

The Importance of Religious Festivals to Promote Cultural Heritage in Turkey and India

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Abstract: *Celebrating religious festivals is a public expression of beliefs that strengthens the believer's relationship with God. Different religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, regard celebration as one of the ceremonies that believers are mandated or urged to practice. Religious festivals can boost spirituality among believers and boost the local economy by generating revenue, supporting existing businesses, and encouraging new enterprises to start up. Religious festivals can boost their image and focus as a cultural destination by engaging in promotional activities. This study aims to examine religious festivals in Turkey and India to promote cultural heritage. This research employs a qualitative method by reviewing scientific articles, books, and journals. The result of this study revealed that festivals are an essential form of cultural tourism in which cultural activities are leveraged to generate more visitors. Religious festivals can strengthen their cultural heritage and become more focused as a cultural destination by engaging in promotional activities. While the organizer partly determines a festival's success, if a festival is not effectively organized, the destination will lose revenue and its image. These play a vital role in the cultural development process. In this light, this research will analyze the religious festivals in Turkey and India through cultural heritage and their extent and relationship to tourism development.*

Keywords: *cultural heritage; India; religious festivals; tourism; Turkey.*

Introduction

Religion, particularly monotheistic religions (Judaism, Roman Catholicism, the Protestant Reformation, and Islam), regulates existence on temporary earth while conveying the norms of an endless, everlasting world. It is generally agreed that religion establishes the laws of life in society and aims to allow individuals to think about the possibility and to make various sacrifices. As a result, religion tries to maintain societal order.¹

The term cultural property, which refers to heritage in many countries, first occurs in the Hague Convention of 1954, which deals with the case of armed conflict and safeguarding cultural assets. The Convention declares that all humanity's cultural legacy must be protected. The UNESCO Recommendations on Archaeological Excavations, issued in New Delhi in 1956, specified the criteria that must be applied to any remains whose preservation is of public significance from an artistic and historical standpoint.²

Celebrating religious festivals is a public expression of beliefs that strengthens the believer's relationship with God. Different religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, regard celebration as one of the ceremonies that believers are mandated or urged to practice. "In Islamic languages, the term spirituality is linked to the word *ruh*, which means 'Spirit,' or ma'na, which means 'meaning,' and both seek to enhance the relationship with God and inner beliefs. Islam has urged people to train themselves to do good deeds and emphasizes the importance of preparing for the holidays as a group. These Islamic teachings are intended to assist Muslims in making the most of that sacred time and working to improve their relationship with God. Islamic festivals should be depicted to reflect the splendor, holiness, and joy of these auspicious occasions."³

Turkey ranks 16th in the world for natural and cultural heritage resources. Due to the social and economic consequences they have on the economy play a vital role in the development process. In this light, this research will first discuss Turkey's cultural economics and its extent and relationship to economic development.⁴ Meanwhile, India is a country that has a large number of historic buildings, including World Heritage Sites.⁵ Based on the urgency and relevance of the problem, this study aims to examine Religious Festivals in Turkey and India to Promote Cultural Heritage.

Concept of Cultural Heritage

One of the two or three most complicated words in the English language is culture. Because knowing where and when a word can be used is crucial to deciphering its hidden meanings. It may be worthwhile to examine the etymology of the terms Cultural Heritage and Heritage to

¹ Zuhail Yonca Odabas and Gunnur Ertong Attar, "Celebration of Ramadan: The Case of Turkey," *Leisure Studies in a Global Era*, 2018, 75–94.

² Claudia Melis and Donna Chambers, "The Construction of Intangible Cultural Heritage: A Foucauldian Critique," *Annals of Tourism Research* 89 (2021): 103206, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.annals.2021.103206>.

³ Arwa A. Alghamdi, "Contribution of Visual Representation of Islamic Celebrations," *WIT Transactions on the Built Environment* 197 (2020): 179–86, <https://doi.org/10.2495/IHA200151>.

⁴ Hilal Yıldırım Keser, "Culture Economy for Economic Development: Assessments on Cultural Heritage in Turkey," *European Scientific Journal, ESJ* 12, no. 28 (2016): 38, <https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2016.v12n28p38>.

