

# Factors Affecting Spiritual Tourists' Satisfaction In The Mekong Delta Of Vietnam

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## Abstract:

The aim of the current article is to examine the factors that affect tourists' satisfaction at spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. The influential factors are "Tourism operating environment", "Natural and cultural conditions", "Infrastructure", "Government support", "Word-of-mouth information", "Spiritual beliefs" and "Price". The research data was collected from 568 spiritual tourists in the provinces and cities in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam they are (1) Tien Giang, (2) Can Tho, (3) Soc Trang, (4) Kien Giang, (5) Dong Thap, (6) An Giang, and (7) Bac Lieu. The scales were first evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis method. Subsequently, the linear regression analysis method is used to test the appropriateness of the proposed research model and test the research hypothesis. The empirical findings show that all of the 7 factors ("Tourism operating environment", "Natural and cultural conditions", "Infrastructure", "Government support", "Word-of-mouth information", "Spiritual beliefs" and "Price") impose statistical influences on tourists' satisfaction at spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, where "Tourism operating environment - MTHD" has the strongest influence on "Tourist satisfaction - HLDK", while "Government support - HTCQ" is the weakest influencing factor on "Tourist satisfaction - HLDK". The results can be expected to help local governments and tourism businesses have suitable policies on spiritual tourism as well as local residents have appropriate behavior in developing spiritual tourism in their areas.

**Key Word:** Spiritual tourist; Satisfaction; Mekong Delta; Vietnam.

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## I. Introduction

Implementing the Party and State's policies on socio-economic development, with a focus on developing the tourism industry to become a spearhead of the region is a current priority. Economic activities in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, especially in the field of tourism and activities related to attracting both local and national visitors, have attracted research interest not only in the international research community but also in Vietnam. With the diverse development of tourism types, including spiritual tourism, research topics on tourism in general and spiritual tourism in particular have been expanded and approached from many different sides, according to many different approaches by researchers. With natural conditions and unique cultural and historical heritage, the Mekong Delta has attracted millions of domestic and foreign tourists to visit each year.

Currently, the tourism industry in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam mainly exploits eco-tourism, while spiritual cultural tourism has not been given due attention, and spiritual tourism products with service facilities have not been created with high quality tourism service. With the current tourism development trend, the lack of diverse and high-class tourism products and services is a significant disadvantage, greatly affecting the satisfaction of tourists in general and spiritual tourists in particular in the Mekong Delta region. There are many factors stimulating the evolution of tourism, helping it create quality tourism services, a safe and friendly tourism environment for tourists when accessing related support services.

Tourist satisfaction is reflected by their loyalty or intention to return to their destination (Huang & Hsu, 2009). In addition, tourists will feel bad about a tourist destination if they receive negative feedback about that place by the media or receive recommendations from the local government. Domestic projects mostly focus on establishing models to analyze tourist satisfaction. In addition, the number of studies assessing tourists' intention to return to destinations analyzed in Vietnam is still modest.

Therefore, more research is needed on factors affecting tourist satisfaction. Besides, spiritual tourism is a type of tourism that relies on tourists' spiritual beliefs towards spiritual tourist destinations. To develop the field of spiritual tourism in a sustainable way, tourist destinations as well as tourism businesses and local communities as well as the host government should create attractiveness, as well as build separate brands for spiritual tourism destinations there. This will increase satisfaction as well as attract tourists to return to their

spiritual tourism destination. In order to solve the above difficulties and limitations, the implementation of the topic on "Factors affecting spiritual tourists' satisfaction in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam" to be carried out is very necessary and is considered the key to the substantive and sustainable development of the tourism industry in general and spiritual tourism in particular in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam.

