

# COMPARISON OF THE SATISFACTION ON DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL VISITORS WITH THE HIMACHALI CUISINE

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## Abstract

This study investigates the factors influencing tourist satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences, utilizing a sample of 670 respondents selected through purposive sampling. By employing quantitative research methods, the study examines the impact of food quality, authenticity, service quality, ambience, and novelty on tourist satisfaction. The findings reveal that food quality and authenticity are the most significant predictors of satisfaction, while service quality and ambience also play essential roles. Hypothesis testing indicates significant differences in satisfaction levels based on nationality, age, and previous experience with Himachali cuisine. The study highlights the critical role of maintaining high food quality and authenticity and emphasizes the need for targeted marketing strategies to cater to diverse tourist segments. The implications for restaurateurs, tourism stakeholders, and policymakers include enhancing service quality, promoting local food festivals, and supporting sustainable culinary tourism practices. Limitations include reliance on self-reported data and purposive sampling, suggesting a need for future research incorporating more representative samples and multi-stakeholder perspectives.

**Keywords:** Culinary Tourism, Tourist Satisfaction, Himachali Cuisine, Authenticity

## • Introduction

The culinary experiences in Himachal Pradesh significantly shape the overall tourist satisfaction, drawing domestic and international visitors to the region. Himachal Pradesh, with its rich cultural heritage, scenic beauty, and distinctive cuisine, offers a unique blend of experiences that cater to the diverse preferences of tourists. This comparative study explores the satisfaction levels of domestic and international visitors with Himachali culinary experiences. It examines the factors contributing to their overall dining satisfaction and how these experiences influence their perceptions of the destination. The tourism industry in Himachal Pradesh is a vital economic sector, contributing significantly to the state's economy through employment generation and income opportunities. The state's diverse offerings, including its traditional cuisine, attract a broad demographic of tourists. Himachali cuisine, characterised by its traditional methods and local ingredients, is an integral part of the cultural experience that tourists seek. The "Dham," a traditional festive meal, is particularly notable for its cultural significance and appeal to tourists (Verma & Rana, 2023).

Domestic tourists often seek culinary experiences that provide a sense of nostalgia and connection to regional traditions. These experiences are enhanced by the opportunity to interact with locals, which adds to the authenticity and richness of the experience (Roy & Pradhan, 2022). On the other hand, international tourists are generally driven by the quest for unique and exotic food experiences that offer a glimpse into the cultural and gastronomic diversity of the region. Studies have shown that international tourists derive significant hedonic value from their culinary experiences, further amplified by the novelty and escapism of travelling abroad (Ponsignon et al., 2020). Several factors, including food quality, service, atmosphere, and the overall dining environment, can influence tourist satisfaction with Himachali's culinary experiences. The freshness and authenticity of local ingredients, traditional cooking methods, and the unique flavours of Himachali cuisine are critical components that enhance tourist satisfaction (Kanwar & Bhushan, 2020). Additionally, interacting with local culture through food festivals, cooking classes, and direct engagement with local food producers can significantly enhance the overall experience for tourists (Sahoo, 2020).

The study also considers the impact of culinary tourism on local communities and the sustainable development of tourism in Himachal Pradesh. Promoting local cuisine enhances the tourist experience and supports local economies by creating income opportunities for local farmers, artisans, and food vendors (Thakur, 2022). The role of culinary tourism in preserving cultural heritage and promoting sustainable tourism practices is also examined, highlighting the importance of integrating local food traditions into the broader tourism strategy of the region (Bhartwal & Sharma, 2022). Tourist satisfaction is a critical determinant of their future behavioural intentions, including their likelihood of revisiting and recommending the destination to others. Satisfied tourists are more likely to engage in positive word-of-mouth promotion, which is crucial for the sustainable growth of the tourism sector (Saxena et al., 2021). This study aims to comprehensively analyse the factors influencing tourist satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences and identify strategies for enhancing the overall culinary tourism experience in Himachal Pradesh.

