

## THE ROLE OF SPIRITUAL VALUES IN TOURISM: INSIGHTS FROM SLOVAK TOURISTS

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**Abstract:** Tourism is a multifaceted phenomenon encompassing a wide range of cultural, historical, recreational, and spiritual dimensions. One such aspect, the pursuit of spiritual values, plays a significant role in shaping travel motivations. Spiritual tourism extends beyond traditional religious tourism to include opportunities for personal reflection, meditation, and visits to sacred sites. Spiritual tourism incorporates a diverse range of tourism activities such as pilgrimages, festivals, visits to sacred spaces and explorations of religious and cultural heritage. This study examines whether Slovak tourists actively seek spiritual values during their holidays and identifies the demographic groups which are most interested in different types of religious tourist sites. A questionnaire survey was conducted among 752 Slovak respondents to assess their preferences for spiritual experiences while traveling. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and non-parametric statistical methods, including Spearman's rank correlation, the Mann-Whitney test, and the Kruskal-Wallis test. The results offer valuable insights into the motivations of Slovak tourists. Although Slovakia remains a strongly religious country, only about 22% of respondents viewed the pursuit of spiritual elements as an important factor when selecting their holiday destinations, with respondents who rated spiritual values as important in their everyday lives seeking out such experiences more frequently during their vacations. However, religious sites and events attracted both religious and non-religious tourists, although generational differences were identified in terms of the forms which this participation took. Older travelers preferred traditional religious activities, whereas younger travelers were more inclined toward concerts and cultural events with spiritual themes. The study highlights the growing appeal of intangible cultural heritage and the integration of spiritual elements into tourism services. The results offer practical implications for destination marketing and tourism development, suggesting that travel agencies and policymakers should consider the diverse motivations of tourists when formulating tourism products.

**Keywords:** religious tourism, spiritual tourism, pilgrimage sites, travelers, destination marketing, spiritual values

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### INTRODUCTION

Tourism is characterized by a deliberate departure from everyday life, providing individuals with the opportunity to encounter new stimuli and situations. This experience has the potential to transform the unfamiliar into lasting and memorable moments (Agapito & Sigala, 2024; Carvalho & Alves, 2023; Bernaki & Mars, 2023) have suggested that the tourist experience is a complex interplay of cognitive, emotional, sensory and behavioural interactions, and the careful management of these interactions throughout a tourist's journey can enhance their satisfaction and foster the creation of lasting memories. The management of experiences in tourism destinations has been a topic of research for over two decades but, as has been noted by the UNWTO (2023), recent years have seen a growing interest in spiritual heritage, often at the expense of more tangible forms of heritage.

Spiritual values are a key component of cultural heritage, and their integration into tourism strategies can help to enhance the overall visitor experience. This shift has been attributed to the expansion of tourism consumption into areas such as contemporary culture, creativity and cultural experiences derived from local lifestyles, traditions and gastronomy (OECD, 2008; Cordova-Buiza et al., 2024; Chaigasem & Kumboon, 2024).

Despite global trends toward secularization (Jirásek & Štěrbová, 2023; Bachimon & Thery, 2021; Marine-Roig, 2015) and the rise of consumerism (Dimitrovski et al., 2020), there has been a notable increase in demand for tourism activities that incorporate spiritual values, particularly in the realm of religious tourism (Qiu et al., 2022; Iliev, 2020; Collins-Kreiner, 2020; Darabos et al., 2024). As is apparent in Durán-Sánchez et al. (2018) in their bibliometric analysis and more recently in a review by Qiu et al. (2022), religious tourism is now the focus of considerable research within the

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broader context of intangible cultural heritage, in addition to ecotourism, gastrotourism and festival tourism. Several studies have also explored the motivations of pilgrims, revealing that the motivations of such travellers are not only religious but also secular (Jirásek & Štěrbová, 2023; Marine-Roig, 2015). The exploration of spiritual elements in tourism is significant not only within the context of religious tourism but also in terms of the broader products and services which individual destinations can offer. Spirituality is a natural human desire which has long served as a motivation for travel and the search for meaningful experiences (Soares et al., 2024). Furthermore, spirituality in travel is frequently linked to benefits in mental health and well-being, reinforcing its continued importance in contemporary tourism (Heintzman, 2010; Warfield et al., 2014; Kainthola et al., 2023; Klimiuk & Moriarty, 2021).

Although travel with purely spiritual motivations is a less common phenomenon, tourists are often driven by a combination of secular and spiritual interests (Brumec et al., 2023). Major spiritual destinations such as Compostela, Lourdes and Via Francigena attract visitors from around the world, but many spiritual sites of local or national significance are becoming increasingly important, particularly in the changing tourism landscape of the post-COVID era (Olsen & Timothy, 2020; Mróz, 2021). While these smaller pilgrimage sites might not enjoy the global appeal of major pilgrimage destinations, they nonetheless play a crucial role in destination management and the development of sustainable tourism practices (Guriță & Scortescu, 2023; Notarstefano & Gristina, 2021).

