



The religious tourism attraction of Graha Maria Annai Velangkani based on visitor perceptions

Claudia Purba

D3 Travel Tourism study program, University of northern sumatera, Medan, Indonesia
purbacclaudia294@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines visitors' perceptions of the religious tourism appeal of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni in Medan. Religious tourism today is no longer solely about worship, but also a place for visitors to seek tranquility and spiritual experiences. This study uses a quantitative approach with a survey method to obtain a more measurable picture of visitor assessments. Data were collected through direct observation and questionnaires distributed to visitors to Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni using a purposive sampling technique. The questionnaires were compiled using a Likert scale, and the data obtained were analyzed using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method with the help of the SmartPLS application. The results show that visitors have a positive perception of the religious tourism appeal of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni. The unique architecture, environmental conditions, and the calm and religious atmosphere are the main factors that influence visitor assessments. From these results, it can be concluded that Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni has good potential as a religious tourism destination in Medan.

Keywords: Visitor perception; tourist attraction; spiritual experience; Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni

Received: 2 October 2025

Revised: 4 November 2025

Published: 30 December 2025

INTRODUCTION

Religious tourism is a rapidly growing form of tourism in Indonesia. This tourism activity is not only oriented towards religious visits, but also towards the search for spiritual experiences, inner peace, and an understanding of the cultural and religious values inherent in a destination. With the growing public interest in value-based and meaningful tourism, religious tourism destinations are beginning to be seen as an important part of sustainable tourism development, particularly in urban areas with cultural and religious diversity.

The Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni, located in Medan, is a well-known religious tourism destination. This building boasts unique Indo-Mughal architectural style rarely found in other places of worship in Indonesia. In addition to serving as a place of worship and pilgrimage for Catholics, the Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni is also open to the general public and tourists from various backgrounds. The building's beauty, serene atmosphere, and strong spiritual values make this place not only a place of worship but also an important religious tourism attraction in Medan.

In the development of a tourist destination, tourist attractions are a primary factor influencing tourist interest. Tourist attractions are not only assessed from physical aspects such as building architecture, cleanliness, and supporting facilities, but also from non-physical aspects such as atmosphere, comfort, and the emotional and spiritual experiences experienced by visitors. Assessments of these attractions are strongly influenced by visitor perceptions, as perceptions reflect direct experiences at the destination.

Several previous studies have examined visitor perceptions of tourist attractions, both cultural and religious tourism. These studies indicate that visitor perceptions influence levels of satisfaction, intention to revisit, and recommendations to others. However, most studies have focused on religious tourism destinations in general or on large-scale tourist attractions. Consequently, studies examining visitor perceptions of religious tourism attractions at specific destinations are relatively limited, particularly in the city of Medan.

Based on these conditions, this study offers a novel approach by specifically examining visitor perceptions of the religious tourism attractions of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni. This study focuses on visitors' direct assessments of the physical and non-physical aspects of the destination's attractions. This research's novelty lies in the specific study object and the approach of visitor perception as the basis for assessing religious tourism attractions. Thus, this research is expected to provide scientific contributions in the development of religious tourism studies and become a consideration for managers in improving the quality and management of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni as a religious tourism destination.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach with a survey method to analyze visitor perceptions of the religious tourism attraction of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni in Medan. This quantitative approach was used because this study focused on measuring visitor perceptions through numerical data obtained from respondents.

The study was conducted at Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni in Medan. The research subjects were visitors who came to the research location during the data collection period. Respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique, targeting visitors who had visited and experienced the Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni.

Data collection was conducted through direct observation and questionnaires. Observations were used to obtain a general overview of the location and available facilities, while the questionnaire served as the primary instrument to measure visitor perceptions of the religious tourism attraction. Questions in the questionnaire were

structured using a Likert scale to facilitate the assessment process.

The data obtained were then analyzed statistically using SmartPLS software. This analysis was used to interpret visitor perceptions of the religious tourism attraction of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni as a basis for discussion and drawing conclusions from the study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results of an analysis of visitor perceptions of the religious tourism appeal of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni. The analysis was conducted using a Partial Least Squares (PLS) approach to examine the relationship between religious tourism appeal and visitor perceptions.

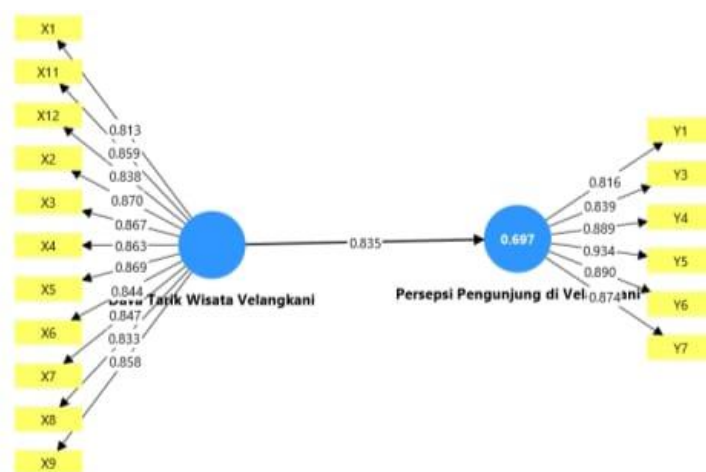


Figure 1. Analytical Model of Visitor Perceptions of Religious Tourism Attractions Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni

The analysis results indicate that visitors have a generally positive perception of the religious tourism appeal of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni. This is reflected in the fulfillment of validity and reliability values for all research indicators, both in the physical and non-physical aspects of the tourist attraction. These findings indicate that the elements that make up the tourist attraction are well-received by visitors.

