

The advantages of faith-based tourism and pilgrimage: niche-market formation and arguments for local stakeholders

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Pilgrimage has been with humanity for a very long time, probably as long as humans travelled the world for religious purposes. Tourism has been linked to pilgrimage presumably along the same stretch of time, which has given rise to many discussions and qualifications of faith-based tourism and pilgrimage.

The relevance of pilgrimage and faith-based tourism is that they are very much growth-markets. Reader (2007) remarks that pilgrimage centres worldwide, related to many religions, have been reporting increasing numbers of pilgrims. At the same time, Reader continues, this growth does not necessarily run parallel with a growth in faith or is a result of a religious revival, but perhaps is connected to improved travel accessibility, which allows not only more people to go on a pilgrimage than previously, but also to go frequently.

At first glance, one may wonder why Malta, so rich in its authentic cultural and religious heritage, about 7,200 years, is not a main destination for faith-based tourism, notwithstanding its fully developed and functional present tourism infrastructure. Worldwide, religious tourism is showing growth, and thanks to increasing numbers, investments can be made to preserve sites and develop the product. Locally, many people and organisations helped, both in the past and in the present, to promote visits and pilgrimages to Malta, but it seems that the islands never managed to come out of the periphery of matters.

This talk will provide many arguments why this form of tourism is important and why it deserves its own niche.