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# Tourism and religion: an uneasy relationship?

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## **Tourism and Religion: An uneasy relationship?**

**Jan te Kloeze**

### **Abstract**

The interrelationship of religion and tourism has barely been touched upon in research (Vukonić, 1996). Smart (1996) distinguishes various dimensions of religion, but not in terms of cultural meaning and identity. Changes take place, for instance in Islamic beliefs, from relatively tolerant to extremely intolerant (Bauer, 2011), or in terms of secularisation in Christianity (Giddens, 1993). This paper questions how hosts and host societies perceive tourists' behaviour while relating their perception to religious (or cultural) convictions. How far does this perception lead to condemnation through disapproval, bans, resistance, or violence? Nevertheless, Cavanaugh (2009) warns against the myth of religious violence.

**Keywords:** tourism, religion, orthodoxy, conflicts, identity

### **Introduction**

Usually people have positive feelings while discussing the relationship between tourism and religion, they refer to pilgrimages such as Santiago de Compostella, Mecca, or a visit to the Notre-Dame in Paris. The question is, do we feel comfortable in a community where the Sunday observance is (still) valid, or do we enjoy our holidays while the media speak about the threat of terrorist attacks, implying a link here to Muslim fundamentalists? With questions such as this in mind it is worthwhile to search for the influence of religion on tourism, mainly for the influence of fundamentalist utterances of the various religions on tourism.

### **The origin of religion**

Searching for the origin of religion it seems to be that non-humans – e.g. chimpanzees and bonobos and elephants - do exhibit some traits that would have been necessary for the evolution of religion (King, 2007), while Bekoff (2009) argues that many species grieve death and loss. The earliest evidence of religious thought is based on the ritual treatment of the dead. The earliest known burial of modern humans is from a cave in Israel located at Qafzeh. Human remains have been dated to 100,000 years ago. Insights from a totally different perspective are given by the

neurobiologist Swaab (2010), who says a primal feeling is hidden in the human brain which makes people religious.

However, the focus here is on the possibly uneasy influence of religion on tourism, in terms of the possibly unwanted or unacceptable behaviour of tourists, unacceptable from the host society's point of view which may be dictated by religious convictions that may not be explicit. The problem then, consists of the following questions:

- (1) How do hosts and host societies perceive tourists' behaviour while relating their perception to religious (or cultural) convictions?
- (2) Which differences and similarities can be found between (fundamentalist) utterances of various religions, such as the main Eastern religions of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism and Taoism, and the three main, monotheist religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam?
- (3) Which theoretical views can be found in this regard?

For this exploratory paper, the sources which have been consulted are literature, papers, documents, newspapers, TV programmes, Internet, and other social media, including correspondence through social media. While searching for similarities and differences between religions with regard to their influence on tourism we follow the methodology of the grounded theory in order to generate theory from data (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Another point needs to be made here, as this is work in progress, I did not refer to publications that specifically focus on tourism and terrorism. An initial assessment of those publications suggests that most of them focus on the effects of terrorist attacks on tourism demand (for example. Araña and León (2008).

### **What is Religion?**

Looking at religion from an institutional and sociological point of view, first we have to agree about the definition of religion. Religion is a collection of cultural systems, belief systems, and worldviews that establishes symbols that relate humanity to spirituality and moral values. While religion is difficult to define, one standard model of religion, used in religious studies courses as well as anthropology was proposed by Clifford Geertz, who simply called it a cultural system (Geertz, 1966). According to Giddens:

all religions involve a set of symbols, invoking feelings of reverence or awe, and are linked to rituals or ceremonials [...] engaged in by a community of believers. [...] Whether or not the beliefs in a religion involve gods, there are virtually always beings or objects inspiring attitudes of awe or wonder (1993:458).

