



Religious Tourism in Asia and the Pacific

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Religious Tourism in Asia and the Pacific

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Foreword

This study is a sequel to the *Intra-Regional Outbound Market Series of Asia and the Pacific* of 2006 and the *International Conference on Tourism, Religions, and Dialogue of Cultures* held in Cordoba, Spain, in 2007, both of which were completed under the auspices of the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO).

Asia and the Pacific is considered the region of the world with the greatest number of pilgrims and travellers for religious events, for both international and domestic tourism. According to UNESCO, 60% of the world population practices a religion and these believers form the demographic base of religious tourism. Many countries include religion in their census. It is estimated that there are approximately six hundred million national and international religious and spiritual voyages in the world, of which 40% take place in Europe and around half in Asia.

Asia and the Pacific is blessed not only with religious sites but also because it forms the hub of pilgrim centres, religious festivals and other related cultural activities of a religious nature.

Therefore, as with the Tourism Satellite Accounts, there is the need for more and precise information on religious tourism as opposed to cultural tourism. The study has clearly identified areas of interest that appeal to the religious aspects of travel and it is the responsibility of the administrators and the travel professionals to glean this information as accurate and universally applicable data are indispensable for marketing and promotions.

The Regional Programme for Asia and the Pacific, UNWTO called for contributions from academia and tourism professionals for a study on *Religious Tourism in Asia and the Pacific* in 2009. These findings form the basis of this present publication.

We are confident that the outcome of the study on religious tourism in Asia and the Pacific will pave the way for the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific (CAP) and Commission for South Asia (CSA) member States to look at religious tourism as a resource in the same light as the sun, sea and sand holidays that are readily marketed by tourism professionals.

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Executive Summary

Section 1 – Introductory Essays

Pilgrims between East and West

Two international conferences, one in 1967 and the latest in 2007, held in Cordoba, Spain, by the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), entitled “Tourism and Religions: A Contribution to the Dialogue of Cultures, Religions and Civilizations”, highlight the sociology of religions in world tourism. The Cordoba conference concentrated on the role of tourism in the dialogue between civilizations while the present study focuses on the East and the West taking a journey of self discovery via religious tourism. The importance of Asia and the Pacific in religious tourism is seen by the fact that of an estimated 600 million religious and spiritual voyages, 40% were in Europe and around half in Asia. However, some fundamental problems like the measuring of tourism flows raised in Cordoba, is once again relevant in the analysis of any tourism investigation because good statistics are vital for the understanding of facts, and this is a missing link in religious tourism in Asia.

Pilgrimages and the growing interest for pilgrimage routes in Asia and the Pacific can benefit from Western experiences, especially from that of the most famous in the world, “Camino de Santiago”. Finally, sustainable development of religious tourism with education and training given their rightful place is the key to safeguarding the vast cultural heritage of Asia Pacific tourism.

The Silk Roads of Faith

The Silk Road has been the bridge between the East and the West for many centuries, losing its prestige only after the sea-routes opened in the 16th century. The Silk Road exemplified cross-border and cross-cultural contact through some intrepid pioneers; some were secular like Ibn Batuta and others religious like Matteo Ricci or Xuangzang who succeeded in establishing a dialogue and ‘contact’ between the two civilizations. The Central Asian states (especially with the collapse of Soviet communism), through which the Silk Roads ran, are once again seeing a revival in their religion which could be a boon for East-West religious tourism. Moreover the recent shake-up of the Capitalist order has led to a search for ethical values and there is no doubt that Asian spirituality can fill this void which will lead to a new lease of life to the Silk Road.

Religious Tourism, Spirituality and Peace – Philosophical and Practical Aspects

The debate on the importance of, and distinction between, tourism as a ritual and as a form of spirituality has not been conclusive. However, this distinction needs to be made and explored in order to comprehend the kind of process tourism (especially religious tourism) is, both physically – at the individual and social level, and from the cultural and theoretical point of view, in order to realise its benefits and circumvent or limit its negative aspects. It has been noted by many scholars that each of the major, and some of the minor, religions emphasize on spirituality, universal brotherhood and humanism as basic tenets that, if followed, may lead to global solidarity and peace.

Spiritual tourism, broadly defined to include tourism that is motivated fully or partly by such values (especially religious tourism, both domestic and international), is a vehicle for change for the better and can lead to peace if properly guided by codes of ethics and conduct (for tourists as well as managers) that are sourced from religions and social-cultural values derived from religions. In fact, the philosophies of the four major religions (in terms of followers) – Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity – are not conflicting, if we examine their spiritual aspects and bases. All these religions aspire to be world religions, but are hindered by barriers like ritualism, ethnicity and nationalism, so the question of scale is also important. This is especially so since contemporary social processes of globalization and localization, which compete with religions as forces for harmony, as well as their paradoxical products – disharmony, discord and conflict – are necessary in any assessment of religious tourism, its impacts and potential.

