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## Review of: Religious Tourism in Asia: Tradition and Change through Case Studies and Narratives, by S. Yasuda, R. Raj & K. Griffin

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## Review of : *Religious Tourism in Asia: Tradition and Change through Case Studies and Narratives*

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Yasuda, S., Raj, R. & Griffin, K. (2018) *Religious Tourism in Asia: Tradition and Change through Case Studies and Narratives*, CABI, Oxfordshire, UK x+175, £85.50 / €112.50 / \$144.00 US (Hardcover)

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Religious tourism studies tends to be the domain of mainly Western scholars who study pilgrimage religious/spiritual tourism to Western sacred places (read: Europe) that are owned and maintained by Western religious groups. As such, *Religious Tourism in Asia: Tradition and Change through Case Studies and Narratives* is a welcome addition to the literature on religious tourism.

This book focuses on the development of this tourism niche market across this world region. While the introductory chapter does little to introduce the focus of the book, the 16 case study chapters provide readers small glimpses of the potential of religious tourism in this world region. Chapter 2 highlights several religious sites in the Sultanate of Oman that could be utilised for religious tourism purposes, while Chapter 3 focuses on the strategic development of religious tourism in India by entrepreneurial Islamic tour operators. Chapter 4 provides a discussion of Sufism and its links to spiritual types of tourism to the graves of important holy people. Chapter 5 focuses on current religious tourism challenges in Azerbaijan, Chapter 6 looks at holy caves and mountains held as holy by both Animists and Christians in the Philippines, and Chapter 7 examines religious tourism in the context of China, where religious tourism is focused on its education aspects rather than its religious/spiritual aspects. While religious tourism has a long history in India, the authors of Chapter 8 provide recommendations on how to move this niche market forward in an Indian context. In Chapter 9, the author takes an ethnographic perspective in examining pilgrimage as it relates to Sundanese in West Java, while in Chapter 10 the focus is on the politics of sacred site management at the Mahabodhi Temple Complex, a UNESCO World Heritage Site in Bodhgaya, India. The authors in Chapter 11 examine the potential of Buddha's birthplace in Nepal for religious tourism development, Chapter 12 focuses on religious tourism potential in contemporary Central Asia, and Chapter 13 looks at the impacts of religious tourism and government

promotional efforts on the Aobao religious festival in China. Chapters 14 and 15 look at the religious tourism potential in Pakistan and Nankana Sahib, the birthplace of Sikhism, respectively, while Chapter 16 investigates the destination marketing of religious tourism in Uzbekistan and Chapter 17 discusses religious tourism at three temples in Kerala, India.

With all books, there are ways in which the structure and focusing of this book could have been improved. For example, the authors are correct in pointing out that one of the weaknesses of this book is that the book lacks a 'coherent narrative' (p. 5). This may be because Asia, as defined in this book, stretches from the Middle East to the Southeast Asian region of the world. This expansive geographic definition of Asia leads to a lack of focus in terms of a more intense understanding of religious tourism development in a particular world sub-region. Indeed, the chapters in this book should probably have been organised by sub-region (e.g., Central Asia, India, and Southeast Asia). Another way of organising the book would have been by topic or theme, as many of the chapters focused on the potential of religious tourism in a country while others looked at theological or spiritual principles related to religious tourism.

Because this book is a series of case studies, outside of a couple of chapters, it does not push or add much to the theoretical limits of religious tourism studies. However, considering the dominant European focus in this tourism research subfield, this book is a breath of fresh air in presenting religious tourism concepts and ideas in an area of the world where religious tourism and its potential development is relatively unknown.

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