

# Marian Tourism: Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic pilgrimage

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## Abstract

The purpose of this article is to make a conceptual contribution to the literature pertaining to Marian religious tourism pilgrimages by briefly discussing Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic religious tourism and suggesting what the tourism market could do to further promote this type of tourism and more successfully meet the realistic expectations of tourists. There are many destinations and sites that are by their very nature of great religious, cultural, architectural or historical value and thus of great interest to both domestic and foreign tourists. If there are deficits in marketing communication, poor infrastructure and other areas, this could hinder the development of pilgrimage and religious tourism which is a huge sector and niche market. Changes will invariably arise from the need to meet and exceed the requirements of travellers to holy sites as consumers. Religious pilgrimage tourism is designed to meet the need for spirituality arising out of a highly secular global society and is laden with great personal spiritual and also figurative meanings. Religious pilgrimage tourism has fortunately provoked the interest of many researchers and tourism practitioners and bodes well for the further development of this sector, especially where Marian pilgrimage is concerned.

**Keywords:** pilgrimage, tourism, Virgin Mary, Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy

## Introduction

An important type of cultural tourism exists in what we term as either 'faith travel', 'religious tourism' or 'pilgrimage'. Its market segment is referred to in diverse variations including faith tourism, pilgrimage tourism, spiritual tourism, religious tourism, and tourism pilgrimage and whatever its appellation, this type of travel is likely the earliest form of tourism in the world (Al-Amin, 2002). Santos (2002), states that religious tourism is basically the expression that has been used by tour operators and religious leaders to describe all kinds of situations that bring together religion and tourism, including pilgrimages. Religious tourism and in the case of this article Marian tourism (dedicated to pilgrimages to shrines relating to the Virgin Mary) relates to the common and sustainable development of alternative and special interest tourism in which respect is shown by travellers for holy places. Religious tourism stresses the preservation, restoration and expansion of religious and historical monuments for the purpose of attracting sustainable tourism. The pilgrimage tourist enjoys sightseeing, traveling, visiting diverse places and, may travel by land, air or sea to a desired destination. Once there, they may stay for one or many nights and buy local memorabilia, eat at local restaurants and experience the unique culture and virtually act like every other tourist, except that they are primarily spiritually motivated. This therefore includes tourism that is inspired by spirituality and religiousness and it is generally associated with religious heritage sites. The religious desire to travel is one of the oldest motivations.

The contemporary tourist is a secular pilgrim however religion is the fundamental motivation of the segment which we presently define as 'tourism'. This was in past centuries referred to as 'pilgrimage' and is also an important a subject for various academic disciplines, including sociology, geography, anthropology and history (Hudman and Jackson, 1992). Religious tourism is often referred to a subclass of cultural tourism in which the traveller expresses the desire to travel from their homes to a destination which they consider as sacred and generally hope to participate in some religious proceedings.

Travel for religious reasons is growing in leaps and bounds and comprises a sizeable portion of the international tourism numbers (Timothy and Olsen, 2006). Travel companies across the globe offer extensive faith related packages to a range of religious destinations and pilgrimage sites and this tourism is growing rapidly (Reader, 2007). Lanquar (2011) asserts that about 600 million national as well as international religious and spiritual trips are conducted globally and of that number roughly 240 million tend to visit Europe. Consequently, religious tourism has become an important commercially driven enterprise in which tourists opt for single day or one to two week stays at selected pilgrimage sites. The implication is that religious sites such as shrines or other religious buildings be maintained, protected and where age is taking its toll, restored. Such destinations require careful promotion and management (Rotherham, 2007). If we take as an example the Muslim pilgrimage to Mecca, this requires exceptional management as numbers of pilgrims are in the millions per day (Henderson, 2011). Religious tourism thus comprises followers of individual faiths visiting sacred locations that are considered to be holy sites for whatever reason. In numerous cases, religious tourists will visit a holy site on the anniversaries of an event that is of significance to the followers of a specific religion. The World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has established objectives and guidelines specially aimed at stimulating the rise of sustainable religious tourism (UNWTO, 2008).

The religious background of the tourist is associated with their perception of a site, so that those who are devout believers are more emotionally bonded with a destination than those who have lesser belief (Poria, Butler and Airey, 2003). Religious tourism satisfies specific spiritual and/or religious needs (Collins-Kreiner, 2010). Rojo (2007) notes that the majority of people who travel to religious sites as those on the Camino route of Santiago de Compostela are religious but up to 35 percent of the travellers did not see themselves as religious and did thus not travel to the sites for any religious reason. Crowley, (2012) maintains that those travelling on such trips are on the lookout for a spiritual encounter and special experiences that may motivate them to alter the way the live. They thus seek evocative contacts with other pilgrims or travellers, local inhabitants, and the built religious landscape that may lead them to a desirable state of mind to growth as people and change for the better.

The religious motivation is only one of a range of possible additional motivations as tourists seek not only the spiritual side of a holy site visit. Frey (2004) noted in a study on pilgrimages to Santiago de Compostela - the locality of the shrine of St. James the Apostle, that more than half of the travellers to religious sites are male, and that not only Catholics, but also Protestants, Agnostics, Buddhists, and the members of New Age or esoteric spiritual movements tend to visit religious sites. Many of them are also urban, middle-class, educated Europeans who have no religious motive, but travel for various other cultural, spiritual, sporty, and personal reasons. Generally tourists are happy to pay a bit more to have both their religious and secular needs satisfied. There are also for example, numerous tourists who tend to visit a shrine or church for out of pure curiosity and with a desire to be more informed (Josan, 2009). People tend to visit a site for either religious and spiritual motives which is understood as the difference between personal piety and orthodoxy, so that spiritual motives mirror the emphasis on the individual or transcendent spirituality before

orthodoxy (Eade and Sallnow, 2000). Zwissler, (2011) ascertained that many travellers visit religious sites for the exercise. Murray and Graham (1997) also support this notion.

