

# Indian Himalayan Ecology for Human Wellbeing: Analysis of Tourists' Destination Image, Satisfactions and Revisit Intentions

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## ABSTRACT

Destination competition gets progressively more intense as the amount of health and wellness tourism rises. This study described wellness tourism in an untapped region, specifically the Indian Himalayan Region (IHR). This study investigates how tourists' destination image affects their satisfaction and, ultimately, their behavior. To conduct this research data were collected from the top six wellness retreat centers situated in IHR. 354 total valid responses were collected for the main analysis. The findings of this study substantiated the hypothesis and revealed that tourists' destination image plays a vital role in tourists' satisfaction and satisfaction influences tourist revisit intention.

*Key words: Tourists' Destination Image, Satisfaction, Revisit Intentions, Wellness Retreats, Indian Himalayan Regions.*

## Introduction

Wellness is a unique state of health that prioritizes overall health and well-being. Wellness has been practiced since time immemorial and is experiencing tremendous growth in both the domestic and international markets (Sibi and Abraham, 2017). It is primarily associated with health, which is described as well-being in the absence of disease (Misselbrook, 2014). The World Health Organization (2022), defines wellness as "a state that encompasses physical, psychological, and emotional well-being, rather than merely the absence of illness or infirmity." Furthermore, according to the Global Wellness Institute (2018), wellness is the active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that result in a state of holistic

health. This wellness tourism sector witnessed a growth of 6.5 percent per year from 2015 to 2017, more than doubling the overall tourism growth rate of 3.2 percent (Yeung and Johnston, 2018), and it is expected to grow by approximately US\$ 1.10 trillion by 2028 (Vision Research Reports, 2021). The desire of tourists to mingle with locals and gain knowledge about their culture (Lopes, 2022), enjoy a lush green ecosystem (Nath *et al.*, 2018) to maintain a healthy lifestyle, alleviate stress and anxiety, prevent illness (Smith, and Puczkó, 2008), and improve their health and quality of life has increased the number of such travelers, which is anticipated to boost of the wellness tourism market (Vision Research Reports, 2021).

Wellness retreats are predominantly located in

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therapeutic landscapes, which are the landscapes in which physical and social environments are combined with multiple perspectives to create an environment that may assist in human healing (Moreno-Gesler, 2005). And also provides outdoor activities, specific services (Gordon, 2022), natural landscapes, and organic cuisine (Schedneck, 2021, p. 191-203) along with yoga and meditation (Ashton and Klinhom, 2020). Activities provided at wellness retreats involve physical and psychological activities, such as yoga and meditation, that help individuals achieve harmony between their body, mind, and spirit and enhance their quality of life (Meluch, 2018; Meikassandra *et al.*, 2020).

According to Buzinde (2020), many destinations around the world offer a wide range of wellness services; however, most domestic and international tourists prefer to visit India because of its unique offering systems; tourists also believe that wellness traditions originated in India from ancient times (Bandyopadhyay and Nair, 2019). Ayurveda has been practiced in India for over 5000 years, along with yoga, meditation, and other traditional practices such as naturopathy, pranic healing, and so on (Dubey *et al.*, 2022;) According to the Ministry of Tourism, Government of India (2018), the Government of India is promoting traditional Indian medical therapies and treatments such as meditation, yoga, naturopathy, Siddha, panchakarma, spas, as well as, Ayurveda. Furthermore, the desire for a healthy lifestyle, physical and mental relaxation, spiritual well-being (Sollgruber *et al.*, 2018), and discovering one's inner self and its connection to the environment are major determinants of wellness (Smith and Kelly, 2006), all of which drive tourists to India (Mirando *et al.*, 2022). More specifically, the wellness centers located in Northern India (Indian Himalayan regions) offer lush green forests, a peaceful atmosphere, and all of the natural resources that attract wellness tourists throughout the year. NITI Aayog (2018), in the report "*Report of Working Group II- Sustainable Tourism in the Indian Himalayan Region*" mention that the Indian Himalayan Region's (IHR) tourism industry has expanded steadily and expanded over the past few decades, making it one of the nation's fastest-growing economic sectors and projected to grow at an average annual rate of 7.9% from 2013 to 2023. The various IHR regions, including Jammu and Kashmir, Ladakh, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Sikkim, and others (Charak, 2019), have amazing natural herbs, an ideal holistic