Regarding the physical appeal, the unique architecture of the building is a key element shaping visitor perceptions. The building's distinctive shape, unlike other places of worship in general, creates a strong visual impression and is a distinctive feature of this destination. Furthermore, the relatively clean and well organized environment and the availability of supporting facilities contribute to a comfortable visit.

Beyond the physical aspects, non-physical attractions also significantly influence visitor perceptions. The serene atmosphere and spiritual values felt during a visit to Graha Maria

Annai Velangkanni are important factors in providing visitors with a meaningful experience. This experience is shared not only by Catholics but also by visitors from diverse backgrounds, demonstrating the inclusive nature of religious tourism.

The findings of this study align with previous research, which found that religious atmosphere and emotional experiences play a significant role in shaping visitor perceptions and satisfaction at religious tourism destinations. Positive perceptions of tourist attractions have the potential to boost visitor satisfaction, encourage repeat visits, and encourage recommendations to others.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni has strong potential as a religious tourism destination in Medan. Therefore, management needs to maintain the quality of its facilities and maintain its religious atmosphere to sustainably enhance the visitor experience.

CONCLUSION

The analysis results indicate that visitors have a generally positive perception of the religious tourism appeal of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni. This is reflected in the fulfillment of validity and reliability values for all research indicators, both in the physical and non-physical aspects of the tourist attraction. These findings indicate that the elements that make up the tourist attraction are well-received by visitors.

Regarding the physical appeal, the unique architecture of the building is a key element shaping visitor perceptions. The building's distinctive shape, unlike other places of worship in general, creates a strong visual impression and is a distinctive feature of this destination. Furthermore, the relatively clean and well-organized environment and the availability of supporting facilities contribute to a comfortable visit.

Beyond the physical aspects, non-physical attractions also significantly influence visitor perceptions. The serene atmosphere and spiritual values felt during a visit to Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni are important factors in providing visitors with a meaningful experience. This experience is shared not only by Catholics but also by visitors from diverse backgrounds, demonstrating the inclusive nature of religious tourism.

The findings of this study align with previous research, which found that religious atmosphere and emotional experiences play a significant role in shaping visitor perceptions and satisfaction at religious tourism destinations. Positive perceptions of tourist attractions have the potential to boost visitor satisfaction, encourage repeat visits, and encourage recommendations to others.

Overall, the results of this study indicate that Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni has strong potential as a religious tourism destination in Medan. Therefore, management needs to maintain the quality of its facilities and maintain its religious atmosphere to sustainably enhance the visitor experience.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Cooper, C., Fletcher, J., Gilbert, D., & Wanhill, S. (2018). *Tourism: Principles and practice* (6th ed.). Pearson Education.

Graha Maria Pastoral Work Team. (2018). *History and architecture of Graha Maria Annai Velangkanni*. Graha Maria Press.

Haq, F., & Medhekar, A. (2020). Is spiritual tourism a sustainable tourism product? A case study from India. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 34, 100665.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2020.100665>

Henderson, J. C. (2018). Religious tourism and pilgrimage: A case study of Mecca. *Tourism Recreation Research*, 43(2), 1–11.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/02508281.2018.1445695>

Kim, H., & Chen, J. S. (2016). Destination image formation process: A holistic model. *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 22(2), 154–166.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1356766715615911>

Krešić, D., & Prebežac, D. (2017). Index of destination attractiveness as a tool for destination attractiveness assessment. *Tourism: An International Interdisciplinary Journal*, 65(4), 497–517.

Lopez, L., & Garcia, J. A. (2020). Spirituality and tourism experience: An analysis of visitors' perceptions. *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change*, 18(3), 321–338.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14766825.2019.1646810>

Mulyadi. (2019). *Psychology of perception*. Kencana.

Pitana, I. G., & Gayatri, P. (2005). *Sociology of tourism*. Andi Offset.

Rahayu, N. (2020). The attraction of religious tourism and its influence on visitor experiences. *Journal of Tourism and Culture*, 12(2), 45–57.

Raj, R., & Griffin, K. (2015). *Religious tourism and pilgrimage management: An international perspective*. CABI.

Sharpley, R. (2018). Tourism, tourists, and society. In *Routledge handbook of tourism and society*. Routledge.

Suwena, I. K., & Widyatmaja, I. G. N. (2017). *Basic knowledge of tourism science*. Larasan Library.

Timothy, D. J., & Olsen, D. H. (2016). *Tourism, religion, and spiritual journeys*. Routledge.

Triyuni, N. N., & Sari, N. L. (2021). Tourist perceptions of religious tourism attractions in Bali. *Indonesian Tourism Journal*, 15(1), 23–34.