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# DOES FREQUENCY OF VISIT INFLUENCE TOURISTS' MOTIVE FOR FINDING SPIRITUAL PEACE? AN EMPIRICAL COMMUNICATION

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## **Abstract**

*Spiritual tourism has been gaining significance predominance among a distinct segment of tourists across the globe. Drastic changes in motives that lead to the emergence of new forms of tourism have conceived vehement competitive outsets for destination marketers, policymakers and governments. Changing external contexts such as lifestyles, westernisation of cultures, digital inclusions in people's lives, countries' upliftment of travel restrictions, competitive and lucrative positioning of destinations with multifaceted value offerings and increase of complexity of living have evoked the significance of spiritual tourism. The motive to find inner peace, being an integral aspect of spiritual tourism, has been witnessed as a niche market segment's want. This paper is an extract from a major research work that fosters an understanding of this perspective of finding inner peace and evaluating the influence of tourists' frequency of visits on their motives. With an empirical research design, the findings from the analysis of 327 responses acquired through a structured questionnaire reveal that the frequency of tourists' visits to the destination signifies their motives of finding inner peace. This paper indicates how the thereof can facilitate their destination branding strategies using this inference.*

**Keywords:** *Spirituality, Inner Peace, Destinations, Tourists, Motives, Frequency of Visits*

## **Introduction**

With growing fierce competition in the global tourism industry, Destination Marketing Organizations (DMOs) are trying to lucratively brand and position their destinations with the essence of satisfying a wide range of tourists' motives (Wang et al., 2020; Shankar et al., 2022). Changes in the tourists' perception, motives and choice process, digital inclusion in tourism that facilitates tourists and destination marketers, global movements of tourists that force policymakers to reassess their governing frameworks, and the need for fostering more sustainability have been significant reasons for the competitive fierceness in tourism markets (Ruiz-Real et al., 2020; Shankar, 2019; 2021; 2022). Along with these changes, the era of social revolution, where people look for quality perspectives in their consumption process, has resulted in new motives among tourists. Similarly, the digital inclusions in tourists' behaviour – from information search and destination consumption to post-destination experience sharing and destination marketing and branding have increased the complexities. While there are enough challenges that the social revolution and digital inclusions attract, destination marketers confront lucrative opportunities in targeting a wide range of tourists, analysing their characteristics, formulating marketing strategies, and delivering tourism offerings with multifaceted values. In post-pandemic times, the vibrance has even become stringent, and thus, the research paradigms in understanding tourists' characteristics and motives have become highly significant. While Indian destinations possess varieties of tourism attributes, a multifaceted value proposition of tourism destinations is still in the quest (Shankar & John, 2022). In that context, spiritual tourism in India has a greater reach among tourism marketers across geographies as it has huge relevance to yoga tourism, religious tourism, and environmental responsibility (Haq & Medhekar, 2019; McCartney, 2019; Mukherjee et al., 2020; Kainthola et al., 2021). However, there exists a requirement to analyse whether these Indian destinations have multifaceted offerings that satisfy the wider motives of tourists, mainly catering to spiritual tourism. Such evaluation is possible only when destination marketers focus more on finding the micro tourism market segments in the given tourist cohorts. This research extract is derived based on such focus and intends to produce insight into the sub-theme of spiritual tourism – finding inner peace. While tourists tend to revisit the destinations

based on their memorable experiences and satisfaction, there is another void that exists here; that is, whether tourists' frequency of visits conceives new motives to visit the destination. This ideology is perhaps because tourists' frequency of visits has a significant influence on satisfaction, happiness, loyalty and recommendations (Tran et al., 2022; Woyo & Slabbert, 2020). This research attempts to blend these voids and analyse the tourist's frequency of visits to evoke tourists' motive of finding inner peace. The outcomes of this research work will facilitate destination marketers to keenly focus on the micro-segments that exist in spiritual tourists' cohorts based on their frequency of visits and eventually add valuable insight to the tourists' behaviour literature.