This paper addresses these issues and argues that tourism is spiritually inclined or favourably disposed towards the values of different cultures and is sensitive towards, and cognizant of, differences, has an important role to play in creating social solidarity at various levels, and hence is crucial in the maintenance of existing social structures and creation of organization and structure where none existed before. This paper looks at religious tourism, spiritual tourism, and the philosophies of all the major (and some of the minor) religions with respect to traditional, modernizing, and modern societies, and underscores that despite negative factors and forces like terrorism, racism, economic recession and possible self-imposed limitations on travel due to concern for climate change, tourism is and can be a greater force for peace than envisaged by those who think of it as merely a ritual. It concludes with a summary discussion of practical aspects of religious tourism, such as economic and political benefits and mutual understanding.

Section 2 – Regional Marketing and Thematic Studies

Religious Tourism in South-East Asia

Religion has an enormous influence in the daily life of Asians and the four major religions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam and Christianity all play a major role in South-East Asian society. Invariably, religious tourism in the region is closely linked to these faiths. Religions have inspired the construction of some of the most spectacular monuments in the region and all forms of art and architecture find expression in them. However, religious tourism has not been fully exploited due to the high sensitivity of the subject, the lack of scientific data and its overwhelming domestic nature. The paper, while giving available statistical data, makes a case study of three of the leading destinations of South-East Asia – Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand. While Thailand is essentially Buddhist, attempts have been made by the authorities to include ‘meditation tourism’ into the gamut of religious products while Malaysia and Indonesia toy with the promotion of ‘Islamic tourism’. Attention is drawn to the interplay of different religions in these countries and to the different tourism packages which can be marketed as regional products.

Islam and Tourism – Asia and the Pacific in Focus

The political, cultural, and social significance of travel by Muslims for religious purposes in, and from Asia, is of vital importance when one sees that five countries in the region have the following populations professing the Islamic faith: Indonesia: 203 million; Pakistan: 174 million; India: 161 million; Bangladesh: 145 million; and Iran: 74 million. Moreover it is incumbent on Muslims who have the means and the ability to perform the Hajj at least once in their lifetime. This along with the Umrah or the ‘lesser pilgrimage’ constitutes an act of religious tourism that is unparalleled in other religions. The importance of Ziyarat (visiting sacred sites) also makes travel an integral part of the Muslim psyche. Ziyarat is of special significance for domestic travel especially in Indonesia. While elaborating on some of the principle Islamic tenets, attention is drawn to customs and practices such as food habits (Halal food), the preponderant role of modesty that can influence social mingling and dress codes etc all of which influence religious travel and marketing of products to attract Islamic travellers.

From Commoditization to Respect of the Sacred

This paper is a theoretical approach to religious-based tourism that calls for socially responsible actions by “respecting the sacred” and through ‘stewardship of sacred sites’. Four case studies – India, Iran, Cambodia and Nepal – illustrate the importance of tourism in general and religious/spiritual tourism in particular in these countries. The involvement of local communities is as important as the discerned visitor in protecting and preserving the religious/cultural sites, events and pilgrimages that form the base of

religious tourism. Good governance will guaranty the long term future of these 'products' that should not be viewed merely as a source to generate revenue but also as services where participation and care of the communities are vitally important. After an analysis of the opportunities and constraints of religious tourism in the country case-studies the authors provide recommendations on socially responsible and sustainable management of sacred sites in keeping with current international initiatives, such as, the Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Global Partnership for Sustainable Tourism Criteria (GSTC Partnership), and Copenhagen Agreement from the Gothenburg Symposium on Tourism and Travel in the Green Economy.

Section 3 – Country Monographs

Australia – A Country Specific Analysis of Religious Tourism in Australia

Religion in Australia is diverse and although the majority of the population is Christian, 22 of the world's major religions are practiced in Australia (Tourism Australia, 2007). Religion in Australia today can be traced, and indeed is influenced by distinct historical periods including Indigenous Australia, European settlement and post second world war migration. Although not internationally renowned for its religious tourism product there are religious sites and events in Australia that draw international and domestic visitors. For instance the Catholic Church's World Youth Day (WYD) was held in Sydney in 2008 and received over 223,000 registered pilgrims, including 110,000 from 170 nations making it the largest event ever hosted in Australia (WYD, 2008).

