

Navigating Spiritual Journeys: Expectations and Satisfaction of Spiritual Tourists in Rishikesh and Haridwar, Uttarakhand

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Abstract

Spiritual tourism brings visitors looking for spiritual experiences, reflection, cultural influences and inner peace. As a segment of the tourism industry, it has increased in demand over the past one decade. The research investigates the expectations and satisfaction of spiritual tourists in the regions of Rishikesh and Haridwar in the state of Uttarakhand. Primary data collection was achieved through questionnaires that were appropriately structured and assembled after responses were achieved from 218 individual tourists. The primary interpretations on the expectations & satisfaction of tourists were derived from information on 10 aspects which were cleanliness, safety awareness, cost issues, hospitality, spiritual activities, events, spiritual guides, means of transport, tourism experience, and spiritual services catered. The data was processed with the use of frequency, percentage and independent sample t-test. The results suggest a positive expectation for tourists in all researched dimensions. However, out of these expectation drivers, hospitality was noted as important for expected improvements. The research also highlighted that satisfaction levels were also affected by price, spiritual activities, spiritual guides and means of transport. A key takeaway of the research is that with improvement in the above mentioned aspects, the quality of spiritual tourism and thus the number of tourists may improve considerably.

Keywords: Expectations, Haridwar, Rishikesh, Spiritual Tourism, Satisfaction.

Introduction

In recent years, spiritual tourism has received increasing scholarly attention as a form of travel in which visitors seek meaning, reflection, personal development and experiences connected with spirituality. Research has highlighted that spiritual tourism may involve quests for meaning, personal transformation and subjective experiences of transcendence and connectedness (1, 2). Authenticity is also important in tourism experiences, with existential forms of authenticity helping to explain why travellers may value personally meaningful experiences even when the setting is not objectively authentic (3). Understanding motivations and satisfaction can therefore inform destination management and the design of meaningful visitor experiences (4, 5).

Motivations and Expectations: Understanding spiritual travelers' motivations is important for anticipating their expectations and satisfaction. Research has identified motivations associated with meaning, spiritual growth, self-development, discovery and religious belief (2, 6-11). Meditation retreats and other spiritually oriented activities

may also be associated with reflection and well-being (5). These motivations encourage travelers to seek destinations that provide opportunities for introspection, meditation, religious practice and personal development.

Factors Influencing Travel Decisions: Several destination attributes may influence the travel decisions of spiritual tourists. Accessibility, infrastructure, destination image, management and marketing have been identified as relevant factors in spiritual tourism consumption (4). Studies of sacred and pilgrimage destinations also show that the meaning attached to a place, interactions with others and perceptions of destination attributes can shape destination image and satisfaction (6, 8, 12).

Pre-Travel Expectations: Spiritual tourists may expect meaningful, transformative and personally relevant experiences (1, 2, 7, 10). They may also anticipate authentic engagement with local cultures, traditions and sacred practices (3, 6). Pre-visit destination information, including online reviews and electronic word-of-mouth, can

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contribute to destination-image formation and travel decision-making (12, 13).

Post-Travel Satisfaction: Tourist satisfaction is influenced by the relationship between prior expectations and the experience received. Expectancy-disconfirmation research demonstrates that differences between expected and perceived outcomes can help explain satisfaction and dissatisfaction (14). Research on religious tourism and pilgrimage similarly indicates that satisfaction can be related to site attributes, services, emotions and the extent to which visitor needs are met (15-19).

Management Implications: Effective management of spiritual tourism destinations requires attention to visitors' distinctive expectations, destination attributes and the quality of the experience. Research suggests that infrastructure, accessibility, management, marketing and destination image can influence spiritual tourism

consumption and visitor responses (4, 12, 20). Accurate destination information and appropriate visitor services may help align expectations with actual experiences and support satisfaction (13, 14).

Table 1 synthesizes the literature underpinning the study across motivations and expectations, travel-decision factors, pre-travel expectations, post-travel satisfaction and management implications. It shows that spiritual tourists commonly seek inner serenity, personal growth, meditation, authenticity and transformative experiences, while accessibility, infrastructure and destination reputation also shape travel decisions. The reviewed evidence further indicates that satisfaction depends on the relationship between prior expectations and the experience received, providing the conceptual basis for the dimensions examined in this study.

