

Research Article

Understanding Foreign Tourists' Perception of India for Enhancing Destination Appeal

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Abstract: This research examines India's increasing popularity as a foreign tourist destination, highlighted by its rich cultural heritage, historical landmarks, and government initiatives. The main objective is to explore the factors influencing international tourists' decisions to visit India. This investigation analyses these motivations, offering a worldwide perspective on India's appeal. Using convenience sampling, quantitative analysis was conducted based on a survey of 330 participants from different countries, guided by a review of existing literature. The paper finds that “religion, yoga and spirituality” and “cultural and heritage perspectives” are among the most influential factors, indicating the importance of promoting India's wellness tourism, including yoga and spiritual practices, rich culture and heritage sites to enhance tourist satisfaction and encourage repeat visits, respectively. This is followed by local cuisine attractions and perceived value of India as a brand, which significantly influence tourists' attention to India, emphasising the importance of strategic branding in tourism marketing. The leisure and shopping experiences were found to be less significant in the Indian context. The managers in the sector are advised to enhance tourist satisfaction and loyalty by promoting cultural authenticity, culinary diversity, and spiritual wellness, aligning with the preferences of modern tourists who prioritise meaningful and immersive experiences. By leveraging these strengths, India can strengthen its position as a leading global tourist destination.

Keywords: Foreign tourists, Destination preferences, Cultural attractions, Local cuisine, Perceived value, Heritage perspective, Infrastructure, Safety and security, Religion, yoga, spirituality, Tourist motivation and satisfaction

INTRODUCTION

Travel and exploration have long played a pivotal role in fostering socioeconomic and cultural connections across diverse populations (Sharpley, 2020). In today's globalized world, where cultural exchange and international mobility are growing rapidly, a country's perceived image significantly influences travel decisions. A rich cultural heritage, social harmony, and political stability enhance a nation's appeal as a tourist destination (Kaurav et al., 2024). India, with its diverse cultural offerings, historical landmarks, spiritual traditions, and unique experiences, continues to attract global attention as a prominent tourism hub (Gupta & Thakur, 2016; Updhyay & Sharma, 2014). Tourist destination choice is shaped by multiple factors, including infrastructure quality, accessibility, safety, and cultural significance (Reitsamer & Brunner-Sperdin, 2017; Zou & Yu, 2022). The Indian government has made substantial investments in tourism infrastructure, including the development of 157 airports, 517 new air routes, and an expansion of over 145,000 kilometres of national highways (Ministry of Tourism, 2024). Iconic landmarks, UNESCO World Heritage sites, and distinctive offerings such as wildlife tourism, yoga retreats, and regional cuisines add to India's attractiveness (Živković & Brdar, 2015; Recuero-Virto & Valilla Arróspide, 2024).

Empirical data from the Ministry of Tourism (2024) illustrates a steady rise in Foreign Tourist Arrivals (FTAs), from 1.28 million in 1981 to 10.93 million in 2019. Although the Covid-19 pandemic temporarily disrupted tourism, recovery was evident by 2023, with FTAs reaching 9.52 million—87% of pre-pandemic levels. The tourism sector contributes 5% to India's GDP and generated over 76 million jobs in 2022–23. However, India still accounts for only 2.1% of global tourism receipts, indicating room for growth despite ongoing government campaigns like Atithi Devo Bhava, which emphasise hospitality and cultural inclusivity (Gupta & Thakur, 2016).

This study aims to investigate the perceptions, motivations, and expectations of foreign tourists visiting India. It explores how various factors—such as local cuisine, perceived brand value, cultural heritage, infrastructure, safety, spiritual experiences, and leisure opportunities—influence destination appeal and satisfaction. Understanding these preferences is vital for developing targeted marketing strategies and refining India's global tourism positioning.

Preliminary literature reveals a significant research gap in comprehensively analysing all these factors together. To the best of our understanding, no existing study holistically

captures the interplay of these variables in the Indian context. By bridging this gap, the current research provides practical insights for tourism managers, policymakers, and destination marketers to enhance India's image and competitiveness in the global tourism landscape. A nuanced understanding of tourist perceptions will assist in aligning India's destination branding with international visitor expectations, thus fostering greater satisfaction and repeat visitation.

The structure of the paper is organized as follows: Section 2 provides a review of the existing literature, emphasizing significant theories and past research. Section 3 describes the conceptual framework. Section 4 showcases the research methodology, detailing the study design, data collection methods, data analysis, results and findings, accompanied by pertinent data, tables, and figures. Section 5 explores the conclusion and managerial implications of the findings, comparing them with earlier research, and addressing limitations, and proposing directions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

India attracts global tourists with its vibrant cultural heritage, diverse landscapes, and cost-effectiveness (Kaurav et al., 2024). Tourists form expectations prior to their trips through media, advisories, and online reviews, which influence their perspectives on safety, local interactions, infrastructure, and governance (Xie et al., 2021). The research emphasises that perceptions of safety are socially constructed from multiple channels and require strategic management to boost tourist confidence and security before, during, and after travel (Zou & Yu, 2022). The main reasons for visiting India include culinary adventures, spiritual quests, budget-friendly travel, and cultural experiences, though issues like pollution, overcrowding, and inconsistent services can hinder the overall experience (Kaurav et al., 2024). Ancestral tourism is becoming a significant segment, demanding personalised experiences to engage tourists more deeply to interact with culture and heritage (Murdy et al., 2018). After the pandemic, tourist trends also show a growing interest in wellness and spiritual tourism (Aggarwal et al., 2023). The involvement of local communities in supporting tourism is also vital, as research indicates that residents with strong community ties and awareness of tourism benefits are more likely to support tourism initiatives (Alsaloum et al., 2024). Infrastructure development, especially in transportation and communication, is a major factor in attracting international tourists, with enhanced facilities significantly boosting tourism growth (Barman & Nath, 2019). Authenticity and emotional connections to destinations increase engagement, fostering trust, loyalty, and co-creation (Rather et al., 2019). Destination branding, immersive storytelling, and technological advancements like virtual and augmented reality are shaping modern tourism strategies to improve visitor experiences (Rather et al., 2019). Institutional quality and governance are also significant, as poor governance undermines tourists' confidence in safety and infrastructure, highlighting the need for improved policies (Abbas et al., 2024). The satisfaction of tourists heavily relies on hospitality,

