

TEMPORAL IMMERSION: A PROCESSUAL CONCEPTUALISATION OF MEANINGFUL TOURISM EXPERIENCES IN A LIVING BUDDHIST MONASTERY

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Abstract:

While meaningful tourism experiences are increasingly understood as emerging through interactions with place, people, and culture, less is known about how they develop within living heritage environments. This study explores how visitors construct meaningful experiences through engagement with the everyday temporal organisation of a living Buddhist monastery. The research was conducted through participant observation, reflexive field journals, and 12 informal interviews with residential tourists during a 22-day qualitative case study at Key Monastery in the Indian Himalayas. Data were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Findings indicate a sequential experiential response beginning with curiosity and observation, followed by learning, participation, adjustment to the monastic rhythm, and reflection and personal response. Rather than emerging solely from individual sacred moments or prolonged isolation, meaningful experiences developed through sustained interaction with recurring temporal practices, including communal routines, shared meals, silence, and the rhythm of monastic life. To conceptualise this process, the study proposes temporal immersion as a lens for understanding how visitors gradually become attuned to the temporal organisation of community life. The study contributes to tourism scholarship by conceptualising temporality as an experiential dimension of meaningful tourism and offering a process-oriented perspective on meaningful experiences in living heritage environments.

Keywords: Temporal immersion, Living heritage, Meaningful tourism, Buddhist monasteries, Qualitative case study

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INMERSIÓN TEMPORAL: UNA CONCEPTUALIZACIÓN PROCESUAL DE LAS EXPERIENCIAS TURÍSTICAS SIGNIFICATIVAS EN UN MONASTERIO BUDISTA VIVO

Resumen:

Si bien las experiencias turísticas significativas se entienden cada vez más como experiencias que surgen de las interacciones con el lugar, las personas y la cultura, se sabe menos sobre cómo se desarrollan en entornos de patrimonio vivo. Este estudio explora cómo los visitantes construyen experiencias significativas mediante su implicación con la organización temporal cotidiana de un monasterio budista vivo.

La investigación se llevó a cabo mediante observación participante, diarios de campo reflexivos y 12 entrevistas informales con turistas residentes, en el marco de un estudio de caso cualitativo de 22 días realizado en el Monasterio de Key, en el Himalaya indio. Los datos se analizaron mediante un Análisis Temático Reflexivo.

Los resultados indican una respuesta experiencial secuencial que comienza con la curiosidad y la observación, seguida del aprendizaje, la participación, la adaptación al ritmo monástico y, finalmente, la reflexión y la respuesta personal. En lugar de surgir únicamente de momentos sagrados individuales o de períodos prolongados de aislamiento, las experiencias significativas se desarrollaron mediante una interacción sostenida con prácticas temporales recurrentes, entre ellas las rutinas comunitarias, las comidas compartidas, el silencio y el ritmo de la vida monástica.

Para conceptualizar este proceso, el estudio propone la inmersión temporal como una perspectiva para comprender cómo los visitantes se van sintonizando gradualmente con la organización temporal de la vida comunitaria. El estudio contribuye a la investigación turística al conceptualizar la temporalidad como una dimensión experiencial del turismo significativo y ofrecer una perspectiva orientada al proceso sobre las experiencias significativas en entornos de patrimonio vivo.

Palabras clave: Inmersión temporal; patrimonio vivo; turismo significativo; monasterios budistas; estudio de caso cualitativo.

1. INTRODUCTION

Many travellers see tourism as a pursuit of experiences that go beyond leisure, to experiences that allow for reflection, meaning-making, and personal well-being. Many travelers are not only looking for places that slow down their lives and adopt new local speeds, but also for a chance to immerse themselves in local lifestyles and to discover themselves and others (Rosa, 2013; Urry & Larsen, 2011). One setting that offers such experiences is the living Buddhist monastery. Unlike traditional touristic environments focused around the itinerary of tourists or commercial interests, monasteries are dynamic religious communities in which daily life is organised around repetitive rituals, communal life, silence, collective work and strict practices. Visitors therefore encounter not only a sacred site but also a living way of life. It is therefore important that we look at how meaningful experiences can be present in the rhythms of daily life of a monastery, when we connect to it through living monasteries. However, an important analytical question has not yet been sufficiently addressed: how do meaningful tourism experiences gradually

develop over a process of sustained engagement in the life of living communities? Previous studies have provided explanations for the results of spiritual and transformative tourism, such as authenticity, personal growth, mindfulness and well-being (Collins-Kreiner, 2010b; Kirillova et al., 2017; Pung & Chiappa, 2020). Research on slow tourism also demonstrates that slowing down modern living leads to higher appreciation of the place and higher level of mindful travelling (Dickinson et al., 2011; Fullagar, 2012), and research on religious tourism emphasizes opportunities in sacred spaces for contemplation, cultural learning, and spiritual engagement (Norman, 2011; Olsen & Timothy, 2006). The perspectives together account for the nature of the meaning, and the potential consequences of tourism, but offer somewhat less explanation for the process of the development of meaning in the experience as it unfolds over time, as a person continues to be a member of the living community's everyday practices.

