

**The recognition of marketing of spiritual tourism as a significant new area in  
leisure travel  
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# **The recognition of marketing of spiritual tourism as a significant new area in leisure travel**

## **ABSTRACT**

This paper proposes that spiritual tourism be recognised as a distinct form of tourism. The term, spiritual tourism, is new, but the phenomenon itself is not. It is clear that there has been a shift from orthodox religious practice to a universal spiritual dimension of human psychology and it is also apparent that people from various religious backgrounds visit sacred sites to enjoy spiritual experiences rather than observing religious rituals. Since spirituality has a multi-dimensional definition, this paper defines spirituality as a relationship between the “creature and the Creator”, regardless of the religion followed. Consequently, people who travel with some sense of appreciating or understanding God can be considered to be spiritual tourists.

This paper is a theoretical piece and places stress on the business and academic importance of spiritual tourism. Due to lack of literature on spiritual tourism and since it is suggested to be a subset of special interest tourism, the relevant theory on special interest tourism has been studied. This paper offers a contribution to tourism practice by introducing the concept of spirituality as a complete or partial tourism motive, and identifies a growing tourism market for countries seeking tourism opportunities for economic growth but which lack the required infrastructure. Spiritual tourism may assist economic revival in poorer countries that can not offer luxurious and fun-based tourism, but which can attract a significant amount of spiritual tourists.

## INTRODUCTION

Whether it is for self-actualisation or for survival, and for any other needs, satisfying spiritual needs and wants appear to be central to human social psychology, irrespective of race, colour, creed or any other criteria. It has been widely acknowledged by scholars recently that there has been a remarkable trend in people turning towards spirituality (Kale, 2004; Lewis & Geroy, 2000; Piedmont & Leach, 2002). Recently, Paul Bootes, the MD of the Australian religious website operator and book distributor, Koorong Christian Products, gave his reason for this change, saying “ spirituality is growing because people are getting tired of living a materialistic lifestyle and are looking for a spiritual solution” (Maclean & Walker, 2004, p.16). This growth in religious and spiritual awareness is also highlighted by Sergeant (2004), based on the work of Robert Putnam of Harvard University. Sergeant (2004, p.4) suggested that “religion is by far the largest generator of social capital in the US, contributing to more than half of the social capital in the country; this is a major subset and thus an area of worthy study on its own”.

Scholars belonging to various schools of thought have noticed a rising trend of people turning towards spirituality and related matters. At the same time, we know from centuries of history that people from most cultures travel for spiritual experience purposes. The interest in spirituality has affected a number of industries around the world including the tourism industry (Mittroff & Denton 1999). One senses that there is a rising significance of spiritual tourism as both a business activity and a social phenomenon. This is something which has not been fundamentally recognized in the academic or trade literature, but which is significantly growing in all regions of this world. For example, the documented millions of people visiting Mecca, reportedly 2,564,468 in 2005 ([www.saudiembassy.net](http://www.saudiembassy.net)), the Vatican (about 6 million recently visited Rome to see the Funeral procession of the Pope John Paul II), Jerusalem and the Indian Ashrams every year would substantially exceed those attending the Olympic Games, or visiting the beaches in various tropical regions around the world. The travel agents specializing in religious and spiritual tourism claim that business in the field have recently gone up by 25% (Bernstein 2002). Based on the above discussion, this study tries to give business and academic recognition to spiritual tourism without advocating any religious beliefs. One wonders whether these figures suggest that there might be another “S” (for spirituality), to be added to Malcolm Crick’s four “Ss” of tourism, i.e. sun, sand, sea and sex (Crick, 1989).

