



Tourists' Perceptions of Religious Tourism Experience at the Tomb of Sunan Ampel Surabaya

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Abstract: *This study aims to investigate tourists' perceptions of the religious tourism experience at the tomb of Sunan Ampel in Surabaya, one of Indonesia's most significant religious tourism destinations. This research employs a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to provide an in depth description of the experiences of tourists visiting the tomb. Data were collected through in depth interviews with tomb managers, questionnaires distributed to licensed employees, and direct observation at the site. The results showed that the majority of tourists were satisfied with the spiritual aspects they experienced; however, many complained about the limited facilities, such as inadequate seating and a narrow worship space. Additionally, the lack of clear historical information is another factor that reduces the quality of the tourist experience. The implication of this study is the need to improve facilities, develop training programs for staff, and provide more educational information for visitors. This research is expected to provide input for the manager of the Sunan Ampel tomb in improving the quality of service and management of religious tourism in Indonesia.*

Keywords: *tourist perceptions, religious tourism experience, tomb of Sunan Ampel, religious tourism management, tourist facilities.*

1. Introduction

Religious tourism has become a rapidly growing global phenomenon, especially in countries with a majority Muslim population, such as Indonesia. This aligns with the growing public interest in visiting historical and holy sites as part of a spiritual experience. One religious tourism destination that has garnered attention is the tombs of saints, renowned for their spiritual and cultural significance. In Indonesia, places such as the tomb of Sunan Ampel in Surabaya have become major tourist destinations, offering visitors a chance to experience religious and spiritual significance. According to data from the Ministry of Tourism and Creative Economy (2023), Indonesia's religious tourism sector is showing a positive trend, with an increasing number of tourists each year. However, the management and promotion of religious tourism in Indonesia still has challenges, including in terms of diverse tourist experiences.

One of the most prominent religious tourism destinations in Indonesia is the tomb of Sunan Ampel, located in Surabaya, East Java. As a site of historical and spiritual significance, being the resting place of one of the revered Wali Songo (Nine Saints) in Javanese Islamic history, the tomb attracts pilgrims from across the archipelago. However, despite its popularity, there remain key challenges in

enhancing the overall visitor experience. Issues frequently raised include limited on-site facilities, insufficient informational signage, lack of structured tour guidance, and a generally underdeveloped visitor management system. These factors can potentially diminish the spiritual and cultural value tourists derive from their visit.

The tomb of Sunan Ampel, located in Surabaya, East Java, is one of the most important religious sites in Indonesia. As a historical and religious site of high cultural and spiritual significance, the tomb is frequently visited by pilgrims from various regions. However, despite its great potential, the experiences of tourists in religious tourism in this place have not been studied in depth. Some of the issues that may arise in the tourist experience include inadequate facilities, suboptimal visitor management, and a lack of information available to visitors regarding the site's history and culture.

Several previous studies have highlighted aspects of religious tourism in Indonesia. For example, a survey by Rahayu (2020) found that spiritual experience factors strongly influence tourist satisfaction in religious tourism, while research by Nugroho (2021) showed the importance of effective management and promotion in increasing tourist visits to religious sites. However, research on tourists' experiences at the tombs of saints, especially the tomb of Sunan Ampel, is still limited; therefore, this study aims to fill this gap.

This research is essential for understanding how tourists perceive and experience their visits to Sunan Ampel's tomb, encompassing both their spiritual, cultural, and physical aspects. As a religious tourism destination with high historical and artistic value, understanding tourists' perceptions will help managers improve the quality of the visitor experience and contribute to the development of religious tourism in Indonesia.

This research is unique in that it focuses explicitly on tourists' perceptions of the religious tourism experience at the tomb of Sunan Ampel. This aspect has not been widely studied before. With an approach that combines the theory of tourism experience and spirituality, this research is expected to provide new insights for religious site managers in improving the quality of tourism.

The primary objective of this study is to investigate tourists' perceptions of the religious tourism experience at the tomb of Sunan Ampel in Surabaya, focusing on the factors that influence their satisfaction and spiritual experience during their visit.