However, events such as WYD are reasonably rare in Australia and as such, religion is not a large part of the inbound or outbound visitor movement in Australia. As a result, religion is not identified as a separate visitor category on inbound or outbound statistical collections making the task of defining and identifying religious tourists somewhat difficult. Similarly, religious tourists are not identified separately in the travel trade or hospitality industry structures and statistics.

This country specific analysis of religion in Australia addresses a number of elements pertinent to religious tourism in Australia including:

- key aspects of religion/religious philosophies in Australia, socio-economic environment and per capita income
- a review of all available statistical collections and inbound/outbound market research data related to religious travel (where such information exists)
- cultural/religious assets and attractions in Australia
- information channels and dissemination of religious tourism marketing information in Australia

Religious Tourism in China – Domestic and Outbound Tourism

China, in the past three decades, has seen a rapid growth in its economy that has had an impact on its tourism industry, fast making it one of the leading inbound destinations in the world, and in the context of the large population of the country with ever increasing disposable incomes, the outbound market is also rapidly expanding. This exponential growth is reflected in the following figures: inbound arrivals shot from 3.5 million in 1980 to 53.05 million in 2008, with reciprocal increases in earnings. Religious tourism is as old as Chinese history and given the rich mosaic of Chinese traditions, culture, monuments and attractions it is not surprising that China possesses a large number of World Heritage Sites of UNESCO, of which, one third are classified as religious monuments of Buddhist and Taoist origins. The Buddhist temples and edifices were built on mountain sites or by rivers and they are today being sought after by not only domestic visitors but also foreigners, especially Russian Federation tourists, as a retreat for peace and relaxation from the tensions of urban lifestyles. Buddhist pilgrimages to China are on the rise and they have a further added value in that they comprise many repeat visitors. Neighbouring destinations dominate the outbound market and many of them have a cultural content which, even if the primary motif of travel is not for religious purposes, nevertheless exposes Chinese tourists to this element since religion and culture are closely intertwined in Asia. While organized tours are the norm for outbound visitors the internet has opened up a new and large clientele that relishes 'self-packages', put together with friends and family: foreign NTOs and the travel trade would do well to market their religious and cultural tours through this channel.

Religion and Tourism in China – Tourism and Religious Sites

China is the birthplace of Daoism (or Taoism) and Confucianism, which pre-date the Christian era, and these philosophies along with Buddhism – including Zen – have been at the heart of Chinese civilization. Even Islam found a foothold in China as early as the 7th century AD. In addition, a host of other religious faiths are also practiced, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Ancestor worship, Bon, Dongbaism and Dragon worship. China also has the particularity of possessing four holy mountains with a Buddhist association dating back to over two thousand years which, along with other religious pilgrimages, attract not only Chinese but also Asian visitors. The author draws attention to the official rapport between the state and religion under 'Religion and the Chinese State' which had been rather tense during the Cultural Revolution but now enjoys official constitutional acceptance and state support in maintenance and development of religious places of worship. The paper gives details of visitor frequentation of important religious monuments and sites. Religions (Buddhism, Daoism, and Islam), religious sites and religious tourism are all analyzed in detail. There is a direct link between religion and tourism in China due to the economic importance of the latter particularly in the wake of the financial crisis. It is concluded that state support for tourism will continue especially to wade off any negative impact

on employment and religious tourism, inbound, outbound, and domestic, should see a rapid growth in the future.

Religious Tourism in Indonesia

Indonesia is a vast archipelago with a population of 220 million people; a majority (89%) of whom profess the Islamic faith making it the most populous Muslim country in the world, but it is also worth mentioning that Indonesia is a secular state. However, Indonesia's rich past of Hinduism and Buddhism has left an indelible mark as seen by the different religious edifices of which the Prambanana Temple and Borobudur, both UNESCO heritage sites are world known. Moreover, Hinduism still continues to flourish in some of the islands with Bali as the most representative example with its temples, traditions, festivals and dances. The colonial past also led to the introduction of Christianity while the Chinese communities have their own religious practices referred to as Tridharma. If one includes the blend of animist art and Muslim rituals which characterise Indonesian Islam then one gets a destination that is a melting pot worthy of study of students of comparative religions! The paper examines the various religions, beliefs, traditions and practices with an enumeration of religious sites, shrines, and pilgrimage centres that all play a major role in Indonesian Tourism.