gastronomy (cuisines), and service quality, and it is becoming popular worldwide (Živković & Brdar, 2015). Indian cuisine, celebrated for its diversity and rich flavors, is a significant cultural asset that increases the appeal of destinations, with foreign tourists especially appreciating its taste, variety, and affordability (Kumar & Bakshi, 2023). Moreover, the World Heritage Sites are also key attractions that enhance India's visibility and competitiveness in international tourism (Li et al., 2008). Motivations, cognitive and affective brand images, and responsible tourism initiatives influence tourist loyalty (Mody et al., 2017). Visitor segmentation studies classify tourists into shoppers, casual visitors, and knowledge-seekers, each with unique preferences and expectations (Nayak & Bhalla, 2016). The overall image of a destination is shaped by cultural heritage, infrastructure, service quality, hospitality, and accessibility, underscoring the importance of ongoing improvements to sustain global appeal (Kumar & Thyagaraju, 2024). Post-pandemic travel trends show a move towards localised, sustainable, and immersive experiences, encouraging destinations to rethink strategies for maximizing economic and cultural benefits. Digital platforms, such as virtual tours and online engagements, are transforming tourism trends, providing new opportunities to attract global audiences and enhance India's position in the global tourism landscape (Dutta, 2021).

Local cuisine attraction

The local cuisine attraction or culinary landscape of India significantly enhances the travel experiences of foreign tourists (Dixit & Prayag, 2022). India's diverse food heritage—rooted in regional customs, spices, and culinary techniques—offers a distinctive gastronomic appeal. Tourists' perceptions of local cuisine are strongly linked to overall satisfaction and influence their likelihood of revisiting or recommending the destination (Yasami et al., 2020). The authenticity, flavour, presentation, and food quality are central to this satisfaction. High levels of hospitality and service quality also contribute positively to tourists' impressions (Živković & Brdar, 2015; Kumar & Thyagaraju, 2024). Moreover, local cuisine provides a lens through which tourists engage with a destination's cultural and historical identity, deepening their understanding of regional traditions (Recuero-Virto & Valilla Arróspide, 2024). Immersive culinary experiences such as cooking workshops, food festivals, and traditional meals further enrich tourist engagement (Dixit & Prayag, 2022). Visual appeal, taste, and dining ambience are critical aspects of the gastronomic experience (Kumar & Bakshi, 2023). Additionally, digital platforms and social media reviews amplify the appeal of local food, making cuisine a powerful motivator for foreign tourists (Onorati & Giardullo, 2020). In summary, local cuisine functions not only as a cultural bridge but also as a significant economic driver, playing a vital role in shaping tourist satisfaction and destination attractiveness.

H_{1a}: "Local cuisine attraction significantly influences foreign tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit"

Perceived Value (Indian Brand)

The perceived value of India as a tourism brand plays a

critical role in shaping foreign tourists' satisfaction and overall travel experience. Perceived value is defined as the consumer's overall assessment of a product or service's utility, based on the balance between perceived benefits and costs (Zeithaml, 1988). In tourism, this value is measured by the difference between the total benefits received and the time, effort, and financial costs incurred during the trip (Chen & Chen, 2010). A higher perceived value is positively associated with increased tourist satisfaction and revisit intentions. A country's image affects destination evaluation, tourist behavior and willingness to visit (Zhang et al., 2018). In India's case, strengthening its global image through strategic branding and experience management is essential for enhancing tourist satisfaction (Kaurav et al., 2024). Marketing efforts shape expectations and influence destination image, while accessibility and affordability further guide tourist choices (Kumar & Thyagaraju, 2024). However, perceived value can be diminished by issues such as inconsistent service quality, lack of cleanliness, and safety concerns, all of which can negatively impact tourists' desire to return (Kumar & Thyagaraju, 2024). According to Madhavan and Rastogi (2013), the perceived value of India encompasses economic, emotional, and safety dimensions that significantly affect destination choice. Overall, the perceived value of India as a brand is a key determinant of foreign tourist satisfaction and loyalty, necessitating focused efforts in branding, service consistency, and infrastructure improvement. To investigate the impact of perceived value on foreign visitors' experience and intention to revisit, the following hypothesis is put forth.

H_{1b}: "Perceived Value (Indian Brand) significantly influences foreign tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit"

Cultural and Heritage perspective

Tourism is deeply shaped by cultural representations and can act as a vehicle for social change (Santa & Tiatco, 2019). India attracts foreign tourists due to its rich cultural and heritage offerings, including iconic UNESCO World Heritage sites like the Taj Mahal, Jaipur's forts, and Khajuraho's temples (Kaurav et al., 2024). These landmarks reflect India's architectural and historical depth. Tourists perceive India as a land of vibrant traditions, showcased through festivals, classical arts, and handicrafts, creating immersive cultural experiences (Kumar & Thyagaraju, 2024). Heritage tourism is further enhanced by historical narratives conveyed through museum visits and guided tours (Sharma & Nayak, 2019). Initiatives like Buddhist and Ramayana circuits have strengthened India's cultural tourism identity (Ministry of Tourism, 2021). Cultural attractions such as religious structures and local events contribute to emotionally rich, memorable visits (Rather et al., 2019). Emerging technologies like virtual and augmented reality provide immersive storytelling, deepening tourists' connections with heritage sites. Despite infrastructure limitations, India's cultural legacy remains a key motivator for foreign travel. To sustain its appeal as a heritage tourism destination, ongoing preservation and responsible management of cultural sites are essential (Li et al., 2008). Ultimately, cultural and heritage dimensions significantly influence foreign tourists' satisfaction and

their intention to revisit.

