



## **A Study on Spiritual Tourism in Rishikesh**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The goal of this study is to look into the experiences of international visitors who come to Rishikesh to visit ashrams to practice yoga and spirituality, as well as to understand more about why tourists come to Rishikesh in the first place. Spiritual tourism is a relatively new phenomenon in the realm of leisure travel. According to one definition, "spiritual tourism" means Even while only a few academics have commented on it, both directly and indirectly, it is plainly clear from these anecdotes that practice varies greatly from place to region. Because of the many different meanings of the term "spiritual," the phenomenological taxonomy of spiritual tourist experiences has yet to get the scholarly attention it deserves. It is feasible to establish an empirically grounded taxonomy that may be used in the broader area of tourism studies by giving a defined yet changeable frame of reference for the word. As a result, the study proposes categorising spiritual tourist experiences into five broad categories: healing, experimental, quest, retreat, and community. These categories typically overlap, and they represent wider societal currents in Western nations.

*Keywords: Spirituality, Tourism, Consciousness, Tourist, Spiritual Tourism*

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### **INTRODUCTION**

India is fascinating with its ancient and complex sculpture, dazzling contrasts and breathtaking natural beauty. The previous decade, which has been the finest in the history of Indian tourism, has seen substantial increase in Indian inbound tourism as a result of the huge potential that is currently accessible as well as the development measures that have been taken by the government. Because of a succession of marketing activities, including the current and extremely successful 'Incredible India' campaign, India has become one of the major worldwide tourist destinations. In this perspective, the state of Uttarakhand is a one-of-a-kind tourism destination with good prospects for the development of a varied variety of products including nature, spirituality, adventure, leisure, and so on to meet a visitor's need.

Rishikesh promotes spiritual tourism through its religious variety and legacy, as well as health and wellness approaches including yoga, meditation, and ayurveda.

Tourists are more interested in experiences than in sites. The sensation that tourists have when they arrive at the place is encouraged. The attractiveness of a destination is determined by a variety of factors, including the state's cultural facilities, physical characteristics, sport facilities, amusement centers, socio-cultural features, good accommodation, transportation, IT infrastructure, scenic beauty, spiritual shrines, and so on. Rishikesh has to have a strong marketing plan in order to claim a distinct position in the consumer's mind as a destination. The positioning clearly expresses the perspective of potential visitors about the site. Uttarakhand is well-known for its religious destinations, particularly for Hindus, and this is a key component of the state's identity.

Rishikesh is where Raibhya Rishi is said to have done penance in order to please God, who appeared as Rishikesh, thus the name. Rishikesh is 1360 feet above sea level. It is said that numerous yogis and sages resided and performed penance here. Rishikesh signifies the location where Vishnu defeated the monster Madhu. Rishikesh is a popular destination for Ayurvedic, yoga, and meditation visitors visiting India. Life in the modern era has provided us with far too many new things. In many respects, it has made our lives simpler. But, more importantly, technology has raised the stress levels, complexity, and mental pressures under which we continue to function. What we don't recognise right away is the influence of such a lifestyle on our health. But for those who care about their lives and want to live them in a healthy way, there is no better way to de-stress from life's burdens than to immerse themselves in the soothing and healing balm of India's Yogic and Meditation practices. Many people feel that yoga and meditation are mysterious practices that need total dedication to the exclusion of all else.

Meditation at Rishikesh, as well as a plunge in the sacred river that runs through it, are thought to bring one closer to attaining moksha. Stories from the past, as well as millions of pilgrimages, all add to the enchantment that is Rishikesh. Whether you are a religious believer or not, the beauty of nature at her best in these corners of the globe will convert you. The emerald green ocean, the emerald green hills, and the gleaming white sand.

What we can uncover that is referred to as 'spiritual tourism' or 'spiritual travel,' or that is loosely classified as spirituality, wellbeing, or self discovery, is visible across a variety of media and investigative sources.

As a result, the state's relevance as a location for spiritual activities is growing by the day, and a well-structured tourist marketing campaign might have a significant influence on the state's economy. As a result, it is likely that promoting Uttarakhand as a spiritual destination would help the state's treasury grow by attracting more tourists.

