Chapter 7
Religious Tourism in South Africa: Challenges, Prospects, and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The growth of tourism in South Africa after the end of apartheid can be associated with the growth of various forms of special interest tourism. Religious tourism as a form of special interest tourism is possibly the most important contributor of tourism geographical dispersion in South Africa. South Africa’s religious tourism is dominated by Christian religious pilgrimage. Religious pilgrimages produce positive spin off for many destinations in South Africa, which may not be regarded as traditional tourism destinations. Religious-linked domestic travel continues to dominate domestic tourism expenditure. The existence of several African Initiated Churches such as the Zion Christian Church and the Nazareth Baptist Church attract several million worshippers during their religious pilgrimages, attracting worshippers beyond South Africa. Robben Island, which is a shrine for the anti-apartheid struggle, has a glorious Muslim resistance history, which is yet to be exploited by the Robben Island Museum. This chapter adds to the academic literature on religious tourism.

INTRODUCTION

“Economic growth—and in particular employment growth—represents the most critical challenge currently facing South Africa” (Jourdan, 1998: 717). The high levels of unemployment contribute to intergenerational poverty, which is the defining feature...
of post-apartheid South Africa. The economy of South Africa has been primarily focused on extraction industry, primarily gold mining. The tourism industry continued to grow especially in the post-apartheid period since 1994, to become the number one foreign exchange earner in South Africa. Tourism has been observed by different authors as one of the growing industries that has a major foreign currency earner for many countries worldwide (Henning, 2007:02). According to Phaswana-Mafuya and Haydam (2005) the tourism industry was overprotected from foreign competition through limited international investment in tourism facilities, protected from demanding tourists through allowing a limited flow of international tourists into the country; and protected from itself through having suppliers who catered to a largely homogenous and predictable clientele. Although there are different types of tourism, different people are engaging themselves to numerous activities that are tourism related for different reasons, such as recreation, health, religious, travel, adventure etc. According to Fatima, Naeem and Rasool (2016), there are six categories of tourism: relaxing tourism; relaxing and health care tourism; visiting tourism; transit tourism; short distance tourism and; professional tourism. Religious tourism is one of the ancient types of tourism where by people travel solely and intensely for religious reasons. It has been observed that the largest proportions of delegates to religious gatherings, particularly in the SADC region are women (SAWIT, 2016).

It is assumed that the world over 25% of the traveling public are interested in faith-based tourism. When one adds to this the number of people who travel for faith-based conventions, and faith based activities such as weddings, bar mitzvahs or funerals, the number become extraordinarily large. World Religious Travel is one of the fastest growing segments in travel today. Religious travel is estimated at a value of US$18 billion and 300 million travellers e.g. Conferences and missionary work. Religious-oriented travel then has occurred since the first pilgrimages. In recent years, however, religious travel and tourism has developed into a much larger and more segmented market. When thinking of religious tourism most communities tend to believe that this form of tourism does not apply to their locale, unless they are a major pilgrimage destination. Religious tourism is not only a visitation to a particular holy destination, but may also be travel for a humanitarian cause, for reasons of friendship or even as a form of leisure. Religious travel can be the primary reason for a trip but it can also be part of a trip and provide a destination with additional attractions. “Religion is a factor that has power in explaining tourist behaviour, whether it motivates or constraints the tourist’s destination choice. The contribution of religion to the tourism attractiveness of a region has received some attention in the literature” Fourie, Rosello & Santana-Gallego (2014). “Most tourists choose destinations according to what complies with their belief” (Hamza, Chouhoud & Tantazi, 2012: 86).
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