



## Tourism Management Perspectives

Volume 53, September 2024, 101289

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# Exploring the spiritual well-being experiences of transnational religious festival attendees: A grounded theory approach

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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tmp.2024.101289> ↗

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### Highlights

- Constructivist grounded theory method guided this study.
- Participation in religious activities generate multiple spiritual well-being benefits.
- Migration history, religiosity, and festival role determine the well-being outcomes.
- The findings offer insights for event organizers and diaspora policies.

### Abstract

This study aimed to examine the spiritual well-being outcomes that encompass eudemonic well-being elements within transnational religious festivals. Employing a constructivist grounded theory method, the study focused on two UNESCO inscribed transnational religious festivals attended by an Ethiopian diaspora community. Through this research, six dimensions of spirituality were identified: attachment to God, spiritual reward, spiritual growth, self-transcendence, religious knowledge, and sense of meaning. Each of these dimensions contributed to various domains of well-being, such as personal growth, environmental mastery, engagement, and positive relationships. The study also discovered that the experience of spirituality is influenced by individuals' roles and levels of engagement within the festivals. Key activities such as prayer, attending mass services, baptism, participating in religious programs, singing, and volunteering, are instrumental in yielding spiritual well-being outcomes. The findings offer valuable insights for event organizers and destination managers seeking effective strategies for marketing and managing religious-themed migrant festivals.

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## Introduction

Spiritual well-being is a critical domain of quality of life (Uysal et al., 2016) and an outcome of leisure and tourism (Heintzman, 2020). The term “spiritual well-being” is often used interchangeably with spirituality, which is known to bring inner peace, well-being, and improve quality of life (Pilger et al., 2016). Spirituality involves transcendence, meaning, mystery, animating or life-giving, and connecting or unifying experiences (Delgado, 2005). Although past studies have revealed that tourism and events improve participants' spiritual well-being (Christou et al., 2023; Kujawa, 2017; J. Li et al., 2021; Matheson et al., 2014), inadequate attention has been given to this topic in the tourism and event literature. The experience of spiritual well-being, which can be considered as equivalent to eudemonic well-being (van Iwaarden & Nawijn, 2021), has the potential to improve individuals' overall quality of life. This is particularly significant for migrants, as they may face unique challenges in their daily lives in adapting to their new environment (Hassanli et al., 2020). Some studies have indicated that festivals can contribute to enhancing subjective well-being for migrants (Walters & Venkatachalam, 2022). Furthermore, their engagement in religious activities facilitates coping with challenges and generates a sense of spiritual fulfillment (Counted et al., 2020). By actively participating in religious events, migrants can nurture their spiritual well-being, empowering them to navigate the difficulties they encounter, find personal meaning, and establish stability in their new home.

An extensive review of the literature resulted in a number of research gaps, necessitating this research. First, even though past studies have indicated that events allow attendees to

experience spirituality (Higgins-Desbiolles, 2016; Piramanayagam & Seal, 2021), few efforts were made to exclusively identify the spiritual well-being domains experienced in events. This has limited our understanding of what spiritual well-being domains are elicited by events in general, and the activities that lead attendees to experience particular aspects of spiritual well-being. Second, tourism scholars have introduced the concept of spiritual tourism targeting non-religious travel and destinations, to expand our knowledge and discuss how non-religious practices can offer spiritual experiences (Christou et al., 2023; B. Kim, Kim and King, 2016, Kim, Kim and King, 2020; Kujawa, 2017; J. Li et al., 2021). However, the knowledge of how this concept can be applied to event tourism is still under-researched. As a result, tourists traveling to events that are meant to provide them with a spiritual experience and enhance their spiritual well-being may find that their expectations are not met. This could be because the events are not designed in a way that offers a fulfilling spiritual experience.

Third, scholars have highlighted that spirituality makes strong contribution to human well-being (Koenig, 2009). Fostering the spirituality of individuals can enable them to survive and cope with multiple forms of challenges. While festivals have the potential to offer spiritual benefits to attendees (Matheson et al., 2014; Piramanayagam & Seal, 2021), there is currently limited research available on this subject. When considering a specific group such as the diaspora and its festivals, the gap remains very wide. Fourth, given the broader sphere of studying these elements in a single research, scholars have investigated and advised multiple suggestions by focusing on one or some of them. The study on spiritual well-being is now extended to challenge the other aspect of well-being. Even though it focuses on how well we are spiritually, it is attached to other aspect of our life such as physical and mental.

To narrow down these research gaps this research aimed to explore spiritual well-being experiences of transnational religious festival migrant attendees. Additionally, the study aimed to identify the factors that influence each domain of spirituality and explain how participating in religious festivals enhances the spiritual well-being of diasporas. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to expanding our understanding of the spiritual benefits of diaspora festivals, increase our knowledge of spiritual well-being, and provide new insights into the well-being perspectives of contemporary migrants. From a practical standpoint, the study will assist various stakeholders in organizing, supporting, and participating in religious and transnational festivals, helping them achieve their goals and maximize the benefits of these events.

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## Section snippets

### Diaspora, its roles, and tourism

A diaspora is a transnational community comprised of members who migrated from their original place for various reasons, but remain connected with their homeland, and identify each other through ethnic or other entities (Brubaker, 2005; Grossman, 2019). Compared with other groups of migrants such as those of refugees and students, members of a diaspora are assumed to be permanent residents in their host country. Diasporic individuals enjoy relatively more freedom than do other types of...

### Methodology

This study utilized a constructivist grounded theory method because of its advantages in maintaining reflexivity, streamlining the coding process, and allowing for a review of literature before data collection and storytelling (Charmaz, 2008). This method enables the collection and analysis of data to occur simultaneously, incorporates a continuous review of literature throughout the research process, and involves the subjective interpretation of data by the researcher to maintain reflexivity (...)

### Result and discussion

This study constructed six focused codes, which we described as the domain of spiritual well-being experiences elicited in diaspora religious festivals. These were: God attachment, spiritual reward, spiritual growth, possessing good personality, sense of meaning and fulfillment, and religious competency. Each is explained in the following sub-sections....

### Conclusion

This study aimed to explore the spiritual well-being domains of religious and transnational festivals. The research identified six domains of spirituality or spiritual well-being applicable to diaspora religious festivals, as depicted in Fig. 4: God attachment, spiritual

reward, spiritual growth, possessing a good personality, sense of meaning and fulfillment, and religious knowledge. These experiences were evoked through various activities, including attendance, baptism, accompanying arks,...

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Ermias Kifle Gedecho:** Writing – original draft, Visualization, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Seongseop (Sam) Kim:** Writing – review & editing, Validation, Supervision, Conceptualization....

## Declaration of competing interest

None...

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