

Tourism in the Perspective of Islam and Promotion of the Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism

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Abstract

Researches indicate that tourism, and specifically religious tourism, has an ancient history. This issue which is one of the significant foundations of the global economy in the twenty first century is now apparent among the nations of the globe, especially for Muslim nations, more than ever due to travel incentives and invention of various means of transportation. Since the old times, people traveled around the globe for several purposes including food, touring, trade, pilgrimage to holy places, entertainment, a variety of sports, which is continued with an increasing trend. Nowadays, one of the most common types of tourism is the religious and pilgrimage tourism which is flourished and prospered, in the light of Islamic laws and regulations, after formation of stable Islamic governments and as security is maintained. An special attention has been paid to touring and journeys in Islam religion, specifically in the word of God almighty in the Holy Quran, touring is emphasized and repeated as examples for the servants in more than tens of verses so that people act intelligently as they see the relics of the past, and in fact, these are a guiding light for those who are trying to provide themselves with spirituality and free themselves from the darkness and to bring peace and comfort besides safety for themselves. The Islamic country of Iran, has a high potential of religious tourism, and with the holy shrine of his Holiness Imam Reza (PBUH) and the holy shrine of her Holiness Fatemeh Masoumeh (PBUH) and also over 3400 known Pantheons which many of them is the shrine of great martyrs, also 8919 holy religious places, can be the vanguard of religious and pilgrimage tourism in the world and thus to benefit from its economic and spiritual effects, which we address here in this paper.

Keywords: *Tourism, Religious Tourism, Touring and Journeys, Holy Quran, Divine Verses, Islam.*

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Introduction

Tourism industry is considered as one of the most important and major sources of income for most countries of the world. The Islamic Iran, having hundreds of components of tourism, is one of the exceptional countries of the world in terms of tourism. Unfortunately, however, due to lack of proper advertising and lack of knowledge of the international community toward these attractions, this country was not able to take even a small percentage of tourism income, especially concerning the religious tourism and in fact has been deprived and disadvantaged from its absolute right of this huge resource.

Therefore, research on the strengths and weaknesses of tourism technology in this Islamic country and presenting effective solutions and also appropriate and efficient utilization of information and communication technology in tourism industry, which is advancing day by day, is a necessity. Thus, this technology should be exercised and favorably benefited in order to strengthen and address this industry in various aspects, especially the religious and pilgrimage tourism which have a high potential in this Islamic country and to bring this country out of several difficulties regarding this very important and crucial issue.

Research Method

Considering the concerned factors in the field of tourism industry and special consideration of this important issue within the Holy Quran, in this research we benefited from the verses of the Holy Quran and applied library research method, and further to the importance of the case and its valuable religious and pilgrimage effects for the country, we have applied descriptive analytical method, as well.

Definition of the Religious Tourist and Religious Tourism

Previous researches indicate that tourists have various purposes and thus the type of tourism becomes obvious based on such purposes. Therefore, there are several definitions concerning the tourist and

tourism from various perspectives, which some of them are addressed briefly hereunder:

1- World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) defines tourists as persons who spend at least one night or more than a full day in their country of destination and their purposes are leisure, entertainment, recreation, health, relaxation, reading, sports and so on.

2- Upon researches on the rich Persian cultures, the definition is expressed as following:

Tourism and travelling the world is for entertainment, leisure, touring, pilgrimage and applies to traveling to a destination and then returning to the main place of residence.

3- Iran Touring and Tourism are defined as per following in the Law for Developing Iran Touring and Tourism:

Iran Touring and Tourism applies to any individual or group travel that lasts for more than 24 hours and the purpose of that is not business (Set of Rules, 1991).

4- The United Nations and UNESCO defined: any person spending the night out of his home is called tourist.

5- Religious Tourism consists of tourists visiting holy places such as shrines, tombs, and so on.

6- The Statistical Organization of Iran states: Tourist is a person who travels to a country or city other than the place of his residence not for less than 24 hours and not for over one year and his purpose of traveling are entertainment, recreation, sports, visiting relatives and friends, missions, participation in seminars, conferences or meetings, treatment, study and research or religious activities.

Tourism Industry and its Various Aspects

Tourism, in today's word, is discussed as the foundations of the global economy as well as industry and economic basis of the twenty-first century and sometimes is addressed as the most important job creating sector in the world and has a solid place for itself as the second economic activity after oil. Tourism has been common among human societies since the ancient time and is developed in various aspects in the world and in Iran, throughout history and now has reached to its current position in terms of economy, society and industry. Tourism, in fact, lies within the nature of mankind and thereby tourism is based on traveling and relocation as the main factors, while transportation

industry has played a significant role in transformation of this issue and continues to do so.