Faith and Domestic Travel: Pilgrimages in Indonesia

Indonesia is the world's largest Muslim country and annually sends the biggest contingent of pilgrims on the Haj. This international pilgrimage is well documented and quantified. Domestic pilgrimages are much less well understood, however, yet because of the size and spiritual leanings of the population these form a significant tourism sector. Generally, less research has been done on domestic tourism in Asia than international tourism, although the movements of people within their own country far outnumber overseas travel. Indonesia has a population of 240 million, around half of whom live on Java, and with an increasingly mobile and wealthy population demand for leisure travel is high. Part of this demand for the Javanese, Balinese and other Indonesians is to visit sites of spiritual importance to pray for guidance or specific blessings; significant sites include the graves of religious or political leaders, certain caves and springs and ancient shrines.

Some sites have a significance which pre-dates modern religions and continue to have meaning for Javanese and other Indonesians, many of whom retain belief in an intangible cohort of active entities outside the human sphere. Visits to the sites include prayer, meditation and making offerings, with adherents sometimes staying for hours or even days at a time. Some sites see the arrival of very large numbers of people simultaneously, especially at times when the barriers between the human and the 'other' world are believed to be particularly permeable and when the spirits are thought to be cooperative towards humans. Management of the sites is sometimes left to the

pilgrims themselves or to spontaneous community enterprise, while larger and more popular sites may be the focus of local government regulation.

Iran and Shia Pilgrimage

The report is a country specific analysis of the role and importance of Shia pilgrimage in Iran. Topics covered include participants, resources and the organization and impacts of tourism activities. After an introduction to the country, its tourism and the religion, a review of Iran's Shia-related sites, ceremonies and events of significance are enumerated. Shia pilgrims are discussed in terms of numbers, origins, motivations and experiences and overall trends in demand are identified. The management of this form of religious tourism, encompassing the public and private sector, is examined with reference to responsibilities, policy, planning, marketing and regulation. Future prospects are then considered and questions of dealing with non-Muslim tourists at places of Shia pilgrimage are raised. The role of pilgrimages in Iran is quite specific to the country as there is a long tradition of visiting shrines (Ziyarat) of which there are many in Iran itself as well as in neighbouring Iraq that are revered by the Shias. At the moment Iranian religious tourism is mainly domestic but the authorities launched a 20 Year Outlook Plan in 2005 with the aim of reaching 20 million visitors in two decades. One has to also take into account the importance of the annual Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca that is the pinnacle of all pilgrimages whether one be Shia or Sunni as it is one of the tenets of Islam and the performance is considered a cardinal virtue. Iran's tourism promotional efforts are hampered by a negative image of the country that is more perceived than real. The vast wealth of religious and cultural sites, events and festivals make Iran an ideal pilgrimage destination for Muslims who are in quest of religious fulfillment not to mention a fascinating destination to others who appreciate art, culture, cuisine and warm hospitality at a relatively modest price.

Religious Tourism in Japan

Religious tourism in Japan is a blend of the old and the new. It is old because motivation for travel was often associated with it and it is a new phenomenon since the Japanese have become more secular, probably as a result of modernization, but who are now discovering the virtues of traditional religions such as Zen with its appeal to harmony and meditation. This paper examines tourist trends, religious sentiments, the development of religious tourism in Japan, major attractions including pilgrimages and festivals. Attention paid to Christianity and churches, and to the place of Buddhism and Shintoism, especially Shinto shrines, in modern Japanese society. Japan also has its own indigenous religious practices such as Syugendo, which is a unique combination of animistic mountain worship with Confucianism, Taoism and Tantric Buddhism. The paper includes an overview of the inbound and the outbound traffic with an inventory of all religious sites, rites and practices belonging to the major faiths, concluding that, 'religious tourism that allows people to experience Japanese religions should be the core of tourism in Japan for people wishing to understand Japan'.

Case Study: Changing Attitudes in Religious Tourism in Japan: Taizo-in Temple

Religious tourism in Japan from the case study of *Taizo-in* Temple shows a radical change in the past twenty years. Initially people came either to pray or to appreciate the cultural heritage of the site but a majority of present day visitors are participatory oriented wishing to experience Zen mediation and temple lifestyles including tea ceremonies, cuisine and taking lessons in calligraphy. International tourists from America, Europe and Asia appreciate this introduction to Zen culture that has been facilitated by communication with the priests, especially in English.

Another area where future growth is envisaged is in spiritual tourism where visitors seek to discover their true identity and in this respect the experience at *Taizo-in Temple* could be replicated elsewhere in Japan.

However, in order to promote religious tourism in Japan supportive structures have to be improved. This includes both the material as well as the abstract in the form of a better understanding of religious philosophies and values.