Table 1: Review of literature

Aspect	Details	References
Motivations and Expectations	Inner Serenity and Personal Growth: Previous research indicates that spiritual travelers may seek inner peace and personal development.	(1, 2, 9)
	Spiritual Enlightenment: Earlier research suggests a desire for spiritual awakening and deeper understanding.	(1, 2, 9)
	Introspection and Meditation: Past research shows that travelers may be drawn to locations offering introspection, meditation, and spiritual retreats.	(5, 10)
	Authentic Spiritual Experiences: Earlier studies indicate that travelers may seek experiences that resonate with their beliefs and values.	(2, 3, 6)
Factors Influencing Travel Decisions	Proximity and Accessibility: The closeness and ease of access to sacred sites are crucial.	(4)
	Supporting Infrastructure: Availability of meditation centers, yoga retreats, and wellness facilities impacts decisions.	(4)
	Destination Reputation: The perceived reputation and spiritual atmosphere of a destination influence travelers' choices.	(1)
Pre-Travel Expectations	Transformative Experiences: Spiritual tourists expect significant and life-changing experiences.	(14)
	Cultural and Spiritual Authenticity: They anticipate engaging with local cultures and customs that align with their spiritual values.	(3)
	Influences: Expectations are shaped by promotional materials, word-of-mouth, and online reviews presenting destinations as spiritually enriching.	
Post-Travel Satisfaction	Tourist satisfaction is influenced by the relationship between prior expectations and the experience received. Expectancy-disconfirmation research demonstrates that differences between expected and perceived outcomes can help explain satisfaction and dissatisfaction.	(14)
Management Implications	Understanding Unique Needs: Effective management requires insight into the specific needs and expectations of spiritual visitors.	(15)
	Promoting Authenticity: Strategies should emphasize authenticity, support spiritual growth, and respect diverse beliefs.	(4)
	Reflecting Spiritual Offers: Marketing efforts should accurately represent the spiritual attributes of destinations to meet tourist expectations and enhance satisfaction.	(15)

Despite previous research on spiritual tourism, religious travel, motivation, destination image and tourist satisfaction, limited empirical work has directly compared the expectations and satisfaction of spiritual tourists from India and other countries visiting Rishikesh and Haridwar using the same set of destination-related dimensions. The present study addresses this gap by examining ten dimensions and statistically comparing responses across the two destinations.

This study considered the following objectives:

- a) To assess the expectations of pilgrims from India and other countries visiting Rishikesh and Haridwar, Uttarakhand.
- b) To assess the satisfaction level of pilgrims from India and other countries visiting Rishikesh and Haridwar, Uttarakhand.

This study has taken the following hypotheses:

H1: There is a significant difference in the expectations of pilgrims from India and other countries visiting Rishikesh and Haridwar, Uttarakhand.

H2: There is a significant difference in the satisfaction levels of pilgrims from India and other

countries visiting Rishikesh and Haridwar, Uttarakhand.

Tourism is an important component of Uttarakhand's visitor economy, with destinations combining natural, adventure, cultural and spiritual attractions. Official national tourism statistics recorded approximately 54.64 million domestic tourist visits to Uttarakhand in 2022, placing the state among India's leading destinations for domestic tourism (21). These figures highlight the importance of tourism to the state and the need to manage visitor growth sustainably.

Table 2 summarizes the broader tourism context of Uttarakhand, including its geographical setting, principal attractions, visitor statistics, economic relevance, sustainability efforts and destination-management challenges. The table highlights the coexistence of hill-station, adventure and spiritual tourism products and the importance of major destinations such as Rishikesh, Haridwar and the Char Dham circuit. It also indicates that continued tourism growth requires attention to infrastructure, accessibility, environmental pressures and community-based approaches.