This gap in analysis is partly due to lack of consideration for temporality as an experiential aspect of tourism. While tourism is a spatial and temporal phenomenon, research is predominantly focused on spatial and temporal aspects of tourism trips, such as their duration, seasonality, itineraries, or travel speed, but not on the experience of alternative temporal organisations of tourism. Temporality is socially constructed in everyday life, structuring the organization of work, interactions and social action (Durkheim, 1915). While contemporary societies have to manage life in fast, linear, and productivity-oriented time patterns (Bauman, 2000; Rosa, 2013), Buddhist monasteries manage life according to repeating cycles of prayer, ritual, communal meals, silence, and collective routines. It is a distinctive temporal organisation where visitors gradually enter, witness and adjust to a different way of living and experiencing time, transforming tourist experiences from temporary to engaged.

The living monasteries thus offer a useful backdrop for the analysis of the development of meaningful tourism experiences. They are places of worship, living heritage and residential communities, as active religious institutions. They are not only of architectural and religious value, but are also of significance in the continuity of the daily activities that enable the life of the monastery. Bells are used to organize daily life, communal meals take the place of personal schedules, ritual repetition frames the day, and silence transforms attention and interaction. These daily temporal routines are not just the context in which spiritual encounters can occur, but they also help visitors to create meaning and to connect with the monastery. This takes the ongoing investigation of authenticity and spirituality in tourism to a new level, bringing analytical focus to the dynamics of the "hows" and "whys" that lead to the gradual attunement of visitors to the temporal organisation of the everyday monastic life.

In this context the present study examines the experiences and slow adaptation of tourists to the daily time-use within a living Buddhist monastery. Meaningful tourism is therefore typically understood through existing scholarship in terms of the conditions and outcomes, while the experiential process of how meaning gradually arises as a result of ongoing participation in their local contexts of everyday life is comparatively less developed. Drawing on a qualitative case study informed by participant observation at Key Monastery, this study examines how visitors gradually become attuned to the temporal organisation of everyday monastic life. It proposes the concept of temporal immersion as a contextually grounded analytical concept that explains how meaningful tourism experiences may progressively develop through sustained engagement with everyday

community practices. The results show that there is a gradual experiential pattern that visitors go through as they begin to lose their sense of the time of day, move towards monastic rhythms, grow more aware of ritual, and eventually look deeper. Existing tourism perspectives help to account for some aspects of this development but account for relatively little of the experiential process by which it occurs. To respond to this analytical gap, the study develops the concept of temporal immersion as a conceptual lens for understanding how visitors may gradually become attuned to and engage with the daily temporal rhythms that structure monastic life. Temporal immersion is not intended to supplant other theories on meaningful or transformative tourism, but rather provides a modest, process-oriented analytical concept for the study of how consumption of the daily life of a place through tourism can facilitate observation, participation, reflection, and meaning-making in places of living heritage.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 From Consumption to Meaningful Tourism Experiences

Over the past two decades, tourism scholarship has increasingly shifted from viewing tourism primarily as consumption towards understanding it as a meaningful human experience. While earlier research focused largely on destination choice, satisfaction, and service quality, contemporary scholarship recognises that travel may foster personal growth, self-understanding, emotional well-being, and deeper connections with people and places (Kim et al., 2012; Kirillova et al., 2017). Tourism is therefore increasingly understood not merely as an escape from everyday life but as an opportunity for reflection, learning, authenticity, and existential fulfilment. This shift reflects broader transformations in contemporary life, characterised by accelerating social rhythms, digital connectivity, and pressures associated with productivity and efficiency (Rosa, 2013). In response, travellers may seek experiences that enable them to disengage from these accelerated temporal regimes and reconnect with slower and more intentional ways of living (Dickinson et al., 2011; Fullagar, 2012). Tourism thus becomes not only spatial mobility but also an encounter with alternative ways of being, relating, and making meaning. Although closely related, meaningful tourism and transformative tourism emphasise different aspects of experience. Meaningful tourism primarily concerns experiences perceived as personally significant, whereas transformative tourism focuses on the enduring personal changes that may arise from such experiences (Kirillova et al., 2017).

Within this context, transformative tourism explains how travel can reshape visitors' perspectives, values, behaviours, identities, and understandings of themselves and the world (Kirillova et al., 2017; Pung & Chiappa, 2020). Meaningful tourism research similarly emphasises authenticity, emotional engagement, personal relevance, and self-reflection as central to significant experiences (Kim et al., 2012). Together, these perspectives have advanced understanding of the conditions and outcomes of meaningful tourism. However, comparatively less attention has been given to the experiential process through which meaning develops during sustained engagement with everyday community life. This distinction is particularly important in living heritage settings, where meaningful experiences may emerge not from singular extraordinary encounters but through repeated participation in the practices and rhythms that organise everyday life. The present study therefore shifts attention from why tourism becomes meaningful or what outcomes it

produces to how meaning progressively develops through sustained engagement with the everyday temporal organisation of a living Buddhist monastery.

