

# The Influence of Demographic Factors on Tourist Experiences at Sikkim Buddhist Monasteries

Ashi Pempem Wangmo\*, Arvind Kumar Dubey\*\*

**Abstract** *This paper provides an analysis of tourists' experience based on their demography. Sikkim is known to be a Buddhist state has incorporated religious sites in tourism. The monasteries in the state have not only attracted domestic tourists but international tourists as well. Tourists who visit solely for the purpose of religion mostly follow the Vajrayana sect of Buddhism. This study focuses on the aspect of religious tourism in the State of Sikkim. It takes into account the demography of the tourists and their effect on experience in monasteries situated within Sikkim. The demographic variable of tourists was categorized into gender, age, marital status, monthly income, educational qualification, occupation, and Sikkim monasteries profile of the tourists were the type of tour, Motivation for visiting religious sites, participation in or performed rituals in religious ceremony, accommodation of stay, duration of visit, means of bookings, monasteries visited while in Sikkim, means of information and recommendation of the site to others. Data was collected through primary and secondary sources. Data were collected from respondents through interviews and questionnaires based on the nominal scale. A total of 200 samples were gathered from diverse tourists visiting six of the Buddhist monasteries in Sikkim (Rumtek, Tashiding, Sangachoeling, Chorten, Pemayangtse and Dubdi monastery) utilizing the convenience sampling method. The collected questionnaires were analyzed with the application of independent sample T-test and one-way ANOVA. This study concluded that the demography of the tourists is essential in segregating and assessing what tourists expect from their visits to these monasteries. The study provides an overview of tourists visiting Sikkim's religious sites, revealing diverse demography and motivations for tourists to visit monasteries. Hence, identifying the demography of the tourists needs to be given equal importance to enhance the future tourist experience.*

**Keywords:** *Religious Tourism, Tourist Demography, Tourist Experience, Buddhism, Monasteries etc.*

## INTRODUCTION

There are many names for the State of Sikkim, which is located in the north-eastern corner of India. The indigenous people, the Lepchas, have named it Nye-mae-el, which translates to heaven/paradise. The Bhutias' have given it the name Beyul Demzong, which translates to the hidden valley of rice. Sikkim is widely known as a Buddhist state; nevertheless, it is home to several non-Buddhist groups as well, including Nepalese, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim people. The people who live in Sikkim consider Mount Khangchendzonga to be more than just the third tallest peak in the world. Instead, they believe it to be the dwelling place of a local deity who is responsible for safeguarding

this little Himalayan State of Sikkim. During the local festivals commemorating the brotherhood pact between the Lepchas and the Bhutias during the fifteenth Century, the local people honored and worshipped this God (Risley, 1999). In 2021, Sikkim welcomed 5,11,669 domestic and international tourists post-COVID due to COVID protocols (Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation). Historically, religious and Buddhist tourism are among the most popular types of tourism in Sikkim; religious sites, both man-made and natural, can be seen in every nook and corner of the State (Sikkim Tourism Policy, 2010, p. 29). The religious importance of most tourist attractions around the State draws visitors to this State.

Tourism in Sikkim started gaining popularity after 2000 after

\* PhD Scholar, SOTHSM, IGNOU, New Delhi, India.

\*\* Associate Professor, SOTHSM, IGNOU, New Delhi, India. Email: [arvindkrubey@ignou.ac.in](mailto:arvindkrubey@ignou.ac.in)

the development of various Tourism Circuits and facilities. The relaxation and opening of certain tourist spots like Tsomgo Lake, Nathula and Gurudongmar Lake increased the flow of tourists visiting Sikkim. The Central Government included the North East Region in their Leave Travel Concession by Air, encouraging Government employees to travel to Sikkim (Sikkim Tourism Policy, 2015, p. 14).

Over the years, the State's Cultural Affairs and Heritage Department have taken steps towards preserving its unique heritage. The ASI and INTACH have identified ancient monasteries and monuments that have cultural and historical significance. These monuments have been undergoing preservation processes and have been restored to their original, authentic State (Cultural Affairs and Heritage Department, Government of Sikkim).