## **II. Research hypothesis**

The tourism environment is often assessed through tourists' perceptions of tourism atmosphere, products and services that businesses provide, as well as the impact on the local community where tourists visit. In the case of spiritual tourism destinations, the tourism environment which is expressed through the level of safety, hygiene, friendliness, service prices, openness of information and diversity of services that meet the needs of tourists' demand (Bigne et al., 2001; Ibrahim & Gill, 2005; Prayag, 2008; Sun et al., 2013; Phan Minh Duc & Dao Trung Kien, 2016; Than Trong Thuy, 2019). Saqib (2019) confirmed the positive association between the image of the destination and the tourism environment with satisfaction and the decision to return of tourists: a positive image of the destination is synonymous with high satisfaction of visitors.

Natural and cultural conditions also reflect the attractive image of a destination to tourists. Natural features are often related to natural landscapes, environment and weather at the destination, creating special experiences in tourism activities. Culturally, the attraction of the destination is expressed through its architectural ensemble, religious monuments and intangible cultural aspects such as religious festivals and ceremonies. The better the impressions of natural and cultural conditions that the destination gives tourists, the more satisfaction they will create (Nguyen Van Dinh et al., 2021). Factors affecting tourist satisfaction are proposed in the research model, including: natural resources and physical conditions, environment, food services as well as cultural heritage (Nguyen Thi Ha Thanh, 2013).

From infrastructure, all activities of the local community and tourists are served. This is an important system in creating favorable conditions for spiritual tourism activities. That infrastructure includes physical elements such as roads and basic material systems available in the tourist area, to meet the needs of tourists and help them access and participate in experiencing tourism activities (Phan Minh Duc & Dao Trung Kien, 2016). A good infrastructure will create favorable conditions, helping tourists easily access and explore tourist destinations, contributing to their loyalty. Research by Le Thi Khanh Ly (2021) analyzed the influence of different factors on the satisfaction of visitors to Thung Nham, including the destination's facilities.

In Nguyen's (2009) study, destination image was assessed through three different aspects, in which local government support was considered a key factor affecting customer satisfaction. Nguyen (2009) affirmed that support from the government plays an extremely important role in customer satisfaction. Piewdang et al (2013) evaluated the management of spiritual tourism, and said that active support from the government often has a great impact on the business sector as well as the local community. This indicates that government support plays an important role in creating a favorable environment for tourists and local service providers. In a study by Phan Minh Duc and Dao Trung Kien (2016), government support has a positive effect on tourist satisfaction.

Word-of-mouth information is considered a form of experiential learning and has become an important variable shaping potential customers' expectations. Positive word-of-mouth information often has a positive influence on individuals' decisions because it is often shared from trusted sources such as friends and relatives (Chi & Qu, 2008). Reichheld et al (2000) focused on the power of word-of-mouth and emphasized that positive word-of-mouth can strengthen customer loyalty and satisfaction, as well as increase revisit intention by tourists. This demonstrates the importance of word-of-mouth information not only in shaping individual decisions but also in creating and maintaining customer loyalty and satisfaction (Abubakar, 2016).

Macintosh and Lockshin (1997) argued that a customer's personal trust is explained as the customer's decisiveness in defining trust as trustworthiness. Studies have shown that beliefs about a destination can influence the behavior of individuals or groups toward that place (Artigas et al., 2017). Strong beliefs about a destination will play an important role in tourist satisfaction with the travel destination. Spiritual destinations are often related to religious sites or indigenous beliefs, and spiritual tourism activities are often inseparable from the spiritual beliefs of tourists (Than Trong Thuy, 2019). Spiritual belief is seen as a driving force behind an individual's performance of spiritual and religious activities, especially within the scope of research, which is the process of choosing to travel to a specific destination.