H_{1c}: "Cultural Heritage Perspective of the tourist destination in India significantly influences the foreign tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit"

Infrastructure, Safety and Security

Robust infrastructure, including efficient transportation, quality accommodations, and attractive destinations, significantly enhances the tourist experience. Improved road networks, air connectivity, and telecommunication facilities have a positive influence on tourist inflows by increasing accessibility and convenience (Barman & Nath, 2019). Safety and security are pivotal concerns for tourists, especially in unfamiliar foreign destinations (Zou & Yu, 2022). Risk perceptions related to crime, political instability, natural disasters, and health threats can strongly influence tourists' decision-making and increased reliance on social media during crises (Schroeder & Pennington-Gray, 2015). Safety is a subjective perception shaped by interactions with local communities, infrastructure, and law enforcement (Xie et al., 2021). Tourists' sense of security improves with visible safety measures, including tourism police and emergency response systems (Zou & Yu, 2022). Infrastructure and safety collectively impact overall satisfaction and the likelihood of revisits (Kaurav et al., 2024; Kumar & Thyagaraju, 2024). Enhancing both elements through integrated strategies can significantly boost India's appeal as a tourist destination. Consequently, infrastructure, safety, and security remain interconnected elements that substantially affect the growth and reputation of India's tourism industry.

H_{1d}: "Infrastructure, Safety and Security at the tourist destination in India significantly influences the foreign tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit"

Tourist leisure and shopping

Tourist leisure and shopping encompass various amenities such as sports facilities, nightlife, entertainment, kid-friendly attractions, beachside features, shopping opportunities, and cultural site access (Kozak & Rimmington, 2000). These factors significantly influence foreign tourists' satisfaction and shape their overall perceptions of a destination. Leisure shopping is increasingly viewed as a recreational pursuit involving browsing, purchasing, and seeking enjoyment beyond routine life (Oviedo-García et al., 2016). Tourists can be categorized into shopping-focused, casual, and knowledge-seeking tourists (Nayak & Bhalla, 2016). Accessible shopping areas, quality merchandise, and a relaxing atmosphere play a vital role in enhancing the tourist experience (Saqib, 2019). India's rich cultural offerings, festivals, and handicrafts provide unique recreational and shopping opportunities (Nayak & Bhalla, 2016). Tourists value authentic interactions, such as exploring traditional markets, watching cultural performances, and purchasing local goods like textiles, jewellery, and spices (Oviedo-García et al., 2016; Murphy et al., 2011). Strengthening these aspects can bolster India's appeal as a prime destination for leisure and shopping tourism.

H1c: “Tourist leisure and shopping significantly influence the foreign tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit”

Religion, Yoga, spirituality and recreation

India's rich spiritual and religious heritage forms a cornerstone of its tourism appeal, offering transformative experiences for foreign tourists (Jauhari & Sanjeev, 2010). As the birthplace of major world religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, and Sikhism—India presents profound opportunities for cultural and religious immersion through iconic sites such as Varanasi, Rishikesh, Haridwar, Auroville, and the Golden Temple (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). Spiritual practices like meditation and mindfulness attract visitors seeking inner peace, while yoga and Ayurveda have positioned India as a leading wellness tourism destination (Sharpley & Sundaram, 2005). The popularity of spiritual retreats and ashrams continues to grow among international tourists. Government initiatives, such as the promotion of spiritual tourism circuits and International Yoga Day, further support this sector (Ministry of Tourism, 2022). Additionally, spiritual tourism fosters communal harmony and promotes cultural diversity (Verma & Sarangi, 2019). By leveraging its religious, spiritual and wellness offerings, India strengthens its global image as a destination for transformative travel (Tripathi et al., 2010).

H1r: “Religion, yoga, spirituality and recreation significantly influence the foreign tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit”

Satisfaction and Intention to Revisit

Tourists' prior experiences play a crucial role in shaping satisfaction and their intention to revisit a destination (Tribe & Snaith, 1998). Positive encounters enhance destination loyalty, increase the likelihood of return visits, and foster favourable word-of-mouth, which significantly influences future tourist inflow (Chen & Tsai, 2007; Barman & Nath, 2019). Conversely, negative feedback can deter potential visitors and harm a destination's reputation (Chen & Chen, 2010; Zou & Yu, 2022). The emergence of digital platforms has amplified this impact, allowing tourists to share experiences instantly and influencing perceptions globally (Rather et al., 2019). Meeting or exceeding tourists' expectations is critical for promoting satisfaction and positive recommendations (Živković & Brdar, 2015). Personalised experiences—tailored to individual preferences—have become essential in enhancing enjoyment and encouraging repeat visits (Kumar & Thyagaraju, 2024). Overall, satisfaction, driven by both service quality and experiential factors, remains a strong predictor of tourists' intention to revisit.

Conceptual Framework

Fig. 1 suggests a conceptual model based on the above discussion and theories. The key factors are hypothesised “local cuisine attraction”, “perceived value (Indian brand)”, “cultural and heritage perspective”, “infrastructure, safety and security”, “tourist leisure and shopping”, “religion, yoga, spirituality and recreation” to positively influence “overall tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit India”. Tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit are expected to

be positively impacted by the independent factors. The study used confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and structural equation modelling (SEM) to test the hypothesised relationship. This conceptual framework provides a structured approach to examining the key factors shaping foreign tourists' experiences in India and their impact on satisfaction and revisit intentions. It incorporates relevant theories and considers a comprehensive analysis.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research has explored and evaluated the key variables influencing international tourists' choices for selecting India as a travel destination. Based on a comprehensive literature review, the study identifies critical influencing factors that offer strategic insights to enhance India's destination appeal and tourist satisfaction. To meet the research objectives, this study adopts a quantitative research methodology that includes a structured questionnaire to collect data on the preferences of international tourists visiting India. The technique is both descriptive and explanatory, to identify major influencing elements and investigate their effects on foreign tourists' satisfaction and desire to return.

Questionnaire

The study employed a structured questionnaire to gather data on factors influencing foreign tourists' satisfaction and intention to revisit India, following an extensive review of the literature. The questionnaire comprised two sections: the first captured demographic information, specifically the respondents' country of origin (refer to Table 1), while the second focused on tourism-related perceptions and experiences. Key constructs included local cuisine attraction, perceived value (Indian brand), cultural and heritage perspectives, infrastructure, safety and security, tourist leisure and shopping, and religion, yoga, spirituality, and recreation. Further, items assessing overall tourist satisfaction and revisit intention were incorporated. All items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from ‘Strongly Disagree’ (1) to ‘Strongly Agree’ (5). To ensure inclusivity, the questionnaire was distributed through both online and offline modes. The scales used to assess the constructs were adapted from established studies (refer to Table 2) and designed to evaluate all dimensions within the proposed conceptual model (refer to Figure 1).