According to the data of the Ministry of Tourism, during the year 2022 religious' tourism in India witnessed 1439 million tourists and earned 1.34 lakh crores. They have predicted that the revenue generated will be 59 billion by 2028 and will be a major source of employment by 2030 (Verma, January 2024). Sikkim is renowned for its landscape and also for its culture which is displayed in the form of its architecture. The monasteries in Sikkim has been synonym to the tourism industry in the State. Tourists visit at least one monastery during their stay in Sikkim. The famous Rumtek Monastery, Dubdi monastery the first monastery built in Sikkim during the time of it being a Kingdom and other monasteries offer opportunities to experience their rich cultural and spiritual heritage of the region. People visiting these monasteries are motivated by the aesthetic of the site or simply for pilgrimage purposes.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious tourism has always existed in various forms since time immemorial, including conferences, pilgrimages, festivals, retreats, and religious tourism (Stausberg, 2011). Religious tourism has not only played a role in spirituality but has now been identified as a major economic source, forming a niche tourism popularly known as "religious tourism".

Supriya Dam (2016) mentioned that the Tourism Policy of 2010 emphasized on sightseeing and pilgrimage. Her study showed Sikkim as a growing tourism destination from year 1991 to year 2007. She identified some problem areas like replacing traditional houses with new structures and the concentration of tourism only in the East District, to mention a few. She further suggested that tourism must be spread to the North and South districts and that Sikkim Tourism should target premium tourists to add less pressure to the land.

Hassan et al. (2023) surveyed 384 pilgrims visiting Mecca to find if there was a significant relationship between socio-

demographic features and their satisfaction with religious tourists. Their study found that the variables of age, marital status and daily expenditure of a tourist were directly related to how motivated and satisfied they were to visit religious sites.

In their research, Sahoo and Mohanty (2022) analyzed the connection between the demography of tourists and the impact on their behavior in the religious site of Jagannath Dham Puri. 400 samples were tested based on a questionnaire with the use of the convenience sampling method. These questionnaires were tested using the ANOVA and T-test techniques. It was observed that factors like age, education, gender, and marital status did not impact the behavior of tourists. Furthermore, tourists from rural areas show more interest in taking part in the temple's rituals than visitors from semi-urban and urban areas.

The purpose of the study is to investigate how host community perceptions of tourism impact in historical tourism locations in developing nations are influenced by socio-demographic factors. Age, gender, religion, educational attainment, length of stay in the community, and involvement in the tourism industry are the characteristics that are discussed. 450 samples were gathered from three host communities in Puri, an eastern Indian cultural site, using a questionnaire survey approach. Descriptive approaches such as mean distribution and frequency were employed in the analysis, along with statistical procedures like one-way ANOVA, post-hoc testing, and t-test. The results showed that the most important factor affecting the host community's perception was religious. The survey also discovered length of residence and educational attainment as influential factors (Swain & Sthapak, 2022).

The research by Gozalez et al. (Dec 2023) points to demographic and past experience variables as potential influencing factors on travellers' impressions. Although some research has looked at how these characteristics affect marketing variables, more data is still required to better forecast visitor behaviour and comprehend how they interpret their encounters. This study investigated if an individual's past experiences and demographic traits affected their behavioural goals, experience quality, and satisfaction. 367 travellers who were taking part in tourism experiences provided information for an online survey. The analysis employed a Kruskal-Wallis test and a t-test for independent samples. The findings indicated that gender groups (males and females) differed most from one another. The findings indicated that gender groups (males and females) contained the majority of the disparities. On the other hand, there were no appreciable variations observed across groups categorised by age, educational attainment, prior travel to the location, prior involvement in the experience, and prior involvement in comparable events. The primary contribution of this research is the empirical insights it offers regarding potential

attributes of the visitor and the experience that influence how a tourist behaves when acquiring positive affective responses, favourable satisfaction levels, and behavioural intentions.

On the other hand, Collins-Kreiner and Kilot (2000) assessed the behavior of the pilgrims visiting the churches in Israel. They concluded that the major factors influencing visitor behavior were age, religious reasons and socioeconomic status. In contrast, the factors that had a lesser influence on the visitor's behavior were gender, age, race and nationality. A study found that gender affects tourists' satisfaction differently (Bhat & Darzi, 2018). At the same time, gender and age were seen as factors that mostly affected tourists' attitudes towards a product of tourism (Milicevic et al., 2020).

The paper used non-probability convenience sampling to examine the association between demography, prior visitor experience and satisfaction. This study considered the demographic variables of age, gender and educational level, although the authors suggested other variables like income, occupation, number of tourists travelling and length of stay of visitors could be included for further research (Pasaco-González, 2023). Based on the results of the studies mentioned above, the role of the demographic characteristics of tourists in evaluating the tourism experience is evident. The present study aimed to determine the association between demographic factors, experiential quality, satisfaction, and behavioral intention.