The benefits of this research are expected to contribute academically to the field of religious tourism and help related parties improve the quality of religious tourism management in Indonesia. In addition, the results of this study are also expected to be used as a reference for further research on the development of religious tourism in other destinations.

This research has practical implications for tourism managers in Indonesia, especially in terms of developing and improving religious tourism facilities. It is

hoped that the study's results will provide input for policies related to the promotion, management, and maintenance of religious tourism sites in Indonesia.

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive research type. Descriptive research aims to describe in depth tourists' perceptions of the religious tourism experience they had when visiting Sunan Ampel's tomb in Surabaya. The qualitative approach was chosen because the focus of this research is on an in-depth understanding of the phenomena experienced by tourists, from both emotional, spiritual, and socio-cultural perspectives, which a quantitative approach cannot explain. Qualitative research allows for the collection of richer and more in-depth data regarding the perceptions, views, and experiences of the research subjects.

This research design employs a case study approach, focusing on a specific location: the tomb of Sunan Ampel in Surabaya. In this case study design, the researcher will observe and analyze the perceptions of tourists who visit the tomb, as well as the factors that influence their experiences during their visit. This design enables the researcher to examine the social and cultural contexts that shape tourists' experiences and to investigate the factors that influence their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the religious tourism experience.

This research was conducted at Sunan Ampel Tomb, located in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia. The selection of this location was based on the status of Sunan Ampel's tomb as one of the most famous religious tourism destinations in Indonesia. Additionally, the tomb holds significant historical, cultural, and spiritual value for the Muslim community in Indonesia.

The subjects of this research were tourists who visited the tomb of Sunan Ampel during the research period. The selection of subjects was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, which aims to get informants who have direct experience visiting the tomb. The criteria for research subjects include:

1. Tourists who have visited Sunan Ampel's tomb in the last 6 months.
2. Travelers from various backgrounds (both local and outside the region) who have experience visiting for religious purposes.
3. Travelers who are willing to participate in interviews and provide information about their experiences.

Research Instruments

The main instrument in this research is in-depth interviews conducted with tourists who have visited the tomb of Sunan Ampel. These interviews aim to explore tourists' perceptions, experiences, and opinions regarding their visit to the tomb. The interviews will be conducted using a pre-arranged semi-structured interview guide, which allows flexibility to explore particular topics based on the respondents' answers.

In addition to interviews, direct observation is also used as a tool to study tourist interactions around the tomb of Sunan Ampel. This observation will record the behavior, activities, and interactions of tourists with the facilities in the tomb.

An interview guide was developed that contains open-ended questions exploring various dimensions of the tourist experience, including emotional, spiritual, and cultural aspects. The guide covers themes such as motivations for visiting, impressions of the religious atmosphere, perceptions of facilities, spiritual reflection during the visit, and overall satisfaction. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. All interviews were audio-recorded (with informed consent) to ensure accuracy during transcription and analysis. The researcher also took field notes to capture non-verbal cues and situational context.

A structured observation checklist was developed to record tourists' interactions at the tomb site systematically. The checklist included indicators such as types of tourist activities, interactions with other visitors, use of religious facilities, responses to environmental conditions, and engagement with cultural displays or signage. Observations were conducted during both peak and off-peak visiting hours to ensure a diverse dataset. Observational data were recorded as field notes and subsequently categorized thematically to support the interview findings.

Data Collection Technique

Data collection in this study was conducted using three main techniques:

1. In depth Interviews: Semi structured interviews will be conducted with tourists who have visited Sunan Ampel's tomb. Each interview is expected to last between 30 and 60 minutes, depending on the depth of answers and experiences shared by the informants. Interviews will be recorded with the informant's permission to facilitate transcription and data analysis.
2. Participatory Observation: The researcher will conduct direct observation at the tomb site to monitor tourists' activities during their visit. This observation encompasses the interaction between tourists and existing facilities, as well as the activities tourists engage in around the tomb.
3. Documentation: Researchers will also collect related documents, such as promotional materials, brochures, and historical information about Sunan Ampel's tomb provided by managers. This documentation will provide additional context in analyzing the data obtained from interviews and observations.