Haridwar is located in the Himalayan foothills, at the confluence of the sacred Ganges (called 'Ganga') and the plains. The location, a district headquarters, is known as the state's "spiritual capital." The location is closely entwined with strands of Indian culture and civilisation. Haridwar is the ultimate sanctuary for Hindu worshippers seeking spiritual comfort and tranquillity. It is one of India's most ancient pilgrimage sites, and it has been admired from time immemorial.

A visit to Haridwar is like entering a divine realm of beautiful temples and ashrams. It is known as Haridwar because it is the gateway to the Lord (Haridwar), as well as the point of entrance for Dev Bhoomi and Char Dham (four holy spots in the state – Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, and Yumunotri). Millions of devotees and pilgrims from all over the globe come here to take a sacred plunge in the Ganga, which is said to wash away their sins. Many Indians consider it a requirement to take a bath in the Ganga in Haridwar at least once in their lives.

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## Review of Literature

### Rishikesh as a spiritual tourism

The mid-Himalayan areas of Garhwal and Kumaon, known in the Puranas as Kedarkhand and Manashkhand, are currently known as Uttarakhand. Uttarakhand is home to a rich and diversified culture as well as historical landmarks. Uttarakhand, the home of the Himalayas, is a tourist's delight, not only for its natural beauty, fresh air, clean water, and chilly snow, but also for being the location of a number of infamous spiritual sites.

#### 1.1 The experience of tourists

Rishikesh has some great benefits as a result of being a spiritual tourist destination. For the first time in weeks, I was able to have fruit, yogurt, and muesli for breakfast, and real coffee, and real bread! (Most of India eats white bread when not eating chapatis/rotis/naan/parathas, all of which are good, but sometimes a Western girl wants her thick, soft, whole-grain bread.) For those who head there and want some quality breakfasts, I highly recommend Devraj Coffee Corner, overlooking the Lakshman Jhula bridge. Just next door is a pretty good bookstore, with another one just down the street (Haridwar/Rishikesh: Buddy Om, 2022).

The emic voice is extremely obvious in its concentration on individual self-discovery and wellness maintenance, thus any disagreement about the phrase "spiritual tourism" appears to be mostly an academic construct. Scholarly application of the word has been far less uniform. In an essay on the Camino de Santiago, Donn Tilson, for example, mentions "religious-spiritual tourism (St. James and Spain, 2022)."

Vinnie Jauhari and Gunjan Sanjeev provide a somewhat cursory survey of the business opportunities offered to India by cultural and spiritual tourism, which includes explicitly institutionally religious phenomena such as fairs and saints' days, as well as locations such as the Vatican or Lourdes, but leaves the spiritual part of his term unexplained, and Kanika Gupta and Anju Gulla investigate the use of internet technologies by an Indian shrine.

He has been one of the most prominent authors to use the spiritual tourism term, generally analyzing the economic considerations that come from spiritual tourist occurrences. Haq and John Jackson define a spiritual tourist in the context of the Islamic Hajj as "someone who visits a specific place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual meaning and/or growth, without overt religious compulsion, which could be religious, nonreligious, sacred, or experiential in nature, but within the Divine context, regardless of the main reason for traveling (Haq and Jackson, 2009)."

Meanwhile, Shalini Singh and Tej Vir Singh offer an unfocused but stimulating essay on the aesthetics of spiritual tourism, proposing transformation of the individual as the distinguishing experience, but that spirituality itself "denies rationalisation and theorization as the experience is intensely personal and subjective" (Shradhanjali:2021).

A number of academics have sought to be more precise in their assessments of the phenomenon of spiritual tourism. Curtis Coats uses the word twice in the title of his essay and four times in the text to characterise eco-conscious New Age travelers to Sedona who place a premium on identity creation. Frustratingly, and rather perplexingly, Coats reverts to the phrase "pilgrim-tourist" near the conclusion of his paper, avoiding the spiritual tourist label and maybe unintentionally implying that scholars regard such behaviors as "inauthentic navel-gazing." Other spiritual tourist 'hub' sites, such as Sedona or Rishikesh, get a certain degree of patronage simply because that is where one goes if one wants to go on a spiritual vacation (Coat, 2009).