Data Collection

A total of 41 items representing six exogenous and one endogenous construct were developed based on an extensive review of tourism literature. This process included the creation of a basic coding table, a questionnaire draft, and a framework outlining key dimensions of the foreign tourist experience in India. The survey was conducted with a sample of 330 foreign tourists who had visited India within the previous 12 months. Respondents, aged 18 years or older, represented a diverse range of nationalities, capturing varied perspectives and travel experiences. A convenience sampling method was employed to target tourists who had encountered multiple aspects of Indian tourism, ensuring relevance and validity of responses. While the findings offer insights applicable to foreign tourists broadly, generalizability may vary

depending on the countries represented. A sample size of 330 is deemed sufficient for statistical analysis and meaningful interpretation (Comrey & Lee, 1992).

Data analysis and interpretation

This section discusses the interpretations of the statistical analysis done on the collected primary responses received from the foreign tourists who participated in the survey. The collected data were analysed using structural equation

modelling to assess the relationships between the factors and tourist satisfaction and revisit intention. Descriptive statistics, path coefficients, and R-square values were calculated to evaluate the structural model's explanatory power and predictive relevance, indicating model fit data (Hair et al., 2011).

Country of origin

Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of foreign tourists based on their countries of origin. Among the 330 respondents, the highest representation came from the USA (14.8%) and the UK (14.2%). This was followed by tourists from Bangladesh (9.1%), indicating strong regional travel ties. Other notable representations included Canada (7.3%) and Australia (6.4%). Tourists from Germany, France, the Russian Federation, China, Singapore, and Afghanistan each contributed between 4.2% and 4.8% of the sample, reflecting a balanced distribution. Meanwhile, Japan (3.9%), South Korea (3.0%), and Italy (3.3%) recorded the lowest frequencies among individually listed countries. Respondents represented a broad geographical spread across North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia. Additionally, 6.1% of the tourists fell under the 'Others' category, indicating a diverse yet less concentrated presence of other nationalities.

Table 1: Countries of origin- frequency distribution

Country	Frequency	Percent
USA	49	14.8 %
UK	47	14.2 %
Bangladesh	30	9.1 %
Canada	24	7.3 %
Germany	16	4.8 %
France	16	4.8 %
Malaysia	14	4.2 %
Australia	21	6.4 %
Japan	13	3.9 %
Russian Federation	16	4.8 %
China	14	4.2 %
Singapore	14	4.2 %
South Korea	10	3.0 %
Afghanistan	15	4.5 %
Italy	11	3.3 %
Others	20	6.1 %
Total	330	100.0

(Source: Output using SPSS)

Factors influencing foreign tourists to visit India

The study examined seven key factors—local cuisine attraction, perceived value (Indian brand), cultural and heritage perspective, infrastructure, safety and security, tourist leisure and shopping, and religion, yoga, spirituality and recreation—along with overall tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit. Descriptive analysis (Table 2) revealed a moderately high agreement among foreign tourists toward statements related to these factors. Foreign tourists were particularly drawn to India's rich culinary offerings, including hygienic and flavorful street food, traditional regional dishes, and the availability of international food chains (Updhyay & Sharma, 2014; Saqib, 2019; Kumar & Bakshi, 2023; Kaurav et al., 2024). They also perceived India as a value-for-money destination, offering high-quality accommodation and well-organized travel experiences (Kaushal et al., 2019; Mody et al., 2017; Saqib, 2019; Barman & Nath, 2019). In terms of cultural and heritage appeal, tourists reported immersive experiences while visiting ancient monuments, which enriched their knowledge and fascination with India's diverse traditions and histories (Chand, 2010; Beerli & Martín, 2004; Alsaloum et al., 2024). This cultural depth increased their desire to revisit the past through travel (Chand, 2010). Infrastructure and safety were also influential factors. Tourists appreciated quality roads, airports, public and private transport, and accessible accommodation and dining options. Safety expectations were high, with tourists preferring secure and well-equipped destinations (Khadaroo & Seetanah, 2007; Chakravarty & Irazábal, 2011; Barman & Nath, 2019; Živković & Brdar, 2015; Kaurav et al., 2024). Tourists expressed interest in local arts and crafts, clothing, and souvenirs, alongside exploring entertainment options such as bars, clubs, and discotheques. Cost-effective leisure services like spas and body therapy also contributed to their enjoyment and emotional satisfaction (Mody et al., 2017; Oviedo-García et al., 2016; Kaurav et al., 2024; Hosseini et al., 2023; Saqib, 2019). Religion, yoga, spirituality, and recreation further enhanced the appeal of Indian destinations. Tourists were emotionally connected to spiritual experiences such as yoga, meditation, and Ayurvedic treatments, and valued the country's religious and historical richness (Jauhari & Sanjeev, 2010; Chakravarty & Irazábal, 2011; Chand, 2010; Kaurav et al., 2024; Şahin & Güzel, 2024). Finally, tourists reported satisfaction

with their Indian travel experiences, expressing a strong intention to revisit and recommend destinations to others through positive word-of-mouth (Kaushal et al., 2019; Kumar & Bakshi, 2023). They felt relaxed, secure, and emotionally fulfilled during their visits (Barman & Nath, 2019).