This paper suggests that spiritual tourism is too large and too significant to be ignored any longer, and now is a most opportune time to put together the existing academic knowledge, the accumulation of practical wisdom from experienced operators, and the beginnings of a new research tradition in this field. As a first step in putting together the existing knowledge, it is appropriate to examine the other types of tourism that could be subsets of spiritual tourism or vice versa. Various categories of tourism are already well recognised, for example, special interest tourism and cultural tourism describe the objectives of tourists who look for customised and specific interests and who desire to travel to improve their cultural knowledge. Meanwhile, similarly, religious or sacred tourism or pilgrimage is described as a religiously motivated journey to sacred places. However, these types of tourism do not seem to describe/include the aims of a tourist who has a specific interest in cultural and religious experience, but who seeks a spiritual dimension that is free of any formal religious dogma. These motives are covered by spiritual tourism, and as mentioned, spiritual tourism is yet to be formally recognised as a business or academic concept.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Academic and internet searches reveal no body of literature that specifically deals with spiritual tourism. However, what anecdotal information there is seems to indicate that spiritual tourism, if accepted as an academic discipline, would be a new sub-area of tourism that is probably an offshoot of special interest tourism, but which also covers various aspects of other types of tourism such as religious (pilgrimage), - eco, - sacred and experiential secular-wellness tourism. Scholars from various backgrounds have discussed spirituality for centuries, though it seems to have entered the serious business and management lexicon only more recently (Cimino & Lattin, 1999; Hill, 2002; Konz & Ryan, 1999; Pesut, 2003). It has also been observed by various authors that spirituality in general has recently become an important subject of research in social and business areas (Cimino & Lattin, 1999; Hill, 2002; Konz & Ryan, 1999; Pesut, 2003). Piedmont & Leach (2002) argue that spirituality is receiving more attention in mass media and professional circles and it is also creating whole new areas of analysis, such as neurotheology (Newberg, D'Aquili, & Rause, 2001), which is analyzing the neurological and biological bases of spiritual experiences, and theobiology (Rayburn & Richmond, 1997) which is exploring spirituality as the reality of the natural

world in which we live. This rise in spirituality-related matters has influenced many industries including the tourism industry. The large numbers of people traveling around the world for spiritual and religious matters, belonging to various organized religions, or to nonreligious groups, well indicate the rise of this new segment of tourism. Killion (2003, p.16) in her PhD thesis supports this fact: “pilgrimage tourism motivated by religious reasons, and visits by secular visitors to sites having some religious significance have remained relatively under-researched within the wider spectrum of special interest tourism. There is a certain irony insofar as, at a time when Euro-Western societies appear to place a higher value on secular orientations, the popularity of destinations and sites having some religious significance, rather than diminishing, has seemingly increased”. However, Mick Brown in his book “The spiritual tourist: a personal odyssey through the outer reaches of belief” says that spirituality has become a buzz-word used by various professionals to evoke spiritual qualities in their work (Thompson-Noel, 1998), even the latest mission of NASA to Mars calls one of the twin rovers as spirit (Chang, 2004).

A number of definitions of tourism itself are available in the literature, for example, the WTO conference in 1991, in Canada, provided a precise definition of tourism as being people who travel at least 80 kilometres from their usual environment, for the purposes of recreation, medical treatment, religious observances, family matters, sporting events, conferences, study or transit to another country (WTO, 1991). The e-encyclopedia on tourism, defines tourism as a service industry comprising of tangible components such as transportation and hospitality services, and intangible components such as rest and relaxation, culture, adventure, new and different experiences ([www.nationmaster.com](http://www.nationmaster.com)). In both given definitions, it can be noted that ‘religious observances’ and ‘culture and experiences’ are accepted as tourism motives that will be further discussed in this study and connect to the motives for spiritual tourism. The description of tourism by Hinch & Higham (2001) is possibly the most comprehensive as it described tourism within three dimensions. The first dimension is the spatial dimension, the second includes the temporal characteristics associated with tourism, and the third dimension covers the purpose and activities engaged in by the tourist (Hinch & Higham, 2001). Many subfields of tourism, including spiritual tourism, find both their genesis and their revelation predominantly in this last dimension.

