Majority of the tourist’s duration of stay in Puducherry is 1 day or 2-4 days. 36.2% of the respondents duration of stay in pilgrimage destination in Puducherry is 2-4 days and 26.2% of the respondents duration of stay in pilgrimage destination in Puducherry is 1 days. This study reveals that majority of the tourists are accompanied with their family, friends and partner. The respondents accompanied with their family members (48.8%), friends (30%), partner (15%) and alone (6.2%). The purposes of visit of the respondents are Holiday (35%), Causal (27.5%), pilgrimage / spiritual (21.2%) and others (16.2%). 21.2% of the respondent’s purpose of visit is pilgrimage / Spiritual. However, the holiday (35%) and casual (27.5%) visitors are also interested to visit spiritual / pilgrimage destinations, which shows the potential and prospectus of pilgrimage and spiritual tourism in Puducherry. Further, it is pertinent to mention that only 37.5% of the respondents are first time visitor and remaining respondents are repeated visitors. Most interestingly, the pilgrimage / spiritual destinations in Puducherry attract large number of repeated visitors especially the destinations like Aurobindo Ashram, Auroville, temples and churches in Puducherry.

**Table 6: Safe and secure destination**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid D	3	3.8	3.8	3.8
N	19	23.8	23.8	27.5
A	36	45.0	45.0	72.5
SA	22	27.5	27.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

*Source: Questionnaire*

45% of the respondents are agreed and 28% of the respondents are strongly agreed that Puducherry is a safe and secure destination.

**Table 7: Local people are friendly**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid SD	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
D	5	6.2	6.2	8.8
N	27	33.8	33.8	42.5
A	30	37.5	37.5	80.0
SA	16	20.0	20.0	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

*Source: Questionnaire*

37.5% of the respondents are agreed and 20% of the respondents are strongly agreed that local community people are friendly with tourist.

**Table 8: Employment opportunities for local community people**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid yes	55	68.8	68.8	68.8
no	25	31.2	31.2	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

*Source: Questionnaire*

68.8% of the respondents are agreed that pilgrimage tourism provides employment opportunities for local community people in Puducherry

**Table 9: Traffic is a main problem**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid SD	3	3.8	3.8	3.8
D	5	6.2	6.2	10.0
N	13	16.2	16.2	26.2
A	35	43.8	43.8	70.0
SA	24	30.0	30.0	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

*Source: Questionnaire*

43.8% of the respondents are agreed and 30% of the respondents are strongly agreed that traffic is a main problem.

**Table 10: whether Puducherry as pilgrimage destination**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid SD	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
D	9	11.2	11.2	13.8
N	21	26.2	26.2	40.0
A	28	35.0	35.0	75.0
SA	20	25.0	25.0	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

*Source: Questionnaire*

35% of the respondents are agreed and 25% of the respondents are strongly agreed that Puducherry is pilgrimage destination

**Table 11: Would you like to visit again**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid SD	1	1.2	1.2	1.2
N	19	23.8	23.8	25.0



A	31	38.8	38.8	63.8
SA	29	36.2	36.2	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Source: Questionnaire

38.8% of the respondents are agreed and 36.2% of the respondents are strongly agreed to visit again to the pilgrimage destinations in Puducherry.

**Table 12: Are you satisfied with the destination**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid 1	74	92.5	92.5	92.5
2	6	7.5	7.5	100.0
Total	80	100.0	100.0	

Source: Questionnaire

92.5% of the respondents are satisfied with the pilgrimage destinations in Puducherry. From this study, it is ascertained that the majority of the tourists are satisfied and willing to visit again, which shows the positive impact of the pilgrimage tourism and spiritual tourism in Puducherry.

