

Spiritual Consumerism and Cultural Tourism: Understanding Visitor Motivations in Neo-Vaishnavite Sattras of Majuli, Assam

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Received:
04/08/2025
Revised:
19/08/2025
Accepted:
09/09/2025
Published:
26/09/2025

ABSTRACT

Assam, in Northeast India, has emerged as a significant cultural tourism destination, attracting over 9.8 million domestic and 26,000 international visitors in 2022–23 (Assam Tourism Development Corporation, 2025). Central to this appeal are the Neo-Vaishnavite Sattras, which function as religious, cultural, and community institutions. While these sites hold deep heritage value, limited consumer research has examined how tourists experience and interpret Sattras-based tourism. This study addresses this gap by analysing visitor motivations, satisfaction, and revisit intentions within the context of spiritual consumerism and cultural tourism in Assam. The research focuses on Majuli, the world's largest river island and home to prominent Sattras such as Dakshinpat Sattras, Sri Sri Auniati Sattras, and Garamur Sattras. A structured survey was conducted with 400 respondents, distributed equally across the three Sattras. The sample size was determined using Cochran's formula, calibrated against Assam's annual tourist inflows. Factor analysis revealed two dominant motivation clusters: push factors (spiritual quest, inner peace, identity search) and pull factors (cultural authenticity, Sattras festivals, and performance arts). Regression results showed that motivations had a significant influence on tourist satisfaction ($\beta = .62, p < .001$), while satisfaction strongly predicted revisit intention ($\beta = .57, p < .001$). A comparative analysis found domestic tourists more inclined toward spiritual motivations, whereas international tourists emphasised authenticity and cultural heritage. The findings extend consumer behaviour research by situating spiritual-cultural sites as consumer landscapes. Practical implications include designing differentiated marketing strategies while ensuring sustainable preservation of Assam's Neo-Vaishnavite heritage.

Keywords: Consumer behaviour, cultural tourism, Neo-Vaishnavism, Assam, tourist motivation, spiritual tourism



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INTRODUCTION

Assam has consolidated its position as a high-potential cultural tourism destination over the last few years, with domestic tourist inflows peaking at 9.81 million in 2022–23 and recording 7.04 million in 2023–24, alongside 26,129 international arrivals in 2023–24 (Assam Tourism Development Corporation [ATDC], 2025). Recent assembly disclosures also note that over 24.3 million tourists visited the state across four fiscal years from 2021–22 through 2024–25 (The Economic Times Travel, 2025; The Week, 2025). These figures indicate both the scale of demand and the sector's recovery dynamics after pandemic disruptions.

Within this broader context, Neo-Vaishnavite Sattras, enduring centres of religious practice, performance traditions, craftsmanship, and community life, are pivotal to Assam's cultural identity and its experiential tourism appeal. These living institutions shape visitor expectations of authenticity, spirituality, and

participatory heritage. Yet, despite their prominence in Assam's brand narrative, there is limited consumer-focused empirical work examining how tourists motivate, evaluate, and intend to behave (e.g., revisit, recommend) after Sattras-based experiences. This gap is especially salient for Majuli, the world's largest river island and a focal point for Sattras culture, where footfall data show steady (if modest) volumes at the destination scale, for instance, 14,280 domestic and 600 foreign visitors recorded in 2023–24 (Times of India, 2025).

Responding to this gap, the present study analyses visitor motivations, satisfaction, and revisit intentions associated with three prominent Sattras in Majuli, Dakshinpat, Auniati, and Garamur, framing Sattras visitation as a form of cultural-spiritual consumption. Positioning tourists as consumers of meaning-laden experiences aligns the study with contemporary consumer research and applied

How to cite: Bezborah CJ. Spiritual consumerism and cultural tourism: understanding visitor motivations in Neo-Vaishnavite Sattras of Majuli, Assam. *Adv Consumer Res.* 2025;2(4):4456-4461. psychology, where motivations (push–pull), perceived service/experience quality, satisfaction, and loyalty intentions are treated as interlinked constructs driving behaviour in cultural settings (Crompton, 1979; Gnoth, 1997; Urry & Larsen, 2011).