The literature offers many definitions of 'spirituality' based on the cultures and backgrounds of various academics. "There are thirty one definitions of religion and forty of spirituality in social science publications throughout the past century" (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999, p.891). A more traditionally accepted definition of spirituality comes from Clark (1958), which explains spirituality as an inner experience of the individual when s/he senses a "beyond", especially as evidenced by the effect of this experience on his/her behavior when s/he actively attempts to harmonize his/her life with the "beyond". Principe, as cited in (Heintzman, 2003, p.27), explained that "spirituality" comes from the Latin 'spiritus', meaning "breath of life", and can be traced to the Greek word 'pneuma', which is used in the New Testament to describe, we are told, a person's spirit guided by God's spirit. Pava (2003) discusses and partially agrees with the two-dimensional definition of spirituality given by Mitroff & Denton (1999), that is firstly, it is the desire and need to find meaning and purpose in one's life in order to live an integrated life, and secondly, spirituality includes the belief in a Supreme power controlling the entire universe.

In this research a more secular definition of spirituality given by Burkhardt is also analysed that describes spirituality as unfolding mystery, harmonious interconnectedness and inner strength (Pesut 2003). Similarly, a multi-religious approach to spirituality is also considered as translated "my heart has become capable of every form: it is the pasture of gazelles and a covenant of Christian monks and a temple of idols and the pilgrim's Ka'ba (Mecca) and the tables of the Tora and the book of Quran. I follow the religion of love: whatever way love's camel take, that is my religion and faith" (Nicholson, 1978, p.67). However, this study agrees with Pesut (2003), and concludes that three key elements are common to most definitions on spirituality: enlightened attention to God, self and others. This definition is also supported by Kale, who suggests "spirituality is based on four overarching ideas, i.e. a sense of inner self, a sense of meaning, a sense of interconnectedness and a notion of the "beyond", or "God" (Kale, 2004, p.93). Thus, whenever people travel to engage in these elements and ideas, either fully or in a large part, with an objective of some Divine connection, regardless of their religions, this study accepts them as spiritual tourists.

There appears to be no recognized tourism body or professional group that has provided an industry-wide definition of spiritual tourism. However, since spiritual tourism is proposed as a subset of special interest tourism, the definition of special interest tourism could be used to derive the definition for spiritual tourism. Special interest tourism is defined as "the provision

of customized leisure and recreational experience desired by the specific expressed interests of individuals and groups” (Douglas, Douglas, & Derrett, 2001, p.3). From this definition, spiritual tourism can be defined as the provision of customized leisure and recreational experience demanded by the spiritual interest of individuals and groups. It needs to be noted that spirituality in this study is oriented towards the Divine concept and the relationship with God Almighty or the High Supreme Spirit (Kale, 2004; Pesut, 2003). Piedmont & Leach (2002, p.1889) also support this Divine aspect of spirituality, “although religious practices, rituals, and views of God may vary across cultures, human beings’ desire to connect with some larger and sacred reality has been a constant force in human societies over time”.

An academic definition of a spiritual tourist could also be derived from the definition of a cultural tourist: “someone who visits, or intends to visit, a cultural tourism attraction or participates in wide range of activities at any time during the trip, regardless of the main reason for traveling” (McKercher, 2002, p.30). Similarly, a spiritual tourist could be defined as someone who visits a place out of his/her usual environment, with the intention of spiritual growth (which could be religious, non-religious, sacred or experiential in nature, but within the Divine context), regardless of the main reason for traveling. Exploring spiritual tourism further from this view of McKercher (2002), it could be viewed as a broad concept including the tangible products and services, such as temples, shrines and arguably other religious centers with a spiritual focus, as well as intangible products and services, such as organized spiritual events, training, festivals and gatherings with spiritual motives.