⁵ A Sharma, "Exploring Heritage of a Hill State—Himachal Pradesh, in India," *AlmaTourism* 12 (2015).

define them properly.⁶ According to Bilore⁷, since it provides a relationship between the past and the present, culture is the foundation of any society. It provides data about native social contexts, lifestyles, and habitats, as well as the capacity to compare and contrast civilizations. Herskovits⁸ expands on the application of a number of cultural qualities, such as cultural context, materials, organizations, and dynamics, to support ethnographic analyses of society in traditional cultural language. Such cultural observations provide information regarding various causal agents, logic, practice, and processes, allowing us to gain a deeper understanding of symbolic actions, enactments, and rituals related to human activity in many parts of the globe.

Nowadays, the importance of historical relics is so clear that nearly every country devotes a significant portion of its budget to their maintenance and exhibition, resulting in millions of enthusiastic visitors. The ideas demonstrate not only the critical importance of cultural legacy of the nation, but also significant role for diplomacy strategy in modern communities.⁹ However, suppose we wish to provide a comprehensive description of cultural heritage. In that case, we must answer two key questions: first, "what is cultural heritage?" and second, "what values urge us to work to preserve it?". The illustration as followed on the Figure 1.

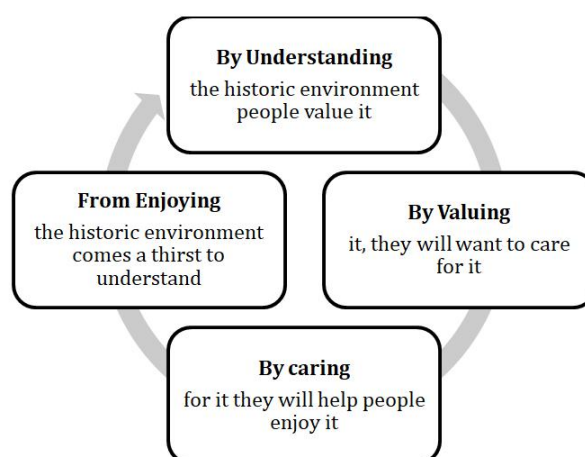


Figure 1. The Heritage Cycle Diagram

Source: Thurley (2005).¹⁰

⁶ Jafar Rouhi, "Definition of Cultural Heritage Properties and Their Values By the Past," *Asian Journal of Science and Technology* 08, no. 12 (2017): 7109–14.

⁷ Soniya Billore, "Cultural Consumption and Citizen Engagement—Strategies for Built Heritage Conservation and Sustainable Development. A Case Study of Indore City, India," *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 13, no. 5 (2021): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13052878>.

⁸ Herskovits, M.J. *The Science of Cultural Anthropology*. New York, 1949

⁹ Rana Singh and Pravin Rana, "Cultural Diplomacy in India: Dispersal, Heritage Representation, Contestation and Development". In: Olimpia Niglio and Eric Yong Joong Lee (eds.) *Transcultural Diplomacy and International Law in Heritage Conservation. A Dialogue between Ethics, Laws, and Culture*. Cultural & Media Studies: Cultural Heritage series. SPRINGER NATURE Pte Ltd. Singapore, Singapore: pp. 231-256, 2021. https://www.academia.edu/44653771/_555_21_Singh_Rana_S_2021.

¹⁰ S Thurley, "Into the Future. Our Strategy for 2005-2010.," *Conservation Bulletin [English Heritage]*, 2005.

Method

This library research employs a qualitative method by reviewing scientific articles, books, and journals. The inclusion criteria used were full text articles in English focusing on religious festivals in Turkey and India. The literature search strategy searches scientific publications through online databases, namely Science Direct, Researchgate, ProQuest, and Google Scholar.

Results and Discussion

Religious Festivals in Turkey

In one essential way, Turkey's religious scene differs from Western Europe: The more educated a Turk is, the less likely he is to visit a mosque. Because educational attainment is linked to family income, while church congregations in Western Europe tend to be middle-class, mosque congregations in Turkey are predominantly lower-middle or working-class or have been until recently. Ramadan fasting is one of Islam's five essential traditions.¹¹

Ramadan is a lunar month that lasts 29 or 30 days and falls in the ninth month. Because the lunar calendar differs from the Gregorian calendar, Ramadan falls 11–12 days earlier each year than the year before. For Muslims all across the world, Ramadan is a sacred month. Muslims believe that Allah (God) is more forgiving during this month than any other year. This concept can be explained in several ways, one of which is that the Islamic holy book, the Quran, was revealed this month.¹²

Its purpose is to educate self-control while providing insight into the lives of the underprivileged. It is the month when social bonds are strengthened, and interpersonal hierarchy is lowered. The idea that everyone is equal in God's eyes is one of early Islam's foundational assumptions and beliefs, and it is especially pertinent during Ramadan. Those who cannot fast during this time (children, the sick, pregnant women, travelers, and so forth) either start fasting after Eid al-Fitr or give money to the destitute. Ramadan is a month of celebration as well. Ramadan comprises different social events that bind Muslims together in the name of Allah because of its religious significance.

