

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

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Keywords | Motivation, religious tourism, Yazd, Iran, Muharram event

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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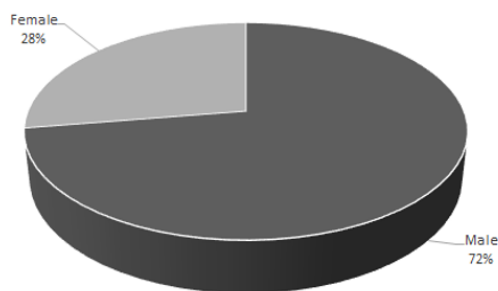
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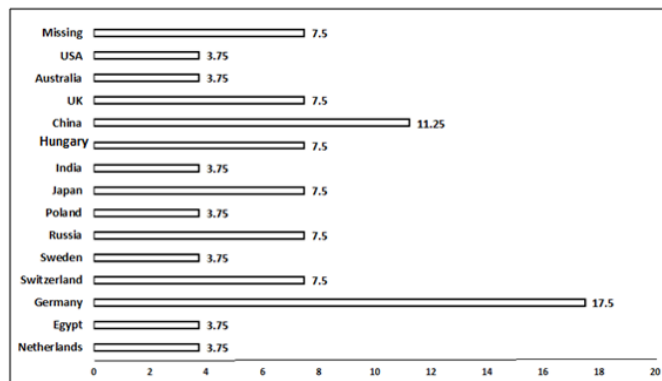
second phase we focused on international tourists and, in order to study the their travel motivation, a questionnaire (using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very low to very high) was distributed on the Day of Ashura (Muharram event). The population of international tourists who visited the Yazd 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).



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 1 | Percentage of males and females in the samples



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 2 | Percentages of the nationalities of international tourists who participated in the study

Based on the result of the descriptive analysis (on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very low to very

Table 1 | Descriptive analysis of the attitude of international tourists towards religious tourism development

Age (years)	Percentage	Educational level	Percentage
18-24	3.8%	High school	3.8%
25-34	45.0%	Vocational school	15.0%
35-44	18.8%	Bachelor	22.5%
45-54	18.8%	Master	40.0%
55-64	3.8%	PhD	7.5%
>64	10%	Others	3.8%
-	-	Missing	7.5%

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).

Table 2 | Descriptive analysis of the attitude of international tourists in religious tourism activities

Variables	Frequency (Scale)						Skewness
	Very low	Low	Medium	High	Very high	Missing	
For me the experiences during a religious holiday should primarily be							
Spiritual	-	12.5%	11.3%	38.8%	30%	7.5%	-0.712
Intellectual	-	3.8%	22.5%	30%	37.5%	6.3%	-1.064
Physical	7.5%	10%	36.3%	27.5%	15%	3.8%	-0.352
Emotional	6.3%	2.5%	6.3%	43.8%	22.5%	18.8%	-1.474
How interested am I in the following forms of religious tourism in Yazd City?							
Religious events such as Muharram events; Shabans festivals, etc.	-	-	-	46.3%	53.8%	-	-0.153
Visiting mosques	-	-	11.3%	50%	38.3%	0	-0.354
Volunteer travel to the events	6.3%	7.5%	41.3%	27.5%	13.8%	3.8%	-0.350
Spiritual experiences	2.5%	11.3%	27.5%	32.5%	26.3%	-	-0.443
Nakhl Gardani	-	-	28.7%	31.3%	36.3%	-	-0.147
Religious Islamic music	2.5%	7.5%	18.8%	52.5%	18.8%	-	-0.899
Visiting an Islamic cemetery	3.8%	8.8%	41.3%	35%	11.3%	-	-0.355
Cooking special foods for events (e.g. Ash,...)	15%	-	38.8%	32.5%	13.8%	-	-0.399
Islamic conferences and workshops	-	-	27.5%	25%	47.5%	-	0.1

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 (H_0 : Mean ≤ 3 (tourists are not interested in activities); H_1 : Mean > 3 (tourists have a high interest in activities) indicates that international tourists are interested in religious tourism activities in Yazd city (Table 3).

Table 3 | The result of the One Sample t-Test analysis for the variables
One-Sample Statistics

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Islamic conferences and workshops	80	3.4500	.91264	.10204
Cooking special foods for events (e.g. Ash,..)	80	4.2000	.84793	.09480
Visiting an Islamic cemetery	80	3.4125	.93719	.10478
Religious Islamic music	80	3.7750	.92743	.10369
Nakhl Gardani	77	4.0779	.82344	.09384
Spiritual experiences	80	3.6875	1.06252	.11879
Volunteer travel to the events	77	3.3636	1.03757	.11824
Visiting mosques	80	4.2750	.65555	.07329
Muharram events; Shabans festivals etc.	80	4.5375	.50174	.05610

One-Sample Test

Variables	Test Value = 3					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Islamic conference and workshops	4.410	79	.000	.45000	.2469	.6531
Cooking special foods for events (e.g. Ash,..)	12.658	79	.000	1.20000	1.0113	1.3887
Visiting Islamic cemetery	3.937	79	.000	.41250	.2039	.6211
Religious Islamic music	7.474	79	.000	.77500	.5686	.9814
Nakhl Gardani	11.487	76	.000	1.07792	.8910	1.2648
Spiritual experiences	5.787	79	.000	.68750	.4510	.9240
Volunteer travel to the events	3.075	76	.003	.36364	.1281	.5991
Visiting mosques	17.396	79	.000	1.27500	1.1291	1.4209
Muharram events; Shabans festivals, etc.	27.408	79	.000	1.53750	1.4258	1.6492

Conclusions | 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.

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