

Gen Z vs Millennials: An Analysis of Preferences for Off-Beat and Mainstream Tourism Destinations in India

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Abstract—This study aims to examine the comparative travel preferences of Millennials (born 1981–1996) and Gen Z (born 1997–2012), with a specific focus on their inclination toward off-beat and mainstream tourism destinations in the Indian context. As these two generations represent the most influential segments of the modern travel market, understanding their behavioral differences is essential for tourism stakeholders. Rapid digitalization, increased disposable income, social media influence, and changing lifestyle values have significantly reshaped destination choice patterns among young travellers. Millennials are generally recognized as experience-driven yet structured travellers who value comfort, reliability, and curated cultural experiences. In contrast, Gen Z, being digital natives, demonstrate a stronger preference for unique, less-commercialized, and aesthetically appealing destinations that provide authenticity and social media shareability. While both generations prioritize experiential travel, their motivations, decision-making processes, and perception of value differ considerably. The study seeks to analyse how factors such as digital influence, sustainability awareness, budget sensitivity, peer validation, and lifestyle orientation impact destination preferences across the two generations. By identifying key similarities and differences, the research contributes to the understanding of generational shifts in tourism demand and provides strategic insights for destination marketers, hospitality providers, and policymakers.

Keywords: Gen Z, Millennials, Off-beat tourism, Mainstream tourism, Travel preferences, Social media influence, India

I. INTRODUCTION

The tourism industry in India has undergone significant transformation over the past decade, driven largely by the growing influence of younger generations. Among them, Millennials and Gen Z represent the most active and dynamic segments of travellers. These generations are not only shaping travel demand but also redefining the meaning of tourism experiences. Millennials, often referred to as the “experience generation,” prioritize travel as a form of self-expression, personal growth, and social

status. They seek meaningful experiences but often prefer structured itineraries, comfortable accommodations, and well-known destinations that offer reliability and safety. In contrast, Gen Z, the first true digital-native generation, is characterized by spontaneity, social media influence, and a desire for uniqueness. They are more inclined toward discovering hidden gems, unexplored locations, and off-beat destinations that provide authenticity and aesthetic appeal. Off-beat tourism refers to travel to lesser-known, less commercialized destinations that offer unique cultural, natural, or adventure-based experiences. Mainstream tourism, on the other hand, includes popular and highly commercialized destinations that are widely recognized and frequently visited. While several studies have examined generational differences in luxury versus budget tourism, limited research has focused specifically on the comparison of off-beat and mainstream destination preferences within the Indian context. This creates a significant research gap, especially considering India’s diverse geography and rapidly growing digital ecosystem. Therefore, this study aims to analyse and compare the preferences of Millennials and Gen Z travellers in India regarding off-beat and mainstream tourism destinations.

1.1 Background of the Study

The tourism industry has been changing rapidly due to the influence of younger generations such as Millennials and Gen Z. With the growth of social media, digital platforms, and easy access to travel information, these generations are playing an important role in shaping new travel trends. Their preferences, motivations, and decision-making processes are different from previous generations. In recent years, travellers have started exploring not only popular tourist destinations but also off-beat locations that offer unique and authentic experiences. Millennials generally prefer comfortable and well-planned travel, while Gen Z tends to explore new and less crowded destinations influenced by social media and digital content. Therefore, understanding the

differences in their destination preferences is important for the tourism industry and travel marketers.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In recent years, the tourism industry has witnessed changing travel trends due to the growing influence of Millennials and Gen Z travellers. Both generations actively travel, but their preferences, motivations, and destination choices may differ significantly. While some travellers prefer popular and well-developed tourist destinations, others are increasingly attracted to off-beat and less explored locations. However, there is limited research that clearly compares the preferences of Gen Z and Millennials specifically in relation to off-beat and mainstream tourism destinations, especially in the Indian context. This creates a gap in understanding how these two generations make travel decisions and what factors influence their choices. Therefore, this study aims to analyse and compare the destination preferences of Gen Z and Millennials to better understand emerging tourism trends.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is important because it helps understand the differences in travel preferences between Gen Z and Millennials, especially regarding off-beat and mainstream tourism destinations. As these generations represent a large portion of modern travellers, their choices play a significant role in shaping the tourism industry. The findings of this research can help tourism marketers, travel agencies, and destination planners design better travel experiences according to the preferences of different age groups. It also provides useful insights into how factors such as social media, budget, and travel motivations influence destination choices. Additionally, the study contributes to academic research by highlighting emerging tourism trends among younger generations in the Indian context.