## **What does Literature Say?**

Spiritual tourism has become widely popular in tourism research and among tourism consumers as it adequately fosters the personal and social exhaustion issues caused due to materialistic lifestyles (Kraft, 2007; Simpson et al., 2008; Cochrane, 2009; Blomfield, 2009; Haq & Wong, 2010). This form of growing tourism influences the other allied businesses and industries as there is a huge inflow of tourists from various classified categories (Brownstein, 2008; Cohen et al., 2008; Fernando & Jackson, 2006; Haq & Wong, 2010; Rosentraub & Joo, 2009; Shankar, 2019 and Vu & Turner, 2009). Spiritual tourism is distinct from religious tourism, which focuses on the tourists' spiritual experiences and personal growth rather than the devotional satisfiers (Kujawa, 2017). The characteristics and motives of tourists can well differentiate religious and spiritual tourists (Kujawa, 2017). Stausberg (2014: 355) differentiate spirituality and religion based on its essence of semantic experience 'both within and beyond' religion. Even the authors - Norman and Pokorny (2017) and Singleton (2017) claimed that spirituality in tourism is beyond the religious elements. However, religious tourism is defined as a system inculcating strong beliefs, rituals and procedures aimed at worshipping sacred power (Koenig et al., 2000 and Halim et al., 2021). Tourists who attempt to travel domestically or overseas to churches, temples, mosques do fall into the spiritual tourist cohorts based on their motives that beyond religious thoughts (Haq & Medhekar, 2019; Halim et al., 2021).

There are a few perspectives on what spiritual tourism is based on the tourists' motives and the following Table 1 depicts those.

**Table 1: Dimensions of Spiritual Tourist's Motives**

<b>Author (s) with Year</b>	<b>Motives Referred for Defining Spiritual Tourists</b>
Heintzman (2002)	Leisure lifestyle aligning with spiritual thoughts.
Ouellette et al. (2005)	Reflection, bonding with others, and receptiveness to new ideas.
Little and Schmidt (2006)	Self-awareness, other-awareness, sense of connection, and intense sensation.
Narayanan and Macbeth (2009)	Manifest personal feelings about the <i>Aha-experiences</i> .
Smith et al. (2010)	Harmonising mind, body and soul.
Cutler and Carmichael (2010)	Physical, social and material, knowledge, emotions, self-identity and perceptions.
Ponder and Holladay (2013)	Inner psychological development, self-development, and well-being.
Coghlan (2015)	Create positive emotions and enhance well-being.
Hanefar et al., (2016)	Meaning of life, consciousness, transcendence, spiritual resources, self-determination, soul detoxication and spiritual ability to face obstacles.
Smith and Diekmann (2017)	Voyage of discovery – self-awareness and transformation.
Wang et al., (2020)	Wish to learn religions, search for emancipation or relief, search solutions for lost minds.
Osin et al., (2021)	Relaxation, peace of mind, exploring new culture.

Source: Author's own derivation from literature.

The Table 1 describes the dimensions of motives that are looked upon in evaluating spiritual tourists. One of the key findings is, all these spiritual tourists' motives have referred to finding inner peace (Smith et al., 2010; Ponder & Holladay, 2013; Hanefar et al., 2016; Osin et al., 2021).

Researchers argue that religious experience is the centrality to spiritual tourism (Hall, 2006). Contrastingly, spiritual tourists don't acquaint themselves with any religious or institutionalised faith (Kujawa, 2017). Rather, spiritual tourists attempt to interpret their total mode of life and living and believe in the notions of God and beyond those by believing in self (Geering, 2002,

p. 147; Hall, 2006; Kujawa, 2017). In other words, spiritual tourism offers individuals to explore their meaning through travelling and 'to cater to the subjectivity of life' (Wilson et al., 2013; Heelas & Woodhead, 2005, p. 130). This perspective can be witnessed in that Table 1 defined by the researchers. The factors that contribute to the subjectivity of life include self-reflection, a search for harmony, peace and self-exploration etc (Ouellette et al., 2005; Smith et al., 2010; Smith & Diekmann, 2017). Researchers infer that spirituality is semantically located both within and beyond religions yet, distant from religious actions (Stausberg, 2014: 355; Cheer et al., 2017). Spiritual tourists tour for three critical reasons – mobility physically and mentally, to acquire experiential values that are authentic, unique and cathartic, and to consume the inherent qualities of the tourists' route itself (Cheer et al., 2017). Also, their core motive is to reflect on themselves and achieve an altered state of consciousness (Cheer et al., 2017) that is related to more of finding inner peace through self-exploration. Aggarwal et al. (2008) inferred that spiritual tourism evaluation lies in tourist attempt to find peace, a sense of purpose, and even connect to others. Some evidence in the literature either says that leisure factors are highly inculcated with spiritual tourism (Doohan, 1990; Heidari et al., 2018). Thus, the overall review in the context of tourists' motive of finding inner peace relies on the centrality of spirituality (Halim et al., 2021).

