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## A perspective on pilgrimage tourism in Thanjavur district

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### Abstract

In the rapidly changing global economic scenario, tourism is considered to be one of the largest and fast growing industries. Thanjavur is the headquarters of Thanjavur district of Tamil Nadu state. There are numerous ancient temples in the district and also the famous Mahamaham Tank in Kumbakonam. Tourism provides very useful and fruitful avenues especially to those people who are engaged in tourism activities because through this smokeless industry, they are not only enhancing their standard of living but also generating income and employment opportunities. In the contemporary era of globalization and industrialization, the whole world has shrunk into a global village. Tourism has played a very decisive role to transform the world into a globalized economy where all nations can exchange free trade and culture and share their interest of mutual benefits based on tourism industry. India is one of the major destinations of the foreign tourists particularly as it is a country that has a rich cultural heritage. Tourists visit Thanjavur for its scenic beauty, navagraha temples and ecological resources. The major centers of tourist attractions in the district are Kumbeshwara Temple, Mahamaham sacred tank, the temple of Lord Sarangapani, Darasuram Temple, Thiuvanchuzhi, Swamimalai Patteswaram and Uppiliappan koil. This research paper deals with Pilgrimage Tourism and importance of tourism in Thanjavur District.

**Keywords:** Tourism, Foreign and domestic pilgrims, Thanjavur and Kumbakonam.

### Introduction

Tourism is a complex industry that involves a broad range of business organizations and government agencies working together at different levels to deliver a complete tourism experience. Each party in the chain contributes to the overall holiday experience of the customer from initial destination marketing to the ground level experience. Tourism is a collection of activities, services and industries that deliver a travel experience, including transportation, accommodation, eating and drinking establishments, retail shops, entertainment business, activity facilities and other hospitality services provided for individuals or groups travelling away from home. The World Tourism Organization defines tourists as people "traveling to and staying in places outside their usual environment for not more than one consecutive year for leisure, business and other purposes".

### Review of Literature

2015, Dr. R. Kavitha and A. Sugapriya in their study "Pilgrimage Tourism in Tamil Nadu an Overview" find that India is blessed with plenty of well-known religious destinations that brings enormous economic gain to local residents.

2012, the study conducted by Selvi, G. Kalai, and S. Jesi Isabella, with the title "Analysis of the Seasonality of Tourism Market in Thanjavur District" proved the importance of tourism for economic prosperity and employment opportunity. The number of tourist arrivals to a destination has direct relationship on its local economy and employment.

2010, Chauhan, G in his study titled "Analyzing tourism potential of Tamil Nadu state of India: a people-tourist's perception approach" highlighted that India is one of the major destinations of the foreign tourists particularly the state of Tamil Nadu which has a rich cultural heritage among the Indian states.

2006, a study conducted by Dallen. J. Timothy and Daniel H. Olsen, titled "Tourism, Religion and Spiritual Journeys London and New York: Rout ledge" Pilgrimage tourism seems to be a newer academic concept but it is certainly not a new phenomenon.

1999, Rathod in his study titled "Tourism, Religion and Spirituality" found that facilities

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such as accommodation, transportation, darshan, food and drinking water, shopping and so on are essential at the pilgrimage sites and the behaviour of the local people with the pilgrims is also important.

1992, John Elsner observed in his study titled “A Greek Pilgrim in the Roman” that pilgrimage tourism in general has recently become an important subject of research in social and business areas.

**Objectives**

- ❖ To know the importance of tourism
- ❖ To identify pilgrimage tourist places in Thanjavur District.
- ❖ To view the quantum of tourists visiting India and Tamil Nadu.

**Scope of the Study**

The present study has brought out the importance of tourism and the identification of various popular Pilgrim tourist spots in Thanjavur District along with some statistical information regarding the tourists’ arrivals in India and the study area.

**Data Collection**

This article is prepared by the researchers mainly based on secondary data. The secondary data has been collected from official websites tourism development corporations and government of India, magazines and various research articles published by co-researchers.