According to Nguyen Minh Tuan (2020), customers are increasingly interested in prices and payment conditions. Therefore, tourism businesses need to focus on understanding customer behavior to satisfy customers through providing services at reasonable prices. In this viewpoint, Nguyen Trong Nhan (2013) analyzed factors affecting tourist satisfaction and thereby proposes solutions to improve this level of satisfaction. In particular, one of the solutions mentioned is adjusting the prices of garden tourism services such as cuisine, attractions and shopping activities. Rao et al. (2021) built a model to study factors affecting online customer satisfaction. With a research sample of 800 observations, the research results show that customers will be satisfied if they feel the price of goods/services is reasonable. Overall, it can hypothesize:

H1: Tourism operating environment has a positive influence on tourist satisfaction with spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam

H2: Natural and cultural conditions have a positive influence on tourist satisfaction with spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam

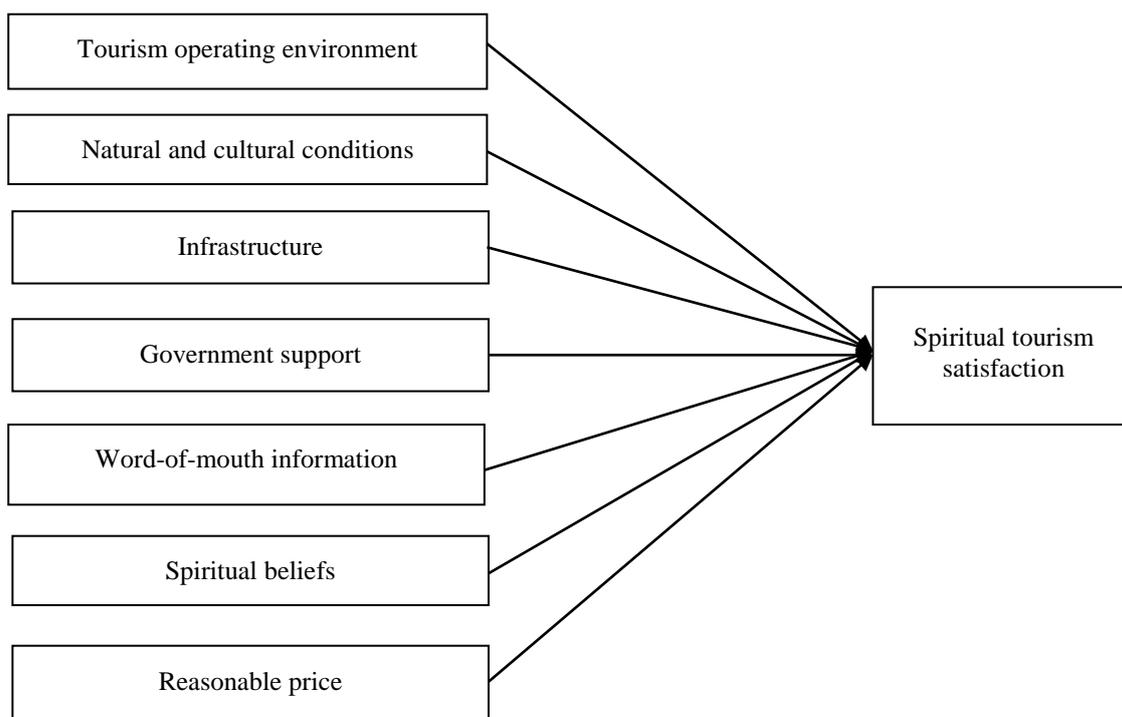
H3: Infrastructure has a positive influence on tourist satisfaction with spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam

H4: Government support has a positive influence on tourist satisfaction with spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam

H5: Word-of-mouth information has a positive influence on tourist satisfaction with spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam

H6: Spiritual beliefs have a positive influence on tourist satisfaction with spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam

H7: Reasonable price has a positive influence on tourist satisfaction with spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam



**Figure 1:** Research Model

The above hypotheses are used as a foundational knowledge to yield a proposed research model on the effects of "Tourism operating environment", "Natural and cultural conditions", "Infrastructure", "Government support", "Word-of-mouth information", "Spiritual beliefs" and "Price" on "Spiritual tourism satisfaction" in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. Having clarified the hypotheses derived from the reviewed literature, the current article arrives at the research model as presented in Figure 1. Then, the research methodology, which are applied to guide the data collection and facilitate the data analysis in the following section.