Despite the existing studies on culinary tourism in Himachal Pradesh, several gaps in the literature warrant further investigation. Firstly, while there is ample evidence on the satisfaction levels of domestic tourists, there is limited research focusing specifically on the comparative experiences of international tourists. Future studies should aim to provide a more detailed analysis of the unique preferences and satisfaction determinants of international visitors to Himachali cuisine. Secondly, the role of culinary tourism in promoting sustainable tourism practices and supporting local economies requires further exploration. While it is acknowledged that culinary tourism can create income opportunities for local communities, there is a need for more empirical data to quantify these benefits and to develop strategies for maximising the positive impacts of culinary tourism on local economies. The influence of modern culinary trends and the integration of innovative food practices into traditional Himachali cuisine have not been extensively studied. As culinary preferences evolve, it is essential to understand how modern influences can be incorporated into traditional cuisine without compromising its authenticity. Research in this area could provide valuable insights for Himachal Pradesh food producers and tourism stakeholders.

Lastly, there is a need for more comprehensive studies that examine the impact of cultural and culinary tourism on the overall destination image of Himachal Pradesh. Understanding how culinary experiences shape tourists' perceptions of the destination can help develop targeted marketing strategies that highlight the unique culinary offerings of the region. By addressing these gaps, future research can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the role of culinary tourism

in Himachal Pradesh and provide actionable insights for enhancing the tourist experience and promoting sustainable tourism development.

## 2. Review of Literature

The tourism industry in Himachal Pradesh, India, has significantly transformed with an increasing focus on culinary tourism. Himachali cuisine, with its rich flavours and traditional cooking methods, has become a crucial component of the tourism experience, attracting both domestic and international visitors. This review examines various studies to understand the factors influencing tourist satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences, the impact of these experiences on tourism development, and the differences between domestic and international tourist perceptions. Culinary tourism is a growing trend globally, and Himachal Pradesh is no exception. The traditional "Dham," a festive meal for special occasions, highlights Himachali cuisine. Verma and Rana (2023) emphasise that Dham plays a vital role in the hospitality sector of Himachal Pradesh. Their study highlights that Dham's traditional preparation and presentation significantly enhance tourist satisfaction, providing them with a unique cultural experience. This particularly appeals to domestic tourists who seek a connection to their cultural roots.

Sahoo (2020) studied tour guides' perceptions of gastronomic tourism in Himachal Pradesh. The research underscores the importance of specialised training for tour guides to better cater to the growing demand for culinary tourism. The study also suggests that branding Himachali cuisine through ethnic restaurants and culinary tours can further enhance the tourist experience. This aligns with the findings of Kanwar and Bhushan (2020), who discuss the role of ethnic fermented foods and beverages in enriching the culinary landscape of Himachal Pradesh. Their research indicates that these traditional foods offer health benefits and contribute to the region's cultural appeal. On the other hand, international tourists are often driven by the novelty and escapism associated with experiencing new cuisines. Ponsignon, Lunardo, and Michrafy (2020) found that international tourists derive significant hedonic value from their culinary experiences, which enhances their overall satisfaction and intention to revisit. This is supported by the study of Widjaja et al. (2020), which examines tourist behavioural intentions towards gastronomy destinations in Indonesia. The study shows that the quality of the culinary experience directly affects tourist satisfaction and their perception of the destination.

The role of food quality, service, and ambience in tourist satisfaction has been extensively studied. Kala and Barthwal (2020) explored tourist satisfaction with food and restaurant experiences in mountainous religious destinations in India. Their findings reveal that the quality of food and service, along with the physical attributes of the restaurant, significantly contribute to tourist satisfaction. However, attributes like food preparation, presentation, and employee behaviour were found to be less significant. This suggests that while the overall dining environment is crucial, the core quality of food and service remains paramount. Digital platforms and online reviews also play a critical role in shaping tourist perceptions. Srivastava, Pareek, and Sharma (2021) used text mining to analyse international tourists' reviews of Delhi's street food. Their study identifies key dimensions of culinary experiences that can enhance a destination's image. The insights suggest that positive online reviews can significantly influence potential tourists' decisions, highlighting the importance of maintaining high standards in culinary offerings.

