

EVALUATE THE QUALITY OF SPIRITUAL TOURISM SERVICES IN AN GIANG PROVINCE USING THE IPA MODEL

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ABSTRACT:

This study evaluates the quality of spiritual tourism services in An Giang province using the Importance–Performance Analysis (IPA) model. Data were collected through convenience sampling from a survey of 115 tourists. The findings indicate that although most service quality criteria were rated highly in terms of performance, they still fell short of tourist expectations, particularly in the dimensions of responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Tourists also highlighted several strengths, including convenient transportation and diverse local specialties. Based on the results, the study proposes targeted solutions to enhance the quality of spiritual tourism services and support the sustainable development of An Giang province's tourism sector.

Keywords: service quality, spiritual tourism, An Giang province, IPA model.

1. Introduction

Spiritual tourism - also known as pilgrimage or faith-based tourism - is a specialized form of tourism that combines sightseeing with the practice of beliefs and religion. It is not merely a journey to explore culture but also a profound spiritual experience that helps balance the body, mind, and spirit (Smith et al., 2010). According to Norman (2012), spiritual tourism is a facet of leisure tourism aimed at enhancing spiritual well-being. In terms of motivation, spiritual tourism can be divided into two groups: pilgrimage for

spiritual reasons or participation in religious rituals, and sacred sightseeing to visit places like temples. Developing spiritual tourism not only brings economic, social, and cultural benefits but also helps tourists find purpose and enrich their lives (Nhan & Khanh, 2014).

In Vietnam, spiritual tourism is growing, particularly in areas with rich cultural and religious backgrounds like An Giang Province. An Giang is ethnically and religiously diverse, known for its spiritual sites such as the Ba Chua Xu Temple on Sam Mountain, Hang Pagoda, and the Maitreya

Buddha Statue on Cam Mountain. With a rich system of temples, pagodas, and shrines, and a blend of various beliefs, An Giang possesses a unique spiritual tourism identity. Notably, the Ba Chua Xu Temple Festival has been recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity since 2025, attracting millions of Buddhist pilgrims. In 2024, An Giang welcomed approximately 9.1 million visitors, generating 10,250 billion VND in tourism revenue. Despite its strong potential, many spiritual destinations in An Giang face issues related to security, service quality, and staff attitudes, which significantly impact tourists' satisfaction and experiences. Therefore, it is essential to comprehensively assess the quality of spiritual tourism services in An Giang to propose appropriate solutions for the sustainable development of the province's tourism industry.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Approach

Spiritual tourism was first studied by Cohen (1979) as a branch of religious tourism. Spirituality has become an important motivation that promotes tourism, drawing the attention of many scholars, which led to the emergence of spiritual tourism (Besecke, 2014). Spiritual tourism brings sacred emotions and spiritual experiences to travelers, while also being a form of cultural tourism that is rapidly growing to meet the spiritual development needs and cultural exploration of modern humans (IGI Global, 2017). In Vietnam, spiritual tourism exploits spiritual cultural elements during tourism activities, based on tangible and intangible cultural values associated with the historical formation of human awareness about the world, faith, religion, beliefs, and other special spiritual values (Thang et al., 2017).

Service quality is defined as the extent to which a service meets or exceeds customer expectations (Parasuraman et al., 1988). High service quality leads to greater tourist satisfaction, encouraging them to return and recommend the destination to others (Parasuraman et al., 1985). There are

several models for measuring service quality, such as SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1988) and IPA (Martilla & James, 1977). This study applies the IPA model due to its outstanding advantages, including its visual assessment of the gap between importance and performance, its support for effective management decision-making, and its alignment with current research trends in tourism service quality (Thang & Hong, 2022).

The study uses the Paired-samples T-test to test the gap between the importance (I) and performance (P) of components measuring the quality of spiritual tourism services in An Giang. A negative result ($I > P$) indicates that the service quality has not met expectations, while a positive result ($P > I$) shows that it exceeded tourists' expectations.

2.2 Evaluation criteria for spiritual tourism service quality in An Giang

Based on a literature review and practical context at spiritual tourism sites in An Giang Province, the study developed service quality measurement criteria under five components as detailed in Table 1 below.

2.3 Data collection method

The study has employed the convenient sampling combined with direct interviews to collect data from 115 tourists at spiritual tourism sites in An Giang Province. The sample characteristics are as follows: 63.5% of the tourists were female and 36.5% were male; their ages ranged from 14 to 81 years (average age: 35); educational levels varied, with the majority having university degrees (39.1%), followed by college/intermediate levels (34.8%); 78.3% of respondents were single; the main occupation was officer (32.2%). Regarding travel behavior, 62.5% had visited spiritual destinations in An Giang more than twice. The most commonly visited sites included Lam Vien - Cam Mountain (75.7%), Ba Chua Xu Temple (54.8%), Ta Pa Pagoda (36.5%), Tay An Pagoda (28.7%), and the Thoai Ngoc Hau Mausoleum (20.9%).