Writing about religious authority does not mean the process of secularisation should be forgotten (Giddens, 1993). Smart dissociates himself from the secularisation thesis: 'I ... believe we are moving toward a global ideology that has a place for religion and recognizes the contributions of the different traditions. Hopefully, it will have an overarching view as to how we can work together for the promotion of human values and spirituality' (London, 2007). Casanova (1994) describes how religions, suddenly reconquered the public sphere towards the end of the last century, a process he called the de-privatisation of religion. Regarding religious changes in the Western world and parts of the Southern world, at least two developments should be mentioned: the search for spirituality, and the overwhelming growth of Evangelical movements (the latter not in the United States and Europe only, but very much in Latin America). These developments usually are going at the cost of established denominations. In some cases the two developments go hand in hand.

### **The Sociology of Religion**

Marx, Durkheim and Weber represent the objectivist, or modernist tradition within sociology. A different perspective might be taken from a postmodern sociologist, or an anthropologist who might look at religion through the lens of the believer--to explore what it is to believe (Townesley, 2004; Giddens, 1993). The core of this paper concerns the influence of fundamentalist religious utterances on tourism, particularly in relation to the religions mentioned earlier. Information has been collected based on literature, papers, narratives of tourists, and social media. Taking each major religion in turn, a brief comment is given in terms of host – guest relations, if any.

### **Hinduism**

Joseph and Kavoori (2001) found that inhabitants of the pilgrimage town of Pushkar, India, perceived tourism as a threat to 'tradition' and religion. Although the Hindu

inhabitants of Pushkar found a way to cope with tourists' behaviour through mediated resistance, it is quite clear they perceive this behaviour as adverse effect on their religious beliefs.

### **Buddhism**

So far, there is little data relating to Buddhism and Lamaism relating to the problem of this paper (Zhong, 2011). However, one informant, a Tibetan who left Lhasa recently told me no negative or even hostile reactions from Tibetans towards Chinese tourists had been observed. Of course one cannot generalise from one case, but it may be worth investigating the hypothesis that Buddhists do not bother too much about tourists' behaviour as they seek to escape the cycle of life.

### **Confucianism**

Confucius was direct as to how people should relate to each other. One should treat the other with respect and in a manner which will cause the other to feel worthwhile: '...great guest; to employ the people as if you were assisting at a great sacrifice; not to do to others as you would not wish done to yourself.'<sup>1</sup> Mutual understanding between people could occur only when there was agreement to respect and tolerate individual differences and responsibilities, and the latter is fully underpinned by Confucian values (Arcodia, 1994, 2003).

### **Taoism**

'Taoism has been one of the most influential philosophies and religions during the past 2,500 years in China, and it affects every aspect of Chinese life, including leisure' (Wang and Stringer 2000:33). The purpose is communication, public relation and mutual understanding. Might we theoretically spoken conclude Taoists believers do not experience problems with tourism?

### **Judaism**

Mea Shearim is an Old World enclave in the heart of Jerusalem. In some groups, the women wear thick black stockings all year long, including summer. Married women wear a variety of head coverings, from wigs to headscarves. The men have beards

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<sup>1</sup> See: <http://classics.mit.edu/Confucius/analects.3.3.html>

and some grow long side curls, called peyyot. When visiting the neighbourhood, women and girls are asked to dress modestly (knee-length skirts or longer, no plunging necklines or midriff tops, no sleeveless blouses or bare shoulders) and tourists are requested not to arrive in large, conspicuous groups. During the Shabbat (from sunset Friday until it is completely dark on Saturday night), visitors should refrain from smoking, photography, driving or use of mobile phones, and when entering synagogues, men should cover their heads.

A visitor told me: "Walking around you may observe locals don't look at you; posters tell "foreigners leave". So, as a tourist you are not welcome; very likely this holds for all visitors who don't belong to the residents". Apparently, this visitor had experiences which show a more hard line attitude than mentioned above (Te Kloeze, 2011). The question is how far the Mea Shearim residents cope with the hospitality texts out of the Torah.