2.2 Living Buddhist Monasteries as Spaces of Meaning-Making

Living Buddhist monasteries occupy a distinctive position within tourism because they function simultaneously as sacred places, living heritage, and active residential communities. Unlike heritage attractions that primarily preserve material remains of the past, living monasteries sustain religious practices, communal routines, monastic education, and ritual traditions as part of ongoing everyday life. Visitors therefore encounter heritage not simply as something displayed but as something continuously enacted. In this study, living heritage refers to heritage sustained through the continued practice of cultural, religious, and social traditions by resident communities rather than through preservation of material remains alone. Research on spiritual and religious tourism shows that monasteries attract visitors seeking contemplation, cultural learning, personal reflection, and encounters with alternative ways of living beyond pilgrimage or sightseeing (Collins-Kreiner, 2010; Norman, 2011; Olsen & Timothy, 2006). In such settings, authenticity is generated through engagement with continuing cultural practices rather than through architecture or symbolic representation alone (Wang, 1999; Rickly-Boyd, 2013). Ongoing rituals, communal routines, and disciplined monastic life can reinforce perceptions of authenticity precisely because they continue independently of tourism.

As living heritage, monasteries preserve not only buildings and artefacts but also knowledge systems, ritual practices, social organisation, and intergenerational continuity (Timothy, 2024; UNESCO, 2003). Their significance therefore lies in the continued reproduction of community life through everyday practice. Existing scholarship explains why monasteries may be experienced as sacred, authentic, and meaningful, but provides less insight into how visitors gradually become attuned to the temporal organisation that sustains monastic life. Recurring rituals, communal routines, shared meals, silence, and collective work do not merely constitute an authentic setting; they organise participation, attention, and reflection. Examining how visitors engage with these temporal practices is therefore essential to understanding how meaning develops in living heritage settings.

2.3 Temporality in Tourism: From Context to Experience

Time is fundamental to tourism, yet it has traditionally been examined largely as a contextual or managerial variable associated with trip duration, seasonality, itineraries, and the allocation of leisure time (Urry & Larsen, 2011). Such approaches offer limited insight into how visitors experience and negotiate alternative temporal worlds during travel. The development of slow tourism has challenged this instrumental perspective by emphasising unhurried mobility, longer stays, and deeper engagement with local environments and cultures (Kostilnikova et al., 2022; Wadham & Dashper, 2025; Wulandari & Jayanti, 2025). In the context of increasingly accelerated social life, slow tourism demonstrates how decelerated travel can create conditions for more reflective and meaningful experiences (Beegum A & Aboobaker, 2026; Farkić et al., 2020).

However, travelling slowly is not equivalent to becoming immersed in the temporal organisation of a place. Slow tourism primarily addresses the pace and mode of travel, whereas less attention has been given to how visitors gradually adapt to the rhythms through which communities organise everyday life. A slower visit does not necessarily

involve participation in recurring routines, ritual cycles, or shared temporal practices. Living Buddhist monasteries offer a particularly valuable context for examining this process. Their everyday life is organised through recurring prayer cycles, communal meals, ritual repetition, silence, and collective work. These practices do more than structure daily schedules: they shape how individuals attend, participate, interact, and reflect by bringing visitors into contact with an alternative temporal order (Perriam, 2015). Temporality should therefore be understood not merely as the background of tourism but as an experiential dimension through which meaning can develop. Although existing research has examined the outcomes of slow, spiritual, and transformative tourism, less attention has been devoted to the process through which sustained engagement with everyday temporal practices leads to observation, participation, reflection, and meaning-making. This unresolved question provides the analytical foundation for the present study.

2.4 Research Gap and Conceptual Positioning

Tourism scholarship has developed substantial insights into meaningful experiences through complementary perspectives. Meaningful tourism highlights the characteristics of significant experiences; transformative tourism explains personal change; spiritual tourism examines sacred and existential encounters; slow tourism demonstrates the value of decelerated engagement; and living heritage research emphasises the experiential significance of continuing cultural practices (Dickinson et al., 2011; Kim et al., 2012; Kirillova et al., 2017; Timothy, 2024). Despite these contributions, the experiential mechanism through which meaning progressively develops during sustained participation in everyday community life remains insufficiently theorised. Existing perspectives largely explain the conditions associated with meaningful tourism or the transformations it may produce, but provide less explicit attention to how visitors gradually become attuned to unfamiliar practices and temporal rhythms. In particular, the progressive adaptation of visitors to the temporal organisation of living communities remains underdeveloped as an experiential process. This gap is especially significant in living Buddhist monasteries, where everyday life is structured through recurring rituals, communal routines, shared meals, periods of silence, and collective work. Engagement with these practices requires visitors to adjust not only to different schedules but also to alternative modes of attending, interacting, and reflecting. Meaning may therefore develop progressively through sustained engagement with the temporal organisation of monastic life rather than solely through encounters with sacred spaces or exceptional spiritual experiences.

