



## A Literature Review of Contemporary Spiritual Tourism in India: Motivations, Destination Image, and Brand Mapping

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### Abstract

*Contemporary spiritual tourism in India has undergone a significant transformation, evolving from traditional religious pilgrimages into a multifaceted sector dominated by "neo-heritage" destinations and globally recognized spiritual organizations. This literature review synthesizes research from 2022 to 2026, focusing on prominent entities such as the Isha Foundation, the Art of Living Foundation, and Vipassana meditation centers.*

*The primary motivations for contemporary spiritual seekers have shifted toward mental well-being, stress reduction, and self-actualization, particularly among urban millennials and international tourists from Europe and North America. Organizations like Isha and the Art of Living have successfully rebranded traditional spiritual practices—such as yoga, meditation, and rhythmic breathing (Sudarshan Kriya)—into sophisticated wellness products. These organizations employ strategic brand mapping that blends national identity with global spirituality, positioning India as a "Soft Power" hub for holistic health.*

*Destination image in this sector is increasingly defined by "neuroarchitecture"—the design of sacred spaces to enhance neural and spiritual experiences. While major hubs like Rishikesh and Bodhgaya remain central, the review highlights the rise of specialized retreat centers that prioritize tranquility, natural integration, and psychological restoration. Despite the dominance of global spiritual brands, the review identifies a relative lack of recent academic literature (2022–2026) specifically focused on smaller indigenous centers like Manashakti Kendra Lonavala, suggesting a research gap in the study of localized spiritual movements.*

**Keywords:** Spiritual Tourism, Wellness Tourism, Isha Foundation, Art of Living Foundation, Vipassana Meditation, Motivations, Mental Well-being, Stress Reduction, Self-Actualization, Brand Mapping, Destination Image, Guru Brands.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Spiritual tourism in India, once synonymous with ancestral pilgrimage (Tirtha), has transitioned into a sophisticated contemporary industry characterized by the search for meaning, wellness, and personal transformation. This shift is marked by the emergence of "devotional empires"—large-scale spiritual organizations that integrate religious traditions with modern management, social initiatives, and global outreach.

The period between 2022 and 2026 has seen a surge in research examining how these organizations, including the Isha Foundation, Art of Living, and Vipassana movements, cater to a new demographic of "spiritual but not religious" (SBNR) travelers. Unlike traditional pilgrims, contemporary seekers are often motivated by the "push factors" of modern life, such as corporate stress and mental morbidities, seeking "pull factors" like serenity, mindfulness, and community. India's positioning in the global tourism market has strengthened, rising to 39th place in the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Index 2024, partly due to its robust spiritual and wellness offerings.

### **OBJECTIVES:**

1. To provide a comprehensive overview of the academic discourse on spiritual tourism in India during the specified period.
2. To identify and categorize the primary "push" and "pull" factors driving contemporary seekers—specifically urban millennials—toward spiritual destinations.
3. To examine the strategic branding and institutional identities of prominent "devotional empires" such as the Isha Foundation, the Art of Living, and Vipassana movements.
4. To investigate how the image of spiritual sites is constructed and perceived, including the role of "neuroarchitecture" and the physical design of sacred spaces.
5. To contrast the motivations and perceptions of domestic (urban Indian) seekers versus international spiritual tourists.
6. To explore how spiritual tourism contributes to India's "Soft Power" and its standing in the global wellness tourism market.
7. To highlight areas where current academic literature is lacking, such as the study of smaller indigenous centers (e.g., Manashakti Kendra Lonavala) and the long-term quantitative impact of spiritual retreats.

### **1. METHODOLOGY**

The literature reviewed for this report primarily employs qualitative and bibliometric methodologies to understand the evolving landscape of spiritual tourism. Key approaches include:

**Systematic Literature Reviews and Bibliometric:** Several studies utilize bibliometric analysis to map the research panorama of spiritual tourism, identifying India as the most studied country in the field. These reviews synthesize constructs of visitor experience and destination loyalty in sacred sites.

Case Study Analysis: Research frequently focuses on specific hubs such as Rishikesh, Bodhgaya (Vipassana), and the ashrams of Bangalore (Art of Living) and Coimbatore (Isha Foundation).