The authors (Wider et al., 2023) studied demographic variables that affected religious views, including gender, age groups, religion, employment status, household income, marital status, self-perceived adulthood, and country of origin. Data was gathered online via a survey between September and December of 2022. Data from 885 respondents in five countries—Malaysia, the Philippines, China, Kenya, and Indonesia—were gathered using a cross-sectional approach. Five factors that are associated with religious belief were included in the survey: religious certainty, religious practice, religious relevance, religious culture, and confidence in God. The data were analysed using t-tests and one-way ANOVA in order to identify any noteworthy variations in religious beliefs among the five nations. The findings showed that respondents who were female had more fervent religious convictions than respondents who were male. Additionally, respondents between the ages of 30-45 believed they had a more advanced religious culture and practice than those who were between the ages of 18 and 29. In terms of religious beliefs, Islamist groups came in first, then Christian, Roman Catholic, and Hindu groupings. While lower-income groups assessed themselves as more religious than middle- and upper-class groups, full-time students evaluated themselves as less religious than other groups and full-time working individuals. When it came to their belief in God, single

groups scored higher than cohabiting and partnership groups. To sum up, this study shows that respondents from five different countries' religious beliefs are influenced by demographic characteristics. These findings can help us understand how different socio-demographic characteristics influence religiosity and can guide the development of treatments and policies that support religious diversity and tolerance.

This study explores the perception of religious tourism behavior, 345 Hungarians were made to participate, belonging to various socio-demographic backgrounds. The result of this study showed that there was a huge difference between senior tourists and young tourists. It concluded with inputs to develop new scales measuring attitudes and related behaviour in religious tourism (Irimias, 2016).

Spence (2002) stated that a person's willingness to participate in tourism activities depends on their age, where the willingness to travel increases when the person is younger and decreases as the person grows older. Gender plays a major role in deciding the experience of the tourist. A study showed that women participate more in shopping and cultural activities while men partake in adventurous activities (Xie et al., 2008).

Lee and Bhargava (2004) observed that singles spent more time enjoying leisure than married couples because they have more personal and social responsibilities, giving them very little time for vacations and holiday trips. This study has taken a sample of 384 foreign tourists at Bangkok International Airport to assess their travel experience regarding education, age and marital status. Questionnaires were handed out in English with close-ended questions. The responses were analyzed using the chi-square test, ANOVA and Kruskal-Wallis's test. The results show the experiences and preferences of different age groups of tourists regarding the type of tour, lodging, activities, mode of transport, etc (Batra, 2009).

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The prime focus of the research was:

- To investigate how demographic variables impact tourist experience.

## DATA COLLECTION

Primary data and secondary data were used in this study. The questionnaire was prepared based on the demographic factors influencing tourists visiting Sikkim monasteries. The primary data was collected from the tourists who visited Sikkim Buddhist monasteries. The demographic variable of tourists was categorized into gender, age, marital status, monthly income, educational qualification, occupation, and

Sikkim monasteries profile of the tourists were the type of tour, Motivation for visiting religious sites, participation in or performed rituals in religious, accommodation of stay, duration of visit, means of bookings, monasteries visited while in Sikkim, means of information in the site and recommendation of the site to others.

The research methodology used primary and secondary data to comprehensively explore the factors influencing tourists' visits to Sikkim. The questionnaire utilized in the study was meticulously designed based on various demographic factors that impact tourists' decisions to visit these monastic sites.

The primary data collection involved directly engaging with tourists who had visited Sikkim Buddhist monasteries. The respondents were tourists and they were approached physically in the selected monastery sites during the peak tourist season of Sikkim i.e. March to May in the year 2022. The questionnaire administered to these tourists encompassed various demographic variables, including gender, age, marital status, monthly income, educational qualification, and occupation. These variables were based on research showing that distinct tourist clusters have differences in age, gender, and family life cycle, which affects their motivations and experiences, demographics were selected as variables to explain the tourism experience (Omneya, Mokhtar & Yacout, 2022).