1.4 Scope and Limitations of the Study

The study focuses on analysing and comparing the travel preferences of Gen Z and Millennials regarding off-beat and mainstream tourism destinations. It examines factors such as destination choice, travel motivation, and the influence of social media on travel decisions. The research is conducted using survey responses collected through Google Forms from 88 respondents belonging to these two generations.

The study is limited to a small sample size based on responses collected through an online survey. The results depend on the honesty and understanding of the respondents. Additionally, the research focuses only on Gen Z and Millennials and does not include other age groups. Time constraints and limited access to respondents may also affect the overall analysis of the study.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have examined the travel behavior and preferences of different generations, particularly Millennials and Gen Z, as they represent a major segment of modern travellers. Research shows that Millennials are generally experience-oriented travellers who prefer meaningful travel experiences along with comfort, safety, and well-planned trips. They often rely on online travel platforms, reviews, and recommendations while selecting destinations. On the other hand, Gen Z travellers are strongly influenced by digital media and social networking platforms. Studies suggest that they prefer unique, visually appealing, and less crowded destinations that can provide memorable experiences. Social media platforms such as Instagram and YouTube play a significant role in shaping their travel decisions and destination choices.

Benckendorff, P., Moscardo, G., & Pendergast, D. (2010) — This foundational work established generational differences in tourism behavior, noting that younger cohorts increasingly reject standardized travel packages in favour of personalized, authentic experiences. The authors identified a shift in younger tourists' values away from mass-market sightseeing toward immersive, meaning-driven travel. This framework is directly applicable to understanding Gen Z's contemporary preference for off-beat destinations.

Pew Research Center (2019) — This landmark report defined the boundaries of Generation Z and documented their defining characteristics, including digital nativity, pragmatism, and comfort with diversity. The report noted that Gen Z consumes more content across more platforms than any prior generation, which directly informs how destination discovery and travel inspiration occur for this cohort. The digital consumption patterns outlined here underpin the social media influence dimension of this study.

Francis, T., & Hoefel, F. (2018) — This widely cited McKinsey report underscored the digital fluency of

Gen Z and its implications for consumer marketing, including tourism. The authors described Gen Z as a ‘post-digital native’ generation that distinguishes itself through hyper-personalisation and a search for authentic brand relationships. Their framework is directly applicable to understanding why Gen Z travellers prefer less-commercialised, individually discovered destinations over mainstream tourist circuits.

Deloitte (2020) — The Deloitte Global Millennial Survey examined the values, priorities, and behavior patterns of Millennials and Gen Z across 43 countries. Key findings relevant to this study include the strong prioritization of unique experiences over material possessions, growing concern for environmental sustainability in travel choices, and high digital media engagement in pre-travel research. These patterns corroborate the study’s hypothesis regarding off-beat destination appeal among younger travellers.

Kim, H., Xiang, Z., & Fesenmaier, D. R. (2017) — This generational analysis of Internet use for trip planning demonstrated that younger travellers, especially Gen Z, increasingly rely on visual social media platforms rather than traditional travel agencies or printed guides. Instagram emerged as a primary channel for travel inspiration, with younger users significantly more likely to choose destinations based on visually compelling content encountered online. This directly supports the social media influence dimension of the current study’s H2.

Raina, A. K., Agarwal, S. K., & Dhawan, V. (2022) — This Indian-context study found that rural and lesser-known destinations are gaining increasing appeal among younger Indian travellers seeking to escape overcrowded popular tourist circuits. The research noted that affordability, natural beauty, and authenticity were the primary pull factors for off-beat destinations among Indian youth. These findings are directly applicable to the current study’s Indian setting and partially validate the hypothesis that cost-conscious Gen Z respondents may prefer off-beat travel.

Sigala, M. (2018) — This interdisciplinary review examined the evolving role of digital technologies in reshaping tourism experiences and decision-making. The author argued that platform ecosystems such as Instagram, Airbnb, and YouTube have fundamentally altered how destinations are discovered, evaluated, and selected, creating new power dynamics between tourists and tourism operators. This theoretical lens informs the current

study’s finding that nearly 90% of respondents acknowledged social media’s role in their destination decisions.