The debate about spiritual and pilgrimage or religious tourists in the tourism sector is ongoing. There are some researchers who view them as conventional tourists. However, the World Tourism Organizations (WTO) has linked them with cultural tourism (UNWTO, 1985). The UNWTO estimates that no less than 300 to 330 million tourists visit the world's key religious sites annually with roughly 600 million national and international religious voyages in the world, 40% of which take place in Europe. As significant tourism destinations, religious heritage sites drive international tourism and economic growth, and also provide important meeting grounds for visitors and host communities, making dynamic contributions to tolerance, respect and mutual understanding between diverse global cultures (UNWTO, 2014). Roman Catholics accept religious tourism due to its huge economic magnitude. The same acceptance is observed in the Orthodox Church, although in both denominations, the term religious tourism is frowned upon from a purely theological criterion (Moirá 2009). Religious pilgrimage tourism is a means to increase social interrelationships in societies due to the interaction that is produced between travellers and the local host population who manage the sites. Economically, it is an important resource, which allows visitors to become witnesses and contributors in the religious and historical memory of the host community, while allowing the latter to assume a reduced self-referential attitude to their religious heritage. They are able to link it more closely to the context, traditions and communities that contributed to its construction (Rizzello and Trono, 2013).

It is important for nations to leverage the growing interest for religious pilgrimage tourism worldwide since this beneficial for the tourism sector, and also engenders and ethos of tolerance and respect for others as a cultural dialogue and peace (UNWTO, 2014). Pilgrimage tourism, or whatever name we may call it, plays an important part in preserving the heritage of humanity for future generations.

In most European towns and cities there are religious traditions, festivals, celebrations, monasteries, cathedrals that pilgrims and other tourists wish to visit, and many of these are dedicated to the veneration of the Virgin Mary. Religious tourism also invariably creates new jobs in the destinations concerned and restaurants and hotels also enjoy increased patronage which bodes well for sustainability in a region in general. Tour companies organize all-inclusive trips to, churches, historical sites and temples and other sites where religious people lived and /or performed miracles, or where they died naturally or were martyred. Such trips may be guided tours, or individual, in which tourists visit numerous sites in one day or during a multiple-day tour. Many sites relating to the Virgin Mary are of significance to both Christians and Muslims. Generally, the various pilgrimage or religious tourism routes and the itineraries necessitate harmonised partnerships and strong collaboration between the host communities, tourism professionals and local authorities of a destination. Tourism is a key driving force for the preservation of many religious sites as a result of the growing secularization of society. When tourists interact with other religions in other parts of the world, this offers an inimitable experience that is made even more special by the host communities and tourists positive interactions and mutual respect. Other than Europe, there are a multitude of sites throughout the world that are regarded as sacred and holy by some believers since they claim to have seen visions of religious figures at such sites. When there are religious feasts or holidays and related celebrations, countless people from all over are likely to visit these sites and religious ceremonies are conducted to mark special occasions.

The churches have what is termed a 'calendar of saints' which is a traditional Christian manner by which of organizing a liturgical year association is made of each day of the year with one or more saints. It refers then to the day as the feast day of a saint and in Orthodoxy,

the Virgin Mary is the “First amongst the Saints” (Typikon, 2003). The Marian feast days are thus very precise holy days of the liturgical year recognized by Christians as momentous Marian days for the celebration of happenings in the life of the Blessed Virgin Mary and her veneration. The number of Marian feasts which are celebrated, their designations and even dates may vary among Christian denominations. Feast days came about due to the early Christian tradition of commemorating each sacred person annually on the date of his or her death, or ‘birth’ into heaven. Thus in Latin such as date is referred to as the person’s *natalis* (“day of birth”).

Orthodoxy refers to the calendar of saints as a Menologion in which saints special dates are depicted in order for the year in question. Some dates are fixed while others may vary. Either way, these dates are important for tourism as pilgrimages intensify at such times when the faithful desire to visit a shrine for a ‘blessing’. These dates are however also important for what is referred to as ‘secular’ or ‘non-confessional pilgrimages’ (Magry, 2008). Many tourists who are not necessarily adherents to a faith desire to travel to a certain destinations due to what they may have seen on Internet travel sites and are motivated by the spirit of adventure and perhaps even history, art and culture. Knowing the dates and knowledge of what is happening across the world at different times can empower tourism operators’, in conjunction with churches, to create carefully crafted packages to meet the growing demand for religious tourism experiences which is evident in recent times (Albera and Eade, 2015). Religious tourism boosts economic activity and helps safeguard both cultural and historical heritage, and plays a crucial role in the future of the tourism sector. Religious heritage sites and their many and varied traditions serve the added purpose of educating future generations and fashioning a sense of belonging in host communities. This is why it is important to preserve both the veracity and authenticity of sites and support local community tourism development and beneficitation.

### **Branding and resources**

Destinations such as those visited by pilgrimage tourists have very strong brand images which are important for destination marketers to further exploit as they position them for specific religious, historical, cultural and art markets which appeal to the diverse needs and requirements of consumers. The brand images should further promote the notions of diversity and tolerance of others. Attractions such as cathedrals and other churches which are classified as cultural heritage resources should be managed and controlled for their own sakes and the enjoyment and education of visitors. The resources of destinations such as those highlighted later in this article must be converted into viable and top-notch tourist attractions.

Tourists should be guided to learn more about the sites they visit through interpretation of them by exhibits, animations and signage which guides tourists. The cathedrals and other churches involved in pilgrimage tourism house collections of priceless art and other significant cultural heritage resources. These need to be preserved for future generations to enjoy. The diversity of the distinctive architectural styles as found in Orthodox and Catholic churches needs to be further exploited for enhanced tourism generation. Included in the experience of a tourist should be an understanding and enjoyment of the cultural patterns, dress, lifestyle, customs and especially the religious practices and beliefs surrounding a site. Where there are religious feasts or pageants at sites, these need to be included in itineraries of tour operators (Pavicic, Alfirevic, and Batarelo, 2007).