**Importance of Tourism**

“We must welcome friendly visitors from abroad not only for economic reasons, but even more because this leads to greater understanding and mutual appreciation.”

**Jawaharlal Nehru**

The importance of tourism and its implications on economy for any country can be inferred from the following points

- ❖ Transfer of resources from the “generating economics” to the “receiving economies
- ❖ Income distribution among the people either within the country or in different countries.
- ❖ A “multiplier effect” can be generated by improving the tourism in an area, so that entire community in that place gets benefitted.
- ❖ Tourism can improve the ecological conservation as the national heritage is preserved and exhibited to the people in its original charm.

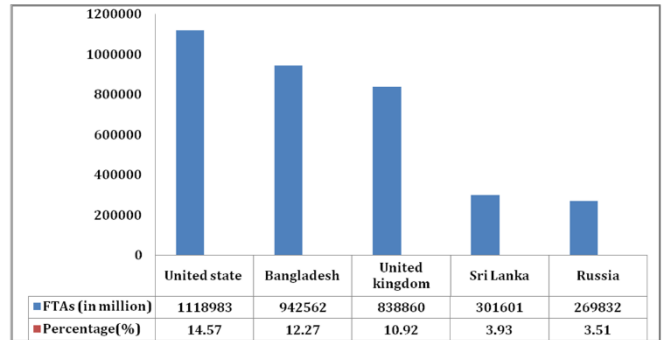
**Table 1:** Important Facts about Tourism in India

No. of foreign tourist arrivals in India	7.68 Million
Annual growth rate	10.2%
No. of Indian nationals departures from India	18.33%
Annual Growth Rate	10.3%
No. of domestic tourist visits to all states/ UTs	1282 Million
Annual growth rate	11.9%
<b>Foreign exchange earnings from tourism</b>	
i) In INR terms	Rs. 1,23,320 Crores
Annual growth rate	14.5%
ii) In US \$ terms	US \$ 20.24 Billion
Annual growth rate	9.7%

Source: Tourism Statistics handbook 2014.

The above table shows the number of foreign tourist arrivals in India in 2014 (7.68 Million), annual growth rate (10.2%), domestic tourist visit to all states (1282 Million) and annual

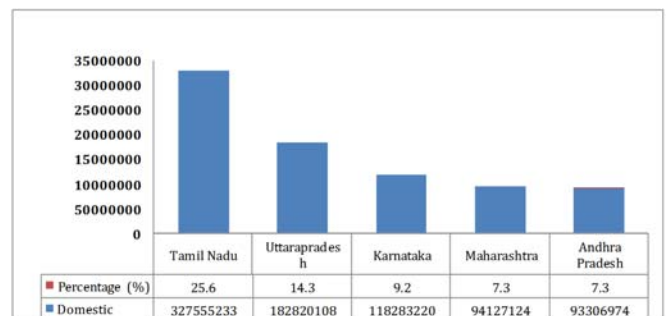
growth rate (11.9%). The foreign exchange earnings from tourism were US \$ 10.73 Billion in 2007 and in 2014 it rose to US \$ 20.24 Billion which was tremendous growth of 9.51 billion from tourism. The main reason for this was Ministry of Tourism of Government of India launched various campaigns such as ‘incredible India’ to raise the number of tourists coming to India. Moreover, the Ministry of Tourism started to give a lot of good facilities to the tourists especially after the year 2007.



Source: Bureau of Immigration, Govt. of India.

**Chart 1:** Foreign Tourist Arrivals in India In 2014

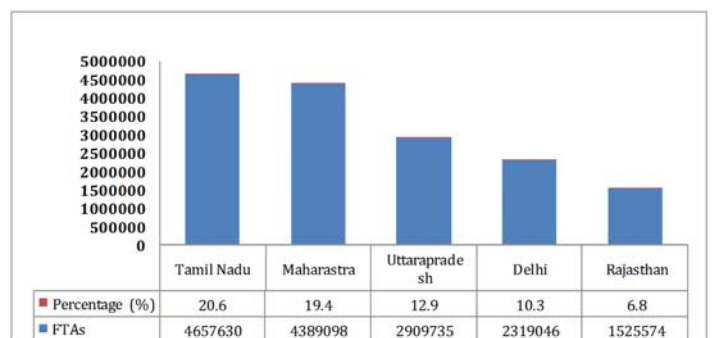
From the graph it clear that the highest number of tourists arrivals are from the United States, followed by Bangladesh, United Kingdom, Sri Lanka and Russia.