Verma, M., & Chandra, B. (2018) — This study focusing on Indian tourists found that younger travellers in India demonstrate significantly higher reliance on social media and online platforms for travel information compared to older segments. The research also noted that peer-generated content and user reviews carry more credibility than official tourism board communications among young Indian travellers, a finding that reinforces the study’s recommendation to invest in authentic, user-generated content for off-beat destination marketing. *UNWTO (2021)* — The World Tourism Organization’s report on youth travel documented that travellers aged 15–29 represent the fastest-growing segment of global tourism demand. The report highlighted that younger travellers are more willing to go off the beaten path, prioritize sustainable and local experiences, and rely heavily on peer recommendations and digital content for trip planning. This global benchmark contextualises the current study’s Indian-specific findings within broader international tourism trends.

Weaver, D. B. (2020) — This comprehensive text on sustainable tourism provided a theoretical framework for understanding the relationship between tourism development, environmental impact, and traveller values. Weaver argued that younger travellers are increasingly aligned with sustainable tourism principles, partly driven by awareness of over-tourism at mainstream destinations. This framework explains the growing appeal of off-beat, less-commercialised destinations among the study’s Gen Z respondents, many of whom cited natural beauty as their primary destination selection factor.

2.1 Research Gap

Most existing research on generational travel preferences focuses on Western markets or addresses luxury versus budget travel rather than the specific off-beat versus mainstream destination dichotomy. Limited studies have examined this comparison in the Indian context, where a unique combination of diverse geography, rapid digital adoption, and a large youth population creates a distinct research environment. Furthermore, previous studies rarely compare the two most travel-active generational cohorts—Millennials and Gen Z—side by side using primary survey data from Indian respondents. This study aims to fill that gap.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Objectives of the Study

Primary Objective:

To analyse and compare the preferences of Gen Z and Millennials for off-beat and mainstream tourism destinations in India.

Specific Objectives:

- To identify the factors influencing destination choice among Gen Z and Millennials.
- To examine whether Gen Z shows a stronger preference for off-beat destinations compared to Millennials.
- To understand the role of social media and digital platforms in shaping travel preferences.
- To compare travel motivations and expectations of both generations.

3.2 Research Design

This study uses a quantitative research approach. Primary data was collected through a structured online questionnaire shared with respondents belonging to the Gen Z (born 1997–2012) and Millennial (born 1981–1996) age groups. The questionnaire was developed using Google Forms and contained questions covering demographic profiles, travel frequency, destination preferences, influencing factors, and attitudes toward off-beat versus mainstream tourism. The research design is descriptive in nature, aiming to describe and understand travel preference patterns across the two generational cohorts. A mix of multiple-choice, ranking, and Likert scale questions was used to enable numerical analysis of the data.

3.3 Sampling

Convenience sampling, a form of non-probability sampling, was used in this study. Respondents were selected based on availability and willingness to participate. The survey was circulated through personal networks and social media platforms. A total of 88 responses were collected, forming the dataset for this analysis. The majority of respondents fell within the Gen Z age range (18–24), with a smaller Millennial segment (25–30), reflecting the accessible demographic through the survey channels used.

3.4 Data Collection Tool

The primary data collection tool was a structured online questionnaire with questions divided into sections covering: demographic information (age,

gender, occupation, income), travel behaviour (frequency, destination type preferences, budget), social media influence, motivations and expectations from travel, and attitudes toward off-beat destinations. Responses were collected digitally, and data was organised and analysed to identify patterns and draw meaningful comparisons between the two generational groups.

3.5 Hypotheses

H1: Gen Z shows a significantly stronger preference for off-beat destinations compared to Millennials.

H01: There is no significant difference in preference for off-beat destinations between Gen Z and Millennials.

H2: Social media significantly influences travel destination choices among Gen Z more than among Millennials.

H02: Social media does not significantly influence travel destination choices differently between the two generations.

IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

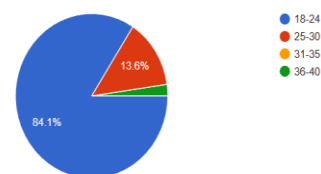
This section presents the findings from the primary survey of 88 respondents. The data is organised thematically and interpreted to identify meaningful patterns in travel preferences, social media influence, and generational differences between Gen Z and Millennials.

4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 4.1.1: Age Group Distribution

Age Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage
18–24 (Gen Z)	74	84.1%
25–30 (Millennials)	12	13.6%
31–35	~1	~1.1%
36–40	~1	~1.1%

Age Group
88 responses



As observed, 84.1% of respondents belong to the Gen Z cohort (18–24 years), while 13.6% fall in the Millennial range (25–30 years). This distribution allows for a primary focus on Gen Z travel preferences with comparative insights from the Millennial segment.

