
Editorial

Razaq Raj

Leeds Metropolitan University,
Bronte Hall,
Headingley Campus,
Leeds, LS6 3QW, UK
E-mail: r.raj@leedsmet.ac.uk

Kevin Griffin

School of Hospitality Management and Tourism,
Dublin Institute of Technology,
Cathal Brugha Street,
Dublin 1, Ireland
E-mail: Kevin.griffin@dit.ie

Biographical notes: Razaq Raj is a Senior Lecturer in Events Financial and Strategic Management in the School of Events, Hospitality and Tourism at Leeds Metropolitan. He has published internationally on community events, outdoor events, economic impacts, religious tourism, cultural festivals and events, sustainable tourism, cultural diversity in events management and financial management for events. He has published work on special events, financial management in events, cultural festivals and events, sustainable tourism and religious tourism. He regularly attends and presents papers at national and International conferences. He is a board member of the ATLAS and CIRCLE International Research Groups.

Kevin Griffin is a tourism lecturer in the School of Hospitality Management and Tourism at the Dublin Institute of Technology. He is head of the ATLAS Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Research Group. His qualifications include teaching, tourism geography and historical geography and currently his main research interests span sustainability, heritage and religious tourism.

The papers in this Special Publication are drawn from the ATLAS Religious Tourism and Pilgrimage Special Interest Group Conference, 'Enhancing the Religious Tourism Experience' which was held in the religious site of New Norcia, Perth, Western Australia, from 20th to 25th June 2011. Similar to previous meetings / workshops of this active research group, this conference was not only an opportunity for the sharing of current research insights in religious tourism and pilgrimage and academic networking but also a forum for discussing future group activity and outputs, of which this publication is one example.

As a unit the papers indicate in a very definite manner that religious tourism has the potential to grow into the future. Mindful of that, this special issue is a timely re-assessment of the increasing linkages and interconnections between shared sacred and secular spaces on a global stage and explores key learning points from a range of

contemporary case studies of religious and pilgrimage activity, related to ancient, sacred and emerging tourist destinations and new forms of pilgrimage, faith systems and quasi-religious activities. Therefore a key strength of this special issue is the presentation of current and diverse research insights on aspects of enhancing religious tourism experience.

The first paper by Carlos Fernandes, and his colleagues begins this volume with interesting findings on research related to the Caminos de Santiago, but in this instance the less-known and less-travelled Portuguese route. As per-the broader literature on pilgrimage and religious tourism, a number of the subsequent papers touch on the perennial topic of whether a pilgrim is more a tourist than a religious participant. In his paper, Raj strongly posits that Muslims undertaking the visit to religious sites are highly stimulated by religious motivations. Following this, Morpeth presents an interesting discussion on how churches in modern times are facing the challenge of achieving a balance between commodifying their 'product' and maintaining their religiosity, while at the same time struggling to remain 'viable'. McGettigan and Griffin in a similar theme of interrogating the interface between pilgrim and destination, present an evidence based paper which suggests an emerging 'spiritual-experiential' visitor who seeks a new form of interaction at religious sites. While the main focus of the internationally based paper by Wiltshier and Clarke is on income maximisation and upskilling of site 'guardians' they do not abandon an understanding of the sacred nature of the experience, which they propose can remain core to the management of a site, while still achieving business efficiencies. Rashid's paper on the utilisation of web-based technologies to attract visitors continues this pragmatic theme and suggests that many religious sites could improve the efficiency of their web presence were they to consider a more customer-centric strategy in website design and provision. Griffin's paper on the Irish Traveller community concludes the volume with a further reflection on the importance of considering the customer, but in this instance minority and marginalised groups as opposed to the voluminous and assumed to be homogenous mass-pilgrim group(s).

These papers connect important insights into enhancing the religious tourism experience in both Eastern and Western cultural traditions. Exploration of the emerging experience economy has implications as to how an expanding symbolic economy has the capacity to cater for and add to these expressions of enhanced religious tourism experiences.

The aim of the special issue is to provide both empirical and personal insights into the changing nature of religion in society and to further the debate for both policy-makers and academics to consider these evolving challenges within the future development of faith tourism and pilgrimage.