Table 1: Evaluation of the quality of spiritual tourism services in An Giang

Factor	Observed variables	Scale	Resources
Reliability	Destination provides services as committed.	5-level Likert	Van Phung et al., (2024), Thuy & Nguyen (2020)
	Destination information is provided fully and accurately.		
	There is a complete introduction document about the tourist destination.		
	Quickly resolve tourist problems.		
Responsiveness	Good service during peak seasons.	5-level Likert	Thuy & Nguyen (2020), Nhan & Khanh (2014)
	Good connection between tourist attractions.		
	Diverse souvenirs and local specialties.		
	Local cuisine with strong identity.		
	Unique and attractive spiritual activities.		
Assurance	Food safety and hygiene are guaranteed.	5-level Likert	Thuy & Nguyen (2020); Nhan & Khanh (2014)
	Security and safety conditions are guaranteed.		
	Medical and health care facilities are available.		
	Clean and green surrounding environment.		
	Professional and polite service staff.		
	Service prices are commensurate with quality.		
Empathy	Friendly and hospitable locals.	5-level Likert	Van Phung et al., (2024), Thuy & Nguyen (2020)
	Staff are knowledgeable and responsive to tourists' needs.		
	Staff are always caring and sharing with tourists.		
	Staff are willing to support and help tourists.		
Tangibles	Beautiful and diverse architecture of temples, pagodas, and monasteries.	5-level Likert	Van Phung et al., (2024), Thuy & Nguyen (2020)
	Rich cultural and historical relics.		
	Accommodations with full facilities and amenities.		
	Convenient transportation system.		
	Neat and elegant staff uniforms.		
	Beautiful and impressive natural landscapes.		
	Traditional crafts and unique folk art performances.		

Source: Authors' compilation and adjustment, 2024

3. Research Results

3.1 Tourists' evaluation of reliability

Based on the test results in Table 2, tourists highly rated the performance level of reliability

criteria; however, these criteria still fell short of tourists' expectations, as reflected by the difference between importance and performance. The criterion "Quickly resolve tourist problems"

Table 2: Reliability testing result

Sign	Reliability	(I)	(P)	(P-I)	Sig.
1	Destination provides services as committed.	4.13	3.94	-0.191	0.035
2	Destination information is provided fully and accurately.	4.10	3.97	-0.139	0.073
3	There is a complete introduction document about the tourist destination.	3.91	3.82	-0.096	0.223
4	Quickly resolve tourist problems.	4.33	4.06	-0.270	0.002

Source: Survey data of 115 tourists, 2024

showed the largest gap, followed by “Destination provides services as committed.” The other two criteria were not statistically significant (Sig. > 0.05) within the research sample. These findings suggest that spiritual tourism sites should improve reliability-related criteria to enhance the quality of services in the future.

3.2 Tourists’ evaluation of responsiveness

As shown in Table 3, most responsiveness criteria had negative gaps and were statistically significant. This indicates that spiritual tourism sites have not met tourists’ expectations. Notably, the criterion “Good connection between tourist attractions” had a large negative gap, suggesting that interconnection between spiritual destinations in the area is still limited. Similarly, the criterion “Good service during peak seasons” did not meet tourists’ expectations. Improving destination linkages and strengthening staff service capacity are essential to enhance service quality and increase visitor satisfaction.

3.3 Tourists’ evaluation of assurance

Table 4 presents the test results for assurance criteria. Although tourists highly rated the performance level, the assurance criteria still did not meet expectations. The criterion “Security and safety conditions are guaranteed” had the largest gap, reflecting tourists’ concerns about safety and security at spiritual destinations. Criteria related to food safety and healthcare services also fell short of expectations. These findings indicate that tourists highly value a safe, friendly, and professional tourism environment, making it a critical requirement in improving service quality.

3.4 Tourists’ evaluation of empathy

As indicated in Table 5, the empathy criteria all have a lower level of performance than the level of importance. This shows that empathy in spiritual tourism services has not met the expectations of tourists. In particular, the criterion “Staff are willing to support and help tourists” has the largest

Table 3: Responsiveness testing result

Sign	Responsiveness	(I)	(P)	(P-I)	(Sig.)
1	Good service during peak seasons.	4.30	3.97	-0.330	0.000
2	Good connection between tourist attractions.	4.21	3.85	-0.357	0.000
3	Diverse souvenirs and local specialties.	4.16	4.05	-0.104	0.227
4	Local cuisine with strong identity.	4.29	4.30	0.009	0.902
5	Unique and attractive spiritual activities.	4.15	4.11	-0.035	0.581

Source: Survey data of 115 tourists, 2024

Table 4: Assurance testing result

Sign	Assurance	(I)	(P)	(P-I)	(Sig.)
1	Food safety and hygiene are guaranteed.	4.39	4.11	-0.278	0.000
2	Security and safety conditions are guaranteed.	4.25	3.90	-0.348	0.000
3	Medical and health care facilities are available.	4.38	4.11	-0.270	0.000
4	Clean and green surrounding environment.	4.38	4.18	-0.200	0.010
5	Professional and polite service staff.	4.20	3.97	-0.235	0.004
6	Service prices are commensurate with quality.	4.23	3.97	-0.252	0.002