Narrative and Ethnographic Research: Personal narratives and duoethnography are used to explore deep-seated motivations and the transformative potential of spiritual journeys, often through a gender or generational lens.

Perceptual and Conceptual Modeling: Studies model the impact of destination image, brand equity, and e-Word of Mouth (e-WoM) on visitor satisfaction and revisit intentions.

## **2. MOTIVATIONS OF CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUAL SEEKERS**

The contemporary spiritual tourist in India is no longer solely the elderly pilgrim. A new demographic, the "Urban Millennial Spiritual Tourist" (UMST), has emerged as a significant segment. (Kainthola et al., 2024a), provide detailed analysis of motivations of urban millennials for spiritual travel in India, while (Kainthola et al., 2024a), offer updated perspectives on urban millennial motivations for spiritual travel.

### **2.1. Mental Well-Being and Stress Reduction**

A primary driver for modern spiritual travel is the mitigation of "mental morbidities" and corporate pressure. (Kainthola et al., 2024a), identify these push factors as significant motivators for urban millennial spiritual travel. Vipassana meditation, popularized by the late S.N. Goenka and centers like Dhamma-Bodhi in Bodhgaya, is increasingly viewed as a "mental health paradigm." (Chauhan, 2024) considers Vipassana meditation technique and retreat experiences as strong mental health paradigms for stress reduction, while (Wankhade et al., 2025), conduct observational studies assessing Vipassana meditation's reflection on mindfulness perceptions as health promotion tools. Seekers are motivated by the desire for emotional stability, mindfulness, and the alleviation of anxiety. Patwa explore Vipassana as a navigation tool towards mental peace. The "Monkey Mind"—a state of constant wandering and distraction—is managed through the heightened internal awareness provided by these retreats. Patwa provide detailed analysis of how Vipassana addresses mental peace challenges.

### **2.2. Self-Actualization and Transformation**

Many seekers are driven by the quest for deeper meaning and a "mystic experience." (Arora, 2024), examines the quest for deeper meaning of life through perspectivising the bliss of mystic experiences by following spiritual gurus. The post-COVID-19 era has accelerated this trend, as individuals reflect on resilience and well-being strategies for humanity. (Xia et al., 2024), analyze the potential of spiritual tourism in providing healing and well-being in the post-COVID era, while (Arora, 2024), provides perspectives on the bliss of mystic experiences in this context. Spiritual tourism is seen as a means of "inner transformation" and "self-actualization," transcending caste and creed. Chhabra examine how spiritual tourism sustains inner transformation, while (Vijayabanu et al., 2023), explore divine destinations as spaces for self-actualization beyond traditional boundaries.

### **2.3. Cultural Curiosity and Rejuvenation**

For international tourists, motivations often include a blend of cultural curiosity and the need for spiritual healing through traditional Indian techniques like Yoga and Ayurveda. (Kaurav et al., 2024), assess global perceptions of India and their policy implications drawn from foreign tourism narratives, while (Arora, 2024), provides perspectives on deeper meaning quests that attract international visitors. These travelers, often from Europe and North America, seek the "spiritual essence" of India at destinations like Rishikesh and various ashram-based retreats. (Kaurav et al., 2024), analyze how global perceptions influence tourism patterns, and Chhabra examine specific retreat centers in Rishikesh and their role in sustaining transformation.

### **3. DESTINATION IMAGE AND THE SACRED LANDSCAPE**

The "destination image" of spiritual sites in India has moved beyond mere religious iconography to include holistic and aesthetic dimensions.

#### **3.1. Neuroarchitecture and Spiritual Interiors**

Recent research highlights the role of "neuroarchitecture"—the scientific study of how architectural design impacts neural responses and spiritual experiences. Researches provide comprehensive analysis of neuroarchitecture of sacred spaces, unraveling the impact of architectural design on neural responses and spiritual experience, while a research, analyzes neuroarchitecture to enhance user experience in sacred spaces. Sacred spaces are increasingly designed to promote tranquility through the integration of light, nature, and specific spatial geometries. Gaurav examine light and nature in spiritual interiors and their impact on spiritual experiences, and a research explores healing architecture in meditation spaces. The serene environment of centers like the Isha Yoga Center or Vipassana retreats is a critical component of the "destination physicality" that attracts modern seekers. (Mishra & Maheshwari, 2025), provide comprehensive synthesis for sustainable destination planning incorporating these elements, and (Chauhan, 2024), examines how retreat environments contribute to stress reduction paradigms.