Table 2: Overview of Tourism in Uttarakhand

Category	Details	References
General Overview	Tourism is an important component of Uttarakhand's visitor economy, with official national statistics recording substantial domestic tourist visits.	(21, 22)
Geographical Location	Northern India; known for its Himalayas, lush valleys, and sacred rivers.	(23, 24)
Major Attractions	a) Hill Stations: Nainital, Mussoorie, Almora. b) Adventure Tourism: Rishikesh. c) Spiritual Tourism: Haridwar, Char Dham (Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath, Badrinath).	(24)
Visitor Statistics	Rishikesh and Haridwar are important spiritual and tourism destinations in Uttarakhand, with yoga, meditation, pilgrimage sites, Ghats, temples, and religious ceremonies among their principal attractions.	(24)
Economic Contribution	Official destination statistics are available for major tourist destinations in Uttarakhand, including Rishikesh and Haridwar.	(23)
Sustainable Tourism Efforts	a) Development of eco-friendly infrastructure. b) Promotion of responsible tourism practices. c) Enhancement of accessibility to tourist attractions.	(8)
Challenges	a) Natural Disasters: Vulnerability to events such as the 2013 floods, which exposed infrastructural weaknesses. b) Environmental Impact: High tourist volumes can strain resources and cause ecological damage.	(23, 24)
Government and organizational measures	a) Infrastructure improvements, including better roads and transportation systems. b) Promotion of eco-tourism initiatives to minimize environmental impact. c) Encouragement of community-based tourism projects to ensure equitable distribution of benefits and active local involvement.	(9)

Future Outlook	Expected growth due to Uttarakhand's blend of natural beauty, adventure opportunities and spiritual significance. Emphasis on addressing sustainability and environmental issues to maintain positive impacts.
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Uttarakhand also plays a major role in spiritual tourism, with pilgrimage destinations such as Haridwar and the Char Dham circuit of Yamunotri, Gangotri, Kedarnath and Badrinath. Official tourism statistics recorded 34,259,407 visitors to Haridwar in 2022, while the four Char Dham destinations recorded substantial visitor numbers during the same year (23). Haridwar is associated with sacred ghats and Ganga Aarti, while Rishikesh is strongly associated with yoga, meditation and spiritual retreats (23). Table 3 focuses specifically on spiritual tourism in Uttarakhand and outlines its

major pilgrimage sites, visitor patterns, sustainability concerns, community involvement and future prospects. Haridwar is characterized by ghats, temples, pilgrimage activities and the Ganga Aarti, whereas Rishikesh is strongly associated with yoga, meditation and spiritual retreats. The table also emphasizes that growing visitor demand must be balanced with waste management, environmental protection, disaster preparedness and local participation to sustain the spiritual character of these destinations.

Table 3: Spiritual Tourism in Uttarakhand

Aspect	Details	References
Overview	Spiritual tourism is an important component of tourism in Uttarakhand because of the presence of major pilgrimage and spiritual destinations.	(23, 24)
Major Pilgrimage Sites	Haridwar is known for the Ganga Aarti, ghats, temples, and pilgrimage activities, while Rishikesh is associated with yoga, meditation, and spiritual retreats.	(24)
Visitor Statistics	Official statistics provide visitor data for major destinations, including Haridwar and Rishikesh.	(23)
Economic Impact	The economic importance of spiritual tourism is reflected in visitor demand and tourism-related activity; no unsupported percentage contribution is reported.	
Sustainability Initiatives	Efforts include developing eco-friendly infrastructure, improving waste management, and reducing environmental impacts. For example, upgrades to Char Dham infrastructure aim to balance visitor accommodation with ecological preservation (8).	(23, 24)
Challenges	Managing large numbers of pilgrims can strain local resources and lead to environmental issues such as waste disposal and soil erosion. The region's susceptibility to natural disasters, like the 2013 floods, necessitates effective disaster management and recovery strategies (9).	(23, 24)
Community Involvement	Community-based tourism projects aim to distribute economic benefits fairly and involve locals in preserving cultural heritage. These initiatives help maintain the authenticity of spiritual experiences and support local economies (9).	(23, 24)
Future Outlook	The sector is expected to grow further due to Uttarakhand's unique blend of spiritual, cultural, and natural attractions. Balancing tourism development with environmental stewardship will be key to sustaining the region's spiritual tourism in the long term.	(23, 24)

Rishikesh and Haridwar are two prominent tourism centers in Uttarakhand. Located along the Ganges, both destinations combine religious and cultural significance with tourism services and activities. Rishikesh is strongly associated with yoga and meditation, while Haridwar is a major pilgrimage destination with important Ghats, temples and religious ceremonies (23). Haridwar is an important Hindu pilgrimage destination where visitors participate in religious ceremonies, visit temples and Ghats, and engage in rituals associated with the Ganges. Its religious

significance and major festivals make it an important setting for the study of spiritual and pilgrimage tourism (23).