The relationship between culinary tourism and economic development is also noteworthy. Bhartwal and Sharma (2022) discuss the impact of standard cuisine practices in Rajasthan, emphasising that

well-planned culinary tourism can reduce poverty and create income opportunities for local communities. This perspective is echoed by Thakur (2022), who highlights the importance of local festivals and fairs in promoting cultural tourism in Himachal Pradesh. Integrating culinary tourism with these cultural events can enhance the tourist experience and support local economies. Culinary tourism enhances the tourist experience and fosters cultural exchange and understanding. Rodríguez-Gutiérrez et al. (2020) studied gastronomic satisfaction in Popayán, Colombia, and found that culinary experiences significantly influence tourists' overall satisfaction with the destination. Similar findings by Fitrizal, Elfiswandi, and Sanjaya (2021) in Padang, West Sumatra, indicate that culinary tourism positively impacts tourist satisfaction and destination loyalty. These studies suggest that food is a powerful medium for cultural exchange, helping tourists connect with the local culture on a deeper level. The dynamic and competitive tourism market shows the need for innovation in culinary tourism. Maitra, Bansal, and Joseph (2021) study on the Golden Triangle of India highlights culinary tourism's potential to attract niche travellers. The research suggests that innovative food tours and incorporating traditional recipes can significantly enhance the tourist experience. This approach is supported by Gozali and Wijoyo (2022), who emphasise the importance of understanding tourist perceptions and experiences to develop effective culinary tourism strategies. In conclusion, the literature on culinary tourism in Himachal Pradesh and other regions underscores the importance of high-quality food, authentic cultural experiences, and innovative tourism practices in enhancing tourist satisfaction. Integrating traditional culinary practices with modern tourism strategies can create a unique and appealing experience for domestic and international tourists. Future research should focus on quantifying culinary tourism's economic impact and exploring modern culinary trends in traditional cuisines.

The following hypotheses were formulated for the study in line with the above discussion.

H1: The cuisine's authenticity and traditional preparation methods significantly influence domestic tourists' satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences.

H2: International tourists derive higher satisfaction from Himachali culinary experiences due to the novelty and escapism of experiencing new and exotic foods.

### 3. Methodology

The methodology for this study on tourist satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences employs a quantitative research approach. The study aims to analyse the satisfaction levels of both domestic and international tourists. A sample size of 670 respondents was selected using purposive sampling to ensure that participants had firsthand experience with Himachali cuisine. This sampling method was chosen to specifically target individuals who have interacted with the culinary offerings in Himachal Pradesh, thereby providing relevant and insightful data. Data collection involved a structured questionnaire that was administered to the selected participants. The questionnaire was designed to capture various dimensions of tourist satisfaction, including food quality, service, ambience, and the overall dining experience. The variables in the study were sourced from existing literature on culinary tourism and tourist satisfaction. These variables include food quality, authenticity, service quality, ambience, novelty, and overall satisfaction. Each variable was measured using a Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), allowing for a detailed analysis of the tourists' perceptions and experiences.

The collected data were analysed using statistical techniques to determine the relationships between the variables and overall tourist satisfaction. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise the

sample's demographic characteristics, and inferential statistics, including regression analysis, were employed to identify the significant predictors of tourist satisfaction. This methodological approach provides a robust framework for understanding the factors influencing tourist satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences. It offers valuable insights for enhancing the culinary tourism sector in Himachal Pradesh.

4. Results

4.1 Demographic Characteristics

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the sample. The age distribution shows a diverse range of respondents, with the majority falling in the 26-35 age bracket (220 participants), followed by the 18-25 group (150 participants), the 36-45 group (130 participants), the 46-55 group (100 participants), and those aged 56 and above (70 participants). Gender distribution is relatively balanced, with 320 males and 350 females. Regarding nationality, domestic tourists (400) outnumber international tourists (270), indicating a higher representation of local visitors. Previous experience with Himachali cuisine is also significant, with 450 respondents having prior experience and 220 without. These demographic insights provide a comprehensive overview of the study's participants, highlighting the diversity in age, gender, nationality, and prior experience with the cuisine, which are critical factors in understanding variations in satisfaction levels.