While tourists' motives for finding inner peace are evaluated, it is also critical to analyse the tourist's travel-related factors, such as their frequency of visits to destinations. Researchers found that tourist frequency of travel and duration of stay in the destination has a significant influence on their perception (Beerli & Martin, 2004; Machado, 2010; Shankar et al., 2021; Yilmaz et al., 2009; Yurtseven & Emel, 2002). Perhaps, these two factors, such as the frequency of visits and duration of stay to/in the destinations, have an interrelationship (Ganzon & Fillone, 2015). These frequencies of visits vary based on various factors such as tourists' characteristics, mainly nationality, destination attributes, destinations publicity, destination uniqueness, and destination demand, thereby influencing tourists' motives to visit the destinations (Bavik et al., 2021; Barros & Machado, 2010; Barros et al., 2008; Ganzon & Fillone, 2015; Ibrahim, 2013; Thrane, 2016; Todorović & Jovičić, 2016; Shankar, 2021; Shankar et al., 2021). Tourists' motives are also triggered by the multifaceted destination personality traits that the destination possesses, and such motives significantly drive behavioural changes (Shankar & John, 2022). While these travel frequencies influence tourists' perception of destination image and destination personality traits, perhaps the motives (Jang & Wu, 2006; Tasci & Gartner, 2007; Shankar, 2020), there evokes a question does the travel frequency influence the significant perspective of inner peace and tourism marketing and tourists' behaviour literature do not have stringent

evidence on this quest. There are two critical reasons why this perspective has to be researched. First, though finding inner peace is an inherent component of spiritual tourism, many tourists who are motivated to explore other than spirituality do look for finding inner peace. In this context, it is decisive to analyse whether the frequency of visits influences evoke such motives of finding inner peace among tourists. Two, if there is a significant influence by tourists' frequencies, can marketers find new micro-segments in the spiritual tourism market that also serve other tourists' motives? Unfortunately, this perspective has not been found in the literature, and therefore, the following hypotheses have been proposed:

*Null Hypothesis: There is no significant relationship between the tourist's frequency of visits and tourists' motives for finding inner peace.*

*Alternative Hypothesis: There is a significant relationship between the tourist's frequency of visits and tourists' motives for finding inner peace.*

## **Research Methodology**

Since this work has been extracted from hefty research on understanding tourists' motives, the methodological attributes constituting this work have been provided below.

### ***Research Type***

This research is based on tourists' insights; hence, an empirical analysis (quantitative) has been deployed.

### ***Sample Unit, Size, and Technique***

Tourists who visited the selected destination (Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu) were covered as Sample Units. Though the estimated sample size was 500 for research purposes, the final sample size was rounded to 327 after expelling the illegible responses. A convenient sampling technique was used.

### ***Methods of Data Collection***

Primary data was collected from tourists who visited the destination, and data was based on a Structured Questionnaire that contained questions on tourists' socio-demographic characteristics, tourists' frequency of visit and tourists motive for finding inner peace. Tourists' demographic characteristics consist of age, gender categories, occupation, education, and monthly income. Frequencies of visits have been measured with options such as visited once,

visited 2 to 4 times, 4 to 6 times, more than six times and frequent visitors (every month). The motive of finding inner peace has been measured with the statements - *A. Get stress relief, B. Meditate and reflect, C. Spend time with nature, D. Search for peace of mind, E. Search for harmony, F. Search for Spirituality, G. Know myself, H. Stay away from criticism.* The dependent factor – tourists' motive was measured using Likert 5-point scaling technique. The reliability value of the scale measuring tourists' motives was highly consistent with the 0.849 Cronbach value.