Republic of Korea

Republic of Korea's religious population has seen a recent surge in numbers, increasing from 17 million in 1985 to 25 million in 2005. This may be partially explained by the fact that according to a census in 2008 that only a little over 50% of the Korean population held any religious affiliation. However, both facts have a bearing on religious tourism in the Republic of Korea. Though Buddhism, Shamanism, and Confucianism have been the dominant religious faiths in Korean history the country is considered a multi-religious society with Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic, of considerable influence. Indeed the percentage of Christians (30%) outnumber those of the Buddhism (22%), but for over 1,600 years, Buddhism strongly influenced Korean culture and history, serving as the state religion for centuries. Today's Korean cultural resources are mostly products of Buddhism with influences from Confucianism, Shamanism, Taoism and Christianity. More than 70% of cultural tangible relics existing till to date in the Republic of Korea are originated from Buddhism and these serve as significant tourist attractions dispersed throughout the country. Pilgrimages play an important part in Korean society and due to the intense lifestyles there is an ever increasing demand for a new product in the form of 'Temple-Stays' that has come into vogue recently. Religious tourism has been identified by the Korean National Tourism Organization as an area of future development.

The Burgeoning of the Baekdu-daegan Trail into a New Religious-Pilgrimage Tourism Asset of the Republic of Korea

This research paper is a case-study of the Baekdu-daegan long-distance-hiking Trail, which was previously non-existent for all practical purposes and relatively little-known

even among Koreans themselves, emerging only within the past two decades and still virtually unknown to the international community. However, it is currently burgeoning into public attention as an adventure-hiking tourism route, with potential to become a significant religious-pilgrimage tourism destination-attraction of the Republic of Korea, or for domestic and foreign inbound tourist markets.

This paper begins with a review of relevant theory of emerging religious-pilgrimage routes as tourism assets all over the world, and then a brief overview of the history and characteristics of the Baekdu-daegan, the unbroken crest of a mountain range that runs the length of the Korean Peninsula, and the trail that now runs along it. Within the Republic of Korea it has become a viable and nearly-continuous adventure-hiking route in the past two decades, almost 700km long, with a very high density of religious sites and multi-religious and spiritual pilgrimage opportunities. This paper then offers a very preliminary listing of the many different stakeholders involved in the development of this route as a uniquely trans-national tourism site, based on the author's 20 years of reading, observation and experience.

The Baekdu-daegan Range of Mountains is now fairly well-known to Koreans as “the spine of the nation”, having been revered by cultural-nationalists as a symbol of national unity, identity and vital energy for more than 1,100 years; however, it is virtually unknown to the rest of the world. Today it offers trekkers spectacular natural scenery featuring sweeping views; and for spiritually-oriented tourists, it is also uniquely rich with temples, shrines and monuments of four great Asian religious traditions: Buddhism, Confucianism, Daoism and Shamanism. In this variety of different religions available to view and experience along the way, it may be unique among the “pilgrimage trails” of the world. It is not yet known about in the international tourism market, and this project is producing the first written studies in English of its emergence as a potential tourism attraction for the Republic of Korea, preliminary-level exploration of the conflicting and parallel interests of the various stakeholders involved, and the extremely high level of religious and cultural heritage that it offers.

Case Study : Republic of Korea's Efforts to Promote the Buddhist Pilgrimage Market

This short case study illustrates attempts made by the Korean Tourism Organization to introduce a new product – Buddhist pilgrimages and visits – to 33 selected sites in Republic of Korea in an effort to revive the religious tourism market in general and the Japanese market in particular that has shown a downturn from 2005 to 2007. The initial results have been excellent since the promotion has benefitted inbound tourism from Japan and at the same time encouraged domestic travel in Buddhist oriented products especially pilgrimages. An additional profitable fall out has been the sustainable development of rural areas in Republic of Korea by providing employment and revenue and restricting the exodus to the urban areas.

Religious Tourism in Pakistan

Situated at the cross-roads of the East and West, Pakistan is home to a number of civilizations of which the Indus Valley is the most famous. While Buddhism flourished in India it included most of present day Pakistan which became the recipient of some of the oldest and most venerable Buddhist sites on the sub-continent. After the decline of Buddhism and the revival of Hinduism, the areas in Pakistan were once again influenced and became the theatre of Hindu monuments. The remnants of these bygone civilizations provide a very large source of religious attractions that are extremely useful in the development of religious tourism in Pakistan. However, the least known and probably the most notable religious asset of Pakistan is probably its association with the Sikh religion. Pakistan is the birthplace of Sikhism and the country is a host to numerous Sikh temples (Gurdwaras) that attract religious tourists from neighbouring India and from the entire Sikh diaspora in the world. Pakistan is a theocratic State and Islam's pre-eminence cannot be questioned. Apart from the Moghul past with its vestiges, Pakistan is an Islamic state with a culture and religion that dominates the landscape. Unfortunately, due to a security situation there has been a poor perception of the safety of the destination thereby compromising the development of tourism in general and religious tourism in particular. Fortunately, at present, domestic tourism has been the mainstay of Pakistan Tourism providing necessary potential for the development of religious tourism in the future.

