Sacred Sites, Cultural Insights: Exploring Spiritual Tourism in Bharat

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Spiritual Tourism, Cultural Heritage, Economic Impact, Marketing Strategies and Consumer Preferences	A survey of 400 respondents across Gujarat was conducted to explore their experiences and perceptions regarding spiritual tourism in Bharat. The survey examined respondents' familiarity with spiritual tourism destinations and whether they believed spiritual tourism had positive economic effects on local communities. It also sought to understand respondents' awareness of the cultural implications of the rapidly growing spiritual tourism industry in Bharat. Statistical analysis and factor analysis have been done. Results classified respondents into three categories: 'The Conscious Spiritual Traveler,' 'The Wellness-Seeking Traveler', and, 'The Culturally Immersive Traveler' investigating how spiritual tourism can drive global interest in Bharat's cultural heritage by analysing travellers' motivations, beliefs, and the emotional value of spiritual destinations. Findings highlight the need for better promotion of Bharat's spiritual sites to attract global tourists and enhance the tourism industry's potential. Effective marketing strategies that appeal to Gen Z, promoting increased cultural awareness, and improving accessibility to spiritual sites, along with supportive government policies, contribute to the growth and documentation of Bharat's cultural heritage and tourism.

INTRODUCTION

The global COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the importance of tourism because people are increasingly seeking moments to relate to themselves and achieve peace amidst global uncertainty. This trend underlines an evolving value that tourism assumes in today's societies. Of its multitude of manifestations, the most important differentiation is made between religious tourism and spiritual tourism. Religious tourism is a type focused outward wherein religious affiliation, belief, and practice serve as motivation. Spiritual tourism is inward-focused that emphasizes personal purpose, mindfulness, and inner peace (Nair & Dileep, 2021; Cheer et al., 2017).

Spiritual tourism is a concept with different meanings reflecting its diversified appeal. Halim et al. (2021) defined spiritual tourism as "a journey to find the purpose of life, and it is a lively exploration that goes beyond the self.". It contributes to the balance of the body-mind-spirit, which may or may not have a relationship with religion." Despite the fact that there is no consensus on the subject matter in the academia, spiritual tourism consumption has long been prevalent and has witnessed a marked increase in recent years. This growth is driven by the modern lifestyle, which often alienates individuals from themselves and their loved ones (Kumar et al., 2022; Sarkar et al., 2021). It is through this perspective that materialism has contributed to increasing stress, as people have had to seek comfort, peace, and emotional stability (Kujawa, 2017). The quest for fulfilment, meaning, and purpose is a very strong motivation in the current modern times of leisure travel.

India is a mystic and culturally rich land, drawing millions of domestic and international visitors who seek to explore how to find purpose in life and become deeply transformed into a new self. With growing self-discovery trends among younger people, this study unfolds the cultural insight of spiritual tourism for the present as well as future generations. These efforts go along with the efforts of Viksit Bharat@2047 that aim to enhance spiritual tourism and its transformative nature.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Spiritual tourism

The terms spiritual tourism and religious tourism and wellness tourism are often used synonymously, but the distinctions between spiritual and religious tourism are highly significant, mainly in determinants such as tourist demographics, motivations, behaviours, and activities (Robledo, 2015). As pointed by Demir (2018), spiritual and religious belief varies from each other entirely: while spirituality is premised on values and behaviours leading to the development of individual traits, religion is founded on belief in a supernatural power and religious activities, such as worshiping in sacred places. Spirituality can, thus, be religious or non-religious, based on the person's beliefs (Gill et al., 2011). Unlike religious tourism, spiritual tourism is a new trend among "new pilgrims" who seek authentic spiritual experiences beyond the traditional religious frameworks (Kujawa, 2017).

The rise in spiritual tourism over the last decade can be attributed to the increasing prevalence of neo-liberalism and materialism (Cheer et al., 2017). Spiritual tourism has also been described as a journey leading to spiritual realization (Singh et al., 2020). While it has multifaceted determinants, spiritual tourism is gaining momentum for motives beyond spirituality, such as education, knowledge, and awareness. Travelers with such intentions are often referred to as "seekers" or "experiential tourists" (Haq and Medhekar, 2015). A spiritual tourist can be defined as "someone who visits a specific place outside their usual environment with the intention of seeking spiritual meaning and/or growth, without overt religious compulsion. This experience may be religious, non-religious, sacred, or experiential in nature, but within a divine context, regardless of the primary reason for traveling." Spiritual tourism is a holistic concept encompassing both tangible aspects, such as temple design, monasteries, customs, traditions, and libraries, and intangible elements, such as the atmosphere, culture, and service quality attributes, which collectively influence tourists' intentions to visit (Garg et al., 2021).