To address this gap, the present study develops the concept of temporal immersion as a contextually grounded explanation of how visitors progressively become attuned to the everyday temporal rhythms of a living monastery. The concept does not constitute a new tourism typology or seek to replace theories of meaningful, transformative, or slow tourism. Rather, it complements these perspectives by explaining the experiential process through which sustained participation in everyday temporal practices contributes to observation, participation, reflection, and meaning-making. Drawing on ethnographic evidence from Key Monastery in the Indian Himalayas, the study develops a conceptualisation of temporal immersion grounded in this specific living heritage context. Although empirically rooted in one monastery, the concept provides an analytical concept that may inform future research on experiential processes in other living heritage environments.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design drawing on ethnographic methods to examine how visitors developed meaningful tourism experiences through sustained engagement with the everyday life of a living Buddhist monastery. A qualitative case study was appropriate because the phenomenon under investigation was context-dependent and could not be adequately understood through short visits or structured methods. Instead, understanding how meaning developed required prolonged engagement within the natural setting, allowing visitors' experiences to be examined as they unfolded through everyday interactions, participation, and exposure to monastic temporal rhythms (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007; Spradley, 1980).

The study was conducted at Key Monastery in Spiti Valley, Himachal Pradesh, India. The monastery was purposively selected because it functions simultaneously as a living religious community, a centre of monastic education, a heritage site, and a residential tourism destination. Unlike heritage sites primarily encountered through sightseeing or pilgrimage, Key Monastery permits visitors to reside temporarily within the monastery and participate in aspects of everyday monastic life, making it an appropriate setting for examining how meaningful experiences develop through sustained engagement with living heritage practices. Reflexivity was integrated throughout the research process. Consistent with an interpretivist qualitative approach, knowledge was understood as co-constructed through interactions among the researcher, participants, and the field context. Continuous reflexive journaling was used to examine how the researcher's assumptions, position, and ongoing engagement influenced data generation and interpretation, thereby enhancing transparency and analytical rigour (Finlay, 2002).

3.2 Fieldwork and Data Generation

Fieldwork was conducted over 22 consecutive days. Because accommodation within the monastery was limited to residential visitors, the researcher resided in a nearby village and spent each day at the monastery observing everyday activities, participating in communal life where appropriate, attending religious services, and engaging informally with monks and visitors. Participant observation focused particularly on residential visitors, whose experiences could be followed throughout their three-day stays, allowing the researcher to observe how their engagement, interactions, and interpretations evolved over (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007). Data were generated from three complementary qualitative sources. First, participant observation documented visitors' interactions with monks, participation in communal activities, responses to monastic routines, and engagement with the temporal organisation of everyday monastery life. Second, reflexive field notes were written at the end of each day to record observations, contextual details, emerging interpretations, methodological reflections, and the researcher's evolving understanding of the field. Recording observations immediately after each day's fieldwork helped preserve contextual richness and supported subsequent analysis (Emerson et al., 2011). Third, twelve informal ethnographic interviews were conducted with purposively selected residential tourists during their three-day stays. Participants comprised eight international and four domestic visitors, including ten men and two women. Rather than following a structured interview schedule, conversations developed naturally during shared meals, walks, and other everyday interactions. Across participants, discussions broadly

explored visitors' motivations for staying at the monastery, their observations of everyday monastic life, interactions with monks, participation in daily activities, and reflections on their experiences. Most conversations lasted more than 30 minutes, while several continued across multiple encounters during participants' stays. Conversations were not audio-recorded because recording was considered inconsistent with the naturalistic ethnographic setting and could have disrupted the spontaneity of informal interactions. Instead, detailed written accounts were prepared immediately after each conversation, documenting key topics, participants' perspectives, and expressions recalled as closely as possible. These written accounts were subsequently integrated with participant observations and reflexive field notes during analysis (Rutakumwa et al., 2020).

The study prioritised analytical depth rather than numerical saturation. The combination of prolonged engagement, repeated observation of visitors throughout their residential stays, and convergence of patterns across participant observation, field notes, and informal conversations generated sufficient depth to address the research question. All participants were informed about the purpose of the research and participated voluntarily before conversations took place. The integration of multiple qualitative data sources strengthened the credibility of the interpretations by enabling recurring experiential patterns to be examined across complementary forms of evidence (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

3.3 Data Analysis

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021) Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Observational field notes, reflexive journal entries, and written accounts of ethnographic conversations were treated as an integrated qualitative dataset. Analysis began during fieldwork through ongoing memo writing, allowing emerging insights to inform subsequent observation and data generation. Following fieldwork, all materials were read repeatedly and coded inductively using manual coding. Analysis progressed from descriptive coding of observed practices and participants' accounts to more interpretive coding that explored relationships among recurring experiential patterns. Through iterative movement between the empirical material and relevant literature, related codes were progressively refined into broader themes concerning visitors' engagement with the temporal and social organisation of monastic life. This iterative analytical process enabled the interpretation to remain grounded in participants' experiences while being informed by existing conceptual understandings of meaningful tourism and temporality. Across the integrated dataset, a recurring experiential pattern emerged in which visitors gradually became attuned to monastic temporal rhythms through continued observation, participation, and reflection. This interpretive pattern provided the empirical foundation for developing temporal immersion as a contextually grounded conceptual lens. Consistent with Reflexive Thematic Analysis, themes were understood as interpretive constructions developed through the researcher's active engagement with the data rather than objective entities waiting to be discovered (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

