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## **Service Quality Dimensions Relationships with Satisfaction among Domestic and Foreign Tourists in Pondicherry**

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### **Abstract**

Tourism significantly contributes to the economic and cultural advancement of Pondicherry, drawing both domestic and international visitors due to its unique French heritage, coastal aesthetics, and spiritual allure. While international tourism has often been the subject of research, domestic tourism forms the cornerstone of the region's travel economy. This research examines the correlation between dimensions of service quality and tourist satisfaction among both domestic and international visitors to Pondicherry. A total of 186 respondents engaged in the survey utilizing a structured questionnaire. The research utilized a convenience sampling method and conducted descriptive analysis to assess tourists' perceptions of service quality and satisfaction. The results indicate that tangibility, empathy, assurance, reliability, and responsiveness are essential factors influencing tourist satisfaction. Domestic tourists assessed the dimensions of service quality more favorably than foreign tourists, indicating a greater familiarity and comfort with the local environment. For foreign tourists, assurance, reliability, and responsiveness were significant factors contributing to their satisfaction. The study indicates that enhancing service quality via improved infrastructure, staff training, and cultural sensitivity can elevate satisfaction levels among both domestic and international tourists, thereby reinforcing Pondicherry's status as a favored tourism destination in South India.

### **Introduction**

Pondicherry, recognized for its distinctive amalgamation of French heritage, tranquil beaches, and spiritual atmosphere, has become one of India's most sought-after tourist destinations. The city draws a significant influx of both domestic and international tourists in pursuit of cultural, historical, and recreational experiences. The tourism sector in Pondicherry has increasingly contributed to the local economy, creating employment opportunities and supporting related industries, including hospitality, transport, and retail.

The satisfaction of tourists is significantly influenced by the quality of services offered by tourism-related establishments. The dimensions of service quality—tangibility, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy—are crucial in shaping visitors' perceptions and influencing their overall experience. Domestic tourists are generally more satisfied when they are familiar with the local culture and language. On the other hand, foreign tourists care a lot about how professional, accessible, and welcoming local service providers are. Examining the correlation between service

quality dimensions and tourist satisfaction in Pondicherry is crucial for formulating effective tourism strategies. Identifying the aspects of service that most significantly influence satisfaction enables stakeholders, including hotel managers, tour operators, and government agencies, to enhance visitor experiences, bolster customer loyalty, and position Pondicherry as a prominent global tourism destination.

### **Domestic tourism Pondicherry**

Domestic tourism constitutes a significant, albeit frequently overlooked, aspect of the global tourism sector. The significance of this initiative is evident in its support for local economies, preservation of cultural heritage, and facilitation of year-round tourism activities. The absence of standardized definitions and robust data collection systems frequently results in the underestimation of domestic travel activities. Domestic tourism generally entails travel away from one's regular residence, typically including a minimum of one overnight stay. It is assessed using metrics such as the count of registered hotel guests or the total number of overnight stays.

Domestic tourism in India has experienced significant growth attributed to increasing disposable incomes, enhanced infrastructure, and heightened government initiatives aimed at promoting local destinations. The sector plays a crucial role in the national GDP and employment, positioning India as one of the fastest-growing tourism markets worldwide. Domestic tourists constitute a fundamental component of India's tourism sector, engaging with the country's extensive cultural, spiritual, and natural diversity, which includes heritage sites, temples, hill stations, and coastal areas. Pondicherry, characterized by its French colonial architecture, tranquil beaches, and notable spiritual sites like Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram, has become a significant destination for domestic tourists. The improvement of service quality, hospitality standards, and accessibility has reinforced Pondicherry's status as a favored domestic tourism destination in South India.

### **Foreign tourism in Pondicherry**

The global travel and tourism industry has experienced significant changes in recent decades, driven by economic fluctuations, health crises like SARS and COVID-19, and security concerns that have notably affected international travel patterns. Simultaneously, advancements in digital technology, such as online booking systems and social media marketing, have enhanced global accessibility and transformed traveler expectations. The rise of low-cost

airlines, competitive hotel rates, and enhanced international cooperation have significantly contributed to the expansion of cross-border tourism.

