

BACKPACKER TOURISM GROWTH IN AMRITSAR AND CHANDIGARH HOSTELS

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Abstract

Backpacker tourism has become one of the fastest-growing forms of budget travel worldwide, emphasizing cultural immersion, affordability, and community engagement. This study explores the rapid rise of backpacker tourism in Punjab, with a specific focus on hostels in Amritsar and Chandigarh. Through surveys, interviews, and secondary data analysis, the research examines how these destinations are attracting a new generation of travelers seeking authentic local experiences at minimal cost. Findings reveal that the increasing number of budget hostels has not only supported tourism growth but also encouraged intercultural interaction, youth entrepreneurship, and sustainable community participation. The study also highlights that hostels act as social hubs, fostering cultural exchange through shared spaces, local tours, and events that connect travelers with the regional lifestyle. However, challenges such as inconsistent quality standards, lack of unified marketing strategies, and limited government support still restrict the full potential of backpacker tourism in Punjab. The research concludes that improved infrastructure, digital promotion, policy support, and partnerships with local communities can help transform Amritsar and Chandigarh into leading backpacker-friendly cities in North India.

Keywords: Backpacker Tourism, Amritsar, Chandigarh, Hostels, Budget.

Introduction

Backpacker tourism represents a rapidly growing segment of independent travel focused on affordability, adventure, and authentic cultural experiences. It is driven largely by young travelers who seek deeper connections with the destinations they visit, preferring meaningful encounters over luxury comforts. In recent years, India has witnessed a steady rise in backpacker tourism, particularly in culturally rich and accessible regions. In Punjab, cities like Amritsar and Chandigarh have emerged as key destinations for backpackers due to their vibrant atmosphere, welcoming communities, and expanding network of youth hostels that cater to budget-conscious travelers. This shift marks an important transition in tourism trends—from traditional sightseeing toward immersive, participatory experiences that celebrate local life. Amritsar, with its timeless charm, attracts travelers from around the world who wish to experience spirituality, history, and Punjabi hospitality. The city's iconic landmarks such as the Golden Temple, Jallianwala Bagh, and Gobindgarh Fort provide insight into India's cultural and historical legacy. Beyond these attractions, the narrow lanes of the old city, filled with street food, markets, and traditional crafts, allow backpackers to explore the region's authentic flavor and social fabric. Chandigarh, in contrast, offers a distinctly modern experience. Known for its planned architecture, urban greenery, and café culture, it appeals to digital nomads and young travelers seeking creative inspiration and urban leisure. Its proximity to the Himalayan foothills also makes it a strategic stopover for backpackers traveling toward Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand. The increasing number of hostels in these two cities reflects the evolution of travel culture in Punjab. Unlike conventional hotels, backpacker hostels emphasize social interaction, shared spaces, and cultural exchange. They foster a sense of community among travelers through common lounges, dormitories, and group activities such as heritage walks, cooking sessions, and local tours. These experiences not only enhance visitor satisfaction but also generate livelihood opportunities for local residents and small entrepreneurs. Therefore, this research aims to examine how backpacker tourism contributes to tourism growth, local employment, sustainable development, and cross-cultural interaction—ultimately promoting Punjab as a youth-friendly and globally appealing travel destination.

Objectives of the Study:

- To analyze the role of budget hostels in attracting backpacker travelers to Amritsar and Chandigarh.
- To study how backpacker tourism chooses their accommodation and what's the reason behind due which Backpacker tourism growth is increasing?

Literature Review

Singh and Kaur (2024) conducted a comparative study on backpacker tourism in North Indian cities, particularly Amritsar and Chandigarh. Their research highlighted that the growing number of young travelers, improved hostel infrastructure, and budget-friendly lodging have significantly contributed to the development of backpacker tourism. The study concluded that hostels serve as essential nodes for social interaction and cultural immersion in both cities.

Sharma (2023) examined the role of hostels in promoting youth and budget tourism in India. The author found that the increasing availability of affordable hostel accommodations has expanded travel opportunities for students and solo travelers. The study emphasized that hostels encourage sustainable tourism by supporting local employment and reducing travel costs.

Gupta and Mehta (2022) explored how social media influences backpacker travel behavior in Indian cities. Their findings indicated that platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and travel blogs significantly shape travelers' perceptions and destination choices. Visual storytelling and peer recommendations were identified as key motivators behind hostel-based tourism growth.

