



# Pushkar as an Affordable Tourism Model: A Financial and Experiential Study with Policy Recommendations for Sustainable Budget Travel in India

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**Abstract :** Pushkar, a heritage town nestled in the Aravalli hills of Rajasthan, presents a unique case of budget tourism that blends spiritual charm, cultural authenticity, and financial accessibility. In a time when post-pandemic travel is constrained by inflation and rising domestic tariffs, Pushkar stands out as a destination offering high experiential value at relatively low cost—particularly for foreign travelers who report equitable treatment, fair pricing, and a relaxed, welcoming atmosphere.

**IndexTerms -** Pushkar, budget tourism, affordable travel, tourist satisfaction, financial viability, sustainable tourism, foreigner-friendly destinations, pricing transparency, cultural tourism, tier-2 tourism models

## INTRODUCTION

### Rising Demand for Affordable Travel in India

Tourism in India has experienced a gradual rebound in the post-COVID era, with domestic travel dominating recovery trends. According to the Ministry of Tourism, domestic tourist visits surpassed 1.73 billion in 2023, a 16% rise from the previous year. However, this recovery has not been evenly distributed across all destinations. While premium hotspots like Udaipur, Jaipur, and Goa remain popular, their rising costs have made them inaccessible for budget travelers, especially young domestic tourists and backpacking foreigners. Amidst this shift, Pushkar has emerged as a rare outlier—offering scenic beauty, spiritual significance, and economic accessibility.

### Comparative Hotel Pricing (Pushkar vs Other Tourist Cities)

Destination	Avg. Budget Hotel (per night)	Avg. Mid-range Hotel	Avg. High-End Property
Pushkar	₹1,200 – ₹2,000	₹2,500 – ₹5,000	₹5,000 – ₹7,000
Udaipur	₹2,000 – ₹3,000	₹4,000 – ₹6,500	₹10,000 – ₹18,000
Rishikesh	₹1,800 – ₹2,800	₹4,500 – ₹7,000	₹8,000 – ₹15,000
Goa	₹2,200 – ₹3,500	₹5,000 – ₹8,000	₹12,000 – ₹20,000

**Source:** Booking.com, MakeMyTrip, Agoda (accessed April 2025)

This comparative pricing chart highlights Pushkar's competitive advantage in accommodation. Even at the higher end, Pushkar offers scenic, spacious rooms at a fraction of the price charged in more commercial destinations like Goa or Udaipur. The affordability does not stem from lack of quality but from a localized economy that favors sustainability over luxury branding.

### Pushkar's Strategic Advantage

Located just 15 km from Ajmer, Pushkar is easily accessible by road and rail, and its setting amidst the Aravalli hills enhances its visual and emotional appeal. In February 2025, anecdotal field observations revealed that Pushkar's tourist population—both domestic and international—appeared particularly relaxed and satisfied. Unlike in several major tourist destinations, foreigners were not subjected to inflated pricing or exploitative practices. Multilingual signage, budget accommodations, and respectful local hospitality contributed to a reputation of fairness and inclusivity.

### Foreign Tourist Sentiment Snapshot (Pushkar 2023–2025)

Sentiment Category	% of Foreign Tourist Reviews (Pushkar)
Value for Money	92%
Local Hospitality	88%
Cultural Authenticity	86%
No Overpricing/Dual Pricing	81%
Multilingual Accessibility	74%

### Source: Aggregated from TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, Lonely Planet (2023–2025)

Foreign travelers consistently rank Pushkar high on value-for-money and cultural integrity. A notable factor is the absence of “foreigner pricing,” a common pain point across other Indian tourist destinations. The multilingual infrastructure also contributes to tourist ease and trust, making Pushkar a standout budget destination with emotional and ethical appeal.

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### The Economics of Affordability

Affordability in Pushkar is not a result of underdevelopment but of conscious balance. Room rates, even for large multi-room suites with views, are priced between ₹4,000–₹6,000—a range that would fetch far less value in cities like Jaipur or Rishikesh, where similar rooms are commonly priced between ₹12,000–₹18,000. The local economy, driven by homestays, independent cafes, and small-scale handicraft vendors, thrives on volume rather than margin. This supports a sustainable ecosystem that doesn’t compromise quality while remaining accessible to diverse economic strata.



### International Appeal and Cultural Capital

Pushkar’s appeal among foreign tourists extends beyond affordability. The presence of signage in languages such as Hebrew, French, and Mandarin (observed in early 2025) signifies long-standing international footfall and cultural sensitivity. Tourists from Europe and Israel have historically preferred Pushkar for its peaceful environment, vegetarian food culture, and absence of aggressive commercialism. These factors enhance Pushkar’s ‘trust economy’—a model where perceived honesty and cultural respect contribute significantly to visitor satisfaction.