Perception and preferences: Pillars of spiritual tourism

The initial step in analysing tourist behavior is to identify who they are and their purpose for traveling. Purpose is often described as the psychological motivation that drives a traveller's behavior. In the context of spiritual tourism, the subsequent key determinant is preference. Travel preferences in this domain can vary widely, including a desire to connect with the destination, cultural interests, participation in renowned events or festivals, secular or educational motives, culinary experiences, or environmental factors.

Spirituality has often been linked to improved well-being (Lifshitz, Nimrod & Bachner, 2019). Participating in leisure activities at spiritual places can greatly reduce stress. Many people visit religious monuments as a way to find answers to personal questions and, in some cases, to make changes in their lifestyles (Kumar, et. al., 2022). Such destinations are increasingly chosen by the younger generation with the intention of achieving these outcomes. Tourist behavior often gets influenced consciously or unconsciously by reference groups (Fernandes & Londhe, 2015). Spiritual interests may arise either independently or from such groups. Families, especially those with elderly members who are very spiritually motivated, often travel together on spiritual tours, taking along young children who have not yet realized the concept of spirituality.

Stress is now an issue often seen in the world today, even affecting the newer generation as well. The stress relief conceived by spiritual practices made many, who had to endure through high stresses in their regular life, seek solace through the path of spiritual tourism. The interest and decision to experience spirituality is the driving demand force for tourist, which the product under the conceived tourism has to achieve since demand eliminates the market and consequently revenue. Thus, spiritual tourism flourishes on the grounds of catering to the perception of its audience.

A global shift toward personal spiritual growth is influencing travel decisions, with religious and spiritual destinations gaining prominence. This change is shaped by a wide array of information sources that significantly impact potential travellers' perceptions and preferences for such destinations (Agarwal, A., et al., 2021).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To explore people's familiarity and preferences related to spiritual tourism destinations in India.
2. To study preferences, visited regions, spending, and cultural awareness in India's spiritual tourism.
3. To assess factors contributing to the growth of spiritual tourism in India.
4. To evaluate respondents' perceptions of the economic and infrastructural impacts of spiritual tourism in India.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A survey of 400 respondents across Gujarat was conducted to examine their experiences and perceptions of spiritual tourism in Bharat. The study explored respondents' familiarity with spiritual tourism destinations and their perspectives on the economic benefits of spiritual tourism for local communities. Additionally, it investigated their awareness of the cultural

implications associated with the rapid growth of the spiritual tourism industry in Bharat. Statistical analyses, including the Chi-Square test, factor analysis, and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM), were employed to derive meaningful insights from the data.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Demographic details of the respondents

The majority of respondents are male (56%), with females accounting for 44%. Most respondents fall within the age ranges of 30–40 years (34.5%) and 40–50 years (26.5%), followed by 20–30 years (23%), 50–60 years (10.5%), 60 years and above (4%), and under 20 years (1.5%). Occupationally, most respondents are employees (34.5%) and businessmen (23%), with homemakers (22%), students (17.5%), and retired individuals (3%) comprising the remaining groups. In terms of annual income, 42% earn less than 5 lacs, 32.75% fall in the 5–10 lacs range, 19.5% earn 10–15 lacs, and 4% report incomes exceeding 20 lacs. Regarding educational qualifications, the largest group consists of graduates (56.5%), followed by postgraduates or higher (33%), respondents with schooling (7.5%), Ph.D. holders (2.5%), and diploma holders (0.5%). These details are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Details		
Demographic Variables	Frequency(n)	Percentage (%)
The gender of the respondents		
Male	224	56
Female	176	44
Age		
Under 20	6	1.5
20-30	92	23
30-40	138	34.5
40-50	106	26.5
50-60	42	10.5
60 and Above	16	4
Educational Qualification		
Schooling	30	7.5
Graduate	226	56.5
Post- Graduate	132	33
Diploma	2	0.5
Ph.D.	10	2.5
Occupation		
Student	70	17.5
Employee	138	34.5
Homemaker	88	22
Businessman	92	23
Retired	12	3
Income		
Less than 5,00,000	168	42
5,00,000-10,00,000	131	32.75
10,00,000-15,00,000	78	19.5
15,00,000-20,00,000	20	5
Above 20,00,000	3	0.75

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

Considering the objective of the present study, i.e., to assess respondents' agreement on key motivations for spiritual tourism in India, the researchers have formulated the following hypotheses among the various constructs taken for the study.