Secondary data was the information and the insights derived related to the theme of research from the journals listed in Cabells Directories, EBSCO, JSTOR, SCOPUS, ABDC and other indices.

### ***Analysis Tools and Techniques***

IBM SPSS was used to perform Simple Percentage Analysis (to understand the tourists' socio-demographic factors), calculate Mean Values (to understand the tourists' motives for finding inner peace and frequency of visits) and Analysis of Variance (to understand the influence of frequency of visit on tourists' motive of finding inner peace).

## **Analysis and Discussion**

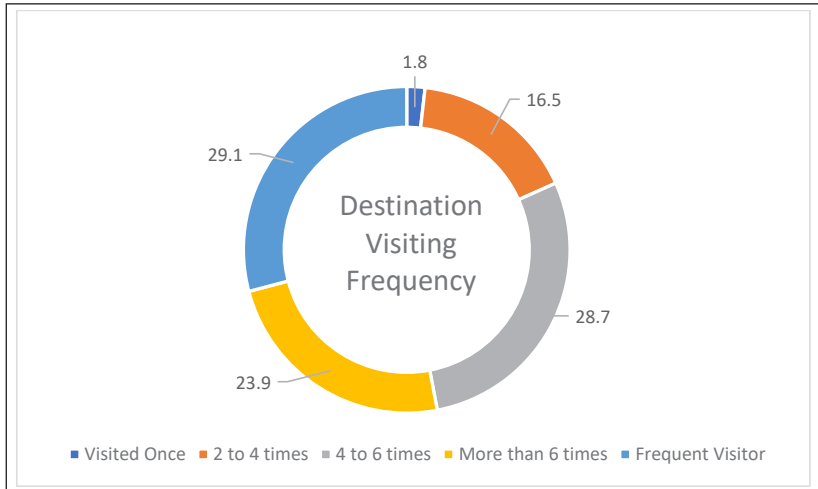
### ***Descriptive Statistics on Tourists Profile***

The core purpose of this study is to understand whether the frequency of visit impact the tourists' motive of finding inner peace. However, it is critical to understand the significant distribution of tourists based on their socio-demographic characteristics.

The highest percentage of the respondents were male (53.3%), whereas the female respondents were 46.7%. As far as categories of age are concerned, tourists belonging to the age category between 25 and 35 years were higher in percentage (42%). The majority of the tourists who responded to this research were postgrads (34.2%) and working in private sector organisations (44.2%). Economically, tourists earn more than 65000 INR per month (26.35).

### ***Simple Percentage Analysis***

A simple percentage analysis was carried out to understand the distribution of respondents based on their frequency of visits to the destination. The following figure represents the frequency of destination visits.



**Fig. 1: Frequency of Visit**

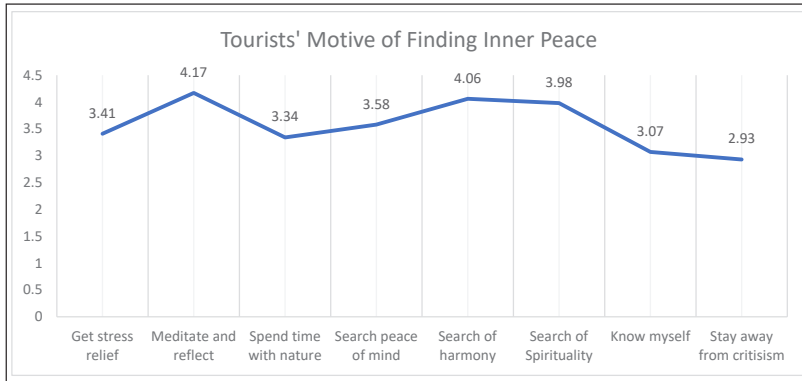
The above Fig. 1 represents the tourists' frequency of visits to the selected tourist destination. The highest percentage of respondents were frequent visitors (every month) to the destination (29.1%). 28.7% of the tourists visited the destinations between 4 and 6 times in a year. However, 23.9% of the respondents visited the destination more than six times a year. The least percentage of the respondents – 1.8% visited the destination only once. This shows that tourists at least visit the destination once a year, and thus, this indicates a positive sign for the marketers on the potentiality of the destination.