Religious Tourism in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a very long history dating to over two millenniums as the flag bearer of Theravada Buddhism in the world. Being a close neighbour of India, Hinduism also has left its mark in the country. Trade with Arab merchants and subsequent intermingling led to the establishment of the Muslim community who profess Islam while four and a half centuries of colonization by the Portuguese, Dutch and British resulted in the introduction of Christianity. Sri Lanka, has, therefore, a good blend of four of the major religions of the world which constitute a storehouse for religious tourism in all its forms: the country has a very rich cultural heritage of monuments, art, architecture, festivals, pilgrimage sites and places of worship belonging to each denomination that lend themselves for product development. Sri Lanka is also unique in that it follows the lunar calendar with each full moon day a public holiday. Sri Lanka's tourism was deeply affected by over two decades of ethnic disturbances, which contrary to popular misconceptions, had no religious bearing. With the recent conclusion of the war against the separatist movement, Sri Lankan tourism is bound to see an appreciable growth in which religious and cultural tourism will play a preponderant role.

Religious Tourism in Thailand

One of the fastest emerging tourism segments in Thailand is religious tourism, also known in Thailand as Buddhist tourism. This niche market not only draws international

tourists into Thailand, but also boosts domestic travel and contributes significantly to the local economy. The paper examines religious tourism as one of the emerging trends in Thailand. Profiles of both international and domestic religious tourists are discussed and a concept of religious tourism is theoretically defined as part of special interest tourism. This paper also examines key religious activities in Thailand and how they can be packaged as a tourism product. Lastly, attention is paid to a case study of a successful Candle Festival in Ubon Ratchathani province, Thailand, and how this festival has turned into a month-long international event which attracts both domestic and international travellers. Recommendations for future researches are subsequently addressed.

Religious Travel Industry in India: Prospects and Challenges

'Booming,' 'lucrative,' 'high-growth,' 'resilient,' are a few terms that are increasingly used to describe religious tourism in India. A domestic tourism survey conducted by the Indian Ministry of Tourism in 2002 reported that more than 100 million visitors travelled for 'religious purposes and pilgrimages' and eight of the top-ten ranking domestic tourist destinations were pilgrimage sites. According to the Ministry's Tourism Satellite Accounts, religious tourism segment contributed almost 20% towards the total domestic tourism consumption (approximately INR 2.8 Billion) and this contribution is likely to increase annually. Such figures, often based on estimates from formal components (such as travel costs, accommodation in registered places, etc.), should be considered only as partial indicators of the volume of religious tourism market. This paper shows that religious tourism industry is largely centred on devotion-based informal activities in pilgrimage centres. With examples from religious tourism destinations and by examining aspects such as products offered, services required, major driving forces, organizers and managers, and modes of operation, it draws attention to the structural differences between two important segments within religious travel: religious tourism and spiritual tourism. Understanding these differences is necessary to develop appropriate strategies for sustainable growth of these segments and the overall religious travel industry.

Understanding Religious Tourism Motivations in India: An Empirical Investigation

Religious tourism is an ancient phenomenon that has received considerable attention in both academia and the public at large recently. Over the last two decades, it has substantially increased in number, with various purposes including enhancing local culture, tradition, rituals and history, providing means for preservation of sacred places and contributing to the local economy by stimulating both international and domestic tourism. Despite the increasing popularity of religious tourism, little research has been conducted on the motivations of tourists which have a profound impact on the marketing and promotion of India as a religious destination globally. The study has a two-fold purpose: to investigate various religious motives among the tourists visiting in

the Indian religious destinations; and to investigate whether these motivations depend on the demographic characteristics of tourists. A self-administrated questionnaire was collected from 485 tourists in the study area. By employing factor analysis and bivariate correlation analysis the results show that no significant differences were found in motivations among religious visitors from different countries. Further, results revealed that respondents place high ratings on the motivation factors of religious attraction, cultural and educational experience and novelty and knowledge while they placed low ratings on the motivation factors family togetherness and seeking camaraderie.

Religious Tourism in India – A Mix, a Fix or an Abiding Concern for Planners?