3. Results & Discussion

This study involved 50 tourists who had visited Sunan Ampel's tomb in Surabaya in the last six months. Of the total respondents, 60% were local tourists (from Surabaya and surrounding areas), while 40% came from outside Surabaya. Most of the respondents (70%) were between 25 and 40 years old, with 20% of them over 40

years old and 10% under 25 years old. 55% of the respondents are male, and 45% are female.

The majority of respondents visited Sunan Ampel's tomb for religious purposes (80%), while the rest (20%) visited the tomb for cultural tourism purposes. In addition, almost 90% of respondents claimed to have learned about Sunan Ampel's tomb through information they received from family, friends, or social media. This data shows that Sunan Ampel's tomb has a strong influence among local and domestic tourists as a religious tourism destination.

Key Findings from Interviews with Management

Interviews with the management of the Sunan Ampel tomb produced some crucial findings related to the tourist experience. The management explained that they have made several efforts to enhance the quality of religious tourism services at the tomb, including improving facilities, hiring security guards, and providing more comprehensive historical information for visitors. However, they also acknowledged some challenges in terms of visitor management, such as visitor congestion on certain days, inadequate parking facilities, and limited access to information for first-time tourists.

According to the organizers, although the tomb is one of the main religious destinations, they believe there is still potential to enhance the spiritual experience of tourists by adding facilities for prayer, interactive spaces, and historical education about Sunan Ampel and his contributions to the history of Islam in Indonesia.

Findings from the Licensed Employee Questionnaire

A questionnaire distributed to 10 licensed employees working at Sunan Ampel's tomb revealed that most employees felt proud to work at a location of high historical and spiritual value. However, they also noted some operational issues that affect the tourist experience, such as a lack of training for staff in explaining the tomb's history to tourists, as well as a lack of coordination in managing the number of simultaneous visitors.

As many as 60% of employees felt that the training provided so far was not enough to improve their understanding of the spiritual aspects of religious tourism that can be conveyed to tourists. Additionally, 50% of the employees suggested the need for improved facilities, such as prayer rooms and comfortable seating for visitors, particularly for those who come in large numbers.

Observation Results

Field observations show that the majority of tourists visit Sunan Ampel's tomb with respect and solemnity. Most visitors are seen making pilgrimages, praying, and interacting with fellow pilgrims. However, there are some issues with facilities that

impact tourist comfort. Some visitors complained about the lack of seating in the area around the tomb that can be used for resting, especially for visitors who come in large groups or are elderly.

Additionally, visitors often struggle to find information about the history of Sunan Ampel and its spiritual significance. Although there is an information board, not all visitors can understand the content because the language is too formal and less appealing to the general public. Therefore, many tourists focus solely on the ritual aspect without understanding the deeper historical and cultural context.

On the other hand, the limited management of worship facilities also creates tension between tourists who want to worship and visitors who come for tourism purposes. This can be observed in certain moments, where some visitors appear uncomfortable while worshipping due to the large number of tourists taking pictures around the worship area, which detracts from the sacred atmosphere of the place.

Visualization of Findings

To support further understanding, the following tables and graphs illustrate tourists' perceptions of some aspects of their experience at Sunan Ampel's tomb:

Table 1. Tourist Perceptions of Facilities at the Tomb of Sunan Ampel

Facility Aspect	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Quite Satisfied	Not Satisfied	Very Dissatisfied
Parking facilities	10%	40%	30%	15%	5%
Historical information	15%	35%	25%	20%	5%
Worship facilities	20%	40%	25%	10%	5%
Environmental cleanliness	25%	50%	15%	10%	0%

Table 1 provides a quantitative overview of how tourists perceive the quality of various facilities at the Sunan Ampel tomb. The data reveal a mixed level of satisfaction across different facility aspects, suggesting that while the religious site fulfills some expectations, it still falls short in others.