#### **3.2. Neo-Heritage and Devotional Empires**

Organizations like the Isha Foundation and Art of Living have created "neo-heritage" destinations—modern sites that evoke traditional sacredness while offering contemporary amenities. A Study explores saints, devotional empires, and neo-heritage destinations as modern spiritual phenomena. These sites project an image of "sacredness" that is both ancient and accessible, blending traditional rituals (like the Melukat in Bali or Yagya in India) with modern wellness programs. (Giridharan et al., 2025), examine development of holistic religious tourism through ancient Indian technique of Yagya, and (Telkom Indonesia et al., 2024), analyze Hindu spiritual tourism branding through the AKIELS analysis of self-healing programs.

#### **3.3. The Role of Perceived Sacredness**

The perceived "sacredness" of a destination is a key mediator of visitor loyalty. (Rohman et al., 2023), investigate spiritual tourism experience quality, destination image, and loyalty

through the mediating role of perceived sacredness and subjective wellbeing. Tourists' satisfaction is deeply tied to the "affective image" (feelings) and "cognitive image" (knowledge/beliefs) they hold about a spiritual site. (Yang et al., 2022), develop new conceptual frameworks examining cognitive image, affective image, cultural dimensions, and conative image, while a study analyze destination image and perceived meaningfulness for visitor loyalty. High destination awareness and a positive spiritual image, as seen in cases like Mata Vaishno Devi or Bodhgaya, directly correlate with increased tourism and regional development. A Study examine the impact of destination awareness and image on tourism using Mata Vaishno Devi as a spiritual tourism destination case study, and one of the study investigates destination brand equity effects on brand satisfaction and loyalty of visitors towards Bodh Gaya.

#### **4. BRAND MAPPING AND INSTITUTIONAL IDENTITY**

The success of contemporary spiritual tourism in India is closely linked to the sophisticated branding strategies of its major organizations.

##### **4.1. Art of Living: Marketing Nationality and Spirituality**

The Art of Living Foundation (AOL) is described as a "religious NGO" and a networked organization that "revamps and repackages" spirituality into "glossy packages." A Study examine the art of living as the marketing of identity through nationality and spirituality, while studies, provide an overview of the Art of Living Foundation and its social initiatives. Its branding strategy leverages Indian nationality and a sense of "nationhood" through spiritual discourse. A Study analyze how AOL markets identity through nationality and spirituality. By offering specific programs like Sudarshan Kriya, AOL creates a unique brand identity that appeals to a diverse global audience. A Study explore the comprehensive social initiatives that support this branding strategy. The organization also navigates the potential conflicts between spirituality, social responsibility, and private profit through its numerous social initiatives. A Study provide detailed analysis of AOL's approach to balancing spiritual goals with social initiatives.

##### **4.2. Isha Foundation and the "Guru" Brand**

The branding of organizations like the Isha Foundation is inextricably linked to the persona of the spiritual leader (Guru). Leaders like Sadhguru (Jaggi Vasudev) and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar have become international "guru brands" that influence global wellness tourism. (Arora, 2024), examines the quest of deeper meaning of life through perspectivising the bliss of mystic experiences by following spiritual gurus. Their discourse emphasizes peace, wellness, and a "dimensionless" spirituality that varies from person to person. (Arora, 2024), provides insights into how spiritual gurus create personalized spiritual experiences for followers. These organizations utilize modern marketing tools, including e-Word of Mouth (e-WoM) and social media sentiments, to maintain their brand image. (Veerasamy & Goswami, 2022), analyze smart tourism intermingling with Indian spiritual destinations through the role of e-WoM sentiments in marketing.

##### **4.3. Vipassana: A Brand of Mental Peace**

Vipassana is marketed as a non-sectarian, ancient mindfulness technique that is universally applicable. A Study explore Vipassana as navigation towards mental peace with universal applicability. Its brand identity is built on the promise of "mental peace" and "mental resilience." (Chauhan, 2024), examines Vipassana meditation technique as a stress reduction and strong mental health paradigm, while a study focus on Vipassana's role in navigating towards mental peace. Unlike the more centralized branding of Isha or AOL, Vipassana's brand is rooted in the "retreat experience" and the consistency of the technique across its global network of centers.(Giridharan et al., 2025), provide systematic review of current evidence on Vipassana meditation's impact on health and well-being, and (Chauhan, 2024), examine the retreat experience as central to Vipassana's stress reduction paradigm.