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics

Characteristics	Frequency
Age	18-25: 150, 26-35: 220, 36-45: 130, 46-55: 100, 56+: 70
Gender	Male: 320, Female: 350
Nationality	Domestic: 400, International: 270
Previous Experience with Himachali Cuisine	Yes: 450, No: 220

4.2 Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)

Table 2 presents the reliability analysis results using Cronbach's Alpha for the different variables measured in the study. All the variables show high reliability, with values ranging from 0.79 to 0.88. Specifically, food quality (0.85), authenticity (0.80), service quality (0.88), ambience (0.83), novelty (0.79), and overall satisfaction (0.86) indicate internal solid consistency. These results suggest that the items used to measure each construct are reliable and consistently represent the underlying variables. High reliability is essential for ensuring that the data collected is stable and accurate, providing confidence in the subsequent analysis and findings.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis Results

Variable	Cronbach's Alpha
Food Quality	0.85
Authenticity	0.8
Service Quality	0.88
Ambience	0.83
Novelty	0.79
Overall Satisfaction	0.86

4.3 Regression Analysis

Table 3 provides the regression analysis results, showing the influence of different variables on overall tourist satisfaction. Food quality has the highest beta coefficient (0.30) and a p-value of 0.001, indicating a strong and significant positive impact on satisfaction. Authenticity follows with a beta coefficient of 0.25 and a p-value of 0.003, showing a significant, favourable influence. Service quality (beta = 0.20, p = 0.010), ambience (beta = 0.15, p = 0.025), and novelty (beta = 0.10, p = 0.050) also significantly contribute to overall satisfaction, though to a lesser extent. These findings underline the importance of food quality and authenticity in enhancing tourist satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences. The significant p-values across all variables indicate that these factors are statistically important in explaining the variations in tourist satisfaction.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Results

Variable	Beta Coefficient	p-value
Food Quality	0.30	0.001
Authenticity	0.25	0.003
Service Quality	0.20	0.010
Ambience	0.15	0.025
Novelty	0.10	0.050

4.4 Hypotheses Testing

Table 4 summarises the hypothesis testing results. For the hypothesis on domestic vs. international satisfaction, the test statistic is 3.25 with a p-value of 0.001, indicating a significant difference in satisfaction levels between domestic and international tourists. This suggests that international tourists generally have higher satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences, possibly due to the novelty and uniqueness of the cuisine. Regarding age vs. satisfaction, the test statistic is 2.75 with a p-value of 0.006, showing a significant difference in satisfaction levels across different age groups. This finding implies that satisfaction with Himachali cuisine varies with age, potentially due to



differing culinary preferences and expectations among different age demographics. The experience vs. satisfaction hypothesis test statistic is 4.10 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a highly significant difference in satisfaction based on previous experience with Himachali cuisine. Tourists with prior experience tend to have higher satisfaction levels, likely because they have more accurate expectations and a deeper appreciation for the cuisine.

Table 4: Hypotheses Testing Results

Hypothesis	Statistic	Value
Domestic vs International Satisfaction	Test Statistic	3.25
Domestic vs International Satisfaction	p-value	0.001
Age vs Satisfaction	Test Statistic	2.75
Age vs Satisfaction	p-value	0.006
Experience vs Satisfaction	Test Statistic	4.10
Experience vs Satisfaction	p-value	0.000

## 5. Discussion

The findings from this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing tourist satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences, emphasising the significant role of food quality, authenticity, service quality, ambience, and novelty. The demographic characteristics of the respondents, predominantly domestic tourists, highlight the need for targeted strategies to cater to diverse tourist segments. The demographic data showed that most respondents were domestic tourists, with a balanced gender distribution and a diverse age range. This demographic insight suggests that domestic tourists are strongly interested in exploring regional cuisines, and the country has a substantial market for culinary tourism. The significant proportion of tourists with previous experience with Himachali cuisine underscores the importance of repeat visitors who have developed a taste for local dishes and are likely to contribute to positive word-of-mouth promotion.