Objective 1: To explore people's familiarity and preferences related to spiritual tourism destinations in India.

Analysis:

Table 2: Have you explored spiritual tourism destinations in India?	
Yes	388
No	1
Maybe	11

Interpretation:

Spiritual tourism in India shows that 97% (388) have visited such destinations, with only 1 respondent saying no and 11 undecided. This highlights immense interest and market potential. Marketing implications include creating targeted campaigns to maintain engagement and converting undecided audiences through compelling narratives. Economic implications involve boosting local economies via increased tourism revenue, encouraging infrastructure development, and generating employment opportunities in hospitality, travel, and allied sectors linked to spiritual tourism.

Table 3: What type of spiritual destinations do you prefer?	
Historical pilgrimage sites	132
Cultural and heritage sites	92
Contemporary spiritual retreats	176

Interpretation:

A survey on preferred spiritual destinations shows diverse interests: 34% favour contemporary spiritual retreats (176), 25% prefer historical pilgrimage sites (132), and 18% opt for cultural and heritage sites (92). **Marketing implications** include segmenting campaigns to target different preferences, promoting contemporary retreats to urban audiences, and highlighting historical and cultural significance for tradition-focused travelers. **Economic implications** involve driving revenue across diverse segments, fostering development in retreat infrastructure, and preserving heritage sites to support sustainable tourism.

Hypothesis 1

H0: There is no association between the respondents and their familiarity with spiritual destinations across Bharat.

H1: There is an association among the respondents and their familiarity regarding spiritual destinations across Bharat.

Table 4: Chi-square test and demographic associations						
Gender	**Not Familiar**	**Very Familiar**	**Grand Total**	**Test Applied**	**Test Result**	**Test Status**
Male	54	170	224	Chi-Square	0.004	Null Hypothesis is rejected
Female	64	112	176			
Grand Total	118	282	400			
Age of the respondents	**Not Familiar**	**Very Familiar**	**Grand Total**	Chi - Square	0.012	Null Hypothesis is rejected
20 - 30	28	64	92			
30 - 40	28	110	138			
40-60	42	64	106			
60 and above	20	44	64			
Grand Total	118	282	400			
Education	**Not Familiar**	**Very Familiar**	**Grand Total**	Chi-Square	0.031	Null Hypothesis is rejected
Graduate	78	148	226			
Post-Graduate	26	106	132			
Diploma		2	2			
Schooling	14	16	30			
Ph.D.		10	10			
Grand Total	118	282	400			
Occupation	**Not Familiar**	**Very Familiar**	**Grand Total**	Chi-Square	0.047	Null Hypothesis is rejected
Student	24	46	70			
Employee	32	106	138			
Businessman	28	64	92			
Retired	2	10	12			
Homemaker	32	56	88			
Grand Total	118	282	400			
Annual Income	**Not Familiar**	**Very Familiar**	**Grand Total**	Chi-Square	0.021	Null Hypothesis is rejected
Less than 5,00,000	70	98	168			
5,00,000-10,00,000	32	100	132			
10,00,000-15,00,000	10	68	78			
15,00,000-20,00,000	4	16	20			
Above 20,00,000	2		2			
Grand Total	118	282	400			

Interpretation:

We can see that the test valves come out to be less than 0.05, which means that null hypothesis is rejected and there is an association amongst the respondents and their familiarity regarding spiritual destinations across Bharat. Familiarity with spiritual tourism is higher among males (224) compared to females (176) and peaks in the 30–40 age group (138). Graduates (226) and those earning less than ₹10,00,000 annually (300) dominate the demographic. Employees (138) and students (70) are the most engaged occupations. **Marketing implications** include tailoring strategies for young professionals and leveraging digital platforms to reach students and employees. **Economic implications** highlight the potential for boosting mid-income group

spending, promoting employment in tourism, and enhancing destination appeal to drive local economic development.