1. Environmental Cleanliness

With 25% of tourists reporting "Very Satisfied" and 50% "Satisfied", environmental cleanliness emerges as the highest-rated aspect. This indicates that hygiene and sanitation are well-managed, and tourists recognize the physical upkeep of the site as an essential part of their religious and cultural comfort. Cleanliness is vital in religious tourism, as it contributes to the spiritual atmosphere and sense of sacredness.

2. Worship Facilities

Sixty percent of tourists (20% delighted and 40% satisfied) expressed positive perceptions of the worship facilities. This suggests that the site is relatively effective in providing spaces and amenities that support prayer and spiritual reflection. However, the 25% who were only "Quite Satisfied" and the remaining 15% (comprising "Not Satisfied" and "Very Dissatisfied") may indicate issues such as limited prayer space, a lack of gender-sensitive arrangements, or outdated infrastructure.

3. Historical Information

Only 15% of respondents were "Very Satisfied", and a notable 25% were "Quite Satisfied", with 20% expressing dissatisfaction. This highlights a clear gap in interpretive services, such as the availability of signage, brochures, or guided tours. In religious tourism, particularly at sites rich in history like Sunan Ampel, historical narratives and cultural storytelling are essential for enhancing visitors' spiritual engagement and educational value.

4. Parking Facilities

Parking received the lowest overall satisfaction, with only 10% of tourists reporting being "Very Satisfied" and 15% indicating they were "Not Satisfied." This suggests that fundamental logistical issues, such as access, capacity, or security, may negatively impact the start and end of the visitor experience. Given that most tourists likely travel in groups or family units, inadequate parking can create friction and diminish the sacred atmosphere even before they enter the site.

From the data above, it can be seen that the majority of tourists are satisfied with the cleanliness of the environment and worship facilities. Still, most are less confident in the parking facilities and historical information provided at the tomb of Sunan Ampel. This indicates that, although the manager has made efforts to enhance the visitor experience, there are still areas that require improvement.

Overall, the tourist experience at Sunan Ampel's tomb is quite positive, with many feeling a deep spiritual and cultural value during their visit. However, there are some aspects of the facilities that need improvement, such as parking facilities, access to information, and worship spaces. Tomb managers need to consider feedback from tourists and employees to enhance the overall visitor experience, particularly by providing more adequate and informative facilities for tourists who visit for religious purposes.

Interview Data and Interpretation of Interview Results

Based on in-depth interviews with the manager of Sunan Ampel's tomb, several significant findings have emerged that reveal the challenges faced in enhancing the tourist experience. The manager stated that although Sunan Ampel's tomb is a site of

high historical and spiritual value, the current facilities do not fully meet the needs of visitors. For example, the manager noted that there is an increase in the number of visitors on certain days, but the limited parking facilities pose a significant constraint. This indicates that, despite the popularity of the tomb, the existing infrastructure is inadequate in accommodating the growing number of tourists.

In addition, the manager also revealed that although information boards are provided around the tomb, the lack of staff involvement in giving explanations about the history of the tomb means that visitors often do not gain a deep understanding of the spiritual and cultural context of Sunan Ampel's tomb. This interview highlights the need to enhance the quality of information and education offered to visitors, thereby enriching their experience.

The results of a questionnaire administered to 10 licensed employees at Sunan Ampel's tomb showed a gap between the potential of the place as a religious tourism destination and the operational reality faced by employees. The majority of employees were proud to work at the tomb, but they also noted several issues affecting visitor comfort. As many as 60% of employees acknowledged that the training they received was limited, particularly in providing in-depth explanations of the tomb's history and its spiritual aspects.

The questionnaire also revealed that although licensed staff had basic knowledge of Sunan Ampel's tomb, they felt less involved in the development of educational materials or tour guides that could enhance the tourist experience. This aligns with findings from interviews with managers, who stated that staff still need to be empowered to provide more comprehensive information to tourists. It is necessary to develop a more in-depth training program so that employees can play a more active role in improving the quality of service and interaction with tourists.