The demand for intangible cultural heritage in tourism is also on the rise within the specific context of Slovakia. This Central European country is a still highly religious, and it would therefore be useful to explore the importance of spiritual experiences for Slovak travellers during their holidays. The objective of this paper is thus to investigate whether Slovak tourists seek out spiritual values during their holidays and to identify which demographic groups are most interested in various types of religious tourism sites.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The 1990s saw a significant shift in research into tourism trends with the emergence of discussions into the changing nature of religious travel and the increasing relevance of tourism for religious purposes. Seminal works such as “Forms of Religious Tourism” by Rinschede (1992) and “Religious Sites as Tourism Attractions in Europe” by Nolan and Nolan (1992) laid out the foundational theoretical framework for understanding religious tourism. Rinschede (1992) defines religious tourism as any journey undertaken for religious reasons, either in part or fully, a category which encompasses visits to sacred places, pilgrimage sites or religious ceremonies, festivals and performances.

One particular area of scholarly interest is the motivation and behaviour of religious travellers. Some authors distinguish between pilgrims and tourists, both of whom engage in religious tourism, a distinction which has evolved as secular pilgrimage has developed alongside traditional religious pilgrimages. Hyde & Harman (2011) explored the motivations of non-religious individuals who visit pilgrimage sites in search of personal meaning, while Smith (1992) proposed the “sacred-profane continuum” of acts of pilgrimage, with religiously motivated pilgrimage situated at one end of the spectrum and secular travel at the other. Secular travellers often aim to fulfil more personal needs such as pursuing sports and adventurous activities, wellness or self-reflection. In contrast, religious motivations are typically linked to practices of religious rituals, affirmations of personal and family identity, the fostering of cohesion with a religious community, or the deepening of an individual’s cultural and spiritual context. Several studies have confirmed that the pursuit of peace and happiness through visits to sacred sites is a key motivation driving religious tourism (Olsen, 2014).

However, purely religious or purely secular motivations for travel are generally rare; a combination of both needs is more common, with travellers often motivated by a blend of spiritual and non-spiritual elements (Brumec et al., 2023). It is also important to incorporate the perspectives of local communities, as the experiences which individuals enjoy at sacred sites can vary depending on whether visits are undertaken alone or as part of a group (Shinde, 2021).

Empirical data also indicates differing motivations in the cases of both religious and secular travellers travelling along pilgrimage routes. For example, data from the Associazione Europea delle Vie Francigene (2024), an organization which monitors the Via Francigena pilgrimage route to Rome, reveals a continuous rise in numbers of pilgrims on the route. In 2023, for example, 35% of pilgrims cited religious and personal development factors as motivations for their journeys, while other key motivations recorded in the survey included the desire to share experiences with others (50%), cultural interests (38%) and more general tourist activities (35%). Additional motivations included interest in the environment, sports and gastronomic or wine tourism. The pilgrimage route to Assisi in Italy also experienced a record increase in walking pilgrims in 2022, with Sviluppumbria (2024) reporting a 26% rise over figures from 2021, surpassing even pre-pandemic statistics. While a third of pilgrims cited religious motivations for their decision to journey on the route, other reasons included the search for inner peace and cultural experiences. This route also recorded an increase in participation among younger age groups, reflecting this broader trend in pilgrimage tourism.

### **Sites Typology in Spiritual Tourism**

Academic literature on spiritual tourism has identified a diverse range of activities associated with the topic, with several works developing various typologies with which to define the phenomenon (Ohlan & Ohlan, 2024; Collins-Kreiner & Wall, 2015; Kujawa, 2017; Norman, 2012). These typologies are categorized based on the main activities pursued by tourists:

- Religious rituals,
- Pilgrimages,
- Heritage exploration,

- Spiritual tourism,
- Experiential spiritual tourism.

These categories demonstrate the variety of ways in which spiritual and religious elements are integrated into the tourism experience, with tourists often seeking a blend of both spiritual growth and cultural enrichment.

Recent research by Shinde (2021) has provided a comprehensive overview of trends in religious tourism, focusing on how the field has evolved in response to social shifts and the growing secularism of contemporary society. In addition to traditional sacred sites, new sacralized spaces linked to contemporary spiritual practices have emerged, attracting both religious and non-religious visitors and offering considerable economic and social benefits for local areas. Less formally religious facilities have been developed in these sites to meet the needs of tourists, some of which have been provided by religious organizations and others by local communities.

Religious tourism is often associated with “slow tourism,” but new modes of transportation have altered this dynamic, creating new challenges for managing the influx of visitors (Shinde, 2021). Alongside the spiritual dimension, many studies have examined the economic, sociocultural and environmental impacts of religious tourism on both sacred sites and local populations. Shinde (2021) and other scholars have also addressed the negative impacts of the trend, noting the commercialization of sacred sites, increased pollution, the loss of heritage buildings and the strain placed on local resources due to increased tourism. Bennett-Cook (2022) perceives institutional management as one of the most under-researched areas in tourism literature and calls for more in-depth and comprehensive research into the issue.