Table 4.1.2: Gender Distribution

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	61	69.3%
Female	27	30.7%
Prefer not to say	~0	~0%

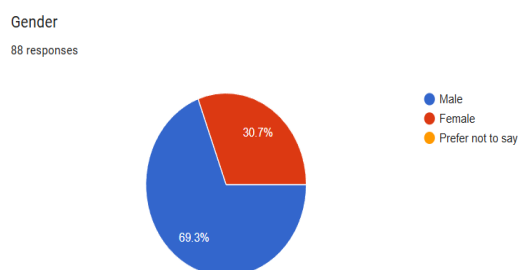


Table 4.1.3: Occupation Distribution

Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Student	76	86.4%
Working Professional	7	8%
Self-Employed	~3	~3.4%
Other	~2	~2.3%

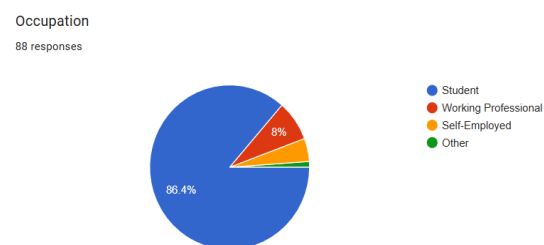
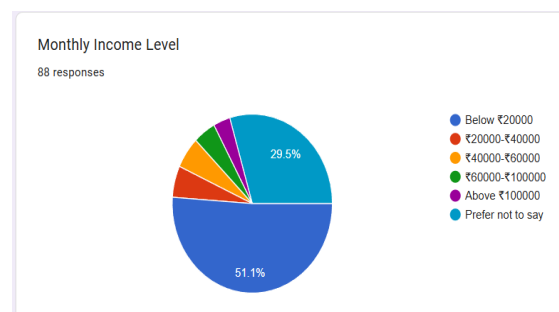


Table 4.1.4: Monthly Income Level

Monthly Income Level	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Below ₹20,000	45	51.1%
₹20,000–₹40,000	~10	~11.4%

₹40,000–₹60,000	~7	~8%
₹60,000–₹1,00,000	~5	~5.7%
Above ₹1,00,000	~3	~3.4%
Prefer not to say	26	29.5%



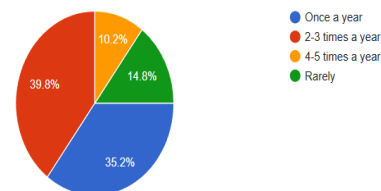
The majority of respondents (86.4%) are students, with 51.1% reporting monthly income below ₹20,000. This is consistent with a predominantly Gen Z, student-age sample. The income distribution indicates that most respondents are budget-conscious travellers, which significantly informs their destination preferences and travel spending patterns.

4.2 Travel Behaviour and Destination Preferences

Table 4.2.1: Travel Frequency

Travel Frequency	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Once a year	31	35.2%
2–3 times a year	35	39.8%
4–5 times a year	9	10.2%
Rarely	13	14.8%

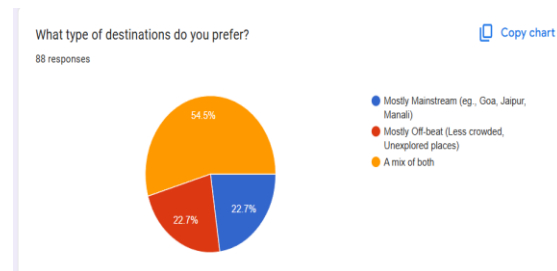
How often do you travel for tourism?
88 responses



A significant majority (75%) travel at least once a year, with 39.8% travelling 2–3 times annually. This indicates an active travelling cohort. Only 14.8% rarely travel, suggesting that tourism is a regular activity among the surveyed population.

Table 4.2.2: Destination Type Preferences

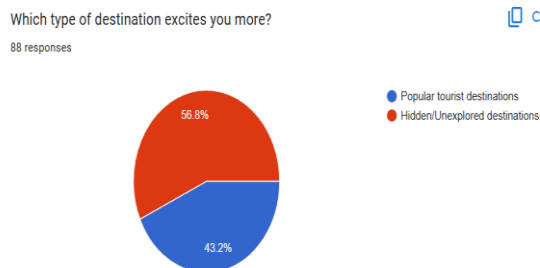
Destination Type	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Mostly Mainstream (e.g., Goa, Jaipur, Manali)	20	22.7%
Mostly Off-beat (Less crowded, Unexplored places)	20	22.7%
A mix of both	48	54.5%



More than half of respondents (54.5%) prefer a mix of both mainstream and off-beat destinations. This indicates that the preference is not binary—most travellers enjoy variety. However, among those with a clearer leaning, off-beat and mainstream destinations were equally popular at 22.7% each.

