The impact of Covid-19 pandemic on tourism and religious destinations: A case of Catholic pilgrimages in KZN, South Africa

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Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an adverse impact on religious destinations ever since its outbreak was reported from Wuhan, China in 2019. The aim of this paper is to reflect on the negative impact that the Covid-19 pandemic has had on tourism and religious destinations. Empirical evidence elucidates that the Covid-19 pandemic has wreaked havoc on tourism and religious destinations and it disrupted Christianity for some believers. Religious tourism concentrates on visiting significant religious sites. The main motivation for this travel is to meet the spiritual, and religious needs of people. However, another motivation for travel may be to simply explore the culture of other nations and their religions and sacred objects. In Christianity, social beliefs and values of individuals, and pilgrims were threatened, and their faith was sorely tested during the pandemic. The focus will be on Catholic religious destinations in KwaZulu-Natal Province, South Africa. This is notwithstanding that some religious destinations have not fully recovered even though they are now operating. A qualitative approach was employed, and indirect unstructured interviews were conducted. Systematic sampling was randomly done at the pilgrimage destination sites visited. The paper reflects on the sufferings endured by pilgrims who annually visit the religious destinations and the impact the pandemic has had on these sites. Significance of these religious destinations are also reflected on, the rituals such as that of the Catholic Church venerating the Virgin Mother Mary every month of October was sadly halted. Religion and social value theory is thus reflected upon in this discussion. The findings adopt a descriptive analysis of how Covid-19 impacted on the religious destinations within the study areas. Lastly, strategies for tourism and religious pilgrimage destinations post Covid-19 pandemic to survive are suggested and briefly discussed.

Keywords: Religious destinations, tourism, pilgrimage, Christian faith, post Covid-19, social value.

Introduction

Natural disasters, pandemics, and disasters such as bush fires, drought and floods are inevitably a contributing factor to human livelihoods. Religious destinations were declared hotspots for the Covid-19 pandemics globally, social gatherings such as religious activities, crusades and evangelism were events of concern for the super-spreading of the Covid-19 pandemic (Mbogo, 2020). The South African government took a decisive step to implement stringent lockdown rules to avoid a risk of contamination and the strain to cope with the virus by the health departments which have limited facilities. The inducing of lockdown had an impact on the social lives of most South Africans hence the theory of social value was adopted for this section. Christians were affected by the decision of not gathering to worship as their Christianity and faith is based on such gatherings. The South African government took the decisions it took based on the increasing death rate and infections of people in the country. Several sectors were affected, and social lives and values were compromised by the decisions taken during the lockdown.

The tourism industry is one sector that greatly suffered, because of the pandemic (Henama & Apleni, 2020). The impact of Covid-19 pandemic has presented major damage to the travel and tourism industry globally (Henama & Apleni, 2020). Religious tourism is a form of tourism whereby people travel for pilgrimage, missionary activity, fellowship purposes and it has been growing worldwide in recent decades (Kapur, 2018). The aspects of religious tourism can be defined as: (a) the faith of tourists who have a spiritual attachment to the destination in line with religious belief, and (b) the new spiritual experience of a tourist, belonging to another belief or a different religion, and for whom the destination and the religious practices have the dimensions of newness and novelty (Kapur, 2018).

A global perspective of the COVID 19 pandemic on religious destinations.

Pew Research Center (2017) perceives religion as one of the most prominent and wide-reaching social institutions, touching and shaping every sphere of culture, value, and society. According to the Pew Research Centre, approximately 84% of the world's population are affiliated with a specific religious group irrespective of Christianity or non-Christianity (Pew Research Centre, 2017). The term 'value' denotes a range of different meanings and interpretations (Ives, 2019). Values can equally refer to broad underlying principles in life, important features within a landscape, or monetary figures assigned to goods or services (Ives, 2019). Tadaki et al. (2017) critically outlined a broad typology of value concepts in a Christian context. The intersection of religion with social values focuses our inquiry on 'held' values with 'universal' human values. The relation of religion with social value is that of behaviour and attitude (Tadaki, 2017). The trend of such behaviour and attitude has shown a massive increase globally in recent times and at different times of the year. Common practice is that, during the month of May, devotions are celebrated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, this occurs in countless Catholic parishes and pilgrimage sites globally (Nicolaides 2021).