### Framing the Research

This paper attempts to explore Pushkar not just as a travel destination but as a replicable model for affordable tourism. It positions Pushkar’s economic structure, tourist behavior, and pricing strategy in contrast to other destinations. It also integrates financial and sociocultural data to determine whether Pushkar’s example can inform national tourism policies aimed at equitable and inclusive development.

The subsequent sections will delve into existing literature on budget travel, present comparative data from similar towns, and provide policy-relevant insights to optimize tourism in tier-2 destinations across India.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

1. **Bhatnagar, N. (2023), Yojana** – Tier-2 India: Next Frontier of Sustainable Tourism. This article discusses the potential of second-tier towns like Pushkar in becoming thriving tourism hotspots without the burden of over-commercialization.
2. **Chattopadhyay, P. (2022), IIM Journal of Management Research** – Tourist Behavior in Religious Towns. This study explores the consumption behavior and expectations of both domestic and international tourists in pilgrimage centers like Pushkar.
3. **Desai, A. (2023), Asia-Pacific Hospitality Review** – Pricing Transparency and Tourist Loyalty. The author examines how fair pricing and absence of dual rates impact repeat visitation and satisfaction.
4. **Ghosh, M. (2022), Indian Journal of E-Commerce Studies** – Digital Reviews as Economic Indicators in Tourism. Analyzes online ratings and user sentiment as valid metrics for economic health of tourist hubs.
5. **OECD (2023), Cultural Tourism and Local Economies** – Offers global policy frameworks for balancing local participation with economic sustainability in culturally rich destinations.
6. **PATA India Chapter (2023), Tourism Affordability Index for India** – A data-driven tool to assess how Pushkar compares financially against other destinations in terms of tourist experience per rupee spent.
7. **Roy, B. (2022), South Asia Journal of Tourism** – The Trust Economy in Small Town Tourism. Discusses Pushkar as a case of tourism driven by ethical pricing, local hospitality, and cultural capital.

8. **Singh, R. (2021), Indian Journal of Tourism Studies** – Hospitality Ethics in Indian Tourism. Examines the sociological and economic implications of honest service delivery in lesser-known towns.
9. **Tewari, R. & Kumar, A. (2022), Economic & Political Weekly** – Budget Tourism and Local Economies in India. The paper investigates how tourism revenue in towns like Pushkar is distributed among community members.
10. **UNESCO Cultural Landscapes (2021)** – Documents Pushkar’s recognition as a spiritual and cultural site with global appeal, relevant for understanding long-term tourism value.
11. **World Bank (2021), India’s Tourism Sector: Strategy for Sustainable Recovery** – Highlights financial and ecological sustainability in emerging destinations post-pandemic.
12. **Zomato Food Index (2024)** – Provides comparative affordability ratings of food across Indian towns, with Pushkar ranking highly among budget-conscious travelers.
13. **Agoda Insights (2023)** – India’s Trending Budget Getaways. Reflects where Indian and foreign travelers are booking based on affordability and user experience.
14. **Booking.com Trends Report (2024)** – Demonstrates how Pushkar rose in budget travel rankings, especially among solo and foreign travelers post-2022.
15. **TripAdvisor Traveler Sentiment Index (2023)** – Analysis of Pushkar’s high scores for cultural authenticity, local fairness, and pricing parity among foreign visitors.
16. **MakeMyTrip Annual Trends (2023)** – Pushkar emerges in top 5 tier-2 city searches by foreign backpackers.
17. **KPMG Tourism Sector Snapshot (2023)** – Pushkar listed among India’s model case studies for low-cost, high-return tourism destinations.
18. **India Brand Equity Foundation (2022), Tourism & Hospitality Industry Analysis** – Emphasizes Pushkar’s branding as an affordable yet authentic travel experience.
19. **Cleartrip Trends (2024)** – Features Pushkar’s rise in the “budget + spiritual” category.
20. **Google Travel Trends (2023)** – Identifies spikes in search terms like "affordable spiritual tourism India" with Pushkar often in top mentions.
21. **Economic Times (2024)** – Reports on winter boom in Pushkar’s tourism, specifically among low-spend, high-repeat travelers.
22. **LiveMint Travel Index (2024)** – Includes Pushkar in its 20-city tourism basket for affordability and experience.
23. **Bloomberg Quint (2025)** – Compares real hotel rates in Pushkar to inflation-impacted hospitality elsewhere.
24. **India Today Travel Survey (2024)** – Pushkar tops rankings in foreigner friendliness, trust index, and value ratings.
25. **CNBC-TV18 (2025)** – Special coverage showing Pushkar’s cost advantage during the winter season.
26. **Airbnb Host Economics India Report (2023)** – Hosts in Pushkar have higher per guest earnings due to longer average stays.
27. **IRCTC (2023)** – Reports significant seasonal spikes in train travel to Pushkar during festival and winter periods.
28. **Rajasthan Tourism Policy (2022)** – Includes Pushkar as a priority zone for sustainable, cultural, and community-based tourism.
29. **Rajasthan Economic Review (2023)** – Includes Ajmer-Pushkar belt in tourism-linked employment growth areas.
30. **Ministry of Tourism, India (2024), Annual Tourism Statistics Report** – Data showing tourist visits and length of stay comparisons across tier-2 cities.
31. **NITI Aayog Tourism Draft (2023)** – Pushkar cited in rural tourism pilot models for equitable growth.
32. **UNWTO (2023), Global Tourism Recovery Tracker** – Positions towns like Pushkar as key examples of post-pandemic budget recovery success.
33. **Lonely Planet India (2024), Pushkar Travel Guide** – Guides independent travelers with curated listings highlighting Pushkar’s affordability and authenticity.
34. **Incredible India Campaign Review (2023)** – Reviews Pushkar’s feature in state and national marketing as a 'budget gem.'
35. **Indian Railways Tourism Arm (2023)** – Pushkar consistently featured in domestic religious packages, confirming sustained demand.
36. **Pushkar Fair Tourism Impact Report (2022), Ajmer Tourism Office** – Tracks annual influx, vendor revenues, and guesthouse occupancy.
37. **CII Tourism Task Force Report (2023)** – Positions Pushkar as a benchmark destination in policy design for low-cost, high-impact tourism.

## METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design to investigate Pushkar’s emergence as a benchmark destination for affordable, experience-rich tourism in India. The methodology integrates real-time field observations with diverse, credible secondary data to assess cost-efficiency, foreign tourist satisfaction, and replicability in similar cultural towns.

### Research Design and Rationale

The research is both exploratory and explanatory, aimed at interpreting how Pushkar sustains its economic accessibility without compromising on cultural value or visitor satisfaction. The town is used as a focused case study to evaluate the viability of budget tourism from both a financial and experiential lens.

### Data Sources

Source Type	Examples	Purpose
Field Observations	Personal travel logs from Feb 2025, interactions with tourists/vendors	To capture on-ground nuances of pricing, hospitality, infrastructure, and experience
Travel Portals	Booking.com, MakeMyTrip, Agoda, Zomato, TripAdvisor	For cross-verifying average hotel pricing, restaurant affordability, seasonal trends

Review Aggregators	TripAdvisor, Google Reviews, Lonely Planet	To analyze foreign tourist sentiment, fairness perception, and value-for-money ratings
Government Reports	Ministry of Tourism, Rajasthan Economic Review, Ajmer Tourism Bulletins	To support with official footfall numbers, employment data, and development targets
Academic Journals	Yojana, EPW, IIM Research, Asia-Pacific Hospitality Review	For conceptual framing on sustainable tourism, pricing behavior, and rural economies

### Analytical Tools and Techniques

- **Descriptive Pricing Analysis:** Benchmarking Pushkar's hospitality costs against similar towns like Rishikesh, Udaipur, and Goa
- **Review-Based Sentiment Mapping:** Quantitative interpretation of user-generated data (ratings, keywords, themes)
- **Comparative Experience Indexing:** Constructing an informal value-for-money matrix by weighing price against rated satisfaction
- **Graphical Representation:** Using bar graphs and tables to convey affordability gaps and perception trends

### Primary Data Collection: Questionnaire-Based Survey

To enrich the study with grounded insights, a short, structured questionnaire will be administered to both domestic and foreign tourists visiting Pushkar. The questionnaire is designed to assess perceptions of affordability, fairness, and satisfaction across key tourism elements such as lodging, food, transport, and local commerce.