Source: State / UT Tourism Department.

**Chart 2:** Top Five Tourism Destinations for Foreign Tourists in India In 2014

The above chart clearly indicates that in the year 2014, Tamil Nadu ranks first as the most preferred tourism spot for the foreign tourists, followed by Utrara Pradesh, Karnataka, Maharashtra and Andra Pradesh.



Source: State / UT Tourism Department.

**Chart 3:** Top Five Tourism Destinations for Domestic Tourists in India In 2014

The above chart highlights that the top tourism destinations for domestic tourists is Tamil Nadu, followed by Maharashtra, Uttara Pradesh, Delhi and Rajasthan.

### Pilgrimage Sightseeing in Tamilnadu

Tamil Nadu has made an exciting score in the area of pilgrimage tourism. It is blessed by abundance of well recognized religious destinations and sites. Pilgrimage tourist invasion to these destinations brings massive financial gains to local people. The number of Pilgrimage tourists visiting the pilgrimage centers is approximately equivalent to the people of Tamil Nadu. Tamil Nadu has lot of potentialities with regard to unique sites and signs of spiritual significance. Some of the premier pilgrim destinations in Tamil Nadu are Kancheepuram, Karaikal, Mahabalipuram, Vellankani, Pondicherry, Chidambaram, Tanjore, Tiruvannamalai, Madurai, Rameshwaram, Karaikal, and Trichy. The most visited temples are Meenakshi temple, Brihadeeswara temple, Ramanatha Swamy temple, Palani Andavar temple, Paratha Sarathi temple, Swami Malai, kapaleeswarar temple, Chayavaneashwara temple, Kumbeswara temple, Mailapur temple, Annamalai temple and Manakulavinayagar temple. The number of renowned temples in Tamil Nadu is overwhelming. They are visited by tourists throughout the year. The Government of Tamil Nadu has taken sufficient measures to encourage tourists to visit places of devotion. There have been some individual efforts done by few tour companies in promoting some pilgrimage festivals. The packages are planned throughout the best seasons to practice Tamil traditions and religious rituals. Necessity to improve is felt with respect to infrastructural excellence to lodge the ever growing amount of devotees. The Department of

Tourism runs numerous buses to the variety of blessed sites. Tamil Nadu over, the years, has evolved as a model place for pilgrimage tourism. The pilgrimage tourists to Tamil Nadu are pleased to see the architectural marvels, to identify the olden times and the traditions, the festivals, the civilization, the rituals, and the melody which gives Tamil Nadu a spiritual attraction and an edge over many tourism promoting States in India. Pilgrimage tourism revels with delight during season, as it brings great payback to host people too. There is a surge in profits, employment opportunities, and normal livelihood for the local communities in the religious centers in Tamil Nadu.

Tamil Nadu is the ground of philosophical religious manifestations. It has a history that dates back to numerous thousand years. This venerable land is where society and culture blend and keep on thriving in harmony. The state abounds in monuments and temples that are very old and each has its own story of religious, creative and enriching events and specialties waiting to be heard. Through thousands of temples dotting the grounds cape of Tamil Nadu, the State is accurately called the land of temples. Tamil Nadu Tourism was recognized in July 1971 underneath the Companies Act 1956. Tamil Nadu Tourism was shaped with the objective of promoting pilgrimage tourism in Tamil Nadu by providing infrastructure amenities such as transportation and accommodation. To complete this objective, Tamil Nadu Tourism has extended its behaviour into 3 main operations namely hotels, transport, and fairs.

