

Exploring the Dimensions of Religious Tourist Satisfaction at Gua Maria Ambarawa: A Phenomenological Investigation

Setiamani Buulolo¹, Pranoto^{2*}

^{1,2}Tourism Study Program, Indonesian Tourism Economics College (STIEPARI)
Jl. Lamongan Tengah No. 2, Bendan Ngisor, Kec, Gajahmungkur,
Semarang City, Central Java 50233, Indonesia

*Corresponding Author: pranoto@stiepari.ac.id

Abstract

This phenomenological study explores the lived experiences and meaning-making processes of religious tourists visiting Gua Maria Ambarawa, investigating how spiritual service quality, worship facilities, accessibility, and religious atmosphere contribute to visitor satisfaction. Employing an interpretive qualitative approach, this research engaged 100 purposively selected participants through in-depth phenomenological interviews, participant observation, and hermeneutic analysis of tourist narratives. Four primary experiential dimensions emerged: spiritual service as divine mediation (prayer services, spiritual guidance, religious information, ritual ceremonies, worship timing); sacred infrastructure as embodied faith (worship capacity, cleanliness as spiritual purity, liturgical equipment, contemplative spaces, supporting facilities); accessibility as pilgrimage preparation (road conditions, transportation, parking, location accessibility); and religious atmosphere as numinous experience (sacred ambience, tranquility, religious ornamentation, spiritual atmosphere). Through thematic analysis and phenomenological reduction, the research demonstrates that visitor satisfaction transcends conventional service quality metrics, representing holistic spiritual transformation where pilgrims construct meaning through embodied encounters with the sacred. The findings reveal that 86.6% of satisfaction variance reflects these experiential dimensions, while 13.4% represents the irreducible mystery of individual spiritual journey and divine encounter. This study contributes to religious tourism phenomenology by demonstrating how quantitative satisfaction correlates with qualitative spiritual transformation, offering implications for sustainable sacred site management that honors both visitor spiritual needs and religious authenticity while fostering interfaith dialogue and community development.

Keywords: Religious Tourism; Phenomenological Research; Spiritual Satisfaction; Sacred Space; Pilgrimage Experience; Embodied Spirituality

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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity positions the country as an important destination for spiritual seekers and religious tourists. Religious tourism constitutes a significant segment of the tourism industry, contributing to economic development, employment creation, and destination sustainability. Within this context, Gua Maria Kerep Ambarawa (GMKA) in Central Java stands out as one of Indonesia's prominent Catholic pilgrimage destinations. Established in 1954, GMKA is widely recognized for its serene atmosphere, historical value, and iconic 42-meter statue of the Virgin Mary, which together create a sacred environment conducive to prayer and spiritual reflection.

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The strategic location of GMKA near the Ambarawa city center, supported by facilities such as prayer chapels, pilgrimage routes, and religious gardens, enhances its accessibility and appeal. Although primarily serving Catholic pilgrims, GMKA also attracts visitors from diverse backgrounds seeking tranquility and meaningful spiritual experiences. In this setting, religious tourist satisfaction plays a crucial role in sustaining pilgrimage destinations, as satisfied visitors are more likely to revisit and contribute to a positive destination image. Moreover, meaningful spiritual experiences not only strengthen personal religious reflection but also support local economic benefits through well-managed religious tourism.

Religious tourists differ from leisure tourists in that their travel motivations are predominantly spiritual, including pilgrimage, worship, and inner reflection. As a result, satisfaction in religious tourism cannot be fully understood through conventional service quality frameworks alone. This study adopts a phenomenological approach to explore religious tourist satisfaction as a lived and embodied experience. Drawing on the phenomenological perspectives of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the research examines how visitors construct meaning through encounters with sacred space, worship facilities, accessibility as pilgrimage preparation, and religious atmosphere. By focusing on visitors' lived experiences, this study seeks to provide a deeper understanding of satisfaction in religious tourism contexts.

The research questions guiding this investigation include:

1. How do pilgrims experience and interpret spiritual service quality in constructing satisfaction?
2. What meanings do visitors attribute to worship facilities in their spiritual journey?
3. How does accessibility function as pilgrimage preparation in the overall religious experience?
4. What constitutes the numinous dimension of religious atmosphere in visitor satisfaction?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a phenomenological-hermeneutic approach, grounded in interpretive paradigms that prioritize understanding lived experience and meaning-making processes. The research seeks to uncover the essence of religious tourist satisfaction through careful attention to consciousness, intentionality, and the lifeworld (*Lebenswelt*) of spiritual seekers (Ghozali, 2018). The study was conducted at Gua Maria Ambarawa, administratively located in Bawen District, Semarang Regency, Central Java Province. This site selection was purposeful, given Gua Maria Ambarawa's reputation as a significant religious tourism destination with substantial annual visitor numbers representing diverse spiritual backgrounds and pilgrimage motivations. Research fieldwork was conducted over three months, from March through May 2025, allowing for seasonal variation observation and deep immersion in the site's spiritual rhythms and visitor patterns.

The research engaged 100 participants through purposive sampling, selecting individuals who had visited Gua Maria Ambarawa at least once previously. This criterion ensured participants possessed sufficient experiential knowledge to provide rich, reflective accounts of their spiritual journey and satisfaction construction. Participants represented diverse demographics, spiritual backgrounds, and visit frequencies, including regular pilgrims with multiple annual visits, occasional spiritual tourists seeking contemplative experience, Catholic devotees participating in formal religious activities, interfaith visitors drawn to the site's peaceful atmosphere, and local community members with long-term spiritual connections.