### ***Mean Calculation***

The Mean calculation was performed to understand the most significantly reported factor measuring the tourist's motive of finding inner peace. The following figure represents the mean values of the factor – The motive of finding inner peace.

Fig. 2 depicts the mean values of the motives that portray the factor of finding inner peace. The most sought emphasised aspect is the tourists' tour to the selected destination to meditate and reflect (4.17). The second and third highest mean values stand for the motive to search for harmony and search for spirituality, with values of 4.06 and 3.98, respectively. The mean values of the statements search peace of mind and stress relief is closer (the mean values are 3.58 and 3.41, respectively). Also, the mean value of the aspect of spending time with nature is 3.34. The statements knowing oneself and

staying away from criticism have the least mean values of 3.07 and 2.93, respectively. Overall, the mean value indicates that there is no wide range between the tourists' responses towards the motives of finding inner peace.



**Fig. 2: Tourists' Motives for Finding Inner Peace**

***Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) between Frequency of Visit and Tourists Motives***

ANOVA has been used to test the significant differences between means of independent groups. Shapiro-Wilk test of SPSS reveals that the sig value of the frequency of visits is 0.784, which is greater than 0.05, and hence, the data is normally distributed. Levene's test of homogeneity of variance also resulted in the sig value < 0.05 and thereby confirmed the viability of performing ANOVA.

Table 1 shows the Analysis of Variance results between the Tourist's Frequency of Visits and the motive of Finding Inner Peace.

**Table 2: Frequency of Visits and Tourists' Motives**

Frequency of Visit and Tourists' Motives	F Values	Sig Values	Significance
Motive 1	17.465	0.000*	Significant
Motive 2	1.781	0.974	Not Significant
Motive 3	11.288	0.000*	Significant
Motive 4	11.102	0.000*	Significant
Motive 5	0.275	0.894	Not Significant

<b>Frequency of Visit and Tourists' Motives</b>	<b>F Values</b>	<b>Sig Values</b>	<b>Significance</b>
Motive 6	17.337	0.000*	Significant
Motive 7	15.573	0.000*	Significant
Motive 8	13.427	0.001*	Significant

Source: Author's own source produced from analysis (2023).

Note: \*p-value is significant at 0.05 level.

Note: Motives in this table are the statements that measure tourists' motives to search for and find inner peace. Motive 1 – Get stress relief; Motive 2 - Meditate and Reflect; Motive 3 – Spend time with nature; Motive 4 – Search for peace of mind; Motive 5 – Search harmony; Motive 6 – Search Spirituality; Motive 7 – Knowing myself and Motive 8 – Staying away from criticism

Table 2 represents the Analysis of Variance results between the tourists' motives and the frequency of visitors to the destination through the F and Sig values. The significance and the influence have been found by framing and testing the hypotheses.

From the table, it has been found that the statements meditate and reflect, and the search for harmony is not significant as their sig values are greater than the acceptable range of 0.05. That is, meditate and reflect  $F = 1.781$  and sig value =  $0.974 > 0.05$  and the search for harmony  $F = 0.275$  and sig value =  $0.894 > 0.05$ . Thus, the null hypothesis – there is no significant difference between tourists' motive of finding inner peace (meditating and reflecting and searching for harmony) and tourists' frequency of visiting the destination can be accepted. This indicates that tourists' motive of meditating and reflecting on themselves and tourists' motive of searching for harmony are satisfied in this destination despite their frequency of visits.

However, the statements such as get stress relief –  $F$  value = 17.465 and sig value = 0.000, spend time with nature –  $F$  value = 11.288 and sig value = 0.000, search peace of mind –  $F$  value = 11.102 and sig value = 0.000, a search of spirituality –  $F$  value = 17.337 and sig value = 0.000, knowing myself –  $F$  value = 15.573 and sig value = 0.000, and staying away from criticism –  $F$  value = 13.427 and sig value = 0.001 are significant as their p values (sig values) are lesser than 0.05. Hence, the alternative hypotheses – There are significant differences between tourists' motives (only in the cases of motives – 1, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 8) and tourists' frequency of visits can be accepted. This result indicates that tourists' motives for finding inner peace differ depending on their frequency of visits to the destinations.

