

BOOST IN RELIGIOUS TOURISM



Religious tourism is mostly viewed as a niche market for senior citizens or an extreme branch of tourism for activist tourists. Although this may remain the view of many, the fact is that the definition of religious tourism and the amount of people taking part in it are rapidly changing. Recent surveys, mostly carried out in the US, have indicated that many people now tend to mix religious activities with traditional holiday activities such as sunbathing and sports. Such mixed itineraries have never been so popular. The top three destinations for such enthusiasts are Israel, Italy and Greece.

According to a survey results, one third of adults in America are likely to take part in some sort of religion-based trip in the future. One in ten has already participated in such activities, of which 60% have university degrees. This suggests that the more educated levels of society are tending to venture on spiritual tours. On a similar note, perhaps the most famous religious site in Europe, Vatican, has more doubled its amount of visitors in the last decade. Vatican reached an all-time high in 2006, boasting 4.2 million visitors.

This question begs as to why religious tours are suddenly springing up on many peoples' itineraries? The simplest answer would be that globally more people are going on holiday. Economies described as 'sleeping giants' such as China, India or Russia all have less strict rules for their citizens to travel abroad. Russia in particular is a country experiencing a huge growth in Christianity and this is now evident in the world tourism market. Secondly, the Christian population of the US is up 10 million in the last decade. This explains why places such as Jordan and Israel are full of American tourists. Lastly, tourism seems to be one of the ways people are integrating religion and faith into their busy lives. Whereas cinema started to do this with films such as 'The Passion of Christ' and 'The Chronicles of Narnia', tourists have followed suit with their travel plans.

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