Religious destinations shape the religious influences of human beings. For decades, spirit seekers have visited sacred places to seek forgiveness for their wrong doings and they travelled to religious destinations to be nearer to divinity, to worship and to seek blessings from higher powers (Nyaupane et al., 2015).
Citrinot (2011) has classified religious tourists into three categories. The first group is involved in only religious activities such as liturgical services, prayers, and rituals; the second group tend to visit shrines or other sites to enjoy history and/or art; The third group take part in spiritual retreats, festivals, or listen to speakers offering religious teachings.

UNWTO (2020) notes that one of the major travel motivators is to visit religious and pilgrimage sites, further emphases the popularity of this form of travel. Religious destinations have become one of the most visited in the world (Nyaupane at al., 2015). Pilgrimages have become so prevalent that researchers believe they have become one of the most dominant human mobility

motivators globally (Nyaupane, et al., 2015; Huang & Pearce, 2019; Martin et al., 2019). Pilgrimage events such as the Zion Christian Church (ZCC), Moria, in Limpopo and the Hajj in Mecca are amongst the largest in the world that gather tourists from various parts of the world (Henderson, 2011). The Kumbh Mela is another religious gathering in India that attracts over 120 million pilgrims worldwide, making it one of the largest gatherings globally (Memish et al., 2019). Therefore, religious activities and tourism are intertwined. It is this popularity and qualities of religious tourism that sparked interest amongst many researchers to understand travel motivations and activities engaged during this niche type of tourism (Memish et al, 2019).

UNWTO (2020) exerts several mechanisms to quantify religious travel as well as its potential to contribute to destination economies. However, natural disasters such as droughts, plagues and the Covid19 pandemic have been almost inevitable for humanity. These natural disasters consequently disrupt life as we know and have witnessed (Henderson, 2011). The natural disasters and pandemics force individuals to find new ways of living and doing things.

The preventative Covid-19 pandemic protocols wrecked social integration, solace and sharing of love and care which is what most religious events stand for (Yassin, 2020). Shrines, churches, and temples had to either cancel or down-size their ceremonies and rituals which left many highly disorientated. Religious destinations such as mosques and synagogues had been considered hotspots for the Covid-19 pandemic infections. According to Yassin et al. (2020), missionary-based activities in Pakistan and Malaysia were a catalyst resulting in the sharp increase of Covid-19 pandemic infections.

As elucidated by Reuters (2022), Philippine authorities had to cancel an annual procession, which normally draws millions of Catholic devotees accompanying a black wooden statue of Jesus Christ through the streets of Manila, due to the Covid-19 pandemic concerns. This event is known as the "Black Nazreen procession", which is one of the Philippines' largest religious festivals before celebrations related to the January 9 procession which was also cancelled or halted because of the rising statistics of Covid-19 pandemic infections (Reuters, 2022). However not only these Philippines religious events were halted in Eshowe, KwaZulu- Natal (KZN) province of South Africa similar other gatherings such as a night vigil to Ngome Marian Shrine held every August month for the adoration and glorification of Mother Mary was halted.

The consequences of such cancellations have had a dire effect on the livelihoods and social values of communities (Mroz, 2021). The national lockdown was imposed because of the rising numbers of deaths and infections, the virus left a cause for concern about the safety of loved ones and where the remedy would come from to regain some sort of normality. However, the decisions to downscale or cancel religious and social events were imperative in the quest to minimise the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Cancellation consequences were again that many places of worship were seen to be empty, and such actions are attested to have affected the wellbeing of Christians and non-Christians alike who depended on the faith and spirituality of these religious destinations.

Tourism is classified as an economic booster across the globe and the African continent is amongst the richest with a variety of cultural and religious practices (Henama & Sifolo 2018). According to Yasin at al. (2020), the major categories of religious tourism include missionary travel, leisure fellowship vacations, faith-based cruising, crusades, conventions, retreats, monastery visits, faith-based camps, and religious tourist attractions. All these categories attract gatherings in various magnitudes for reasons related to spiritual upliftment of individuals. In South Africa, for Christians Easter celebrations symbolise the rising of Jesus Christ from death (Henama & Sifolo, 2018) and it is an important religious period. Christians celebrate this event to honour the rise of Jesus Christ who died on the cross for human sins (Henama & Sifolo, 2018). The Christian faith, Zion Christian Center (ZCC) group celebrate their Easters by gathering in the Zion City of Moria, Limpopo (Kruger & Saayman, 2016).