In India, foreign tourism significantly contributes to foreign exchange earnings and facilitates cultural exchange. The nation's extensive heritage, spiritual significance, and varied natural attractions consistently attract millions of international visitors each year. Pondicherry has emerged as a notable international destination, characterized by its French colonial architecture, serene beaches, yoga and wellness centers, and significant spiritual sites such as Auroville and the Sri Aurobindo Ashram. The town's amalgamation of Indian and European influences offers a distinctive tourism experience that attracts foreign visitors in search of culture, tranquility, and authenticity. The steady increase in foreign tourist arrivals in Pondicherry necessitates improvements in service quality, infrastructure, and sustainable tourism practices to ensure visitor satisfaction and maintain the long-term competitiveness of the destination.

### **Literature Review**

**Meshack et al. (2020)** study the interrelationships among service quality, customer satisfaction, and loyalty within the context of tourist hotels in Tanzania. The findings indicate that reliability, responsiveness, and assurance are primary factors influencing satisfaction. Domestic tourists prioritize speed and affordability, while foreign tourists emphasize empathy and the accuracy of information. The research highlights that adequately trained staff and effective operations improve customer loyalty and provide a competitive edge. The conclusion indicates that upholding consistent quality standards can markedly enhance satisfaction across diverse visitor segments. **Xie et al. (2021)** discuss contemporary approaches to assessing service quality and satisfaction in the context of tourism. The study highlights a trend towards multidimensional models that integrate technology. Domestic tourists place a growing emphasis on digital convenience, whereas foreign tourists anticipate personalized and culturally sensitive services. The research underscores the ongoing significance of SERVQUAL dimensions, indicating that subsequent studies should incorporate digital and emotional quality elements to more effectively identify satisfaction determinants among various tourist segments. According to **Han (2021)**, service quality in tourism public health, which includes hygiene, safety, and environmental management, has a direct impact

on tourists' trust, satisfaction, and loyalty. The research indicates that post-COVID travelers prioritize health-related tangibles and the responsiveness of staff. Domestic and foreign tourists demonstrate increased satisfaction when destinations uphold visible health standards, indicating that the quality of public health services is a crucial new dimension of SERVQUAL in the tourism sector. Managers must consistently oversee sanitation and safety communication to maintain visitor trust and satisfaction. **Pawlicz and Šimunková (2022)** demonstrate that the quality of host services and facilities in peer-to-peer accommodations significantly influences guest satisfaction. Factors such as cleanliness, comfort, and reliable amenities enhance the value perception of domestic travelers, whereas foreign tourists emphasize the importance of host responsiveness and cultural understanding. The research demonstrates that maintaining consistent service delivery standards in peer-to-peer accommodation can uphold high satisfaction levels and encourage intentions to revisit, highlighting the importance of host training and property upkeep. **Xing et al. (2022)** examine the concept of "fine service" within rural tourism, revealing that empathy, responsiveness, and assurance significantly enhance both satisfaction and loyalty. Domestic tourists exhibit a higher sensitivity to responsiveness, while foreign tourists prioritize assurance of safety and hospitality. The research suggests that high-quality rural tourism services foster emotional attachment and trust, which subsequently encourage repeat visits. Enhancing fine service can clearly set rural destinations apart and boost satisfaction among different groups. **Rodrigues-e-Melo (2023)** reviews the quality of food and beverage services in coastal destinations, identifying hygiene, timeliness, and authenticity as key factors influencing customer satisfaction. Domestic tourists prioritize cleanliness and affordability, while foreign tourists highlight the importance of authentic local cuisine and the friendliness of staff. The research indicates that food and beverage service quality plays a crucial role in enhancing overall tourist satisfaction and shaping destination image. Upholding hygiene standards and providing genuine culinary experiences can enhance satisfaction among both domestic and international visitors. According to **Alonso-Almeida et al. (2023)**, the safety and public-health aspects of service quality are significant predictors of tourist satisfaction within the sharing-economy accommodation sector. Their research shows that international travelers care more about cleanliness and safety than domestic travelers do.

The display of accurate health information and the responsiveness to emergencies significantly impact satisfaction and trust. The research suggests incorporating health protocols into fundamental service-quality assessment frameworks to improve perceived safety and loyalty among tourist groups. **Nian et al. (2024)** demonstrate that service quality has a significant impact on tourist satisfaction, even in congested heritage sites. The SCA-S framework of the study indicates that crowding diminishes satisfaction; however, dependable and empathetic service can alleviate these impacts. Domestic tourists exhibit greater tolerance for crowding in the presence of efficient service, whereas foreign tourists prioritize clear information and courteous personnel. The authors recommend enhancing service consistency and crowd management to improve satisfaction among both domestic and international visitor groups.

