



# Enlightening Tourism.

## A Pathmaking Journal



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## **BOOK REVIEW:**

Noel Scott and Jafar Jafari. 2010. *Tourism and Muslim World*. Bingley, UK: Emerald Group Publishing, ISBN 978-184950920-6. Price £82.95

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The post 9/11 effects were manifold. Many economies and industries not only suffered serious losses but it also stagnated their own growth for years and it is safe to conclude that tourism and hospitality experienced a decline in volume. For a while New York was portrayed as an unsafe destination, but recently some specialists have questioned the idea that terrorism directly affects tourism in the long term. After a terrorist attack takes place, as in the case of Bali and Egypt, the international demand is diverted towards other destinations. The Middle East also is a region characterized not only by hypnotic landscapes and an extensive heritage but also by a degree of conflict in the encounter between two civilizations. This is the topic explored in *Tourism and Muslim World*, edited by Noel Scott and Jafar Jafari. How are we to examine such issues? Are tourism and Islam compatible?

In its introductory sections, Boris Vukonic (research discussed in chapter 3) explores painstakingly the importance of tourism in the Middle East, considering a significant background of previous studies in the encounter between international tourists and locals. The Muslim World has experienced

great change in the advance of modernity and tourism, and whilst some countries keep a friendly relationship of cooperation and diplomacy with the West for others there is an atmosphere of rivalry and conflict. What remains clear for Vukonic is that western tourism is problematic not for its lack of familiarity with the destinations, but also the cultural values it represents. Without careful management tourist values may be offensive to local tradition and customs. In this vein, the specialized literature marks a vast trajectory in studies of host/guest encounters, focusing in the problems as well as opportunities they engender. However, Vukonic convincingly explains that the religion / tourism connection may be configured in three distinct ways: that religion somehow supports tourism; tourism somehow influences religion, and finally, that religion and tourism stand in opposition

It is widely accepted that religion gives support to tourism only when religious norms are not defied or in danger. The world witnessed how the four great religions were celebrated by means of pilgrimage and to adhere to religious doctrine, travel played a crucial role because it paved the way for the construction of infrastructure and the creation of access to shrines and holy places.

Under some circumstances tourism exerts an influence on religion depending on the viewpoints of residents and participants. Where conflict exists some countries may reinforce their understanding of each other by means of tourism because it creates value and mutual respect. Religion and tourism can, however, be incompatible especially where it point up inter-cultural differences rather than common values. Some guest-introduced practices may, for example, be incompatible with the religious beliefs of hosts. Since tourism accelerates interaction, in this context conflict may surface.

Furthermore, throughout the Middle East and beyond, developing countries adopted tourism as their primary industry to for economic and political reasons. Although in the short-run, tourism stimulates fresh investments to develop economies, they can become over-dependant on their tourism industry.

Where terrorism and insurgency occur in such situations this may affect the destination image, and the tourism-dependent economy is jeopardized. Therefore, terrorism is for Vukonic a glitch in the process of communication, an anomaly that prevents tourism and religion from understanding each other.

One problem is the extent to which Muslim-countries may be wrongly seen from a unique and homogenous gaze. In Chapter 6, entitled *Islam & Tourism*, Joan Henderson enumerates the problems and challenges of tourism in Brunei, Malaysia, Singapore and Indonesia, looking to understand the role of ethnic minorities in conflict-management. The messy realities in Malaysia where Muslims are a minority contrasts with Brunei. Although some non-Islamic tourists may be targeted as fertile source of terrorist attacks, it is important to note that Muslim world is interested in expanding new products for tourism-led demands locally. Starting from the basis that Islam dominates almost all spheres of society in these countries, as a major religion, tourism is adjusted to the local situation. Not surprisingly, the major religion when allied to ethnicity does not generate serious disputes with tourism, and based on her experience, Henderson reminds us that the right to benefit from tourism is universal, regardless of race, religion or culture.

Chapter 10 deals with Islamic tourism in Jordan. This research conducted originally by Norig Neveu offers a good view-point to trigger debate about the limitations and opportunities of the marketing offer in traditional societies. This poses the question of whether tourism is exclusive to secular societies. Jordan has embraced tourism as a fertile growing industry since 2001 and is developing associated industries such as building and transport. Some specialists have suggested that this growth is generating serious impacts on the politics and development of this country. Unless development is limited and focussed on national interests, destinations run the risk of experiencing a rapid boost and decline rather than sustained development. Sustainability policies led by specialists should focus on the precautionary principle of mitigating such negative effects. Local views and lifestyles should be taken into consideration by policy makers and planners. At this destination religious becomes an

attraction itself but at the same time it exhibits a serious challenge when the religious heritage is reconstructed for the consumption of an international tourist demands.

The success of tourist destinations in Middle East depends on many variables but as Christian Steiner states, marketing and management literature is ignoring the complex relationship between risk, attractiveness and tourism. To be more exact, this chapter questions the belief that terrorist attacks create a direct decline in tourist destination image. What changes in these types of events is the dynamic of tourism and its fluxes, not tourism as an activity. Post 9/11 many Muslim destinations declined their attractiveness for tourists, while others emerged. This poses a more than interesting question about causes and effects.

Steiner argues that terrorism affected the Western demand in Middle East but encouraged the intra-regional markets opening new opportunities for Muslim destinations. This engendered a two-sided aftermath which alternates stabilization with conflict. In spite of negative images portrayed by the Media respecting to the New York attacks, people still move towards other regions.

Ultimately, Deepak Chhabra (Chapter 17) looks at how the process of islamicization can be aligned to promotional goals. The Middle East is rich in heritage and cultural products, which may create new opportunities to revitalize regional economies. However, unlike commercial western goals, Muslim countries emphasize the spiritual aspects of travels. This should be exploited following and respecting local values. Muslim destinations should be designed by a pro-Islam marketing agency to ensure the grounding values will not be offended. In this vein, technology and web-based strategies would be of paramount importance to provide further understanding about Market dynamics. Tourism may then successfully integrate attitudes which otherwise remain at odds.

The main flaw in this book is that almost all the authors ignore the fact that that terrorism in the Middle East corresponds with previous and historical religious conflicts, conflicts with secular values or earlier troubling encounters between Islam and Christianity. The chapters that form this book are based on ideas that do not follow an investigation of such historical sources; they represent a conceptual discussion about modern social issues and therefore lack some context. Secondly, in finding the market opportunities to embrace tourism in the Middle East, this book lacks a conceptual framework that will help readers to understand the real roots of terrorism and the negative effects of colonialism such as the influence of the British Empire, rather than Islam's legacy.

Nonetheless, this valuable book provides a fresh perspective on the connection between Islam and tourism. The diverse chapters gathered in this work are good illustrative case studies with influential argument and analysis. This book is suggested particularly for managers, scholars and practitioners interested in Middle East opportunities to embrace tourism. Scott and Jafari provide a good and seminal compilation presenting a timely examination of the troublesome relationship between tourism and terrorism.

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**P.S.: If you would like to review a new or recent book, or you have a suggestion for a book to be reviewed in the journal, please contact Steve Watson, Book Reviews Editor, at [s.watson@yorks.ac.uk](mailto:s.watson@yorks.ac.uk)**