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the factors

Factor	Item code and statements	Relevant Literature	Mean (SD)
Local cuisine attraction	LCA1- Food prepared at the tourist destination is full of hygiene and tasty	Beerli & Martín (2004), Gupta et al. (2020), Saqib (2019), Kaurav et al. (2024) Updhyay & Sharma (2014), Ahmad (2014)	3.715 (1.100)
	LCA2- Presentation style of local cuisine attracted tourists to the tourist destination		3.791 (1.121)
	LCA3- The flavour, aroma and variety of delicious cuisine attract tourists to the destination		3.742 (1.086)
	LCA4- Many tasty street food options are available at the destination		3.739 (1.183)
	LCA5- Traditional Local food attracts tourists to the destination		3.739 (1.154)
	LCA6- Foreign food chains are easily available at the tourist destination		3.715 (1.080)
Perceived Value	PV1- The complete tour is a good value for money	Kaushal et al. (2019), Saqib (2019), Mody et al. (2017)	3.564 (1.140)
	PV2- The tour is well organized and reasonably on-budget		3.552 (1.125)
	PV3 - The tour destination does not exceed the travel budget		3.591 (1.203)
	PV4- When I think of a good tourist place, India is the tourist destination that comes to my mind		3.539 (1.149)
	PV5- India as a tourist destination has high-quality accommodation		3.597 (1.095)
	PV6- Visiting India as a tourist destination is a good deal (perceived benefits are higher than the perceived cost)		3.612 (1.181)
Cultural & Heritage perspective	CHP1- The destination increased my eagerness to travel back into the history of time.	Alsalam et al. (2024), Chand (2010), Beerli & Martín (2004), Saqib (2019), Kaurav et al. (2024) Chand (2010), Verma & Rajendran (2017), Sharma & Sarmah (2019), Dwivedi et al., (2009), Jauhari & Sanjeev (2010) Dey et al. (2020)	3.564 (1.100)
	CHP2- During the visit, I imagined that I was living in the time period in which the Monuments of heritage destinations were built.		3.655 (1.007)
	CHP3- When I saw the monuments of heritage destinations, I got lost in the ancient time period.		3.676 (1.056)
	CHP4- I like to experience different cultures with fascinating histories and ethnic traditions		3.600 (1.017)
	CHP5- The tourist destination is full of culture and heritage history (including forts, monuments, museums, historical buildings, kings and dynasties etc.)		3.612 (1.085)
	CHP6- India's Culture potentially improves the knowledge of foreign tourists.		3.609 (1.057)
Infrastructure, Safety and Security	ISS1- I have high expectations regarding the safety of tourists at the destination in India.	Beerli & Martín (2004), Saqib (2019), Madhavan & Rastogi (2013), Sharma & Nayak (2019),	3.818 (1.135)
	ISS2- The infrastructure of the tourist destination attracts my interest in India.		3.852 (1.122)
	ISS3- I expect the tour destination as a safe place to visit with good quality accommodation and value for money		3.703 (0.899)
	ISS4- Good quality of roads, airports, railways and ports at the tourist destination		3.845 (1.052)
	ISS5- Easy availability of private and public transport facilities at the tourist destination		3.782 (1.045)
			3.730 (0.998)

	ISS6- Tourist centres, hotel and self-catering accommodations, and quality restaurants are available at the Indian tourist destinations	Sharma & Sarmah (2019), Dwivedi et al. (2009) Jauhari & Sanjeev (2010)	
Tourist leisure and shopping	TLS1- I like destinations with Shopping opportunities TLS2- I like to explore all the entertainment possibilities at the destination including Bars, discotheques and clubs TLS3- I like to go the destination that provides me with a feeling of enthusiasm, delight, cheerful pleasure and joy TLS4- Cost-effective tourist leisure services at the tourist destination like accommodation, transportation, body spas and body therapy TLS5- I, prefer to buy a wide variety and good quality local art and craft products, clothes, handicrafts and accessories.	Beerli & Martín (2004), Saqib (2019), Kaurav et al. (2024), Sharma & Nayak (2019), Dey et al. (2020), Madhavan & Rastogi (2013), Dwivedi et al. (2009), Kumar & Nayak, (2018), Kaurav et al. (2024) and Saqib (2019).	3.591 (1.050) 3.603 (1.049) 3.555 (1.095) 3.558 (1.133) 3.645 (1.125)
Religion, Yoga, spirituality and recreation	RYS1- I find the recreational activities at this destination enjoyable and feel that they offer a unique atmosphere. RYS2- The high-quality Ayurvedic medicines, aromatic products, and herbal offerings attract me to this tourist destination. RYS3- India is a great place to do yoga, meditation and spiritual learning RYS4- The Indian Tourist destination has religious characteristics and a rich historical background RYS5- I am emotionally attached to and involved with the tourist destinations in India RYS6- I experience a sense of peace at Indian tourist destinations that offer religious, yoga, and spiritual activities	Chand (2010), Kaurav et al. (2024), Jauhari & Sanjeev (2010), Arya et al. (2018), Tripathi et al. (2010), Madhavan & Rastogi (2013), Jauhari & Sanjeev (2010)	3.570 (1.022) 3.633 (1.010) 3.736 (1.065) 3.712 (1.117) 3.755 (1.040) 3.630 (1.129)
Overall Tourist Satisfaction and Intention to Revisit	SAT1- I feel satisfied with the tour visit to India SAT2- I am satisfied with the contribution I have made to arrange my trip SAT3- I am satisfied with the Indian tourism experience SAT4- I am likely to recommend this tourist destination in India to others through positive word-of-mouth SAT5- I want to visit the same destination again to explore the new areas, which I missed last visit SAT6- I feel relaxed and secure enough to visit the Indian tourist destination again	Kaushal et al. (2019) Saqib, (2019), Kumar & Nayak, (2018), Sharma & Nayak (2019), Chand, (2010), Sharma & Sarmah (2019)	3.603 (1.235) 3.579 (1.294) 3.606 (1.164) 3.615 (1.243) 3.697 (1.106) 3.570 (1.247)

(Source: Various Authors)

The internal consistency reliability of the responses obtained from foreign tourists was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. All the factors influencing tourist preferences demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.7. Specifically, the values were: cultural and heritage perspective (0.883), infrastructure, safety and security (0.879), local cuisine attraction (0.896), overall satisfaction and intention to revisit (0.912), perceived value of the Indian brand (0.881), religion, yoga, spirituality and recreation (0.889), and tourism, leisure and shopping (0.855). These results indicate that the measurement scale used in the study meets the criteria for internal consistency and reliability (George & Mallery, 2003; Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Further, convergent validity was evaluated using construct loadings, composite reliability (CR), and average variance extracted (AVE). According to Hair et al. (2011), construct loadings should exceed 0.7, CR values should be above 0.7, and AVE should exceed 0.5. The results satisfied all these criteria, confirming convergent validity: cultural and heritage perspective (CR = 0.883, AVE = 0.557), infrastructure, safety and security (CR = 0.878, AVE = 0.545), local cuisine attraction (CR = 0.892, AVE = 0.582), overall satisfaction and intention to revisit (CR = 0.912, AVE = 0.634), perceived value (Indian brand) (CR = 0.881, AVE = 0.554), religion, yoga and spirituality (CR = 0.889, AVE = 0.572), and tourist leisure and shopping (CR = 0.853, AVE = 0.541). These findings confirm the measurement scale's reliability and convergent validity (refer to Table 3).