### **Religious tourist motivations**

It is evident from a wide range of literature (Singh, 2006; Jewell, 2007; Raj and Morpeth, 2007; Wright, 2008; Rundquist, 2010; Stausberg, 2011). That religious tourists or pilgrims

seek to escape the stresses of daily work and life in general. Many thus desire some spiritually invigorating formative and cultural experience in which they grow and become enlightened. Many enjoy dabbling in diverse world views and lifestyles and experiencing other cultures. Jackson and Henrie (1995) ascertained that half of the respondents in a study which they conducted reported having experienced a religious state of mind during their visits to holy sites. In addition, Voase (2007) states that religious tourists acquire a feeling of serenity during their visit to church or cathedral or other holy site. Furthermore this feeling remained with them after they left the site in question and thus had a residual wellness effect. Marketers and tour operators need to recognize the interconnections among shared sacred and secular spaces as they develop products (Raj and Griffin, 2015).

In order to be effective in planning religious tourism packages which are pertinent to Virgin Mary tourism as such, tour operators require knowledge of the aforesaid as well as which feast dates are core to the Christian denominations in question. Table 1 below offers guidance in this regard. It is noticeable that it is not only Christians who visit Christian sites. Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and many other believers in other faiths also enjoy visiting pilgrimage holy sites.

### **Market Segmentation of Religious Tourism**

Segmenting travellers into similar groupings allows researchers to study what motivates them to travel. Such knowledge once acted upon assists destinations to gain a strategic competitive advantage. By knowing what tourists want and need, destination planners are able to adequately lay important foundational work. The segmentation in very specific market segments such as religious or pilgrimage tourism has been studied by numerous scholars in Greece and Cyprus such as Zografos and Allcroft (2007), Alebaki and Iakovidou, (2011) and Farmaki, (2012) and Ćurčić et al, (2009) has focussed extensively on socio-demographic criteria.

In 1992, Morinis unpacked six types of pilgrims namely, the devotional, instrumental, normative, obligatory, initiatory, and wandering tourist. Timothy and Olsen (2006), state that the industry segments markets in terms which activities the tourist engages in while travelling as opposed to their motive when travelling. There is no doubt that towns and cities in which religious tourism is evident, such as in the case of Marian tourism, tourism planners, operators and promoters require an enhanced understanding of the myriad of religious motivations and expectations of diverse types of visitors so as to be able to better meet their needs and wants (Gutic, Caie and Clegg, 2010; Triantafillidou, Kortios, Chatzipanagiotou and Vassilikopoulou, 2010). The various impacts of religious pilgrimage tourism on local communities are in many cases structural, and result from the construction or expansion of hotels and allied catering infrastructure such as restaurants and the start-up of new entrepreneurial businesses such as travel agencies, specialised tour operators, souvenir shops and other establishments providing education and entertainment such as museums and theatres. All these aspects tend to alter the physical appearance and in places even the layout of towns where religious sites such as cathedrals, churches and shrines are located. Of late, religious tourism is increasingly defined on travel motivations which are of a spiritual orientation (Wong, McIntosh and Ryan, 2013) so that townfolk 'become more spiritual' during their peak seasons. Religious tourism boosts cultural awareness and unites people from diverse religions and backgrounds.

In order for religious tourism to remain sustainable, it will require state-church collaboration (World Economic Forum, 2013). The churches involved in the countries in which Marian tourism exists should work in concert with the State so that religious tourism and tourism in general, are not only economically driven to be sustainable, but also consider the moral, cultural and intellectual movement and development of local areas (Rodosthenous, 2012).

### Traveller characteristics, needs and wants

Various studies have investigated the characteristics of those who travel to explicit religious sites, including churches and cathedrals (Gutic et al, 2010; Hughes et al, 2013), others have studied tourism to and monasteries (Klimova, 2011). Hung et al, (2013) have studied religious festivals and the infrastructural facilities including hotels and other accommodation. It is evident from the literature that religious pilgrimage tourists prefer to visit sites where there are activities organized by the community, especially for feasts such as Marian feasts. The majority would rather travel independently to enjoy varied religious and other activities. The solitude at a Marian shrine is important to them and they prefer their autonomy. It is equally important for them to experience what they believe they will discover in a state of harmony with nature and their fellow travellers. Contrary to what was believed earlier, they are also to an extent interested in local authentic cultural experiences and savouring additional delights in authentic local environments. They show interest in intermingling with the local population and are happy to be guided where they feel the need. Igoumenakis (2000) asserts that the foremost feature of religious tourism is the fact that travellers are members of all socio-economic classes and are mainly over 60 years of age.

Most religious pilgrimage tourists tend to visit a site either as part of a small group which may be comprised of friends and family or even with a guided tour group. Well informed guides are a locus of authority and are often critical to demonstrate the legitimacy of a site and interpretations based on authority are in any event, desired by travellers. For example, guides in Marian pilgrimage tourism will need to demonstrate how the Virgin Mary and sites are deeply intertwined and the significance thereof. Guides, whether professional or should be discerning enough to cater for both the secular and spiritual tourist. At certain sites, such as *inter-alia* Lourdes, Fatima or Tinos in Greece, priests and monks of local Archdioceses are often used to guide travellers and offer advice as to how adherents can transform their lives. It is imperative that guides be licensed as such, whether operating in private tourism companies in local communities or as clergymen or nuns, or even as students from the community. The guides play a huge role in framing the experience of the travellers and must come across as authentic in what they say or do. They are to all intents and purposes 'cultural brokers' (Mac Donald, 2006). In addition to expert guiding, tourists in this sector, generally seek low-cost accommodation that will suit their usually limited budgets.