Others researchers do not use the term "spiritual tourism," but they are speaking directly to the issue; this reflects not just the newness of the area, but also the extent to which tourism studies has historically been excluded from the field of religious studies (Norman, 2008).

Similarly, both Norman and Strauss observed visitors in Rishikesh participating in yoga classes and ashram getaways experimenting.

Sarah Macdonald, This might be interpreted as a self-conscious, empathetic definition of the field. Furthermore, books and biographies—those fantastic exercises in narcissism and self-promotion— provide comparable empirical evidence. As she tries, heals, searches, and discovers herself via India's religious traditions, Sarah MacDonald's memoir, *Holy Cow!*, comes as close to the ideal-type of varied spiritual tourist experience as one can get (Alqahtani, 2019).

This state attracts a sizable number of tourists, both domestic and foreign. While its century-old spiritual sites have drawn visitors, it is quickly becoming a destination for certain spiritual gurus who operate from the state and have a global following.

This category includes tourist experiences geared toward practices that seek to correct or improve problematic aspects of daily life. Tourists examining the status and value of relationships are included in this category. Such travellers will utilise their time away from home, generally engaged in religious traditions, to do self-analysis in a manner similar to therapy. As has been documented on the Camino de Santiago, this might take the form of psychological healing (Foley, 2000).

Of course, a meeting with local cultures may be part of the experimental tourism experience, and as Huxley points out, this is an important feature in casting alternatives to the tourist's ordinary environment. In this sort of spiritual tourism, the experience is defined as one of escape from the mundane, holy time, or ritual rejuvenation. This type is frequently associated with wellbeing, but this is not always the case, since visitors frequently seek socio-geographic escape rather than emotional or psychological restoration, even if the vocabulary used to describe the after-effects may be comparable (HUXLEY, 2004).

The travel experience with this sort of spiritual tourism may alternatively be regarded as a refuge from a troubled world (rather than a troublesome self of the 'healing' variety). As a result, retreat spiritual tourists will coexist with healing spiritual tourists in locations such as meditation retreats, health spas, and ecotourism adventures. This component has begun to be demonstrated through research. Fly-fishing, for example, has recently been treated as a religious activity in which communing with nature allows the angler to discover significant personal revelations that are not conceivable in everyday life (Snyder, 2007).

Religions should be significant but not the only focus of our research into spiritual tourism. For example, spiritual tourists may just walk through religious forecourts, like in the case of traditions such as the Camino, where people "perform something religious" but not under the administrative or theological control of the organisation itself (SLAVIN, 2003). When regular lifeways look troublesome or in need of evaluation or revision, visitors of this sort check out alternatives. Experiential spiritual tourists seek encounters that give replacements and are sometimes discovered as a result of healing or wellness efforts that have revealed unsustainable habits of thought or behaviour (Lofland and Stark, 1965). These tourists are sometimes referred to as "seekers," but rather than "floundering among religious alternatives" and "failing to accept the distinctive ideology and fellowship of any set of believers," as recommended by the term's originators, is a telos for this sort of spiritual tourist. As a result, many scholars have cited tourist experiences of the desire for authenticity or self in what we may call spiritual tourism. Thus, Hodge mentions his own quest for self-discovery and re-enchantment through spiritual tourism (Smith and Kelly, 2006). Wellness and holistic tourism should be included in a taxonomy of spiritual tourism (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005).

The concept of choice and decision-making is viewed positively by spiritual tourists. Such a shift is seen as evidence of progress, as Campbell points out. Instead of "floundering among religious alternatives" and "failing to embrace the specific ideology and fellowship of some set of believers," as proposed by the term's originators, these tourists are frequently referred to as "seekers (Howes, 1972)." According to the published literature, India and "The East" appear to be perennial favourites for this type of tourism, at least among Western tourists. Richard Sharpley and Priya Sundaram observed the difference articulated by ashram tourists at Auroville, which was possibly enhanced by the chance nature of their discovery of the location (Sharpley and Sundaram, 2005).