Additionally, it delved into specific aspects of the tourists' profiles concerning their visit to Sikkim monasteries. These aspects included the type of tour undertaken, the motivation for visiting religious sites, participation in or performance of rituals, accommodation preferences, duration of the visit, means of booking accommodations, and monasteries visited while in Sikkim, means of obtaining information about the sites, and the likelihood of recommending the site to others. By collecting primary data directly from tourists, the study aimed to capture firsthand insights into their perceptions, preferences, and behaviors related to visiting Sikkim monasteries. This approach allowed for a detailed examination of the factors influencing tourists' decisions and experiences during their visits.

The study also incorporated secondary data from existing literature, research articles, and official reports on tourism in Sikkim and the significance of Buddhist monasteries in attracting visitors to the region. This secondary data provided valuable context and background information to supplement the primary findings and enhance the overall understanding of the research topic. By employing a mixed-methods approach encompassing primary and secondary data, the research methodology ensured a comprehensive analysis of the factors driving tourist visits to Sikkim monasteries. This methodological framework facilitated a nuanced exploration of tourists' demographics and preferences, contributing to a deeper understanding of regional tourism dynamics.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to find out influence of demographic variables on the experience of tourists visiting the Buddhist monasteries of Sikkim, the collected questionnaires were analyzed with the application of independent sample T-test and one-way ANOVA.

A total of 200 samples were gathered from diverse tourists visiting six of the Buddhist monasteries in Sikkim (Rumtek, Tashiding, Sangachoeling, Chorten, Pemayangtse and Dubdi monastery) utilizing the convenience sampling method. Convenient sampling method means collecting data from samples that are readily available for the researcher (Edgar & Manz, 2017). The statistical analyses examined the relationship between various categorical and metric variables. Similarly, the independent sample T-test (Walker & Ugoni, 1995) was conducted to assess significant differences between categorical variables with two groups, such as gender, marital status, and recommendation to others, and the metric variable of Tourist Experiences at Sikkim Monasteries.

Similarly, the one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was employed to analyze significant differences between categorical variables with three or more groups (Kim, 2017) including age, monthly income, educational qualification, occupation, type of tour, means of bookings, means of information about the site, motivation for visiting a religious site, participation in or performance of rituals in spiritual activities, accommodation of stay, duration of visit and monasteries visited while in Sikkim, and the metric variable of Tourist Experiences at Sikkim Monasteries.

These statistical analyses allowed for systematically exploring how various demographic and experiential factors may influence tourists' experiences at Sikkim monasteries. By examining categorical variables with two groups and those with two or more groups, the research aimed to comprehensively understand the factors contributing to tourists' perceptions and satisfaction levels during their visits to these cultural and religious sites.

## AREA OF STUDY

Sikkim, a state located in the Himalayas of India, is renowned for its Buddhist aesthetics and culture. The State focuses on its cultural heritage and molds its architecture and landscapes around Buddhist art and designs. Sikkim is a land that houses over 200 monasteries, small and big. Buddhism is not only seen as a religion but it has contributed to the tourism industry through its intricate architectural details in the structures of its monasteries. The Buddhist population of Sikkim follows Vajrayana Buddhism. Sikkim is known to be a sacred land that holds treasures hidden

by Guru Padmsambhava. Tourism has been actively a part of Sikkim's revenue since the early 1990s and has grown ever since. Tourism has indirectly enhanced and maintained these Buddhist structures which have played a pivotal role in attracting tourists to the State. This study is based on the following monasteries; Rumtek, Tashiding, Sangachoeling, Chorten, Pemayangtse and Dubdi monastery.

**Table 1**

Years	Foreign Tourist	Domestic Tourist	TOTAL
2005	16,518	3,47,650	3,64,168
2006	18,049	4,21,943	4,39,992
2007	17,837	4,65,204	4,83,041
2008	19,154	5,12,373	5,31,527
2009	17,730	6,15,628	6,33,358
2010	20,757	7,00,011	7,20,768
2011	23,945	5,52,453	5,76,398
2012	26,489	5,58,538	5,85,027
2013	31,698	5,76,749	6,08,447
2014	49,175	5,62,418	6,11,593

Years	Foreign Tourist	Domestic Tourist	TOTAL
2015	38,479	7,05,023	7,43,502
2016	66,012	7,40,763	8,06,775
2017	49,111	12,24,236	12,73,347
2018	71,172	14,26,127	14,97,299
2019	1,33,388	11,96,468	13,29,856
2020	19,935	2,96,473	3,16,408
2021	11,508	5,00,161	5,11,669

Source: Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Government of Sikkim.