When visiting churches and cathedrals religious tourists also presume that there will be a wide range of facilities associated with them for example an information pamphlet or information boards in various languages, available parking, tours on request, self-guiding audio tapes and even bookshops (Shackley, 2006). Many visitors are driven to visit and explore a site for their interest in either architecture or history and so spiritual reasons may well be secondary. Those of faiths differing with that espoused at a sacred site may not wish to have the religious doctrines and/or practices associated with the site thrust upon them and so guided need to be extremely mindful and tolerant of diversity (Voase, 2007; Woodward, 2004). It is interesting to note that even non-religious tourists are keen to have some type of emotive involvement while at a sacred site (Singh, 2013). It is indeed not an easy task to satisfy travellers' needs and wants and great care needs to be taken in this regard. The Social Communication General Direction published in SECTUR (2012) submits that Spiritual Tourism transfers around 300 million people in the world and it has a total expenditure of 18 billion dollars, which shows the magnitude of this important sector, and also the immense opportunity that it encompasses.

Table 1: Marian Feasts

Marian feast days in the Roman Catholic Liturgical calendar	Marian feast days in the Eastern Orthodox
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	Liturgical calendar
<p><b>January 1:</b> Mary, the Holy Mother of God</p> <p><b>March 25:</b> The Annunciation of the Lord (it may be either moved to the day before Palm Sunday should this date be on Holy Week; or to the Monday after the second Sunday of Easter if this date falls on either Friday or Saturday of Holy Week or during Easter Week[12])</p> <p><b>May 31:</b> The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary 9 days after Corpus Christi - The Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin Mary</p> <p><b>August 15:</b> The Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary</p> <p><b>August 22:</b> The Queenship of Mary</p> <p><b>September 8:</b> The Nativity of the Blessed Virgin Mary</p> <p><b>September 15:</b> Our Lady of Sorrows <b>October 7:</b> Our Lady of the Rosary</p> <p><b>November 21:</b> The Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary</p> <p><b>December 8:</b> The Immaculate Conception of the Blessed Virgin Mary</p> <p><b>Optional Marian memorials</b>  <b>February 11:</b> Our Lady of Lourdes  <b>May 13:</b> Our Lady of Fatima  <b>July 16:</b> Our Lady of Mount Carmel  <b>August 5:</b> Dedication of the Basilica of Saint Mary Major  <b>September 12:</b> The Most Holy Name of the Blessed Virgin Mary  <b>December 12:</b> Our Lady of Guadalupe                      (Source: <a href="http://www.-catholic--forum.-com/-saints/">www.-catholic--forum.-com/-saints/</a>)</p>	<p><b>September 8:</b> The Nativity of the Virgin Mary</p> <p><b>November 21:</b> The Presentation of the Virgin Mary in the Temple</p> <p><b>December 25:</b> Christmas</p> <p><b>March 25:</b> The Annunciation</p> <p><b>August 15:</b> The Repose of the Virgin Mary</p> <p>(Source: <a href="http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7070">http://www.goarch.org/ourfaith/ourfaith7070</a>)</p>

### Why the Virgin Mary is venerated

Muslims as well as Christians consider the Virgin Mary to be holy above all women, and her name “Maryam” appears more frequently in the Qur’an than the name “Mary” appears in the Bible which says she lived in Nazareth when Rome controlled Palestine. After Mary became pregnant, her betrothed, Joseph, considered unobtrusively leaving her until an angel appeared to him in a dream and instructed him not to. The birth of Jesus Christ is mentioned in two Gospels, Luke and Matthew. The evangelists Mark and John refer to Jesus’ mother numerous times. Mary says something only four times, beginning with the Annunciation, when, according to Luke’s Gospel, the angel Gabriel appeared to her and told she would bear “the Son of the Most High.” Mary humbly replied, “Here am I, the servant of the Lord.” Her only protracted speech, is the inspired Magnificat in Luke’s gospel, expressed in early pregnancy: “My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has looked with favour on the lowliness of his servant. Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed”. Some Marian scholarship emphasises her as a caring Jewish mother who enjoyed a scared relationship with Our Lord. The Virgin Mary is thus an important part in the religious tourist’s quest for and involvement in new and reflective and philosophical

experiences of an appealing and artistic, spiritual, emotional, intellectual, or psychological orientation. Many tourists feel compelled to visit sacred places, and their primary objective is experience some type of spiritual experience.

The veneration of Mary plays a foremost role in the preservation of Orthodox and also Roman Catholic doctrine and she enjoys a special place of honour as the most exalted of all of God's creation. The respect paid to her is a manifestation of the Christology or doctrine concerning Christ as God. She is called Panagia, the "All-Holy," indicating her intimacy to God in her obedience to Him. Mary's most significant title is Theotokos (in Greek, Θεοτοκος) is a Greek word that means "God-bearer" or "Birth-giver to God." This notion was validated by the Third Ecumenical Council, the Council of Ephesus in 431 C.E. It states that the son of the Virgin was God from the instant of his conception. Mary was an obedient servant so that once the Archangel Gabriel spoke to her, she could have refused God's request to bear His Son. However, her affirmative response to the Archangel Gabriel plays a significant part in salvation. For the Orthodox, Mary is the second Eve, and it is her obedience which liberates humanity from the consequences of the disobedience of the first Eve and the Fall. The visitation was critical and refers to the visit of Mary to Elizabeth the mother of John the Baptizer as recorded in the Gospel of Luke (Luke 1:39–56). The Immaculate Conception of Mary is not Orthodox dogma and the Orthodox Church consider Mary to have been "immaculate," and "all pure," at the Annunciation after she agreed to accept what God offered to her, as an expression of the Orthodox understanding of salvation as humanity striving for *theosis* or becoming 'godlike'. It was at this point that the Holy Spirit came upon her and made her suitable for receiving the Logos in her womb. From that point she became "blessed" and was "full of grace".