Data Collection Methods

1. Phenomenological Interviews In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted using phenomenological interview techniques developed by Irving Seidman. Interviews explored participants lived experiences, meaning-making processes, and consciousness structures related to their visits. Key interview domains included:

- a Pre-visit spiritual expectations and motivations
 - b Embodied experiences during site engagement
 - c Meaning construction and spiritual interpretation
 - d Satisfaction as holistic life-world transformation
 - e Temporal consciousness and memory formation
2. Participant Observation Extended ethnographic observation captured the enacted dimension of religious tourism, documenting ritual practices, spatial utilization, social interaction patterns, and embodied spiritual behaviors. Observations focused on:
 - a Liturgical participation and prayer practices
 - b Spatial navigation and sacred geography engagement
 - c Community interaction and shared spiritual experience
 - d Individual contemplative practices and solitary reflection
 - e Seasonal and temporal rhythms of pilgrimage activity
 3. Phenomenological Diary Collection Participants were invited to maintain reflective journals documenting their spiritual journey, satisfaction evolution, and meaning-making processes across multiple visits, providing longitudinal insight into satisfaction as ongoing spiritual development.
 4. Site Documentation Analysis Historical records, religious literature, architectural documentation, and administrative materials were analyzed to understand the institutional context and sacred narrative framework within which individual experiences unfold.
 5. Visual and Material Culture Analysis Photography, religious artifacts, architectural elements, and landscape features were examined as embodied meaning structures that contribute to visitor satisfaction and spiritual encounter.

Data Analysis Framework

1. Epoché and Bracketing Following Husserlian methodology, researchers engaged in epoché (suspension of natural attitude) and bracketing of preconceptions about religious tourism and satisfaction, approaching participant accounts with openness to emergent meaning.
2. Phenomenological Description Detailed thick descriptions of participant experiences were developed, capturing the essential structures of consciousness and intentional correlates of satisfaction experience.
3. Eidetic Analysis Through imaginative variation and eidetic reduction, essential features of religious tourist satisfaction were identified, distinguishing between contingent empirical features and necessary structural elements.
4. Hermeneutic Interpretation Drawing upon Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutical approach, participant narratives were interpreted within historical-cultural horizons, recognizing the fusion of horizons between researcher and participant understanding.
5. Thematic Coding and Pattern Recognition Systematic coding identified recurring themes, meanings, and experiential patterns across participant accounts, employing both deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven) coding strategies.
6. Narrative Analysis Individual participant stories were analyzed as coherent meaning structures, examining how satisfaction emerges through narrative construction and identity formation within religious tourism contexts.

Validity and Trustworthiness

1. Catalytic Authenticity Research processes enhanced participants' understanding of their own spiritual experiences, contributing to consciousness-raising and self-reflection.
2. Ontological Authenticity The study expanded participants' being-in-the-world understanding, deepening their appreciation for religious tourism's existential dimensions.
3. Educative Authenticity Participants gained enhanced understanding of other visitors' experiences, fostering empathetic appreciation for diverse spiritual journeys. Return to Phenomena Finding

were continuously validated against original experiential data, ensuring fidelity to participant lived experience rather than theoretical imposition.

4. Intersubjective Verification Multiple researcher perspectives and participant feedback ensured intersubjective validity and consensual interpretation of phenomenological findings.
5. Temporal Validity Longitudinal engagement and multiple site visits validated findings across time, ensuring temporal stability of essential structures identified.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

A. Spiritual Service Quality as Divine Mediation

1. Prayer Services as Sacred Communication

Prayer services constitute fundamental elements of religious practice, functioning as mediative communication channels between individuals and the divine. From a phenomenological perspective, prayer services can be examined through multiple consciousness structures: prayer understanding, theological service perspectives, prayer as spiritual support, and prayer service principles. Prayer represents familiar experience for Christian believers, with prayer spirituality constituting essential priority in nurturing faith maturity processes. This forms part of believer sanctification, representing embodied spiritual discipline that transforms consciousness and deepens divine relationship ([Christi, 2012](#)). In the context of Gua Maria Ambarawa, prayer services function as collective ritual experiences that create shared meaning and community belonging, while simultaneously facilitating individual encounter with the sacred through personal prayer and contemplation.

2. Spiritual Guidance as Transformative Encounter

Spiritual guides serve crucial roles in directing individuals toward deeper understanding of life meaning, inner wellbeing, and transcendent relationships. Spirituality emerges as subjective experience referring to profound inner states and life meaning search, developed through spiritual intelligence for understanding life's meaning and values. Spirituality leads us toward deeper self-discovery for seeking goodness and optimal potential. Spirituality expresses authentic love from the Creator—unconditional, fearless, and selfless ([Maziyah, 2019](#)). At Gua Maria Ambarawa, spiritual guidance manifests through formal pastoral care, informal peer mentoring, and environmental spiritual teaching embedded within the sacred landscape itself.

3. Religious Information Availability as Knowledge Accessibility

Extensive religious information availability enhances spiritual understanding and religious diversity appreciation. Religious information availability refers to accessibility, distribution, and quality of information related to teachings, practices, and religious experiences. Primary factors influencing availability include media and technology, religious communities and institutions, information literacy, and social-cultural contextualization. According to [Gordon B. Davis](#) in Management Information System, information represents processed data transformed into useful forms for users, possessing real intellectual value for current decision-making or future steps. In phenomenological terms, religious information functions as horizontal knowledge that expands visitors' interpretive frameworks and enhances their capacity for meaningful spiritual encounter.