Among different incentives for travelling, mental need is motivating the humans above all concerning travelling and relocation. The same leads to life expectancy more than ever, mental happiness and transferring joy and cheerfulness to other fellows and to form an empathy and harmony, especially among Muslim nations.

Considering the world, this ancient phenomenon was very common in Europe and more than all, the purpose of travelling for nobles and young princes to different locations was to become familiar with different forms of government and public life (Rahnamaei, 1990).

Tourism and traveling, therefore, has been one of the old habits of the ruling and wealthy class of the communities. Romans who had wealth, position and power always purchased houses in the surrounding villages of their city of residence and used them for the purposes of accommodation, income and to spend their leisure time (Drew, 1992).

Tourism in the form of pilgrimage traveling to holy places and or religious cities has been common among tourists since the old times and has increasingly flourished among the followers of all religions, which now, upon utilization of new facilities, has extraordinarily expanded. The hajj has been a major factor for encouraging Muslims regarding tourism, as many people all gathered in the site of Al Kaaba Al Musharrafah since the first time and this important pilgrimage has been developing day by day and attracts the floods of many enthusiasts.

However, tourism for the purpose of leisure and recreation commenced from the early sixteenth century and people interested in that, traveled to visit great and well-known cities of the world. Gradually a type of leisure travel, for the purpose of using beaches and for entertainment and recreation, replaced the traditional-educational travels and thus people who did travel for such purposes, and especially to France, were called Tourists.

Considering the above mentioned, it can be stated that the development of tourism is beholden to the advancements in the transportation industry, especially railroads. Whereas development of transportation has been flourished with means of travel that were

faster, less expensive and with a relative comfort, therefore it led to a great revolution in the tourism industry (Rezvani, 1998).

Tourists have different incentives and purposes. For this reason, tourism industry and especially religious tourism have a significant role in making cultural communications and preventing a monotonous daily routine. Furthermore, this industry has been of more concern during the recent years for several reasons such as job creation, increasing the foreign currency income and sale of domestic products and etc. and also poverty alleviation can be addressed as another advantage of tourism industry. Nowadays and throughout the world and especially in developing countries a challenge is to face unemployment and its ominous results which are poverty and social disorders due to several reasons including population growth, high rate of rural-urban migrations and labor market failure in attracting skilled labor.

Therefore it should not be overlooked that tourists and especially religious tourists are connecting near and far countries and are discoverers of unknown lands and or observers of ancient relics and thus are linking religion, economy and industry together and are forming new incomes and various occupations and finally evangelists of kindness and messengers of peace and friendship (karegar, 2007).

We certainly believe that our Islamic country is one of the top 10 countries of the world in terms of natural resources and tourism attractions including religious and pilgrimage tourism. However, the trend of arrival of tourists in this country has been announced to be very slow during the past years (Mohaghegh Damad, 1997).

Tourism industry inevitably plays a significant role in the economy of the countries and on the other hand, it facilitates the path to achieve stable development due to small investment and high added value and existence of stable sources of income and especially job creation. However, below statistics indicate failure to make the necessary success in tourism industry in this Islamic country.

We are certain that there are several difficulties in the development of tourism industry, and especially religious and pilgrimage tourism which caused dependence of foreign tourism, including: inadequate security for tourists, cultural difficulties, insufficient welfare and accommodation facilities, lack of wide and standardized roads, lack of

facilities to use international credit cards, failure to adequately monitor the performance of hotels, performing poor health services in residential centers and on roads, unfamiliarity of the drivers with foreign languages, especially English, and troublesome and restrictive rules, lack of promotion and proper guidance and experts in various fields (Karegar, 2007).

Table 1: The number of tourist arrivals during different years

Year	Number of Tourists
1991	249103
1996	573449
2001	1402160
2003	1500439
2004	1659479
2005	1889000
2006	2735000
2007	2171699

Extensive and Worthy Perspective of Islam and the Holy Quran toward Tourism

There are several verses in the Holy Quran in which mankind is repeatedly advised to tour the earth and to see the works of creation and getting to know the situation of human societies and nations in the past and paying more attention to the everlasting power of God and to learn from predecessors, all which are addressed in various verses, which some of them are referenced hereunder:

A) Surah the Livestock (Al-an'am), Verse 11:

Say, "Travel in the land and see what was the end of those who rejected truth."