3.4 Researcher Positionality and Trustworthiness

Reflexivity was maintained through a journal documenting the researcher's assumptions, interpretations, methodological decisions, and responses to the field setting. This enabled ongoing examination of how the researcher's prolonged engagement influenced data generation and interpretation (Finlay, 2002). Trustworthiness was strengthened through prolonged engagement, reflexive practice, and the integration of

complementary qualitative data sources, including participant observation, reflexive field notes, and ethnographic conversations. Recurring themes were developed through iterative comparison across these sources rather than from isolated observations or individual accounts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The study does not claim statistical generalisability or universal applicability. Instead, it provides a contextually grounded and conceptually coherent understanding of visitors’ experiential meaning-making within a living Buddhist monastery. The findings should therefore be understood as analytically transferable rather than statistically generalisable, with potential relevance to comparable living heritage settings where visitors engage with continuing cultural practices and everyday community life.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 Encountering Everyday Monastic Life

Visitors’ engagement with Key Monastery generally began with curiosity, often directed towards Buddhism, spirituality, the monastery’s reputation, architecture, or landscape. Initial visits were therefore largely observational and resembled conventional sightseeing. However, as the novelty of the physical setting diminished, attention gradually shifted towards the people, routines, and interactions that sustained everyday monastic life.

Visitors increasingly observed monks moving between classrooms and prayer halls, novice monks interacting with one another, communal meals, and the recurring routines that structured the day. Because these activities occurred independently of tourism, they were often perceived as representing the “real” life of the monastery rather than a performance for visitors. As one participant explained:

“At first, I wanted to see the monastery, but then after a while I was more interested in seeing how the monks lived.” (Tourist 2)

Another reflected:

“I realised that this was not just a monastery for tourists or a place for people to look at, it was a place where people lived, studied and prayed every day and that was what I was lucky to be able to see.” (Tourist 7)

Field observations reflected this shift. After photographing the architecture and landscape, visitors increasingly spent time in common areas quietly observing interactions and recurring daily activities. Their focus moved from the monastery as an attraction to the monastery as a living community. This did not constitute a meaningful experience in itself but represented a change in orientation: curiosity increasingly directed attention towards the social and temporal practices through which monastic life was sustained.

4.2 Learning through Everyday Monastic Practices

Following this initial shift in attention, visitors gradually learned about monastic life through repeated observation and informal interaction rather than formal instruction. Knowledge emerged from observing patterns of study, prayer, work, meals, and social relationships. In this sense, the monastery functioned not simply as a sacred site but as a living environment in which understanding developed through everyday participation.

Visitors contrasted this experience with museums and heritage sites, where knowledge is commonly communicated through guides, displays, and interpretive materials. At Key

Monastery, they spent extended periods observing monks moving between prayer halls and classrooms, participating in communal meals, chanting, and interacting across generations. With repeated exposure, ordinary routines began to acquire greater significance.

One participant stated:

“After a few days watching the monks, I began to get the idea of why they did all their duties daily and it was not repetitive, it was part of their living.” (Tourist 6)

Another observed:

“The learning that takes place is more from being quiet and observing than it is from reading the information boards or listening to a guide.” (Tourist 11)

Field observations similarly indicated that visitors increasingly remained in communal spaces without actively seeking new attractions. Through observing prayer, bells, shared meals, study, maintenance work, and informal interactions, they gradually interpreted everyday practices as expressions of discipline, simplicity, communal responsibility, and shared values. The depth of this learning varied. Visitors with longer or more engaged stays developed more substantive understandings of monastic life, whereas those with shorter stays or stronger sightseeing orientations remained more focused on its visible features. Thus, experiential learning depended not simply on physical presence but on the quality and continuity of engagement.

4.3 Adapting to the Rhythms of Everyday Monastic Life

With continued engagement, some visitors gradually moved from observation towards participation in the temporal rhythms of monastic life. Although they did not become members of the monastic community, their daily routines increasingly became organised around communal meals, prayer sessions, periods of silence, informal interactions, and the recurring activities of the monastery rather than predetermined sightseeing itineraries.

This adaptation was gradual and generally unintentional. As one visitor explained:

“This was my first day and I didn't think about what I was going to see next, I just went with the flow of the place.” (Tourist 5)

Another reflected:

“Life here is easy, there is no pressure to do something at all time. After some time, I also ceased to take the watch too often.” (Tourist 9)

Field observations indicated increasing periods of quiet observation in communal areas, participation in meals, informal conversations with monks, and time spent in the courtyard after organised activities. Visitors increasingly allowed the monastery's routines to shape the timing of their day rather than attempting to maximise the number of attractions they could experience.

As familiarity developed, conversations also moved beyond general questions about the monastery towards monastic education, daily duties, Buddhist practice, and personal experiences. These interactions were spontaneous and developed through repeated contact rather than formal interpretation.