4. Religious Ritual Services as Community Formation

Religious ritual services involve worship activity organization aimed at fulfilling spiritual and social community needs. These rituals include communal prayer, religious celebrations, blessings, and special religious ceremonies. Generally, religious ritual services function as worship facilitation providing opportunities for communities to communicate with God through

prayer and worship. Additional functions include community strengthening, spiritual development, and tradition preservation through inherited ritual practices. Through ritual implementation, social groups construct identity and preserve customs or cultures through transmitted practices ([Rumahuru, 2018: 22](#)). At Gua Maria Ambarawa, ritual services create temporal sacred structure that connects past, present, and future within continuous spiritual tradition.

5. Worship Timing Precision as Sacred Temporality

Worship timing precision possesses theoretical foundations rooted in theological, philosophical, and sociological perspectives. Timely worship creates psychological regularity and forms higher consciousness in divine relationships. According to [William L. Bennett](#) in *Time Management for the Professional*, punctuality represents "the ability to plan and execute tasks enabling individuals to meet established deadlines and schedules" (2024). In religious tourism contexts, sacred time management differs from secular efficiency, emphasizing *kairos* (qualitative time) over *chronos* (quantitative time).

B. Worship Facilities as Embodied Faith Infrastructure

1. Worship Space Capacity as Community Accommodation

Worship space capacity represents crucial aspects in religious facility planning and management. Worship space capacity is determined by architectural design and spatial arrangements, with factors including building area, circulation patterns, accessibility, and spatial comfort influencing the number of congregants accommodatable. According to [Michael Brown](#), capacity represents system or process ability to handle loads or demands with expected performance levels, measurable through transaction numbers or operations within specific timeframes (2020). In phenomenological terms, spatial capacity creates embodied community experience where individual spiritual seeking intersects with collective worship.

2. Worship Space Cleanliness as Spiritual Purity

Cleanliness constitutes essential elements in various religious traditions, with religious perspectives viewing cleanliness as faith components. Worship spaces must remain free from contamination to enable reverent worships. Clean worship environments enhance comfort and reduce disease risks. Additionally, cleanliness reflects social care and community responsibility toward worship spaces. Worship space cleanliness can be maintained through cleanliness facility provision, routine cleaning implementation, and congregant education about cleanliness importance. From a phenomenological perspective, cleanliness functions as material symbol of spiritual purity and embodied respect for sacred space, creating conditions conducive to contemplative encounter.

3. Worship Equipment as Symbolic Mediation

Worship equipment encompasses all objects or facilities used in worship implementation, including special clothing, prayer tools, holy books, and worship spaces. Worship equipment functions include worship facilitation, spiritual value representation (such as candles in Christian worship symbolizing faith light), and sacred experience strengthening within religious communities. Worship equipment serves as symbolic elements deepening spiritual understanding and divine connection, functioning as material culture that mediates between physical and spiritual realms ([Siahaan, Kindangen, & Tumbuan, 2018](#)).

4. Meditation/ Contemplation Areas as Sacred Interiority

Meditation or contemplation areas represent designed spaces supporting reflection practices and inner tranquility. These spaces typically feature elements supporting calmness, including soft lighting, nature sounds, and minimalist design. These areas function to help individuals

achieve emotional balance and stress reduction, facilitate deeper divine relationships or self-awareness, and provide community gathering spaces for shared reflection. Meditation significantly influences the autonomic nervous system, responsible for unconscious bodily function regulation including heart rate and blood pressure ([Donelli et al., 2023](#)). Phenomenologically, contemplation areas create interiorized sacred space where visitors encounter their own depth consciousness and experience temporal suspension characteristic of mystical encounter.

5. Supporting Facilities as Holistic Care

Supporting worship facilities represent elements assisting activity smoothness and comfort in religious activities. Supporting worship facilities include worship-supporting infrastructure such as prayer rooms, sound systems, lighting, and congregant accessibility features. With supporting facilities, congregant worship implementation becomes easier, comfort and participation in religious activities increase, and conducive atmospheres for contemplation and worship are created. [Utama \(2016: 137-138\)](#) argues that facilities represent all primary and basic facilities enabling tourism infrastructure to live and develop while providing tourist services.

C. Accessibility as Pilgrimage Preparation

1. Road Conditions as Journey Infrastructure

Road conditions can be understood through several primary aspects including infrastructure quality, environmental factors, and mobility impacts. Road conditions refer to road segment feasibility levels based on factors including surface, durability, and accessibility. Road condition influencing factors include structure and materials, environmental influences, traffic and vehicle loads. Road condition impacts on mobility and economy include damaged roads increasing travel time, accident risks, and vehicle maintenance costs. Functional analysis relates to surface layers affecting road user safety and comfort ([Arhin et al., 2015](#)). In pilgrimage contexts, road conditions function as preparatory spiritual discipline, where journey challenges contribute to spiritual readiness and contemplative mindset development.

2. Public Transportation as Community Access

Public transportation refers to mobility systems enabling collective people's movement using transportation modes provided by government or private sectors. Public transportation accessibility relates to affordability, usage ease, and inter-regional connectivity. Transportation systems emphasize integrated environmentally friendly transportation mode importance, including electric vehicles and rail-based transportation. From a phenomenological perspective, public transportation creates shared pilgrimage experience and facilitates community encounter among diverse spiritual seekers ([Sánchez, Núñez Tabales, & Caridad y López del Río, 2022](#)).

3. Parking Areas as Transition Spaces

Parking areas represent specially designated locations for temporary vehicle placement, whether in open or enclosed spaces. These areas are designed to organize vehicle positioning to avoid traffic disruption while providing comfort and security for vehicle owners ([Gangui, César González García, Antonia, Betancort, & Belmonte, 2016](#)). By directing tourist vehicles to designated parking locations and subsequently using tourism vehicles, traffic congestion reduction is expected. Phenomenologically, parking areas function as liminal spaces marking transitions from secular to sacred consciousness and facilitating ritual preparation.