### Findings

- Most of the pilgrimage tourists visiting puducherry are between the age group of 20-40 comprising 52% and the age group above 40 comprising 40%.
- The tourist average duration of stay in puducherry is mostly 2-4 days.
- Foreigners usually are attracted by French architecture and cultural connectivity in White Town and the spiritual significance of Aurobindo Ashram and Auroville.
- Most of the pilgrimage tourists are accompanied by their family members and friends.
- Parking facility is a major problem near to the pilgrimage centers during weekend days.
- The majority of the tourist’s preferred mode of transportation is a car and they are not willing to travel on public transport, due to overcrowding.
- In some pilgrimage tourism destinations, the tourism ambience is distributed by beggars, vendors and auto drivers.
- Most of the pilgrimage tourists stated that basic amenities and infrastructure facilities are available at the destination.
- Cleanliness and hygiene conditions near the pilgrimage centre are moderate.
- Pollution is a major problem in the heart of the city, due to the increased number of vehicles and also affects tourist travel within the city.
- Puducherry is having a potential to promote as pilgrimage tourism destination, due to the availability of various spiritual significant places.

- Toilets and other basic amenities are not sufficiently available at bus stand. Hence, the Government Authorities shall address the issues connected therewith and also the issues of poor sanitation facility within the vicinity of Puducherry Bus Stand.
- Most of the tourists acknowledged that local peoples are friendly with the tourist.
- Most of the tourists accepted Puducherry as pilgrimage tourism destination.
- The majority of the tourists are interested in visiting again to the pilgrimage tourism destinations in Puducherry.

### Suggestions

- The finding of the study has suggested for the implementation of the proper cloakroom facilities for the tourist at the destination.
- It is strongly suggested for the improvement of sanitation facilities, proper waste management system and purified drinking water facilities in the bus stand.
- It is suggested to the Government the cleanliness and hygiene condition of the public transport systems needs to be improved.
- The government of Puducherry is to find out new opportunity to create the positive experience to the tourist. And, minimize the barriers and challenges of the pilgrimage tourist.
- Special attention needs to be taken care of the improvement of parking facilities and maintenance of vehicle traffic at the destinations.
- PTDC, Tourists, local shopkeepers plays an equal role in the tourism of Puducherry, so they should be equally involved and understand their responsibility towards the preservation of Puducherry environment.
- The local shopkeepers, vendors and auto drivers should be educated on how to behave with the tourists.
- Needs to develop tourist facilities like eco-friendly accommodations and promotion of eco-friendly practices and sustainable development activities.
- The local community people can be employed and encouraged to be involved in the tourism business and its related activities.
- The Government needs to give special attention to maintain the cleanliness and hygiene condition of the tourist destinations, due to large influx of tourists during weekends.
- Need to preserve the French architectural buildings in white town area of Puducherry, these are distinctive tourist attractions in Puducherry.
- Puducherry has the potential to promote as a pilgrimage tourism destination. If sufficient attention is being drawn to the improvements of positive impacts such as sustainable development practices, employment generation, economic growth, inclusive growth, entrepreneurship and business opportunities etc. and also mitigates the negative impacts such as littering, pollutions, and environmentally harmful practices.
- Proper waste management system, better sanitation facility, maintenance of cleanliness and hygiene conditions of the pilgrimage destination will create a good environment, conducive atmosphere and attracts large number tourist to the destination.
- Puducherry Tourism Development Corporation can encourage young entrepreneurs to promote Puducherry as a pilgrimage tourism destination, due to its extreme potential in this area.

- Hop-on-Hop-off buses services offered by the Government provide easy connectivity to the tourist destinations in Puducherry, which is helpful for the budget traveller. However, wide publicity is needed for attracting large number of tourists.

### Conclusion

The tourism industry gives employment opportunities to the professional, skilled, semi-skilled persons and sometimes unskilled persons also benefited. Further, tourism gives an impetus to the economic growth and development of various service sectors such as accommodations, transportations, banking, insurance, foods and beverages, entertainments etc. Therefore, the local community peoples are explicitly and implicitly benefited out of tourism and its allied activities in the tourism destinations. Further, it is inferred from this study, Puducherry is having an immense potential on pilgrimage tourism, due to availability of various spiritual and pilgrimage tourist destinations. Further, the promotion of pilgrimage tourist destinations in Puducherry will attract large number of tourist inflow. Thereby, increases an employment and business opportunities to the various stakeholders. And, also fosters an economic growth, inclusive growth and sustainable development in Puducherry.

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