### Religious Tourism in Slovakia

The predominant influence of Christianity on the Slovak population is deeply rooted in the country’s historical development and has led to the establishment of numerous pilgrimage sites that continue to play a significant role in Slovak culture. During the 1950s, almost 99.5% of the population identified as Christian, and a strong Christian confession persisted even after several decade active secularism under socialism. The most recent population census in 2021 reveals the continuing influence of Christianity, with 58.9% of the population identifying as members of the Catholic Church, and 55.8% specifically affiliating with the Roman Catholic denomination. Nonetheless, the results also indicated a rising trend of secularization in Slovak society, with almost 24% of the population identifying as non-religious (Figure 1).

The country possesses a well-developed sacral infrastructure, with an average of 1.43 churches per municipality; of Slovakia’s 2,927 municipalities, 2,685 have at least one church (Dzurjanin, 2008). Krogmann et al. (2017) explored religiosity and its impact on tourism in Slovakia, identifying 147 Catholic pilgrimage sites across 137 individual settlements. These sites are widely dispersed, with the highest concentration in Western Slovakia (35%), followed by 33% in Central Slovakia and 31% in Eastern Slovakia. Pilgrimage sites in Slovakia have varying degrees of significance in religious tourism, with the most visited being the Marian pilgrimage sites and those associated with Saints Cyril and Methodius. The majority (90%) of these sites hold local or regional importance, while seven sites are of national significance (Krogmann et al., 2017, Hronček et al., 2022).

Understanding the character of individual pilgrimage sites is crucial for ensuring the optimal development of religious tourism. Under suitable conditions, the sites of national importance in particular can emerge as prominent centres of religious tourism, attracting both devout and secular tourists. Nonetheless, the majority of pilgrimage sites in Slovakia have failed to fulfil their potential, albeit with a few notable exceptions.

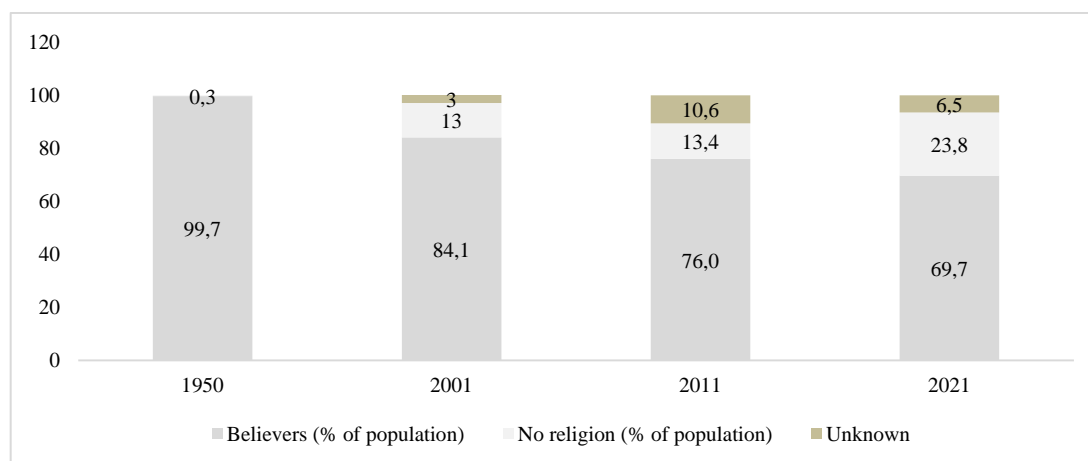


Figure 1. Population distribution by religious affiliation in Slovakia 1950 – 2021

(Source: Census of Population, Houses & Dwellings, 2021, Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, 2023)

### DATA AND METHODS

Our study aims to outline the preferences of respondents regarding the pursuit of spiritual values within the context of their tourist activities and to identify factors associated with their choices. The data for the analysis was obtained through a survey conducted among Slovak travellers between March 2024 and May 2024. The data collection process employed a mixed-method approach, integrating online responses through the Google survey platform and the Computer-Assisted Web

Interviewing (CAWI) method. The questionnaires were available exclusively in digital format, but interviewers were present to provide assistance and facilitate accurate inputs from respondents, particularly older participants, in order to minimize potential misunderstandings and enhance the reliability of the collected data. The data was collected by 97 trained interviewers, and the participants were primarily from the western regions of Slovakia with a strong tradition of pilgrimage (Trnava, Bratislava, Nitra, Trenčín and Žilina). The questionnaire included multiple-choice and scaled questions on a Likert 5-point scale which were formulated to identify interest in specific spiritual elements during holidays.

The survey collected a total of 752 valid responses which were then subjected to statistical analysis. For the purposes of our research, we developed a categorisation of spiritual places that reflected national and regional specificities as well as religious practices in Slovakia. The questionnaire items were organized into the following categories:

- participation in religious services,
- visits to places of worship or pilgrimage sites,
- visits to smaller sacred sites (e.g., Calvaries, exhibitions with spiritual themes, sites related to the lives of saints),
- attendance at cultural events with spiritual elements (e.g., concerts, exhibitions, festivals).

In formulating the survey questions, we considered both the tangible and intangible aspects of cultural heritage. Participation in religious services and attendance at spiritual cultural events emphasized intangible heritage (i.e., events or practices), while interest in visiting churches, pilgrimage sites and smaller sacred buildings highlighted tangible cultural heritage (i.e., physical sites and objects).