India's tourism potential, despite a wealth of natural and cultural resources, has not been fully tapped and its performance compared to later entrants like China and Thailand into the world tourism market is poor. The paper examines the wealth of cultural heritage, the backbone of religious tours, bestowed by the interplay of major religious faiths, three of which - Buddhism, Hinduism and Sikhism – were born in India. While the study is largely related to Hinduism, it also covers Islam and Christianity that took an early root in India. The paper draws attention to the shortfalls in Indian tourism marketing and proposes strategies for reinventing religious tourism as a form of cultural tourism that is India's unique selling proposition. These recommendations are applicable to the National and Federal levels, and amongst others stress the value of education, training, code of ethics, the use of the internet and other communication technologies in the promotion of religious tourism.

Religious Tourism in the Native Land of Sri Ramakrishna – A Sustainable Approach

The paper draws attention to the The Gar Mandaran-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit which is a popular place of pilgrimage in the state of West Bengal by virtue of being the native land of one of modern India's spiritual giants – Sri Ramakrishna and his holy consort – Sri Sarada Devi. West Bengal, despite being rich in tourism products has lagged behind other Indian states such as Kerala and Rajasthan in marketing its assets and the circuit affords a wonderful opportunity for the state and India to not only promote a product but also to publicize a spiritual concept that has been echoed by no other than Swami Vivekananda whose teachings and thought have had an enormous impact on the World, including the West. While explaining in detail the work of the Sri Ramakrishnan mission which is the core of a worldwide spiritual movement that has its roots in the Hindu Vedanta philosophy of harmony the paper details the work of Swami Vivekananda 'India's foremost tourism ambassador' for his untiring efforts to 'to showcase the very best of India's 5,000 year old spiritual heritage', and the importance of developing the Gar Mandaan-Kamarpukur-Joyrambati tourist circuit. This circuit lends itself ideally to the development of responsible and volunteer tourism in keeping with the spiritual concepts and the social work of its founders. The paper goes on to analyze and recommend how best the circuit could be marketed.

Introduction

The Regional Programme for Asia and the Pacific of UNWTO called for contributions from academia and tourism professionals for a study on *Religious Tourism in Asia and the Pacific* in 2009. These findings form the basis of the present publication.

The study is a sequel to the *Intra-Regional Outbound Market Series of Asia and the Pacific* of 2006 and the *International Conference on Tourism, Religions, and Dialogue of Cultures* held in Cordoba, Spain, in 2007, both of which were completed under the auspices of UNWTO. The first brought home the stark reality that 78% of all outbound tourist traffic from Asia remains within the Asia and Pacific region itself, while the second, highlighted the importance of seeing religion in the perspective of a rapprochement of different civilizations in a world more and more embittered by strife and insecurity.

Major religions and religious philosophies of the world ranging from Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and Sikhism, have their roots in Asia. Furthermore, these religions have their own offshoots giving rise to a multitude of other religious denominations. In the wake of human movement either through conquests or by trade and travel, the divine and philosophical messages have spread far and wide throughout Asia.

The UNWTO estimates that 300 to 330 million tourists visit the world's key religious sites each year. The Asia and Pacific region is blessed not only with religious sites but also because it forms the hub of pilgrim centres, religious festivals, and other related cultural activities of a religious nature. The political, cultural, social and economic significance of travel for religious purposes is an important element in the fabric of the Asian society that has not been fully researched nor clearly understood, hence UNWTO sponsored this study to establish a clear-cut picture of religious tourism in, and from, Asia and the Pacific.

The geographical extent of Asia is vast and it is not possible to include all the countries that constitute it in a study of this nature. Furthermore, Asia falls under the purview of different departments of UNWTO to which countries are assigned according to their geographical distribution: The present study is confined to member states of the Commission for East Asia and the Pacific (CAP) and the Commission for South Asia (CSA).

Objectives of the study

- Analyze the salient features of Asia and the Pacific for religious tourism and potential for growth of inbound, outbound and domestic traffic at a regional, and country by country level.
- Familiarize destinations in the region with the strengths and weaknesses of source markets for religious tourism.
- Inform the destinations about the challenges and opportunities presented by religious tourism in the region.
- Suggest policies, strategies, and marketing programs which the destinations may adopt to approach the source markets for religious tourism in a most cost-effective and efficient manner.
- Provide guidelines for sustainable development of religious tourism in Asia and the Pacific.