Reliability analysis indicated high internal consistency across the variables, suggesting that the measures used to assess tourist satisfaction were robust. The high Cronbach's Alpha values for food quality, authenticity, service quality, ambience, novelty, and overall satisfaction confirm that the items used in the survey were reliable indicators of these constructs. This reliability is crucial for ensuring the validity of the findings and providing confidence in the data collected. Regression analysis revealed that food quality and authenticity were the most critical factors influencing tourist satisfaction. This finding aligns with previous studies emphasising the importance of authentic and high-quality culinary experiences in enhancing tourist satisfaction (Kanwar & Bhushan, 2020; Verma & Rana, 2023). Tourists value the freshness, taste, and traditional preparation methods of Himachali cuisine, significantly contributing to their overall satisfaction. Authenticity, reflected in the traditional methods of cooking and local ingredients, also plays a vital role in attracting tourists who seek genuine cultural experiences. Service quality and ambience were also significant predictors of tourist satisfaction, although to a lesser extent than food quality and authenticity. These findings are consistent with Kala and Barthwal (2020), who noted that the overall dining

environment, including service and ambience, contributes to tourists' satisfaction in religious destinations. The importance of service quality and ambience suggests that enhancing these aspects can further improve the dining experience for tourists, making it more enjoyable and memorable.

The novelty factor, although significant, had the lowest beta coefficient, indicating that while it contributes to satisfaction, it is not as critical as other factors. This finding suggests that while tourists appreciate unique and new culinary experiences, their primary concern remains the quality and authenticity of the food. This insight aligns with the study by Widjaja et al. (2020), which highlighted that the quality of the culinary experience directly impacts tourist satisfaction and behavioural intentions. Hypothesis testing provided further insights into the differences in satisfaction levels based on nationality, age, and previous experience with Himachali cuisine. The significant difference in satisfaction levels between domestic and international tourists suggests that international tourists find Himachali culinary experiences more novel and exotic, leading to higher satisfaction levels (Ponsignon et al., 2020). This finding underscores the potential of Himachali cuisine to attract international tourists seeking unique and authentic culinary experiences. The significant variation in satisfaction levels across different age groups highlights the diverse preferences and expectations related to food and dining experiences. Younger tourists might seek trendy and vibrant food experiences, while older tourists prefer traditional and authentic cuisines. This demographic insight is critical for developing targeted marketing strategies that cater to the specific preferences of different age groups. The highly significant impact of previous experience on satisfaction levels indicates that tourists with prior exposure to Himachali cuisine are more likely to be satisfied with their dining experiences. This finding is consistent with the notion that familiarity with the cuisine sets accurate expectations and enhances the overall experience (Srivastava et al., 2021). Repeat visitors, therefore, represent a valuable segment for culinary tourism, as they are likely to be more satisfied and contribute to positive word-of-mouth promotion.

Overall, the discussion highlights the multifaceted nature of tourist satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences. The findings emphasise the importance of maintaining high food quality and authenticity while enhancing service quality and ambience to create a holistic and satisfying dining experience. The significant differences in satisfaction based on demographic factors suggest the need for tailored marketing strategies to cater to diverse tourist segments, ensuring that the unique culinary offerings of Himachal Pradesh continue to attract and satisfy both domestic and international tourists.

## 6. Implications of the Study

The implications of this study are manifold and extend to various stakeholders in the tourism and hospitality industry in Himachal Pradesh. First and foremost, the findings underscore the critical role of food quality and authenticity in enhancing tourist satisfaction. This insight is particularly valuable for restaurateurs and food service providers, who should focus on maintaining high standards of food quality and preserving traditional cooking methods to meet the expectations of tourists. By emphasising the authenticity of Himachali cuisine, they can attract tourists seeking genuine cultural experiences and differentiate their offerings from competitors. The significant impact of service quality and ambience on tourist satisfaction suggests that hospitality providers should prioritise these aspects to enhance the overall dining experience. Training programs for staff to improve service quality and create a pleasant and culturally immersive ambience can significantly boost tourist satisfaction. These improvements can lead to higher customer retention



and positive word-of-mouth promotion, which are crucial for the long-term success of culinary tourism in the region. The study's findings on the differences in satisfaction levels based on demographic factors have important implications for marketing strategies. For instance, the higher satisfaction levels among international tourists indicate a significant opportunity to promote Himachali cuisine to global audiences. Tourism boards and marketing agencies should highlight Himachali cuisine's unique and exotic aspects in their promotional campaigns to attract international tourists. Collaborations with international travel agencies and participation in global food festivals can also help showcase Himachali cuisine to a broader audience.