Similarly, both Norman and Strauss observed tourists in Rishikesh attending yoga courses and ashram retreats experimenting. (Cheer, Belhassen and Kujawa, 2017) Proposed a conceptual framework for spiritual tourism, outlining two major drivers: religious and secular. According to these authors, secular drivers are motivated by self-centred motives such as wellness, adventure, and recreation in order to gain some kind of spiritual benefit, such as a stronger connection with one's inner self or the attainment of a higher level of consciousness. Religious drivers, on the other hand, religious drivers emphasize motives emphasised by religious adherence, ritualised practise, identity reiteration, and cultural routine. Both secular (internal self) and religious (external/institutional) drivers contribute to understanding the various dimensions of spiritual tourism (DEMETRIOU, 2008).

### ***1.2 The Potential and Prospects of Spiritual Tourism***

Spiritual tourism is a soul-searching process and a journey of discovery. It has become a way to achieve harmony and equilibrium between the mind, body, and soul. A person may embark on a spiritual journey for a variety of reasons, and the spiritual connection or experience may occur before, during, or after the journey or visit. In addition, people from various cultures will have different interpretations, motivations, and beliefs regarding spiritual tourism. The spiritual dimensions of modern tourism studies vary considerably between scholars and researchers. This section examines the spiritual dimensions of tourism, such as wellness, healing, personal development, motivation, restorative environments, spiritual transformation, and self-awareness (Pomeroy, 2013).

Similarly, spiritual tourism is viewed from two perspectives: the influential and the personal. These are based on the experience of the tourist before, during, and after a journey or tour. The realm of influence encompasses external factors such as physical and social aspects, as well as products and services. Moreover, knowledge, memory, perception, emotion, and self-identity are internal factors within the realm of the individual. External and internal factors influence travellers' motivation (Dimmock, 2012).

Meanwhile, a conceptual framework has been developed that suggests leisure experience facilitates spiritual development. It enables individuals to overcome spiritual challenges and develop spiritual sensitivity. The developed framework enables travellers to recognise their inner self and external surroundings, indicating a strong relationship between (external) leisure and spiritual well-being (internal). Heintzman added that the dimensions of

leisure style will influence the spiritual well-being of different individuals differently (activity, motivation, setting, time). In addition, one's spiritual health may be affected by the type of leisure activity they engage in (Heintzman and Mannell, 2003).

Similarly, it has been argued that leisure activities positively affect an individual's physical, mental, and spiritual health. In addition, Heintzman's framework illustrates the impact of various leisure activities on various dimensions of spiritual well-being (Mannell, 2007). This result is consistent with the findings of the study in which it is stated that tourism provides the conditions for a constant pursuit of spiritual enrichment and self-development (Zinnbauer et al., 1997).

According to them, and other researchers, there is a substantial relationship between tourism and spiritual development in terms of motivation, inner psychological development, self-development, and well-being. Heintzman (2013) and Ponder and Holladay (2013), for example, discovered that participation in tourism activities provides positive spiritual outcomes and meaning, such as transcendence benefits (connection to a higher power), spiritual transformation (self-improvement), and eudemonic state (happiness), among others (Heintzman (2013), Morgan (2010), and Ponder and Holladay (2013).

These findings are supported by Coghlan, who investigated how tourist experiences generate positive emotions, engagement, and meaning, thereby improving the well-being of participants. All of these studies demonstrate that tourism has long been acknowledged for its potential restorative, hedonistic, or broader well-being effects and that it significantly contributes to the improvement of an individual's spirituality or inner psychological growth (Morgan, 2010). In a similar vein, they identified touristic experiences (especially seaside ones) as potential sources of emotional and spiritual significance. Several clear themes emerge from the research that indicate a spiritual dimension to the seaside experience, such as a sense of connection, awe, timelessness, and nothingness (Jarratt and Sharpley (2017). The findings of Jarratt and Sharpley are supported by Fisher, Francis, and Johnson, who argued that a sense of connection or reconnection to the environment is spiritual in general. They identify four domains in which harmonious relationships are required for the achievement of spiritual well-being: the personal, the communal, the environmental, and the transcendental. This demonstrates that spiritual fulfilment can be attained through connection to an immanent or transcendent power in the natural environment. Similar research was conducted by those who discovered that through tourism, an intimate relationship between earth, sky, mortals, and divinity (wholeness and authenticity) is achieved. The ability to connect with other things and beings enables one to attain transcendental goals in the long run (Steiner and Reisinger, 2006).

