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Leveraging Religious Tourism for Domestic Travel

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Abstract

This study explores the potential role of religious tourism in stimulating domestic travel within South Africa. Adopting a quantitative research approach, the study focused on two major religious events held in Gauteng Province. Data were collected from a sample of 271 event attendees using a self-designed survey instrument. The findings indicate that while spiritual motivations were the primary reason for attendance, participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the events and perceived them as offering good value for money. Notably, many attendees also engaged in additional travel-related activities, including spending on food and shopping, as well as visiting friends and relatives. These patterns suggest a clear appetite for domestic tourism linked to religious events. The study concludes that contemporary religious tourism, if strategically integrated into national and regional tourism promotion efforts, holds significant potential as a catalyst for enhancing domestic tourism.

Keywords Domestic travel, motivation, religious tourism, religious tourists

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Introduction

The tourism industry has evolved significantly post-apartheid in South Africa (Henama & Sifolo, 2018). This evolution, along with increased industry knowledge, brought forth the need for a diversified industry that caters for niche markets such as religious tourism (Afferni & Ferrario, 2016; Henama & Sifolo, 2018). As a result, opportunities have emerged to develop and capitalise on previously untapped niche markets (Ivanovic et al., 2009; Rogerson & Collins, 2015). Religious tourism contributes to the overall global tourism economy (Budovich, 2023; Gedecho & Nyikana, 2023; Mzobe & Nyikana, 2024). In support of this, religious tourism is acknowledged as a global sector that generates 18 billion US dollars (Griffin & Raj, 2018; Jha et al., 2024) and attracts an estimated 300 – 330 million religious tourists worldwide annually (Mzobe, 2023). Reflecting this potential, Rogerson and Collins (2015) argue that religious tourism is equally important as any other tourism type in South Africa; accordingly, the socio-economic benefits derived from religious tourism warrant greater academic attention.

Nyaupane (2009) projected a significant growth in religious tourism, an estimation that has been proven to be accurate, given that the sector now ranks as one of the fastest-growing market segments (Henama & Sifolo, 2018; Apleni & Henama, 2021). Correspondingly, there is evidence that confirms the growth, for instance, South Africa has been established as a well-known religious destination of choice on account of the frequent occurrence and hosting of major religious events such as the Night of Bliss, which then represent the expanding presence of religious tourism market (Stadium South Africa, 2018). However, despite the growing body of literature on event tourism in South Africa (see Chinhanga et al., 2024; Daniels & Tichaawa, 2021; Giampiccoli et al., 2015; Lekgau & Tichaawa, 2024; Swart & Maralack, 2020; Tichaawa et al., 2015), religious tourism have been somewhat neglected. Vukonic (1998) previously identified religious tourism as one of the least researched topics of importance in the field of tourism, and yet, religious tourism is still among the least researched topics in tourism, a trend that Nyikana (2017) also pointed out, which persists today.

Within the Southern African context, existing studies (see Apleni & Henama, 2020; Fourie et al., 2015; Muzurura et al., 2022; Nyikana, 2017) that explored religious tourism have largely focused on Zion Christian Church events in Limpopo. However, this focus has arguably limitations, as the destination often has limited infrastructure to support tourism consumption (Kruger & Saayman, 2014), and as a result, does not significantly contribute and or feed extensively into domestic tourism (Henama & Sifolo, 2022; Kruger & Saayman, 2014). Additionally, existing academic research has examined the nature and impacts of religious tourism (Dafuleya et al., 2017; Schofield, 2017), categorised its different types (Esu et al., 2011; Muresherwa et al., 2017), explored its prospects and challenges of religious tourism (see Acha-Anyi, 2018; Ayorekire et al., 2020; Henama & Sifolo, 2018), and motivations for religious travel (Gyekye et al., 2014; Saayman et al., 2014). Limited attention has been given to examining the potential of leveraging religious tourism for domestic travel. This gap is especially relevant in light of the tourism sector's efforts, where domestic tourism has been identified as a key driver for the sector's recovery (Lekgau et al., 2021). Given the strong domestic appeal of religious events in South Africa, this paper sought to investigate the potential of leveraging religious tourism events for domestic tourism and travel.

