

PRE-PUBLICATION draft**EXCERPT from Section 5.2 Cathedrals, churches and religious buildings**

In the modern age European societies are becoming increasingly secular. Compared to, say, the latter part of the last century there are significantly less people regularly practicing religion. This notwithstanding, the built heritage associated with the Christian religious traditions retains an appeal that often transcends personal culture and beliefs. As a result of this interest, many cathedrals, churches, monasteries and other religious sites have effectively become yet one more element of the tourism product.¹

There are three levels of tourism relevance of religious sites. At the highest level are the cathedrals, churches and religious sites which are of sufficient cultural and religious importance to motivate people to visit the city. Examples include St. Peter's in Rome, Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris,² Sagrada Familia in Barcelona and St. John's Cathedral in Valletta, Malta. Then there are cathedrals and churches which are of touristic relevance but not sufficiently to motivate tourists to visit the city. These would be part of the overall tourism product that is offered by the city, possibly also being a must-see attraction. One example is Wawel Cathedral, Krakow. Most churches in cities fall into a third category which are those churches that are not listed as a main attraction in the guide books but which are also interesting for religious, cultural, artistic or architectural reasons. A visit to the lesser known churches and religious sites in a city enhances the overall experience of the visitor. For example: a visit to Salzburg would most likely include a visit to several churches located in or near the Old Town.

Some historic city centres seem to have a church around every corner. For example, Smørvik³ notes that it is difficult to imagine Rome without its many churches. Sometimes they are small and unassuming, with a narrow church facade squeezed in between residential and commercial buildings. Other times they are massive buildings in prominent locations or dominating over a main city square.

Tourists who visit churches and religious sites do so for many reasons, some religious and some secular. Religious motive has a strong spiritual focus and involves the search for a deeper spiritual and fulfilling experience. Certain individuals choose sites linked to their faith or to a specific holy person or event that is relevant to their faith.⁴ Although focused on religion, these visitors often have a broader interest in the historical and cultural dimension of the site.

People visit sites of religious significance for a variety of reasons that may or may not be related to faith or spiritual needs. For many visitors a religious experience is not the purpose of the visit.^{5, 6} For example: in a study of visitors to four cathedrals in the United Kingdom, Winter and Gasson⁷ found that almost two thirds of visitors claimed to be motivated by historic and architectural interest. Less than a quarter of respondents visited for religious reasons. Similarly in a study of visitors to the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome, only one of fifteen interviewees described themselves as religious.⁸ Therefore, for a vast majority of visits to churches and religious sites, the experience cannot be described as religious tourism. Smørvik⁹ describes religious tourism as a form of tourism “whose participants are motivated in part or exclusively for religious reasons.” A visit to a religious site becomes religious tourism if there is a sense of pilgrimage and if the visit is motivated by religious belief.

Religious heritage sites offer multidimensional experiences that oscillate between the religious and the secular. Non-religious motivations can be a combination of factors. Some visitors to a church may be motivated by impulse or an urge that arises there and then, as they walk and explore the urban area. Curiosity compels exploring tourists to get to know the narratives and history of a place – narratives that until a few minutes earlier they might not have known existed. There is also a ‘visual curiosity’, with visitors wanting to set their eyes on features, including art works that they had never seen before. As the tourist is exploring the historic centre, the open door of a church is inevitably seen as an invitation to walk in.

Smørvik¹⁰ suggests other reasons for visiting churches and religious sites. Visitors may be seeking a break from the world outside or a peaceful experience. They may wish to enter the church because of its status or position. Hughes et al.¹¹ suggest that visitors to cathedrals may be looking for “selfguided, contemplative and reflective individual experiences”. Even for non-believers, the visit to a church may be an opportunity to reflect and could therefore encompass something existential or spiritual. Smørvik¹² describes it as follows: “The encounter with the interior of the church, the many lighted candles, the people praying at the front, the dark brown wooden benches, the sparse light from the high windows, and the low-pitched voices all invited visitors to rediscover their true self.” There are also heritage-focused visitors who are keen to learn about the cultural dimension of the place including its architecture and its associations with specific persons or events.¹³

References and notes

- ¹ Woodward, S. (2004) Faith and tourism: planning tourism in relation to places of worship. *Tourism and Hospitality Planning & Development*, 1:2, 173-186.
- ² Notre-Dame Cathedral was severely damaged in a fire that broke out on April 15, 2019. Most of the roof, a spire and some of the rib vaulting were destroyed.
- ³ Smørvik, K. (2020) Why enter the church on holiday? Tourist encounters with the Basilica of Santa Maria in Trastevere, Rome. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*. DOI: 10.1080/1743873X.2020.1807557 .
- ⁴ Lupu, C., Brochado, A., & Stoleriu, O. (2019). Visitor experiences at UNESCO monasteries in Northeast Romania. *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, 14(2), 150–165.
- ⁵ Hughes, K., Bond, N., & Ballantyne, R. (2013). Designing and managing interpretive experiences at religious sites: Visitors' perceptions of Canterbury Cathedral. *Tourism Management*, 36, 210–220.
- ⁶ Lupu et al, 2019.
- ⁷ Winter, M. & Gasson, R. (1996). Pilgrimage and tourism: cathedral visiting in contemporary England. *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 2(3), 172-182.
- ⁸ Smørvik, 2020.
- ⁹ Smørvik, 2020. Page 3.
- ¹⁰ Smørvik, 2020.
- ¹¹ Hughes et al, 2013. Page 218.
- ¹² Smørvik, 2020. Page 8.
- ¹³ Lupu et al, 2019.