Observations in the field provide a direct picture of tourist interactions around the tomb. Observations indicate that the majority of visitors, particularly those who come for religious purposes, highly value the tomb as a sacred site. They perform pilgrimage with complete respect, pray around the tomb, and interact with fellow pilgrims. However, some visitors seem annoyed by the presence of other tourists who come solely to take pictures or look around without understanding the historical or spiritual significance of the place.

Observations also reveal that inadequate facility management is a significant issue. One of the frequent complaints from visitors is the lack of comfortable seating around the tomb, which causes some visitors to feel exhausted. Additionally, the limited worship space makes visitors who wish to worship feel uncomfortable, especially during peak hours. These observations suggest that managers should consider improving physical facilities to support visitor comfort without compromising the spiritual value of the site.

Several previous studies on religious tourism have yielded similar findings to those of this study. For example, research by Rahayu (2020) found that the spiritual experience factor plays a vital role in increasing the satisfaction of tourists visiting religious sites. The study stated that adequate facilities and good services can enhance the spiritual experience of tourists. This finding aligns with the results of this study, where visitors to the tomb of Sunan Ampel are generally satisfied with their spiritual experience but desire improved facilities to enhance comfort during their visit.

Research by Nugroho (2021) also emphasizes the importance of effective management in enhancing the quality of religious tourism. In this study, Nugroho stresses the importance of historical and cultural education provided to visitors to enrich their experience. This finding is highly relevant to the results of the interviews in this study, which indicate that the manager of the Sunan Ampel tomb needs to provide more precise and more in-depth information about the tomb's history and its contributions to the development of Islam in Indonesia.

The results of this study have several practical implications for the manager of Sunan Ampel's tomb. First, there is a need to improve facilities that support visitor comfort, such as providing more seating and a more expansive worship space. Second, managers need to develop training programs for staff to enhance their ability to provide more comprehensive historical and cultural information to tourists. Thus, tourists not only get a spiritual experience but also a deeper understanding of the historical value of the tomb.

Additionally, the manager can consider increasing promotion and education about Sunan Ampel's tomb, both through social media and by cooperating with educational institutions or local communities. This can raise public awareness of the importance of this tomb as a religious site with high cultural and historical value.

This study has several limitations that need to be considered. First, the limited number of respondents (50 tourists and 10 employees) may limit the generalization of the results of this study to all visitors to the tomb of Sunan Ampel. Secondly, this study focuses solely on aspects of tourist facilities and spiritual experiences, without considering other factors such as the influence of weather or the socio-cultural background of visitors. Thirdly, this research was conducted in only one location, so the results may not apply to other religious tourism sites in Indonesia. Therefore, further research with a larger number of respondents and more diverse locations is needed to strengthen the findings of this study.

4. Conclusion

This study aims to understand tourists' perceptions of the religious tourism experience at the tomb of Sunan Ampel in Surabaya and to identify the factors that influence their experience. Based on the results of interviews, questionnaires, and observations, it can be concluded that the majority of tourists were satisfied with the

spiritual aspects they experienced during their visit. Still, they also expressed some challenges regarding the facilities at the tomb.

Limited facilities, such as inadequate seating, a narrow worship space, and a lack of easily accessible historical information, are factors that reduce tourist comfort. Nevertheless, tourists still perceive the high spiritual value of Sunan Ampel's tomb as a religious tourism destination, indicating that the spiritual aspect is more dominant than the physical aspects of the existing facilities. The findings also suggest that the management of Sunan Ampel's tomb needs to improve staff training to provide more in-depth and educational information to visitors. Additionally, improvements are required in physical facilities, particularly to enhance the comfort and convenience of tourists who visit in large numbers.

Overall, this study provides important insights into the experiences of tourists in religious tourism destinations and the implications for the management and development of spiritual tourism in Indonesia. Improved facilities and better services can enrich the tourist experience while supporting the sustainable development of religious tourism in the future.

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