According to Odabas and Attar¹³ study, Since the beginning of the millennium, the significance of Ramadan has changed in Turkey. Conservatism has become more evident in public and private realms during the AK Party's period in office. Religion and all religious activities are no longer regarded as 'the other,' as they were in the past when secular government power reigned supreme. Religion was regarded as 'the other' at the time, not considered normal in the public sphere but only proper in the private sphere. This mentality was also present throughout Ramadan. Ramadan celebrations, which are part of Turkish and Islamic traditions, are now more open to the public than they were 15 years ago (Figure 2).

¹¹ Andrew Mango, "Religion and Culture in Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 42, no. 6 (2006): 997–1032, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200600923559>.

¹² Odabas and Attar, "Celebration of Ramadan: The Case of Turkey."

¹³ Odabas and Attar.

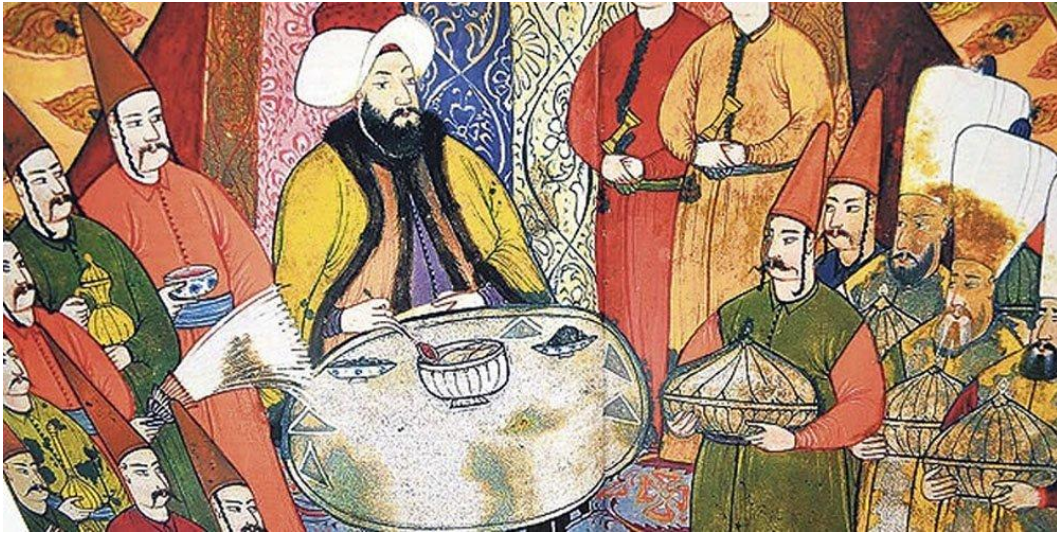


Figure 2. Ramadan Bayram celebrations during Ottoman times are seen in this painting.

Sources: Ergil (2021).¹⁴

Meanwhile, a number of festivities associated with Eid al-Fitr traced back to the Ottoman Empire, some of which are still followed today and others that have tragically faded away. In any case, the holiday will be unusual this year because it has occurred under the country's most severe lockdown since the outbreak began. For those expatriates who are feeling hemmed in Turkey now, Consider how much the Turks are suffering due to their inability to follow their traditional customs during the festival, which is the Turkish equivalent of Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas all rolled into one.¹⁵

Throughout Ottoman times, Celebrations took place in a carnival-like atmosphere throughout Ramadan and the festival that followed it, as seen by baklava parades by janissaries, the Ottoman army's main elite regiment, and street entertainment. In previous Ramadans, however, there were many more beloved and unique rituals. Exhibitions and fairs would be conducted in the courtyards of Istanbul's most important mosques, such as Sultan Ahmet, Hagia Sophia, and Eyüp Sultan, where vendors sell everything. There used to be wonderful oil lantern soaring shows after the nighttime prayer, in which adorned lanterns were hung up between minarets and mosque courtyards.