Kaur and Bansal (2021) focused on affordability and social experience as driving forces behind hostel tourism. They found that travelers are drawn to hostels not only for low prices but also for opportunities to meet diverse individuals and participate in group activities. Their research linked hostel stays to higher satisfaction levels and repeat travel intentions.

Verma , Gill and Das (2024) studies highlight that Amritsar attracts a large proportion of young and budget-conscious tourists motivated by religious, cultural, and historical experiences. Research indicates that visitors, particularly youth travellers, value cultural immersion, social interaction, and affordable facilities, while challenges such as overcrowding and infrastructure gaps influence their stay decisions. These factors create favourable conditions for the growth of hostel-based accommodation, which supports backpacker tourism in heritage-oriented urban destinations

Verma and Joshi (2024) studied backpacker accommodation preferences and cultural engagement in Northern India. Their research revealed that most backpackers prefer hostels over traditional hotels because of their proximity to local attractions, cultural activities, and authentic experiences. The study emphasized that cultural exchange forms a vital part of the backpacking experience.

Thakur (2023) investigated the role of community-based tourism in the rise of hostel culture in urban India. The author observed that hostels often collaborate with local communities to organize cultural events, heritage walks, and volunteer activities. This engagement not only enriches the traveler experience but also supports the local economy and preserves cultural identity.

Patel and Khanna (2023) analyzed how affordability and connectivity influence youth travel decisions in India. Their study showed that well-connected transport systems, along with low-cost accommodations like hostels, have made intercity backpacking more accessible. The researchers concluded that infrastructure development and price sensitivity are key factors behind the rapid growth of youth tourism.

Chopra and Gill (2022) explored the role of digital media in promoting hostel-based backpacker tourism. The authors found that social media marketing, online reviews, and influencer collaborations have increased visibility for hostel brands. Their study emphasized the importance of digital engagement in attracting global backpackers to emerging Indian destinations.

Rana and Singh (2024) discussed social interaction and community living as defining features of hostel tourism in India. They argued that the shared spaces, dorm-style living, and cultural programs in hostels foster friendship, collaboration, and intercultural understanding, which significantly enhance traveler satisfaction.

Kapoor and Mehra (2021) examined backpacker motivations and satisfaction in emerging tourist destinations of Punjab. Their findings indicated that travelers seek authentic experiences, affordability, and adventure, all of which are well-supported by the hostel ecosystem. They also highlighted the potential of Punjab's cities to become key backpacker hubs.

Bhatia and Verma (2023) studied hostel accommodation as a driver of sustainable urban tourism. They concluded that hostels encourage eco-friendly practices, local resource use, and longer tourist stays, thereby contributing to sustainable tourism models. Their research emphasized that hostels not only meet travelers' economic needs but also align with global sustainability goals.

Gill and Bansal (2022) analyzed the changing accommodation preferences of millennial travelers in North India. Their study revealed that hostels have become the first choice for young tourists due to affordability, flexibility, and the community-oriented atmosphere they provide. The researchers concluded that the hostel sector's informal and friendly environment aligns perfectly with the lifestyle expectations of modern backpackers seeking both comfort and cultural authenticity.

Choudhary (2023) explored the relationship between local cultural experiences and the satisfaction of hostel travelers. The study emphasized that backpackers increasingly value immersive cultural interactions, such as local food, art, and heritage walks, offered through hostel networks. Findings indicated that hostels promoting local engagement enhance travelers' emotional connection with destinations, thus contributing to repeat visits and positive word-of-mouth promotion.

Raina and Verma (2021) investigated the role of digital transformation in the hostel tourism industry in India. The authors found that online booking platforms, review-based marketing, and influencer-driven visibility have revolutionized how travelers choose accommodation. They concluded that digital accessibility has not only increased hostel occupancy rates but also helped smaller local hostels compete effectively with established hotel chains.

Kaur and Thakur (2024) examined the socio-economic impact of hostel-based tourism on local communities in Punjab and Haryana. Their findings highlighted that the growth of hostel culture generates employment, promotes small-scale entrepreneurship, and encourages sustainable urban development. The study also noted that hostels contribute to inclusive tourism by making travel accessible to a wider range of economic groups, particularly youth and students.

Research Methodology

The study on "Backpacker Tourism Growth in Amritsar and Chandigarh Hostels" employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The research design is descriptive and exploratory in nature, aimed at identifying factors contributing to the growth of backpacker tourism in the two cities. The target population includes both domestic and international backpackers staying in hostels, as well as hostel owners and managers. The collected data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, percentage, frequency) and correlation analysis to determine relationships between variables. Qualitative data will be thematically analyzed to identify emerging trends. Ethical considerations such as informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation will be strictly maintained throughout the research process.