This research contributes in three ways. First, it updates the empirical base for Assam’s cultural tourism with a focused field setting, complementing state-level aggregates. Second, it applies and tests motivation–satisfaction–loyalty linkages in a spiritual–cultural site type that is underrepresented in consumer research (Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Raj & Griffin, 2015). Third, it offers segmentation-relevant insights by contrasting domestic and international visitors, informing differentiated communication and experience design for Sattras tourism in Assam.

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Tourist Motivation and the Push–Pull Framework

Tourist motivation has long been a central concern in consumer behaviour and tourism studies. Crompton’s (1979) seminal work introduced the push–pull framework, where internal psychological needs (“push” factors such as escape, relaxation, spiritual fulfilment) interact with external destination attributes (“pull” factors such as cultural attractions, festivals, or natural beauty). Subsequent studies refined this framework, emphasising how expectations are shaped by motivational states (Gnoth, 1997). This model remains foundational for understanding why tourists select certain destinations and how experiences translate into satisfaction. In cultural and spiritual contexts, push factors often relate to inner quests for meaning, while pull factors are linked to heritage authenticity, rituals, and performance traditions.

2.2 Consumer Behaviour in Cultural and Spiritual Tourism

Theorists such as Urry and Larsen (2011) highlight that the “tourist gaze” is socially constructed, influenced by culture, identity, and marketing. Tourists consume not just physical attractions but curated experiences that reinforce their sense of belonging, spirituality, or distinction. Spiritual tourism has thus been framed as a form of experiential consumption, where symbolic value is as important as material services (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). In this sense, religious and cultural institutions become “consumer landscapes” that satisfy both hedonic and eudaimonic needs.

Empirical studies confirm that motivations, satisfaction, and revisit intention are closely interlinked in spiritual tourism. For instance, Henderson (2011) examined Buddhist sites in Southeast Asia and found that cultural authenticity and ritual participation were key drivers of revisit behaviour. Similarly, studies on pilgrimage tourism in Europe and South Asia reveal that spiritual identity, perceived authenticity, and cultural performance strongly influence both satisfaction and loyalty (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Raj & Griffin, 2015).

These insights provide a conceptual scaffold for exploring Assam’s Neo-Vaishnavite tourism.

2.3 Cultural Tourism in Assam and Northeast India

Cultural tourism in Assam has received limited academic attention compared to wildlife or eco-tourism. Choudhury (2019) highlights Assam’s potential in leveraging crafts, festivals, and indigenous traditions, but notes significant gaps in consumer-oriented research. Studies of Majuli’s Sattras underscore their dual role as spiritual centres and cultural repositories, offering devotional music (Borgeet), theatre (Ankiya Naat), and craft traditions that appeal to both domestic and international visitors (Baruah, 2016). Yet, most existing literature is descriptive, focusing on heritage preservation rather than tourist behaviour or motivations.

Moreover, official statistics from the Assam Tourism Development Corporation (2025) demonstrate significant inflows of both domestic and foreign tourists, but these reports remain at an aggregate level, without disaggregated analysis of visitor profiles, motivations, or satisfaction. Thus, there is a clear disjuncture between policy-level data and consumer research evidence. Given the importance of Neo-Vaishnavism in Assam’s identity, an empirical study of consumer motivations in Sattras tourism is both timely and necessary.

2.4 Identified Research Gap

Three strands of literature converge on the need for this study. First, while push–pull motivation theory (Crompton, 1979; Gnoth, 1997) provides a robust explanatory framework, it has rarely been applied to Assamese cultural tourism. Second, scholarship on religious tourism (Timothy & Olsen, 2006; Raj & Griffin, 2015) emphasises motivations and authenticity but underrepresents non-pilgrimage spiritual sites like the Sattras. Third, existing Assamese studies (Choudhury, 2019; Baruah, 2016) are largely descriptive, overlooking the consumer psychology dimension. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge these gaps by empirically examining how motivations influence satisfaction and revisit intentions in the context of Majuli’s Sattras, while contrasting domestic and international visitor profiles.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Study Area

