A study on religious tourists’ motivations: The case of the Muharram event (Yazd, Iran)

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Objectives | According to Rinschede (1992), religious tourism is a form of tourism that is exclusively or strongly motivated for religious reasons. It can be said that religious tourism is one of the oldest types of tourism and a worldwide phenomenon of religious history. Robinson and Novelli (2005) studied religious tourism under cultural tourism. Since the majority of Iranians associate themselves with the Shi’a branch of Islam, Iran can be a destination for religious tourism with an emphasis on Islam. Among the religious cities in Iran, Yazd, which is called the house of worship (Darolebadeh), not only includes historical religious sites but also organizes religious workshops and festivals. One of the most important religious festivals in Yazd is The Day of Ashura. It is commemorated by Shi’a Muslims as a day of mourning for the martyrdom of Husayn ibn Ali, the grandson of Muhammad at the Battle of Karbala on Muharram 10th in the year 61 AH. Nakhl Gardani (carrying the large symbolic wooden coffin in the shape of a cypress) is another mourning custom on Ashura. This one is uniquely held in central Iran, particularly in Yazd. The major objective of this study is to investigate motivations of religious tourists in Yazd city. Data was gathered through a questionnaire applied during The Day of Ashura (in 2015).

Methodology | The aim of this study is to measure motivation of religious tourists. The research was conducted in Yazd city (Iran) during The Day of Ashura (in 2015). In order to achieve this goal a hypothesis was developed: International tourists are interested in religious tourism activities in Yazd city. A quantitative method was used and data was gathered through a questionnaire (closed-ended questions). The first phase of research consisted of an extensive literature review on religious tourism. In the

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second phase we focused on international tourists and, in order to study the their travel motivation, a questionnaire (using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very low to very high) was distributed on the Day of Ashura (Muharram event). The population of international tourists who visited the Yazd city and participated in the organized tour during the Muharram event in 2015 was 100 people. For determining the sample size, the researchers used Veal’s (2006) instructions. Veal’s table (2006) illustrated that the sample size should be 80 people. Thus, 100 questionnaires were distributed and 80 questionnaires were returned to us.

Main Results and Contributions | As mentioned before, a total of 100 questionnaires were distributed to international tourists in the city, on the Day of Ashura. After eliminating unusable responses from the completed questionnaires, 80 responses were coded for data analysis. Cronbach’s alpha is 0.904, which presents a high level of reliability. Descriptive statistics were calculated to ascertain the characteristics of the sample and to compare means and standard deviations for each multi-item scale. Among the survey participants, 72% were male and 28% were female (Figure 1). Most respondents were between 25 and 34 years of age (45%) (Table 1). Furthermore, approximately 40% of respondents had a Master’s degree (see Table 1) and the majority of international tourists were from Germany (Figure 2).

Based on the result of the descriptive analysis (on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very low to very
high), 68.8% (high and very high on the scale) of respondents believe that spiritual experiences during a religious holiday are their main activities (Table 2).

Among the religious activities in Yazd city, participating in Muharram events, Shabans festivals, etc. (100% - high and very high on the scale) and visiting mosques (88% - high and very high on the scale) are the preferred activities. In addition, analysis of the data with One Sample t-Test method (H0: Mean ≤ 3 (tourists are not interested in activities); H1: Mean > 3 (tourists have a high interest in activities) indicates that international tourists are interested in religious tourism activities in Yazd city (Table 3).
We believe that the clearest results of the investigation allow us to conclude that international tourists who participated in organized tour of Muharram event (The Day of Ashura) were interested in religious tourism activities (religious events; visiting mosques; volunteer travel to the events; spiritual experiences; Nakhl Gardani; religious Islamic music; visiting Islamic cemetery; cooking special foods for events (e.g. Ash...); Islamic conferences and workshops) in Yazd city. It is noteworthy that participating in Muharram events, Shabans festivals, etc. and visiting mosques are the preferred activities.

Conclusions

References