Literature review

Religious tourism is widely considered as ancient as religion itself, making it arguable the oldest form of tourism (Acha-Anyi, 2018; Hassan et al., 2024; Kim et al., 2020; Luz, 2020; Wall & Mathieson, 2006). Rinschede (1992) defines religious tourism

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as travel connected to religious purposes, originally focused on travel to sacred sites (Foruzan, 2014). However, due to the evolving nature of religious tourism, the definition and meaning have expanded. Contemporary definitions of religious tourism encompass a physical journey to sacred sites and pilgrimage to attend and participate in religious activities (Raj et al., 2015; Rosak-Szyrocka et al., 2023). Traditionally, religious tourism was associated with primary travel to mega-religious sites such as Mecca (Jafari & Scott, 2014). Presently, religious tourism has expanded beyond traditional pilgrimage to mega religious sites, to include the appreciation of art, culture and architecture (Acha-Anyi, 2018). The shift from the traditional context of pilgrimage towards embracing younger participants through the inclusion of educational programs, spiritual recreations and religious festivals (Černá, 2014). Furthermore, modern religious tourism also attracts non-religious tourists since traditional religious sites have evolved from places of worship to also being tourist attractions (Apleni & Henama, 2018).

The importance of religious tourism

Religious tourism has increasingly been recognised as an important segment due to its socio-cultural, spiritual and economic contribution for both participants and the host destination (Adirestuty et al., 2025; Aulet et al., 2021). It not only fosters spiritual fulfilment for religious tourists but also contributes to increased economic conditions for the host destinations (Luz, 2020). The importance of religious tourism is also accentuated since religious travels coexist with tourism activities, meaning that an increase in religious travel results in the consumption of tourism both domestically and internationally (Nkwanyana et al., 2022). Globally, the sector is estimated to generate 20.7 billion US dollars by 2027 (Adirestuty et al., 2025). The significance of religious tourism through events lies in the promotion of repeat visitation, cultural exchange, an increase in revenues, creation of employment opportunities and improvement of infrastructure, especially in local and rural areas where these events are held (Bhandari, 2022; Mzobe & Nyikana, 2024; Nyika et al., 2022). In South Africa, the potential role of religious tourism remains underexplored (Henama & Apleni, 2021); such neglect has led to limited understanding of religious tourism (Gedecho & Nyikana, 2023). Additional religious tourism is considered resilient (Senbeto, 2024). As such, its importance in supporting domestic travel and sustaining local economies is acknowledged.

Religious Tourism in South Africa

Christianity dominates South African religious events (Henama & Sifolo, 2018), with the easter season marking the peak season for religious tourism (Apleni et al., 2017; Mathebula & Smallwood, 2022). The religious landscape is diverse (Schoeman, 2017) with different types of events occurring throughout the year; however, the Zion Christian Church (ZCC) stands out as the most dominant (Mathebula & Smallwood, 2022). The ZCC church is widely regarded as a prime example of African-Indigenous Christianity (Muller, 2015). Established in 1916 by Engenas Lekganyane, who sought to create a church that embraced African heritage in response to white dominated churches (Henama & Sifolo, 2022). The ZCC pilgrimage attracts over 14 million visitors over the easter weekend, who are predominantly domestic (Mathebula &Smallwood, 2022). The pilgrimage to Moria is well planned and developed, producing positive socio-economic benefits for the destination (Apleni & Henama, 2020; Kgruger & Saayman, 2016; Nyikana, 2017; Saayman et al., 2014). Similarly, the Shembe church is one of the oldest African Indigenous Churches in South Africa (Kumalo & Mujinga, 2017; Henama et al., 2018). Famously known as Shembe, the church was founded in 1911 by the church leader Isaah Shembe (Mashabela, 2023). It merges the Zulu cultural traditions with Old Testament Christianity (Sifolo, 2015). The church is estimated to have around five million members (Kumalo & Mujinga, 2017; Sosibo, 2012), its annual pilgrimage to the holy mountains remains their largest religious event, attracting thousands of attendees, including tourists (Nazarite, 2016).