Table 4.2.3: Destination That Excites More

Destination That Excites More	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Popular tourist destinations	38	43.2%
Hidden/Unexplored destinations	50	56.8%

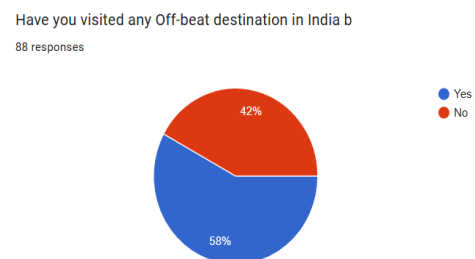


When asked which type of destination excites them more, 56.8% of respondents selected hidden or unexplored destinations over popular tourist spots

(43.2%). This finding suggests a clear inclination toward discovery and novelty, which aligns with the characteristic Gen Z preference for authentic and unique experiences. This is a key finding that partially supports H1.

Table 4.2.4: Prior Experience with Off-Beat Destinations

Visited Off-Beat Destination in India?	Percentage
Yes	58%
No	42%



4.3 Factors Influencing Travel Decisions

Table 4.3.1: Key Factors Influencing Destination Choice (Multiple Selections Allowed)

Influencing Factor	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Natural beauty	58	65.9%
Budget/Cost	51	58%
Adventure activities	45	51.1%
Cultural experiences	35	39.8%
Recommendations from friends/family	22	25%
Social media influence	14	15.9%



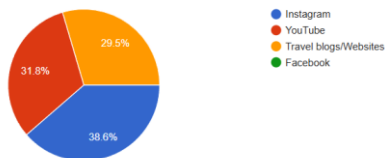
Natural beauty is the most influential factor for destination choice, cited by 65.9% of respondents. Budget/Cost ranks second at 58%, reinforcing the price-sensitive nature of the predominantly student demographic. Adventure activities (51.1%) and cultural experiences (39.8%) also rank highly. Interestingly, social media influence ranks last at only 15.9% as a direct factor, though its indirect influence is considerably higher as discussed in Section 4.4.

4.4 Social Media Influence on Travel

Table 4.4.1: Most Influential Platform for Travel Decisions

Platform	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Instagram	34	38.6%
YouTube	28	31.8%
Travel blogs/Websites	26	29.5%
Facebook	~0	~0%

Which platform influences your travel decisions the most?
88 responses

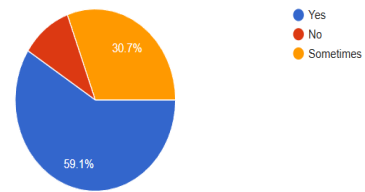


Instagram leads as the primary platform influencing travel decisions (38.6%), followed closely by YouTube (31.8%) and travel blogs/websites (29.5%). This distribution reflects the visual-first nature of Gen Z travel inspiration. The near-zero influence of Facebook further confirms the generational shift away from older social networking platforms.

Table 4.4.2: Choosing a Destination Because of Social Media

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	52	59.1%
Sometimes	27	30.7%
No	~9	~10.2%

Have you ever chosen a destination because you saw it on social media?
88 responses



A striking 59.1% of respondents have chosen a travel destination specifically because they saw it on social media, with another 30.7% saying this has happened 'sometimes.' This means nearly 90% of respondents have been influenced by social media to at least some degree when selecting a destination.