### **Christianity**

With regard to Christianity the focus will be on strict forms of this religion: the pietistic Reformed living in the Netherlands. Closed swimming pools on Sundays, no shops open, tourists neglected by locals: these are some facts, and some experiences of tourists in this so-called Bible Belt of the Netherlands. Even in some villages (e.g. Kootwijk) Sunday observance starts on Saturday evening 10.00 pm when the pubs are closed (Van de Poel 2007). Strict Dutch Protestants' views means a severe maintenance of Sunday observance, and the strategy while meeting tourists can be portrayed as ignorance. In order to put the former into perspective - research indicates that only 5% of the Dutch population have problems with tourists, and even in the Bible Belt area (Volkskrant, 2002).

### **Islam**

According to Din (1989) the doctrine of Islam, which encourages travel and hospitable behaviour as such, has little influence on the mode of tourism development in Muslim countries. Dłużewska (2008) studied the influence of religion on global and local conflict in tourism in the case of four Muslim countries: Tunisia, Dubai, Kenya, and Philippines (Palawan). The author concluded that '...among the factors which cause dysfunctions originating in tourism, religion is one of the utmost importance, regardless of culture [...] They can cause [...] aggression towards

visitors' (p. 63). Particularly, Russian tourists and Germans also were breaking cultural norms in a drastic way, while no problems were reported in the case of Muslim tourists. However, from the perspective of Islamicists in Tunisia, tourism is a cause of adverse cultural impact. Violating Islamic religious activities provides fuel to Islamic fundamentalists who criticise the excessive Westernisation of Tunisian society (Pourier, 1995).

Let's see how far actions against tourists take place since then in the Muslim world..

**Table 1:** Anti – tourist violence since 1995

Date	Perpetrators	Place	Victims	Motives	Additional motives
1995	Jihad Islami	Club Cairo, Egypt	19 Greek tourists		No problem tourism decreases due to holy terror
17-11-1997	6 terrorists	Luxor, Egypt	62 tourists killed	Battle against corrupt regime in Egypt	Sabotage of agreement between Egyptian government and Muslim organisations not to use violence
09-1-2004	Jama'ah Islamia	Taba, Sinai, Egypt	34 tourists	Israeli-Palestinian conflict	
23-07-2005		Sharm el-Sheikh	3 tourists	Against international tourism???	
30-04-2005			4 foreign tourists wounded		
23-02-2009		Cairo	1 tourist killed; 21 wounded	Egyptian tourist industry	
12-10-2002	Amrozi bin Nurhasiym, Imam Samudra and Ali Ghufron	Bali, Indonesia	202 tourists, mainly Australians		
01-10-2005		Bali, Indonesia	23 (?) tourists		
02-07-2007	Al-Qaeda	Sanaa, Yemen	7 tourists + 2 drivers killed; 5 wounded	Forcing release prisoners (members al-Qaeda)	
2008			2 tourists + Guide + driver		
15-03-2009			4 tourists		

The problem with this data concerns the motives of the perpetrators. The targets were the (Egyptian) government and the (international) tourism industry. A political

motive was mentioned also: the Israeli – Palestinian conflict. Nevertheless, the victims were tourists and the perpetrators Muslims.

In order to give insight into the ambivalent feelings regarding (Western) tourists by Muslim workers in the tourist industry a few quotations illustrate the problems. . In an article in The Los Angeles Times titled 'Egypt, tourism and Islam live uneasily side-by-side' (Fleishman and El-Hennawy, 2007) some Egyptian workers in the tourist industry are quoted as follows:

"I pretend I don't see what's happening around me," said Hossam Helmy, a janitor in blue coveralls and a ball cap that read: Staff. "My religion protects me. It has kept me from sin. When I see a half-naked woman I feel guilty and I feel this is not my country anymore. But work is scarce and I need this job. What can I do except get used to it?"

Many (...) tourism workers complain of humiliation, anger and temptations too salacious to ponder:

"When we serve liquor we feel it is wrong because we are Muslims," said Alaa Sayed Ghorbeyya, a waiter who has worked here for 11 months. "Deep down inside we hope God will forgive us. It is hard during Ramadan. I know my job is un-Islamic, but I believe my good deeds will override that."