In Catholicism, it is believed that the purpose of the stay was to convey divine grace to both Elizabeth and her unborn child. Even though he was still in his mother's womb, John became aware of the existence of Christ, and leapt for joy as he was cleansed from original sin and filled with divine grace. Elizabeth her cousin, also responded and recognised the presence of Jesus, thus Mary exercised her function as intercessor between God and man for the first time.

And she [Elizabeth] spoke out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed [art] thou among women, and blessed [is] the fruit of thy womb. And whence [is] this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in mine ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy. And blessed [is] she that believed: for there shall be a performance of those things which were told her from the Lord. (Luke 1:42–45)

Orthodox Christians do not agree with the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. The Orthodox believe that the Blessed Virgin was born in ancestral sin just like any other person. If Mary had not been born in inherited sin, God could not have assumed sinful human nature from her. Through Christ, the Virgin Mary became "more honorable than the cherubim, more glorious beyond compare than the seraphim," for she has been sanctified and has inherited a place in the Kingdom of God. After the Annunciation, Mary retained the secret of God's plan for her. She visited Elizabeth, not thinking of her own needs, but of Elizabeth's and to share her joy. Mary modestly prepared for the birth of her Child and dutifully accepted the command to flee into Egypt. The Virgin Mary, thus aided by Divine Grace, carried out her actions in a real world and made great efforts and sacrifices. She is for both Orthodox and Roman Catholic adherents a model of virtues.

The prominent place played by Mary in Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism which together comprise over 1.4 billion Christians, demonstrates the importance of worship as the



quintessence of the Church and the dominant means whereby the Church communicates and conserves the Gospel for future generations. The deification of Mary and her Co-Redemptress role as the 'New Eve' and the 'Spouse of the Holy Spirit' demonstrates that the assurances of Christ are authentic. Thus the absolute holiness of her nature and her abundant virtues make the Virgin Mary an important person in Christian faith and it is through her that God's promises to His people manifest but she remains ontologically less than Jesus Christ. Mary is a worldwide symbol of maternal love, as well as of humility, suffering and sacrifice, and she is habitually the yardstick of our yearning for meaning, and a more reachable link to God. For the believer, she provides security and protection.

### **Virgin Mary Tourism**

Religious tourism is clearly not a novel idea, and shrines – many of which are related to Mary the mother of Jesus Christ, the *Theotokos* or 'God-bearer', are visited daily by millions of tourists from across the globe. In earlier periods these religious tourists were referred to as pilgrims and in some cases they are still called pilgrims. Religious tourists is a more appropriate term these days, since many of the tourists are non-religious (Poria et al., 2003), and visit a site for cultural or historical reasons (Norman, 2013; Ambrosio and Pereira, 2007). Many are however religious and are keen to connect with the divine and have done so since the dawn of man. In both Christian Orthodoxy as well as Roman Catholicism, the Virgin Mary is venerated and has been since their advent and this is not surprising in the least, given that she is considered to be an agent of God's incarnation and is critical to Christian identity. Pilgrimages to shrines related to the Virgin Mary have been conducted by the avid faithful since the age of antiquity. The last few decades have witnessed a flow of non-Orthodox Christians joining the Eastern Orthodox Church. Its stress on a spiritual union with God, and its' fascinating history and liturgies, are a magnet for worshippers desiring a profound sense of awe in their adulation and devotion (Tsirpanlis, 1991). From the earliest days of the Eastern Orthodox Church, worshippers have desired to embark on journeys for religious reasons. In this regard, the Greek Orthodox Church in particular, is the most prominent when it comes to pilgrimages. This is due in part, to the vast number of sites associated with the Virgin Mary.

Gillquist (1992) asserts: "The Orthodox church miraculously carries today the same faith and life of the Church of the New Testament." Despite the fact that the Eastern Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches differ in their approaches to theology since the second century, in that the latter theological model is creation-fall-redemption, while the former is creation-deification, and mystical union with God or *theosis*, both attach huge importance to the Virgin Mary in matters of faith (Coniaris, 1982). In any event, Mary's "perpetual virginity" became the official dogma at the Council of Chalcedon in A.D. 451, and it is binding upon both the Greek Orthodox (Eastern) and Roman Catholic sections of the Church (Pelikan, 1958).

### **Roman Catholic pilgrimage**

The Virgin Mary obtained millions of new Catholic supporters with the Spanish conquest in the New World in the early 1500s. This trend is increasing globally in recent times and at different times of the year. For example, during the month of May devotions to the Blessed Virgin Mary occur in countless Catholic parishes. At other times of the year as shown in table 1, other important major feasts are celebrated. Such feasts invariably include pageantry of some sort and Marian devotion takes various forms including *inter alia* elaborate church services, singing by choirs and parades. October is referred to a "rosary month" in the Catholic Church, when the faithful are fortified to pray the rosary. Sites where miracles attributed to the Virgin Mary have occurred or where apparitions have manifested or are purported to have been evident, are also important pilgrimage sites.

In the mid-16th century, the Roman Catholic Church announced a stringent inspection process for miracles such as the over 2,000 sightings of the Virgin Mary that have been claimed since 40 C.E. All apparitions must be considered to be miraculous with a very high degree of certainty and consistent with church doctrine, and they found to have been found to have made a significantly positive impact (Lambouras. 1997). From 2000 onwards there have been more than forty apparitions of the Virgin Mary, according to [Miraclehunter.com](http://www.miraclehunter.com). These all inspire such appeal among the faithful that the sites where they have allegedly occurred often develop into major tourism centres. Some of the most important Roman Catholicism pilgrimage sites are briefly highlighted below.