**Table 2:** Tourist Arrivals in Tamil Nadu

Year	Domestic	Growth Percentage %	Foreign	Growth Percentage %
2010	10,30,10,435	10.34	28,04,504	15.30
2011	13,67,50,750	13.73	33,08,438	18.05
2012	18,41,36,840	18.49	35,61,740	19.43
2013	24,42,32,487	24.52	39,90,490	21.77
2014	32,75,55,233	32.89	46,57,630	25.42
Total	99,56,85,745	100.00	1,83,22,802	100.00

*Source:* Commissioner of tourism, Chennai -2

The above table shows that domestic tourist visits in Tamil Nadu since last five years has seen a growth of tourism in 2010 as 10.34%, in 2011 as 13.73%, in 2013 as 24.52% and a high growth of 32.89% in the year 2014 as compared to previous years. The foreign tourist visits in 2010 was 15.30%, in 2011 it rose to 18.50%, in 2012 it rose to 19.43, in 2013 it increased to 21.77 and in 2014 the percentage growth was 25.42% which was considered as the highest growth among all the years. It statistical data providing an indication that India especially the state of Tamil Nadu has abundance showcase to the world due to its rich culture and heritage.

### History of Thanjavur

The districts of Thanjavur, Kumbakonam and Nagappattinam (constituting the erstwhile Thanjavur district) possess hundreds of ancient temples. The municipality of Thanjavur was the seat of the wonderful Chola Empire of Tamilnadu, and was later on, the seat of the Nayaks and the Marathas. Thanjai periya kovil is the largest temple in Tamil Nadu for its 200 feet height tower made with single stone. This temple is located in Thanjavur district, about 4kms from highway and its major deity is Lord Shiva. Raja Raja Chola (985–1014 A.D.) was one of the greatest emperors of the chola dynasty. By birth he was recognized as Arulmozhi Verman, the third son of Parantaka Sundar Chola. He was taught to be

a warrior to lead the cholan army in conquest against the pandya and Sinhalese kingdoms. Aditychola II, the eldest son was murdered under doubtful situation. The theory is that he was murdered by the concubines with snake venom while engaging in an orgy session. This was a conspiracy hatched by the defeated pandyan king supporters (Vira Pandya) whose beheaded skull was paraded on the streets. He was succeeded out of turn by Uttama Chola ahead of Arulmozhi. Raja Raja Chola was continually occupied in battle with Chalukyas in the north, Pandyas in the South and Sinhalese across the shore. One day while he was engaging in the battle in Sri Lanka, he saw huge statues of Buddha. He was stimulated by this gorgeous statue and decided to dedicate the Brideswar Temple in Thanjavur to his family deity Lord Shiva at. He commissioned the construction of the huge temple in 1004 AD. Since the scale of construction was unmatched in the history of temple construction, it took almost 3 decades and it was finished by his son Rajendra Chola in the year 1034 AD. Rajendra chola (1014–1044 A.D.) accredited the construction in his dad's name even though major building was undertaken under his patronage.

### Pilgrim Attractions in the District Sri Brahadeeswarar Temple

Thanjavur has as many as 74 temples but the most superb is Sri Brihadeswara temple. The temple dedicated to Nandi, the

Bull is a masterpiece of the captivating Chola architecture. The mount of Lord Shiva i.e. Nandi has been made from a single granite rock. Similarly the dome of the temple rests on one granite rock. The Chola king Raja Raja I built the Brihadeswara temple way back in the 10th century AD. The architecture of the temple is simple but beautiful and the best amongst the many in the temple town of Thanjavur. The Brihadeswara temple stands 216 ft. tall but it has been built in such a manner that throughout the day its shadow never falls on the ground! Built by the great Chola King, Raja Raja I in the 10th Century AD, it is an outstanding example of Chola architecture.