The concentration of spiritual visitors in Rishikesh and Haridwar contributes to local tourism activity through spending on accommodation, food, transportation, guiding and other services. Research on tourism destinations indicates that visitor satisfaction and destination attributes can influence future behavioral responses, making service quality and destination management important considerations (12, 16, 18, 19).

Despite its benefits, spiritual tourism in Rishikesh and Haridwar can place pressure on infrastructure and the environment during periods of high visitor concentration. Waste management, congestion and protection of culturally and environmentally sensitive sites are therefore important destination-management concerns (20, 24).

Sustainable tourism practices, including environmentally responsible accommodation, waste-management measures, visitor awareness and community participation, can help destinations respond to these pressures. Such measures are particularly relevant where spiritual and cultural attractions depend on the preservation of natural and heritage resources (20, 24).

Methodology

Population of the Study: The study population comprised spiritual tourists visiting Rishikesh and Haridwar, Uttarakhand. The research sites were located at Rishikesh and Haridwar (approximate GPS coordinates: 30.0869° N, 78.2676° E and 29.9457° N, 78.1642° E respectively).

Sample of the Study: A stratified sampling technique was employed. Questionnaires were administered to spiritual tourists, and a total of 218 responses were collected. Sample-size considerations can be informed by established approaches to determining adequate sample sizes for survey research (25).

Study Instruments: The survey was divided into two sections. In Section A, information was collected based on the demographics of the respondents. Section B measured the expectations of the respondents and their level of satisfaction through ten dimensions: cleanliness, safety, price, hospitality, spiritual activities, spiritual events, spiritual guides, transportation, tourism experiences and spiritual services. These dimensions are consistent with the broad destination-attribute and experience dimensions discussed in research on spiritual and religious tourism (4, 15, 16, 22).

Study Reliability: Cronbach's alpha was applied to evaluate the internal consistency of the

questionnaire. The coefficient obtained was 0.813, indicating good internal consistency for the measurement instrument (26).

Data Collection: Both primary and secondary data were used in the study.

Measurement Tools: A five-point Likert scale was used to measure the variables, ranging from strongly disagree [1] to strongly agree [5]. Likert-type scales are widely used for measuring attitudes and perceptions in survey research (27).

Statistical Analysis: The data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics for Windows, Version 21.0 (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

Independent Samples t-test: To investigate significant differences between respondents from India and other countries visiting Rishikesh and Haridwar about expectations and satisfaction across the ten dimensions, independent-samples t-tests were performed. Levene's test was used to assess equality of variances, and Welch-adjusted results were considered when the equal-variance assumption was not met (28).

Tools (Demographic Data): Frequency and percentage were employed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Tools (Likert scales): The study used a five-point Likert scale to assess the dependent variables, with responses ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree (27).

Results and Discussion

Table 4 presents the demographic composition of the 218 respondents according to age, gender, educational qualification, marital status, income and country of origin. The sample contains a relatively high proportion of respondents aged 60 years and above, while gender representation is almost evenly distributed. Most respondents are married and from India, and the educational and income categories show representation across several groups, providing a broad demographic profile for interpreting the subsequent expectation and satisfaction results.

Table 4: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Age	No.	%	Qualifications	No.	%	Income	No.	%
18-30	34	15.59	10 + 2	48	22.01	0-30000	28	12.84
31-45	49	22.47	U.G.	85	38.99	30000-60000	62	28.44
46-60	60	27.53	P.G.	32	14.67	60000-90000	77	35.32
60+	75	34.41	Professional	53	24.31	90000+	51	23.39

Gender	No.	%	Marital Status	No.	%	Country	No.	%
Male	108	49.54	Married	167	76.61	India	156	71.56
Female	110	50.46	Unmarried	51	23.39	Others	62	28.44

Note: U.G.=Undergraduate, P.G. = Postgraduate, INR = Indian rupees, % = Percentage.