Objective 2: To study preferences, visited regions, spending, and cultural awareness in India's spiritual tourism.

Analysis:

The most preferred spiritual destination in India happens to be Shirdi in Maharashtra. The below table highlights the most preferred spiritual destinations in India, with **Shirdi** (186, **20.3%**) topping the list, followed by **Rishikesh** (149, **16.3%**), **Haridwar** (144, **15.7%**), and **Varanasi** (111, **12.1%**). Other significant sites include Ajmer (110, 12%) and Mathura (91, 9.9%). Lesser-visited sites like **Bodh Gaya** (9, **1%**) and **Sabarimala** (5, **0.5%**) indicate untapped tourism potential. Spiritual tourism fosters cultural preservation, community bonding, and substantial economic contributions through hospitality, transportation, and local crafts. Enhanced focus on lesser-known sites could further promote economic growth and diversify India's rich spiritual heritage.

Table 5: Most preferred spiritual destinations in India	
Shirdi	186
Rishikesh	149
Haridwar	144
Varanasi	111
Ajmer	110
Mathura	91
Vrindavan	89
Amritsar	64
Dharamshala	33
Gangotri	26
Badrinath	20
Jagannath Puri	20
Kedarnath	19
Pushkar	17
Tiruvannamalai	16
Hampi	13
Bodh Gaya	9
Mahabalipuram	8
Sabarimala	5

Most preferred spiritual destinations in India
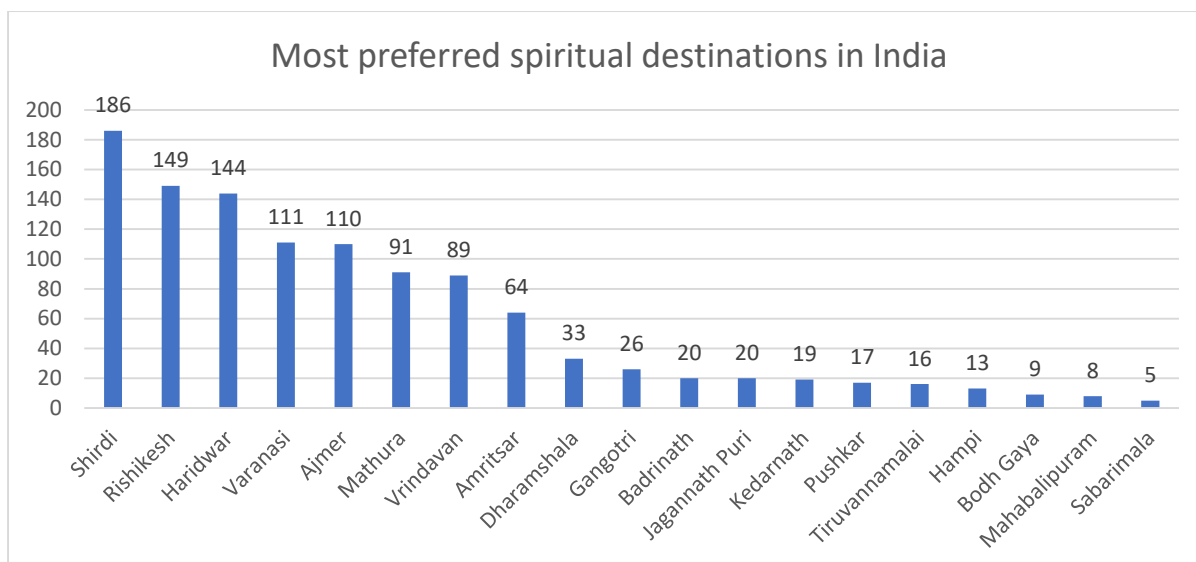
The data reveals that the majority of respondents typically spend approximately ₹20,000 to ₹30,000 per person on a spiritual tourism trip. The data indicates that the majority of respondents (46%) spend ₹20,000–₹30,000 per spiritual tourism trip, followed by 23% spending ₹10,000–₹20,000, and 21% spending ₹30,000–₹40,000. A smaller proportion spends less than ₹10,000 (2.5%) or more than ₹40,000 (7.5%). These expenditures reflect the economic significance of spiritual tourism, as higher spending contributes to the growth of local businesses, including hotels, transport, and handicrafts. Culturally, such trips support the preservation of sacred sites and traditions, fostering spiritual and communal bonds. The significant expenditure also underscores the willingness of individuals to invest in spiritual fulfilment and cultural engagement.