Temporal adaptation did not require visitors to adopt monastic practices or become temporary monks. Rather, it involved becoming more receptive to the monastery's

temporal structure, including recurring routines, rituals, waiting, silence, and shared activities. However, this process varied among visitors. Those with limited time or strong sightseeing orientations generally remained observers, whereas visitors who engaged more consistently with everyday monastic rhythms were more likely to adjust their own routines. The findings suggest that length of stay alone was insufficient. Visitors' willingness to engage with everyday monastic life also appeared to influence the depth of temporal immersion.

4.4 Reflection and Meaning-Making

As visitors became more familiar with everyday monastic life, many reported experiences of quietness, peace, and reflection. These experiences did not generally involve sudden or dramatic spiritual transformation. Instead, reflection developed gradually through exposure to the simplicity, discipline, silence, and communal organisation of monastic life.

One participant stated:

“I was impressed with the simplicity of life here as compared to my life and watching how the monks live made me realise how busy and distracted my everyday life has become.”
(Tourist 3)

Another explained:

“I didn't think I would find a spiritual experience here, but I did find the time to think about myself and what I was doing, here, in silence.” (Tourist 10)

Field observations supported these accounts. Visitors were frequently observed sitting quietly in courtyards and communal areas after prayers or shared activities, often without electronic devices. Their questions also increasingly moved beyond Buddhism and monastery-related matters towards work, family, personal priorities, and everyday life. Some visitors appeared to value extended periods of silence more than additional activities.

For many, sustained engagement with monastic routines prompted reflection on alternative ways of organising time, relationships, and daily life. Visitors commonly described greater appreciation for simplicity, mindfulness, and slowing down, although the content and depth of these reflections varied individually.

Overall, the findings indicate that meaningful experiences generally developed as a gradual experiential process rather than through a single extraordinary encounter. The dominant pattern involved an initial shift from observing the monastery as an attraction towards observing it as a living community, followed by learning through repeated observation, increasing adaptation to monastic temporal rhythms, and, for many visitors, reflection and meaning-making. This sequence should not be understood as a fixed or universal progression. Rather, it represents the principal experiential pattern observed in the field, with its depth and expression varying according to visitors' motivations, duration of engagement, and openness to participating in everyday monastic life.

Collectively, these findings indicate that meaningful experiences developed through a gradual process of becoming increasingly attuned to the temporal organisation of everyday monastic life. Rather than emerging from isolated sacred encounters, visitors' experiences evolved through continued observation, participation, adjustment, and reflection. This

recurring experiential pattern provides the empirical basis for the conceptualisation of temporal immersion discussed in the following section.

5. DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that meaningful experiences in a living Buddhist monastery did not arise primarily from isolated sacred encounters or the symbolic significance of the monastery. Rather, they developed gradually through sustained engagement with everyday monastic life. Visitors moved from initial curiosity to closer observation, learning through repeated exposure, adapting to the rhythms of communal life, and, for many, reflecting on their own experiences and ways of living. Tourism therefore emerged as a process of progressive engagement rather than a brief or passive encounter. The concept of temporal immersion provides an analytical lens for understanding this process and offers a modest conceptual contribution to research on meaningful experiences in spiritual, religious, and living heritage tourism.

5.1 Everyday Monastic Life as the Basis of Meaningful Experience

The findings show that meaningful experiences developed not primarily through isolated religious events but through continued engagement with the everyday practices that structured monastic life. Communal meals, prayer, study, silence, and shared responsibilities were not merely the background to visitors’ spiritual experiences; they enabled visitors to gradually understand and experience the monastery as a living community. Meaning therefore emerged through engagement with everyday social life rather than solely through individual religious encounters.

This finding extends scholarship on spiritual and religious tourism, which has traditionally examined pilgrimage, sacred places, ritual engagement, authenticity, and transformative outcomes (Collins-Kreiner, 2010b; Olsen & Timothy, 2006). These dimensions remain important, but the present findings indicate that the sacred may also be experienced through the continuity of everyday practices that sustain a religious community. Everyday monastic life thus functioned as an active experiential resource through which understanding developed progressively.

The findings also support scholarship conceptualising authenticity and heritage as dynamic social processes rather than fixed material objects (Rickly-Boyd, 2013; Timothy, 2024; Wang, 1999). Visitors experienced authenticity not simply through the monastery’s architecture or history but through observing monastic life continuing according to its own rhythms rather than being organised for tourists. Heritage was therefore experienced through participation in living cultural practices, with the continuity of everyday religious life often possessing greater experiential significance than the material setting alone.

Taken together, these findings shift attention towards the ordinary social and temporal processes through which meaning develops over time. This provides the foundation for the concept of temporal immersion.

5.2 Temporal Immersion as an Analytical concept

This study proposes *temporal immersion* as a contextually grounded analytical concept that explains how visitors gradually become attuned to the temporal organisation of everyday community life through sustained engagement. As visitors progressively

participate in recurring communal routines, periods of silence, shared activities, and everyday monastic practices, this attunement creates the conditions through which meaningful tourism experiences may emerge.