Age: The largest age group among the respondents is 60 years and older, constituting 34.41% of the sample. This suggests a significant presence of older adults in the spiritual tourism demographic. The second-largest group is those aged 46-60 years, making up 27.53%. This indicates that middle-aged individuals also form a substantial part of the respondents. The 31-45 age groups constitute 22.47% of the total, showing a moderate representation of this age range. The youngest age group, 18-30 years, has the smallest percentage at 15.59%, suggesting that younger adults are less represented in the sample compared to older age groups.

Gender: The gender distribution is fairly balanced, with a slight majority of females (50.46%) compared to males (49.54%). This indicates that both genders are well-represented in the sample.

Qualifications: The majority of respondents have undergraduate qualifications (38.99%), indicating a higher level of education among the majority. High school graduates make up 22.01%, representing a significant proportion of respondents with basic educational qualifications. Professional qualifications (24.31%) and postgraduate degrees (14.67%) show that a notable number of respondents have advanced education, with professional qualifications being slightly more common than postgraduate degrees.

Marital Status: A significant majority of respondents are married (76.61%), suggesting that spiritual tourism in this sample is predominantly associated with married individuals. Unmarried respondents make up 23.39%,

indicating a smaller but still noteworthy proportion of single individuals.

Income: The largest income bracket is INR 60,000-90,000 comprising 35.32% of the respondents. This suggests a significant proportion of the sample belongs to the middle-to-upper-middle-income range. The INR 30,000-60,000 income range constitutes 28.44% of the total respondents, indicating a substantial number of respondents are in the lower-middle-income bracket. The INR 90,000+ income group stands at 23.39%, reflecting a sizable portion of higher-income individuals. The lowest income bracket, INR 0-30,000 has the smallest representation at 12.84%, suggesting fewer respondents with very low incomes.

Country: The majority of respondents are from India (71.56%), highlighting the strong domestic presence in spiritual tourism. Respondents from other countries make up 28.44%, indicating a substantial international interest but still less compared to domestic tourists.

Table 5 reports the group statistics for tourists' expectations across the ten study dimensions for respondents from India and other countries. Mean scores vary across cleanliness, security, price, hospitality, spiritual activities, spiritual events, spiritual guides, transportation, experience and spiritual services, allowing the two groups to be compared descriptively. Spiritual activities record comparatively higher mean expectation scores in both groups, while the remaining dimensions show smaller differences that are examined statistically in the following independent-samples test.

Table 5: Expectations of Spiritual Tourists

Variables		N	$\bar{x}$	σ	σ_M
Cleanliness	India	156	2.03	0.846	0.068
	Others	62	1.97	0.886	0.113
Security	India	156	1.74	0.796	0.064
	Others	62	2.10	0.882	0.112
Price	India	156	1.76	0.728	0.058
	Others	62	1.97	0.701	0.089
Hospitality	India	156	2.28	1.163	0.093
	Others	62	2.39	1.121	0.142
Spiritual Activities	India	156	2.53	1.086	0.087
	Others	62	2.47	1.112	0.141
Spiritual Events	India	156	1.94	0.832	0.067
	Others	62	2.19	0.623	0.079

Spiritual Guides	India	156	1.88	0.880	0.070
	Others	62	2.03	0.746	0.095
Transportation	India	156	2.08	1.032	0.083
	Others	62	2.11	0.943	0.120
Experience	India	156	2.08	0.930	0.074
	Others	62	2.15	0.846	0.107
Spiritual Services	India	156	1.92	0.831	0.067
	Others	62	2.05	0.965	0.123

Note: $\bar{x}$ = Mean, σ = Standard Deviation, σ_M = Standard Error of the Mean, N = Number of Respondents.

Table 6 presents the independent-samples t-test results used to assess differences in expectation scores between respondents from India and other countries across the ten dimensions. Levene's test indicates that the assumption of equal variances is not uniform across all variables, so the appropriate

equal-variance or unequal-variance result must be interpreted for each dimension. The significance values and confidence intervals provide the statistical basis for determining whether the observed difference in group means represent.