Religious Festivals in India

The issues that South Asian cities face today are significant. They are also at the forefront of inclusive city planning. With a population of 1.77 billion people, South Asian cities are among the world's largest and densest. India's urban population is anticipated to double by 2050, from 410 million in 2014 to a staggering 857 million. As a result, issues including growing informality, housing constraints, and rising rural-to-urban migration impact the urban fabric. India is one of

¹⁴ Leyla Yvonne Ergil, "Turkish and Ottoman Traditions for Eid Al-Fitr: A Time for Gratitude," Daily Sabah, 2021.

¹⁵ Ergil.

the most common cultural tourist attractions, with rich and diverse histories and cultures that provide possibilities for cultural heritage exploration.¹⁶

The country has recorded 3,969 sites preserved by the Archaeological Survey of India, includes 40 World Heritage sites with 31 cultural properties, eight natural sites, and one mixed site.¹⁷ There are other 14 aspects of intangible cultural activities and manifestations on the UNESCO list (December 2021).¹⁸ However, urban sites and buildings in India considered national, state or local significance are threatened by urban pressures, negligence, vandalism, and destruction. Given the rise of urbanization in India's cities, rehabilitation attempts to protect rich legacy assets are visible at only a few historical sites. Cultural heritage issues have not been mainstreamed into the wider urban planning and development framework.¹⁹

Diwali is India's most important holiday, commemorating the victory of light over darkness, knowledge over ignorance, and good over evil. Diwali is a five-day festival marked by prayer, feasts, fireworks, family gatherings, and charitable giving enjoyed by over a billion people of all faiths throughout India and its diaspora. For some, Diwali also represents the start of a new year. Diwali, on the other hand, is best known as a celebration of lights. Diwali is named from the brightly lit clay lamps that people line up outside their homes to celebrate the festival. It comes from the Sanskrit word Deepavali, which means "lights in a row."²⁰

In the history of Diwali, each religion commemorates different historical events and stories.²¹ Hindus commemorate the deities Rama and Sita's return to Ayodhya after a 14-year exile. They also symbolize Mother Goddess Durga's victory over the monster Mahisha. Sikhs remember Hargobind Singh, the sixth guru, who was released from prison in 1619. Sikhs, on the other hand, had previously celebrated the holiday. The foundation of the Golden Temple in Amritsar, the holiest site in the Sikh faith, was placed on Diwali in 1577. The origin of Jainism is Lord Mahavira. During Diwali, Jains celebrate the time he obtained Moksha (Nirvana, or eternal bliss).

According to Gupta, although this sounds very echoic, the Diwali festival symbolizes goodness that triumphs over evil, hope that triumphs over despair, and prosperity that triumphs over misery. However, some less privileged people in our society for whom Diwali brings jealousy, envy, feelings of inadequacy, frustration, and even death. On the day of Diwali, we received a case involving homicide-suicide (Dyadic death).

¹⁶ Chika Udeaja et al., "Urban Heritage Conservation and Rapid Urbanization: Insights from Surat, India," *Sustainability (Switzerland)* 12, no. 6 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.3390/su12062172>.

¹⁷ "Two New Indian Sites on the UNESCO World Heritage List," UNESCO News (UNESCO, July 27, 2021), <https://en.unesco.org/news/two-new-indian-sites-unesco-world-heritage-list>.

¹⁸ "India - UNESCO World Heritage Convention," UNESCO, accessed February 1, 2022, <https://whc.unesco.org/en/statesparties/in/>.

¹⁹ A Sharma, "Heritage Tourism in India: A Stakeholder's Perspective," *Travelling* 1 (2017): 20–33; M Sharma, "Intangible Cultural Heritage Elements from India Inscribed on UNESCO's List till Date" (New Delhi, 2018); Sharma, "Exploring Heritage of a Hill State—Himachal Pradesh, in India."

²⁰ Amy McKeever, "Diwali Is India's Most Important Holiday and a Celebration of Good over Evil," *National Geographic*, 2021.

²¹ Vaishnav H Gupta S, "Case Report Dyadic Diwali," *J Indian Acad Forensic Med* 30, no. 2 (2018): 75–78.

How Religious Festivals Promote Cultural Heritage?

Culture and culture-based development are acknowledged as significant parts of sustainable development that contribute to building sustainable and resilient cities, gender equality and financial growth opportunities, and inclusive societies.²² Events and festivals enhance the image of tourism destinations by illuminating and amplifying cultural expressions. Events have spread worldwide as an important forum for celebrating tourist destinations' cultural heritage while attracting large crowds. Therefore, festival research and its role in promoting cultural heritage tourism have become a necessary and popular topic of tourist research.²³

Falassi²⁴ defines a cultural heritage festival as "a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which all members of a whole community, united by race, language, religion, historical bonds, and sharing a world view, participate directly or indirectly and to a diverse extent in various forms and a sequence of coordinated events." All parties, including the commercial sector and residents, have different motivations and expectations when staging a festival. Festivals can help to lengthen the tourist season, produce cash for the government, and boost the local economy by generating revenue, supporting existing businesses, and encouraging new enterprises to start up.