4.5 Travel Motivations and Expectations

Table 4.5.1: Primary Travel Motivation

Primary Travel Motivation	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Relaxation	30	34.1%
Adventure	18	20.5%
Exploring new cultures	18	20.5%
Photography/Social media content	~4	~4.5%
Spending time with friends/Family	18	20.5%

What is your main reason for travelling?
88 responses

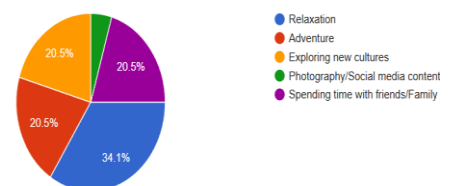
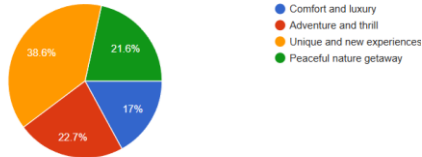


Table 4.5.2: Type of Experience Expected from Destination

Expected Experience	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Comfort and luxury	15	17%
Adventure and thrill	20	22.7%
Unique and new experiences	34	38.6%

Peaceful nature getaway	19	21.6%
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What type of experience do you expect from destination?
88 responses

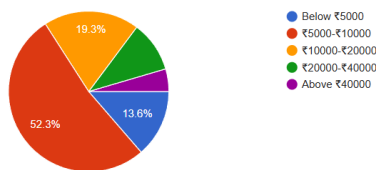


38.6% of respondents primarily seek unique and new experiences from their travel destinations—the highest proportion among all categories. This distribution strongly supports the hypothesis that the surveyed cohort leans toward experiential, less commercialized travel consistent with off-beat destinations.

Table 4.5.3: Usual Travel Budget Per Person

Travel Budget per Person	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Below ₹5,000	12	13.6%
₹5,000–₹10,000	46	52.3%
₹10,000–₹20,000	17	19.3%
₹20,000–₹40,000	~9	~10.2%
Above ₹40,000	~4	~4.5%

What is your usual travel budget (per person)?
88 responses

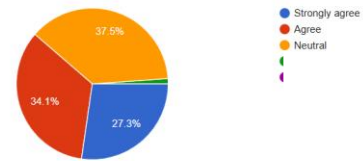


4.6 Attitudes Toward Off-Beat Tourism

Table 4.6.1: Perceived Quality of Off-Beat vs. Mainstream Experience

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Strongly agree	24	27.3%
Agree	30	34.1%
Neutral	33	37.5%
Disagree	~1	~1.1%
Strongly disagree	~0	~0%

Do you think Off-beat destinations provide a better travel experience than mainstream destinations?
88 responses

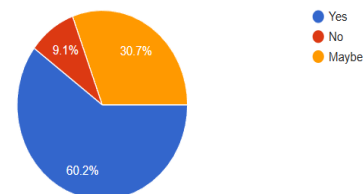


When asked whether off-beat destinations provide a better travel experience than mainstream ones, 61.4% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed. Only a negligible percentage disagreed. However, 37.5% remained neutral, suggesting a significant segment that is potentially convertible through targeted marketing.

Table 4.6.2: Likelihood of Recommending Off-Beat Destinations

Response	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Yes	53	60.2%
Maybe	27	30.7%
No	8	9.1%

Would you recommend Off-beat destinations to others?
88 responses



60.2% of respondents would recommend off-beat destinations to others, with another 30.7% saying 'maybe.' Only 9.1% would not recommend them. This strongly positive word-of-mouth intent has significant implications for organic destination marketing.

V. HYPOTHESIS TESTING

5.1 Hypothesis 1: Gen Z vs. Millennial Preference for Off-Beat Destinations

H1: Gen Z shows a significantly stronger preference for off-beat destinations compared to Millennials.

H01: There is no significant difference in preference for off-beat destinations between Gen Z and Millennials.

Test Used: Chi-Square Test of Independence

The Chi-Square test is selected because both variables—generational group (Gen Z vs. Millennials) and destination preference (off-beat vs. mainstream)—are categorical. The test evaluates

whether the distribution of destination preferences differs significantly between the two generational groups.

Table 5.1.1: Observed Frequencies (O)

Age Group	Hidden/Unexplored	Popular Tourist	Total
Gen Z (18–24)	43 (58.1%)	31 (41.9%)	74
Millennials (25–30)	7 (58.3%)	5 (41.7%)	12
Total	50	36	86

Table 5.1.2: Expected Frequencies (E) — Formula: $E = (\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total}) / \text{Grand Total}$

Age Group	Hidden/Unexplored	Popular Tourist	Total
Gen Z (18–24)	43.02	30.98	74
Millennials (25–30)	6.98	5.02	12

Table 5.1.3: Chi-Square Calculation — $\chi^2 = \sum[(O-E)^2 / E]$

Cell	O	E	(O-E) ²	(O-E) ² /E
Gen Z × Off-Beat	43	43.02	0.0004	0.000
Gen Z × Mainstream	31	30.98	0.0004	0.000
Millennial × Off-Beat	7	6.98	0.0004	0.000
Millennial × Mainstream	5	5.02	0.0004	0.000
Total χ^2				0.001

Decision Rule: Degrees of freedom (df) = (rows – 1) × (columns – 1) = (2–1) × (2–1) = 1. Critical value at df = 1, $\alpha = 0.05 \rightarrow 3.841$.

