

RELIGION IS BACK IN (TRAVEL) BUSINESS



Over the history, religion has always been an important reason for traveling. Pilgrimages to the Holy Land or to Mecca were important part of the life of medieval believers. According to Kevin J. Wright, the World Religious Travel Association president, religious travel is the historic forerunner of today's mass tourism.

Tourism has evolved into a huge industry leaving its forerunner somewhere behind. Nevertheless, the religious tourism is regaining popularity these days. It is no more a niche sector but an \$18 billion industry. Every year, approximately 300 million tourists participate in religious trips. Revenues from this sector account for as much as 2 per cent of the whole tourism industry revenue. The religious tourism is considered one of the fastest growing tourism sectors. Nowadays it lures not only old people but also young professionals and simply all kinds of people.

A faith tour is a bit different from an ordinary trip. There is a need for a quality guide, believer himself or herself ideally. The guide needs to understand the religious needs of the group he or she guides. Those tourists spend time in prayers, collective singing and the whole atmosphere of the trip is essential for their satisfaction. They often like to visit places bound to their faith that are not usually open to tourists.

Different countries have different approach to this sector of tourism industry. For example Jamaican government wants the island to become a faith tourism destination and started to focus on faith tourists. Even in one of the most atheistic countries in the world, the Czech Republic, you may find numerous places of pilgrimages (especially for Roman Catholics).

The most popular pilgrimage destinations naturally remain Israel, Vatican, Mecca, or Medina. In Japan it is the mountain Fuji or the famous Shinto shrine in Izumo.

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