### Sample

A detailed description of the respondents who formed the research sample is presented in Table 1. The target group for the survey were tourists over the age of 15, and all age categories were represented in the final results. Notably, there was a higher representation of women among the participants; women comprised 59% of the sample, while men accounted for 41%. In terms of religious affiliation, 70% of respondents identified as Catholics and 13% described themselves as belonging to other religious groups. Questions on the educational background of the participants showed that 66% had completed secondary education and 29% had tertiary education.

Table 1. Baselines of the respondents (Source: authors' own)

Variable	Categories	N	
Respondents		752	
Gender	Men	307	41%
	Women	445	59%
Age	Up to 25 years	257	34%
	26-35 years	78	10%
	36-45 years	94	13%
	46-55 years	127	17%
	56-65 years	45	6%
	66 and more	151	20%
Religion	Catholics	525	70%
	Other religion	94	13%
	No religion	133	18%
Education	Primary	34	5%
	Secondary	499	66%
	Tertiary	219	29%

### Methods

The data obtained through the questionnaire was subsequently processed using a series of standard statistical methods, namely Spearman's rank correlation, the Man-Whitney U test for verification hypothesis concerning the differences between men and women, and the Kruskal-Wallis test for verification hypothesis concerning differences between age groups, educational categories and religious affiliations. The aim of our analysis is to gain a deeper understanding of the importance of spiritual elements in the decision-making processes of Slovak tourists.

In our research we posed several key research questions (RQ):

- **RQ 1:** How important is the search for spiritual elements to Slovak tourists during their holidays?
- **RQ2:** What spiritual experiences do Slovak tourists most often look for during their holidays?
- **RQ 3:** What is the relationship between various socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, education, religion) and the search for spiritual elements during vacations?
- **RQ4:** What is the relationship between the search for spiritual values in daily life and during vacations?

### RESULTS

The analysis of the survey data revealed distinct preferences among Slovak travellers for engaging in spiritually enriching activities during their travels. Several factors were identified as significant in influencing these preferences.

The pursuit of spiritual elements during holidays was not considered a priority for most respondents. When choosing a holiday destination, 22% of respondents take into account the availability of spiritual offerings, but a majority of 51.5% indicated that this was not an essential part of the decision-making process (Figure 2).

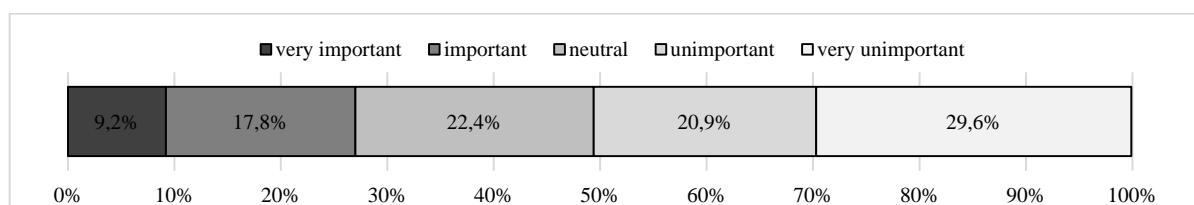


Figure 2. Importance of spiritual elements during holidays (Source: authors' own)

Nonetheless, there was a significant difference in attitudes toward spiritual elements during holidays between individual age groups and religious affiliations. Among younger and middle-aged respondents, approximately 56% of younger and middle-aged respondents did not consider the search for spiritual elements on vacation as significant, with only 21% viewing this feature as important. In contrast, however, older respondents (55+) exhibited a greater inclination towards spiritual engagement during holidays, with 45% seeking spiritual elements and 34% not considering it important (Figure 3). Similarly, 30% of religious respondents considered spiritual elements as important during their vacations, while 47% did not. In comparison, only 12% of non-religious respondents attached importance to spiritual elements, with 76% considering them unimportant (Figure 4).

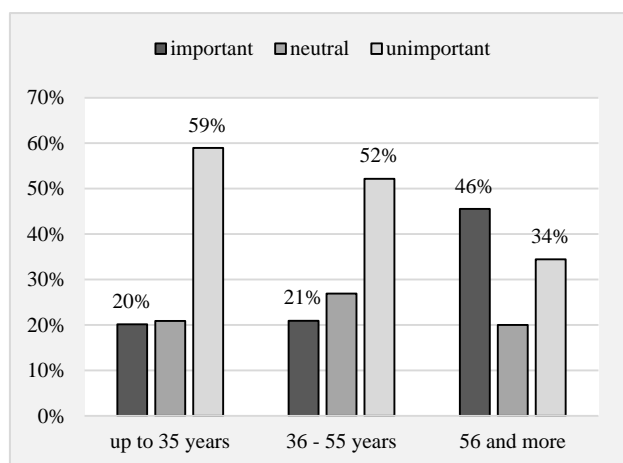


Figure 3. Importance of spiritual elements during holidays according to age of respondents (Source: authors' own)