Table 6: Amount spent by respondents per person per spiritual trip		
The amount typically spent per spiritual trip	**Frequency**	**Percent**
10,000-20,000	92	23
20,000-30,000	184	46
30,000-40,000	84	21
less than 10,000	10	2.5
More than 40,000	30	7.5
Total	400	100

The data reveals that 97.5% of respondents are aware of the potential cultural implications of the booming spiritual tourism industry, while only 2.5% lack such awareness. This widespread understanding highlights the recognition of spiritual tourism's role in preserving cultural heritage, traditions, and sacred sites. Culturally, it strengthens community ties, promotes intergenerational knowledge transfer, and safeguards intangible cultural practices. Economically, heightened awareness can drive sustainable tourism practices, ensuring balanced development while protecting cultural assets. This indicates a strong foundation for initiatives aimed at combining cultural preservation with economic growth, ensuring the long-term vitality of India's spiritual tourism landscape.

Table 7: Awareness regarding potential cultural implications of the booming spiritual tourism industry		
Awareness regarding potential cultural implications of the booming spiritual tourism industry	Frequency	Percent
No	10	2.5
Yes	390	97.5
Total	400	100

Objective 3: To assess factors contributing to the growth of spiritual tourism in India.

Table 8: Mean, Standard Deviation, and Cronbach Alpha validity of the statements			
Statements	Mean	Std. Deviation	Cronbach Alpha Validity
Seeking spiritual enlightenment	4.015	0.71838	0.762
Exploring different cultures and traditions	4.08	0.71756	0.754
Connecting with nature and finding inner peace	**4.34**	0.69686	0.759
Seeking a break from daily routines and stress	4.3	0.74927	0.756
Trying new experiences and adventure	4.115	0.79584	0.758
Relaxation and rejuvenation	4.105	0.75856	0.734
Studying traditional practices and rituals	3.94	0.89353	0.737
Enhanced personal growth and self-discovery	4.02	0.74228	0.746
Visiting sacred sites and pilgrimage destinations	3.985	0.86408	0.734
Tapping into the holistic healing and wellness offerings	4.03	0.77498	0.727
Preserving traditional cultural practices	3.98	0.78175	0.745
Improving the economy of the local communities	4.19	0.77808	0.727

From Table 8, we can conclude that the statement, 'Connecting with nature and finding inner peace' is the most preferred statement as it has the highest mean of 4.340. This highlights a growing demand for serene, nature-centric spiritual experiences. The government can focus on eco-retreats and wellness themes, driving economic benefits through niche tourism services like meditation centers and nature-based accommodations.

Table 9: KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.799
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	923.766
	df	66
	Sig.	0

From Table 9, we can conclude that since the KMO value is more than 0.5, the sample size is adequate in number and for research.

Table 10: Factor Output			
Rotated Component Matrix	**Factors**		
Statements	1	2	3
Seeking spiritual enlightenment	0.795		
Exploring different cultures and traditions			0.789
Connecting with nature and finding inner peace			0.721
Seeking a break from daily routines and stress		0.789	
Trying new experiences and adventure			0.706
Relaxation and rejuvenation		0.741	
Studying traditional practices and rituals	0.706		
Enhanced personal growth and self-discovery		0.805	
Visiting sacred sites and pilgrimage destinations	0.787		
Tapping into the holistic healing and wellness offerings	0.729		
Preserving traditional cultural practices	0.741		
Improving the economy of the local communities	0.78		
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.			
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.			
a Rotation converged in 5 iterations.			

From the above table, we can conclude that the first group can be termed as: 'The Conscious Spiritual Traveler' as the respondents have preferred the following statements: Seeking spiritual enlightenment, studying traditional practices and rituals, visiting sacred sites and pilgrimage destinations, tapping into the holistic healing and wellness offerings, preserving traditional cultural practices, and improving the economy of the local communities. These respondents prefer seeking enlightenment, exploring rituals, visiting sacred sites, embracing holistic wellness, preserving traditions, and supporting local economies, reflecting a deep connection to spirituality and culture.