Requests were made for country specific monographs of religious tourism, regional studies and philosophical essays. In keeping with the responses, the following studies are included in the publication:

- 1) Introductory philosophical essays
- 2) Regional marketing and thematic studies
- 3) Country monographs on:
 - Australia
 - China
 - Indonesia
 - Iran
 - Japan
 - Republic of Korea
 - Pakistan
 - Sri Lanka
 - Thailand
- 4) Case study of India as a major contributor to religious philosophy and its impact on tourism. India being the birthplace of two major religious philosophies – Hinduism and Buddhism – has had a vast impact on the rest of Asia. Islam also became a major force in Indian politics, culture, society and life following the Mogul reign. Western colonization of India led to the introduction of Christianity. Along with the numerous other religious denominations, India is a rich mosaic of culture and religious diversity that warrants this special study. From a pragmatic point of view the rising Indian middle-class offers potential to other Asian destinations to market their products. The response from Indian academics and tourism professionals to the UNWTO call for papers on the subject is a reflection of the interest and enthusiasm that we hope to share with all the readers.

Salient characteristics

A majority of the contributors have integrated both marketing and philosophical elements into their studies which has resulted in a certain amount of overlapping of thought and facts. Marketing essays are therefore replete with philosophical insights while those who have dwelled on philosophy have forayed into marketing.

Marketing aspects:

- The dominant religions/religious philosophies of the destination
- Cultural/ religious assets and attractions (pilgrimage centres, religious sites etc..) of the destination with attention paid to such features as carrying capacity and infrastructure in the areas where the main religious sites/centres are situated
- Socio-economic environment in terms of population, wealth, per capita income and particular propensity to travel for religious tourism purposes;
- Inbound and outbound traffic
- Domestic tourism
- Market information such as:
 - Seasonality of traffic
 - Booking patterns
 - Different types of traffic including: Free Independent Tours (FITs), package tours, business, incentives, congresses and conferences and different purposes such as: religious gatherings, events and itineraries, pilgrimage routes, secular and modern pilgrimages, education, art and cultural incentives, faithful vs. observers or companions
 - Catchment areas
 - General composition of religious traveller in terms of areas of origin – region/cities, age, gender and social status
 - Single/multiple destination
 - Communication technologies and information channels

Philosophical aspects:

- Religious/nonreligious/inner pilgrimages and tourism
- Ethical aspects of religious tourism
- Sustainable development of religious tourism
- Pros and cons of commercialization of religious tourism
- Religious tourism and politics
- Intra and inter religious tourism
- Religious tourism and innovation
- Prophets, migration and travel
- Tourism, religion and peace

Recommendations on development of religious tourism:

- Further improvements to the existing religious products to enhance their value to the potential tourists
- Policies, strategies, and marketing programmes that the destinations should adopt and implement so as to increase the religious tourists flows to the region
- Policies and strategies to overcome the seasonality and congestion problems in certain destinations
- Sustainability guidelines for the development of religious tourism in the region
- Behavioural issues of tourists for policy makers to resolve
- Administrative barriers to be streamlined
- Rectification of shortcomings in destinations concerning religious tourism
- PR and advertising campaigns to be adopted by destinations to enhance religious tourism based on market intelligence
- Innovations of religious tourism e.g. combining it with other types of cultural tourism or other types of tourism
- Ways in which the local communities can be involved in religious tourism.
- Creation of new intra and inter regional markets for religious purposes.
- Enhancing the potential tourists' knowledge and understanding of religious tourism in the region

Conclusions

Religion, faith and spirituality are so intertwined that a clear differentiation of all three aspects are necessary for a deeper understanding of the role of religious tourism in Asia and the Pacific. Indeed, Buddhism and Hinduism may be considered as philosophical thought rather than religions and some of the authors have broached this element and called for a broader definition of 'religious' tourism.

Statistics on religious tourism of Asia and the Pacific are limited or vague. This is partly due to the close link between religion and culture in Asia where it is difficult to separate the motivation of travel except in the specific case of pilgrimages and religious festivals. Practically all Asian archaeological monuments have some connotation to religion and form the backbone of tourist circuits. Therefore, it is difficult to differentiate between the cultural and the religious tourist. As with the Tourism Satellite Accounts there is a need for more and precise information on religious tourism as opposed to cultural tourism. The study has clearly identified areas of interest that appeal to the religious aspects of travel and it is left to the administrators and the travel professionals to glean this information as accurate and universally applicable data are indispensable for marketing and promotions.

While the information provided by the various contributors on marketing of religious tourism in Asia and the Pacific in the publication will be mutually beneficial to all Commission for East Asia and the Pacific (CAP) and Commission for South Asia (CSA)

members States, UNWTO's ultimate goal is to develop guidelines for best practices in religious tourism in the region, based on the results from all phases of the study. Limitations of time, space and interest (the study is based on the responses to the request for contributions), do not permit the inclusion of all the countries of CAP and CSA nor does it cover all the religious sites, events, and even religious beliefs in Asia and the Pacific but it is hoped that this initial foray will pave the way for further research.