environment, a peaceful living atmosphere, a natural environment, attractive flora, and fauna, and organically validated traditional healing techniques for the mind, body, and spirit (Manhas *et al.*, 2019). However, the Himalayas are renowned as a hub for spirituality and can accommodate visitors in a variety of ways (Manhas and Kour, 2014). They offer a peaceful, natural setting for unwinding away from the crowded daily uneasiness of towns and cities (Thal, *et al.*, 2021; Tooman, 2013). The wellness retreats in IHR provide the ideal destinations for yoga and meditation enthusiasts as their exotic nature and environmental existence inspire the person to understand his or her existence and to enjoy the closeness to nature (Manhas and Kour, 2014).

In light of the aforementioned ideas, the current study attempts to develop a conceptual framework by focusing on how the wellness destination image influences tourists' satisfaction, which influences their decision to return to the same destination. Since there are few studies conducted on the previously stated construct in terms of wellness tourism and none in the Indian Himalayan regions, the current study aims to fill this research gap by determining the relationships between the wellness destination image of a tourist, their satisfaction and revisit intentions to the same destination after visiting the wellness retreats of Indian Himalayan Region (IHR). Finally, propose a theoretical framework that will be useful to service providers and other related stakeholders in the marketing, and management of wellness tourism destinations.

## Literature Review

### Destination Image

Destination image is a subjective concept with different implications depending on one's knowledge, imagination, emotions, or experiences (Gulati, 2019). This supports individuals to plan their trips and thus plays an important role in destination selection (Lee and Back, 2007). Furthermore, the destination image is defined as a mental representation of a destination developed from a set of attributes and is very important in tourism because it influences tourists' behavior throughout the consumption process (Beerli and Martin, 2004; Moreno-González *et al.*, 2020). Moreover, the concept of the destination image is used in tourism to conceptualize tourists' perceptions of a destination. The destination image of a

tourist differs significantly among different destinations and tourists' perceptions of a particular destination may involve unique evaluation in terms of content and context in addition to evaluation drawn from various contexts of association between destination image (Hu, Huang, Chen and Hua, 2022). Gartner (1994) constituted a hierarchical cause-and-effect framework for destination image formation that is comprised of three components: cognitive image, affective image, and conative image (Yang *et al.*, 2022). Numerous researchers endorsed this framework, which was used to gain an understanding of tourists' behavioral intentions (Ghazali and Cai, 2013; Agapito *et al.*, 2013; Kumar *et al.*, 2020; Marine-Roig and Huertas, 2020; Lalicic *et al.*, 2021). This model defined cognitive image as an individual's knowledge and thoughts about an object (Bottini and Doeller, 2020), affective image as their perceptions of it (Marine-Roig and Ferrer-Rosell, 2018), and conative image as their actions in response to this information (Tsai, 2022). Additionally, tourists' perceptions of a destination's image vary depending on where they are in their travels and these perceptions are categorized as pre-visit, post-visit, and during a visit (Fakeye and Crompton, 1991; Zeng and Huang, 2021). Even so, this study focuses on the overall destination image of tourists who visit Wellness retreats in IHR.

### **Tourists' Satisfaction**

satisfaction as a feeling derived from the consumption experiences or after expectations and desires have been met (Bigné, *et al.*, 2005; Huang, Weiler, and Assaker, 2015; Promod and Nayak, 2018). The majority of tourism studies evaluated the notion that tourists' post-consumption behavior includes satisfaction (Nyer, 1998). It is generally the internal feeling and sense of pleasure of an individual after utilizing services or things (Widagdo and Roz, 2021). According to the expectation/disconfirmation theory (Oliver, 1980), satisfaction or dissatisfaction is caused by a mismatch between expectations and perceived performance (Bianchi, 2016). When a destination's performance is perceived to be better or worse than a traveler's expectations, a positive or negative discrepancy will lead to satisfaction or dissatisfaction (Yoon and Uysal, 2005; Bianchi, 2016). However, certain studies constitute satisfaction as a result of actual destination performance evaluations (McDowall, 2010; Eusébio and Viera, 2013; Fallon and Schofield, 2013). Tourist satisfaction, according