The second group can be termed as: 'The Wellness-Seeking Traveler' as the respondents have preferred the following statements: Seeking a break from daily routines and stress, relaxation and rejuvenation and enhanced personal growth and self-discovery. These respondents prioritize escaping daily stress, seeking relaxation, rejuvenation, and fostering personal growth, reflecting a desire for self-discovery and mental and emotional well-being.

The third group can be termed as: 'The Culturally Immersive Traveler' as the respondents have preferred the following statements: Exploring different cultures and traditions, connecting with nature, finding inner peace, and trying new experiences and adventure. These respondents aim to explore traditions, connect with nature for peace, and embrace new adventures, reflecting a quest for cultural enrichment and meaningful experiences

Objective 4: To evaluate respondents' perceptions of the economic and infrastructural impacts of spiritual tourism in India.

Analysis: The data highlights the key economic and infrastructural impacts of spiritual tourism. Improved local infrastructure, such as roads and transport (100), leads the list, followed by increased demand for local handicrafts (92) and a boost to the hospitality industry (84).

Regional investment projects (84) and wellness facilities (30) also benefit, though income enhancement for service providers remains low (10). Marketing efforts should emphasize these benefits to attract more visitors, highlighting local crafts, wellness retreats, and enhanced connectivity. Government initiatives should focus on subsidizing infrastructure, promoting local businesses, and training service providers to ensure sustainable growth and equitable economic opportunities.

Table 11: Economic and infrastructural impacts of spiritual tourism in India.	Frequency
Yes, it has improved the local infrastructure, such as roads and transportation facilities.	100
Yes, it has increased the demand for local handicrafts and souvenirs.	92
Yes, it has boosted the hospitality industry, including hotels and homestays.	84
Yes, it has attracted investment in regional development projects.	84
Yes, it has enhanced the income levels of local service providers, such as tour guides and transport operators.	10
Yes, it has encouraged the development of wellness and health-related facilities in the area.	30

The data reveals strong awareness among respondents about infrastructure improvements due to spiritual tourism, with 308 affirming and 92 expressing uncertainty. This highlights the perceived role of tourism in enhancing roads, transport, and public amenities. Marketing campaigns should emphasize these infrastructural upgrades, positioning destinations as accessible and well-equipped. The government can boost tourism by investing in sustainable infrastructure, ensuring eco-friendly development, and promoting digital connectivity in spiritual hubs. Collaboration with local businesses to create immersive experiences can further elevate tourist satisfaction while driving economic growth. Highlighting infrastructure advancements can attract more visitors and enhance India's spiritual tourism appeal.

Table 12: Awareness amongst the respondents regarding improvement in infrastructure due to spiritual tourism	
Maybe	92
Yes	308
Grand Total	400

Measurement and Structural Model

To evaluate respondents' agreement on key motivations for spiritual tourism in India, the Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) technique is employed. According to Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen (2008), SEM has emerged as a preferred method among researchers across various disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. Similarly, Chin (1996), Haenlein and Kaplan (2004), and Statsoft (2013) have highlighted the relevance of SEM as a second-generation multivariate data analysis technique widely used in marketing research. This is because SEM allows researchers to test theoretically supported linear and additive causal models effectively.

As noted by Wong (2013), MacCallum and Austin (2000), Hoyle (1995), and Rigdon (1998), SEM enables researchers to visually analyse relationships between variables of interest,

thereby aiding in resource prioritization to better meet customer needs. Ullman (2001) further describes SEM as a robust statistical technique that integrates exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and multiple regression analysis. It is particularly useful for testing both measurement and structural theories, making it a comprehensive tool for understanding complex relationships in research.

Measurement Model

In line with the study's objective, the key motivations for spiritual tourism in India are categorized into three constructs: *'the conscious spiritual traveller'* (6 indicators), *'the wellness-seeking traveller'* (3 indicators), and *'the culturally immersive traveller'* (3 indicators). The findings suggest a strong motivation among respondents for engaging in spiritual tourism in India. Each of these constructs comprises multiple indicator variables, making a total of 12 indicators tested in the study.

A 5-point Likert scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neutral, Disagree, Strongly Disagree) was used to measure each indicator through a self-administered questionnaire. To evaluate the reliability and validity of the measurement model, three key measures were applied: standardized estimates, average variance extracted (AVE), and composite reliability (CR) of the constructs.