Festivals can boost their image and focus as a cultural destination by engaging in promotional activities. While the success of a festival depends on the organizer, if a festival is not effectively organized, the destination loses revenue and its image. Because West Bengal is a region of rich culture, there is huge potential for attracting more tourists to various locations by celebrating numerous festivals. Murshidabad's three-day heritage festivals provide opportunities for socio-cultural and economic benefits, as well as the development of cultural tourism.²⁵ Murshidabad can also be marketed as a heritage tourism destination due to its abundance of cultural resources with historical relevance. Many festival organizers have been observed holding numerous festivals without incorporating local people, even though local people's involvement is crucial to the development of tourism in a place in many ways. If the locals are unable to participate in any manner in any tourism, the destination will suffer.

In terms of culture and tourism, preserving and protecting historical legacy is critical. It will be possible to access all types of information for any work on historical artifacts or regions using the documents retrieved.²⁶ Safranbolu City in Turkey is one of these UNESCO-protected historical zones, including various historical sites as part of the cultural heritage. In 1994, UNESCO added the medieval Safranbolu town to the list of world heritage sites, which has been appropriately preserved since.

At a global level, historical perspectives range from country to country, with each country highlighting a distinct aspect of the past and a distinct sense of cultural legacy. In general, previous values can be determined for a variety of reasons. A review of a single country's cultural

²² Billore, "Cultural Consumption and Citizen Engagement—Strategies for Built Heritage Conservation and Sustainable Development. A Case Study of Indore City, India."

²³ Sinha R & Murdia, "Heritage Festivals: An Important Factor to Promote Cultural Tourism," *A Peer Reviewed Refereed Research Journal* III, no. II (2017): 1–13.

²⁴ Falassi, "Carnival for Elites? The Cultural Politics of Arts Festivals." *Progress in Human Geography*, 1987, 54–74

²⁵ Sinha R & Murdia, "Heritage Festivals: An Important Factor to Promote Cultural Tourism."

²⁶ Deniz ARCA et al., "Development of Web-Based GIS for the Cultural Heritage of Safranbolu, Turkey," *International Journal of Environment and Geoinformatics* 5, no. 3 (2018): 368–77, <https://doi.org/10.30897/ijegeo.457184>.

heritage approaches across history can show how different epochs, regional authorities, socioeconomic situations, and ideologies, among other things, have influenced the contemporary interpretation of historical values. However, relics that are essential or valuable for one society at a certain age may not be necessary or useful for another or the same society later.²⁷

Furthermore, festivals are one of the most effective assets. Festivals aid in the attraction of tourists to a region, the creation of jobs, the selling of local products, the preservation and development of infrastructure and superstructure, the preservation of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, and the maintenance of peace. Large and small festivals, fairs, exhibitions, special events-anniversaries, and festivities create a sustainable city image worldwide, particularly in rural areas. There are countless examples of festivals' value in promoting a city and establishing a city image.²⁸

A study by Rouhi²⁹ revealed that different social values, beliefs, religions, histories, and practices could be linked through World Cultural Heritage. They can also create opportunities to communicate our perspectives and historical origins with others worldwide. The international cultural legacy creates a sense of togetherness and belonging within a community and a new way of knowing ourselves through this process.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that festivals can extend the tourist season, generate revenue for the government, and strengthen the local economy by producing revenue, supporting current businesses, and encouraging new business. Festivals are an essential form of cultural tourism in which cultural activities are leveraged to generate more visitors. Religious festivals can strengthen their cultural heritage and become more focused as a cultural destination by engaging in promotional activities. While the organizer partly determines a festival's success, if a festival is not effectively organized, the destination will lose revenue and its image.

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²⁷ Rouhi, "Definition of Cultural Heritage Properties and Their Values By the Past."

²⁸ Uysal Yenipinar and Ersan Yildiz, "Festivals as Cultural Heritage: The Mesir Festival of Manisa," *Global Issues and Trends in Tourism*, no. November (2016): 233–334.

²⁹ Rouhi, "Definition of Cultural Heritage Properties and Their Values By the Past."

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