The mosque where many of the men pray is near the Ghazala Gardens Hotel, one of three sites targeted in 2005 by terrorist bombs that killed 88 people. The attacks, aimed at damaging Egypt's \$7.7-billion tourist industry, underscored the conflicting symbols that Sharm, as it is known in colloquial shorthand, has become: A shimmering seaside host of regional peace conferences that brings East and West together for business and play, the resort is at the same time regarded by Islamic radicals as a testament to a Muslim government capitulating to capitalism and liberalism. Another point needs to be made here. As this is work in progress, I did not refer to publications that specifically focus on tourism and terrorism. An initial assessment of those publications suggests that most of them focus on the effects of terrorist attacks on tourism demand (for example. Araña and León (2008).



**Summary and discussion.**

First of all, we give a schematic summary of the reactions on tourism and tourists' behaviour by the various fundamentalist utterances of religion (Table 2, below).

Except Hinduism, the Eastern religions react (very likely) "neutral" on tourist behaviour. That is to say, no reactions in terms of unwanted behaviour have been found. In Hinduism what is called "mediated resistance" is reported.

Fundamentalist versions of the three monotheist religions show reactions varying from "required adaption" to "terrorist actions". It is striking that the views on what is perceived as obscene, disgusting, and decadent (Western) tourist behaviour is more or less similar in the fundamentalist versions of the four religions - indecent clothing, use of alcohol, no respect for their religious habits, holy sites and times.

Table 2: Reaction to tourism and tourists' behaviour

Scheme 2. Reactions on tourism and tourists' behaviour by (fundamentalist) utterances of religion									
		adaptation required	cold-shoulder	disapproval	restrictions	bans	resistance	violence	terror
Hinduism							mediated resistance		
Buddhism	neutral?								
Confucianism	neutral or positive								
Taoism	neutral?								
Fundamentalist Judaism		X						X	
Fundamentalist Christianity			X		X				
Fundamentalist Islam		X		X		X			X

At the same time it is very likely that the differences in this regard *within* the religions are bigger than the differences *between* the religions. Taken the societal impact into account the resistance in all variations valid for fundamentalist Islam, is obviously most violent. In this way the three questions in the problem statement have been answered. The findings invite for a challenging debate and for remarks.

Before we have seen that the three monotheist religions require a hospitable and inviting attitude towards strangers and travellers. What is the reason of the aversion (in various forms) we registered? Is it only because of the tourists' behaviour? If so, the fundamentalist convictions are more important than the call for hospitality. How

far is the aversion religiously driven, how far is it part of local culture of isolated groups in society, too? Answering the latter question depends on which view of religion is used.<sup>2</sup> The resistance looks like a struggle for the protection of religious and cultural identity, sometimes at the costs of peoples' life. It seems to be a clash between religious beliefs and requirements of tourists, between cultures, is it a clash of civilizations too? (Huntington, 1997)

Sometimes the contradictions (religious, cultural, and socioeconomic) appear in peoples' individual life as illustrated by the quotations of the Egyptian workers in the tourism industry, in one word: conflicting lifestyles. Not always the resistance is oriented to tourists, but to governments which means a political rather than a religious motive, perhaps.

Whether the insights of the three founding fathers of sociology of Marx, Durkheim and Weber have been relevant for the problem raised in this paper, can be questioned. Of course, their visions on religion are relevant. For a better understanding of fundamentalist convictions *Verstehen* (Weber) is most important. I agree with Townsley (2004) when he argues that a different perspective might be taken by a postmodern sociologist, or an anthropologist who might look at religion through the lens of the believer in order to explore '...what it is to believe' (p 3). An open mind of the researcher and interviewer / observer, not hindered by prejudices is decisive.