The study was conducted in Majuli, a river island in Assam, India, globally recognised for its Neo-Vaishnavite heritage. Majuli is home to more than 20 active Sattras (Vaishnavite monasteries), which continue to serve as religious, cultural, and artistic hubs (Baruah, 2016). For this research, three prominent Sattras were selected as study sites: Dakshinpat Sattras, known for its Raas festival; Sri Sri Auniati Sattras, noted for its antiquities and ritual performances; and Garamur Sattras, recognised for its theatre and music traditions. These sites were chosen due to their cultural significance and higher tourist visibility compared to smaller Sattras.

3.2 Research Design

The study adopts a quantitative survey-based design, supported by limited qualitative observations. A structured questionnaire was administered to collect primary data from visitors at the three Sattras. The questionnaire was divided into four sections: (i) demographic information; (ii) push motivations (e.g., spirituality, peace, identity); (iii) pull motivations (e.g., Sattras festivals, cultural authenticity, performance arts); and (iv) tourist satisfaction and revisit intention.

3.3 Research Objectives

1. To identify the push and pull motivations influencing tourists visiting Sattras in Majuli, Assam.
2. To examine the relationship between tourist motivations, satisfaction, and revisit intention.
3. To compare motivational patterns between domestic and international tourists.

3.4 Research Hypothesis

Based on the objectives, theoretical framework and identified research gap, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- **H1:** Push and pull motivations significantly influence tourist satisfaction in Sattras-based tourism in Assam.
- **H2:** Tourist satisfaction has a positive impact on revisit intention and word-of-mouth promotion.
- **H3:** Domestic and international tourists differ significantly in their motivations for visiting Sattras.

3.5 Sample Size and Justification

Assam recorded 7.04 million domestic and 26,129 international arrivals in 2023–24 (Assam Tourism Development Corporation [ATDC], 2025). Using Cochran's formula for an infinite population with a 95% confidence level and 5% margin of error, the minimum required sample size was calculated as 384 respondents. To ensure robust representation, the sample size was rounded to 400 respondents, proportionately distributed across the three selected Sattras (approximately 133 respondents per site). This distribution balances

statistical adequacy with logistical feasibility in a single-season field study.

3.6 Data Collection Instrument

The questionnaire employed a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) to measure motivations, satisfaction, and revisit intention. Motivation items were adapted from established scales in cultural and spiritual tourism studies. Satisfaction was measured through overall experience ratings, while revisit intention was measured through intention to return and recommend. The instrument was pre-tested with 20 respondents to ensure clarity and reliability.

3.7 Data Analysis

The data were analysed using IBM SPSS 25.

1. Descriptive statistics summarised demographic profiles.
2. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) identified clusters of push and pull motivations.
3. Reliability tests (Cronbach's alpha) assessed scale consistency.
4. Regression analysis examined the influence of motivations on satisfaction and satisfaction on revisit intention.
5. Independent sample t-tests/ANOVA were used to compare the motivations of domestic and international tourists.

RESULTS

4.1 Sample Profile

A total of 400 valid responses were collected, with 52% domestic and 48% international tourists. The average age was 32.4 years ($SD = 8.6$), with 58% of participants being male. Most respondents had at least a graduate-level education (61%), reflecting the niche cultural-spiritual nature of Sattras tourism.

4.2 Factor Analysis of Tourist Motivations

An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) with varimax rotation was conducted on 14 motivation items. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was 0.87, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 1124.52, p < .001$), confirming data suitability.

Table 4.1 Factor Analysis of Motivational Items

Item	Factor 1 (Push)	Factor 2 (Pull)
<i>Spiritual fulfilment</i>	.81	–
<i>Inner peace/escape</i>	.78	–
<i>Search for identity/meaning</i>	.74	–
<i>Personal growth</i>	.69	–
<i>Authentic Sattrra rituals</i>	–	.82
<i>Cultural performances (Ankiya Naat)</i>	–	.79
<i>Raas festival appeal</i>	–	.76
<i>Handicrafts/traditional arts</i>	–	.71

Source: SPSS 25

Eigenvalues suggested a two-factor solution, explaining 61.4% of total variance. Both factors demonstrated high reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$ for Push, 0.84 for Pull).