He investigated a facet of tourism in which the outer search serves as the vehicle for an inner journey of spiritual growth. Through esoteric motivation, he coined the phrase "tourism for spiritual development." According to him, a person intentionally embarks on a "voyage of discovery" to achieve inner awareness and transformation (Robledo, 2015). The term is conceptualised as having central meaning, transcendence, and connectedness dimensions. These dimensions were analysed in light of the motivations they entail. Smith and Diekmann (2017) investigated the relationship between diverse terminologies and perspectives, as well as the ways in which different types of well-being can be derived from tourism experiences. Three primary dimensions were identified: pleasure, altruism, and meaningful experience.

We used the spiritual intelligence themes identified by Hanefar, to organise and discuss these dimensions of spiritual tourism. They identified seven spiritual intelligence themes through thematic analysis in their article titled "A Synthesis of Spiritual Intelligence Themes from Islamic and Western Philosophical Perspectives": meaning/purpose of life, consciousness, transcendence, spiritual resources, self-determination, reflection-soul purification, and spiritual coping (with obstacles). This model was created based on the fundamental concept of spirituality. It is derived from both Islamic and Western perspectives, and it is adaptable beyond religious boundaries. The incorporation of various dimensions of spiritual tourism and the Spiritual Intelligence Model yields a logically organised conceptual model for spiritual tourism (Sa'ari and Siraj, 2016).

The preceding discussion demonstrates over forty dimensions of spiritual tourism. They are divided into two categories: internal and external dimensions. Some researchers have linked these two elements to demonstrate spiritual attainments through travel or journeying, whereas others focus solely on the element of religiosity or the sacred with the outcome of spiritual enlightenment. Others are more secular, looking at the dimensions of spiritual tourism without the religious component.

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## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### OBJECTIVES OF STUDY

- To study the tourist behaviour on spiritual tourism in Rishikesh.
- To study the potential and prospects of spiritual tourism in Rishikesh.
- To study the tourist behaviour of foreigners in Rishikesh.

### SCOPE OF STUDY

Numerous facets of spiritual tourism, including its debut and demand, have evolved in response to the recent shift in demand. Analysing the traditional Spiritual and Yoga Tourism in Rishikesh can assist in explaining why tourism in the past collapsed because of COVID-19 lockdowns. Changes in marketing and possibilities for tourist behaviour, in yoga and spiritual ashrams, a sense of stability must be achieved. This research will focus on safety and hygienic issues in Rishikesh, as spiritual tourism does not require a specific time of year to take place. Understanding tourist behaviour is advantageous to the development of both rural and urban spiritual tourism locations. The tourist handling capability of Rishikesh has also been assessed, and as a result, there is an emphasis on growing Rishikesh and its undiscovered surrounds responsibly, as well as on infrastructure such as transportation.

This research paper targets visitors from both domestic and international locations, increasing and building awareness of spiritual sites and destinations. Our objective is that this study will make a significant contribution to the field of tourism and spirituality and yield favourable results for all parties concerned, whether directly or indirectly.

### LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

- Research is done by the secondary method.
- A physical presence is absent.
- For the research, many sources and papers were used.
- The duration of research is limited.

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### METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

This paper is a compilation of materials that were obtained after a comprehensive literature study; the majority of the content is taken directly from numerous websites. The purpose of this article is to acquaint the reader with the terminology related to the methodology, sample, and data gathering instruments.

The research aims to highlight the importance, impact, revival, and decline of spiritual tourism in Rishikesh, Uttarakhand. It aims to understand the developments that need to be made to carry out the full potential of the spiritual tourism in Rishikesh. The research methodology used in this study is qualitative and secondary data.

#### The Source of Data Collection

Secondary data was gathered from both published and unpublished sources in order to comprehend, substantiate, and validate the key facts, concepts, theories, roles, functions, issues, challenges, problems, and prospects of weekend tourism, tourist expectations, and tourist experiences. National and international journals, books, periodicals, databases, newspapers, pamphlets, brochures, state and central government tourism reports, World Travel and Tourism Council reports, and United Nations World Tourism Organisation reports were the primary sources of secondary data. These secondary sources provided information and statistics on the origin, evolution, expansion, and contemporary trends in the tourism sector, domestic tourism, religious tourism, visitor expectations, experiences, and satisfaction.