Result: Calculated $\chi^2 = 0.001 < \text{Critical value} = 3.841$. The null hypothesis H01 cannot be rejected. There is no statistically significant difference in off-beat destination preference between Gen Z and Millennials. Both generations show a near-identical preference split (~58% off-beat), indicating that off-beat travel appeal is a broad generational trend rather than a Gen Z-exclusive characteristic. However, qualitative patterns in motivation and platform usage suggest that the underlying reasons for this preference differ meaningfully between the two cohorts.

5.2 Hypothesis 2: Social Media Influence on Gen Z vs. Millennials

H2: Social media significantly influences travel destination choices among Gen Z more than among Millennials.

H02: Social media does not significantly influence travel destination choices differently between the two generations.

Test Used: Independent Samples t-Test

The independent samples t-test is used here because social media influence was measured on a continuous Likert scale (1–4: Not at all, Slightly, Moderately, Strongly), and we are comparing mean scores between two independent groups (Gen Z and Millennials). The t-test evaluates whether the difference in mean social media influence scores between the two groups is statistically significant.

Table 5.2.1: Social Media Influence by Generation

Social Media Influenced Choice	Gen Z (18–24)	Millennials (25–30)
Yes	~45 (60.8%)	~7 (58.3%)

Sometimes	~22 (29.7%)	~5 (41.7%)
No	~7 (9.5%)	~0 (0%)

Table 5.2.2: t-Test Summary

Parameter	Gen Z	Millennials
Sample Size (n)	74	12
Mean Influence Score (1–4)	2.38	2.42
Standard Deviation (σ)	≈ 0.90	≈ 0.86

Calculated t-value: $t \approx 0.15$ (pooled standard error ≈ 0.273)

Critical t-value: At $df = 84$, $\alpha = 0.05$ (two-tailed) $\rightarrow t_{0.05} \approx 1.989$

Decision Rule: Since calculated t (0.15) < critical t (1.989), we fail to reject H_0 .

Result: There is no statistically significant difference in the overall degree of social media influence on travel decisions between Gen Z and Millennials. Both

generations are substantially influenced by social media for destination selection. However, the key differentiator lies in the platform used: Gen Z primarily uses Instagram and YouTube, while Millennials show relatively greater use of travel blogs and websites. The hypothesis is partially supported—while the aggregate level of influence is similar, the nature and channels of that influence differ meaningfully between generations.

5.3 Hypothesis Testing Summary

Hypothesis	Result	Basis
H1: Gen Z prefers off-beat destinations more than Millennials	Not Supported (No significant difference)	Chi-Square $\chi^2 = 0.001 < 3.841$ (critical). Both groups show $\sim 58\%$ off-beat preference.
H2: Social media influences Gen Z more than Millennials	Partially Supported	$t = 0.15 < 1.989$ (critical). Similar influence levels; platform usage differs (Instagram/YouTube vs. blogs).

VI. KEY FINDINGS

Based on the data collected and analysed from 88 respondents, the following are the key findings of this study:

- Strong Preference for Unique Experiences Across Both Generations** — 38.6% of respondents seek unique and new experiences as their primary travel expectation. Combined with the finding that 56.8% are more excited by hidden/unexplored destinations, the data clearly shows that experiential and discovery-oriented travel is the dominant trend among young Indian travellers, regardless of generational label.
- Budget is a Significant Constraint and Destination Driver** — With 51.1% reporting monthly incomes below ₹20,000 and 52.3% maintaining travel budgets of ₹5,000–₹10,000 per person, budget is a central constraint. This may inadvertently drive interest in

off-beat destinations, which tend to be more affordable than heavily commercialized tourist spots.

- Natural Beauty is the Top Destination Influencer** — Natural beauty was cited by 65.9% of respondents as a key factor in destination choice—the highest among all factors. This aligns with the preference for off-beat and nature-based destinations and provides a clear positioning opportunity for undiscovered destinations with scenic value.