Discriminant validity was established using both the Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) ratio and the Fornell-Larcker criterion. The HTMT ratios for all factor pairs were below 0.85, indicating adequate discriminant validity. Additionally, the Fornell-Larcker analysis showed that the square root of the AVE for each factor was greater than its correlations with other constructs, further confirming discriminant validity (Hair et al., 2011). The results of the HTMT ratio and Fornell-Larcker criteria applied in the study are shown in Tables 4 and 5.

Multicollinearity in the study was assessed using the Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) for the items measuring the constructs. A high VIF (greater than 5) indicates strong correlation among items, suggesting potential multicollinearity. According to Hair et al. (2011), VIF values below 3 are considered excellent, while values below 5 are satisfactory. As shown in Table 3, the VIF values for all items were within the acceptable range, indicating the absence of multicollinearity. Additionally, the statistical fitness of the structural model was evaluated using the Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) and Normed Fit Index (NFI). The SRMR value of 0.047 (below the threshold of 0.08) and NFI value of 0.823 (above the recommended minimum of 0.8) confirm a good model fit (Hu & Bentler, 1998).

Table 3: Construct loadings of items included in the scale

Item Code	Constructs	Construct Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	VIF
CHP1	Cultural and Heritage Perspective	0.750	0.883	0.883	0.557	1.481
CHP2		0.782				2.376
CHP3		0.787				2.279
CHP4		0.727				1.844
CHP5		0.782				2.566
CHP6		0.641				2.232
ISS1	Infrastructure, Safety and Security	0.671	0.879	0.878	0.545	2.440
ISS2		0.748				2.144
ISS3		0.744				1.859
ISS4		0.773				2.071
ISS5		0.783				2.026
ISS6		0.707				1.825
LCA1	Local Cuisine Attraction	0.626	0.896	0.892	0.582	2.436
LCA2		0.756				2.606
LCA3		0.686				2.105
LCA4		0.748				2.519
LCA5		0.855				2.012
LCA6		0.877				1.825
PQ1	Perceived Value of Indian Brand	0.671	0.881	0.881	0.554	2.170
PQ2		0.809				2.128
PQ3		0.774				2.384
PQ4		0.741				2.110
PQ5		0.698				1.854
PQ6		0.763				1.909
RYS1	Religious, Yoga and	0.698	0.889	0.889	0.572	2.277
RYS2		0.735				2.088

RYS3	Spirituality	0.789	0.912	0.912	0.634	2.134
RYS4		0.815				2.249
RYS5		0.743				1.982
RYS6		0.754				2.035
SAT1	Overall Satisfaction and Intention to Revisit	0.827	0.912	0.912	0.634	2.763
SAT2		0.779				2.387
SAT3		0.804				2.149
SAT4		0.797				2.555
SAT5		0.815				2.142
SAT6		0.754				2.366
TLS1	Tourists Leisure and Shopping	0.643	0.855	0.853	0.541	1.696
TLS2		0.727				2.038
TLS3		0.642				2.017
TLS4		0.869				2.051
TLS5		0.771				1.592

(Source: Output using SmartPLS)

Table 4: HTMT ratio

	<i>CHP</i>	<i>ISS</i>	<i>LCA</i>	<i>OSIR</i>	<i>PV</i>	<i>RYS</i>	<i>TLS</i>
<i>Cultural and Heritage Perspective</i>							
<i>Infrastructure, Safety and Security</i>	0.661						
<i>Local Cuisine Attraction</i>	0.620	0.579					
<i>Overall Satisfaction and Intention to Revisit</i>	0.717	0.692	0.677				
<i>Perceived Value of Indian Brand</i>	0.737	0.620	0.732	0.745			
<i>Religious, Yoga and Spirituality</i>	0.506	0.604	0.525	0.743	0.617		
<i>Tourists' Leisure and Shopping</i>	0.243	0.368	0.113	0.343	0.217	0.414	

(Source: Output using SmartPLS)

Table 5: Fornell Larcker Criteria

	<i>CHP</i>	<i>ISS</i>	<i>LCA</i>	<i>OSIR</i>	<i>PV</i>	<i>RYS</i>	<i>TLS</i>
<i>Cultural and Heritage Perspective</i>	0.747						
<i>Infrastructure, Safety and Security</i>	0.661	0.739					
<i>Local Cuisine Attraction</i>	0.625	0.584	0.763				
<i>Overall Satisfaction and Intention to Revisit</i>	0.719	0.695	0.687	0.796			
<i>Perceived Value of Indian Brand</i>	0.738	0.622	0.740	0.746	0.744		
<i>Religious, Yoga and Spirituality</i>	0.507	0.607	0.532	0.744	0.618	0.757	
<i>Tourists Leisure and Shopping</i>	0.245	0.366	0.115	0.345	0.219	0.417	0.735

(Source: Output using SmartPLS)

Hypothesis Testing

This study identified key factors—Local Cuisine Attraction, Cultural and Heritage Perspective, Infrastructure, Safety and Security, Perceived Value (Indian Brand), Religious, Yoga and Spirituality, and Tourism Leisure and Shopping—from existing literature as potential influencers of foreign tourists' satisfaction and their intention to revisit India. These reflective constructs (Hair et al., 2016) were measured through questionnaire items. A structural equation modelling (SEM) approach was employed, with the six factors as exogenous constructs and overall satisfaction and intention to revisit as endogenous constructs. The results of hypothesis testing are summarized in the table and visually presented in Figure 1. All variables were tested at a five per cent level of significance. The SEM analysis supported the hypothesis that Cultural and Heritage Perspective significantly influences satisfaction and intention to revisit, with a positive and significant path coefficient = 0.215 (t stats = 4.194), aligning with previous findings (Mishra, 2013; Saqib, 2019; Kaurav et al., 2024). Similarly, Infrastructure, Safety, and Security showed a significant positive effect with a path coefficient = 0.134, (t stats = 3.155), on tourist satisfaction and revisit intention (Saqib, 2019; Živković & Brdar, 2015). Local Cuisine Attraction was also found to have a significant positive impact, with a path coefficient = 0.172, (t stats = 3.632), supporting earlier research (Kaurav et al., 2024; Dixit & Prayag, 2022). The Perceived Value (India Brand) showed a positive influence with a path coefficient = 0.162, (t stats = 2.728), consistent with prior studies (Kaurav et al., 2024; Mody et al., 2017; Bose et al., 2022). Religion, Yoga, and Spirituality demonstrated the strongest positive effect with a path coefficient = 0.311, (t stats = 6.361), reinforcing its significance as a motivating factor (Şahin & Güzel, 2024). Conversely, the hypothesis regarding Tourism Leisure and Shopping was not supported, as the path coefficient was low and statistically insignificant with a value of 0.056, (t stats = 1.580), indicating no meaningful influence on satisfaction or revisit intention—a finding in line with previous research (Esfandiar et al., 2023; Yüksel & Yüksel, 2007).