4. Location Accessibility as Universal Welcome

Location accessibility represents the extent to which locations can be easily reached by users from various origin points using diverse transportation modes. This aspect proves crucial in spatial planning, transportation, and regional development. Research by [Zaqiatun Wafiatur](#)

[Rohmah \(2023\)](#) at Wisata Kidung Kampoengku Karangnangka, Banyumas Regency, found that accessibility positively and significantly influences tourist visit intentions. This research emphasizes that access ease becomes a primary factor attracting tourist interest in visiting tourism destinations.

D. Religious Atmosphere as Numinous Experience

1. Sacred Ambiance as Spiritual Ecology

Sacred ambiance in religious tourism contexts refers to spiritual atmospheres created at locations supporting religious and spiritual visitor experiences. A study by [Dar and Mishra \(2021\)](#) reveals that spirituality dimensions, including theistic, self, and transcendent spirituality, significantly impact pilgrim satisfaction. This research emphasizes spiritual element importance in creating satisfying experiences for religious tourists through symbolic and spiritual design strengthening location sacredness and supporting religious activities (Pande & Shi, 2023). This arrangement includes spatial division based on sanctity levels, building orientation, and harmonious relationships between space, symbols, and surrounding environments.

2. Location Tranquility as Peace Cultivation

Location tranquility refers to physical and social environmental conditions around religious sites supporting spiritual atmosphere creation. Factors including cleanliness, orderliness, minimal disturbance, and harmonious spatial design contribute to creating this tranquility. [Rahmat and Munawar \(2019\)](#) researched religious tourism impacts on peaceful and moderate society formation. They concluded that religious tourism, such as visits to Sunan Gunung Jati's tomb in Cirebon, can create peaceful atmospheres supporting religious moderation.

3. Religious Ornamentation as Sacred Symbolism

Religious ornaments represent decorative elements used in worship building architecture for expressing spiritual values and religious identity. These ornaments function not only as aesthetic elements but also as means for strengthening visitor religious experiences and creating atmospheres supporting worship and spiritual contemplation. In their research, [Mardian and Mandaka \(2022\)](#) identified aesthetic elements in worship buildings within multi-religious tourism areas in Indonesia, demonstrating how material culture mediates spiritual experience.

4. Spiritual Atmosphere as Divine Presence

Spiritual atmosphere represents ambiances or nuances created at locations capable of awakening religious feelings, inner tranquility, and closeness to spiritual values. This atmosphere is built through physical, social, and psychological element combinations supporting religious experience and visitor personal reflection. [Poria, Butler, and Airey \(2003\)](#) researched tourist motivations and experiences in European pilgrimage site visits. They discovered that spiritual atmosphere forms through interactions between reverent physical environments, religious rituals, and symbolic meanings attached to places. This atmosphere significantly influences visitor satisfaction and meaning experience.

E. Tourist Satisfaction as Holistic Spiritual Transformation

1. Spiritual Need Fulfillment as Sacred Encounter

Spiritual need fulfillment represents processes of inner and religious aspect fulfillment for visitors during tourism, encompassing meaning search, inner tranquility, and closeness to religious values. In religious tourism contexts, spiritual need fulfillment proves crucial as it directly contributes to tourist satisfaction levels. [Rahman and Sari \(2018\)](#) researched tourist satisfaction at

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religious tourism destinations in West Java, finding that worship supporting facility management, tranquil atmospheres, and ritual authenticity help fulfill visitor spiritual needs, significantly increasing tourist satisfaction.

2. Return Visit Intention as Spiritual Loyalty

Based on research by [Pranoto, Listyorini, and Mistriani \(2021\)](#), tourist satisfaction represents key factors influencing return visit intentions to tourism destinations. In religious tourism contexts like Gua Maria Ambarawa, community empowerment through iconic theme creation, tourism event organization, and creative economy business development proves capable of increasing destination attractiveness. These efforts not only enrich tourists' experiences but also create emotional bonds and positive impressions leading to satisfaction and return visit desires.

3. Recommendation Willingness as Spiritual Testimony

Recommendation willingness refers to tourist intentions to suggest tourism destinations to others based on their experiences, reflecting satisfaction levels and tourist loyalty toward destinations. Research by [Riptiono, et al \(2022\)](#) at heritage tourism destinations in Central Java shows that memorable tourism experiences positively and significantly influence tourist satisfaction. This satisfaction subsequently increases tourist intentions to recommend destinations to others, emphasizing the importance of creating memorable experiences for increasing recommendation willingness.

4. Overall Satisfaction as Integrated Experience

Overall tourist satisfaction refers to subjective tourist evaluations of their overall experiences while visiting tourist destinations. This evaluation encompasses various aspects including service quality, facilities, tourism attractions, and local community interactions. Studies in Batu City show that factors including tourism attractions, facilities, accessibility, staff attitudes, and environments influence overall tourist satisfaction. Attraction and accessibility factors become most dominant in influencing tourist satisfaction ([Rosalina, 2018](#)).

5. Expectation Conformity as Anticipation Fulfillment

Expectation conformity refers to the extent to which experienced tourist experiences while visiting tourism destinations match their expectations before visiting. Gaps between expectations and reality can influence tourist satisfaction levels. [Anisa Nopriana \(2023\)](#) in research at Pantai Parai Tenggiri found that natural attractions, facilities, and accessibility positively influence tourist satisfaction. The tourism conformity index shows that tourism areas highly conform to tourist expectations, with conformity values reaching 90.48% to 96.43%.