### **III. Research methodology**

The survey subjects of this study are a number of spiritual tourists in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. There are 13 provinces and cities in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. The provinces and cities selected for the survey include: (1) Tien Giang, (2) Can Tho, (3) Soc Trang, (4) Kien Giang, (5) Dong Thap, (6) An Giang, (7) Bac Lieu. These provinces and cities were chosen because they have many spiritual tourism destinations. A total of 600 travelers were surveyed for this study. However, in the end, only 568 responses provided complete information for the data analysis of this research project. The scales were first evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha reliability analysis method. Scales that meet reliability requirements will be included in exploratory factor analysis (EFA) to reduce a set of many variables used to test the conceptual value of the scale (Hair et al., 2010). Then, the linear regression analysis method is used to test the appropriateness of the proposed research model and test the research hypothesis.

To conduct research data analysis, first the measurement scale for two main research variables in the model must be established. The main variables are "Tourist satisfaction", "Tourism operating environment", "Natural and cultural conditions", "Infrastructure", "Government support", "Word-of-mouth information", "Spiritual beliefs" and "Price". A 5-level Likert scale is used to measure analytical variables in the research model; In which, level 1 corresponds to "completely disagree" and level 5 corresponds to "completely agree" towards the statements for the observed variables, other levels correspond in between these two states. The variable on "Tourist satisfaction - HLDK" is measured according to 4 observed variables. The variable on "Tourist operating environment - MTHD" is made up of 6 components. The variable on "Natural and cultural conditions - TNVH" includes 7 components. The variable of "Infrastructure - HTCS" is structured by 4 components. The variable of "Government support - HTCQ" is structured by 4 components. Variable on "Word-of-mouth information - TTTM" is structured by 5 components. The variable of "Spiritual belief - NTTL" is structured by 4 components. The variable "Price - GCHL" is structured by 5 components. The scales were first evaluated by using reliability analysis. The reliability of the scale was evaluated by using the internal consistency method through Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Then, linear regression analysis method is used to test the appropriateness of the proposed research model and test the research hypothesis.

#### IV. Result

After being collected, the data will be checked for reliability, using reliability analysis. All of the 39 observed variables in the research model were included in the reliability analysis. Results from the reliability analysis are presented in Table 1.

The total correlation coefficient of observed variables in the scale is more than 0.5. This result shows that the observed variables in a scale are similar (Hair et al., 2010). In addition, Cronbach's Alpha results show that the components of the scale all have high and good reliability coefficients, which is larger than 0.7 (Hair et al., 2010). In addition, Cronbach  $\alpha$ , if the variable is eliminated, is all smaller than the Cronbach  $\alpha$  of that factor. Therefore, all of the 39 observed variables meet reliability requirements.

Next, the data were subjected to linear regression analysis to test the research hypotheses. Linear regression results are presented in Table 2. The numbers in Table 2 show that the coefficient of determination  $R^2$  is 0.290. This means that the independent variables on "Tourism operating environment - MTHD", "Natural and cultural conditions - TNVH", "Infrastructure - HTCS", "Government support - HTCQ", "Word-of-mouth information - TTTM", "Spiritual belief - NTTL" and "Price - GCHL" explain 29% of the variation of the variable on "Tourist satisfaction - HLDK". The Durbin-Watson coefficient is 1.808, ranging from ( $D_U \rightarrow 4-D_U$ ), with a significance level of 1%; Therefore, it can be concluded that the research model does not suffer from autocorrelation (Hair et al., 2010). In addition, the variance inflation factors of the independent variables are all less than 8, this result shows that the research model does not have multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2010). Furthermore, the model's Fisher coefficient is equal to 32.580 with statistical significance at 1%, which implies that the research model is appropriate at the 1% significance level.