Table 6: Independent Samples Test (Expectations)

Variables		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
Cleanliness	Equal variances assumed	0.341	0.040	0.500	216	0.618	0.064	0.129	-0.189	0.318
	Equal variances not assumed			0.490	107.565	0.625	0.064	0.131	-0.196	0.325
Security	Equal variances assumed	0.014	0.005	-2.917	216	0.004	-.0-360	0.123	-0.603	-0.117
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.791	102.688	0.006	-0.360	0.129	-0.615	-0.104
Price	Equal variances assumed	4.120	0.044	-1.894	216	0.060	-0.205	0.108	-.0418	0.008
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.926	116.229	0.056	-0.205	0.106	-0.416	0.006
Hospitality	Equal variances assumed	0.002	0.061	-0.608	216	0.544	-0.105	0.173	-0.446	0.236
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.617	115.944	0.538	-0.105	0.170	-0.442	0.232
Spiritual Activities	Equal variances assumed	0.023	0.039	0.353	216	0.725	0.058	0.164	-0.266	0.382
	Equal variances not assumed			0.349	109.822	0.728	0.058	0.166	-0.271	0.387
Spiritual Events	Equal variances assumed	3.255	0.003	-2.203	216	0.029	-0.258	0.117	-0.488	-0.027
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.491	148.758	0.014	-0.258	0.103	-0.462	-0.053
Spiritual Guides	Equal variances assumed	5.336	0.022	-1.165	216	0.245	-0.148	0.127	-0.397	0.102
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.251	131.285	0.213	-0.148	0.118	-0.381	0.086
Transportation	Equal variances assumed	1.698	0.019	-0.238	216	0.812	-0.036	0.151	-0.334	0.262
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.247	122.050	0.805	-0.036	0.145	-0.324	0.252
Experience	Equal variances assumed	5.799	0.017	-0.454	216	0.650	-0.062	0.136	-0.330	0.206
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.473	122.430	0.637	-0.062	0.131	-0.321	0.197

Spiritual Services	Equal variances assumed	0.015	0.004	-0.958	216	0.339	-0.125	0.131	-0.383	0.132
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.898	98.855	0.371	-0.125	0.140	-0.402	0.152

Note: F = F-statistic, Sig. = Significance Level, t = t-statistic, df = Degrees of Freedom, Sig. (2-tailed) = Two-tailed Significance Value (p-value), Std. Error Difference = Standard Error of the Mean Difference.

The analysis depicted in Tables 5 and 6 shows significant differences in variances for the variables "Security" ($p = 0.005$), "Price" ($p = 0.044$), "Spiritual Events" ($p = 0.003$), "Spiritual Guides" ($p = 0.022$), "Transportation" ($p = 0.019$), "Experience" ($p = 0.017$) and "Spiritual Services" ($p = 0.004$), indicating unequal variances between the two groups. Conversely, "Cleanliness" ($p = 0.040$), "Hospitality" ($p = 0.061$) and "Spiritual Activities" ($p = 0.039$) require interpretation with attention to the selected significance threshold. The use of variance-sensitive procedures is appropriate when comparing groups with potentially unequal variances (28).

Table 7 provides the descriptive group statistics for satisfaction across the same ten dimensions for respondents from India and other countries. Spiritual activities show the highest mean satisfaction scores for both groups, while transportation, hospitality, experience and spiritual services display varying group patterns. These descriptive results indicate where satisfaction levels appear similar or different and provide the basis for the inferential comparison reported in the subsequent independent-samples test.

Table 7: Group Statistics (Satisfaction)

Variables		N	$\bar{x}$	σ	σ_M
Cleanliness	India	156	2.13	0.988	0.079
	Others	62	2.29	0.948	0.120
Security	India	156	2.23	0.956	0.077
	Others	62	2.26	0.788	0.100
Price	India	156	2.12	0.966	0.077
	Others	62	2.19	0.846	0.107
Hospitality	India	156	2.19	0.956	0.077
	Others	62	2.40	0.896	0.114
Spiritual Activities	India	156	3.08	1.470	0.118
	Others	62	3.34	1.402	0.178
Spiritual Events	India	156	2.18	0.883	0.071
	Others	62	2.19	0.807	0.102
Spiritual Guides	India	156	2.17	0.963	0.077
	Others	62	2.19	0.955	0.121
Transportation	India	156	2.22	0.920	0.074
	Others	62	2.56	0.934	0.119
Experience	India	156	2.95	1.343	0.108
	Others	62	2.74	1.115	0.142
Spiritual Services	India	156	2.22	1.085	0.087
	Others	62	2.45	1.111	0.141

Note: N= Number of Respondents, $\bar{x}$ = Mean, Σ = Standard Deviation, Σ_m = Standard Error of the Mean.