## DISCUSSION

This paper asserts that spiritual tourism is a progressive area of tourism that can trigger growth and development in various related areas. Other than the rise in different religious pilgrimages, the PTDC (Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation) for example, announced that recently inbound tourists in Pakistan visiting the shrines and tombs of Sufis and holy men has far exceeded the number of tourists visiting museums, royal palaces and various natural sites (Pakistan Tourism Development Corporation (PTDC), 2004). (Curtiss, 1996) reports that tourists travelling to Pakistan have been divided into three categories, the adventurers and mountain trekkers, the cultural and historical tourists, and the seekers and 'hippies' who are in search of personal fulfilment. A combination of the second and third categories could be described as spiritual tourists when they visit Buddhist monuments, Mosques, Hindu temples, Sikh shrines, tombs and spiritual leaders etc., for their spiritual growth. PTDC statistics show a significant drop in the total number of foreign tourists visiting Pakistan after the events of 9-11-2001, but the visitors coming for spiritual gains have been stable (Curtiss, 1996). The Economic Analyst of the Ministry of Tourism of Pakistan indicated in an interview on 04 Dec, 2005, that the Ministry has been working on feasibility studies to promote Sikh and Buddhist religious and spiritual tourism. Since the Ministry has recognized that fun-based tourism could not be promoted due to the Government's reluctance to allow open consumption of alcohol and operations of music clubs and bars. Therefore, more efforts are needed to increase the current estimated 150,000 foreign tourists visiting Pakistan for spiritual or religious motives. Following the Indian Sub-Continent example further, it has been agreed that this spiritual tourism, earlier known as religious tourism, is enormous and yet still on a rise in India despite the uncertainty regarding the economic, social and political future (James, 2000). Moreover, spiritual tourism is growing globally and its root cause is its acceptance by the masses and that its negative externalities are perceived to be quite minimal (Gupta, 1999).

Another significant issue that needs to be discussed in this study is the difference between spiritual tourism and religious tourism or pilgrimage. There is not much relevant discussion to be found in the literature, but, Jackowski and Smith (1992, p.93) state: "a pilgrimage has traditionally been described as a religiously motivated journey to a sacred place because of the special activity of God or a deity at that site". Killion (2003) states that pilgrimage or religious tourism is more based upon the motivations of the religious dogma, though she also



accepts the concept of secular pilgrimage, that is people travelling to religious destinations for different motives, such as education, knowledge and awareness. Furthermore, some authors from Schools of psychology, philosophy, religion and management have analysed the differences between spirituality and religion that is important for this study. Some spiritual beliefs are found in religion and others are unconnected to any religious doctrine or organization Lewis & Geroy (2000). The distinction is also described as spirituality being perceived as the more personalized aspect of faith, whereas religion is perceived as the more formalized and institutionalized manifestation of faith (Zinnbauer, Pargament, Cole, & Rye, 1997). Mitroff and Denton (1999) also commented on the practical difference; that religion has been viewed as a highly inappropriate topic to be discussed in the work place whereas spirituality has been viewed as a more appropriate subject to be discussed in the work place.

Victor and Turner, cited in (Rountree, 2002), state that a tourist is half a pilgrim and a pilgrim is half a tourist. Pilgrimage invites tourism while tourism entertains the possibility of pilgrimage experiences (Campo, 1998), but they are not identical. It has been observed that various religious leaders insist that pilgrims are not tourists due to their so-called unique motivations (Hill, 2002). The Rector of the Church of Santa Susanna in Rome, strongly asserts the difference he sees between a tourist and a pilgrim, defining the former as a traveller seeking to replicate in a foreign land his/her own world, while the latter as a traveller in search of something outside the familiar (Robichaud, 1999). He is challenged by Hill (2002) review of the book of Boris Vukonic “Tourism and religion”, concluding that pilgrims are tourists since the hospitality demands serviced by the tourism industry and the economic impacts of travelling pilgrims did fit the definition of tourism. Cohen (1996) quotes MacCannell who views the tourist as a modern pilgrim and concludes that “traditionally pilgrimage is essentially a movement from the profane periphery towards the sacred centre of the religious ‘cosmos’” (p.182). As a contrast, at another place, Cohen (1999) quotes Borocz who states that the tourism industry is “inextricably intertwined with industrial capitalism” (p.29). Following the argument mentioned, and disagreeing with Robichaud, this paper considers pilgrims to be spiritual tourists due to their economic impact and the definition of tourism given earlier. The idea is supported by Topik (1999) who rejects the old theory where religion and commerce were considered antithetical. Topik argues that the link could be established by the huge economic impact of Hajj to Mecca where pilgrims are described by locals as ‘their crops’. Moreover, more than 2 million people going for Hajj to Mecca are selected by their Governments from a much bigger number of hopeful