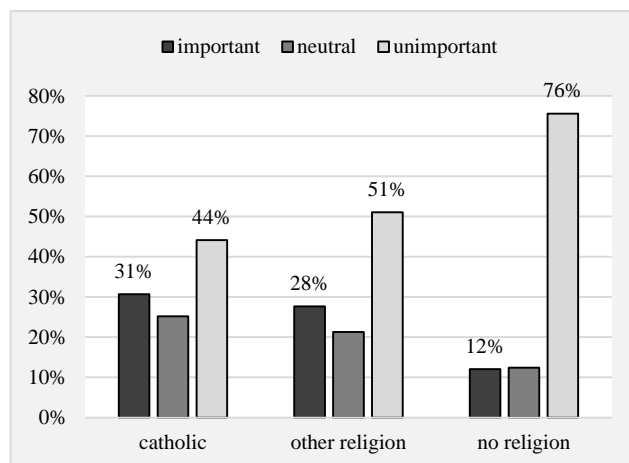


Figure 4. Importance of spiritual elements during holidays according to religious affiliation (Source: authors' own)

No statistically significant difference was observed between men and women in how important they consider the choice of holiday destination depending on the availability of spiritual elements (Mann-Whitney test,  $p$ -value = 0.0904) (Table 2).

Table 2. Importance of the availability of spiritual elements when choosing a holiday destination (Source: authors' own)

	Very important	1	2	Neutral	3	4	Very unimportant	5
Men	7%		12%	19%		18%		45%
Women	10%		13%	17%		20%		39%
All	9%		13%	18%		19%		42%

We then examined which specific spiritual elements were considered important by respondents, and Table 3 presents the relative frequencies illustrating respondents' preferences for seeking various spiritual elements during holidays. Visiting places of worship or pilgrimage sites emerged as the most valued spiritual activity, with 33.4% of respondents expressing a preference for this type of pursuit. Attending a religious service was considered the least important, with 64.6% of respondents indicating it holds little significance during their holidays.

Table 3. Importance of individual spiritual elements during holidays - relative frequency of Likert 5-point scale (Source: authors' own)

During holiday visiting:	Very important	1	2	Neutral	3	4	Very unimportant	5
• Church services	9.8%		9.8%	15.7%		17.7%		46.9%
• Places of worship or pilgrimage	12.0%		21.4%	25.1%		20.3%		21.1%
• Exhibitions with spiritual themes	8.6%		21.8%	25.8%		23.7%		20.1%
• Spiritual concerts, events	6.3%		18.2%	23.1%		22.1%		30.3%

Attitudes toward seeking spiritual elements during holidays differ significantly between various groups of respondents. Table 4 presents the relative frequencies of respondents who identified selected spiritual elements as either very important or important during their holiday. Considerable differences were also observed across age groups, with respondents aged 55 and older placing significantly more importance on spiritual activities compared to those under 55. Among the 55+ age group, 40% of respondents considered attending a religious service as important, 56% valued

visiting a place of worship or pilgrimage site, 53% prioritized visiting an exhibition with a sacred theme, and 34% attached importance to attending a spiritual-themed event during the course of their holiday.

Little variation was apparent between younger (under 35 years) and middle-aged (under 55 years) respondents in terms of the importance they place on spiritual elements. Approximately 25% of both groups ranked visiting places of worship or pilgrimage sites as the most important activity, while attending a religious service was considered the least important activity (13%). In terms of education, respondents with primary education were the most likely to value spiritual elements during their holidays. Regarding religious affiliation, approximately 30% to 38% of respondents who identify with a religion considered it important to seek out spiritual experiences, in contrast to the approximately 15% of respondents without religious affiliations. Gender differences also emerged in the data, with more women than men considering spiritual activities an important element of their holiday plans. Specifically, 37% of women viewed visiting a place of worship or pilgrimage as important compared to 28% of men. Similarly, 34% of women valued visiting an exhibition with a sacred theme compared to 25% of men, while 27% of women prioritized attending a spiritual event compared to 21% of men. Attending a religious service was considered important by an equal proportion of women and men, with about one-fifth of respondents of each gender expressing this view.

Table 4. Relative frequency of respondents by category who ranked visiting selected spiritual elements during their holiday as important (Source: authors' own)

		Frequency (N = 752)	Church services	Places of worship or pilgrimage	Exhibitions with spiritual themes	Events with spiritual content
Age	up to 35 years	335 (45%)	12%	24%	22%	23%
	36 - 55 years	221 (29%)	14%	28%	24%	19%
	56 and more	196 (26%)	40%	56%	53%	34%
Education	primary	34 (5%)	26%	59%	56%	38%
	secondary	499 (66%)	19%	32%	30%	22%
	tertiary	219 (29%)	21%	33%	28%	27%
Religion	Catholic	525 (70%)	38%	38%	35%	25%
	other religion	94 (13%)	34%	34%	29%	32%
	no religion	133 (18%)	14%	14%	12%	17%
Gender	men	307 (41%)	19%	28%	25%	21%
	women	445 (59%)	20%	37%	34%	27%

Note: The percentages in the table represent the proportion of respondents who ranked the spiritual element as very important or important during the holiday.