B) Surah the Bee (An-Nahl), Verse 14:

And it is He who made the sea to serve you, that you may eat from it tender meat, and extract from it ornaments that you wear. And you see the ships plowing through it, as you seek His bounties, so that you may give thanks.

C) Surah The Cave (Al- Kahf), Verse 59:

And these towns—We destroyed them when they committed injustices, and We set for their destruction an appointed time.

D) Surah The Believers (Al-Mu'minun), Verses 18-20:

And We sent down water from the sky in proper quantity, and settled it in the ground, and We are Able to take it away.

With it We produce for you gardens of palms and vines, yielding abundant fruit for you to eat.

And a tree springing out of Mount Sinai, producing oil (olive tree), and seasoning for those who eat.

E) Surah The Spider (Al-Ankabut), Verse 20:

Say, "Roam the earth, and observe how He originated the creation." Then God will bring about the next existence. God has power over all things."

F) Surah The Romans (Ar-Rum), Verses 41 and 42:

Corruption has appeared on land and sea, because of what people's hands have earned, in order to make them taste some of what they have done, so that they might return.

Say, "Roam the earth, and observe the fate of those who came before. Most of them were idolaters."

G) Surah Originator (Fatir), Verse 44:

Have they not journeyed in the land and observed the fate of those who preceded them? They were superior to them in strength. But nothing can defeat God in the heavens or on Earth. He is indeed omniscient and Omnipotent.

H) Surah Muhammad (Muhammad), Verse 10:

Have they not journeyed through the earth and seen the consequences for those before them? God poured destruction upon them, and for the unbelievers is something comparable.

I) Surah The Spider (Al-Ankabut), Verse 56:

O My servants who have believed: My earth is vast, so worship Me alone.

Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism, Enlightening Mankind

This is one of the most common types of tourism in the world. Religious attractions, shrines and holy places, attract many tourists every year. Accommodation and hospitality facilities for this type of tourism, such as guest houses and inns, have their own characteristics considering the social, cultural and ideological context of the tourists, with an extensive diversity in each country (Rezvani, 1995).

The studies indicate that one of the most important demands of the humans which sometimes seems idealistic is to achieve happiness and prosperity and to find a way to reach them, and for that religion had a fundamental role. Perhaps the reason for emergence of different religions and ideologies throughout the history and among all human communities is derived from the same desire and wish. The value and

diversity and difference of the religions and ideologies are appeared and maintained when the governments respect such diversities and in other words when no one imposes their ideology on others. This concept is recognized as the religious freedom and is one of the most important confluence and interaction points of religion and human rights. For the same reason, right after defining the freedom, the international rules of human rights addresses the free expression of religious beliefs and supporting them and determination of various forms and aspects of religion and freedom. It is obvious that in case any kind of manifestation of religious beliefs disturb order, morals and public health, it is then necessary to be dealt with. However, even such should be in conformity with law and as per necessity (Taheri, 2007).

The Role of Religious and Pilgrimage Tourism in the Islamic Country of Iran

Studies indicate that one of the factors with a role in setting up a new business is religious beliefs. Considering the diversity of religious beliefs around the world, however, its effects on entrepreneurs is different. Religious beliefs and values are of the significant factors concerning the process of entrepreneurship. Culture, religion and other social factors are all interconnected and these factors have a significant impact on the formation of people's behavior in their societies. Therefore, it could be expressed that a society which focuses on people with cultural, religious and social teachings, can somehow contribute to the economic advancement of the same society (Maleki, 2008). In this regard, religion and the influence of religious beliefs, concerning subsistence and development and prosperity of life, have deep impacts on the spirit of mankind and underpins the economic prosperity. Furthermore, and other than the economic aspect, its effective role and the special religious base in the territory of mental health and also its efficacy in the treatment of various physical and mental diseases should be considered as well.

Here, there are two categories of tourists. Category one are those who visit the holy places of their own religion, and category two are those who visit the holy places of other religions. In any case they would choose one type of religious tourism based on the purpose they have. Perhaps the difference between these two categories is in the interest

the tourists show for such kind of travels. Whereas some of these travels might be mandatory in terms of performing certain commands of such religion and ideology, thus all people practicing such a religion have to make that travel at least for once, for instance visiting Al Kaaba for the Muslims.