4.3 Regression Analysis: Motivations to Satisfaction and to Revisit Intention

To test H1 and H2, hierarchical regression models were estimated.

Table 4.2 Regression Results

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable(s)	β	t	Sig.	R^2
<i>Satisfaction</i>	Push motivations	.41	7.54	.000	
	Pull motivations	.38	6.92	.000	.48
<i>Revisit Intention</i>	Satisfaction	.57	10.34	.000	.33

Source: SPSS 25

Interpretation:

- **H1 supported:** Both push ($\beta = .41, p < .001$) and pull ($\beta = .38, p < .001$) motivations significantly influenced satisfaction.
- **H2 supported:** Satisfaction strongly predicted revisit intention ($\beta = .57, p < .001$).

4.4 Comparison of Domestic and International Tourists

Independent samples t-tests were conducted to compare motivations between domestic and international tourists.

Table 4.3 Mean Differences in Motivations by Tourist Type

Motivation Factor	Domestic (M, SD)	International (M, SD)	t	Sig.
<i>Push (spiritual)</i>	4.12 (0.64)	3.47 (0.72)	6.21	.000
<i>Pull (cultural)</i>	3.65 (0.71)	4.28 (0.66)	–7.03	.000

Source: SPSS 25

Interpretation:

- **H3 supported:** Domestic tourists scored significantly higher on push (spiritual) motivations, while international tourists rated pull (cultural authenticity) motivations higher ($p < .001$ for both).

DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine how tourists' motivations influence satisfaction and revisit intention in the context of Neo-Vaishnavite Sattras in Majuli, Assam. The findings confirm that both push (spiritual, psychological) and pull (cultural, authenticity-driven) motivations are significant predictors of satisfaction, and that satisfaction strongly influences revisit intention. Furthermore, the comparative analysis highlights clear segmentation between domestic and international tourists, reinforcing the need for differentiated experience design and marketing strategies.

5.1 Motivational Dynamics in Sattrra-Based Tourism

The factor analysis revealed a two-dimensional motivational structure, consistent with the push–pull advanced by Crompton (1979) and later refined by Gnoth (1997). Domestic tourists were primarily motivated by push factors, such as spiritual fulfilment,

inner peace, and identity-seeking, aligning with prior studies that position religious tourism as a quest for personal meaning (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). International tourists, by contrast, emphasised pull factors such as Sattrra festivals, cultural performances, and heritage authenticity, echoing Urry and Larsen's (2011) notion of the "tourist gaze" as a search for cultural distinctiveness and authenticity. This divergence suggests that Sattrra tourism simultaneously fulfils pilgrimage-like functions for domestic visitors and cultural–experiential consumption for international visitors.

5.2 Satisfaction and Loyalty Outcomes

The regression results show that motivations explained nearly half of the variance in satisfaction, and that satisfaction itself strongly predicted revisit intention. These findings corroborate the established consumer behaviour models where satisfaction functions as a mediator between motivation and loyalty (Yoon & Uysal, 2005). Specifically, the high β -value for satisfaction – revisit intention ($.57, p < .001$) underlines the potential of Sattrra experiences to foster repeat visitation and word-of-mouth advocacy. This is consistent with Henderson's (2011) work on Buddhist

How to cite: Bezborah CJ. Spiritual consumerism and cultural tourism: understanding visitor motivations in Neo-Vaishnavite Sattras of Majuli, Assam. *Adv Consumer Res.* 2025;2(4):4456-4461. cultural sites, which similarly found satisfaction to be a strong driver of loyalty in spiritual-cultural settings.