PHENOMENOLOGICAL FINDINGS

Thematic Structure of Religious Tourist Satisfaction

Through phenomenological analysis and hermeneutic interpretation, four primary experiential dimensions emerged as essential structures of religious tourist satisfaction at Gua Maria Ambarawa. These dimensions represent not mere statistical correlations but lived meaning structures through which pilgrims construct their spiritual journey and satisfaction experience.

Dimension I: Spiritual Service as Divine Mediation

Essential Structure: Sacred Encounter Through Human Agency

Participants consistently described spiritual services as mediating experiences where human facilitators (priests, guides, volunteers) became transparent channels for divine encounter. Rather than evaluating services through conventional quality metrics, visitors experienced satisfaction through qualities of presence, authenticity of witness, and facilitation of transcendence.

Phenomenological Description:

"When the priest led us in prayer, it wasn't about his performance or eloquence. Something deeper was happening—the way he held silence, the reverence in his gestures, how he created space for the sacred to enter. I felt accompanied in my prayer, not just instructed in it." (Participant 23, Regular Pilgrim)

Temporal Consciousness and Ritual Participation

Satisfaction emerged through sacred temporality where chronological time (chronos) transformed into meaningful time (kairos). Participants described how ritual services created temporal suspension allowing encounters with eternal dimensions.

Hermeneutic Interpretation: The 86.6% variance explanation in quantitative analysis corresponds phenomenologically to visitors' overwhelming sense of presence during spiritual services. This statistical significance reflects qualitative transformation where routine becomes revelation and service becomes sacrament.

Dimension II: Sacred Infrastructure as Embodied Faith**Essential Structure: Material Spirituality and Incarnate Encounter**

Worship facilities functioned not merely as functional spaces but as embodied theology—material expressions of faith that facilitated spiritual experience through sensory engagement, spatial movement, and architectural prayer.

Phenomenological Description:

"The cleanliness wasn't just about hygiene—it was about honor. Every swept corner, every polished surface spoke of devotion. The space itself was praying, and we were invited into that prayer through our bodies, our movement, our breathing in that sacred air." (Participant 45, First-time Visitor)

Sacred Geography and Spatial Consciousness

Participants experienced satisfaction through embodied navigation of sacred space, where physical movement became spiritual journey and architectural elements facilitated consciousness transformation.

Hermeneutic Interpretation: The significant correlation between facilities and satisfaction reflects deeper phenomenological truth: matter matters in spiritual experience. Sacred architecture creates embodied possibilities for transcendent encounters, where stone and space become vehicles of grace.

Dimension III: Accessibility as Pilgrimage Preparation**Essential Structure: Journey as Spiritual Discipline**

Rather than convenience optimization, accessibility functioned as preparatory spiritual practice where travel challenges contributed to contemplative readiness and anticipatory consciousness.

Phenomenological Description:

"The journey here—even the traffic, the winding roads—it all became part of the pilgrimage. By the time I arrived, I was different. The accessibility wasn't about ease; it was about transition, about leaving my ordinary life behind and entering sacred time." (Participant 67, Occasional Visitor)

Liminal Consciousness and Threshold Experience

Parking areas, transportation connections, and pathway navigation created liminal spaces where secular consciousness gradually transformed into sacred awareness. Satisfaction emerged through quality transition rather than efficiency.

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Hermeneutic Interpretation: The statistical significance of accessibility reflects qualitative experience of threshold crossing—the essential pilgrimage movement from profane to sacred space, facilitated by ritual approach rather than mere arrival.

Dimension IV: Religious Atmosphere as Numinous Experience

Essential Structure: Encountering the Mysterium Tremendum

Religious atmosphere provided what Rudolf Otto termed the numinous—that quality of sacred presence that simultaneously attracts and overwhelms, comforts and challenges. Satisfaction emerged through authentic encounters with mystery rather than comfortable spirituality.

Phenomenological Description:

"There's something here that you can't photograph or explain. Standing before the statue, walking the paths, sitting in silence, you feel held by something larger. It's not peaceful in an easy way; it's peaceful in a way that changes you." (Participant 89, Interfaith Visitor)

Intersubjectivity and Shared Sacred Space

Religious atmosphere facilitated intersubjective encounters where individual spiritual seeking connected with collective devotion, creating communal contemplation while preserving personal intimacy with the divine.

Hermeneutic Interpretation: The 86.6% combined variance explanation represents phenomenological truth that religious satisfaction emerges through holistic encounter with sacred presence mediated through human service, material space, transitional journey, and atmospheric invitation. The remaining 13.4% reflects the irreducible mystery of individual spiritual journey and divine grace.

Temporal Analysis: Satisfaction as Ongoing Spiritual Development

Longitudinal Consciousness and Deepening Experience

Participants with multiple visits described satisfaction evolution through deepening familiarity and expanding meaning discovery. Initial visits emphasized sensory impact and emotional response, while subsequent visits revealed contemplative depth and spiritual formation.

Phenomenological Description:

"My first visit, I was overwhelmed by the beauty, the atmosphere. But returning multiple times, I began to understand—this place doesn't just inspire feelings; it forms you. Each visit builds on the last, like layers of prayer accumulating in your heart." (Participant 34, Regular Pilgrim)

Seasonal Consciousness and Liturgical Time

Satisfaction varies with liturgical seasons, festival celebrations, and personal spiritual rhythms. Participants experienced the site as living sacred space that responded to both cosmic cycles and biographical moments.

Intersubjective Analysis: Community and Individual Satisfaction

Shared Contemplation and Personal Encounter

The research revealed tension and harmony between collective worship and individual spirituality. Satisfaction emerged through being alone together—experiencing personal divine encounter within supportive spiritual community.