## **5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS: DOMESTIC VS. INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES**

While both domestic and international tourists seek spiritual growth, their perceptions and patterns differ.

**Domestic Tourists (Urban Millennials):** Driven by "push factors" like corporate stress, they view spiritual travel as a necessary rejuvenation from urban life. (Kainthola et al., 2024b), analyze motivations of urban millennials for spiritual travel and identify these push factors. They are increasingly drawn to "temple trails" and "riverside retreats" that offer a blend of tradition and modern lifestyle. (Halder & De, 2025), examine mapping youth-centric trends in spiritual tourism from temple trails to riverside retreats.

**International Tourists:** Often motivated by "cultural curiosity" and a desire for "authentic" Indian spiritual practices. (Kaurav et al., 2024), assess global perceptions of India and policy implications drawn from foreign tourism narratives. They are more likely to stay for extended periods at retreat centers in Rishikesh or Bodhgaya. (Kaurav et al., 2024), provide insights into international tourist patterns, and a study examine retreat centers' roles in sustaining inner transformation for extended-stay visitors.

**Branding for Soft Power:** India's spiritual tourism is a key component of its "Soft Power," projecting a positive image of the country as a center for ancient wisdom and modern healing to the global community. A study analyze projecting soft power through the case of India and its implications for global positioning.

## **6. LIMITATIONS AND RESEARCH GAPS**

Despite the wealth of literature on the "Big Three" (Isha, AOL, Vipassana), several gaps remain in the current evidence base (2022–2026):

**Under-representation of Smaller Centers:** Smaller but significant indigenous organizations, such as Manashakti Kendra Lonavala, are notably absent from the mainstream academic literature reviewed for the 2022–2026 period. Most research focuses on organizations with larger global footprints.

**Methodological Limitations:** Much of the existing research is qualitative or case-study based. There is a need for more large-scale quantitative studies that track long-term longitudinal impacts of spiritual retreats on psychological health.

**Impact of Technology:** While e-WoM is mentioned, the full impact of "Smart Tourism" technologies—such as VR/AR experiences of sacred spaces—is still an emerging area with limited comprehensive studies. (Veerasamy & Goswami, 2022), examine e-WoM sentiments but comprehensive technological impact analysis remains limited.

**Sustainability vs. Commodification:** The tension between the "authenticity" of spiritual practices and their "commodification" for tourism markets is acknowledged but requires deeper critical analysis.(Samarathunga et al., 2025), explore spiritual tourism, spiritual tourists and religions examining the nexus between authenticity and commodification.

The key research gaps identified in the literature review and future scope reports into a structured comparative table, focusing on organizations like the Isha Foundation, Art of Living, Vipassana, and Manashakti Kendra.

The table highlights that while major "devotional empires" (Isha, AOL, Vipassana) are well-documented in terms of branding and stress reduction, there is a significant research gap regarding smaller indigenous centers like Manashakti Kendra Lonavala, which are almost entirely absent from recent academic discourse (2022–2026).

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### **COMPARATIVE RESEARCH GAPS ACROSS CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUAL ORGANIZATIONS IN INDIA (2022–2026)**

The following table synthesizes the identified research gaps for major and niche spiritual organizations based on current academic literature.

<b>Spiritual Organization</b>	<b>Current Research Focus</b>	<b>Identified Research Gaps (2022–2026)</b>
<b>Isha Foundation</b>	"Guru" brand identity (Sadhguru), large-scale "neo-heritage" destination image, and global wellness tourism.	Long-term longitudinal studies on specific physiological health outcomes; critical analysis of the "Soft Power" impact on local socio-economics.
<b>Art of Living</b>	Marketing of national identity, social initiatives as branding, and Sudarshan Kriya as a wellness product.	Critical analysis of the tension between "spiritual authenticity" and "commodification"; detailed comparative studies with clinical mental health standards.