**The Saraswathi Mahal Library**

The Library is renowned for its compilation of manuscripts on paper and palm leaves in several Indian and European languages. The 16th century library is home to works of ancient and medieval periods. The biography of Muhammad Ghazni as well as books on the 64 Bathing Ghats of Varanasi are available here

**Schwartz Church**

Rajah Serfoji had built the church in 1779 AD in appreciation of the Rev. C.V. Schwartz of the Danish Mission. The other remarkable structure built by Raja Serfoji is the eight-story victory tower at Manora, which happens to be at a distance of 5 Kilometers from Thanjavur

**Hall of Music**

The Sangeetha Mahal or the Hall of Music is located in the first floor of the Palace. This is a fine auditorium with perfect acoustics, revealing the engineering skill of the ancient builders. Also in this place is the acoustically perfect ancient music hall.

**Mariamman Temple**

The Mariamman temple is located 6kms from Thanjavur. This is an important temple at punnainallur. Inside the mandapam, there are depictions of the different forms of Ashta Sakti. Viz., Gaja Lakshmi, Veera Lakshmi, Soubhagya Lakshmi and Santana Lakshmi.

**Swamimalai**

Swamimalai is near Kumbakonam. It is a railway station on the main line from Madras to Trichy. There is a famous shrine built on a hillock, dedicated to Lord Subrahmanya locally known as Swaminatha.

**Darasuram Airavatheswar Temple**

This temple is a storehouse of art and architecture. The vimana is 85 feet high. The front mandapam itself is in the form of a huge chariot drawn by horses. The temple has some exquisite stone carvings. The main deity's consort Periya Nayaki Amman temple is situated adjacent to Airavateshwarar temple.

**Table 3:** Foreign Tourist Arrivals in Thanjavur District

Year	Foreign tourists	Growth Rate in Percentage %
2013	9384710	-
2014	9764790	4.05
2015	10399501	6.50

Source: Commissioner of Tourism, Chennai

The above table shows that Foreign Tourist Arrivals in Thanjavur district over the last three years. In the year 2014

rose by 4.05% and in 2015 increased by 6.50% compared with previous years. Thanjavur district very well structured and 1000 years Ancient temples, Navagraha Temple and Mahamaham tank and other temples are very famous in the district would be main reasons for the increase in the number pilgrims as tourists.

**Pilgrimage Tourism: A Perspective**

The pilgrimage is such an act which explains deep feelings, faith, belief, respect to the divine and above all sincerity of devotee(s). The tradition of pilgrimage along with mythology maintains the sanctity and significance of sacred capes promoting a deeper sense of tourism (spiritual) in the form of 'Pilgrimage-Tourism'. It will be an alternative way leading to sustainable frame of integrating humanity and divinity. It is now empathetically accepted that tourism leads to rash commercialism having least concern for nature, centuries-old repositories of human culture, and the more comprehensive and the transcendental mother Earth. Hereby it is also recognized that the current tourism and environment, at large, are essentially hostile to each other. To popularize tourism activities the quality of environment, whether rural/natural or urban, remains at best marginal and at worst irrelevant.

**Conclusion**

Pilgrims play an important role in the system of pilgrimage and the same is true for tourists in tourism. Pilgrims become crucial in the maintenance and continuity of pilgrimage. In case of pilgrimage, the maintenance and use of sacred places (the sacred capes) go hand in hand. The visiting pilgrims' goal is to experience the supreme spiritual bliss and the actions guided by the ethics they learn from traditions and mythologies. That is how conservation of environment is intrinsic to pilgrim behaviour and further to the system of pilgrimage. The deeply root Hindu Tradition of Pilgrimage have helped the divine spirit of pilgrimage places to survive and sustain since many centuries.

The existence of navagraha temples and strong religious beliefs especially related to astrology and horoscope have attracted pilgrims from all parts of India as well as the world to Thanjavur the fact that this temple city is the one and only district in the world which is enriched by the existence of all the nine navagraha temples, and the strong belief that all these temples receive direct cosmic energy from the nine planets has contributed towards pushing this place as one of the top ranking pilgrimage centers in India.

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