Comparing the path coefficients of the included factors, *Religion, Yoga, and Spirituality* (0.311), and *Cultural and Heritage*

Perspective (0.215) emerged as the most influential variables in attracting foreign tourists to India. Other significant contributors were *Local Cuisine Attraction* and *Perceived Value of India as a Brand*. In contrast, *Infrastructure, Safety, and Security* had the weakest significant effect, while *Leisure and Shopping* showed no significant influence. The explanatory power of the structural model was assessed using the R-square value, which was 67.2% for overall tourist satisfaction and intention to revisit—indicating strong explanatory strength (refer to Table 6). Additionally, the Q-square value of 0.647 confirmed the model's high predictive relevance (refer to Table 6).

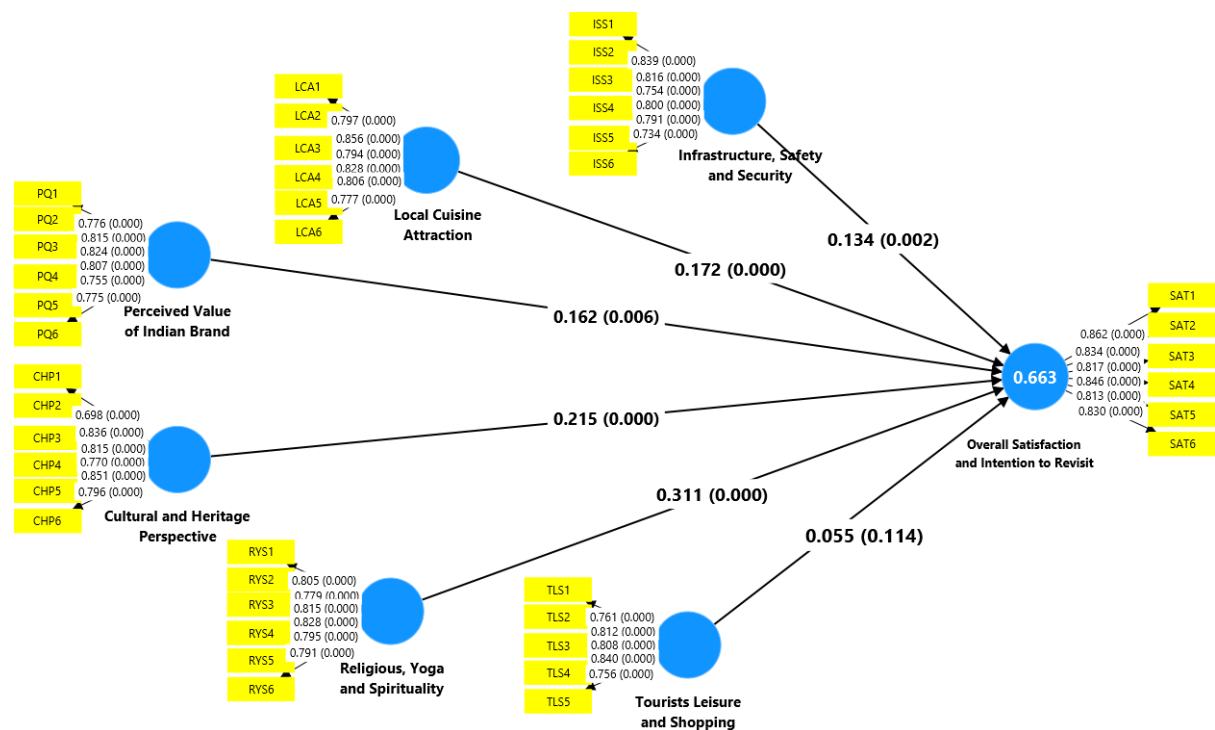


Figure-1. Model of tourism satisfaction and intention to revisit

The result of hypothesis testing is reported in Table 6, and the structural model is shown in Figure 1.

Table 6: Results of the Hypothesis testing

Exogeneous Construct	Endogenous Construct	Path Coefficient	Standard Error	T stats	F Square	R Square (Q Square)
Cultural and Heritage Perspective	Overall Tourist Satisfaction and Intention to revisit	0.215	0.051	4.194**	0.071	67.2% (0.647)
Infrastructure, Safety and Security		0.134	0.042	3.155**	0.031	
Local Cuisine Attraction		0.172	0.047	3.632**	0.048	
Perceived Value of Indian Brand		0.162	0.059	2.728**	0.036	
Religious, Yoga and Spirituality		0.311	0.049	6.361**	0.169	
Tourists' Leisure and Shopping		0.056	0.035	1.580	0.11	

(Source: Output using SmartPLS)