**Perdomo-Verdecia et al. (2024)** look into hotel service quality through fuzzy-set qualitative comparative analysis (fsQCA) and find that no individual dimension ensures satisfaction; instead, effective combinations of reliability, empathy, and tangibles produce favorable results. Domestic guests prioritize price-related value, whereas foreign visitors focus on emotional and assurance factors. The research promotes a comprehensive service-design strategy in which management integrates various service attributes to enhance satisfaction and encourage repeat patronage among different tourist markets. **Miah et al. (2024)** analyze the impact of tourist crowding on satisfaction and loyalty. The findings suggest that perceived crowding diminishes satisfaction; however, high service quality and effective facility management mitigate these adverse impacts. Domestic tourists accept crowding when services are efficient and well-organized, whereas foreign tourists require comfort and individualized attention. The research demonstrates that the integration of service quality and crowd-control strategies enhances satisfaction among both domestic and international visitors. **Nguyen et al. (2025)** assert that service quality significantly impacts tourist satisfaction and behavioral intentions in Hau Giang Province, Vietnam. The research identifies reliability, responsiveness, and empathy as the primary predictors of satisfaction. Tourists who recognized high-quality services demonstrated an increased likelihood of revisiting and recommending destinations. The authors conclude that enhancing the skills of frontline staff and ensuring consistent service delivery can improve satisfaction and long-term loyalty among both domestic and international tourists.

### Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the tourism service quality as perceived by domestic and foreign tourists in Pondicherry.
2. To analyze the relationship between various dimensions of service quality and the level of satisfaction among domestic and foreign tourists.
3. To identify the key service quality factors influencing tourist satisfaction in Pondicherry.
4. To compare the perception differences between domestic and foreign tourists regarding service quality attributes.

### Research Methodology

This study aims to identify the relationships between service quality dimensions and the satisfaction of domestic and foreign tourists. The focus is on the service quality as perceived by both domestic and foreign tourists. A sample of 186 tourists was analyzed, comprising 121 domestic tourists and the remainder being foreign tourists. This research is descriptive in

nature. The study instrument is a questionnaire. The questionnaire comprises three sections: the first section gathers personal information from respondents, while the second and third sections include scales for service quality dimensions and satisfaction, respectively. The convenience sampling method, a form of non-probability sampling, is utilized. Descriptive measures are utilized to examine perceptions of service quality in tourism and the correlation between service quality dimensions and satisfaction. The reliability of this study is reported at 81.36%, with data analysis conducted using SPSS v 25.

### Results And Discussion

The study analyzed responses from 186 tourists visiting Pondicherry, of whom 59.63% were male and 40.37% were female. The majority of respondents (36.32%) were aged between 30 and 40 years, while 34.69% were graduates, and 64.5% were married. These demographics indicate that mid-aged, educated, and family-oriented individuals constitute a significant portion of the tourist population in Pondicherry.

**Table-I: Perception on Service quality dimensions**

Service quality dimensions	Domestic Tourists		Foreign Tourists	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Tangibility	3.83	1.189	3.64	1.039
Assurance	3.77	1.192	3.62	1.042
Reliability	3.67	1.201	3.68	1.051
Responsiveness	3.41	1.264	3.52	1.114
Empathy	3.82	1.189	3.25	1.039

Table-I presents the mean and standard deviation values for service quality dimensions as perceived by domestic and foreign tourists. Descriptive analysis of perceived service quality shows that domestic tourists rated tangibility ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) and empathy ( $M = 3.82$ ,  $SD = 1.19$ ) slightly higher than foreign tourists (tangibility  $M = 3.64$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ; empathy  $M = 3.25$ ,  $SD = 1.04$ ). Reliability was virtually identical between groups (Domestic  $M = 3.67$ ,  $SD = 1.20$ ; Foreign  $M = 3.68$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ). Responsiveness was the lowest-rated dimension for domestic tourists

( $M = 3.41$ ,  $SD = 1.26$ ) and only marginally higher for foreign tourists ( $M = 3.52$ ,  $SD = 1.11$ ). The most substantial difference is in empathy, where domestic tourists report noticeably higher perceived individualized attention than foreign tourists (difference = 0.57), suggesting a potential service gap for international visitors. Language/cultural barriers, staff training focused on local customer expectations, fewer resources (translated materials, culturally-aware staff) aimed at foreign guests, or differing expectations between groups.