5.3 Theoretical Implications

The results contribute to consumer research by situating Neo-Vaishnavite Sattras as consumer landscapes, where visitors engage in symbolic consumption that satisfies both hedonic (enjoyment of cultural performances) and eudaimonic (spiritual fulfilment, personal growth) needs. This extends the scope of motivation-satisfaction-loyalty models into a non-Western, community-based religious heritage context, which has been underexplored in the literature (Raj & Griffin, 2015). Moreover, the domestic-international segmentation provides empirical support for Timothy and Olsen's (2006) argument that spiritual tourism is multivalent, appealing to different audiences through different motivational pathways.

5.4 Practical Implications

For Assam's tourism policymakers and Sattrra custodians, the findings have clear managerial significance. Marketing efforts targeting domestic tourists should emphasise the spiritual and identity-affirming aspects of Sattrra experiences, highlighting devotional practices, prayer rituals, and opportunities for inner reflection. Conversely, for international tourists, emphasis should be placed on cultural authenticity, traditional performances, and festivals such as Raas. Tailoring communication strategies to these differentiated motivations can strengthen both satisfaction and loyalty outcomes.

Additionally, maintaining the authenticity of Sattrra rituals and performances is essential, as international tourists' satisfaction is tied to cultural integrity. At the same time, careful visitor management is required to avoid over-commercialisation, which could diminish both spiritual value for domestic tourists and authenticity appeal for international tourists. Thus, Sattrra tourism offers a compelling case for balancing sustainability, authenticity, and consumer satisfaction within cultural heritage tourism.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

This study examined the motivations, satisfaction, and revisit intentions of tourists visiting Neo-Vaishnavite Sattras in Majuli, Assam, with a focus on three prominent institutions, Dakhinpat Sattrra, Sri Sri Auniati Sattrra, and Garamur Sattrra. Using a quantitative framework, the research confirmed that both push motivations (e.g., spirituality, inner peace, identity) and pull motivations (e.g., festivals, performances, authenticity) significantly influence tourist satisfaction, and that satisfaction, in turn, strongly drives revisit intention and word-of-mouth promotion. Moreover, clear differences emerged between domestic and international tourists, underscoring the need for segmented approaches in cultural tourism marketing.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study extends the application of the push-pull motivation framework (Crompton, 1979) and the satisfaction-

loyalty model (Yoon & Uysal, 2005) into a unique spiritual-cultural setting that has been underexplored in consumer research. By treating Neo-Vaishnavite Sattras as consumer landscapes, the research highlights how visitors consume experiences that are simultaneously hedonic (enjoyment of cultural performances) and eudaimonic (spiritual growth, identity affirmation). This duality offers an enriched perspective on consumer psychology in cultural tourism contexts.

From a practical perspective, the findings offer actionable insights for Assam's tourism stakeholders. For domestic tourists, marketing strategies should emphasise the spiritual and identity-affirming dimensions of Sattrra experiences, reinforcing their role as spaces of devotion and inner reflection. For international visitors, communication should highlight cultural authenticity, ritual performances, and heritage craftsmanship, which align with their motivations for authenticity and cultural immersion. At the operational level, Sattrra custodians and tourism managers must also maintain a delicate balance: enhancing visitor experiences while preserving the authenticity and sanctity of Sattrra traditions.

In conclusion, this research positions Sattrra tourism as both a cultural asset for Assam and a rich field for consumer behaviour inquiry. By linking motivations, satisfaction, and loyalty in a culturally distinct setting, the study contributes to advancing knowledge at the intersection of consumer research, applied psychology, and cultural tourism. It also provides evidence-based recommendations for policymakers and practitioners striving to strengthen Assam's tourism identity while safeguarding its intangible cultural heritage.

6.1 Limitations and Future Research

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. The data were collected from a single destination (Majuli) and may not represent visitor experiences across all Sattras in Assam. Furthermore, the cross-sectional design captures tourist perceptions at a single point in time, which may limit understanding of long-term loyalty behaviours. Future research should expand the scope to include other cultural and spiritual sites in Assam, adopt longitudinal designs, and explore qualitative dimensions of meaning-making in Sattrra tourism. Comparative studies with similar cultural institutions in South and Southeast Asia may also yield valuable insights into the universality and particularity of motivational patterns in spiritual tourism.

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