Muslim tourism has also received academic attention (see Battor et al., 2011; Dagnachew, 2020; Eid & El-Gohany, 2014; Elaziz & Kurt, 2017; Kessler, 2013). Reflecting the consistent 6% annual growth rate of the Muslim tourism sector (Tichaawa & Mhlanga, 2018). While traditionally focused on the Hajj pilgrimage, contemporary research now explores broader travel patterns within Muslim tourism (Gedecho & Nyikana, 2023). During the pilgrimage, Muslim tourists prioritise tourism products and services that conform to the Islamic principles, a niche known as halal tourism, which includes prayer facilities and halal food, factors that strongly influence their travel choices (Mohsin et al., 2015; Tichaawa & Mhlanga, 2018). In South Africa, Muslim tourism largely originates from Cape Town, where heritage sites like Robben Island are an important heritage landmark of Muslim travel (Henama et al, 2016). According to the Global Muslim Travel Index (2024), South Africa has consistently been ranked among the emerging Muslim-friendly destinations. A prominent recent development in South Africa's religious landscape is the rise of African Indigenous Churches (Nyika et al., 2022). These emerging churches integrate traditional Christian teachings with African cultural practices (Mashabela, 2023), creating distinctive religious environments that have attracted substantial followings Ahmed & Memish, 2020; Mzobe, 2023). The expansion of AICs reflects the wider social and spiritual dynamics within South Africa (Mzobe & Nyikana, 2024). Their growing prominence as emerging religious movements enriches the country's religious tourism sector by diversifying the range of religious tourism products, appealing to both domestic and international visitors

The intersection of religious tourism and domestic travel

Religion and tourism have been important drivers of domestic travel (Nyikana, 2017; Schoeman, 2017). This view aligns with Griffin & Raj (2017), who argue that religious events are closely linked with domestic travel, often associated with visiting friends and relatives and local attractions. Furthermore, it has been highlighted that religious tourism not only encourages domestic travel but also attracts an influx of tourists to local destinations during low seasons, thus curbing tourism seasonality (Černá, 2014; Henama & Apleni, 2021). Additionally, the deep fascination with religious tourism events is a major contributor

to the rising demand for religious domestic travel (Okonkwo, 2015). The authors Tshipala and Acha-Anyi (2018) and Sebento (2024) add that religious-related travel is less prone to economic distress as religious tourists are devoted to their faith and usually travel despite the state of the economy. Despite the evident potential role of religious tourism in triggering domestic travel, research exploring specifically the two areas within the South African perspective remains limited. Therefore, against this background, the study seeks to address this gap by critically examining the potential role of religious tourism in triggering domestic travel

Study area and methods

The province of Gauteng in South Africa, the smallest by land area, was chosen as the study site due to its status as the economic hub of the country and the continent of Africa at large (Meyer, 2021). The Gauteng province is well-equipped with tourism infrastructure and features world-class tourism attractions, extensive shopping centres, diverse accommodation options and offers a variety of tourism experiences (Ezeuduji et al., 2024). The province is also easily accessible by various modes of transportation (Risimati et al., 2021), which enhances its appeal as a tourism destination. In the context of religious events, Gauteng has a proven successful track record of large-scale religious events. Notable examples of such events include the Night of Bliss crossover event, which took place at the 94,736-seater FNB stadium (Rhapsody Bible, 2018). This reaffirms the province's well-positioned ability to host large-scale religious events (Stadium Management South Africa, 2016), making the chosen study site the most suitable research area for the profiling of visitors attending religious tourism events. The study targeted two religious events within Gauteng, as shown in Figure 1 below, one representing the city of Johannesburg and the other representing the city of Tshwane. Data were specifically collected at the Enlightened Christian Gathering Church in Pretoria and the Revelation Church of God in Soweto; these events are renowned for attracting thousands of visitors (Acha-Anyi, 2018). These rich contexts constituted an ideal setting to explore religious tourists' profiles, motivations for attending religious events and satisfactions with the destination where the events are held, and critically examine the potential role of religious events in triggering domestic travel.

Figure 1. Study area: Pretoria and Soweto Source: Authors' constructs

A quantitative approach was employed for this study; the approach seemed fitting and relevant as it enabled the researcher to collect, analyse and interpret data (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). The broad aim of the study was to examine the potential role of religious tourism in triggering domestic travel; to achieve this, surveys were administered to domestic tourists who attended religious events in Gauteng. The self-administered survey consisted of various closed-ended and 5-point Likert scales, which

allowed respondents to elaborate on their responses, thus providing a deeper understanding of the situation of the intersection of religious and domestic tourism. The survey was divided into five sections, which focused on establishing a brief socio-demographic profile of respondents, determining the behavioural patterns of domestic religious tourists, understanding their spending patterns, and their satisfaction with Gauteng as a religious and domestic tourism destination.