applicants. The whole exercise injects hundreds of millions of dollars into the local economies as the Hajjis prepare to travel and buy travel necessities and pay local Government fees and taxes, and many more millions into the Saudi Arabian economy, making Hajj a combination of business activity, a social exercise and an example of spiritual tourism.

Cohen (1992) described two polar types of pilgrimage centres: the formal and the popular. He defines a formal centre as one in which “the serious and sublime religious activities are primarily emphasised” and “the pilgrim’s principle motive for the journey to such centres is to perform a fundamental religious obligation” (Cohen, 1992, p.36). On the other hand, within a popular pilgrimage centre, “the ludic and folksy activities are of greater importance and may even take precedence over the more serious and sublime activities” Cohen (1992, p.36). Cohen (1996) also discusses and analyses the tourist as a modern pilgrim and concludes that “traditionally pilgrimage is essentially a movement from the profane periphery towards the sacred centre of the religious ‘cosmos’” (p.182). These discussions indicate that Cohen’s ‘popular pilgrimage’ seems more similar to the concept of spiritual tourism.

The history of mankind shows that spiritual tourism is probably one of the oldest forms of travel. In the olden times, the masses were too preoccupied by survival, so none could travel for fun and excitement, nevertheless, the records of the earliest travel indicate that many people did travel for spiritual and religious motives (Gruber, 1988). The most appreciated and acknowledged religious Doctrines and Holy Books support the idea that the earliest travelling experiences among humans were often spiritually oriented. Gruber argues that spiritual tourism started when the Prophet Moses led the first group on a 40-year tour to Sinai. Another of the earliest group packages for spiritual tourism was led by Thomas Cook in 1869, when people travelled to the Holy land of Jerusalem on horse back. The Holy Family and the three Wise men, and Jesus Christ himself also travelled for their spiritual growth. Prophet Mohammad used to travel annually to the cave of Hira for his own spiritual quest. The Prophets Mohammad, Buddha and Jesus Christ all could have practised meditation at home, but they chose spiritual tourism for the spiritual growth of themselves and the masses and the worldwide spreading of their message.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the above discussion, it can be argued that spiritual tourism covers a broader range of tourists' objectives, than does religious tourism. Similarly, it might be argued that a religious tourist will travel only to fulfil those faith-related needs that are declared by his religion, whereas a spiritual tourist will travel to fulfil his faith related needs that are controlled by his inner desires of interconnectedness. Thus, a spiritual tourist is both a religious and secular pilgrim. For example, a Muslim going for Hajj to Mecca will be classified as both a religious and spiritual tourist, but a Muslim visiting The Vatican will be specifically a spiritual tourist (provided that s/he has travelled there partly for spiritual reasons and not only to observe history, art, scriptures or similar common tourism reasons). It may be said that every religious tourist is a spiritual tourist, but not vice versa.

This paper concludes by stating that spiritual tourism is too large, and too significant to be ignored any longer, and that it is now a most opportune time to put together existing academic knowledge, the accumulation of practical wisdom from experienced operators, and the beginnings of a new research tradition in this field. Further research in this area could also be conducted by assessing and analysing the social, financial and economic impact of spiritual tourism on the regions and destinations visited for this purpose. There is opportunity to research the personal, social and political consequences of spiritual tourism. Considerable work needs to be done to chart and examine the benefits and costs to each stakeholder group within the spiritual tourism industry's value chain. Such research will be better done within the ambit of a newly recognised field known as spiritual tourism.

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