The findings suggest a strong interest in regional culinary experiences for domestic tourists. Tourism stakeholders should leverage this interest by promoting local food festivals, culinary tours, and cooking classes that provide immersive experiences. Engaging local communities in these initiatives can also foster a sense of pride and ownership, contributing to the sustainable development of culinary tourism. The significant variation in satisfaction levels across different age groups highlights the need for targeted marketing strategies that cater to the specific preferences of different demographics. Younger tourists, for example, might be attracted to innovative and contemporary dining experiences, while older tourists might prefer traditional and authentic culinary offerings. Tailoring these segments' marketing messages and culinary experiences can enhance their appeal and satisfaction. The strong influence of previous experience on tourist satisfaction indicates that repeat visitors represent a valuable segment for culinary tourism. Tourism stakeholders should focus on creating loyalty programs and incentives to encourage repeat visits. Providing personalised experiences and exclusive offers for returning tourists can enhance their satisfaction and likelihood of recommending Himachali cuisine to others. In addition to the implications for individual businesses, the study's findings have broader policy implications. The significant role of culinary tourism in promoting cultural heritage and supporting local economies suggests that policymakers should prioritise the development of this sector. Investments in infrastructure, such as improving accessibility to culinary destinations and enhancing the quality of food markets, can facilitate the growth of culinary tourism. Policies that support local farmers and food producers, such as grants and subsidies, can also ensure a steady supply of high-quality ingredients for culinary tourism.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the importance of promoting Himachali cuisine as a key component of the region's cultural tourism strategy. Integrating culinary experiences with other cultural activities, such as festivals and fairs, can create a comprehensive and immersive tourism product that attracts diverse tourists. Collaborations with cultural organisations and local communities can also help preserve and promote traditional culinary practices, ensuring their sustainability for future generations.

Overall, the implications of this study highlight the importance of a holistic and integrated approach to developing and promoting culinary tourism in Himachal Pradesh. By focusing on quality, authenticity, and targeted marketing strategies, stakeholders can enhance tourist satisfaction and ensure the sustainable growth of the culinary tourism sector.

## **7. Limitations and Scope for Future Research**

While this study provides valuable insights into tourist satisfaction with Himachali culinary experiences, it has limitations. One of the primary limitations is the reliance on self-reported data, which can be subject to biases such as social desirability and recall bias. Participants may have

provided responses they believe are socially acceptable or may not accurately remember their dining experiences, which can affect the reliability of the data. Future research could address this limitation by incorporating more objective satisfaction measures, such as observational data or feedback from third-party reviews. Another limitation is the use of purposive sampling, which, while effective for targeting specific respondents with relevant experiences, may limit the generalizability of the findings. The sample may not fully represent the broader population of tourists visiting Himachal Pradesh. Future studies could employ random sampling techniques to obtain a more representative sample, thereby enhancing the generalizability of the results.

The study also focuses primarily on tourists' perspectives and does not consider the views of other stakeholders, such as local food producers, restaurant owners, and tour guides. Understanding the perspectives of these stakeholders could provide a more comprehensive view of the factors influencing tourist satisfaction and the challenges faced in promoting Himachali culinary tourism. Future research could adopt a multi-stakeholder approach to explore the experiences and opinions of various actors involved in the culinary tourism ecosystem. Additionally, the study mainly examines satisfaction levels and does not delve deeply into the specific attributes of Himachali cuisine that tourists find appealing or unappealing. Future research could employ qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, to explore tourists' detailed perceptions and preferences regarding different aspects of Himachali cuisine. This approach could provide richer insights into the specific elements that contribute to satisfaction and areas for improvement. The impact of external factors, such as seasonal variations and cultural festivals, on tourist satisfaction with culinary experiences is another area that warrants further investigation. Seasonal changes can influence the availability and quality of ingredients, which can affect the culinary experience. Similarly, cultural festivals and events can enhance the dining experience by providing a festive and immersive environment. Future studies could explore how these external factors influence tourist satisfaction and how they can be leveraged.

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