Table 13: Measurement Model

Construct	Item	Est	CR	AVE
The conscious spiritual traveller [CST]	Seeking spiritual enlightenment	0.887	0.942	0.732
	Studying traditional practices and rituals	0.874		
	Visiting sacred sites and pilgrimage destinations	0.75		
	Tapping into the holistic healing and wellness offerings	0.88		
	Preserving traditional cultural practices	0.865		
	Improving the economy of the local communities	0.869		
The wellness-seeking traveller [WST]	Seeking a break from daily routines and stress	0.789	0.951	0.7783
	Relaxation and rejuvenation	0.741		
	Enhanced personal growth and self-discovery	0.805		
The culturally immersive traveller [CIT]	Exploring different cultures and traditions	0.789	0.941	0.7386
	Connecting with nature and finding inner peace	0.721		
	Trying new experiences and adventure	0.706		

Convergent validity

In the present study, any construct with an average variance extracted (AVE) value below 0.5 is excluded. According to Henseler et al. (2009), an AVE value lower than 0.5 indicates that

the construct fails to explain more than half of the variance of its items or indicators. Therefore, following the guidelines provided by Henseler et al. (2009), the cut-off value for AVE in this study is set at 0.5.

Internal consistency

Fornell and Larcker (1981) recommended that the composite reliability (CR) value should be 0.70 or higher. As shown in Table 1, all constructs in this study have CR values exceeding 0.70, indicating that the measurement model exhibits adequate internal consistency.

Discriminant validity

Fornell and Larcker (1981) established that discriminant validity is achieved when the square root of the AVE for each construct is greater than its correlation with any other latent variable in the model. This indicates that each construct shares more variance with its own indicators than with other constructs. As shown in Table 2, the results meet the criteria for discriminant validity, as the square root of AVE for each construct exceeds its correlation with other latent variables.

When transitioning from the measurement model to the structural model, the focus shifts from examining relationships between latent constructs and observed variables to analyzing the nature and strength of relationships among the latent constructs. The structural model considers three constructs: the conscious spiritual traveller, the wellness-seeking traveller, and the culturally immersive traveller. Validating the structural model involves assessing the model fit and evaluating the structural relationships and hypotheses.

Table 14: Discriminant Validity

Discriminant Validity			
Constructs	**CST**	**WST**	**CIT**
CST	0.714		
WST	0.57	0.791	
CIT	0.668	0.681	0.71

* Note: The diagonals represent the square root of the AVE, while the off diagonals represent the correlations, CST = Conscious Spiritual Traveler; WST = Wellness-Seeking Traveller, and CIT = Culturally Immersive Traveller

Assessing Fit

McDonald and Ho (2002) emphasized that absolute fit indices evaluate how well a proposed model fits the sample data, identifying the model with the best overall fit. Yuan (2005) highlighted the importance of researchers understanding the critical steps involved in assessing model fit in structural equation modeling (SEM). According to Sugawara and MacCallum (1993), Ding, Velicer, and Harlow (1995), Schermelleh-Engel and Moosbrugger (2003), and Hooper, Coughlan, and Mullen (2008), there is no single criterion for evaluating model fit in

SEM. Instead, various fit indices have been developed to provide a comprehensive assessment. The absolute fit indices are discussed below.

Chi-Square test

Hu and Bentler (1999) described the Chi-Square value as a traditional measure for evaluating overall model fit, assessing the degree of discrepancy between the sample covariance matrix and the fitted covariance matrix. Despite its continued popularity, the chi-square test has significant limitations, prompting researchers to explore alternative fit indices.

RMSEA (Root Mean Square Error of Approximation) is one such index. Byrne (1998) explained that RMSEA indicates how well a model with unknown but optimally chosen parameter estimates would fit the population covariance matrix. According to Hooper et al. (2008), a well-fitting model is characterized by an RMSEA lower limit close to 0 and an upper limit below 0.08.

The Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR): It is defined as the square root of the difference between the residuals of the sample covariance matrix and the hypothesized covariance model. According to Byrne (1998) and Diamantopoulos and Siguaw (2000), SRMR values range from 0 to 1.0, with well-fitting models typically having values below 0.05. Hu and Bentler (1999) further noted that SRMR values up to 0.08 are considered acceptable.

