

## Analyzing the Antecedents of Memorable Cultural Tourism Experiences: A Study of Tourists Visiting the Kashmir Region

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study is to explore key factors that lead to Memorable Cultural Tourism Experiences (MCTE) at a destination Kashmir India and its role in revisiting intention. A qualitative-Grounded Theory method was applied, using data from 20 semi-structured interviews with the cultural tourists visiting the destination Kashmir and the interviews were analyzed by using N VIVO 12. Findings state that the primary motivation to experience cultural heritage is to gain more knowledge and understanding of other cultures, sharpening of self-skills, competencies and develop the linkage and connectedness with the different communities, people who are not from their native places, thus supporting the tenets of Self Determination Theory. Given the scarcity of research dedicated to the cultural tourism experience at a destination level, this study provides a contribution by exploring the visitor's perspective towards what are the factors that makes an experience a memorable one and points out relevant insights, and gives a framework about the understanding of MCTE. To further explore this topic, the sampling extent may be broadened, although Kashmir valley in India is a popular tourist destination that draws many visitors each year, and the triangulation method may be used for generalizing the data.

**Key words:** Cultural tourism, Experiences, Revisit intention, Kashmir valley.

### Introduction

The cultural heritage of Kashmir is intricate; as it is a combination of diverse customs, crafts, languages, religions, and tribes. The Kashmir valley is well known for its intrinsically open culture and liberal philosophical tradition that allows different religions to co-exist (Tandon, 2010). Its distinctive geographical position made it a conflux for many international trade routes in the past and revealed its society to numerous ideas and worldviews that arrived with travelers, scholars, and traders (Bazaz, 1954).

The valley's culture is knotted into its food, music, architecture, and the locale's famed hospitality and friendliness. Its marvelous culture has won its laurels throughout the world, be it literature, lifestyle, language, arts, and crafts, music, or dance, the distinctive culture of the valley presents more opportunities for the tourism industry to emphasize cultural tourism experiences (Singh and Unjum, 2016).

These experiences can be successfully administered at a cultural site, if the cultural tourist requirements are understood, which in turn help a destination in re-visitation, as lower expenses are associated with this type of tourism, due to which many such sites prioritize retaining existing tourists (Chen and Chen, 2010).

To entice repeat visitors, these destinations must do everything to guarantee that guests are delighted with their experiences (Prayag and Ryan, 2012). Nonetheless, only satisfaction may not be sufficient to entice a visitor to return to a cultural place. To further understand visitors' revisit intentions, more research on memory and remembered experiences are needed (Lehto, O'Leary, & Morrison, 2004; Kim, Ritchie, McCormick, 2010), this emphasizes the significance of MTEs in tourism arrivals and their effect on visitor retention.

The primary purpose of tourism is to provide memorable experiences, with "the end goal of a tourist experience being to produce enduring memories that a visitor will remember about and share in various social networks" (Andrades and Dimanche, 2014). As a result, the ability to provide tourists with unforgettable experiences is critical to achieving market superiority (Chandralal and Valenzuela, 2013; Coudounaris and Sthapit, 2017; Kim and Ritchie, 2014; Sthapit and Jime'nez-Barreto, 2018). The outcomes of this study can assist cultural tourism destinations in increasing memorable experiences and destination loyalty among cultural visitors. This will likely give Kashmir Valley a competitive advantage as a cultural destination as it possesses a lot of cultural sub-destinations.

### **Review of literature**

#### **Cultural Tourism**

Cultural tourism, which originated in the sixteenth century in Britain, basically originated in the celebrated grand tour and is considered an old touristic practice (Feifer, 1985). The majority of researchers (Hall & Zeppel, 1990; Reisinger, 1994; Zeppel & Hall, 1992) defined cultural travel as a type of specific travel where tourists seek uniqueness and authenticity by participating in a range of cultural activities and experiences such as "aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or psychological."

Adams (1995) gave a detailed definition of cultural tourism, remarking that it is "a sort of travel for personal adornment." Cultural tourism is described as "movements of humans primarily for cultural purposes such as study tours, performing arts and cultural tours, travel to festivals and other events, visit sites and monuments, travel to study nature, folklore or art, and pilgrimages," according to the UNWTO (WTO, 1985). Some scholars propose a narrow definition, ignoring the reasons for travel and focusing instead on the cultural services tourists consume (Hughes, 2002)

#### **Tourism Experiences**

"Experiences in general, and tourist experiences in particular, are personal, subjective, and, most significantly, difficult to convey or comprehend by others." According to this viewpoint, everyone's experience is unique, making it difficult to quantify them (Pearce & Zare, 2017).