The closure of religious based activities due to Covid-19 pandemic also had a vast impact on the social gatherings and emotional wellbeing of individuals (Lee et al., 2021). Many were left in devastation, unable to practice their faith which is an integral part of their lives. Therefore, the emotional and mental challenges experienced by pilgrims affected by the Covid-19 pandemic has been unquantifiable (Lee et al., 2021). Tourists visit pilgrimage heritage sites for a variety of reasons (Ho & McKercher, 2006). They vary from the purposeful tourist who is seeking authentic cultural experiences, to the casual tourist who may be visiting a historic site simply because it is part of their selected tour (Ho & McKercher, 2006). 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 figurative meanings (Nicolaides, 2016).

According to Nicolaides and Grobler (2017) and Nkwanyana (2021), the main motivation for travelling to pilgrimage sites or religious destinations is to meet the spiritual and religious needs of people in a search for authenticity, hence again the motivation can be exploring the culture of other nations or sacred objects. Tourism at religious sites is a special form of heritage tourism. Pilgrims tend to make an emotional and spiritual investment in a particular place. Grobler and Nicolaides, 2017) have highlighted that preserving heritage at religious sites requires allowing the local community to continue using the site; however, religious practices can be disrupted by the presence of too many tourists. The sheer numbers of tourists at heritage sites often causes negative physical and social impacts. When there are too many tourists, these places lose their sense of spirituality, and they shift from being sacred to secular places (Grobler & Nicolaides, 2017).

Methodology employed

Data was collected through the keywords search of documents related to the research aim. The researchers' identified Scopus, Google Scholar, and ResearchGate databases as suitable search areas. When travelling was permitted after the lockdown period, the researchers then visited some of the Catholic faith religious destinations. Globally, Roman Catholic Christian pilgrims mainly visit Lourdes in France, Fátima in Portugal, and St. Peter's Basilica in the Vatican. South Africa has the Ngome Marian Shrine and other religious destination sites to visit.

Qualitatively, eleven unstructured interviews were randomly conducted at Ngome Marian shrine, under the Eshowe diocese. Unstructured interviews were conducted with the aim of finding out the reasons how COVID 19 had impacted on the pilgrimage destination. Other unstructured interviewees were participants selected at the destination to seek why pilgrims had visited the destination during this vulnerable time while Covid-19 pandemic was still a threat and a cause of death. As investigators, we were cognisant that, pilgrims had come to worship and so did we. Therefore, unstructured interviews were conducted. The key subject focus was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on religious destinations. The host participants working at these destinations were the focal point from which to obtain responses. Ethical issues were carefully considered, and participants remained anonymous. Moreover, the responses given mainly revolved around the participants being victims of the pandemic. The participants were not incentivised to participate and remained anonymous throughout. They were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

As for the participants who came to worship, we observed that pilgrims included not only Catholic pilgrims and there were also non-Catholics, mainly other Christians during the pilgrimage who attended because of similar beliefs and elements of faith, and they primarily came to worship. The significance of the pilgrimage site is often more important to the local community than to tourists. Nine interviews were conducted at Emmaus pilgrimage heritage site. The Roman Catholic Diocese of uMzimkhulu is a diocese in the city of Harding in the Ecclesiastical province of eThekwini (Durban) in South Africa. Some chapels are served by missionaries. A pilgrimage was held on the 2nd of April at Emmaus, uMzimkhulu Diocese. The heritage pilgrimage centre

promotes spirituality and the connection of faith through prayer and thus takes a very important place alongside the anticipated Christian formation of adherents.

Shackley (2001) underscores that when an area contains many heritage attractions, tourists tend to visit only the most popular sites due to time constraints. Emmaus heritage centre is currently enjoying a precious heritage that needs to be acknowledged and kept alive (Nkwanyana, 2021). A normal tourism visit including a religious holiday at Emmaus heritage centre would be meaningful to assist an individual to find solitude and be in a better position to determine and interrogate their desired spiritual and social values.

Nicolaides and Grobler (2017), alluded that, shrines are popular pilgrimage destination for Catholics and non-Catholics alike. Catholics are encouraged to partake at the Eucharistic celebration daily and are ideally required to celebrate Holy Mass every Sunday and on days of obligation (Xulu, 2022). A synthesised descriptive analysis of Ngome Marian Shrine is that it is certainly one of the popular pilgrimage destinations which has increased steadily since1970, and it is situated at the Ngome Estate with a tea plantation and timber forestry area (Xulu, 2022).