### **Lourdes**

Lourdes is a lesser town in France at the foothills of the Pyrenees in southwestern France, enjoys a reputation for many miracles and Marian revelations. Lourdes has about six million pilgrims visiting every year and about 80 000 ill believers visit the town to obtain a cure when they visit the shrine of the Virgin Mary. The Massabielle Grotto (aka the Grotto of Our Lady of Lourdes) has been renowned since February 11,1858, when Mary is reported to have appeared to a teenage girl Bernadette Soubirous who claimed that she saw a radiant vision of a woman in white who requested her to excavate a spring in the ground. From this excavation a pool developed and has been since that time a source of sacred water. Lourdes is connected with miraculous cures and to date sixty-six have been officially documented by the Roman Catholic Church. There is a Medical Bureau at the shrine and all cures need to meet a stringent set of criteria. Before visiting Lourdes, the person seeking a cure must have received a medical diagnosis of an illness considered to be incurable by any current medical means. Their cure must be complete and permanent. Roughly 100,000 volunteers assist in caring for the ill people, and transport them from the train station and airport, caring for them in special accommodation near the shrine, and they also assist them as they attend services. The town of Lourdes's has many religious curio shops which appeal to tourists of all faiths.

### **Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico**

A poor Aztec Indian named Juan Diego encountered a beautiful woman surrounded by a ball of light as bright as the sun. Speaking in his native tongue, the beautiful lady identified herself as the Ever-Virgin Mary, Mother of the true God who gives life and maintains its existence. She told him that she wanted a church to be erected where the people could experience her compassion and be at peace. Juan tried to meet with the Bishop but was unsuccessful. He thus went back to where he saw Mary and she told him to try again. Juan finally met with the bishop who requested that he should ask the Lady to provide a sign as proof of who she said she was. Juan returned to the hill and told Mary, who was again waiting for him there, of the bishop's request. Mary responded: "My little son, am I not your Mother? Do not fear. The Bishop shall have his sign. Come back to this place tomorrow. Only peace, my little son." (<http://www.catholic.org/about/guadalupe.php>)

Juan was unable to return to the hill the next day due to an ill uncle he had to care for. Juan went to find a priest for his uncle and encountered Mary again who told him his uncle was healed. She also instructed him to cut flowers growing on the hillside and take them to her. He removed his *tilma*, a poncho-like cape made of cactus fibre, and cut the roses and carried them back to Mary. She repositioned the roses and told him show them to the Bishop. Juan told the Bishop his story and opened the *tilma* letting the flowers fall out. But it wasn't the beautiful roses that caused the bishop and his advisors to fall to their knees - on the *tilma*, was a picture of the Virgin Mary. Juan took the bishop to the spot where he first encountered Mary. He went back to his village where he met his uncle who was completely cured. His uncle then told him he had met a young woman, encircled by a soft light, who told

him that she had just sent his nephew to the city with a picture of herself and that this image should be known henceforth as Santa Maria de Guadalupe –the patron saint of Mexico.

The *tilma* displays Mary as the God-bearer. The *tilma* has been subject to a variety of environmental hazards comprising smoke from fires and candles, water from floods and torrential downpours and, in 1921, a bomb which was planted by anti-clerical forces on an altar under it. There was also a cast-iron cross next to the *tilma* and when the bomb exploded, the cross was twisted out of shape, the marble altar rail was heavily damaged and the *tilma* remained undamaged. The *tilma* with its image can be viewed today in a large cathedral erected to house up to ten thousand worshippers. It is significantly, by far, the most popular religious tourism pilgrimage site in the Western Hemisphere. (<http://www.catholic.org/about/guadalupe.php>)

### **Fatima**

On May 13th 1917 in the tiny village of Fatima in Portugal, three children were pasturing their flock at the Cova da Iria, when they witnessed lightning, and they decided to go home. On their way they saw another flash of light and a woman in the sky above a tree, dressed in white and more radiant than the Sun. The woman told them not to be afraid and this was the first of numerous visits that the children allegedly received over a five-month period from the Virgin Mary. During her visitations she shared with them a number of prophecies. Initially the children were disbelieved and were jailed and plead with to retract their claims. Eventually more and more people gathered to witness what came to be known as “the Miracle of the Sun,” in which the sphere reportedly broke through rain clouds and trembled and rotated for up to ten minutes. In 1930, after a careful investigation, the Vatican decided that the apparition was believable and a shrine built at the site and has become a very popular religious tourism pilgrims destination (<http://www.theholycross.org/fatimaapparitions>). The story of the children of Fatima is only one of many cases instances in which people have asserted that the Virgin Mary has actually visited them personally.

### **Medjugorje**

The Lady gives messages to the seers for the whole world. To date The Queen of Peace has left thousands of messages. At first the messages were almost daily. Now for the past several years they come on the 25th of each month. Though there are thousands of messages, there are six main ones including conversion, prayer, fasting, faith, peace and reconciliation with those we have wronged. A chapel in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in the village of Medjugorje, in the Bijakovici section, is a site of huge importance to pilgrims because it was where shepherd children reported visions of the Virgin Mary on June 24, 1981. Two girls, Ivanka Ivankovic age 15, and Mirjana Dragicevic age 16, were returning home from a walk. Looking toward a hill named Crnica, Ivanka saw a radiant silhouette of a woman who they all soon identified as the *Gospa* (Our Lady). The next day, the two girls returned to the hill with four others named Vicka Ivankovic age 16, Ivan Dragivevic age 16, Maria Pavlovic age 16 and Jakov Colo age 10. The figure in white called them to come up the hill and they were transported in some mysterious way to a beautiful Lady who called herself, the ‘Queen of Peace’. The Virgin Mary handed down the first of many thousands of messages warning all the faithful to pray more regularly and asking malefactors to repent. Since then countless miracles have been reported as having occurred in Medjugorje where evidence suggests that the healing power of Jesus Christ and the intercessions of the Virgin Mary manifest to believers ( <http://www.medjugorjeusa.org/story.htm>)