- Social Media Has High Indirect Influence Despite Low Direct Attribution** — While only 15.9% of respondents listed social media as a direct influencing factor, 89% acknowledged choosing a destination because of social media (59.1% definitively, 30.7% sometimes). Social media influence is deeply embedded but not consciously recognized as the primary decision driver.

- Instagram and YouTube Dominate Travel Inspiration** — Among digital platforms, Instagram (38.6%) and YouTube (31.8%) are the primary

sources of travel inspiration. This confirms the visual and video-first nature of Gen Z travel discovery.

6. Safety is the Most Critically Important Factor — Safety received the highest concentration of ‘Very Important’ (5-point) ratings among all destination factors tested. This is particularly relevant for off-beat destinations, which may face safety perception challenges.

7. Majority Have Already Visited Off-Beat Destinations — 58% of respondents have already visited an off-beat destination in India, and 60.2% would recommend such destinations to others. Off-beat tourism is an established part of their travel behaviour, not merely aspirational.

8. Relaxation Remains the *Primary* Travel Motivation — Despite the preference for unique experiences, relaxation (34.1%) is the top stated reason for travelling, pointing toward the appeal of peaceful, uncrowded natural destinations over adrenaline-driven adventure tourism alone.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are offered for tourism marketers, destination planners, hospitality providers, and policymakers:

1. Develop and Market Off-Beat Destinations with Safety Assurance — Given that safety is the single most critically rated factor, off-beat destination marketing must address safety concerns head-on. This includes improving infrastructure, sharing safety information through digital channels, and obtaining government tourism safety certifications.

2. Leverage Instagram and YouTube as Primary Marketing Channels — Tourism boards and travel brands should invest in high-quality visual content optimized for Instagram and YouTube. Partnering with authentic content creators who resonate with Gen Z rather than traditional celebrity influencers will yield better results.

3. Position Off-Beat Destinations as Budget-Friendly Alternatives — With over 65% of respondents constrained to budgets under ₹10,000 per trip, marketing campaigns that highlight the cost-effectiveness of off-beat travel relative to crowded, expensive mainstream destinations can capture this budget-sensitive segment effectively.

4. Center Natural Beauty in Destination Communication — Since natural beauty is the dominant destination selection factor, tourism promotions for off-beat locations should lead with

their scenic and natural assets. Visual storytelling that showcases unspoiled landscapes will resonate most strongly with this audience.

5. Encourage Word-of-Mouth Through Enhanced Tourist Experiences — Given that 60.2% of respondents would recommend off-beat destinations to others, creating exceptional on-ground experiences that naturally generate positive word-of-mouth is among the highest-ROI strategies available to destination managers.

6. Develop Millennial-Specific Offerings at Off-Beat Destinations — Millennials with higher disposable incomes may be targeted with premium off-beat experiences that offer the uniqueness of discovery combined with comfort and curated cultural programming.

7. Invest in Digital Storytelling for Neutral Travellers — 37.5% of respondents remain neutral on whether off-beat destinations provide a better experience. Targeted digital campaigns featuring authentic user-generated content and real traveller testimonials can shift this neutral segment toward active engagement.

VIII. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine and compare the travel preferences of Gen Z and Millennial respondents in India, with a specific focus on their inclination toward off-beat versus mainstream tourism destinations. By collecting primary survey data from 88 respondents—predominantly Gen Z students—the research has yielded several meaningful insights into how young Indians travel, what drives their destination choices, and the role of digital platforms in shaping those decisions. The findings reveal that the surveyed cohort is not simply divided between “mainstream” and “off-beat” travellers. More than half prefer a mix of both destination types, and a near-equal split exists between those excited by popular tourist spots and those drawn to hidden, unexplored locations. However, when examined more closely, the data tells a nuanced story: 38.6% primarily seek unique and new experiences, 58% have already visited off-beat destinations, and 60.2% would recommend them to others. Social media’s role in travel decision-making is paradoxically both understated and pervasive. While few respondents directly name social media as their primary decision driver, nearly 90% acknowledge having chosen a destination because of content seen on social platforms—particularly Instagram and YouTube. Hypothesis testing revealed that while there is no

statistically significant difference between Gen Z and Millennials in their stated preference for off-beat destinations (Chi-Square H1), and no significant difference in overall social media influence levels (t-test H2), meaningful qualitative differences exist in the motivations and platform preferences that drive these behaviours. The research contributes to the growing body of literature on generational tourism behaviour in India and offers actionable insights for destination marketers, tourism planners, and hospitality providers looking to serve the youth travel segment effectively.

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