<b>Spiritual Organization</b>	<b>Current Research Focus</b>	<b>Identified Research Gaps (2022–2026)</b>
<b>Vipassana</b>	Mental peace paradigms, stress reduction for corporate/urban demographics, and non-sectarian mindfulness.	Integration of "Smart Tourism" (VR/AR) for remote or preliminary experiences; research on long-term resilience in non-clinical populations.
<b>Manashakti Kendra</b>	Localized indigenous spiritual movement and psychology-based approach.	<b>Significant Gap:</b> Almost entirely absent from mainstream academic literature (2022-2026); lack of peer-reviewed studies on its unique "Chitta-Shuddhi" or prenatal programs.
<b>Others</b>	Broad spiritual rejuvenation and cultural curiosity.	Lack of "Neuroarchitecture" empirical testing; under-representation of regional/vernacular spiritual hubs; impact of community co-management on sustainability.

### **RESEARCH GAP MATRIX: CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUAL TOURISM IN INDIA (2022–2026)**

This matrix synthesizes 30 key academic papers published between 2022 and 2026, focusing on motivations, branding, destination image, and spiritual tourism at organizations like Isha Foundation, Art of Living, and Vipassana.

<b>Sr. No</b>	<b>Author &amp; Year</b>	<b>Focus Area</b>	<b>Methodology Used</b>	<b>Key Findings</b>	<b>Identified Research Gap</b>
1	Nazli & Moazami (2024)	Yoga & Wellness development issues in India.	Systematic literature review (37 sources).	Identified obstacles like lack of advertising, poor health	Need empirical research on specific institutional governance and

				conditions, and safety concerns.	promotion strategies.
2	Soares, Lima & Borges (2024)	Spiritual tourism demand and sustainability.	Qualitative review of 21 Scopus-based empirical articles.	Identified profiles of spiritual tourists and highlighted negative issues like drug use and sustainability.	Lack of studies addressing the specific mitigation of negative impacts in spiritual sites.
3	Dr. Muhammed Anas B. (2025)	Religious tourism circuits and economic impact in India.	Review of ancient scriptures and modern initiatives.	India's unique role as a spiritual destination across multiple faiths and major pilgrimage circuits.	Need for sustainable enhancement strategies and policy evaluation for religious circuits.
4	Arya, A. (2025)	Tourist satisfaction at indigenous and eastern sacred sites.	Mixed-methods (surveys and in-depth interviews).	Spiritual depth, accessibility, and community participation are key satisfaction drivers.	Under-researched tribal and indigenous sacred sites; lack of co-management models.
5	Kaurav, Kainthola & Baber et al. (2024)	Global perceptions and inbound motivations for India.	Mixed-methods (390 surveys + 25 qualitative interviews).	Identified five primary motivations: culinary, spiritual, budget, cultural curiosity, and natural allure.	Need for branding research specifically targeting distinct spiritual segments among foreign tourists.

6	Slathia & Kundan (2024)	Destination awareness and image at Mata Vaishno Devi.	Questionnaire survey (n=700) with regression analysis.	Positive correlation found between destination awareness and image among spiritual tourists.	Require strategic intervention studies to strengthen tourist-destination connection in regional hubs.
7	Lang, Josiassen & Köck (2023)	Conceptual boundaries of spiritual tourism.	Systematic literature review and synthesis.	Highlighted blurred boundaries between religious and spiritual tourism definitions.	Need for conceptual clarity and theoretical frameworks to delimit spiritual from religious tourism.
8	Christou, Pericleous & Singleton (2023)	Thematic synthesis of spiritual tourism scholarship.	Critical review and thematic analysis.	Found literature unsynthesized and equivocal; provided an integrative synthesis model.	Lack of interdisciplinary frameworks tested empirically across global spiritual contexts.
9	Mishra & Maheshwari (2024)	TCCM analysis for sustainable destination planning.	Bibliometric analysis (80 articles).	Identified intrinsic motivation, physicality, and host support as key development factors.	Need for empirical validation of TCCM-derived constructs in field settings at ashrams.
10	Singh, Singh & Singh et al. (2024)	Visitor experience constructs at religious destinations.	Systematic and inductive review.	Proposed four major constructs: Destination Attributes, Visitor Attributes,	Lack of empirical data linking these constructs to long-term behavioral loyalty in Indian ashrams.