The results also show that "Tourism operating environment - MTHD", "Natural and cultural conditions - TNVH", "Infrastructure - HTCS" and "Word-of-mouth information - TTTM" have statistical impacts on "Tourist satisfaction - TTDK" at the 1% significance level. Meanwhile, "Government support - HTCQ", "Spiritual belief - NTTL" and "Price - GCHL" have a statistical impact on "Tourist satisfaction - HLDK" at significance level 5 %.

"Tourism operating environment - MTHD" is the factor that has the strongest influence on "Tourist satisfaction - HLDK" with an influence coefficient of 0.346, while "Infrastructure - HTCS" has the second strongest influence to the "Tourist satisfaction - HLDK" with an impact coefficient of 0.163. "Natural and cultural conditions - TNVH" and "Spiritual beliefs - NTTL" are the 3rd and 4th strongest influencing factors on "Tourist satisfaction - HLDK", with an influence coefficient times of 0.091 and 0.088 respectively.

**Table 1:** Reliability analysis.

Main variable	Observed variables	Total correlation	Cronbach $\alpha$ , if the variable is eliminated	Cronbach $\alpha$
HLDK	HLDK1	0.675	0.824	0.855
	HLDK2	0.702	0.813	
	HLDK3	0.735	0.799	
	HLDK4	0.677	0.824	
MTHD	MTHD1	0.707	0.879	0.895
	MTHD2	0.754	0.872	
	MTHD3	0.689	0.881	
	MTHD4	0.728	0.876	
	MTHD5	0.747	0.873	
	MTHD6	0.689	0.882	
TNVH	TNVH1	0.699	0.885	0.899

	TNVH2	0.723	0.882
	TNVH3	0.708	0.884
	TNVH4	0.718	0.882
	TNVH5	0.688	0.886
	TNVH6	0.695	0.885
	TNVH7	0.698	0.885
	HTCS	HTCS1	0.740
HTCS2		0.650	0.784
HTCS3		0.613	0.803
HTCS4		0.618	0.798
HTCQ	HTCQ1	0.604	0.799
	HTCQ2	0.640	0.784
	HTCQ3	0.733	0.738
	HTCQ4	0.624	0.791
TTTM	TTTM1	0.655	0.861
	TTTM2	0.623	0.871
	TTTM3	0.821	0.820
	TTTM4	0.755	0.835
	TTTM5	0.710	0.845
NTTL	NTTL1	0.637	0.753
	NTTL2	0.579	0.780
	NTTL3	0.594	0.774
	NTTL4	0.687	0.728
GCHL	GCHL1	0.748	0.775
	GCHL2	0.617	0.813
	GCHL3	0.605	0.816
	GCHL4	0.604	0.817

Source: Results of survey data processing by the author

**Table 2:** Linear regression analysis.

Variable	Coefficient not yet standardized		Coefficient standardized	t	P <sub>value</sub>	VIF
	B	Standard error	Beta			
Constant	-0.220	0.241		-0.911	0.363	
MTHD	0.346	0.040	0.332	8.562	0.000	1.182
TNVH	0.091	0.032	0.110	2.850	0.005	1.164
HTCS	0.163	0.043	0.143	3.794	0.000	1.113
HTCQ	0.078	0.037	0.080	2.093	0.037	1.136
TTM	0.087	0.033	0.099	2.673	0.008	1.090
NTTL	0.088	0.043	0.077	2.057	0.040	1.108
GCHL	0.079	0.035	0.082	2.245	0.025	1.060
Model fit: F/P <sub>value</sub>				32.580 /0.000		
R <sup>2</sup>				0.290		
Durbin-Watson				1.808		

Dependent variable: Tourist satisfaction

"Government support - HTCQ" is the weakest influencing factor, while Price - GCHL" is the second weakest influencing factor on "Tourist satisfaction - HLDK", with an influence coefficient times of 0.078 and 0.079 respectively. "Word-of-mouth information - TTTM" has the third weakest influence on "Tourist satisfaction - HLDK" with an influence coefficient of 0.087. From the results of linear regression analysis above, the relationship between influencing factors and "Tourist satisfaction" with spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam is expressed as the following equation:  $HLDK = -0.220 + 0.346xMTHD + 0.091xTNVH + 0.163xHTCS + 0.078xHTCQ + 0.087xTTTM + 0.088xNTTL + 0.079xGCHL + u$