However, experiences are becoming more prominent as a focus of tourism studies (Morgan & Lugosi, 2010). Though it is important to remember every trip experience to make future decisions, specific experiences are more fondly recalled and hence more helpful in their subsequent uses. The enormous effects of the most exceptional or unique encounters on "satisfaction, loyalty, revisit intention, and word-of-mouth" marketing have prompted academics to investigate the components of tourism experiences (Kim et al., 2010; Sthapit, 2017).

Only a few researches have looked at the fundamental aspects that influence cultural tourist experiences. Cetin and Bilgihan (2014) identified five aspects as major characteristics determining cultural visitor experiences in a place in their research: "social interaction, local authentic clues, service, culture/heritage, and challenge."

#### **Memorable Cultural Tourism Experiences (MCTEs)**

Successful cultural tourism locations try to give tourists unforgettable experiences and frequently succeed in (Taheri et al., 2019) generating experiences that are memorable and that have a significant impact on tourists' post-experience assessments of the quality of the destination, and such experiences encourage people to return in the future (Gannon et al., 2017).

As tourists are entranced by emotional and sensory variables, the concrete and ethereal qualities of the place add to the memorability of cultural experiences (Lee, 2015). If the encounters delight people to the point that they are regarded as appealing, exhilarating, meaningful, authentic, or unusual, the sensory and emotional input needed to activate "memorability" can arise (Gannon et al., 2017).

Memorable encounters lead to constructive post-visit habits (Sorrentino et al., 2020). This is significant for cultural tourism operators who want to keep people interested in their products as tourists are more inclined to return to places that provide memorable experiences and they suggest such places to others (Curran et al., 2018).

Memorability of an experience is frequently determined by views of value for the money spent, pleasure, and excellence (Lochrie et al., 2019). Strong MTEs result from solid emotional bonds between visitors, events, and experiences. In 2020, Seyfi et al. created a theoretical model of

Memorable Cultural Tourism Experiences (MCTEs) by using a grounded theory method. They discovered six major characteristics influencing cultural visitor experiences in a destination: "prior perceived significance of the experience, authenticity, engagement, cultural exchange, gastronomic attractiveness, and quality of service."

### **Research Methodology**

To fulfill the aims of this study, in-depth face-to-face interviews were conducted with cultural tourists to determine ground-level experiences and the factors that influence cultural travelers' evaluations of their experiences at a location. Experiments, surveys, and models fail to capture the sensory and sociological aspects of consumption, such as travel (Sherry, 1991). Because quantitative research may overlook rituals, symbols, and the deep meanings of products and services, this study took a qualitative method to achieve its goals. Cultural influences on recalling events are most visible in the interpretations people give to the aspects of such interactions when they tell their travel stories (Reisinger & Turner, 2003).

### **Data collection and sampling**

A qualitative case study technique was used because of the nature of this study; the exploratory research has been adopted due to the lack of academic literature on the experiences of cultural tourists (Creswell, 2007). This elicits the sentiments and ideas of the research participants to find the relevant sections for analysis (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

To get the intended target samples for this experiment, specific criteria were devised. To begin, only those tourists who had spent at least one night in Kashmir valley and visited at least one cultural landmark were considered. The last condition was implemented to eliminate visitors who did not take the time to share their experiences while in the area. The interview was only open to individuals who matched these criteria.

According to Patton (2002), there are no hard and fast sample size criteria in qualitative research. The sample size in a qualitative study is essentially influenced by data saturation, the target sample's reachability, and the time and resources available (Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, & Fontenot, 2013). Interviews continued until the theoretical saturation point was reached. After interviewing 20 visitors, we agreed on the data saturation threshold as the latter interviews provided no new insights, indicating that the sample size was suitable for this research (Marshall et al., 2013).

The open-ended questions were used to allow respondents to express themselves freely and to avoid any potential bias caused by replies being limited to the researcher's preset categorization (Ryan, 1995). The literature created open-ended questions (Cetin & Bilgihan, 2016). They were designed to elicit cultural visitors' impressions and thoughts about the Kashmir valley, focusing on determining the aspects of MCTEs

The interview questions were prepared to address the study's early concerns. A test was also conducted on three visitors to ensure the clarity of the questions. The final interview guide was prepared after considering the input from the pretest sample. Among the inquiries were personal (e.g., age, gender, nationality, marital status) information, as well as questions regarding the traveler's experiences. Following recent research (Altunel & Erkut, 2015; Chen & Rahman, 2018; Kim et al., 2012; Tung & Ritchie, 2011a), the respondents were initially advised to provide a thorough description of their experiences during their journey to Kashmir. They were invited to recall and share those components, which they share with their friends and family when they return home. Finally, they were asked to compare and contrast their travel experiences in Kashmir with those in other places.