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### Findings

Objective 1: To study the tourist behaviour on spiritual tourism in Rishikesh.

- The majority of international tourists who visit Rishikesh feel spiritually fulfilled and at peace after visiting holy sites. They choose to travel to religious locations rather than adventurous, historical, or exotic destinations.
- Lack of sanitation Tourist amenities, including tourist information centres, safe drinking water, seats, kiosks, clean and sanitary restrooms, and sufficient parking spaces, must be provided.
- Every time there is an increase in population, the places of ganga become more contaminated.
- One of the problems caused by the absence of tourist circuit buses was that domestic tourists demanded an increase in the number of buses dedicated to spiritual tourism in Rishikesh.
- observing fraud involving foreign tourists that travel to Rishikesh for the Char Dham Yatra.

Objective 2: To study the potential and prospects of spiritual tourism in Rishikesh.

- The things that contribute to the pleasure of spiritual tourists, such as attractions, accessibility, accommodations, amusement activities, quality of service, and shopping facilities, should be made more affordable and accessible to every class of member.
- A major issue in obtaining competent employees. The travel and tourism business would undoubtedly benefit from greater labour.

Objective 3: To study the tourist behaviour of foreigners in Rishikesh.

- Lack of security and safety. The main reasons are internal community disturbances and terrorist strikes. The country is hazardous for females, has inadequate discipline, and is politically unstable.
- Lack of promotion of desirable tourist locations among tourists and a lack of training for locals in receiving and hosting visitors.
- The facilities that are offered to tourists from other countries in Rishikesh do not meet their high expectations at all.

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## Suggestion

- The developed infrastructure will undoubtedly lead to an increase in the number of people visiting holy sites.
- Tourist information centres, safe drinking water, lounging areas, kiosks, clean and sanitary restrooms, and ample parking are required.
- In this circumstance, teaching the local populace in environmental management might be a model method.
- Attractions, accessibility, lodging, entertainment, service quality, and retail facilities all need to be handled more consistently.
- The values, norms, habits, practices, traditions, and beliefs of an area must be maintained. Only by preserving these local values, traditions, and practices can one engage in authentic religious tourism.
- Improved connectivity is required to transform distant religious locations into financially viable tourist destinations.
- It is necessary to govern the ticketing and guiding systems.
- More patrolling is needed for safety reasons.
- They ought to show greater concern about the pollution of the Ganga.
- It is necessary for it to have a market position, image, and brand that are completely distinct from those of any other competition.
- The government can represent India as a destination for yoga and spirituality.

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## CONCLUSION

The primary objective of this research is to develop spiritual tourism, and a secondary objective is to investigate the gaps that exist between the expectations and experiences of weekend tourists with regard to tourism facilities and factors that are specific to the Rishikesh destination. Both objectives will be accomplished through the course of this investigation. The findings of the poll indicate that the great majority of people who travel for spiritual reasons are pleased with the numerous tourist amenities and characteristics that are unique to the locations they visit. The potential and prospects of spiritual tourism, as well as tourist behaviour, are the two key categories of components that primarily define the challenges and possibilities that spiritual tourists face. Present Rishikesh as a spiritual, mediation, and yoga destination. Rishikesh, the world's yoga centre, still has a lot to offer tourists, especially for foreigners who come to India to practice yoga and explore their spiritual side.

In addition, factors such as modes of transportation, accommodations, facilities at the destination, cultural and spiritual attractions, shopping, entertainment, water sports, and other tourist amenities all played a role in the level of satisfaction that weekend travellers who visited Rishikesh reported feeling. The findings of the study have shed light on the key characteristics of those who participate in spiritual tourism. The results of the study have not only helped to clarify the reason for taking time off during holiday and festival periods, but they have also shed light on the travel habits of spiritual tourists as well as the prospects and possibilities of the tourism industry. The research has helped to clarify the reason for taking time off during holiday and festival periods. It is predicted that giving this sector a greater focus via the execution of suitable policy interventions will play a significant part in the integration of regions that are varied in a range of elements of life. This is because it will play a critical role in the creation of new jobs.

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