Table 8 presents the independent-samples t-test results for satisfaction and evaluates whether the observed group differences are statistically significant across the ten dimensions. The results should be interpreted with reference to Levene's test when selecting the appropriate variance

assumption for each variable. Among the dimensions examined, transportation shows a notable between-group difference, whereas most other satisfaction dimensions do not demonstrate a statistically significant difference at the conventional 0.05 level.

Table 8: Independent samples test (satisfaction)

Variables		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Cleanliness	Equal variances assumed	0.896	0.045	-1.105	216	0.270	-0.162	0.147	-0.451	0.127
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.126	116.584	0.263	-0.162	0.144	-0.447	0.123
Security	Equal variances assumed	8.227	0.005	-0.199	216	0.842	-0.027	0.137	-0.297	0.243
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.217	135.079	0.000	-0.027	0.126	-0.276	0.222
Price	Equal variances assumed	4.745	0.630	-0.512	216	0.609	-0.072	0.140	-0.348	0.205
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.542	127.153	0.589	-0.072	0.132	-0.334	0.190
Hospitality	Equal variances assumed	5.028	0.026	-1.541	216	0.125	-0.217	0.141	-0.495	0.061
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.585	119.131	0.116	-0.217	0.137	-0.489	0.054
Spiritual Activities	Equal variances assumed	0.035	0.051	-1.201	216	0.231	-0.262	0.218	-0.691	0.168
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.227	117.178	0.222	-0.262	0.213	-0.684	0.161
Spiritual Events	Equal variances assumed	4.503	0.035	-0.109	216	0.914	-0.014	0.129	-0.269	0.241
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.113	122.123	0.910	-0.014	0.124	-0.260	0.232
Spiritual Guides	Equal variances assumed	2.947	0.098	-0.186	216	0.852	-0.027	0.144	-0.311	0.257
	Equal variances not assumed			-0.187	112.935	0.852	-0.027	0.144	-0.312	0.258
Transportation	Equal variances assumed	0.073	0.087	-2.452	216	0.015	-0.340	0.139	-0.614	-0.067
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.436	110.597	0.016	-0.340	0.140	-0.617	-0.063
Experience	Equal variances assumed	1.859	0.017	1.074	216	0.284	0.207	0.193	-0.173	0.586
	Equal variances not assumed			1.163	134.057	0.247	0.207	0.178	-0.145	0.559
Spiritual Services	Equal variances assumed	0.033	0.015	-1.424	216	0.156	-0.234	0.164	-0.557	0.090
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.410	109.793	0.161	-0.234	0.166	-0.562	0.095

Note: F= F-statistic, Sig. = Significance Level, t = t-statistic, df = Degrees of Freedom, Sig. (2-tailed) = Two-tailed Significance Value (p-value), Std. Error Difference= Standard Error of the Mean Difference.

Considering recent findings, spiritual tourists were found to have positive expectations from all ten dimensions, but they were the most optimistic about spiritual activities, which received the highest scores. This finding is confirmed by other recent studies stressing the importance of providing tourists with mindful spiritual experiences, transformation, and religious involvement in terms of spiritual tourism (28, 29). Moreover, hospitality was identified as a significant dimension; however, its scores indicate

that hospitality can be improved. This finding corresponds well with recent studies stating that service quality is a crucial element of religious tourism experiences (30). When it comes to satisfaction, spiritual activities reveal rather high scores, which mean that engaging in spiritual activities enhances tourist experiences. Other studies corroborate this finding, proving that participation in religious activities, local customs or authenticity makes tourists feel like they are part of something sacred (31). In terms of the

various dimensions of satisfaction during the study, among the measures identified, transportation appeared to be the only one showing a notable difference between the comparison groups ($p = 0.015$). This demonstrates the significance of visitor access and facilities in respect of outcomes related to religious tourism (22). Thus, the findings indicate that when improving transportation, hospitality, spiritual activities, and related services while keeping spiritual experiences' authenticity, the satisfaction of tourists in Rishikesh and Haridwar can be increased (22, 28-31).