The above graph shows a huge lapse in the flow of tourists during 2020, which was due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its various travel protocols. But tourism picked up during 2021 when the rules and restrictions due to the pandemic were reduced.

## Analysis

The demography and profiles of Buddhist monasteries visited by tourists are explained in Table 2.

**Table 2: Demography of Tourists' Profile Who Visited Buddhist Monasteries**

	% of Buddhist Tourists	Type of Tour	% of Buddhist Tourists
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	48.4	All-inclusive tour	9.1
Female	51.6	partially planned tour	29.2
<b>Age</b>		Independent tour	61.6
Up to 20 years	15.5	<b>Motivation for Visiting a Religious Site</b>	
21-35 years	58.9	Pilgrimage	5.5
36-50 years	24.2	Spiritual contentment	14.6
51-65 years	1.4	Sightseeing	9.1
<b>Marital status</b>		Social	32.4
Married	35.2	Peace of Mind	27.4
Unmarried	64.8	Religious trip	11.0
<b>Monthly Income (INR)</b>		<b>Participated in or Performed Rituals in Religious</b>	
Less than 25,000	29.7	Sang Thu	7.8
25,000 - 50,000	41.1	Tashi Gepa	10.5
50,001 - 1,00,000	25.1	Tongchey	16.0
1,00,001 - 1,50,001	4.1	Lighting of butter lamp	32.0
<b>Educational Qualification</b>		Taking the blessing of a Rinpoche	13.7
Secondary	4.6	Others	20.1
Higher Secondary	10.5	<b>Accommodation of Stay</b>	
Graduate	41.1	Budget Hotel	6.4
Postgraduate	33.8	2-3 Star Hotel	14.6
Others	10.0	4-5-star Hotel	4.1

<b>Occupation</b>		Home stays	46.6
Student	25.6	Monastery	1.8
Govt. Sector employee	31.1	Govt. Guest House	9.6
Private sector employee	20.5	Friends and relatives	16.9
Self-employed	11.4	<b>Duration of Visit to</b>	
Others	11.4	Less than one day	8.7
<b>Means of Bookings</b>		One day	25.1
Internet	22.8	Two days	41.6
Phone	26.5	Three days	12.8
Travel agency	18.3	More than three days	11.9
Friends	28.3	<b>Monasteries Visited while in Sikkim</b>	
Others	4.1	Rumtek Monastery	15.5
<b>Means of Information in Site</b>		Chorten Monastery	16.0
Internet	31.1	Pemayangste Monastery	15.1
Tourist Guide	15.5	Tashiding Monastery	10.5
Tourist information center	7.3	Dubdi Monastery	25.6
Tour operator	16.0	Sangachoeling Monastery	17.4
Travel marts and fairs	15.5	<b>Recommend the Site to Others</b>	
Religious people	6.8	Yes	99.1
Any other	7.8	No	.9

The above data reveals respondents' demographic and behavioral characteristics in a travel-related survey. The sample is fairly balanced in gender, with 51.6% female and 48.4% male. Most respondents (58.9%) fall within the age range of 21-35 years, and a significant proportion are unmarried (64.8%). Regarding income, a substantial portion of the tourists earn between 25,000 and 50,000 INR (41.1%), and the preferred type of tour is independent (61.6%). Online platforms are prominent among tourists making bookings, mostly using the internet (22.8%) and their phones (26.5%). Information was gathered from various sources on the Internet: 31.1%. An overwhelming majority of tourists surveyed (99.1%) were willing to recommend the site to prospective and interested visitors. The results of this data can give insight into planning targeted marketing and services to cater to the preferences of this diverse group of tourists, which can be implemented.

This data provides insights into the motivations and characteristics of tourists visiting religious sites in Sikkim. The visitors' reasons vary, with a significant portion seeking spiritual contentment (14.6%) and peace of mind (27.4%), while others engage in sightseeing (9.1%) and social activities (32.4%). The survey further had a question where tourists who visited for religious purposes were given options of what ritual they performed in the monastery. Most of them participated in lighting butter lamps (32.0%) and seeking blessings from a Rinpoche (high monk) (13.7%). Most tourists preferred staying in home stays (46.6%) and visited for one to three days. Most tourists surveyed visited Dubdi Monastery (25.6%), Sikkim's oldest and first monastery. This data underscores the diverse motivations and preferences of Sikkim tourists, providing valuable insight into the region's tourism management and offerings.

