

PILGRIM TOURISM IS ATTRACTING AN INCREASING NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS



Far from being the sole prerogative of pilgrims, spiritual tourism is becoming ever more attractive. In addition to the beauty of the monuments, many people are simply seeking to “distance themselves from the world”. Pilgrim tourism in France is a strong niche.

According to a study conducted by “Atout France”, **51 million tourists or pilgrims visit French religious sites every year**. It should be noted that France has more than fifteen sanctuary cities on offer to visitors (Alençon, Nevers, Mont-Saint-Michel, etc.) and no fewer than 50 000 religious edifices, 10 000 of which are classified as Protected Historical Monuments. The potential of pilgrim tourism in France is huge.

Sea Shells and Spirituality

Evidently, spiritual tourism is popular at the moment. It is a common trend among believers and non-believers alike as well as agnostics all of whom seem to be more interested in cultural heritage and going on a spiritual quest than in religion per se.

“People are looking to distance themselves from the modern world which is oftentimes too fast and overrated. They want to move away from a consumer society towards a more sharing one. It is a sort of slow-tourism,” explained Didier Arino of the firm “Protourisme”.

The routes to Santiago de Compostela for example are drawing in ever more visitors. Since 2013, these paths delineated by sea shells have attracted over 200 000 pilgrims per year. They even seduced the academician Jean-Christophe Rufin, who, in 2013, published “Immortelle randonnée, Compostelle malgré moi”, following his 850 kilometer pilgrimage along the “Camino del Norte”.

“It was the perfect opportunity for me to distance myself from my daily existence, to reflect on myself and on my role in society,” Jean-Christophe Rufin recounted in a video produced by the Mollat independent bookshop in Bordeaux.

Religious Tourism on the Decline

On the contrary, religious tourism, in and of itself, is no longer attractive.

“In Lourdes, for example, the hotels are in troubles since the number of offerings exceeds the number of tourists,” explained Didier Arino. This desertion is due to a declining rate of religious observance. In his opinion, it is therefore necessary to distinguish between religious and spiritual tourism.

Some others are attempting to bring spirituality back to certain places which have become very - perhaps too - attractive to tourists.

In this way, the press group “Bayard et René Martin” and the Director of the “Folle journée de Nantes” announce, on the 18th of May, the creation of a sacred music festival to be held at

Mont-Saint-Michel and in its bay area.

Entitled "Via aeterna", it will offer, from the 21st to the 24th of September 2017, some fifty **concerts in approximately ten different municipalities in the Mont-Saint-Michel bay area, half of which will take place at the abbey on the last day of the festival.**

"The festival will start in the bay area and converge towards the hill. The idea is to reinforce Mont-Saint-Michel's spiritual character, its spirit, which is struggling against the influence of tourism," Christine Auberger - Music Development Director for Bayard and the project's instigator - explained.

The ensemble "Capella Ekaterinburg", a large Russian Orthodox liturgical musical ensemble is expected to perform at Granville and then later again at Mont-Saint-Michel.

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