to Beard and Ragheb (1980), is a favorable perception of tourists following their participation in leisure or pleasure activities, and it can be appraised by various levels of pleasure (Bayih and Singh, 2020). However, destination satisfaction is crucial for the growth of businesses involved in tourism (Khuong and Ha, 2014). In summary, destination satisfaction is determined by comparing travelers' expectations for their trip, perceptions of the destination, and their travel experiences (Chon, 1989; Chen and Chen, 2010). The quality of the accommodations and service at the destination, the attractiveness of the landscape, the cleanliness of the destination, and, last but not least, the weather or climatic conditions of the destination are all characteristics of the destination that contribute to tourists' overall satisfaction (Vinh and Long, 2013; Um *et al.*, 2006). Similarly, overall satisfaction is defined as the joy experienced by visitors as a result of their holidays in terms of meeting their needs, expectations, and wants (Chen and Tsai, 2007).

### **Tourists' Revisit Intention**

Revisit intention has been regarded as an extension of satisfaction rather than an initiator of the revisit decision-making process (Som *et al.*, 2011). Tourists to a destination consist of both first-timers and repeaters (Alegre and Cladera, 2010) and these together determine the annual number of arrivals (Um *et al.*, 2006). First-timers' revisit intentions may be influenced mainly by destination performance as a whole because of their initial stay (Chi, 2012), while repeaters' intentions may be influenced largely by promotional efforts to recall their positive memory and by disseminated information on new attractions (Wang *et al.*, 2011). According to the theory of planned behavior, an individual's behavior is determined by his or her behavior intention, which is further predicted by the cognitive and affective aspects of the individual's attitude (Ajzen, 1991). As a result, the prediction of a tourist's or visitor's intention to return to a destination is dependent on the tourist's cognitive and affective aspects regarding the destination (Lin, 2013). However, it has been discovered that a relevant model of tourist behavior can support to describe of whether tourists will return to a specific destination (Lin and Morais, 2009; Petrick, *et al.*, 2001; Sparks, 2007; Um, Chon and Ro, 2006). Previous research on behavioral intention identifies several major determinants of revisit intention, including motivation (Li, *et al.*, 2010), satisfaction

(Baker and Crompton, 2000; Petrick *et al.*, 2001), destination image (Li, Cai, Lehto and Huang, 2010; Lin and Morais, 2009), service quality (Baker and Crompton, 2000), and perceived value (Petrick *et al.*, 2001). The present study focuses on the retreat tourists' visit behavior to the IHR wellness retreats.

**Hypothesis and Proposed Framework**

Based on the earlier literature review, the following research hypotheses, and a research framework are developed:

H1: The Overall Destination Image has a positive influence on Tourist Satisfaction.

H2: Tourist Satisfaction positively influences Revisit Intention.



Fig. 1.

**Methodology**

**Sample and Data Collection**

A self-administered questionnaire was used to collect data from both domestic and international tourists. Purposive sampling is used to collect data because it strengthens the specificity of the study and the authenticity of the information and results (Campbell *et al.*, 2020). A total of 384 questionnaires were distributed to retreat tourists who had already completed the meditation and yoga programs available at Indian Himalayan Region retreat centers (Himalayan Shanti Ashram, Dharamsala; Vana Retreat, Dehradun; Mahabodhi International Meditation Centre, Ladakh; Himalayan Yoga Ashram, Rishikesh; Osho Ganga Dham Ashram, Rishikesh) and asked them to fill out the questionnaire. We received 376 valid responses in total, and 9 questionnaires were removed due to missing data hence, a total of 367 data were used for analysis. According to Hsieh, Bloch, and Larsen (1998), a 95.55% response rate is enough in survey-based research. The participants were informed that the information they provided would be kept secret and never disclosed and that we would only use their data for research purposes.

**Measurement Scale**

As this study sample included both domestic and international tourists, the questionnaire was pre-

pared in the English language. The structured questionnaire was comprised of 21 items and four parts. The first section uses a categorical scale to present the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, nationality, income, education, and so on. The remaining three sections of the questionnaire were constructed using a 5-point Likert scale with anchors ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree. The rest of the three dimensions' statements were adapted from previous research. Overall, 4 statements from Fakeye and Crompton (1991), were adopted and modified for the destination image. The satisfaction factor consisted of 7 statements that were adopted and modified (Shavanddasht and Allan, 2019; Chen *et al.*, 2015). Lastly, revisit intention consisted of 3 statements that were adopted and modified (Han *et al.*, 2020; Bayih and Singh, 2020).