To ensure that the research data instrument adopted was relevant and cohesive, the survey was pre-tested through a pilot study that tested a small population of 15 respondents. Validity and reliability are concepts used to assess the quality and trustworthiness of research findings (Hasan & Rana, 2021). Validity is defined as the trustworthiness and accuracy of the measurement of the findings the study intends to measure (William, 2024). Whereas, reliability refers to the likelihood of the research instrument in producing similar results across different observers, at different times and settings (Mertens, 2024). The pilot study was used to test the reliability and validity of the survey instrument adopted for this study. The responses obtained from the pilot study were excluded from the final dataset. A stratified random sampling method was employed in the selection of domestic religious event attendees, which allowed the researcher to subdivide the population to ensure a balanced presentation of the population sample (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Data collection took place at the two case study sites, namely the 'Night of Open Doors in Pretoria and the 'Night of Renewal ' in Soweto. At the end of data collection, a total of n=271 surveys were collected, this was done with the assistance of trained fieldworkers and randomly selected participants therein, to achieve the required sample. The results were triangulated with existing literature to ensure reliability. Data was analysed using SPSS software (IBM SPSS Statistics 25).

Results

An overview of the socio-demographic profile of respondents

The majority of respondents were women (61.4%), which is consistent with the results of Apleni et al. (2017), who found women to be the majority of respondents in studies related to religious tourism in South Africa. Additionally, 71.9% of respondents cumulatively were between the ages of 25-40 years, a finding that is also aligned with Anofuechi (2015) and Nyikana (2017), whose study revealed that young and middle-aged visitors enjoy and are attracted to religious events. The results indicate that respondents travelled from all provinces to attend these events, underscoring the potential of religious events to trigger widespread domestic travel within the country (Acha-Anyi, 2018). Despite the significant distance between the provinces, the willingness of respondents to undertake the journey speaks to the perceived value and importance of religious events. In terms of the level of education of respondents, the overwhelming majority of respondents (89.4%) possessed a minimum of a secondary education certificate, with many also having undergraduate and postgraduate degrees. Other studies (see Linda, 2023) have noted similar characteristics of religious tourists, suggesting that high levels of education may influence their travel choices and awareness of religious events. Additionally, a cumulative total of 66.5% of respondents were either full-time, part-time or self-employed, whilst 30.5% of respondents were unemployed. Interestingly, most respondents indicated receiving a monthly income that ranged from R1000 to more than R20 000. This finding suggests that respondents have varied sources of income, ranging from bursary/scholarship funding, earnings from casual jobs, to regular salaried income.

Over two-thirds of the respondents had a full-time or part-time affiliation with the church responsible for hosting these events, whilst the rest were visitors. This indicated the ability of religious events to serve as an attraction for individuals who have no permanent affiliation with the organisations, thus increasing domestic travel in the country. This is an especially important consideration, given that collectively, 83% of respondents travelled to and attended other similar events in various provinces of the country, varying from 4 to more than 10 times. This finding is consistent with Hassan et al. (2022), whose study found that the religious tourists repeatedly attended religious events. The pattern of repeat attendance provides evidence that religious tourism has the potential to trigger domestic tourism.

Another interesting finding revealed that religious tourists tend to travel in groups, with family, friends or other church affiliates, a finding that is also aligned with Carvache-Franco et al. (2024). The aspect of group travel is an important one that is linked to religious travel, as the common social connection of the church and shared values unite people (Mzobe & Nyikana, 2024). Since religious tourists often engage in other domestic tourism activities, having groups of people travel can be leveraged to promote and enhance domestic travel overall.

Transportation and accommodation

An analysis of the mode of transportation used revealed that the majority of respondents travelled to the religious event via road, either using public transportation (54.3%) or personal vehicles (31.4%), with a minority opting for air transportation. This finding is consistent with Apleni et al. (2017) and Dafuleya et al. (2017), which highlighted the dominance of these transport modes among religious tourists in domestic travel contexts, given the relative affordability. Having their own transport also enabled the respondents to conveniently engage in domestic tourism activities in the region. Additionally, most respondents indicated that they stayed between one and two nights at the destination. During their stay, religious tourists visited nearby local attractions and spent money on shopping; a trend that was also observed by Acha-Anyi (2018). Thus, this finding emphasises the potential role of religious events/tourism in stimulating domestic tourism. In terms of respondents' accommodation choices, 32.6% of respondents reported that they did not use formal accommodation facilities but instead "slept" on their transportation buses. This finding aligns with Linda (2023) study, which highlighted that some religious tourists used buses as sleeping accommodations. Additionally, 33.1% of respondents revealed that they stayed with friends and family, and the remainder opting to stay in paid for accommodation. The importance of this finding lies in its alignment with with the country's Domestic Tourism Growth Strategy 2012 – 2020, which advocates for extending visiting friends and family into