As was discussed above, the most valued spiritual element of respondents' holiday plans was visits to places of worship or pilgrimage sites. Given this finding, we decided to examine how the significance attached to this activity varied across different demographic groups, including age, religion, education and gender.

As is shown in Figure 5, 56% of older respondents (aged 55 and above) considered visiting places of worship or pilgrimage sites, compared to only 26% of respondents under 55.

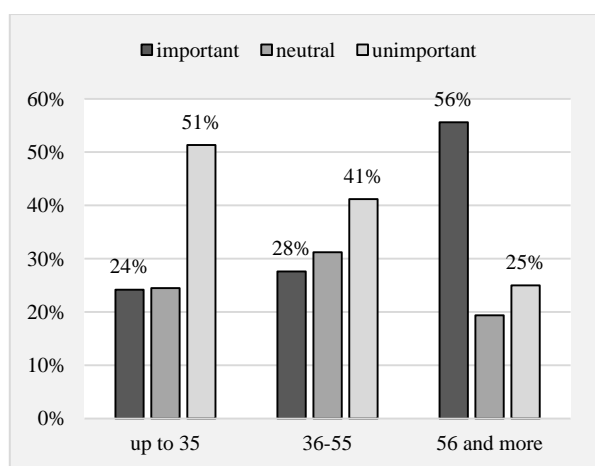


Figure 5. Importance of visiting places of worship during holidays according to age of respondents

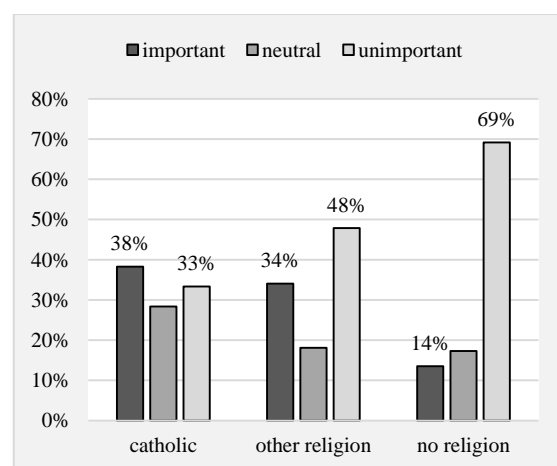


Figure 6. Importance of visiting places of worship during holidays according to religion of respondents

In terms of religious affiliation, 38% of Catholics and 34% of respondents from other religious groups valued visiting places of worship or pilgrimage sites during their holidays, while only 14% of non-religious respondents shared this sentiment (Figure 6). Educational background also played a role in this respect, with 59% of respondents with a primary education comprised largely of secondary school students and retirees in our sample—placing the highest importance on this activity (Figure 7). Lastly, gender differences were clearly evident, with 37% of women and 28% of men considering visits to places of worship or pilgrimage sites an important part of their holiday experience (Figure 8).

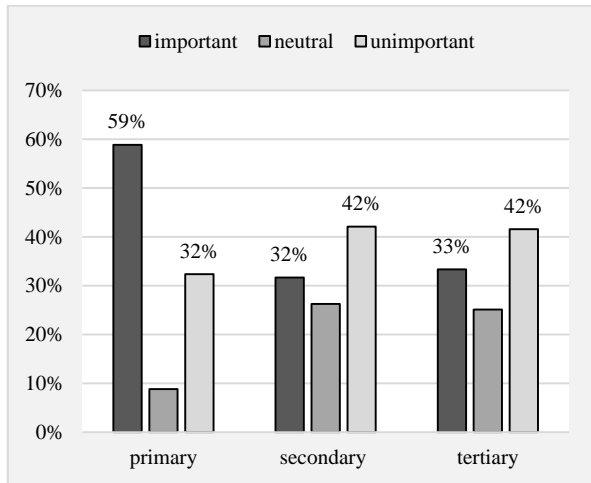


Figure 7. Importance of visiting places of worship during holidays according to education (Source: authors' own)

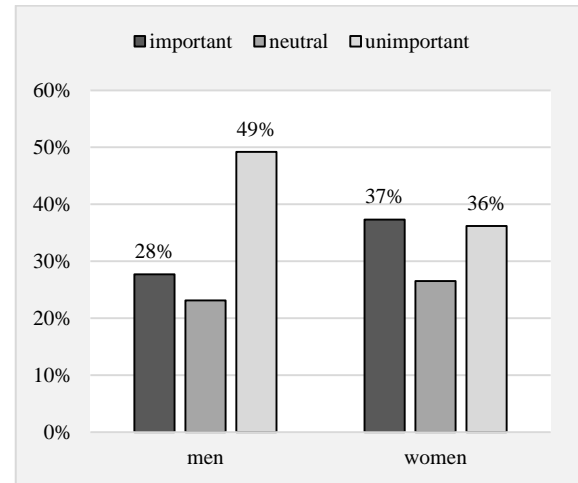


Figure 8. Importance of visiting places of worship during holidays according to gender (Source: authors' own)

We then investigated whether there was any connection between individuals' spiritual behaviours in daily life and during their vacations. The analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between the intensity of seeking spiritual values in everyday life and during holidays; the Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was calculated as  $r_s = 0,793$  ( $p\text{-value} < 0,0001$ ), indicating a strong relationship.