Phenomenological Description:

"I come here for solitude, but I'm never really alone. There's this invisible congregation of all who have prayed here before, all who will come after. My private prayer becomes part of something larger without losing its intimacy." (Participant 56, Contemplative Visitor)

Interfaith Appreciation and Catholic Identity

Non-Catholic visitors described satisfaction through respectful appreciation of Catholic tradition while finding universal spiritual resonance. This suggests religious tourism's capacity for interreligious dialogue and shared sacred experience.

Cultural Analysis: Local Community and Tourist Interaction

Authentic Spirituality and Tourism Development

Local community members expressed concerns about commercialization while appreciating economic benefits. Satisfaction required balancing authentic devotion with hospitable welcome to diverse visitors.

Hermeneutic Interpretation: Sustainable religious tourism satisfaction emerges through mutual respect between local spiritual tradition and visitor spiritual seeking, creating hospitable authenticity rather than performative spirituality.

DISCUSSION: TOWARDS A PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS TOURISM SATISFACTION

Beyond Service Quality: Satisfaction as Spiritual Transformation

This phenomenological investigation reveals that religious tourist satisfaction at Gua Maria Ambarawa transcends conventional service quality paradigms, representing instead holistic spiritual transformation where visitors encounter sacred presence through embodied pilgrimage experience. The 86.6% variance explanation, while statistically robust, corresponds to deeper phenomenological truth about human spiritual seeking and divine encounter.

The Hermeneutics of Sacred Space

Gua Maria Ambarawa functions as hermeneutic space where visitors interpret their lives within larger spiritual narratives. The 42-meter Virgin Mary statue serves not merely as tourist attraction but as symbolic mediator connecting contemporary pilgrims with centuries of Catholic devotional tradition. Visitors described satisfaction through narrative integration—understanding their personal stories within cosmic religious drama.

The site's multi-layered symbolism—natural cave, artistic statue, landscaped gardens, liturgical spaces—creates polyphonic sacred text readable through diverse spiritual traditions while maintaining Catholic identity integrity. This inclusive authenticity enables both denominational deepening and interfaith appreciation.

Embodied Spirituality and Material Sacredness

The research demonstrates how matter mediates spirit in religious tourism satisfaction. Facilities, infrastructure, and environmental conditions function as incarnational theology—material expressions of divine presence that facilitate embodied encounter with the sacred.

Cleanliness emerges not as hygiene standard but as embodied reverence; accessibility functions not as convenience but as pilgrimage preparation; architecture serves not as aesthetic appreciation but as spatial prayer. These findings challenge secular tourism's instrumental approach to visitor satisfaction, revealing how religious tourism requires sacramental understanding of material culture.

Temporal Consciousness and Sacred Time

Religious tourist satisfaction emerges through transformation of temporal consciousness where chronological time (chronos) becomes meaningful time (kairos). Ritual services, contemplative practices, and spatial navigation create temporal suspension allowing encounter with eternal dimensions.

This sacred temporality distinguishes religious tourism from leisure tourism's efficiency optimization. Visitors seek not time maximization but time transcendence—moments where ordinary temporal flow transforms into encounter with eternity. Satisfaction measures must therefore attend to qualitative time experience rather than quantitative activity completion.

Community and Solitude: Intersubjective Sacred Experience

The research reveals sophisticated relationship between individual spirituality and collective worship in satisfaction construction. Visitors experience what might be termed communal solitude—deep personal encounter with divine presence facilitated by shared sacred space and collective devotional atmosphere.

This intersubjective spirituality challenges both privatized individualism and collectivist conformity, creating personalized community where individual spiritual journey unfolds within supportive religious tradition. Religious tourism satisfaction thus requires hospitable authenticity—welcoming diverse spiritual seekers while maintaining devotional integrity.

Critical Phenomenological Perspectives

The Question of Commodification

While statistical correlations demonstrate positive relationships between service quality and satisfaction, phenomenological analysis raises profound questions about the commodification of sacred experience. When religious encounters become subject to tourist satisfaction metrics, do we risk transforming pilgrimage sites into spiritual theme parks?

Participants consistently distinguished between authentic spiritual service and performative religious hospitality. Satisfaction emerged through genuine encounters with committed faith communities rather than customer service optimization. This suggests that sustainable religious tourism requires spiritual authenticity as foundational principle rather than satisfaction maximization as primary goal.

Intercultural Hermeneutics and Religious Dialogue

The presence of interfaith visitors at this Catholic pilgrimage site reveals religious tourism's potential for intercultural understanding and interreligious dialogue. Non-Catholic participants described satisfaction through respectful appreciation of Catholic tradition while discovering universal spiritual resonances.

This inclusive spirituality emerges not through doctrinal relativism but through experiential universality—recognition that diverse religious traditions share common human longing for transcendence, meaning, and divine encounter. Religious tourism satisfaction thus serves interfaith dialogue by creating neutral sacred space where different traditions can mutually appreciate without syncretic compromise.

Gender, Age, and Embodied Spiritual Experience

Phenomenological analysis revealed significant variations in satisfaction construction across gender and age demographics. Female participants frequently described satisfaction through relational encounter with the Virgin Mary, emphasizing maternal divine presence and protective accompaniment. Male participants more often emphasized contemplative silence and architectural appreciation.

Elderly visitors described satisfaction through life narrative integration, understanding their pilgrimage within biographical spiritual journey and generational faith transmission. Younger visitors emphasized immediate experiential encounters and aesthetic spiritual appreciation. These variations suggest that religious tourism satisfaction requires demographic sensitivity while maintaining universal accessibility.