**Table 3: Independent Sample T-Test Result on Tourist Experiences at Sikkim Monasteries**

Independent Sample T-Test	T-Value	P-Value	Level of Significant
Gender	1.718	0.087	Not Significant
Marital Status	-2.016	0.046	Significant
Recommended to others	-24.541	0.000	Significant

Independent T-test is used to show if there is any significance between the independent variables; if the p-value is less than .05, then we can state there is a significant difference in the variables (Verma & Salam, 2019). The Independent Sample T-Test analysis results indicate that in the context of Sikkim

tourists, gender (T value = 1.718, P value = 0.087) does not exhibit significant differences in the studied variable. On the other hand, marital status (T value = -2.016, P value = 0.046) and the likelihood of recommending the destination to others (T value = -24.541, P value = 0.000) show significant

variations, suggesting that marital status and the tendency to recommend the destination are influential factors among the

surveyed tourists. The significance level underscores these variables' impact on the observed differences.

**Table 4: One-Way ANOVA Result of Tourist Experiences on Sikkim Monasteries**

One-Way ANOVA	F-Value	P-Value	Level of Significant
Age	10.482	0.000	Significant
Monthly Income	13.124	0.000	Significant
Educational Qualification	12.846	0.000	Significant
Occupation	3.548	0.008	Significant
Type of Tour	9.623	0.000	Significant
Means of Bookings	2.812	0.026	Significant
Means of Information about this site	2.048	0.061	Not Significant
Motivation for visiting a religious site	2.743	0.020	Significant
Participated in or performed rituals in religious	1.106	0.358	Not Significant
Accommodation of stay	7.440	0.000	Significant
Duration of visit	5.314	0.000	Significant
Monasteries visited while in Sikkim	3.823	0.002	Significant

Analysis of variance or ANOVA is a statistical technique, and one-way ANOVA is used when there are three or more groups of data to analyze if there is a relationship between the dependent and independent variables in the survey conducted. If the p-value of the variable is less than 0.05, then it states there is a significant difference. Still, if the p-value is greater than 0.05, then it is observed that the variables do not have an important difference.

The outcomes of the One-Way ANOVA analysis conducted on Sikkim tourists' data reveal significant variations in several aspects. Age (P value = 0.000), monthly income (P value = 0.000), educational qualification (P value = 0.000), occupation (P value = 0.008), type of tour (P value = 0.000), means of bookings (P value = 0.026), accommodation of stay (P value = 0.000), and duration of visit (P value = 0.000) exhibit statistically significant differences. The Motivation for visiting religious sites (P value = 0.020) and the monasteries visited in Sikkim (P value = 0.002) also display significant variations. However, the means of information about the site (P value = 0.061) and participation in rituals (P value = 0.358) are not deemed significant in explaining differences among the surveyed tourists. These results underscore the influential factors contributing to the diversity of experiences and preferences among Sikkim tourists.

## DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

The study provides an overview of tourists visiting Sikkim's religious sites, revealing diverse demography and motivations for tourists to visit monasteries. While gender shows no influence, significant variations in marital status and recommendation likelihood emphasize their importance in the tourists' experience. Moreover, the One-Way

ANOVA results highlight substantial differences across age, income, education, occupation, tour type, booking means, accommodation, visit duration, Motivation, and monastery preferences. Tourists of different ages could have different experiences; young adults could mostly visit for sightseeing, while the older tourists could be visiting solely for religious purposes and for offering their prayers, hence having a different experience at the same site. The higher a person's income, the more comfortable their tourist experience, and they will be free to participate in any ceremony within the monastery with different price rates, e.g. Rates are set for lighting several butter lamps in the monastery. Education could impact tourists' experience; Okumus et al. (2021) stated in their study that people with a higher level of education were interested in partaking in culinary tourism activity compared to people with a lower level of education. In their research, Cheer et al. (2017) mentioned two motives for religious visits: secular and religious motivators. It could highly affect how a tourist experiences the monastery visited. The monasteries visited in Sikkim also can make a significant impact on tourists' experience; some monasteries are ancient with little changes made, while the newer monasteries have modern amenities that are made for visitors, like resting benches, descriptive signage's, etc. Although means of information and ritual participation lack statistical significance, understanding these influential factors can assist and guide in planning targeted marketing and services, fostering a nuanced approach to enhance visitor experiences and sustain Sikkim's cultural tourism.