Considering the existence of various Monotheistic Religions and their so many believers in Iran, many forms of religious and pilgrimage tourisms can be formed. Thereby, Muslims with their majority in Iran travel to several destinations abroad such as the Hajj taking place in Saudi Arabia, the Holy Shrines in Iraq and the Holy Places in Syria, and also to domestic destinations such as Mashad, Qom, Rey, Shiraz and etc. (www.parstour.ir).

On the other hand, religious and pilgrimage tourism had a long history in Iran due to the interest of the Iranians to the Family of Ahl al-Bayt (Peace be Upon Them All). Thus several holy places all over this country is of concern for Iranians. Religious and pilgrimage tourism, therefore, can have very positive results for Iran in terms of the economic aspects of tourist attraction and all in terms of the promotional effects and the international reflection.

Religious Holy Places are Devine Safe Havens

We come across several social and religious centers throughout the urban and rural studies, which indicate that religious beliefs are the most important geographic factor for formation of such cities and villages. These places are formed around the holy shrines and pilgrimage to these holy places, upon facilitation and development of transportation, has eventually formed a city or a village which there are many examples of that in the East. Mashahd, Qm and Rey are also the best examples of such religious cities in Iran which have a significant role in the Islamic culture.

Also, the Holy Mecca and Medina in Saudi Arabia, the Holy Shrines in Karbala, Najaf, Kadhimiya, Samarra in Iraq, and Varanasi, Allahabad and Ahmedabad in India, Bangkok in Thailand, Jerusalem in the occupied Palestine, Vatican in Italy, Saint Sebastian in Spain, and etc. are all examples of the religious cities.

The pilgrimage role of these cities are not expressed only through the exercise of religious ceremonies by the residence, unless the cities attract many visitors from far away continuously and or seasonally.

The realm of influence and or the gravitational field of the religious cities are different to each other. For instance, Mecca attracts the followers in an international scale as its realm of influence extends to all Muslim countries, and the gravitational field for the cities such as Karbala, Najaf, Kadhimiya, Samarra, Mashad and Qom extends to the Muslim countries with the followers of Shia faith (Rezvani, 1995). Pilgrimage cities and centers become full of population during certain days for exercise of religious practices which brings problems for the visitors in terms of accommodation, food, means of communication, and health, as well. On the other hand, concentration of thousands of people in a certain area might endanger their health, especially when the diseased visitors refuge to such places with the hope of healing. Therefore, religious and pilgrimage tourism demands a specific level of planning so that facilities and requirements of the visitors are provided and met in order to form a satisfying and secure environment for them.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Touring and visiting the earth and the world arena and then our dear Country, Iran, is of high importance from various aspects. Furthermore, tourism and specially religious and pilgrimage tourism as a fundament and principle is effective for deepening and development of the insight and Islamic culture.

This important case is clearly evident in the Holy Quran, and the manner of prophets and Imams (Peace be Upon them All). Attracting tourists to the centers of Islamic civilization not only promotes and exports the Islamic culture, but also affects the hearts and leads to economic development and increases the foreign currency income. The Holy Quran states: “And if anyone of the polytheists asks you for protection, give him protection so that he may hear the Word of God” (9:6).

The Islamic Iran has always been the gate the rich Iranian and Islamic civilization, and therefore, the doors of Islamic countries such as Iran should be always open to foreigners, so that Islamic realities and the Islamic civilization and culture, and on the other hand, hospitality and good treatment are realized during the course of these interactions and visits of the religious and pilgrimage places.

Tourists, with transfer their results and achievements and thereby link the civilizations and cultures of the nations together, and thus, the history, civilization and culture of mankind become more and more dynamic and the domain of human knowledge become more extensive. The role of attempts of the Muslim tourists in visiting the religious and pilgrimage relics are undoubtedly significant and laudable in terms of flourishing the Islamic thought, knowledge and culture, alongside with the other constructive and valuable attempts of the other intellectual groups of the society.

Most importantly, due to the long history of civilization and benefitting from the cultural and scientific organization in Iran, especially after emergence of Islam and the governance of the resuscitative rules of Islam and considering the existence of the valuable religious relics, the tourists have always been and will be blessed with the good temperament and compassion of the governors and hospitality and gratitude of the Iranians.

All these valuable religious relics require the authorities in charge to attempt more than before to promote the religious and pilgrimage tourism along with other types of tourism in the Islamic Iran so that not only the benefit of income is gained, but also the Muslim nations become closer more than ever.

Therefore, reviewing all aspects, we are hoping for the day that we reach to our share and right of the tourism industry, especially in the religious and pilgrimage tourism.

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