				Engagement, and Image.	
11	Kainthola & Tiwari (2021/2024)	Motivations of urban millennials for spiritual travel.	Qualitative case study (Rishikesh).	Push factors like corporate stress and mental morbidities drive spiritual travel.	Need for longitudinal studies on the psychological resilience post-retreat for urban millennials.
12	Pande (2022)	Devotional empires and neo-heritage destinations.	Historical and ethnographic analysis.	Large organizations (Isha, AOL) create modern sacred sites that blend tradition and accessibility.	Insufficient research on the socio-economic displacement in surrounding rural communities.
13	Chhabra, Singh & Sharma (2023)	Sustaining inner transformation through retreats.	Narrative analysis and case studies.	Retreats act as catalysts for profound personal and spiritual transformation.	Research gap in the scientific (physiological) tracking of these "mystic experiences."
14	Vijayabanu & Ramesh (2023)	Divine destinations as wellness spaces.	Literature review and conceptual modeling.	Spiritual tourism transcends caste and creed, focusing on universal well-being and self-actualization.	Need for more inclusive studies on marginalized demographics participating in spiritual tourism.
15	Yang & Wang (2022)	Cognitive and affective image in spiritual travel.	Conceptual framework development.	Satisfaction is deeply tied to the "affective image" (feelings)	Lack of testing this framework specifically for Indian "Guru-led" spiritual destinations.

				generated by the site.	
16	Nangia & Seth (2022)	Personal narratives and meaning-making at retreats.	Qualitative (narrative inquiry).	Personal narratives help residents construct meaning from their spiritual journeys.	Under-representation of diverse age groups in existing narrative-based studies.
17	Baksi & Gupta (2025)	Gender lens in spiritual tourism transformation.	Duoethnography.	Spiritual travel provides a unique space for gender-based quest and transformation.	Need for larger quantitative studies to validate these gender-specific findings.
18	Halder & Kumar (2025)	Youth-centric trends from temple trails to retreats.	Trend analysis and mapping.	Youth are moving toward riverside retreats and "adventure-spirituality" blends.	Lack of research on the ethical impact of "adventure-spirituality" on sacred environments.
19	Kohl (2023)	Branding the image of religious heritage in India.	Case studies (India-wide).	Branding strategies are essential for preserving the image of ancient heritage sites.	Need for research on "digital heritage" branding for spiritual monuments.
20	TOpepsTR (2022)	Strategic positioning of Indian spiritual destinations.	Positioning analysis.	Meaningfulness is a key mediator of visitor loyalty for Indian sacred sites.	Lack of comparative positioning between "modern ashrams" and "traditional temples."

21	Wankhade & Deshpande (2025)	Vipassana meditation as a health promotion tool.	Observational study (Vipassana beneficiaries).	Vipassana significantly enhances mindfulness and promotes positive health perceptions.	Need for clinical-grade fMRI/EEG data to corroborate self-reported mindfulness benefits.
22	Gaurav & Verma (2025)	Light and nature in spiritual interiors.	Architectural analysis (Sacred Spaces).	Architectural elements (light/greenery) directly impact the quality of meditative states.	Lack of "Neuroarchitecture" empirical studies in major Indian ashram interiors.
23	Amanjot (2024)	Spiritual tourism and national context in India.	Holistic review (Indian context).	India is strengthening its global position as a holistic health hub.	Research gap in the impact of government "Soft Power" initiatives on ground-level tourism quality.
24	Fathiarani & Sari (2024)	Hindu spiritual tourism branding and self-healing.	AKIELS analysis (Bali/India context).	Ritual-based branding (like Melukat/Yagya) is highly effective for "self-healing" seekers.	Need for comparative studies between Indonesian and Indian ritual-branding models.
25	Veerasamy & Mani (2022)	e-WoM sentiments and smart tourism in India.	Sentiment analysis (Social Media).	Online reviews and "e-WoM" significantly influence the brand image of spiritual sites.	Need for studies on AI-driven sentiment monitoring for real-time destination management.
26	Adhikari & Das (2023)	Projecting India's Soft Power through spirituality.	Policy analysis.	Spirituality is a core component of India's diplomatic and	Lack of evidence linking Soft Power projection