other forms of travel to create the culture of travel (Department of Tourism, 2021). Furthermore, small accommodation businesses, like guesthouses, bed and breakfasts and self-catering lodges also benefited from religious tourists. Additionally, this finding suggests that respondents were budget-conscious and chose this option to reduce accommodation expenses, especially when attending large religious events where traditional accommodation is limited, expensive or fully booked. This finding aligns with Wlodarczyk & Cudny (2022), who found that religious tourists tend to opt for low-cost travel, and speaks to the larger strategy of tailoring domestic tourism packages, specifically for the profile and characteristics of religious tourists. Therefore, this calls for strategic accommodation planning that prioritises affordable and convenient accommodation options to enhance overall satisfaction with the event, and for the purpose of making related domestic tourism more accessible and affordable to this group of tourists (Kamal & Kashif, 2022; Włodarczyk & Cudny, 2022).

Respondents' motives for attending tourism religious events in Gauteng

Table 1 details respondents' motives for attending religious events in Gauteng. For the purposes of the proceeding discussion, the results for 'strongly disagree' / 'disagree' and 'strongly agree' / 'agree' will be presented collectively. The majority of respondents attended the event to enhance their religious knowledge (99.4%), to fulfil a spiritual need (97.6%), to meet people with similar interests (95.2%), and attended based on the motivations of friends and family (94.7%). Interestingly, 62.3% of respondents were motivated by a variety of tourist attractions they could visit after the event, and over half of the respondents were motivated by the opportunity to friends and family after the event. These findings suggest that travel motivation for religious tourists is closely tied to religion and spiritual fulfilment, and also highlight a potential knock-on effect of religious tourism in stimulating other forms of domestic travel (Nyikana, 2017). Therefore, there is a potential for religion and spirituality to be leveraged as drivers to stimulate domestic travel. To further support this, from the destination's perspective, the majority of respondents indicated that they attended the event due to ease of accessibility to the province, as well as the marketing and promotion efforts made to promote the province. Nyikana (2017) and Linda (2023) similarly noted the importance of tourism infrastructure and strategic marketing to promote religious tourism, emphasising the need for coherent overlap between the various facets for the successful hosting of events, as well as for the promotion and consumption of allied domestic tourism.

Table 1: Respondents' travel motives for attending religious events in Gauteng (n=271 in %)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strong Agree
I wanted to enhance my religious knowledge	0	0	0,6	11,7	87,7
I was motivated by recommendations from my friends and family	2.9	1,2	1,2	14,0	80,7
I wanted to escape from my daily routine	2.9	3,5	14,6	19,9	59,1
Gauteng is easily accessible and convenient	1.2	2,9	7,6	36,3	52,0
Previous successful events have been hosted in Gauteng	0,6	1,8	7,0	23,4	67,3
I wanted to fulfil a spiritual need	0,6	0,6	1,2	12,9	84,7
I responded to the marketing efforts made to promote Gauteng	12,3	18,1	11,7	26,3	31,6
Gauteng is the most recognised religious destination in South Africa	1,2	6,4	32,7	26,9	32,8
I wanted to meet people with similar interests	1,2	0,6	3,0	18,9	76,3
There was a variety of tourist attractions to visit after the event	20,6	5,3	11,8	11,8	50,5
I wanted to visit family and friends after the event	35,1	7,0	4,1	4,1	49,7