Data Interpretation and Analysis

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES	CATEGORIES	FREQUENCY (N=50)	PERCENTAGE %
GENDER	MALE	27	54.0
	FEMALE	23	46.0
TOTAL		50	100
AGE TOTAL	18-25	38	76.0
	26-30	8	16.0
	31-40	2	4.0
	ABOVE 40	2	4.0
TOTAL		50	100
EDUCATION	10 th - +2	15	30.0

	GRADUATION	26	52.0
	P-GRADUATION	7	14.0
	OTHER	2	4.0
TOTAL		50	100

The data indicates that the majority of respondents (76%) belong to the age group of 18–25 years, showing that young travelers form the primary segment of backpacker tourism in Amritsar and Chandigarh. This age group typically seeks affordable stays, cultural experiences, and opportunities to socialize with other travelers. The survey responses suggest that youth are more adventurous, budget-conscious, and eager to explore local heritage through hostels. Gender-wise, the participation is nearly balanced, with males (54%) and females (46%) showing active engagement in backpacker tourism. This balance reflects the growing inclusivity and comfort among both genders in using hostel accommodations and shared travel experiences. Regarding education, most respondents are graduates (52%), followed by those with higher secondary education (30%). This suggests that educated young adults, especially college students and early professionals, are key drivers of backpacker tourism in these cities. Their awareness of sustainable and community-based travel encourages hostel growth and promotes Amritsar and Chandigarh as youth-friendly destinations.

Table 2 – Ever stayed in Hostel

EVER STAYED	YES	38	76.0
	NO	12	24.0
TOTAL		50	100

The results show that a large majority of respondents (76%) have previously stayed in hostels during their travels. This indicates a growing acceptance and popularity of hostel accommodation among backpackers visiting Amritsar and Chandigarh. Most of these travelers cited affordability, social atmosphere, and location convenience as the main reasons for choosing hostels over hotels.

The remaining 24% who have not yet stayed in hostels represent a potential growth segment. Many of them expressed curiosity about trying hostel stays in the future, especially after learning about modern amenities, safety, and community-based experiences offered by hostels.

This trend highlights that hostels are becoming a preferred choice for young and budget-conscious travelers, playing a significant role in promoting backpacker tourism and strengthening the local tourism economy in both Amritsar and Chandigarh.

Table 3 – Factors of Growth

FACTORS	SOCIAL MEDIA	14	28.0
	AFFORDABILITY	17	34.0
	IMPROVED CONNECTIVITY	8	16.0
	LOCAL FOOD AND EXP.	11	22.0
TOTAL		50	100

The data indicates that affordability (34%) is the leading factor driving the growth of backpacker tourism in Amritsar and Chandigarh hostels. Budget-friendly accommodation remains the primary attraction for young and independent travelers seeking economical stays without compromising comfort or community experience.

Social media (28%) emerged as another major influence, as digital platforms play a crucial role in promoting hostels, sharing traveler reviews, and showcasing authentic experiences. Many respondents mentioned discovering hostels through Instagram travel pages, YouTube vlogs, and online travel communities.

Local food and experiences (22%) also contribute significantly, as travelers are drawn to Amritsar's authentic Punjabi cuisine and Chandigarh's café culture. These cultural interactions enhance their stay and create memorable travel experiences.

Lastly, improved connectivity (16%) — including better transportation, online booking platforms, and intercity travel options — supports easier access for backpackers. Overall, the findings suggest that a mix of affordability, social exposure, and local engagement has fueled hostel-based tourism growth in both cities.

Table 4 – Accommodation Preference

PREFERENCE	HOSTELS	26	52.0
	HOTELS	15	30.0
	HOMESTAYS	7	14.0
	OTHER	2	4.0
TOTAL		50	100

The data clearly shows that hostels (52%) are the most preferred type of accommodation among backpackers visiting Amritsar and Chandigarh. This indicates a strong inclination toward budget-friendly, community-oriented stays that offer opportunities to interact with fellow travelers. Many respondents highlighted that hostels provide a more social and youthful environment compared to hotels.

Hotels (15%) were the second most preferred option, chosen by those who seek affordability but with slightly more privacy. Homestays (7%) and Other (2%) accounted for smaller portions, reflecting that traditional lodging options are less popular among backpackers who prioritize cost savings and social interaction over luxury.