### **Kibeho**

A small village in southern Rwanda, is recalled as the place where the Virgin Mary appeared to three young girls and predicted the genocide that would fracture the country in 1994, when the majority Hutu group attacked the minority Tutsi. Over 800,000 people were butchered. The Blessed Virgin Mary and Jesus Christ allegedly appeared to three teenagers in Kibeho in 1981, and has subsequently been referred to as Our Lady of Kibeho. These apparitions were complemented by intense reactions including crying, tremors, and comas. (Tardif, 2009). The viewers of the apparition saw visions including gruesome sights such as rivers of blood, carved human heads, etc.) which were regarded to be a foreshadowing of the Rwandan Genocide of 1994, and predominantly at that specific location in 1995. The Catholic Bishop Gikongoro, Rwanda sanctioned public devotion connected to the apparitions on 15 August 1988 and declared their authenticity on 29 June 2001. Post 1994 genocide, Kibeho became a site for internally displaced persons (IDPs) and a refugee camp, hosting many of the Hutu refugees suspected of having participated in the genocide (Connor, 2008). In mid - April 1995, the Tutsi - led Rwandan Patriotic Army (RPA), closed the camp. The local bishop recognized the apparition of the Virgin Mary officially on 29 June 2001 and The church Notre-Dame des Douleurs (Our Lady of Sorrows) was built in Kibeho, and is a growing religious tourism pilgrimage site.

### **Greek Orthodox pilgrimage**

To the Greek Orthodox psyche, since the classical Greece days of the Olympian pantheon of gods, religious pilgrimage tourism embodies a directed path to the holy and sacred, and thus to God. Orthodox believers are motivated to visit Marian sites and the materiality of such sites is important to them. The figure of Mary is imprinted into the Orthodox fabric of Hellenic society and she is the most significant female presence in Orthodox culture and she is the mediator between the human and the divine. In their pursuit for forgiveness or healing, The Virgin Mary is an intercessor. Consequently religious pilgrimage tourism to holy Marian sites in Greece is largely driven by the tourist visiting such sacred sites and participating in numerous religious celebrations (Apostolakis, 2003). A by-product of the visit would be the added encounter with historical significance and artistic beauty of Byzantine styled churches and monasteries. One cannot ignore the linkages between religious pilgrimage and tradition as a cultural phenomenon and tourism proper (Andriotis, 2009).

The last three decades have observed an outpouring of other Christians from diverse denominations joining the Orthodox Church. The church thus appeals to those seeking a deeper sense of marvel in both their daily worship and faith. Mary is very vibrantly present in the lives of most Greeks. Others are attracted to Orthodox Marian sites due to the stress placed on the aspects of the mystical union with God, and the beautiful locations where Marian sites are found. Greeks and foreign visitors alike are astounded by the many imposing Byzantine era churches and cathedrals and wide range of rural churches and monastery grounds with their lavish gardens, which are all sacred places of pilgrimage and special religious sites. Marian sites of great importance include the 'All Holy' (Panayia) of Tinos, the *Panayia Soumela*, the *Panayia Ekatonpilianani*. A list follows in the addendum after the references, of some of the most important Marian veneration sites in Greece to which thousands of religious pilgrimage tourists flock annually, from across the world. There are of course many other religious sites associated with the Virgin Mary. Religious pilgrimage tourists can see many buildings and religious sites relating to Marian theology and Orthodox religion. Many Marian religious festivals with customs and traditions that are many centuries old are still in evidence today and offer profound experiences for believers.

The special "summertime Easter", the Assumption of the Virgin Mary on 15th August, is a very popular feast day of the Virgin Mary in Greece and in the Orthodox World as such and attracts thousands of visitors annually. Pilgrimage in Greece is an crucial motive movement

of people and is more often than not associated with the religious and historical value of visits to monasteries or churches, and also partaking in religious celebrations at sacred sites. Significant regional economic activity is the result of religious pilgrimage tourism as such. It is not only foreign tourists who visit sacred sites but also locals and it is estimated that over 300 000 domestic tourists visit religious sites annually (Polyzos, 2010).

### **Panayia of Tinos**

The Sacred Church of the *Megalohari* in Tinos (“Great Grace”), also known as *Panayia Evangelistria* of Tinos (Our Lady of Good Tidings), consequential to the greeting of the Archangel Gabriel to the *Theotokos*: “Hail Mary of Full of Grace, the Lord is with you, blessed are you amongst women and blessed is the fruit of the womb!”) is universally viewed as a place of religious tourism pilgrimage. *Panayia* of Tinos is also the national patron saint of Greece. The Church of *Panayia Evangelistria* in Tinos is dedicated to the discovery of an icon in 1823. A certain nun Sister Pelayia, from the Monastery Kehrovouniou saw an apparition in which the Virgin Mary appeared asking her to exhume a buried miracle-working icon. Folklore informs us that the icon was dug up in a field and once it was brought to the surface a hard protective shield coat like glass enclosed it. The men who removed it from the ground penetrated the shield and those who happened to be ill at the time and touched it were healed. Not surprisingly, the first visitors of status to view the sacred image of the *Panayia* were the three most famous Greek War of Independence (1821) heroes Kolokotronis, Miaoulis and Makriyannis. The icon depicts the Virgin Mary kneeling with head bent in a prayer-like pose, pronouncing words written in an open book. Opposite the Virgin stands the Archangel Gabriel holding a white lily in his left hand, while the Holy Spirit is depicted in the form of a dove and is shown descending from heaven.

Art experts have concluded that the Apostle and Evangelist Saint Luke was the painter of this beautiful icon which was highly respected during the Byzantine era. It was either hidden or misplaced during the time of the Ottoman invasions of Constantinople. It was later re-discovered and a huge church was built of marble immediately after the discovery of the Holy Icon in 1822. The church is today a monastic complex. Archaeological excavations have shown that the church was built on the site of an early-Byzantine church which was dedicated to Saint John. This was hitherto built on the site of an ancient temple dedicated to the ancient Greek god Dionysius. The church is resplendent in gold and silver ornamentation which has made available by Christians from all over the world. Religious tourists and pilgrims from across Greece and abroad travel to the Cycladic islands to Tinos, to view the holy icon and pray (Greekreporter.com, 2016).