The study's results explain the demographic composition and motivational drivers of tourists visiting Sikkim's religious sites, particularly its monasteries. Gender does not emerge as a significant determinant, yet marital status and

the propensity to recommend the destination play crucial roles in shaping tourists' experiences. Notably, the One-Way ANOVA analysis reveals substantial variations across diverse demographic and experiential factors, including age, income, education, occupation, tour type, booking methods, accommodation preferences, visit duration, Motivation for visiting, and monastery preferences. These findings underscore the complex interplay of factors influencing tourists' perceptions and experiences in Sikkim's religious landscape.

## MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study's findings offer valuable insights for stakeholders managing and promoting tourism in Sikkim. By spotting tourists' diverse demographic profiles and motivations, tourism authorities and destination managers can better tailor their marketing strategies and service offerings to meet visitors' needs and preferences. For instance, targeting specific demographic segments with tailored promotional campaigns and developing specialized tour packages catering to different interests and preferences can enhance visitor satisfaction and loyalty.

Understanding the influential factors identified in the study, such as marital status, recommendation likelihood, age, income, education, and accommodation preferences, can inform strategic decision-making processes related to infrastructure development, hospitality services, and visitor engagement initiatives. By aligning their offerings with tourists' preferences and expectations, destination managers can create more compelling and memorable experiences, fostering positive word-of-mouth and repeat visitation.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS

From a practical standpoint, the study's findings provide actionable insights for tourism practitioners and service providers operating in Sikkim. For example, leveraging online platforms and digital marketing channels to target specific demographic segments and promote personalized travel experiences can enhance customer engagement and drive bookings. Similarly, investing in training programs and capacity-building initiatives to equip frontline staff with the knowledge and skills to deliver exceptional customer service can elevate the overall visitor experience and foster long-term relationships with tourists.

Also, collaborating with local communities and cultural organizations to offer authentic and immersive experiences, such as guided monastery tours and cultural workshops, can add value to tourists' visits while supporting sustainable tourism development. Additionally, monitoring visitor feedback and satisfaction levels through systematic data collection and analysis can provide valuable insights

for continuous improvement and refinement of tourism offerings and services.

By translating the study's findings into practical actions and initiatives, tourism stakeholders can enhance the competitiveness and attractiveness of Sikkim as a premier cultural and religious destination, thereby contributing to the region's economic growth and sustainable development.

## CONCLUSION

The study concludes with a thorough grasp of the demographic, behavioral, and motivational elements of visitors visiting holy monasteries in Sikkim. The data shows a fair gender distribution and a sizable share of young, unmarried people who choose independent vacations. Online channels play a significant role in reservations and information gathering; most respondents are ready to promote the place. Visitors' different reasons, from spiritual fulfillment to sightseeing and social activities, reflect the varying character of desired experiences. Based on the statistical analyses, factors such as marital status and recommendation likelihood significantly impact tourists' perceptions. At the same time, differences in age, income, education, occupation, tour type, accommodation, visit duration, and monastery preferences contribute to the rich diversity of tourists' perceptions. It provides valuable guidance for targeted marketing strategies, enhancing tourism offerings, and effectively managing Sikkim's unique cultural and religious attractions to cater to the preferences of this multifaceted group of travelers.

## REFERENCES

- Pasaco-González, B. S., Campón-Cerro, A. M., Moreno-Lobato, A., & Sánchez-Vargas, E. (2023). The role of demographics and previous experience in tourists' experiential perceptions. *Sustainability*, 15(4), 3768-3768. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/su15043768>
- Bhat, A. & Darzi, M. (2018). Antecedents of tourist loyalty to tourist destinations: A mediated-moderation study. *International Journal of Tourism*, 261-278.
- Batra, A. (2009). Senior pleasure tourists: Examination of their demography, travel experience, and travel behavior upon visiting the bangkok metropolis. *International Journal of Hospitality & Tourism Administration*, 10(3), 197-212. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/15256480903088105>
- Cheer, J. M., Belhassen, Y., & Kujawa, J. (2017). The search for spirituality in tourism: Toward a conceptual framework for spiritual tourism. *Tourism Management Perspectives*, 24, 252-256.
- Collins-Kreiner, N., & Kliot, N. (2000). Pilgrimage tourism in the holy land: The behavioural characteristics of

