Best Practices for Tour Guides at Christian and Islamic Religious Sites:
A Case Study of Jordan

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Tourism is a major economic pillar for many countries; it enables them to increase gross domestic product, improves the population lifestyle, and preserves natural, cultural, and religious tourism assets. Tourism appears as a magic tool that could change the future of a developing country. However, tourism requires qualified human resources who can deliver high-quality service. Tour guides assume a great responsibility as they communicate with tourists during their sojourn. Their mission is even more critical if they have to accompany tourists to sacred tourist destinations where tourists are engaged in religious activities. The best practices of guides embedded with tourist behaviors are expected to enhance a peaceful world and provide a good touristic experience.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is a case study in which Authors with empirical research insight from various perspectives: geographical, economic perspectives (two members of IREST (Institut de Recherche ET d'Études Supérieures du Tourisme) along with the anthropological perspective (Yarmouk University.

The uniqueness of this chapter stems from the new amalgam of perspectives that has never been discussed before. Moreover, the strength of this chapter results from the authors' familiarity with the area of study, the complexity of the relationship between variables, the necessity of conducting pilot studies at three different religious sites, the elaboration of an objective survey and the necessity of making participant observations followed by pilot studies.

Tourism is a major economic pillar for many countries. It can contribute significantly to the gross domestic product, help in diversification of national industries, generate jobs, and increase the income of stakeholders in the tourism sector, aid in preserving the natural, cultural, and religious tourism assets. Therefore, tourism is one of the vital global economic activities that influence world economy.

For the tourism industry to thrive, qualified human resources who can deliver high quality services are required (Baum, 2006; Mok, Sparks & Kadampully, 2013; Nickson, 2013). Hence, tour guides assume a great responsibility as they communicate with tourists during their sojourns. Their mission becomes even more critical if they have to accompany tourists to sacred sites, where they may engage in religious activities. The qualification of domestic tour guides, their education, historical and cultural knowledge, and comprehension of the tourists' desires play a crucial role in achieving better tourist experiences (Shunnaq & Ramadan Shunnaq, 2012; Esen & Gülmez, 2017).

This chapter aims at answering the following questions:

What are the roles of tourist guides who accompany international visitors to different religious sites? What follows is a description of the current practices of tour guides at religious sites frequented by tourists. This study examines whether tour guides are professional in that they remain unbiased in terms of religious beliefs and whether they tend to expose tourists to dual narratives. This research closely examines the multiple roles tour guides play in the sustainability of religious tourism in Jordan. It contributes to a more in-depth understanding of tourism practices by studying what happens during a visit to a site related to different religions.

The first part of the study presents the religious tourism sites in Jordan, the second suggests hypotheses about the roles of tour guides, and the third shows empirical results from the field. Therefore, the authors through this study, could give planners a clear picture reflecting the current situation of the tour guides' performance at three main religious sites in Jordan. Besides, the comparative approach will enable decision makers to identify the differences between the tour guides' practices at the religious sites.

BACKGROUND

Many online guides and publications are available that outline best practices for the tourism sector (Harrill, 2005; Kişi, 2019). Previous studies have almost exclusively focused on best practices for tourism development, sustainable tourism, destination management, and other areas of tourism activities. However, available literature on the best practices of tourist guides for religious tourism in the Middle East, and particularly in Jordan, is insufficient. Earlier studies have called for a wider investigation in measuring the importance of tourist guides and the quality of their performance as co-creators of the tourism experience in different contexts because these studies are not generalizable and largely inconclusive.

According to academics Raj and Morpeth (2015), who explored the relationship between tourism, pilgrimage and religious tourism, state that religion has been studied by different academic disciplines. Gradually, the emerging academic disciplines integrated religion. Based on Raj and Morpeth's analysis, during the European Association for Tourism and Leisure Education's meeting in 2003, many issues

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