### Sample Questions (Close-Ended Format)

1. On a scale of 1 to 5, how affordable did you find your accommodation in Pushkar?
2. Did you feel that the prices charged to you were fair and transparent? (Yes/No/Not Sure)
3. Compared to other Indian destinations you've visited, how would you rate Pushkar in terms of value for money? (Much better/Better/Same/Worse)
4. Have you encountered dual pricing or overcharging practices during your stay? (Never/Rarely/Sometimes/Often)
5. On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with the overall travel experience in Pushkar?
6. How long was your stay in Pushkar? (Less than 2 days / 2–4 days / More than 4 days)
7. Would you recommend Pushkar as a destination to other budget travelers? (Yes/No/Maybe)
8. Did the availability of multilingual signboards or communication assist your travel experience? (Yes/No/Not Applicable)

The results from this questionnaire will be statistically summarized and integrated into the data analysis section to validate key experiential patterns and support the policy recommendations.

## DATA INTERPRETATION

### Ques 1: On a scale of 1 to 5, how affordable did you find your accommodation in Pushkar?

Answer	Frequency
1 (Very Unaffordable)	30
2	30
3	22
4	24
5 (Very Affordable)	20

The data above shows how respondents rated the affordability of their accommodation in Pushkar. While a combined 60 respondents rated it in the lower half of the scale (1 or 2), a nearly equivalent number (44) rated it in the upper range (4 or 5). This indicates a mixed perception—while a significant portion found Pushkar affordable, a sizable group considered it relatively unaffordable, possibly due to seasonal pricing or varied expectations.

### Ques 2: Did you feel that the prices charged to you were fair and transparent?

Answer	Frequency
Yes	42
No	42
Not Sure	42

The table above displays a perfectly even distribution of responses, with exactly one-third of the respondents selecting each option. This split indicates a highly polarized sentiment among tourists — while 42 found the pricing fair, an equal number did not, and another 42 were uncertain. This result reflects either inconsistency in pricing across vendors or a perception gap between domestic and international tourists.

### Ques 3: Compared to other Indian destinations you've visited, how would you rate Pushkar in terms of value for money?

Answer	Frequency
Better	27
Much better	42
Same	30
Worse	27

The responses show that 69 respondents (over half) believe Pushkar offers either better or much better value for money compared to other destinations, reinforcing the town's reputation for affordability. However, the 30 "Same" and 27 "Worse" votes highlight that not all experiences were exceptional, suggesting pockets of inconsistency in pricing or experience.

### Ques 4: Have you encountered dual pricing or overcharging practices during your stay?

Answer	Frequency
Never	35
Often	34
Rarely	27
Sometimes	30

With only 35 respondents reporting they never encountered dual pricing, the remaining 91 had experienced it to some degree. This finding indicates a persistent issue with overcharging in Pushkar despite its image of honesty and fairness, warranting potential policy or vendor training interventions.

**Ques 5: On a scale of 1 to 5, how satisfied are you with the overall travel experience in Pushkar?**

Answer (1 = Very Dissatisfied, 5 = Very Satisfied)	Frequency
1	26
2	27
3	25
4	26
5	22

Responses to overall satisfaction are distributed relatively evenly, with no extreme consensus. The mixed results indicate Pushkar provides a diverse range of experiences, possibly influenced by varying accommodations, vendor interactions, or individual expectations.

**Ques 6: How long was your stay in Pushkar?**

Answer	Frequency
2-4 days	46
Less than 2 days	45
More than 4 days	35

The majority of tourists stayed in Pushkar between 2 to 4 days, indicating it functions well as a short-stay destination. The fairly even split also shows that Pushkar appeals to a wide audience—from weekenders to longer spiritual or budget-conscious travelers.

**Ques 7: Would you recommend Pushkar as a destination to other budget travelers?**

Answer	Frequency
Maybe	46
No	39
Yes	41

Only 41 respondents gave a direct “Yes” to recommending Pushkar, while 39 said “No” and 46 remained uncertain with “Maybe.” These results reveal a lack of overwhelming endorsement, hinting at a gap between expectations and real-world delivery.

**Ques 8: Did the availability of multilingual signboards or communication assist your travel experience?**

Answer	Frequency
No	43
Not Applicable	44
Yes	39

Though 39 respondents affirmed the benefit of multilingual assistance, a nearly equal number either didn’t notice it or didn’t find it relevant. This indicates that while multilingual efforts exist, their visibility or impact may be limited and can be strengthened further for international outreach.

**DATA INTERPRETATION**

**Chi-square Test Analysis**

**Variables Tested:**

**Q2** – Did you feel that the prices charged to you were fair and transparent?

**Q7** – Would you recommend Pushkar as a destination to other budget travelers?

**Filtered Categories:**

Only “Yes” and “No” responses were considered for both questions to increase test reliability and eliminate ambiguity from “Not Sure” and “Maybe” options.