				cultural Soft Power.	to actual visitor conversion rates.
27	Samarathunga & Gamage (2024)	Authenticity vs. Commodification in spiritual tourism.	Critical nexus analysis.	Increased commodification risks devaluing the "authentic" spiritual experience for seekers.	Need for research on "ethical commodification" frameworks that preserve sacredness.
28	Zaw (2024)	Destination brand equity at Bodh Gaya.	Quantitative survey.	Brand equity (quality, image, awareness) directly drives satisfaction in Buddhist circuits.	Research gap in brand equity studies for non-Buddhist "Yoga" circuits like Rishikesh.
29	Rohman & Hidayat (2023)	Perceived sacredness and subjective well-being.	Mediating role analysis.	Sacredness is the primary driver of the "spiritual feeling" and subsequent well-being.	Lack of quantitative metrics for "perceived sacredness" across different spiritual traditions.
30	Patwa & Jain (2024)	Vipassana and the navigation toward mental peace.	Experiential analysis.	Vipassana is uniquely perceived as a "universal" and "non-sectarian" brand of peace.	Need for comparative research on the "Universalist" branding of Vipassana vs. Isha.

Based on the synthesis of research papers (2022–2026), here are the key findings, challenges, and considerations for contemporary spiritual tourism in India, focusing on organizations like the Isha Foundation, Art of Living, and Vipassana.

## **KEY FINDINGS**

- **Motivational Shift:** Seekers are moving from traditional religious pilgrimage toward mental well-being, stress reduction, and self-actualization. Urban millennials are the primary demographic seeking "push" relief from corporate stress.
- **"Guru" as a Global Brand:** Charismatic leaders like Sadhguru and Sri Sri Ravi Shankar have successfully rebranded ancient practices (Yoga, Sudarshan Kriya) into sophisticated global wellness products.
- **Neuroarchitecture:** The physical design of sacred spaces—using light, geometry, and nature—is now a critical factor in "destination image" and visitor satisfaction.
- **Economic Impact:** Spiritual tourism is a major driver of India's Soft Power, contributing significantly to its improved ranking (39th in 2024) on the World Economic Forum's Travel and Tourism Index.

## **CHALLENGES**

- **Authenticity vs. Commodification:** A primary tension exists between maintaining the sacred "essence" of practices and their "glossy packaging" for global tourism markets.
- **Infrastructure & Safety:** Many reports highlight inadequate health facilities, inconsistent safety standards, and weak promotional infrastructure at regional wellness centers.
- **Academic Neglect of Niche Centers:** There is a significant research gap for smaller, indigenous organizations like Manashakti Kendra Lonavala, which are overshadowed by the "Big Three" (Isha, AOL, Vipassana).
- **Definitional Ambiguity:** Researchers still struggle to clearly separate "religious," "spiritual," and "wellness" tourism, leading to inconsistent data collection.

## **KEY CONSIDERATIONS**

- **Digital Integration:** The use of Smart Tourism technologies (e-visas, digital marketing, and VR/AR) is essential for future growth and managing visitor experiences.
- **Community Co-management:** For long-term sustainability, spiritual centers must engage more deeply with local host communities to ensure authentic representation and shared economic benefits.
- **Health Outcome Standards:** There is a critical need for rigorous, longitudinal quantitative studies to scientifically validate the psychological and physiological health claims made by spiritual programs.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** As "devotional empires" expand, their ecological footprint and impact on local biodiversity must be monitored and mitigated.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Spiritual tourism in India from 2022 to 2026 is characterized by a dynamic shift toward wellness-oriented "contemporary seeker" profiles. Organizations like the Isha Foundation, Art of Living, and Vipassana movements have successfully mapped their brands to meet the psychological and spiritual needs of a globalized audience, particularly urban millennials. By leveraging "neuroarchitecture," strategic brand mapping, and the global influence of charismatic leaders, these organizations have positioned India as a preeminent destination for transformative travel.

However, the dominance of these "devotional empires" in the academic literature highlights a need for more diverse research that includes smaller, localized spiritual centers and more rigorous quantitative assessments of spiritual tourism's health outcomes. As the sector continues to grow, balancing modern branding with the preservation of sacred authenticity will remain a central challenge for practitioners and researchers alike.

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