Findings

The findings on the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on the pilgrimage destinations are described as participants responded. Systematic sampling was done and twenty interviews in total were conducted Eleven of the respondence were indirectly interviewed and randomly selected at Ngome Marian Shrine. Nine participants from Emmaus heritage pilgrimage centre.

Ngome Marian shrine	Participants	%
Interviewed pilgrims at the destinations	9	45
Interviewed host participants of the destination	2	10
Emmaus Heritage pilgrimage Centre		
Interviewed pilgrims at the destination	7	35
Interviewed host participants of the destination	2	10
Total interviewed participants	**20**	

Interviewed pilgrims mostly responded on why they visited the shrine this day. The responses from participants were mainly that they *wanted to come pray for their family and ask for the intervention of the holy mother Virgin Mary to assist in providing a curable solution to the Covid-19 pandemic*".
Purposively, other interviewed pilgrims chosen randomly indicated that "*they had lost their loved ones during the pandemic and were there to pray for the deceased due to Covid-19. They wanted to find healing and closure from the death of their loved ones*".

Randomly, participants were interviewed, some participants came to pray for different needs like seeking employment and other personal matters. Various responses were a directive of emotional motives. Therefore, it was concluded that Ngome Marian shrine is a perfect religious destination for adherents of the faith to pour out their sorrows while others were there to give thanks to God for his grace.

Later in the afternoon, as the researchers were driving out, a bus was offloading pilgrims. Purposefully, these pilgrims were indirectly interviewed and asked where they were from. They indicated *that "they were from Gauteng province"*. These were sleep-over pilgrims that had booked to spend the night and weekend. This justified the response from the host participants who work at the pilgrimage site, who had stated that, Ngome Marian shrine pilgrimage is a popular destination. The host participant indicated that the site accommodates a maximum of 95 pilgrims in the dormitory(hostel) accommodation facility. There are twenty employees at the

pilgrimage site. There are also four religious priests and three Benedictine nuns that are responsible for the daily operational activities of the shrine.

The host participants clearly indicated that, occasionally more than 1000 pilgrims visit the shrine in a week for religious gatherings. *They further stated that "Ngome Shrine only depends on donations, night bookings, repository sales at the curio shop and offerings done by the pilgrims. During the lockdown, the shrine had difficulties in maintaining salaries for the twenty employees. Maintenance of the place has been difficult. As a strategy and measurement to accumulate funds, regrettably the sales at the curio shop had been escalated, repository items prices have doubled. The lockdown made travelling impossible therefore there was still shortage of repository stock. The host participants clarified that "some of the items sold are outsourced hence current stock was limited. He further elucidated that "craftwork was hand work from the community school hence they were waiting for the craftwork from that school. These were some reasons stated as justification of insufficient stock. The host participants clarified that; they are working collaboratively with the community to avoid commodification of items".*

A host participant at Emmaus stated that "Emmaus heritage centre has indeed remained a constant inspiration for the Missionaries of Mariannhill (CMM) and of the Precious Blood (CPS) by far not only for them as solidarity but also importantly for the Roman Catholic Church".
Host participant a CMM priest, missionary at Emmaus Heritage Centre, disclosed that*: "Emmaus heritage centre can accommodate 34 sleeping visitors as it has 34 beds. Some of the rooms are single bed, others double beds and double bunkers. Covid -9 has had a devastating effect on the visitors. Many tourists had to cancel their bookings hence this put a strain on the cash flow of the centre. Plans to sustain the centre are still under discussion as the centre is a joint venture of missionaries of Mariannhill (CMM) and the congregation of the missionary Sisters (nuns) of the Precious Blood (CPS). During the period of the lockdown, the centre did not have pilgrims, it was shut down due to Covid-19 regulations. The heritage centre pilgrimage will be welcoming and accommodating visitors soon. Emmaus survives through bookings for overnight sleeping and the repository sales that can give a little bit of economy reliance. Funds received are used for minor repairs and maintenance of the pilgrimage heritage site, however, will not be sufficient to recover the loss encountered during the lockdown. Emmaus heritage centre only has one casual employee who only comes when needed. However, the Covid-19 pandemic has made it difficult to remunerate thee individual and the (CPS) took it upon themselves to do the labourer's work."*

Pilgrims at Emmaus heritage centre that were indirectly interviewed mainly indicated that "they came to worship since it has been a while being away from church because of the pandemic"

Discussion

Diverse measures to worship by Christians from all denominations have been used throughout the globe. Despite various groups of religious faith embracing online technology and social media during the lockdown period of the Covid-19 pandemic, these forms of online technology could not sustain the destinations and technology could not replace human being present physically. Only the mobility of human beings will resuscitate the pilgrimage destinations. Governments across the globe have lifted most lockdown restrictions, thus permitting national and international tourism-related travel to take place. In South Africa, the government had also lifted most restrictions and international travelling was permitted. This had brought forth much needed optimism in the religious tourism sector to return to its former glory.