Source: Survey data of 115 tourists, 2024

Table 5: Empathy testing result

Sign	Empathy	(I)	(P)	(P-I)	(Sig.)
1	Friendly and hospitable locals.	4.14	4.02	-0.235	0.002
2	Staff are knowledgeable and responsive to tourists' needs.	4.16	3.94	-0.122	0.132
3	Staff are always caring and sharing with tourists.	4.47	4.25	-0.217	0.007
4	Staff are willing to support and help tourists.	4.31	3.93	-0.383	0.000

Source: Survey data of 115 tourists, 2024

difference, clearly reflecting the lack of initiative in the service process of the staff. At the same time, the criterion “Friendly and hospitable locals” is highly appreciated by tourists but still does not meet the expectations of tourists. The criterion “Staff are always caring and sharing with tourists” also has a significant difference, reflecting the greater expectations of tourists from the staff at spiritual tourism destinations. In general, empathy - an important factor in the spiritual tourism experience is positively evaluated by tourists at the level of performance but has not met the expectations of tourists. This is an issue that needs to be further improved to enhance service quality at spiritual tourist destinations.

3.5 Tourists' evaluation of tangibles

Tangibles in spiritual tourism reflect the physical features and direct experiences at destinations, such as architecture, landscape, and infrastructure. Table 6 shows that most tangible criteria were rated highly in performance but did

not meet tourists' expectations. The criterion “Beautiful and diverse temple, pagoda, and monastery architecture” had the largest gap, indicating that tourists expect high aesthetic and unique values from spiritual constructions that were not fully met. The criterion “Well-dressed and elegant staff” also showed a significant gap, suggesting that although tourists were impressed by staff appearance, expectations were still higher. Overall, spiritual tourism sites should continue improving tangible aspects such as scenery, architecture, and attire to enhance performance and leave lasting impressions. Simultaneously, it is crucial to preserve and promote the unique spiritual cultural values of the locality.

4. Conclusion

In general, tourists highly rated the performance level of service quality at spiritual tourism sites in An Giang Province. However, most criteria still did not meet tourists' expectations. This indicates that the overall service quality of spiritual tourism is not

Table 6: Tangibles testing result

Sign	Tangibles	(I)	(P)	(P-I)	(Sig.)
1	Beautiful and diverse architecture of temples, pagodas, and monasteries.	4.47	4.25	-0.217	0.001
2	Rich cultural and historical relics.	4.43	4.30	-0.122	0.099
3	Accommodations with full facilities and amenities.	4.14	4.01	-0.130	0.116
4	Convenient transportation system.	4.05	4.07	0.017	0.842
5	Neat and elegant staff uniforms.	4.27	4.10	-0.174	0.034
6	Beautiful and impressive natural landscapes.	4.47	4.43	-0.043	0.437
7	Traditional crafts and unique folk art performances	4.24	4.10	-0.148	0.071

Source: Survey data of 115 tourists, 2024

yet highly evaluated by visitors. Based on the analysis results, the study proposes several solutions to improve the quality of spiritual tourism services in An Giang Province, including: Enhancing the quality of the tourism workforce, focusing on communication skills, attitude, and professional competencies; Actively promoting and raising awareness of the local community's role in shaping the tourism image, and encouraging community participation in spiritual tourism development; Developing spiritual tourism

products associated with local cultural values that are sacred and distinctive; Ensuring safety and security for tourists throughout their visit; Investing in upgrading infrastructure at destinations, especially facilities serving tourism and environmental sanitation. These solutions not only help improve the quality of spiritual tourism services and enhance tourist satisfaction, but also lay an important foundation for the sustainable development of An Giang's spiritual tourism industry ■

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ỨNG DỤNG MÔ HÌNH IPA ĐÁNH GIÁ CHẤT LƯỢNG DỊCH VỤ DU LỊCH TÂM LINH TỈNH AN GIANG

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TÓM TẮT:

Nghiên cứu này tập trung đánh giá chất lượng dịch vụ du lịch tâm linh tỉnh An Giang thông qua mô hình IPA (Importance-Performance Analysis). Dữ liệu nghiên cứu được thu thập bằng phương pháp chọn mẫu thuận tiện, cỡ mẫu nghiên cứu đạt được là 115 du khách. Kết quả nghiên cứu cho thấy phần lớn các tiêu chí đo lường chất lượng dịch vụ du lịch tâm linh được du khách đánh giá khá cao ở mức độ thực hiện. Tuy nhiên, hầu hết các tiêu chí chưa đạt được sự mong đợi của du khách, đặc biệt là sự đáp ứng, sự đảm bảo và sự đồng cảm. Một số khía cạnh tích cực được du khách ghi nhận như hệ thống giao thông thuận tiện, đặc sản địa phương đa dạng. Từ đó, nghiên cứu đề xuất một số giải pháp nhằm nâng cao chất lượng dịch vụ du lịch tâm linh, góp phần thúc đẩy phát triển ngành du lịch tỉnh An Giang.

Từ khóa: chất lượng dịch vụ, du lịch tâm linh, tỉnh An Giang, mô hình IPA.