

Guest Editorial

Religious and cultural tourism development



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This special issue is devoted to the topic of "*Religious and cultural tourism development*". It is an outcome of an international conference held in Lecce, Italy in October 2009 and which was entitled: *Tourism, religion and culture*. The aim of the special issue is to advance academic enquiry of the religious and cultural meaningful dimensions of tourism; by examining tourism that is motivated by religious experiences or needs, or where the consumption of tourism can be characterised as religious and cultural meaningful in nature.

Increasingly, tourism research has exposed the complex, meaningful, purposeful and multidimensional nature of the tourism experience. Travel experiences can be intensely personal in nature and result in travellers discovering their own religion and culture through introspection; even when it is not expected or purposefully sought. The goals of this special issue, therefore, are to show that religious and cultural tourism extends beyond the limiting realms of historical study of pilgrimage and to encourage researchers to promote further knowledge of holistic experiences in tourism.

This special issue consists of six papers.

Alison J. McIntosh in her paper "Situating the self in religious tourism research: An author's reflexive perspective" examines aspects of the author's journey as an academic researcher and research supervisor to discuss and recognise the realities of situated knowledge creation within the study of religion tourism. She focuses on issues which have emerged from her experiences of researching religious tourism, and the issues and ethical challenges encountered during the supervision process when advising students in the same field. The paper aims to turn religious tourism discourse 'towards the self' in the hope of engendering further consideration of reflexivity within this field of enquiry.

Maria Simone-Charteris and Stephen Boyd wrote about the opportunities and obstacles associated with the development of religious heritage tourism in Northern Ireland. It suggests that religious tourism contributes to attracting visitors to Northern Ireland and this product is best promoted as more broadly cultural heritage tourism. It also emerged that collaboration is welcomed by most organizations both from the public and private sectors although there remains confusion with regard to respective roles and responsibilities for both sectors. The development of a particular religious attraction around the story of St Patrick is presented that demonstrates potential contribution toward regional development.

Noga Collins-Kreiner analyzes the traits of current Jewish pilgrims to holy sites in Israel and explores the phenomenon of Jewish pilgrimage tourism in the country. A market analysis based on geographic, demographic, and psychographic characteristics of visitors to Jewish holy sites in Israel is conducted. Such a survey is a basis for understanding the motivations and preferences of the visitors' specific needs and the first stage 'pre-planning' that is necessary for every future plan of a tourism site. The study

indicates that secular visits of tourists are what trigger site movement toward formal recognition and development, transforming them from pure pilgrimage sites to religious-tourist sites and drawing greater attention to the relationship between pilgrimage and tourism.

Michael Di Giovine in his paper "Rethinking Development: Religious Tourism as Material and Cultural Revitalization in Pietrelcina, Italy" conceptualizes processes whereby religious tourism is adapted to generate socio-cultural "betterment" in small-scale societies by presenting an in-depth case study of the changes in the Southern Italian village of Pietrelcina, the birthplace of the recently canonized St. Padre Pio of Pietrelcina. Often subsumed under the term "tourism development," this practice has long been considered a central means for economic development, employment, and poverty alleviation; it has also been criticized as fostering neocolonialism, inauthenticity and museumification. Focusing more closely on the intangible effects of recent religious tourism initiatives – which include an empowering 'reclamation' of the saint's narrative for reformulating local identity towards tourists and themselves – the paper ultimately urges practitioners and researchers alike to consider revitalization theory as a model for sustainable tourism development.

Russell E. Brayley deals with managing sacred sites for meaningful visitor experiences and positive economic impact. He claims that in order to protect the sacred resource and to make the touristic or pilgrimage experience meaningful, many site managers develop well designed, well maintained and efficiently operated tourist accommodations such as visitor centers, interpretive resources, and events. He gives as an example the Latter-Day Saint sacred sites in and near Palmyra, New York. The world-class tourist accommodation facilities and events associated with LDS sacred sites provide positive opportunities for social and economic development in the region. Positive impacts include site preservation and protection, education and interpretation, social identification, hospitality, social buffering, employment, local spending, tourism product enhancement, marketing, and business networking.

Olga Lo Presti and (the late) Clara S. Petrillo, in their paper "Co-management of religious heritage: an Italian case-study", aim, through the description of a case of success, to identify the factors discriminating an effective and efficient management of assets from different typologies of people. Their case study describes how the Association Oltre il Chiostro in Naples has contributed to the restoration, reopening and showcase some of the most important churches of the city centre, ensuring also a complex network of relations and an innovative management system.

The Guest Editors would like to thank all the authors for their contributions, and hope that the special issue will generate more thought, interest, discussion and research on the spiritual dimensions of tourism. We would also like to dedicate this special issue to our late colleague and friend, Clara Petrillo, who passed away while we worked on this special issue.

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