The questions were created to extract cultural tourists' views and opinions about the location, focusing on the characteristics of MCTEs.

General demographic information and open-ended questions were also asked of respondents. The questions asked were what aspects of Kashmir's culture do you think are unique and tell us about your experiences in the Kashmir valley during your visit? What will you remember about this place after you leave and what experiences do you believe are worth sharing with friends and relatives? How does Kashmiri culture differ from other cultures and your own?

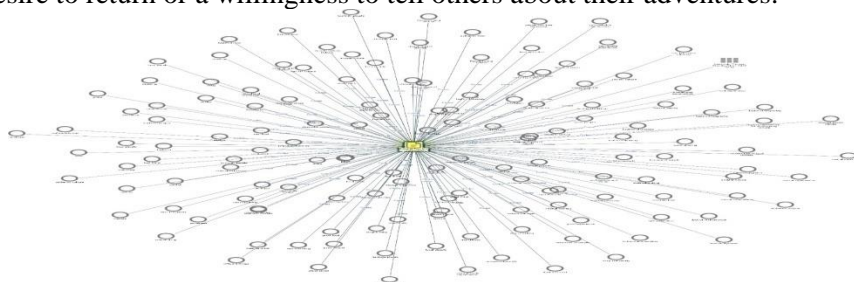
**Demographic Profile of Cultural Tourists**

<b>Table 1.1 Demographic Profile of Cultural Tourists</b>	
<b>Gender</b>	
Male	13
Female	07
<b>Age</b>	
18-34	06
35-54	13
54- above	01
<b>Education</b>	
High School	03
Graduate	04
Post Graduate and above	13
<b>Travel Experiences</b>	
Once a year	12
Two to three times a year	04
Four to Seven times a year	04
<b>Marital Status</b>	
Single	08
Married	12

**Results and Discussion**

The findings show that the participants value everything related to local culture and its impact on their experience. During analysis through the Grounded theory method, 108 open codes were generated in the analysis, which turned into 15 axial codes. These 15 axial codes were converted into six selective codes or themes that were derived from them. The open codes are presented in Fig 1, while selective codes or themes are presented in Fig 2.

The themes highlighted the aspects like heritage, art, history, architecture, and gastronomy under the topic of culture. Six main features emerged as important factors determining cultural tourist experiences at the site based on earlier research on the fundamental components of memorable travel experiences. Most respondents were content with their experiences in Kashmir, and everyone expressed a desire to return or a willingness to tell others about their adventures.



**Fig 1.1:** Cluster analysis through NVIVO depicting the open codes generated in the analysis In the following parts these elements are explained using quotes from interviews and support from the literature.

**Social Interaction**

The social interaction that took place throughout the experience emerged as a significant experience attribute and is characterized mainly by local qualities like hospitality, helpfulness, smiling faces, and friendly and cordial relations.

**A 40-year-old Dehli woman who was traveling with her family commented,**

"We have visited many places, but the experience in Kashmir was quite unforgettable because of its people. We got to experience the real hospitality of Kashmiris when our cab driver took us to his

home and served us the food. We were very touched by his hospitality, and that incident made our experience memorable. We even posted it on instagram. We will never forget this experience."

**Another tourist from Maharashtra states that**

"Kashmiri people are very polite, and their speech is endearing, not rough. The people, their way of talking, and the use of the word "Ji"(which means Yes) are very polite, and it is not only with the tourists; when our taxi driver asked for instructions from another driver, he was very polite and respectful. It is very charming in such an aggressive world, where everybody is in a hurry, someone talking so nicely and musically appeals to anybody."

