

Examining the perceptions of religious stakeholders towards religious tourism development

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Abstract

Travelling for religious and pilgrimage purposes consists of an early-stage motivation for the historical development of tourism. Sacred places become important attractions for local and foreign visitors and many countries invest in the development of religious and pilgrimage tourism. Cyprus has a rich tradition as an important place for the establishment and diffusion of the Christian Orthodox Religion (Greek). Being considered the 'island of Saints', Cyprus sets strong foundations to be recognised as a spiritual destination of devotion for visitors interested in discovering the roots and the spiritual essence of the Christian Orthodox Religion. The paper elucidates on bringing together the fact of whether tourism in sacred places affects spirituality and religiosity. Thus, the aim is to consider the perceptions of main religious stakeholders including monastery abbots in relation to the development of religious tourism. The aim of the study is fulfilled by incorporating questionnaires targeting the responses of the involved religious key players and stakeholders. The results of the study are indicative and provide an understanding of religious tourism as an important product by interpreting the stance of religious stakeholders. In general, religious leaders support tourism in religious sites and argue that spirituality and holiness can be maintained as long there is a policy that is followed both by religious and tourism policymakers. Undoubtedly, establishing Cyprus as a religious tourism destination would bring many economic and social benefits.

Keywords: religious tourism, pilgrimage, Cyprus, Christian Orthodox Religion, sacred places, monasteries