## V. Conclusion

Spiritual tourist satisfaction is the result of a comparison between tourists' experiences at visited spiritual tourist destinations and their expectations about these destinations. The purpose of the topic is to focus on researching factors affecting the satisfaction of spiritual tourists at spiritual tourism destinations in the Mekong Delta region. Research data was collected in the following provinces: (1) Tien Giang, (2) Can Tho, (3) Soc Trang, (4) Kien Giang, (5) Dong Thap, (6) An Giang, (7) Bac Lieu. Data collected from tourists in these spiritual tourism destinations can be representative of the entire Mekong Delta region. At each of the 12 spiritual tourism destinations above, 50 tourists were selected to survey, so a total of 600 tourists were surveyed for this study. However, in the end, only 568 responses provided complete information for the data analysis of this

research project. From the research results, we see that 7 research variables have a statistical influence on the satisfaction of spiritual tourists in the Mekong Delta region. The findings provide an understanding of the cause-and-effect relationship of factors to tourist satisfaction with spiritual tourism destinations. This research topic is expected to help leaders, organizations and individuals involved in spiritual tourism activities make appropriate decisions, helping spiritual tourism in the Mekong Delta region develop sustainably. Based on the research results, this topic proposes the following implications.

**Environment and tourism activities:** The exploitation of tourism resources needs to be managed carefully and in accordance with the renewable and conservation capabilities of the resource. At the same time, close coordination between relevant sectors is very important to control impacts from spiritual tourism activities and ensure that socio-economic development does not have a negative impact on the environment.

**Infrastructure:** Local governments play an important role in creating supportive and preferential policy mechanisms, attracting investment in the spiritual tourism industry. Synchronous development of facilities in related industries such as transportation, healthcare, and telecommunications infrastructure will help promote the overall tourism industry, meeting the diverse and high needs of tourists. .

**Natural and cultural conditions:** Propagating and raising awareness about responsible tourism and destination protection is extremely important to maintain environmental cleanliness and create a safe and friendly tourism environment. It is better to strengthen programs and plans to prioritize the development of spiritual tourism, as well as stimulate community participation in the process of developing spiritual tourism.

**Spiritual beliefs:** Local authorities play an important role in building an appropriate policy system that satisfies the spiritual beliefs of spiritual tourists. Localities need to establish reasonable policies to increase tourists' curiosity about spiritual tourism areas, thereby promoting tourists' intention to return.

**Word-of-mouth information:** Local authorities need to create a specialized website about local spiritual tourism destinations, connecting with family websites and social networks to post information about spiritual tourism destinations regularly and continuously.

**Price:** Publicly listing prices of services according to State regulations is extremely important. Adjusting the prices of services needs to be done flexibly according to the economic context, meeting each specific audience, helping tourists have choices that suit their budget. More importantly, the price of the service must be commensurate with the quality of the service there, avoiding the situation of pricing that is not commensurate with the quality provided.

**Government support:** Local authorities creating conditions to support and encourage travel and tourism companies to exploit spiritual cultural tours to spiritual tourist areas is an important step. It is necessary to establish hotlines to promptly support tourists in all situations; Developing a long-term tourism industry development plan and strategy is necessary.

The current research offers local governments, tourism businesses and local residents as well as researchers with insight into the effects of "Tourism operating environment", "Natural and cultural conditions", "Infrastructure", "Government support", "Word-of-mouth information", "Spiritual beliefs" and "Price" on "Spiritual tourism satisfaction" in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam. These could help them make better decisions on spiritual tourism in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, which can help develop spiritual tourism there.

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