Video and Zoom recordings were posted on social networks in Japan and across the globe. The most prominent among recordings was the video which went viral on 20 May 2020 about images of the blue diamond (*a on Oni)* festival activities which attracted huge numbers of worshippers joining together for prayers and devotion; however, this massive celebration happened in separate locations, homes, and places (McLaughlin, 2020). The video clip posted online ended

by showing the blue diamond in the community recreational parks with its fresh green leaves indicating that the blue diamond was moved outside for the community to pass-by and worship during the stringent lockdown period. As a result, most religious leaders heeded to the call by halting social and collective indoors worshiping and rituals and began to use online techniques such as Microsoft (MS) Teams, Facebook, Zoom, Skype, Videos as well as YouTube (McLaughlin, 2020).

With the religious destinations visited, online technology measures could not replace the human element visiting directly at the destinations. These pilgrimage destinations obviously relied on funds from the pilgrims. Despite the financial sufferings that these destinations endured, there is hope restored with the minimal travelling taking place. Host participant and employees at Ngome Marian Shrine pilgrimage, ensured Covid-19 pandemic protocols were still alertly observed. An indication was that pilgrims for overnight had to book in advance. On checking out, cleaning was done using disinfectants.

Subsequently, for day visitors' regulations of the Covid-19 pandemic were adhered to as well. All visitors were encouraged to keep on wearing masks. Sanitising was done at the gate, registration and temperature checked to every pilgrim that entered. Measures to restrict numbers and congestion were put in place. The host at the destination had designed specific programmes to be followed so that social distancing was maintained. The programme stipulated that while others went for confession, others do the stations of the cross, meanwhile others went down to the streams to collect water. The adoration of the Eucharist then follows. Previously, community children assisted the pilgrims with fetching of water using 20 litre containers, however, of late pilgrims are restricted to only using 5 litres containers so that they can carry those themselves to avoid congestion at the site and contamination by Covid-19, at the same time , not allowing children from the community to flock there and assist the pilgrims with water containers, was a strategy used to maintain the spirituality and calmness for the site.

The significance of these pilgrimage destinations

MacCannell (1973) ascertained that sightseeing is basically a form of ritual respect for society and that tourism engages some of the social functions of religion in the contemporary world. Nicolaides (2016) states that religious and pilgrimage tourism encourages spiritual, social, and cultural relations between people. Nicolaides (2016) further alludes that religious pilgrimage tourism must be planned at local, regional, and national level.

Ngome Marian Shrine is a pilgrimage site where miraculous attributes are venerated to the Virgin Mary. Apparitions have manifested or are purported to have been evident, hence this shrine is such an important pilgrimage site of the Roman Catholic Church and manifestations have drawn the attention of non-Catholics who also have a visitation right to the shrine. During the induced lockdown daily mass celebrations could not continue for pilgrims, however they were only limited to the priests and nuns at the site as a daily obligation of their orders. Religiously, in the Roman Catholic church doctrine, venerating of the Virgin Mary plays an elite role since she enjoys a special place of honour as the most exalted of all God's creation (Nkwanyana, 2020). The value and respect given to the Virgin Mother Mary is a manifestation of the Christology or doctrine concerning Christ as God (Nicolaides, 2016). Religious and pilgrimage tourism is clearly not a novel idea, many shrines are related to the Virgin Mary the mother of Jesus Christ. In earlier periods religious tourists were referred to as pilgrims and undoubtedly, they are still called pilgrims (Nicolaides, 2021).

Lanquar (2011) expresses that religious tourism is designed to meet the need for social values and spirituality arising out of a highly secular global society. Tourists tend to travel to religious destinations because of their individual faith. In essence, it is this faith that has brought popularity to religious tourism; however, this travelling to pilgrimage destinations has been disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic.

The Covid-19 pandemic impacted negatively on pilgrimage destinations. The significance of the impact was seen when travel arrangements were cancelled, flights cancelled and bookings for accommodation cancelled to safeguard the tourists from infection spreading from the pandemic. The cancellations created a massive loss in the tourism industry, and this left the spiritually wounded, even more wounded because they could not travel to any pilgrimage site to find spiritual and physical healing. Many visitors travel to pilgrimage destination for their spiritual reasons, while others want to explore the architecture or history of a particular place.