Respondents' level of satisfaction with the destination

The results of Table 2 detail the respondents' level of satisfaction with the destination. Similar to the results of Table 1, these results are discussed collectively ('very dissatisfied' / 'dissatisfactory' and 'very satisfied' / 'satisfactory'). According to Pande & Shi (2023), the level of satisfaction with the destination plays a vital role in repeat visitation and overall tourist experience. An analysis of respondents' level of satisfaction with the destination revealed that a significant majority (99.4%) of respondents were satisfied with the religious nature of the event, reaffirming its role as the core reason for travel. This finding suggests a strong satisfaction, which might lead to strong destination loyalty, which is also supported by a previous result of repeat visits by attendees. Satisfaction with the event, its proximity to other activities and the location itself can be harnessed to encourage and promote domestic tourism. This finding is supported by Hassan et al. (2022), whose study focused on the segmentation of religious tourism and found the religious nature of the event to be a significant contributor to satisfaction. Overall satisfaction with the infrastructure was generally positive. A total of 56.8% of respondents were satisfied with the venue. Notably, transportation emerged as a key area of satisfaction, with a total of 92.9% of respondents reporting to be satisfied. This is a noteworthy finding since the majority of religious tourists used public transportation to access the event venue, and suggests the importance of accessibility and logistical planning for future tourism religious events to further encourage domestic travel. Additionally, the cleanliness of the location (91.7%), value for money (89.4%), and a variety of tourist attractions (82.4%) were variables that respondents were satisfied with. Importantly, the prices at the destination emerged as a challenge, with 39.2% of respondents indicating dissatisfaction with the prices. This finding is consistent with Kamal & Kashif (2022), who also found that a major challenge that religious tourists faced was on the unregulated and oftentimes inflated prices of food, goods and services. Thus, addressing this challenge could help encourage religious tourists to stay longer and spend more money at the destination. Nonetheless, in the context of the current study destination, the majority of respondents reported that the destination provided value for money. The above findings paint a picture of the potential role of religious events in triggering repeat domestic travel and tourism.

Table 2. Respondents' level of satisfaction with the destination (n-271 in %)

	Very Dissatisfactory	Dissatisfactory	Neutral	Satisfactory	Very Satisfactory
Safety and Security	11,8	9,5	3,0	36,1	39,6
A clean and well-maintained environment	0	6,5	1,8	57,6	34,1
Friendliness and helpfulness	0,6	0,6	0,6	48,5	49,7
Transport	0	4,7	2,4	44,1	48,8
Accommodation	0	1,2	22,4	23,5	52,9
Availability of information	2,3	20,5	12,3	39,2	25,7
Variety of tourist attractions	0	1,2	16,4	21,1	61,3
Prices at the destination	4,1	35,1	8,8	29,2	22,8
Religious nature of the event	0	0	0,6	29,8	69,6
Event venue	12,3	28,1	2,8	16,4	40,4
Value for money	0,6	0,6	9,4	43,8	45,6

Conclusion and recommendations

Domestic tourism is considered the backbone of South Africa's tourism industry and has been designated as a strategy for the growth of the tourism industry in the country (Department of Tourism, 2023). The purpose of this study was to critically examine the potential role of religious events in triggering domestic travel, using religious tourists' profiles, motivations, spending patterns on accommodation and transportation, and satisfaction levels as key indicators. Previous studies on religious tourism in South Africa have highlighted and recommended the need for integrating religious events and tourism into the broader profile of domestic travel and tourism (see Apleni et al., 2017; Nyikana, 2017; Henama & Sifolo, 2017). The findings further reveal that religious tourists are highly motivated by spiritual fulfilment, social connections and previous positive religious experiences at events. This insutates that positive event experiences encourage repeat visits (Acha-Anyi, 2018), which is a particularly important given that repeat visits and general positive experiences are a key component of domestic tourism (Makhaola & Proches, 2017; Mathebula & Smallwood, 2022).

This study revealed that religious tourists display an appetite for partaking in tourism activities, before, during or after the primary religious event. Some of the main activities that they engage in are leisure activities, VFR and shopping, a common finding noted by others (see Kruger & Saayman, 2016; Nkwanyana et al., 2022). Most respondents spent an average of one to two days at the destination and were repeat visitors, indicating destination loyalty. Religious tourists demonstrated budget-conscious travel behaviour, including opting for public transportation use and lower-cost or informal accommodation. Whilst these findings underscore the need for more travel options to encourage longer visits and consumption at the destination, they also point towards the high potential for the intersection of religious with domestic tourism. Leveraging the various religious events, which are frequented by loyal attendees and occur at various times during the year, can serve as a sustainable and strategic growth pathway for domestic tourism, aiding in diversification of the tourism product landscape. Thus, these findings reaffirm the potential role of religious events as a key driver of promoting broader domestic travel, especially if bundled with other leisure travel packages and as a potential way to reduce seasonality patterns in destinations. Thus, the contribution of this paper is centered on the premise that religious tourism can be leveraged to serve the dual purpose of promoting domestic tourism and driving its growth within the country. It is recommended that further research on different religious events, which occur at different times during the year and within different destinations, be conducted to gain a more comprehensive understanding of how religious tourism can be intersected with domestic tourism.

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