**Table-II: Relationship between service quality and satisfaction of Domestic and Foreign Tourists**

Service quality dimensions	Satisfaction	
	Domestic Tourists	Foreign Tourists
Tangibility	0.561** (p=.000)	0.365** (p=.001)
Assurance	0.594** (p=.000)	0.501** (p=.000)
Reliability	0.587** (p=.000)	0.493** (p=.000)
Responsiveness	0.612** (p=.000)	0.551** (p=.000)
Empathy	0.593** (p=.000)	0.303** (p=.003)

\*\*Significant at 1% level

Table-II shows a significant and positive relationship between all service quality dimensions and tourist satisfaction for both domestic and foreign tourists ( $p < 0.01$ ). For domestic tourists, responsiveness ( $r = 0.612$ ), assurance ( $r = 0.594$ ), empathy ( $r = 0.593$ ), and reliability ( $r = 0.587$ ) exhibit strong correlations with satisfaction, indicating that interpersonal and responsive service behaviors play a crucial role in shaping domestic visitor satisfaction. Among foreign tourists, responsiveness ( $r = 0.551$ ) and assurance ( $r = 0.501$ ) emerge as the strongest predictors, although the strength of the relationships is generally lower than that of domestic tourists. Notably, empathy shows a weak relationship among foreign tourists ( $r = 0.303$ ), suggesting possible cultural or communication barriers. Overall, service quality dimensions have a stronger impact on satisfaction among domestic tourists compared to foreign tourists, with responsiveness being the most influential factor for both groups.

#### Implications For Tourism Policy

The results show that all service quality dimensions significantly influence tourist satisfaction, but the strength of the relationship differs between domestic and foreign tourists. Policies should therefore adopt a dual approach. For domestic tourists, improving staff responsiveness, reliability, and assurance will directly enhance satisfaction. For foreign tourists, weaker correlations—especially for empathy, indicate the need for multilingual support, cultural sensitivity training, and better tourist-friendly infrastructure. Improving responsiveness is crucial for both groups, suggesting that tourism policies must prioritize efficient service delivery, digital information systems, and professional staff training. Investments in infrastructure, clear signage, and

standardized service protocols will help create a more consistent and globally competitive tourism experience.

#### Recommendations

##### Recommendations for Domestic Tourists

- Improve responsiveness through faster service, adequate staffing, and clearly defined service time standards.
- Strengthen assurance by enhancing staff professionalism, courtesy, and competence through regular training.
- Ensure reliability by standardizing procedures, providing accurate information, and using technology for real-time updates.
- Promote empathy by training staff in interpersonal communication and emotional intelligence.
- Maintain quality tangible facilities through regular cleanliness, maintenance, and upgrades.

##### Recommendations for Foreign Tourists

- Provide multilingual communication tools such as translated materials, bilingual staff, and language-enabled apps.
- Offer cultural sensitivity training to staff to reduce the empathy gap and improve interpersonal interactions.
- Upgrade tangible facilities with clear signage, hygienic amenities, and internationally familiar symbols.
- Strengthen assurance and reliability through clear explanations, visible certifications, and consistent service delivery.
- Improve responsiveness by creating dedicated help desks, quick-response systems, and digital self-help tools.

## Conclusion

This research in Pondicherry analyzed the impact of service quality dimensions—tangibility, assurance, reliability, responsiveness, and empathy—on the satisfaction levels of domestic and international tourists. The results demonstrate that tourists to Pondicherry prioritize tangible factors, including cleanliness, infrastructure, and the visual attractiveness of the location. The assurance and reliability of services offered by hotels, guides, and local businesses significantly contribute to the enhancement of customer satisfaction. The responsiveness of service, characterized by prompt assistance and courteous behavior, has a major impact on the tourist experience, particularly for domestic visitors. Empathy is significant, yet it is perceived differently by foreign tourists, who may hold distinct expectations influenced by cultural variations. The study indicates that consistent service delivery and personalized attention are essential factors influencing tourist satisfaction in Pondicherry. Enhancing service quality through staff training, customer interaction, and information accessibility can significantly elevate Pondicherry's reputation as a favored tourist destination. The findings illustrate the importance of quality-focused tourism strategies in maintaining Pondicherry's status as an inviting and culturally vibrant destination for domestic and international travelers. Overall, a dual-focused strategy addressing the specific needs of domestic and foreign tourists is essential for creating a more competitive and visitor-friendly tourism environment.

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