Limitations

- a) Because the research was confined to Rishikesh and Haridwar, the findings are limited to these two popular spiritual destinations.
- b) Due to the cross-sectional nature of the research, participants' perceptions and satisfaction were obtained at a particular point in time; hence, tracking changes, if any, was beyond the scope of this research.
- c) The research was based on self-reported responses, which may introduce response bias because participants' perceptions, experiences, ability to respond, and willingness to provide information may vary.
- d) The data were collected during a specific period, and tourists' expectations and satisfaction levels may have changed over time.
- e) The findings cannot be generalized to all spiritual tourists visiting Uttarakhand because the research examined only selected respondents from Rishikesh and Haridwar.

Conclusion

In the tourism sector of Uttarakhand, spiritual tourism has a prominent role to play, especially in the cities of Haridwar and Rishikesh. The focus of the study was to identify the expectations and experiences of spiritual tourists across ten dimensions of tourism; these dimensions included cleanliness, safety, cost, hospitality, spiritual activities, spiritual events, spiritual guides, transport, tourist experiences, and spiritual services. The primary data was collected from a sample of 218 respondents and analysed using appropriate statistical tools. The results of the analysis show that indeed there are positive expectations about spiritual tourism experience for spiritual tourists in regard to the dimensions

studied. Nonetheless, it is hospitality that needs more highlighting, which means that service providers have to know and take into account the expectations of visitors. In terms of overall satisfaction, the results turned out to be positive but the respondents from India and other countries showed dissatisfaction in some areas. Price, spiritual activities, spiritual guides, and transportation turned out to be the areas where the customers experienced a lack of satisfaction. It was revealed that the satisfaction level was more or less the same across various aspects but transportation showed quite a difference here. From the managerial viewpoint, tourism institutions and service suppliers should take steps aimed at improvement of hospitality, transportation, pricing policies, spiritual activities, and guiding services. More attention paid to safeguarding of these aspects may improve tourists' experience in general and help with sustainable and efficient development of spiritual tourism in the destinations mentioned above. The research highlighted how the tourists perceive their expectations and satisfaction in spiritual tourism in Rishikesh and Haridwar based on common dimensions. Further research should develop this approach by using it in different spiritual destinations, in order to fulfil longitudinal study, comparing domestic and international tourists and explore the destination image, loyalty, and tourist experiences.

Future Research

- a) In future studies, it is important to consider adding different popular spiritual sites of Uttarakhand to get a more comprehensive understanding of the expectations and satisfaction of tourists.
- b) Long-term studies should be carried out to understand the shifts in the expectations, experience, contentment, and intentions of tourists.
- c) Future research can analyse local and international spiritual travellers for studying how their expectations differ as well as their experiences, their degree of satisfaction, and intentions.
- d) Future studies can also make use of structural equation modelling to analyse the complicated connections among the expectations, satisfaction, and perception of value, destination experience, and tourist behaviour.

- e) In following studies, the effect of destination image on the satisfaction of tourists and their loyalty should also be investigated.
- f) Future studies can observe how satisfaction influences the intentions of tourists, in other words, whether positive experiences drive tourists back to the spiritual sites.
- g) Qualitative interviews with spiritual tourists can help understand why they travel, how they feel about their experiences, and how they perceive spiritual destinations.

Abbreviations

SPSS: Statistical Package for the Social Sciences,
UTDB: Uttarakhand Tourism Development Board.

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Author Contributions

Megha Sharma: Conceptualization, Material Collection, Methodology, Data Collection, Data Analysis, Interpretation of Results, Manuscript Writing, Alka Maheshwari: Supervision, Conceptualization, Development of the Research Framework, Interpretation of Findings, Critical Review, Manuscript Drafting, Swati Bisht: Research Supervision, Development of the Theoretical Framework, Methodological Advice, Manuscript Review. All authors critically reviewed the manuscript and approved the final version for publication.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

Data Availability

The data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) Assistance

The authors acknowledge the use of generative AI to assist in the paraphrasing of certain parts of the manuscript. All content generated through AI was

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Ethics Approval

This study involved human participants; therefore, ethics approval was obtained.

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