This process draws attention to an aspect of meaningful tourism that existing perspectives have addressed less explicitly. Meaningful tourism research has primarily examined the characteristics that make experiences significant, while transformative tourism has focused on changes that may result from travel (Kim et al., 2012; Kirillova et al., 2017; Pung & Chiappa, 2020). Slow tourism highlights the experiential value of decelerated travel and deeper engagement with places (Dickinson et al., 2011; Fullagar, 2012), while authenticity scholarship examines how experiences are perceived as genuine (Rickly-Boyd, 2013; Wang, 1999). Together, these perspectives explain important dimensions of tourism, but they provide less explicit attention to how visitors gradually become attuned to the temporal organisation of everyday community life. Temporal immersion focuses on this experiential process.

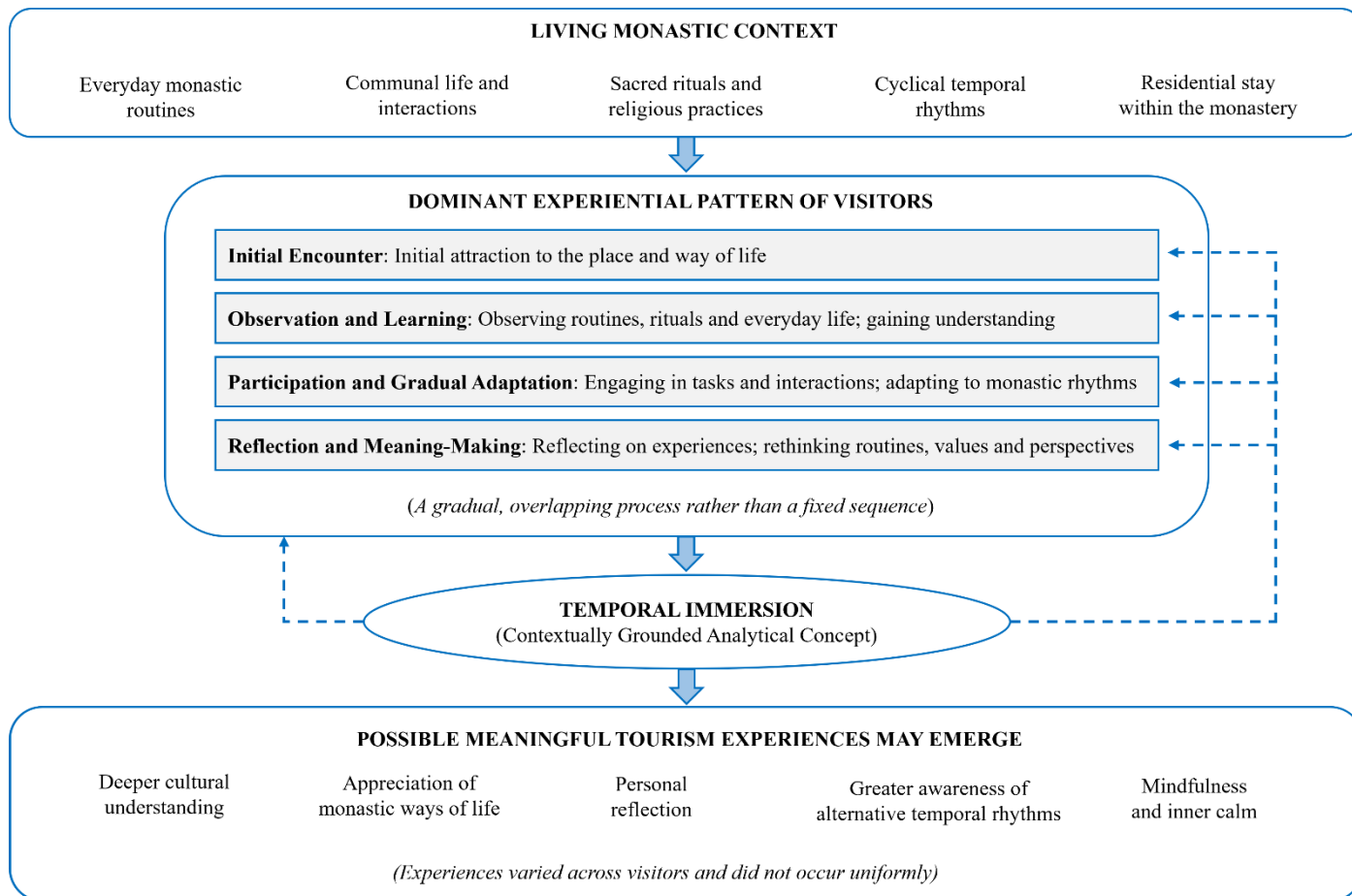
This distinction is particularly important in living heritage settings. A longer or slower journey does not necessarily mean that visitors engage with the rhythms through which a community organises its everyday life. Similarly, entering an authentic monastery or sacred space does not automatically produce meaningful or transformative experiences. The findings instead suggest that meaning developed progressively through repeated engagement with the temporal practices structuring monastic life.

The concept also contributes to ongoing scholarship on temporality in tourism. Time has traditionally been examined through trip duration, itineraries, seasonality, and travel speed. This study conceptualises temporality not merely as a contextual feature but as an experiential dimension that shapes how visitors observe, participate, interpret, and reflect. The temporal organisation of community life therefore becomes an active component of the tourism experience rather than simply the background against which tourism occurs.