This correlation is illustrated in Figure 9, where a greater emphasis on spiritual values in everyday life corresponds with a greater importance placed on spiritual values during respondents' holidays.

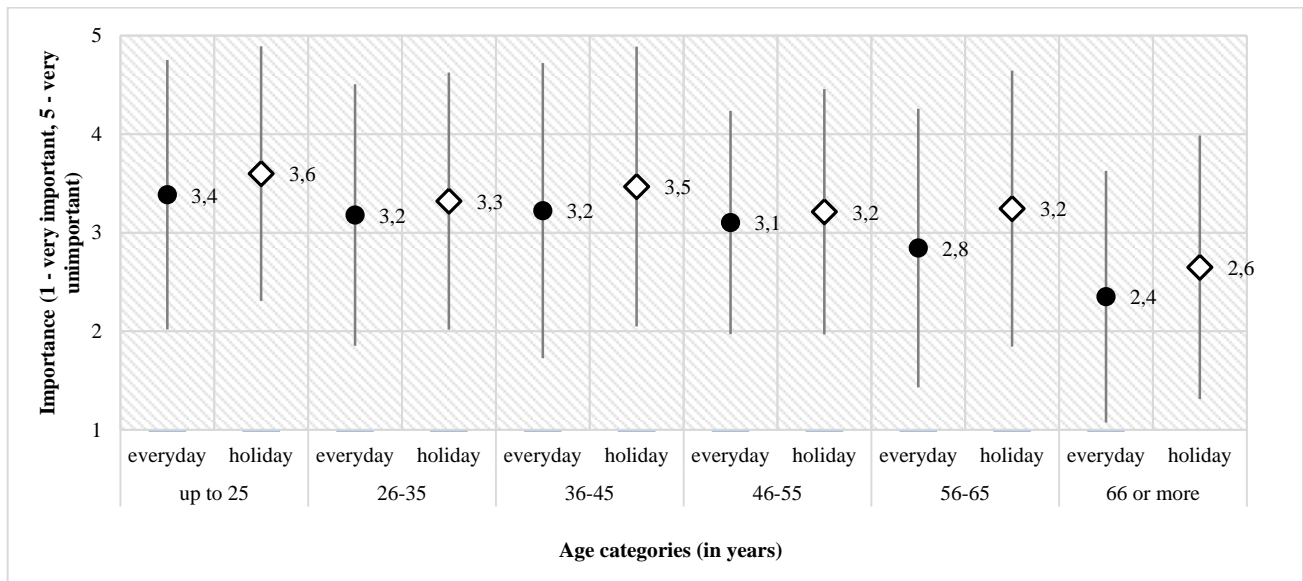


Figure 9. Importance of spiritual values in everyday life and during holidays according to age categories. Mean plot shows the average value  $\pm$  SD (standard deviation) (Source: authors' own)

Additionally, the search for spiritual values was found to vary by age. Figure 9 presents a mean plot showing the average importance of seeking spiritual values in both everyday life and during holidays. For younger and middle-aged individuals, these values tend to be relatively unimportant, with mean values slightly above a neutral score of 3 on the Likert scale, suggesting a tendency toward viewing spiritual values as insignificant.

In contrast, mean values below 3, scores which indicate a greater importance being placed on spiritual values, were observed primarily among older respondents. This demonstrates that older individuals are more inclined to prioritize spiritual values in both their daily lives and during their holidays.

The analysis revealed a statistically significant correlation between an emphasis on spiritual values in everyday life and the inclination to seek spiritual experiences during holidays (Table 5.). More specifically, individuals who prioritize spiritual values in their daily lives are more likely to select holiday destinations that incorporate spiritual elements ( $r_s = 0.615$ ), participate in religious services while on holiday ( $r_s = 0.612$ ), visit places of worship or pilgrimage sites ( $r_s = 0.549$ ), explore exhibitions with spiritual themes ( $r_s = 0.506$ ), or attend cultural events with spiritual content ( $r_s = 0.459$ ). These findings suggest that higher levels of spiritual engagement in everyday life are associated with a greater propensity to incorporate spirituality into holiday activities.

Table 5. Correlation between the importance of spiritual values in everyday life and the search for spiritual elements during holidays (Spearman's Rank Correlation coefficients) (Source: authors' own)

	Importance of spiritual values in everyday life
Choosing a holiday destination according to the availability of spiritual elements	0.615
Attending church services during holidays	0.612
Visiting places of worship or pilgrimage sites during holidays	0.549
Visiting an exhibition with a sacred theme during holidays	0.506
Visiting a cultural event with spiritual content	0.459

When comparing respondents based on age, education, religion and gender in terms of their experience with spiritual values in daily life and their search for spiritual elements during holidays, statistically significant differences were observed across the categories. The results from the Kruskal-Wallis test and the Mann-Whitney test (used for gender comparisons), provide p-values that highlight these differences, as is shown in Table 6. However, when respondents were categorized by education level, no statistically significant differences were found (p-values > 0.05), thereby indicating that education does not significantly influence these particular aspects of spiritual engagement during holidays.