Although Giddens' theory of structuration (Giddens, 1984) is not meant as a theory to be applied, I think it is a challenge linking social practices such as tourism and religion to this theory. Structuration is attempt to reconcile theoretical dichotomies of social systems such as agency/structure, subjective/objective, and micro/macro perspectives. The approach does not focus on the individual actor or societal totality '...but social practices ordered across space and time' (p. 2). So, a historical approach of the (conflicting) relation between tourism and religion is needed. How did tourism develop, how did religion develop, how do millenniums old messages spread daily through social media and modern technology reach true believers, what do they mean for them, how are they internalised as being a taken-for-granted reality? Are we able to understand religious and cultural values and identity formation

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<sup>2</sup> For example compare Geertz's and Durkheim's definitions

through *Verstehen*? And how do we conduct research in order to create a deep understanding of internalised religious beliefs of true believers, of the content of religious doctrines whether or not changed by powerful political and religious leaders, of the perception of faith, and the value attached to cultural identity?

In short, a macro (institutional) view should be confronted with experiences on micro level, such as host – guest relationships. How are the messages about religion and about tourism on macro level transferred to micro level: tourism as a powerful, economic, globalised phenomenon acting on local level with hosts and guests as practising actors, each struggling with their desires, their actions, their aversion, their lack of respect according to the other, their postmodern consumerist value system (Bauman, 2007) and behaviour, their experiences with authentic traditional cultures and peoples who show in their view unacceptable gender relations, although gender differences in tourism involvement has been observed before elsewhere (Swain, 1995). Through real *Verstehen* we see the Other. ‘The Other precisely reveals himself in his alterity (otherness) not in a shock negating the I, but as the primordial phenomenon of gentleness’ (Levinas 1961:150).

### **Better *verstehen*?**

Under the heading “Catering to Muslim and non-Muslim travellers” Hashim, Murphy and Muhammad (2006) plea for providing Islamic information to Muslim tourists as follows: .

- prayer times;
- mosque and *halal* food locations; and
- arrows in hotels pointing towards Mecca on the room ceilings.

At the same time non-Muslim tourists should be aware of possible awkward situations due to ignoring Islamic customs:

- a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer is usually not given by Muslims (in stead: “*insha’Allah*” (God willing));
- avoid physical contact especially with Muslim women (instead smiling and bowing is regarded as acceptable and polite); and
- women should avoid scanty clothing.

Dłużewska (2008) also pleads for proper education programmes for hosts and host countries about the cultural background of the tourists' countries of origin as well as for Western tourists about Islamic norm. Even so, this author is questioning whether '...giving up a certain kind of tourism, which causes most social and cultural dysfunctions' (p. 64) would be an option. In the past I have myself proposed information programmes on do's and don'ts in host countries for tourists (Te Kloeze, 2002) a time when putting forward those proposals was not 'done' in Academia.

Assuming mutual understanding is the core of touristic encounters some authors write about Peace through Tourism (Moufakkir, 2010; Jimenez and Te Kloeze, 2010). Maoz (2010) investigated the relationships between Egyptian hosts and Israeli guests in Sinai. She found both negative and positive attitude changes amongst Israeli tourists and Egyptian workers in the tourist industry. 60% of the Egyptians changed their initial attitude in a positive direction, while 25% of the Israelis did so. Isaac and Platenkamp (2010) wrote about volunteer tourism in Palestine, and concluded volunteer activities are necessary, because they create hope through discussions about normative issues for the Palestinian voices, "and for the reason that they are cared for in their 'places of bother'" (p. 159). In this context an example should be mentioned: the village Neve Sjalom (Hebrew) / Wahat al-Salaam (Arab), meaning "Oasis of Peace", situated between Tel-Aviv and Jerusalem, where Jews and Palestinians peacefully live together (Akkerman, 2011).

One final note, although not related to tourism, an example in Nigeria, kindred to the village in Israel, is the story of Pastor James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa in Nigeria who argue they are beyond their mutual hatred, and work together in Nigeria and abroad in order to let other people, organisations and governments profit from their experiences (Mulder, 2011). I gave this paper the title *Tourism and Religion – An Uneasy Relationship?*. Perhaps experiences and the initiatives mentioned above, may change tourism and religion into a real hospitable relationship.

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