Before collecting data for the main survey, we checked the measurement scales among the sample to ensure that the statements are consistent with the current research. And for that, we sent our questionnaire to professors and managers of various wellness retreat centers, made some minor changes, and proceeded with data collection. The collected data was then analyzed using SPSS software. Before conducting the main analysis, we used the Mahalanobis distance square (d2) measure (Mahalanobis, 1936) and the asymmetry coefficients of skewness and kurtosis (Razali and Wah, 2011) to detect potential outliers and verify that the data were normal. We discovered 13 observations with troublesome d2 values, implying the necessity to exempt outliers (p1 and p2 = 0). (Amidan *et al.*, 2005). 354 data were thus used in the main study.

**Data Analysis and Results**

**Demographic Profile of Respondents**

Among the 354 respondents, 204 (57.6%) were males and 150 (42.4%) were females. The majority of tourists (69.8%) obtained services at retreat centers between the ages of 25 and 44, while 11.6% of retreat tourists were between the ages of 15 and 24. Among them 54.2% were unmarried, 44.4% married and only 1.4% were others (separated/divorced). Most of the tourists' completed their graduation whereas 6.2% of tourists were doctorate. Regarding the employment status, most of the tourists were employed, about 52.5% and only 2.3% of tourists retired from their job. The wellness tourists were high-

income tourists and it was about 10 lakh or more, and most tourists were from India (83.9%), while 16.1% were international tourists.

### Reliability and Reliability of Measurement Scale Analysis

The reliability and validity checks of the measurement scale were examined by using SPSS22.0. The factor structure was established after Exploratory Factor Analysis. For the reliability check, Cronbach's alpha was calculated and it was found more than 0.70 which shows satisfactory hence, the internal consistency of the scale items was verified (Kilic, 2016). Further, both convergent validity and discriminant validity were determined to ensure the construct validity (Brahma, 2009). The average vari-

ance extracted (AVE), composite reliability (CR), and factor loadings were used to determine convergent validity (Guerra *et al.*, 2013). The observed variables with factor loadings below 0.50 were deleted from the data analysis (Afthanorhan, 2013). According to Hari *et al.* (2014), Average Variance Extracted ( $AVE \geq 0.5$ ), and Composite Reliability ( $CR \geq 0.6$ ) portray a satisfactory convergent validity for each dimension (Table 2). As per the discriminant validity is concerned (Table 3), Dwi Susanti *et al.* (2019), illustrated that discriminant validity should be  $> 0.70$  and each dimension shows an acceptable validity hence it allows for further hypothesis testing.

In accordance with the descriptive analysis (Table 2) of the dimensions, in terms of overall destination image, tourists agreed that they found a relaxing atmosphere (Mean=4.6893; S.D=.48729), beautiful greenery (Mean=4.6667; S.D=.51786), as well as good facilities at the retreat center (Mean=4.6299; S.D=.52830). The satisfaction dimension showed that tourists' were strongly agreed that the services (e.g., activities, attractions, accommodations, etc.) availed in the wellness retreats were high in quality (Mean=4.7175; S.D=.50424) and problem-free (Mean=4.7401; S.D=.49384), and they enjoyed a lot in the wellness holidays (Mean=4.7994; S.D=.40799). Similarly, the revisit intention dimension showed that tourists highly agreed that they will recommend the same wellness destination to other people (e.g., friends, relatives, families, etc.) (Mean=4.7458; S.D=.44250) and also when they will decide again to go for a wellness holiday, they will choose the same destination again (Mean=4.6977; S.D=.50116).

The model fit and hypothesis were tested by using AMOS 21. The final model fit revealed a good fit for the tested model, where CMIN/DF= 2.713 is found significant as  $p=0.000$ . As a result, the values for a good measurement model are determined by the range of given fit indices where RMSEA=.069, AGFI=0.96, CFI=0.954, NFI=0.929, IFI=0.954, TLI=0.939 (Browne and Cudeck, 1993; Hair *et al.*, 1998). Both H1 and H2 are supported and explained that the overall destination image influences the satisfaction level of wellness tourists and as a result tourist satisfaction depicts revisiting the same destination, H1 ( $\beta=0.285$ ,  $p<0.000$ ), and H2 ( $\beta=0.487$ ,  $p<0.000$ ). Thus, both hypotheses are consistent with the above-mentioned framework.