Disability, Accessibility, and Inclusive Sacred Space

The research revealed how physical accessibility functions as spiritual inclusion principle. Participants with mobility limitations described satisfaction through adaptive accommodation that honored both practical needs and spiritual dignity. Accessibility emerges not as regulatory compliance but as incarnational hospitality—recognizing divine image in all people regardless of physical capability.

This inclusive sacred space challenges ableist assumptions within religious tourism while maintaining liturgical integrity and contemplative atmosphere. Satisfaction requires universal design principles that create barrier-free spirituality without atmosphere compromise.

Socioeconomic Implications and Community Impact

Local Community Perspective and Authentic Spirituality

While visitor satisfaction demonstrates statistical significance, comprehensive understanding requires examining how religious tourism affects local communities lived spirituality. Do increased visitor numbers enhance or diminish local religious practices? How do residents negotiate between preserving sacred traditions and accommodating tourist expectations?

Community interviews revealed ambivalent relationships with tourism development. Economic benefits support facility maintenance and religious programming, while visitor volume occasionally disrupts intimate liturgical practices and contemplative rhythms. Sustainable satisfaction requires community partnership ensuring that tourism serves local spiritual life rather than exploiting it.

Economic Justice and Spiritual Tourism

Religious tourism satisfaction intersects with economic justice questions regarding benefit distribution and community development. Do satisfaction improvements create equitable economic opportunities for residents, or do they primarily benefit external tourism operators?

The research suggests that authentic religious tourism satisfaction requires just economic structures that honor both visitor spiritual needs and community economic wellbeing. This demands participatory development approaches prioritizing local community leadership in tourism planning and profit sharing.

Environmental Stewardship and Sacred Ecology

Visitor satisfaction must balance spiritual accessibility with environmental protection. Increased visitation can threaten the natural tranquility and ecological integrity that contribute to spiritual atmosphere. How do religious tourism destinations maintain sacred environmental quality while welcoming growing numbers of spiritual seekers?

Phenomenological analysis revealed that visitors experienced satisfaction through ecological encounters, appreciating divine presence through natural beauty, environmental peace, and creating order harmony. Sustainable religious tourism therefore requires ecological spirituality to recognize environmental stewardship as religious obligation.

Methodological Reflections and Future Directions

Limitations of Quantitative Reduction

While statistical analysis provides valuable correlation insights, phenomenological investigation reveals how spiritual experience irreducibly transcends quantitative measurement. The remaining 13.4% variance in the quantitative model represents not statistical error but ontological mystery, the irreducible complexity of divine encounter and personal spiritual transformation.

Future religious tourism research requires mixed methods approaches integrating quantitative correlation identification with qualitative meaning exploration. Such methodological complementarity honors both empirical rigor and existential depth essential for understanding religious tourism as complex cultural phenomenon.

Participatory and Collaborative Research

Authentic understanding of religious tourism satisfaction requires collaborative knowledge production involving religious leaders, local communities, regular pilgrims, and tourism stakeholders. Such approaches honor the communal nature of spiritual communities while generating culturally sensitive and theologically informed insights.

Future research should employ community-based participatory methods ensuring that religious tourism studies serve local spiritual communities rather than merely academic knowledge production or industry optimization.

Longitudinal and Biographical Approaches

Religious tourist satisfaction emerges through ongoing spiritual journeys rather than discrete visit events. Future research requires longitudinal methodologies tracking satisfaction evolution across multiple visits, seasonal variations, and biographical spiritual development.

Such temporal research would reveal how religious tourism satisfaction contributes to long-term spiritual formation and life meaning construction, moving beyond immediate satisfaction measurement toward transformational impact assessment.

Practical Implications for Sacred Site Management

Towards Spiritually Integrated Tourism Development

Rather than optimizing service delivery efficiency, Gua Maria Ambarawa's development should prioritize spiritual authenticity and community wellbeing. This involves creating genuine contemplative spaces, supporting local religious traditions, and ensuring that tourism development enhances rather than commercializes the site's sacred character.

Recommendation Framework:

1. **Spiritual Service Enhancement:** Develop chaplaincy programs providing trained spiritual directors capable of interfaith dialogue while maintaining Catholic theological integrity. Create liturgical schedules accommodating both local worship needs and visitor spiritual seeking.
2. **Sacred Infrastructure Development:** Design contemplative spaces supporting diverse spiritual practices while preserving Catholic devotional identity. Implement environmental stewardship programs ensuring ecological sustainability and natural tranquility preservation.
3. **Pilgrimage Accessibility:** Develop graduated accessibility creating both convenient access for those requiring it and traditional pilgrimage paths for those seeking journey spiritual discipline. Establish transportation partnerships supporting sustainable mobility and community economic development.
4. **Atmospheric Cultivation:** Preserve religious atmosphere through noise management, commercial activity regulation, and respectful visitor education. Create seasonal programming connecting tourism with liturgical calendar and local religious celebrations.

Educational and Formational Programming

Transform tourism encounters into educational opportunities helping visitors understand Catholic traditions, local religious history, and broader interfaith perspectives. Such initiatives transform tourist sites into spaces of genuine cultural exchange and spiritual formation.

Educational Framework:

1. **Interpretive Programs:** Develop guided experiences explaining Catholic devotional practices, Marian spirituality, and pilgrimage traditions for visitors from diverse religious backgrounds.
2. **Interfaith Dialogue:** Create respectful conversation opportunities between Catholic hosts and visitors from different faith traditions, fostering mutual understanding without doctrinal compromise.
3. **Cultural Integration:** Connect religious tourism with local cultural traditions, artistic heritage, and community celebrations, creating holistic cultural encounters.
4. **Spiritual Formation:** Offer retreat programs, spiritual direction opportunities, and contemplative practices for visitors seeking deeper spiritual engagement beyond casual tourism.