There are numerous reports of miraculous healings resulting from such prayers at the icon for the intercession of the Virgin Mary and it is one of the most venerated and honoured icons in the whole of Greece. Four huge festivals that are celebrated at this shrine, January 30th, the Anniversary of the finding of the icon, March 25th, the Annunciation of the Virgin, July 23rd, The Anniversary of the nun Pelagia and August 15th, the day of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The Holy Icon is encrusted with gold and precious stones placed by those who believe in the intercessory power of the Virgin Mary, and as an expression of their faith and gratefulness to Her for her prayers for them, to Our Lord Jesus Christ. During the various celebration, the Holy Icon is carried with great honour and with special services through the streets of Tinos (Tinos Miraculous Icon, 2016). Once the Icon is back in the Church, prayers are chanted in memory of the builders and all those who made offerings towards the construction of the Church. In the evening of the feast days, children led by chanters from the Church fill the streets holding lighted lanterns and singing hymns of praise to Jesus Christ.

## Conclusion

Religion and tourism are invariably complementary with one another and are closely associated. Religious tourism is increasingly an experiential product in which visits are adjudged according to all the attributes of the resources at any particular site, and not only to their religious and spiritual value. Nonetheless marketers and managers of religious sites need to note that the tourist desires an emotionally charged experience at a religious sites and as they tour a religious area. It is abundantly clear that the Virgin Mary plays a key role in religious pilgrimage tourism, and has done so for centuries.

Tourism planners must take cognisance of the fact that Marian religious pilgrimage tourists desire solitude and need to feel a strong spiritual connection with the Virgin Mary in places other than at their homes and local parishes, and thus sacred sites are important to intensify faith. This means that they need to plan their welcoming practices, guiding and other and educational aspects very carefully. A well planned strategic long-term approach involving all stakeholders is needed together with a coordinated management of all the relevant components which make a destination appealing. Thus it is imperative that local services and infrastructural development support the idea of sustaining religious pilgrimage tourism. It is clear that many sacred sites could be further converted into multi-purpose areas, where in which a wide range of other leisure related activities, would enhance a visitors experience if desired.

Religious pilgrimage tourism development must be planned at the local, regional and national level and in part trans-nationally. Religious tourism develops positive social and cultural relations between peoples. Economically, Marian tourism is of huge economic benefit given that religious tourists are ardent buyers of religious souvenirs. By developing Marian religious pilgrimage tourism, it is easier to enhance, maintain and preserve cultural heritage and jobs are created in the process. There is also substantial development potential for entrepreneurs and innovative thinkers, due to the reality of extraordinary religious sites and monuments and also potential to connect Marian religious pilgrimage tourism to other forms of tourism, *inter-alia* cultural tourism, rural tourism, educational tourism, scientific tourism, eco-tourism and sport tourism. Marian religious pilgrimage tourism requires more detailed attention from tourism developers since it is an aspect of cultural tourism that is downplayed to an extent by marketers and yet it has much to offer to tourists who are desirous of spiritual encounters as a flight from the fast-pace of life.

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#### **ADDENDUM**

##### **Holy Orthodox Marian Churches and Shrines of pilgrimage (NB. This is purely a small sample of what exists)**

1. Monastery of Panagia Olympiotissa, Thessaly: The Monastery of Panagia
2. Churches:
3. Athens Cathedral (the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary)
4. Genesion tis Theotokou at Neraida Dolopon (Karditsa, Thessaly)
5. Kapnicarea (Athens)
6. Koimisis tis Theotokou (Dormition of the Virgin Mary) at Dilofo (Kozani)
7. Koimisis tis Theotokou at Merbakas (Argolida)
8. Koimisis tis Theotokou at Aetolofos (Agia, Larissa)
9. Koimisis tis Theotokou (Aiani, Kozani)
10. Koimisis tis Theotokou at Gelanthi (Karditsa, Thessaly)
11. Koimisis tis Theotokou at Noubenitsa (Grevena, Macedonia)
12. Koimisis tis Theotokou at Agiassos (Lesbos)
13. Koimisis tis Theotokou at Kalambaka (Trikala, Thessaly)
14. Koimisis tis Theotokou at Petra (Lesbos)
15. Panagia (Virgin Mary) at Fodele (Heraklio)
16. Panagia Chalkeon (1028 A.D.)
17. Panagia Hozoviotissa, Amorgos
18. Panagia Gourolmata (Drymonas, Leros)
19. Panagia Drosiani (Naxos)
20. Panagia Kakkaviotissa (Limnos)
21. Panagia Kera (Kritsa, Lassithi)
22. Panagia Koumbelidiki or Kastriotissa at Kastoria
23. Panagia Krena (Chios)
24. Panagia Odigitria at Apolpena (Lefkada)
25. Panagia Protothroni (Naxos)
26. Panagia Kera (Our Lady) Crete
27. Panagia Katholiki (Gastouni, Ilia)
28. Panagia Kastrou (city of Rhodes)
29. Panagia Paregoritissa at Arta (Epirus)
30. Panagia Troulloti (Lesbos)
31. Panagia Chalkeon (Thessalonica)
32. Panaxiotissa (Aetoloacarnania, Central Greece)
33. Porta Panagia at Pyli (Trikala, Thessaly)
34. Panagia Gorgoepikoos (Athens)
35. Panagia Gouverniotissa at Potamies, (Chersonisos)
36. Old Cathedral of Veria
37. Old Cathedral of Edessa
38. Old Cathedral of Serres