**Table 1.2 Codes, Categories, and dimensions of MTEs**

Open coding	Axial Coding	Selective coding
Temples. The architecture of the local houses, the Design of the shrines, Wood and Brick houses, Heritage buildings	Built Heritage	Natural and built Heritage
Gardens, Chinars	Natural Heritage	
Houseboat, Woodwork, Handicrafts	Craft Work	
Traditional Dresses, Traditional Cutlery, Simple dressing	Traditional lifestyle	Authentic Clues
Historical Importance of the place Togetherness, Distinctiveness of the culture	Distinctive culture	
Preservation of the culture, Cultural awareness	Cultural preservation	
Language, Diverse belief systems Presence of mosques and Shrines, Religious diversity	Diversity	
Street Foods, Spices, Cuisine, Dried Fruits	Cuisine	Gastronomic Experiences
People, Hospitality Loving the nature of the people, Friendliness	Hospitality	Social Interaction
Politeness Cool behavior Locals' way of talking Cordial Smiling faces Soft-spoken	Politeness	
Nonbusiness relations Down-to-earth nature Honesty of people Helping nature Unforgettable experiences Emotional attachment Humbleness	Helping Nature	
Souvenirns Shopping experiences	Souvenir purchasing	Souvenir Purchasing
No cultural shows around	No cultural Showcase	Challenging Experiences

tourist places		
Unhygienic places Crowdedness Lack of continence at gardens	No mantainence	
Absence of labeling of indigenous trees and flowers		
Not selling real products Forcing the tourists to purchase Tourist traps	Lack of authentic products	

**Authentic clues**

Most of the cultural visitors also talked about authenticclues.

Regarding the theme of "local authentic clues," guests/tourists mentioned things; like they felt uniquely and authentically symbolized the area.

**A traveler from Delhi said,**

"The way Kashmiris eat food while sitting on the floor is amazing. Here people have managed to save their authentic culture. Unlike others, they haven't adopted western culture. Kashmiri culture is ancient; people here are very down-to-earth and have retained their language. Besides, one feels unity in diversity, people of different communities dress up the same way, and eats in the same way, which is unique."

**Gastronomic experiences**

The findings imply that local gastronomy also leads to the creation of tourists' cherished experiences. Under this category, respondents mentioned items such as Kashmiri cuisine (wazwan) and street foods. One of the participants described his experience with Kashmiri food as.

"The Kashmiri food is amazing, especially the ethnic Wazwan. I have tasted a few of its dishes, which was a great experience. Kashmiri people have a unique way of cooking. They prepare every dish with a lot of spices and serve it distinctly. They use the kind of utensils which feels very traditional and Mughlai-type. It makes the guest feel very special."

Some respondents also mentioned street food as their memorable cultural experience. A tourist from Punjab described his experience as

"I was curious about authentic street foods of Kashmir, and I tasted much-appreciated barbeque in Srinagar and Kahwa and local bread at Gulmarg."

**Souvenir Purchasing**

For many tourists, buying souvenirs is a fulfilling pastime that can document a place's visit foster long lasting memories (Jin et al., 2017).

Thus, souvenirs act as reminders of the experience or as a way to recall social interactions (Wilkins, 2011). Purchasing souvenirs is a "pervasive" and "pivotal" practice that alters how visitors behave (Jin et al., 2017, p. 120). Hu and Yu (2007) describe how leisure involvement affects purchasing decisions, and Sthapit et al. (2018) show how perceptions of souvenir authenticity relate to behavioral intentions.

**A respondent stated that-**

"The most memorable thing about our trip is the shopping experience, we bought embroidered stoles and other hand-crafted things like gift boxes and dried fruits, and we would love to share about this place."

**Another tourist from Madhya Pradesh says-**

"Whenever we come here, we do shopping as here one gets many unique and authentic things like the Kashmiri shawl, the local spices like saffron, and paper machine. It is the only thing we take with us as memories. These things make the trip memorable."

**Challenging Experiences**



This word cloud always explains the data representation based on the collection of words here in this fig. 3, it is depicted that the current study has made use of data collected from one of the regions of India named Kashmir in which cultural tourists have responded about their cultural experiences through different means like food, scenic beauty and hospitality of the local community and many more.

### Conclusion

The concept of experiences has become essential for culture and heritage tourism. Less research has been done on the elements that influence cultural visitors' memorable experiences. The focus of cultural travel is getting a taste of local life.

The goal of cultural tourists is to assimilate into the culture momentarily they are visiting. For implications this paper offers insightful empirical data on what makes experience memorable cultural tourism experiences, which destination planners may use business professionals and academics accordingly in their respective business.

Qualitative data was collected and analyzed using the principles of grounded theory. The study identified important factors that influence how cultural visitors interpret their experiences. Six contributing factors, including social interaction, authentic clues, culinary attraction, natural and built heritage, souvenir shopping, and challenging experiences on the MCTE, were investigated.

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