- Christian pilgrims. *Geo Journal*, 50(1), 55-67. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1007154929681>
- Cultural Affairs and Heritage Department, Government of Sikkim. *Creative traditions, flourishing cultures: A chronicle of 23 years of cultural development in Sikkim, achievements & initiatives 1994-2016*, p. 25.
- Dam, S. (2016). *Sustainable tourism development in Sikkim, India: Sustainability and tourism development*. LAP LAMBERT Academic Publishing. ISBN: 3659908266.
- Department of Tourism & Civil Aviation, Government of Sikkim.
- Edgar, T. W., & Manz, D. O. (2017). *Research methods for cyber-security*. ISBN: 978-0-12-805349-2. Syngress.
- Hassan, T., Carvache-Franco, M., Carvache-Franco, O., & Carvache-Franco, W. (2023). Sociodemographic relationships of motivations, satisfaction, and loyalty in religious tourism: A study of the pilgrimage to the city Mecca. *PLoS One*, 18(3), e0283720. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0283720>
- Irimias, A., Mitev, A., & Michalko, G. (2016). Demographic characteristics influencing religious tourism behaviour: Evidence from a Central-Eastern-European country. *International Journal of Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage*, 4(4), Article 3. doi:<https://doi.org/10.21427/D7VB0D>; Retrieved from <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/ijrtp/vol4/iss4/3>
- Kim, T. K. (2017). Understanding One Way ANOVA using conceptual figures. National library of science. *Pubmed Central*, 70(1), 22-26. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4097/kjae.2017.70.1.22>
- Lee, Y., & Bhargava, V. (2004). Leisure time. Do married and single individuals spend it differently? *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 32, 254-274.
- Mili'cevi'c, S., Laki'cevi'c, M., & Petrovi'c, J. (2020). The influence of demographic characteristics of tourist on the tourist's attitudes about the tourism product: Case of Vrnjačka Banja, Serbia. *Econ. Mark. Commun.*, 19, 81-102.
- Stausberg, M., & Engler, S. (Eds.) (2011). *The Routledge handbook of research methods in the study of religion*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Okumus, B., Shi, F., & Dedeoglu, B. (2021). What is the role of demographics in tourists' attitudes towards foods? *Journal of Gastronomy and Tourism*, 5(4), 207-220.
- Yacout, O. (2022). Tourism motives, tourism experience value and cultural change: A focus on Egyptian tourists. In book, *Contemporary Muslim Travel Cultures Practices, Complexities and Emerging Issues*. Publisher: Routledge. doi:<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003036296-8>
- Pasaco-González, B. S., Campón-Cerro, A. M., MorenoLobato, A., & Sánchez-Vargas, E. (2023). The role of demographics and previous experience in tourists' experiential perceptions. *Sustainability*, 15, 3768. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3390/su15043768>
- Risley, H. H. (1999). *The Gazetteer of Sikkim*. Low Price Publications.
- Sahoo, D., & Mohanty, S. (2022). Does demographic factor affect tourist behaviour? Findings from the religious site of Jagannath Dham, India. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 43(3), 1071-1080. doi:<https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.43328-922>
- Sikkim Tourism Policy. (2010). *Tourism touches everyone the land of peace and tranquillity* (p. 29). Sikkim: Prepared by the Government of Sikkim.
- Swain, S., & Sthapak, S. (2022). Socio-demographic analysis of host communities' support for tourism development in the heritage destination of Puri, India. *GeoJournal of Tourism and Geosites*, 44(4), 1427-1434. doi:<https://doi.org/10.30892/gtg.44430-962>
- Spence, M. (2002). The effect of age on the probability of participation in wildlife-related activities: A birth year cohort study. *American Journal of Agricultural Economics*, 84(5), 1384-1389.
- Verma, A. (January 2024). Religious tourism in India to grow at a CAGR 16% by 2030.
- Verma, J., & Salam, A. (2019). *Testing statistical assumptions* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). Hoboken, NJ, USA: John Wiley & Sons.
- Walker, B. F., & Ugoni, A. (1995). The T test: An introduction. *Comsig Review*, 4, 37-40.
- Wider, W., Tanucan, J. C. M., Wu, X., Mutua, C., Pang, N. T. P., Ling, G. H. T., & Cheisviyanny, C. (2023). The role of demographic factors on religious beliefs: Evidence from five countries. *F1000Research*, 12, 372-372. doi:<https://doi.org/10.12688/f1000research.131998.1>
- Xie, H., Costa, C., & Morais, D. (2008). Gender differences in rural tourists' motivation and activity participation. *Journal of Hospitality and Leisure Marketing*, 16(4), 1-27.