The Normed Fit Index (NFI) evaluates the model's fit by comparing its chi-square value to that of the null model, which represents the worst-case scenario where all measured variables are uncorrelated. Bentler and Bonett (1980) suggested that NFI values greater than 0.90 indicate a good model fit.

The Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI) was introduced to address the sample size sensitivity of the Normed Fit Index (NFI), which tends to underestimate model fit for samples smaller than 200 (Mulaik et al., 1989; Bentler, 1990). NNFI favors simpler models and provides a more reliable fit assessment. Hu and Bentler (1999) recommended that NNFI values of 0.90 or higher indicate a good model fit.

Comparative Fit Index (CFI): According to Bentler (1990), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI) is a revised version of the Normed Fit Index (NFI). It assumes that all latent variables are uncorrelated and compares the sample covariance matrix to the null model. Hu and Bentler (1999) recommended a CFI value of 0.95 or higher for a good model fit. Fan et al. (1999) highlighted that CFI is one of the most commonly reported fit indices because it is minimally affected by sample size. As shown in Table III, all fit indices meet the required thresholds, indicating that the structural model is acceptable for the present study.

Table 15: Goodness of Fit Measures

Goodness-of-Fit Statistics (Structural Model)	
Degrees of Freedom	218
Minimum Fit Function Chi-square	530.497
Chi-Square for Independence Model with 253 Degrees of Freedom	7510.94
Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA)	0.059

Standardised RMR	0.047
Normed Fit Index (NFI)	0.929
Non-Normed Fit Index (NNFI)	0.918
Comparative Fit Index (CFI)	0.957

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's conclusions demonstrate the increasing importance of spiritual tourism in India and identify three different types of travelers: those who are seeking wellness, those who are culturally immersed, and those who are conscious spiritual travelers. Every group demonstrates distinct objectives, which might range from pursuing cultural preservation and enlightenment to placing a higher priority on stress reduction, rest, and learning about various customs. The landscape is dominated by popular tourist spots like Shirdi, Rishikesh, and Haridwar, but lesser-known locations like Bodh Gaya and Sabarimala show unrealised development potential. With respondents spending an average of ₹20,000 to ₹30,000 per trip, the survey also shows a major economic impact, supporting the growth of local infrastructure, the demand for handicrafts, and the hospitality industry.

Furthermore, 97.5% of respondents recognised the potential of spiritual tourism to foster sustainable practices and develop community ties, underscoring its significance in protecting cultural property. Along with more regional expenditures in wellness facilities, improved local infrastructure—such as roads and transportation—has been cited as a crucial consequence. Enhancing revenue for regional service providers is still an area that needs more attention, though. These findings imply that spiritual tourism promotes regional and economic development in addition to providing a forum for cultural and personal enrichment. Policymakers and other stakeholders can use these findings to create plans that will increase the allure of a location, guarantee fair economic gains, and encourage environmentally friendly travel.

CONCLUSION

The study emphasizes the important role that spiritual tourism plays in promoting economic growth, cultural preservation, and individual well-being in Bharat. The results show that three main traveler archetypes are drawn to spiritual tourism: the culturally immersive traveler, the wellness-seeking traveler, and the conscious spiritual traveler. These groups' preferences highlight how important spiritual and cultural experiences are becoming to tourists. Increased demand for regional handicrafts, better local infrastructure, and an improvement in hospitality services are some of the economic and infrastructural advantages of spiritual tourism. These results show how spiritual tourism may preserve Bharat's rich cultural legacy while promoting sustainable development. In conclusion, spiritual tourism in Bharat integrates economic, cultural, and personal dimensions, making it a cornerstone of sustainable development. As global interest in meaningful travel continues to rise, Bharat's spiritual legacy positions it as a global hub for transformative and enriching experience

LIMITATIONS

The study is geographically limited to respondents from Gujarat, which restricts its ability to fully capture the perceptions and preferences of travellers from other regions of India or international contexts. While the survey includes a diverse range of age groups and income levels, certain demographics, such as higher-income groups and international travelers, may be underrepresented, potentially skewing the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, the study reflects a temporal snapshot of respondents' perceptions and behaviors, which could evolve over time as trends in tourism and spirituality shift. Furthermore, the quantitative approach of the study, while valuable for identifying broad patterns, lacks the depth to delve into the intricate personal motivations and subjective experiences associated with spiritual tourism, leaving room for more nuanced qualitative exploration in future research.

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