Looking ahead post COVID-19

Pilgrimage tourism is of huge economic benefit. Religion and tourism are invariably complementary with one another and are closely associated. Religious tourism is increasingly expanding, and this is an experiential product in which visitation is deemed according to all the attributes of the resources at any pilgrimage site (Ives, 2019). It is not only to the pilgrims, religious and spiritual value however, thus tourism marketers and managers of religious and pilgrimage sites need to note that the tourists desire an emotionally charged experience at religious sites and as they tour around the area (Ives, 2019). Religion is one element and key process that can enable the emergence and dissemination of values across multiple social ills in society (Koehrsen, 2021).

Tourism planners must take cognisance of the fact that pilgrimage tourists desire solitude and a need to feel a strong spiritual connection when at religious destinations other than at their homes and local parishes (Koehrsen, 2021). For the Post-Covid-19 pandemic era, an understanding and emphasis should be that sacred sites are important to intensify one's faith. This means that pilgrimage site management need to carefully plan their practices, guiding and educational aspects for better promotion of religious destinations as apposite places to visit.

Covid-19 pandemic has impacted negatively on visitation globally, therefore a well-planned strategic and long-term approach involving all stakeholders is needed together with a coordinated management of all the relevant components which make a destination appealing. It is imperative that local services and infrastructural development support the idea of sustaining religious pilgrimage tourism post the Covid-19 pandemic era. Many religious sites could be further converted into multi-purpose areas, where a wide range of other tourism and leisure related activities, would serve to enhance a visitor's experience. By planning for religious tourism, it will be easier to develop, maintain and preserve other forms of tourism such as cultural heritage etc. In Covid -19 times, as cited in Liev (2020), religious destinations have begun to consider diverse forms of religious tourism.

In the post-Covid-19 pandemic era it is imperative for religious destinations to ensure proper maintenance of sites visited as envisaged for sustainability and for entrepreneurship development. Recruiting innovative thinkers to invest in religious destinations will assist to overcome the many financial issues faced at these destinations. Religious destinations require more detailed attention from tourism planners since it is an aspect of other forms of tourism, and it should not be shadowed by Christianity and be downplayed. Tourists who are pilgrims are desirous of spirituality and faith. This element of Christianity should not be shot down to accommodate only economic benefits, however it should be regarded as tourism which promotes spirituality to pilgrims that flee from their fast-paced generally mundane daily experiences. Pilgrims visit religious destinations for the need of inner peace to be accomplished or at least bolstered, therefore collaboration efforts post Covid-19 pandemic should ensure that other forms of tourism happen at religious destinations.

Conclusion

One who travels for leisure is a tourist, while a traveller seeking a religious or spiritual experience is in essence a pilgrim. The tourist is concerned with all types of leisure while a pilgrim has an

approach in which worship is important and is where the pilgrim can pray and commune with God at a holy and significant religious site. Religion with its faith experiences and tourism tend to coexist because increases in religious activities lead to a comparable increase in tourism in both local and international tourism travels. Religious tourism is generally about visiting holy and spiritual places of worship with desire to obtain spiritual experience and advances one's well-being in physical and spiritual ways.

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an enormous negative impact on religious destinations. The aspect of the intersection of human values and religion is complex thus creating a discourse for discussion. We suggest that religion and social values must be understood as a multi-faceted embodied institution of substantial social and political relevance. Religion and social values should be promoted to enable the scholarship of transformation to connect societies and religious leaders so that common ground and authentic decision-making is done to sustain religious destinations. Religion and social values are compatible. We acknowledge that religion does indeed have great capacity to effect change within society because its activities embeds both deep and shallow leverage points. Possibly religion and social values should be intertwined as a cultural "resource" that might be leveraged for social adaptation. Religious destinations should respond to environmental change. The Covid-19 pandemic has impacted negatively on religious destinations, and transformation needs to be implemented and it should focus on adapting aspects of the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR), and the use of technology devices which were trending during the height of the pandemic. Tourism activities are not static, and demand has grown in what was a relatively static market. Religious and pilgrimage destinations should prepare for similar natural and health disasters so that they do not feel the loss when history ultimately repeats itself. The spirituality of these destinations should not be compromised, only renovations and rejuvenation should be done to meet the needs of the current global societies.

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