Table 6. Results of Kruskal-Wallis tests or Mann-Whitney tests (p-values) - testing differences between categories of respondents by age, education, religion and gender (Source: authors' own)

Spiritual values in life / Spiritual elements during holiday	Age	Education	Religion	Gender
Importance of spiritual values in everyday life	< 0.001	0.014	< 0.001	0.0002
Importance of spiritual values during holidays	< 0.001	0.004	< 0.001	0.0003
Choosing a holiday destination according to the availability of spiritual elements	< 0.001	0.070*	< 0.001	0.0904*
Attending church services during holidays	< 0.001	0.054*	< 0.001	0.3889*
Visiting a place of worship or pilgrimage site during holidays	< 0.001	0.061*	< 0.001	0.0001
Visiting an exhibition with a sacred theme during holidays	< 0.001	0.004	< 0.001	0.0007
Visiting a cultural event with spiritual content during holidays	0.004	0.001	< 0.001	0.0220

\*NOT statistically significant at 0.05 level of significance

## CONCLUSION

This study contributes to a broader understanding of tourist behaviour by identifying the preferences and influencing factors related to the search for spiritual values among Slovak travellers. The research maps their preferences in choosing destinations which are either related to the practice of spiritual life or which feature spiritual elements as part of their cultural or historical identity.

The analysis yielded several key findings related to the four research questions:

How important is the search for spiritual elements to Slovak tourists during their holidays?

Although Slovakia remains a religious country, only around 22% of respondents considered the search for spiritual elements as a significant factor in choosing a holiday destination, suggesting that spiritual tourism is a niche but notable interest, especially among older tourists. This finding aligns with global trends, where older tourists are becoming more active travellers due to improved health and extended life expectancy.

What spiritual experiences do Slovak tourists most often look for during their holidays?

The findings showed that the presence of spiritual elements was not even a decisive factor in the selection of a holiday destination among groups of tourists who seek them out in their holiday location.

The most sought-after spiritual elements on vacations are visits to places of worship and pilgrimage sites, followed by sacred-themed exhibitions and event with spiritual content. Other elements were a lower priority for most respondents, especially among younger generations.

What is the relationship between various socio-demographic characteristics (gender, age, education, religion) and the search for spiritual elements during vacations?

Socio-demographic factors were found to strongly influence the search for spiritual elements, and the data highlights clear differences in preferences based on age, gender, education and religious affiliation. Older tourists (55+), women, those with a primary education and religious individuals were more likely to seek out spiritual experiences during their holidays. In contrast, younger tourists and non-religious individuals place significantly less importance on such activities.

What is the relationship between seeking spiritual values in daily life and during vacations?

Respondents who placed high value on spiritual elements in their everyday lives were found to be more likely to seek out similar experiences during their vacations, thereby suggesting a consistent approach to spirituality across both everyday life and travel contexts, particularly among older and more religious respondents.

The findings of this study highlight a number of important implications for tourism strategies, particularly regarding the integration of spiritual elements into the product portfolio of tourism destinations. Notably, 22% of tourists consider the availability of spiritual experiences as a key factor in their destination choice, and this thus represents a significant opportunity for tourism product development in Slovakia. However, this potential is not only restricted to religious tourists but also encompasses non-religious individuals across a range of age categories.

The findings support earlier research into the search for spiritual values as part of leisure time activities. The positive correlation between an individual's level of spirituality and their likelihood of seeking out spiritual experiences during holidays underscores the growing role of spirituality in shaping travel behaviours and preferences, suggesting potential



opportunities for tourism strategies which can incorporate spiritual elements that appeal to a broad audience. The results suggest that tourist destinations should develop strategies that cater to the spiritual aspirations of travellers, particularly those of older age groups which may benefit from enhanced services such as improved health facilities and accessibility. However, spiritual tourism can also appeal to younger generations and non-religious travellers, with the results of our study showing that events featuring spiritual content, such as festivals and concerts, are particularly attractive to these groups.

The growing potential for spiritual tourism, especially in destinations such as Slovakia with its rich religious heritage, presents a promising avenue for tourism development. Additionally, the increasing interest in intangible heritage and non-commercialized tourism products supports the shift toward more sustainable practices and the emergence of slow tourism. Effective destination management that respects both local cultures and visitor expectations will be crucial in achieving this balance. Marketing efforts should focus on the authentic presentation and interpretation of cultural specificities, promoting a deeper and more meaningful engagement with the destination's spiritual and cultural heritage.

This study has several limitations which might affect the generalizability of the findings, including the constrained sample size and the limited number of survey questions. Although the sample was not representative, it nonetheless provided valuable insights into the significance of spiritual values at tourism destinations within the Slovak context. Future research should aim to build on these findings by incorporating a broader and more representative sample.

Further research is also needed to explore visitors' experiences in more detail, in particular to distinguish between moments when they are acting as tourists and when they are engaging in religious practices. Exploratory research could also focus on the economic and social impacts of religious sites, as well as the institutional management of religious tourism.

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