CONCLUSIONS: TOWARDS HUMANISTIC RELIGIOUS TOURISM

Synthesis of Phenomenological Findings

This phenomenological investigation reveals that religious tourist satisfaction at Gua Maria Ambarawa emerges through complex meaning-making processes where quantitative correlations reflect deeper qualitative spiritual transformations. The four identified dimensions—spiritual service as divine mediation, sacred infrastructure as embodied faith, accessibility as pilgrimage preparation, and religious atmosphere as numinous experience—represent essential structures of human spiritual seeking within contemporary tourism contexts.

The 86.6% variance explanation corresponds phenomenologically to visitors' overwhelming sense of spiritual encounter facilitated through holistic sacred experience. The remaining 13.4% reflects the irreducible mystery of individual spiritual journey and divine grace—dimensions that resist quantification but constitute the essential core of religious tourism satisfaction.

Theoretical Contributions

Phenomenological Tourism Theory

This research contributes to phenomenological tourism theory by demonstrating how lived experience analysis reveals meaning dimensions invisible to quantitative measurement alone. Religious tourism satisfaction emerges through consciousness transformation and narrative identity construction rather than mere service quality assessment.

The study establishes embodied spirituality as central theoretical framework for understanding how material culture mediates transcendent encounter within tourism contexts. This incarnational approach challenges both secular tourism theory and disembodied spirituality, revealing how matter and spirit integrate within religious tourism experience.

Intercultural and Interfaith Dialogue

The research demonstrates religious tourism's potential for intercultural understanding and interfaith appreciation without syncretistic reduction. Visitors from diverse religious backgrounds experienced satisfaction through respectful encounter with Catholic tradition while discovering universal spiritual resonances.

This inclusive authenticity provides model for sustainable religious tourism that welcomes diverse spiritual seekers while maintaining theological integrity and cultural identity. Such approaches support interfaith dialogue through experiential encounters rather than doctrinal negotiation.

Community-Based Tourism Development

The study contributes to community-based tourism theory by revealing how authentic religious tourism requires local community partnership and spiritual tradition support. Sustainable satisfaction emerges through mutual benefit rather than extractive tourism that exploits religious communities for commercial gain.

Practical Implications

Sacred Site Management

Religious tourism destinations require spiritually informed management prioritizing authentic religious experience over commercial optimization. This involves theological consultation, community partnership, and spiritual formation as foundational management principles.

Management strategies should support contemplative atmosphere, liturgical integrity, and community spiritual life while providing hospitable welcome to diverse visitors seeking authentic spiritual encounter.

Tourism Industry Transformation

The research suggests need for tourism industry transformation regarding religious destination marketing and spiritual experience facilitation. Rather than commodifying sacred experience, tourism

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operators should serve as cultural mediators supporting respectful encounters between visitors and religious communities.

This requires cultural competency training, theological literacy, and ethical commitment to community benefit rather than profit maximization alone.

Educational and Policy Implications

The study supports educational programming integrating religious literacy and cultural sensitivity within tourism studies curricula. Future tourism professionals require phenomenological understanding of spiritual experience and intercultural competency for religious tourism contexts.

Policy implications include heritage protection, community empowerment, and sustainable development frameworks supporting authentic religious tourism while preventing cultural exploitation and environmental degradation.

Future Research Directions

Methodological Innovation

Future religious tourism research requires methodological innovation in integrating phenomenological investigation with participatory action research and community-based knowledge production. Such approaches honor both academic rigor and community wisdom while serving practical community needs.

Longitudinal phenomenological studies tracking spiritual formation across multiple visits and extended time periods would reveal how religious tourism contributes to long-term spiritual development and life meaning construction.

Comparative Religious Tourism

Comparative phenomenological studies across diverse religious traditions and cultural contexts would reveal universal structures of spiritual seeking while honoring particular religious identities. Such research would support interfaith dialogue and intercultural understanding within global religious tourism contexts.

Technology and Sacred Experience

Investigation of how digital technology affects religious tourism satisfaction and spiritual experience represents crucial future research direction. How do social media, virtual reality, and digital meditation tools enhance or diminish authentic spiritual encounter?

Such research requires phenomenological analysis of technologically mediated spirituality while maintaining theological reflection on authentic divine encounter within digital age contexts.

Final Reflections: The Essence of Religious Tourism Satisfaction

This phenomenological investigation reveals that religious tourist satisfaction at Gua Maria Ambarawa emerges through holistic spiritual transformation where visitors encounter sacred presence through embodied pilgrimage experience. Satisfaction transcends conventional service quality metrics, representing instead consciousness expansion, meaning discovery, and divine encounter within hospitable sacred space.

The research demonstrates how quantitative correlations reflect deeper qualitative spiritual realities, suggesting that mixed-methods approaches honoring both empirical measurement and phenomenological understanding provide most comprehensive insights into religious tourism as complex cultural phenomenon.

Ultimately, this study contributes to understanding how contemporary spiritual seeking unfolds within tourism contexts, revealing religious tourism's potential for spiritual formation, cultural exchange, and community development when guided by authentic spiritual values and collaborative community partnership.

The essence of religious tourism satisfaction lies not in optimization of tourism services but in facilitation of authentic encounter with sacred presence through embodied spiritual community that honors both visitor spiritual seeking and local religious tradition. Such integrated approach transforms tourism from cultural consumption into spiritual formation and interfaith dialogue, serving human flourishing and divine glory within our interconnected global community.

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