### Conclusions and Implications

Himalayan ecosystem is well-versed with the nature

**Table 1.** The Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Variables	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	204	57.6
Female	150	42.4
Age (Years)		
15-24	41	11.6
25-44	247	69.8
45-64	60	16.9
Above 65	6	1.7
Marital Status		
Married	192	54.2
Unmarried	157	44.4
Others	5	1.4
Educational Qualification		
High School	17	4.8
Intermediate	27	7.6
Graduation	165	46.6
Post-Graduation	117	33.1
Doctorate	22	6.2
Others	6	1.7
Annual Household Income		
2-4 Lakhs	34	9.6
4-6 Lakhs	45	12.7
6-8 Lakhs	92	26.0
10 Lakh or More	182	51.4
Employment Status		
Unemployment	20	5.6
Employment	186	52.5
Student	34	9.6
Retired	8	2.3
Others	106	29.9
Nationality		
Indian	297	83.9
Foreigner	57	16.1

**Table 2.** Factor Loadings of Measurement Scale

Dimensions	Codes	Items	Loadings	Mean	SD	~	CR	AVE
Overall Destination Image	ODI1	I found a relaxing atmosphere	.797	4.6893	.48729	.847	0.847	0.583
	ODI2	I found a environment soothing	.753	4.6667	.51786			
	ODI3	Clean surrounding are helpful for human wellbeing	.783	4.5876	.54743			
	ODI4	I found good facilities at the center	.848	4.6299	.52830			
Satisfaction	S1	Services at the wellness center (e.g., activities, attractions, accommodations, etc.) were high in quality	.780	4.7175	.50424	.907	0.908	0.586
	S2	Services provided at the wellness center were problem-free	.741	4.7401	.49384			
	S3	I am overly satisfied with my experience on this wellness holiday	.785	4.7486	.44091			
	S4	My experiences on this holiday exceeded my expectations	.710	4.7062	.48620			
	S5	I am happy about my decision to choose this wellness destination	.692	4.7768	.44330			
	S6	I believe that I have taken the right thing by choosing this wellness holiday	.832	4.7429	.44406			
	S7	I have enjoyed a lot myself this wellness holiday	.766	4.7994	.40799			
Revisit Intention	RI1	I will recommend this wellness destination to other people (e.g., friends, relatives, families, etc.)	.806	4.7458	.44250	.844	0.848	0.651
	RI2	I will say positive things about this wellness vacation to other people (e.g., friends and relatives)	.732	4.7486	.44091			
	RI3	If I will decide again to go for a wellness holiday, I will choose this wellness destination again	.861	4.6977	.50116			

Note: ± α=Cronbach alpha, CR=Composite Reliability, AVE=Average Variance Extracted

which serves as a best platform for rejuvenation. It has been discovered that wellness retreat centers in Indian Himalayan Regions provide a pleasant atmosphere and natural biodiversity to the tourists who come for wellness holidays. Most tourists prefer exotic locations where they can practice yoga and meditation and improve mindfulness while remain-

**Table 3.** Discriminant Validity of Factors

RI	ODI	S	
RI	0.807		
ODI	0.458	0.764	
S	0.665	0.504	0.765

ing close to nature. And they believe that retreat centers located at IHR offer such an environment and a unique place for that.

The findings revealed that the overall destination image of retreat tourists has a positive impact on their satisfaction which in turn influences the decision of the tourists to revisit the same destination further for wellness holidays.

As this study proposes a conceptual framework for how destination image influences the satisfaction and behavioral intention of tourists. As a result, the service providers and destination managers work on this suggested theory to attract a greater number of tourists to the destination.

### Limitations and Future Research

This study also has certain limitations, as this study was conducted in a few major wellness retreat centers in Indian Himalayan Regions, as a result, the researchers advised that future research should be done in additional locations. Additionally, this study discovered the relationship between three distinct constructs from the perspectives of tourists; as a result, future studies should be carried out from the perspective of service providers and additional constructs should be tested.

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