Chapter 19

Accessible Tourism in Religious Destinations: Comparing the Motivations of People With and Without Special Access Needs

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ABSTRACT

People’s reasons for visiting religious destinations range from being devoted pilgrims to tourists with secular motivations. People with special access go to specific shrines for curative purposes. They may be differently motivated and display different behaviors at the destination. As they must confront obstacles when travelling, they may be more constrained, leading to different behaviors in terms of satisfaction and loyalty. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the motivations of those with special access needs and those without when traveling to curative shrines, such as Lourdes, France. First, motivations of these two groups will be compared. Second, the effects of motivations on their travel behavior at the destination will be contrasted. The wide scope of visitors’ motivations means that destinations must address all market segments, being crucial to ensure accessibility standards, as this affects not only people with disabilities but also seniors and families with young children.

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INTRODUCTION

Some years ago, religious journeys were defined as multifunctional journeys dominated by religious factors. Nowadays however, religious motivation is losing importance and other motivations of a different nature are gaining importance (Rinschede, 1992; Rodosthenous, 2016). Religious tourism includes visiting religious ceremonies and conferences and, above all, visiting local, regional, national, and international religious centers (Rinschede, 1992). Consequently, in order to fulfill the wide diversity of motivations of their visitors, modern religious destinations are either located in the immediate area of large tourist attractions (Rinschede, 1992; Vukonic, 2001), or have become tourist attractions by themselves.

From the demand side, people’s reasons for visiting religious destinations range from being devoted pilgrims to tourists with secular motivations. Rinschede (1992) suggests that, in fact, there is a pilgrim-tourism continuum and, depending on personal needs and motivations, many guests fall into the range of intermediate categories.

Some people with special access needs go to specific shrines, which are part of the religious tourism offer, for curative purposes. They may be differently motivated and display different behaviors at the destination. As they must confront obstacles when travelling, they may be more constrained, leading to different behaviors in terms of satisfaction and loyalty.

Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the motivations of those with special access needs and those without when traveling to curative shrines, such as Lourdes, France. First, motivations of these two groups will be compared. Second, the effects of motivations on their travel behavior at the destination will be contrasted.

Some time ago, the challenge of any religious tourism destination was to align and meet the needs of both secular tourists and pilgrims, as they are considered to be different (Weidenfeld, 2006). Nowadays, many people of many faiths and those who claim no religion at all travel to these destinations motivated by curiosity or architectural intensity, among other reasons (Nyaupane, Timothy, & Poudel, 2015). The wide scope of motivations for traveling to these places means that destinations must address all market segments, regardless of their religious affiliation. Furthermore, it is crucial to ensure accessibility standards, as this affects not only people with disabilities, but also seniors and families with young children and so on. In other words, the current challenge for any religious destination is to meet the needs of any tourist, and one of the starting points is to facilitate their experiences by addressing accessibility in broad terms.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Diversity of Motivations in Religious Destinations

Motivations are part of a complex model of tourist behavior. No tourism experience is related to a single motivation, but rather a combination of diverse interacting motivations which define tourists’ experiences and behavior.

Fodness (1994) identified and tested four functional dimensions of motivations: the knowledge function of leisure travel; the social-adjustive function of leisure travel; the value expressive function of leisure travel; and the utilitarian function of leisure travel. For the purpose of the study, these dimensions are described in the context of a religious destination, taking into consideration accessible tourism and people with special access needs.