Table 5 – Reason to Choose Hostels

REASONS	PRICES	18	36.0
	OPP. TO MEET NEW PEOPLE	14	28.0
	LOCAL CULTURE & EXP.	8	16.0
	FACILITIES	10	20.0
TOTAL		50	100

The data reveals that affordable prices (36%) are the primary reason backpackers prefer staying in hostels across Amritsar and Chandigarh. Low accommodation costs enable travelers, especially students and young professionals, to extend their trips and explore more experiences within their budget.

The opportunity to meet new people (28%) ranks second, emphasizing the social aspect of hostel stays. Many respondents mentioned that the communal setup of hostels allows them to connect with travelers from diverse backgrounds, share stories, and build friendships — experience traditional hotels often lack.

Local culture and experience (16%) also play an important role, as backpackers appreciate cultural immersion through hostel events, local tours, and food experiences. Meanwhile, facilities (20%) such as Wi-Fi, common kitchens, and cozy dorms contribute to overall satisfaction but are secondary to affordability and social interaction.

Findings

Objective: To Analyze the Role of Budget Hostels in Attracting Backpacker Travelers to Amritsar and Chandigarh

Based on the research findings and responses from 50 backpackers, it is evident that budget hostels play a pivotal role in attracting backpacker travelers to Amritsar and Chandigarh. The study highlights that a majority of respondents prefer hostels over other accommodation types primarily due to affordability, social interaction, and local cultural experiences. These hostels provide economical lodging options that suit the financial capacity of young travelers, students, and solo explorers — the main contributors to the backpacker tourism segment.

Moreover, hostels in these cities are not just seen as places to stay but as social hubs where travelers can connect, share experiences, and participate in local cultural activities. The influence of social media in showcasing hostel life, combined with improved connectivity and modern facilities, has further enhanced their appeal.

Overall, the analysis indicates that budget hostels serve as a catalyst for tourism growth in Amritsar and Chandigarh by making travel more accessible, interactive, and culturally immersive. They contribute significantly to positioning these cities as youth-friendly backpacker destinations, thereby strengthening their presence in India's alternative tourism landscape.

Objective: To Study How Backpacker Tourists Choose Their Accommodation and the Reasons Behind the Growth of Backpacker Tourism

The research findings reveal that backpacker tourists in Amritsar and Chandigarh primarily choose their accommodation based on affordability, social environment, and cultural experience. Among the 50 respondents, more than half preferred hostels over other options such as budget hotels, homestays, or regular hotels. This preference is largely influenced by the low prices offered by hostels, allowing travelers to manage longer trips within limited budgets.

In addition to affordability, the opportunity to meet new people plays a major role in decision-making. Hostels provide a communal setup where travelers can interact, share travel experiences, and build friendships, which enhances the overall travel experience. Factors such as social media influence, local food and cultural exposure, and improved travel connectivity have also significantly contributed to the increasing popularity of backpacker tourism in both cities.

Overall, the study concludes that backpacker tourism growth in Amritsar and Chandigarh is being driven by cost-effective accommodation, cultural engagement, and community-based travel experiences. These aspects collectively make hostels the preferred and most dynamic choice, fueling the steady rise of backpacker tourism in the region.

Conclusion

The present study on the Growth of Backpacker Tourism in Amritsar and Chandigarh Hostels highlights the significant role that budget hostels play in shaping the modern travel patterns of young and independent travelers. Based on data collected from 50 respondents, the findings indicate that the majority of backpackers are between 18–25 years of age, representing a vibrant, experience-seeking, and budget-conscious segment of the tourism market.

The research reveals that affordability remains the key factor influencing accommodation choices, as most respondents prefer hostels due to their economical rates and value-added social atmosphere. Additionally, social media influence, local culture and food, and improved connectivity have also contributed to the rising popularity of backpacker tourism in both cities. Hostels not only provide affordable lodging but also serve as interactive social spaces that encourage travelers to connect and share cultural experiences, making the stay more engaging and memorable.

Furthermore, the study found that the preference for hostels over traditional hotels or homestays signifies a broader shift in travel behavior toward community-based and experiential tourism. Amritsar and Chandigarh, with their blend of cultural richness, accessibility, and youth-oriented hostel infrastructure, are emerging as leading backpacker destinations in Northern India.

In conclusion, the research establishes that budget hostels are a driving force behind the growth of backpacker tourism by promoting affordable, sociable, and culturally immersive travel. This trend supports sustainable tourism development while enhancing both cities' reputations as welcoming and affordable hubs for global and domestic backpackers.

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