The figure 1 illustrates how meaningful tourism experiences may gradually emerge through sustained engagement with the temporal organisation of everyday life in a living Buddhist monastery. Rather than representing a fixed sequence, it depicts the dominant experiential pattern identified across participants, through which temporal immersion explains the development of meaningful tourism experiences.

Temporal immersion is therefore proposed as a contextually grounded, middle-range analytical concept rather than a universal model of visitor experience. Its contribution lies in explaining how sustained engagement with the temporal rhythms of everyday community life can provide an experiential mechanism through which meaningful tourism experiences develop over time. The concept treats temporality as an active experiential dimension while complementing, rather than replacing, existing perspectives on meaningful, transformative, slow, spiritual, and authentic tourism.

Figure 1. Temporal immersion as a *contextually grounded analytical concept*.



Source: Author

5.3 Theoretical Contributions

This study makes a focused conceptual contribution to tourism scholarship. First, it extends spiritual and religious tourism research by demonstrating that meaningful experiences may emerge through sustained engagement with everyday monastic life rather than exclusively through pilgrimage, sacred rituals, or extraordinary religious encounters. Ordinary practices such as communal meals, study, silence, and shared responsibilities functioned as experiential resources through which visitors progressively developed meaning. This shifts attention from exceptional religious events towards the everyday practices that sustain living religious communities.

Second, it contributes to living heritage scholarship by demonstrating that heritage is experienced not only through material remains but also through the continuity of everyday cultural and religious practices. Visitors engaged with the monastery’s physical environment, but also with the living practices through which the community reproduced its traditions. The findings therefore reinforce understandings of living heritage as dynamic, participatory, and community-centred while highlighting the temporal organisation of everyday life as an important dimension of heritage experience.

Third, the study proposes temporal immersion as a contextually grounded conceptual lens for understanding how sustained engagement with everyday community life may

contribute to meaningful tourism experiences. Existing perspectives largely explain why tourism becomes meaningful, the conditions that facilitate meaningful experiences, or the outcomes that may follow. Temporal immersion complements these approaches by drawing attention to how meaning may progressively develop as visitors become attuned to the temporal rhythms of everyday social life. It therefore treats temporality not simply as a contextual characteristic of tourism but as an experiential dimension associated with observation, participation, reflection, and meaning-making.

Although developed through a qualitative case study informed by participant observation at a single living Buddhist monastery, temporal immersion is intended as a contextually grounded analytical concept rather than a universal model. Its broader value lies in providing a conceptual lens for examining experiential processes in other living heritage settings where cultural practices remain active and visitors engage with communities over time. Future research can examine its applicability across religious, Indigenous, monastic, and community-based tourism contexts and further refine its analytical scope and theoretical transferability.

6. CONCLUSION

This study examined how meaningful tourism experiences develop within a living Buddhist monastery through a 22-day qualitative case study informed by participant observation at Key Monastery in the Indian Himalayas. The findings demonstrate that meaningful experiences emerged not through isolated sacred encounters or prolonged stays alone, but through sustained engagement with the everyday temporal organisation of monastic life. As visitors gradually became attuned to recurring routines, communal practices, ritual cycles, and periods of silence, they moved from observation towards participation, reflection, and meaning-making. Drawing on these findings, the study proposes temporal immersion as a contextually grounded conceptual lens for understanding how meaningful experiences may progressively emerge through sustained engagement with the temporal rhythms of everyday community life. Rather than proposing a new tourism typology, temporal immersion complements existing perspectives on meaningful, slow, spiritual, and transformative tourism by shifting attention from why meaningful experiences occur and the outcomes they produce towards how they progressively unfold through sustained participation in the temporal rhythms of everyday community life.

The study makes a focused contribution by showing how everyday monastic life can become meaningful through sustained engagement with communal temporal practices. It also proposes temporal immersion as a process-oriented conceptual lens for understanding how observation, participation, reflection, and meaning-making may develop through repeated engagement with the temporal rhythms of a living heritage community. The findings also have practical implications for the management of living heritage destinations. Rather than relying primarily on interpretation, staged cultural performances, or highly structured visitor programmes, managers should create opportunities for respectful engagement with everyday community life while safeguarding the autonomy and continuity of local practices. Supporting longer stays, appropriate participation, and informal interaction may foster more meaningful visitor experiences without compromising the integrity of living heritage communities.

The study should be interpreted within its empirical scope. Developed through a qualitative case study informed by participant observation at a single living Buddhist monastery, temporal immersion is proposed as a contextually grounded analytical concept rather than a universally applicable model. Future research should examine its relevance across other living heritage contexts—including monasteries, Indigenous communities, retreat centres, and community-based tourism settings—to refine its theoretical scope and assess its transferability across different cultural environments. Ultimately, this study argues that the distinctive value of living heritage lies not only in the places it preserves, but in the temporal rhythms through which communities continue to live, practise, and transmit their traditions. By showing how visitors may gradually become attuned to these rhythms, the study offers a process-oriented account of meaningful tourism in which temporality is treated as an important experiential dimension through which living heritage may be experienced and understood.

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