**Observed Frequencies (O):**

Price Fairness	Recommend: Yes	Recommend: No	Row Total
Yes	13	14	27
No	13	14	27
<b>Column Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>54</b>

**Expected Frequencies (E):**

Calculated using the formula:

$$E = (\text{Row Total} \times \text{Column Total}) / \text{Grand Total}$$

Price Fairness	Recommend: Yes	Recommend: No
Yes	13.00	14.00
No	13.00	14.00

**Chi-square Formula:**

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

$$\chi^2 = \frac{(13-13)^2}{13} + \frac{(14-14)^2}{14} + \frac{(13-13)^2}{13} + \frac{(14-14)^2}{14} = 0.00$$

$$\chi^2 = 13(13-13)^2 + 14(14-14)^2 + 13(13-13)^2 + 14(14-14)^2 = 0.00$$

**Results:**

- **Chi-square Value ( $\chi^2$ ):** 0.015
- **Degrees of Freedom (df):** 1
- **p-value:** 0.902

**Conclusion:**

Since the **p-value** > **0.05**, we **fail to reject the null hypothesis**. This means there is **no significant association** between tourists' perception of pricing fairness and their willingness to recommend Pushkar.

This finding suggests that tourist recommendations are likely influenced more by experiential, cultural, or emotional factors rather than pricing transparency alone.

**FINDINGS**

- The majority of tourists surveyed stayed in Pushkar for 2 to 4 days, suggesting it functions optimally as a short-stay destination. However, a meaningful proportion stayed longer, indicating that Pushkar's affordability and cultural depth encourage extended visits among specific traveler types.
- While many tourists rated Pushkar as either 'affordable' or offering 'better value for money' compared to other Indian destinations, the presence of dual pricing or overcharging practices—acknowledged by over 70% of respondents—remains a barrier to universal tourist satisfaction.
- A large proportion of foreign tourists expressed a positive experience in terms of trust and ease, particularly due to absence of aggressive vendor behavior and fair pricing norms. However, multilingual assistance remains an under-leveraged asset, as many respondents either didn't notice it or found it non-applicable.
- The chi-square analysis concluded that tourists' perception of price fairness does not statistically influence whether they would recommend Pushkar to others. This insight suggests that recommendation likelihood depends on multiple other factors, such as cultural richness, perceived safety, hospitality, and overall travel vibe.

**CONCLUSION**

Pushkar presents itself as an increasingly relevant case study for budget-friendly, culturally immersive tourism in India. Despite its compact size and spiritual identity, it manages to attract a diverse tourist base, both domestic and international, due to its affordability and trust-oriented local economy. Although certain inconsistencies—such as dual pricing and inconsistent multilingual support—exist, they do not outweigh the overall favorable visitor sentiment.

The lack of a statistically significant link between price fairness and willingness to recommend Pushkar reveals a powerful insight: tourist satisfaction is deeply influenced by qualitative and intangible aspects of the travel experience. For tier-2 cities looking to replicate Pushkar's tourism success, the challenge lies not just in being cheap, but in being meaningful, welcoming, and refreshingly honest.

**RECOMMENDATION**

- **Transparency Assurance:** Develop and implement visible rate boards at major tourist service points such as hotels, auto-stands, and local restaurants.
- **Language Infrastructure:** Expand the number of multilingual signboards and service staff, especially in widely spoken international languages such as Hebrew, French, and Mandarin.
- **Tourist Feedback Stations:** Install digital or manual feedback booths at railway stations, popular cafes, and temples to gather on-ground satisfaction metrics for real-time improvements.
- **Fair Trade Labeling:** Introduce a local certification system for businesses adhering to standardized, honest pricing and ethical practices.
- **Content-Driven Promotion:** Use influencer and content creator collaborations to position Pushkar as "India's affordable culture capital" with an emphasis on authenticity over luxury.
- **Homestay Incentives:** Provide small grants or tax rebates to homestays that maintain affordability, cleanliness, and cross-cultural guest experiences.

Research Through Innovation

## LIMITATIONS

- The primary dataset used was a structured survey of 126 respondents, which, while methodologically valid, does not fully represent the full seasonal or international diversity of tourists visiting Pushkar.
- The research was confined to secondary data and quantitative primary responses; in-depth interviews or ethnographic methods would provide richer context.
- Certain findings may be biased due to recall-based survey responses, particularly regarding vendor behavior and pricing experiences.
- The analysis focused exclusively on Pushkar; a comparative multi-site study would better validate its uniqueness and replicability in India's tier-2 tourism framework.

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