DISCUSSION

This study explored six exogenous factors influencing foreign tourists' satisfaction and preference for India as a destination: local cuisine attraction, cultural and heritage perspective, infrastructure safety and security, perceived value (India as a brand), religion, yoga and spirituality, and tourist leisure and shopping. Using structural equation modelling (SEM), the study examined their relationships with overall tourist satisfaction and the intention to revisit. Cultural and heritage perspectives emerged as particularly

influential, underscoring the role of cultural authenticity in shaping positive tourist experiences (Hosseini et al., 2023; Mishra, 2013; Saqib, 2019; Kaurav et al., 2024). India's rich cultural landscape, including heritage sites and immersive experiences, contributes significantly to tourist satisfaction and loyalty (Kaurav et al., 2024). Infrastructure, safety and security also showed a positive impact, though tourists tend to prioritise meaningful experiences over infrastructure (Zou & Yu, 2022). Local cuisine attraction was found to significantly enhance satisfaction, highlighting the

importance of food as a central element of cultural tourism (Dixit & Prayag, 2022). Promoting authentic culinary experiences can enhance visitor enjoyment and stimulate positive word-of-mouth. Among all variables, religion, yoga and spirituality had the strongest effect ($\beta = 0.311$), reflecting the rising global interest in wellness and spiritual tourism (Şahin & Güzel, 2024). India's deep-rooted traditions in these domains offer a valuable opportunity to attract niche markets seeking holistic travel experiences. The perceived value of India as a brand also positively influenced satisfaction, reinforcing the importance of strategic branding in tourism (Mody et al., 2017; Kaushal et al., 2019). A strong national brand can enhance tourist perceptions and engagement. In contrast, tourist leisure and shopping showed no significant influence on satisfaction. This aligns with findings suggesting that foreign tourists value cultural immersion over conventional shopping experiences (Murphy et al., 2011; Esfandiar et al., 2023). Many visit malls out of necessity rather than for recreation, and mall attributes contribute minimally to trip satisfaction for those not motivated by shopping. The structural model demonstrated robust explanatory power, with an R-square of 67.2% for overall satisfaction and intention to revisit, and a Q-square of 0.647 indicating high predictive relevance. These findings provide practical insights for tourism stakeholders, suggesting that strategies focusing on cultural, culinary, and spiritual dimensions can significantly enhance tourist satisfaction and loyalty.

CONCLUSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

This study highlights the key factors influencing foreign tourist satisfaction and preferences in India, offering actionable insights for tourism stakeholders. Cultural and heritage perspectives emerged as influential, underscoring the importance of promoting India's rich cultural legacy and heritage sites to enhance satisfaction and encourage repeat visits (Verma & Rajendran, 2017; Chand, 2010). Local cuisine also plays a vital role, as culinary experiences are central to cultural tourism and can significantly boost visitor satisfaction and positive word-of-mouth (Upadhyay & Sharma, 2014). India's traditions in yoga and spirituality offer a unique selling proposition in the context of growing global demand for wellness and spiritual tourism, particularly among niche markets seeking holistic experiences (Jauhari, 2010). While infrastructure, safety, and security contribute positively to satisfaction, their impact is comparatively lower than experiential factors. Nevertheless, exceeding safety expectations can enhance trust, revisits, and destination promotion through tourist advocacy (Zhang et al., 2018). The perceived value of India as a brand also supports satisfaction, highlighting the importance of strong, strategic branding in tourism marketing (Allred et al., 2000). In contrast, leisure and shopping were found to be less significant, suggesting that cultural immersion outweighs commercial activities in influencing foreign tourist satisfaction (Murphy et al., 2011). To strengthen tourist satisfaction and loyalty, tourism managers should focus on promoting cultural authenticity, culinary richness, and spiritual wellness. These align well with the evolving preferences of modern tourists, who seek meaningful and immersive experiences

(Jauhari, 2010; Verma & Rajendran, 2017; Saqib, 2019). This study not only aids tourists in making informed travel decisions but also equips destination marketers with insights into tourist expectations and decision-making processes. By leveraging these strengths, India can enhance its global appeal and reinforce its position as a premier tourist destination.

Based on the analysis, several practical and theoretical implications for tourism managers aiming to enhance foreign tourist satisfaction in India. To promote cultural tourism, immersive experiences and well-preserved historical tours must be developed, supported by engaging narratives and interpretive materials. Conservation of monuments and collaboration with indigenous communities can deepen cultural exchange and bolster local economies (Chakravarty & Irazábal, 2011). The significance of religion, yoga, and spirituality highlights the need for dedicated spiritual tourism packages, retreats, and improved facilities at pilgrimage sites to meet rising demand for wellness and meaningful experiences (Kaurav et al., 2024; Şahin & Güzel, 2024). Local cuisine enhances visitor engagement; thus, food tours, festivals, and clean, safe culinary environments should be prioritised. Catering to diverse dietary needs, including vegetarian and vegan options, can further increase inclusivity. A coherent destination branding strategy that reflects India's cultural richness, spirituality, and heritage is essential (Kumar & Nayak, 2018), and leveraging digital marketing platforms will broaden international reach and engagement. Improving transportation and infrastructure will enhance accessibility, while visible safety measures and dependable emergency services can reinforce tourist confidence. Curating shopping zones that blend local craftsmanship with modern retail preferences may also appeal to diverse visitor profiles. The integration of digital technologies—such as virtual and augmented reality for heritage interpretation, AI for personalised services, and social media for engagement—can significantly enrich the overall tourist experience (García-Madurga & Grilló-Méndez, 2023; Rane et al., 2023). Collectively, these strategies will strengthen India's global tourism appeal, support sustainable development, and foster repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth promotion (Mody et al., 2017).

Limitations and future research

While this study offers valuable insights, it has several limitations. The geographic scope was limited to specific tourist destinations in India, potentially affecting the generalisability of the findings. The demographic profile of respondents may not fully capture the diversity of global tourists, as data collection did not account for seasonal trends or long-term behavioural shifts. Cultural biases may have also influenced tourist preferences and perceptions. Moreover, although key determinants of tourist satisfaction were identified, other relevant factors may have been overlooked. This study does not claim to present an optimal model for destination positioning but aims to provide insights to aid marketers in refining their strategies.

These limitations present opportunities for future research. Longitudinal studies could track evolving tourist

behaviour, while comparative analyses across competing destinations in Asia and beyond may offer useful benchmarks. Further segmentation research examining variations by age, nationality, or travel purpose is recommended. Moreover, the impact of emerging technologies, such as artificial intelligence, augmented reality, and mobile applications, on tourist decision-making should be explored. The role of sustainable tourism practices in shaping visitor satisfaction and loyalty also warrants deeper investigation. Finally, evaluating the effectiveness of branding strategies and managing carrying capacity is essential for sustaining tourist satisfaction and preserving destination integrity.

Disclosure Statement

There was no conflict of interest among the authors.

Notes on Contributors

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