## **Conclusion**

### ***Theoretical Implications***

This research work has attempted to explore further deeper into the spiritual tourism motives, mainly focusing on finding inner peace when tourists visit the destinations frequently. The aspects such as spending time with nature, relaxing, searching for peace of mind, exploring oneself, and staying away from criticism have been found similar to the results of previous studies in evaluating the core motives of spirituality (Little & Schmidt, 2006; Osin et al., 2021; Ponder & Holladay, 2013; Smith et al., 2010). However, these findings are highly influenced by the tourist's frequency of visits. This insight turns out to be novel evidence for literature. That is, evaluating spiritual tourists' motives require mandatory consideration of their frequency of visits. However, the ANOVA results also stated that meditating in spiritual activities and self-reflection, and searching for harmony aspects are not significant, that is these two motives are not clouted by the frequency of visits. This inference is deviated from existing evidence (Smith et al., 2010). Yet, the mean calculation infers these two aspects – mediate and reflect, and searching harmony have high mean values of 4.17 and 4.06. While these two aspects are not influenced by the tourist's frequency of visits, they are critical in evaluating tourists' search for peace of mind. Hence, this inference adds value to the literature by stating its significance in evaluating the core tourists' motives for finding inner peace. Since this is a niche, perhaps an in-depth motive (inner peace), not much evidence in the literature has direct insights and thus, this research contributes to tourism marketing literature by producing a tested scale – the items used for measuring the motive of finding inner peace.

### ***Practical Implication***

While spiritual destinations are attributed to offer tourists experiences beyond religious essence, (Norman & Pokorny, 2017; Singleton, 2017), still there exists opportunities to penetrate further in the spiritual tourists' market. The findings of this research infer that the spiritual tourist's motives are intensive; that is, there is a cohort of tourists who look for finding inner peace beyond the normal spiritual tour experiences. This highlights the implication to the destination marketers that while evaluating tourists' motives and behavioural dynamics is important, it is very decisive to evaluate the opportunities of micro tourists segments within the existing tourists' segments. In this case, finding inner peace is a sub-segment of

the spiritual tourists' segment. This is a novel aspect for the industry to further do market segmentation (spiritual tourism) strategy so as to identify the niche groups and their motives among the existing and competitively positioned destinations with multifaceted value offerings. It is also critical to note that this research has indicated that tourists of all age groups look up for finding inner peace and therefore attempt to explore destinations that satisfy their motives. Among these, the young crowd of tourists seem high in numbers and this paves greater opportunities for destination marketers to promote destinations using marketing strategies that attract tourists' inflow. For example, today tourism consumers are bestowed with disruptive technologies and digital communication tools. Designing the marketing messages with the elements of finding inner peace (as stated and found in this research) on digital media and sources of information like Instagram, Facebook, YouTube, Travel Blogs, Travel Vlogs and other digital sources etc., will attract young tourism consumers (Shankar, 2021). Also, this strategy of marketing can be targeted to the global tourism markets that include a wide range of nationals looking up for spiritual experiences despite age, gender and other personal characteristics. It is also critical to note that the tourists frequency of visit to spiritual destinations with an in-depth motive of finding inner peace is high (around 30% are frequent visitors in this case) and inducing tourists to revisit intention would derive favourable results. Perhaps, such revisit intentions of tourists would eventually contribute to unpaid marketing efforts – word of mouth messages and user-generated content and therefore, it facilitates the thereof in deriving profitability to the destinations.

### ***Scope for Further Research and Limitations***

This study is an extract from major research work on understanding tourists' spiritual motives and hence the methodologies pertaining to the approach of this research are limited to the sample framework and destinations chosen. Any changes to this frame of research or re-application on other destinations in other contexts would derive distinct results. However, these limitations can be turned into the scope for further research. As the literature does not have adequate insights to construct spiritual destination image models, further studies on exploring the primary and secondary motives with mediating effects of digital information sources, cultural antecedents, changing external environments like a health crisis, and economic fluctuations that influence spiritual tourists' motives and perception would significantly add more values. Since this study also contributes to sociology, psychology and physiology, more of these references in evaluating the tourist's spiritual motives will produce multidisciplinary results.

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