

Visitor diversification in pilgrimage destinations:

A national segmentation study through means-end theory in Nakahechi trail, Kumano Kodo

学位論文要旨

In contemporary tourism, pilgrimage sites have become important tourism resources, which are visited by an increasing number of domestic and international tourists. Their importance is recognized and promoted around the world by various tourism organizations, national and regional government bodies. In recent years, academic studies related to pilgrimage tourism has focused particularly on the visitors. Japan, an important Asian destination which is promoting inbound tourism in recent decades, is no exception to this trend. However, research on pilgrimage tourism particularly in the Asia-Pacific area is relatively scarce and this provides an opportunity for conducting research on the area that can have both academic and practical implications.

This present research aims to study the diversification in visitor profile in pilgrimage destination through national segmentation. The study is situated within the field of pilgrimage tourism. The research is based on four premises, which were drawn from the literature review on the subject of contemporary spirituality and pilgrimage tourism. Firstly, due to the changes in the role of religion in contemporary society, there is a diversification in both motivation and behavior in pilgrimage sites. Secondly, as sacred sites become international tourism destinations, its visitors have also become diversified. Visitors now may have little religious or cultural connection to the area. Thirdly, despite the importance of inbound tourism in pilgrimage sites, national segmentation and cross-national analysis have not been researched in the field of spirituality and tourism, with previous research mostly utilizing categorizations based on belief or general travel motivation. However, nationality is observed to be a key factor when performing tourist segmentation in different areas. Fourthly, the Asia-Pacific region holds an immense importance in the tourism industry and a great potential for pilgrimage tourism development, but it is an understudied area.

On this basis, the present research aims to demonstrate the diversification in contemporary pilgrimage related tourism regarding visitor's motivation and behavior, and contribute to the academic discussion on spiritual tourism through proving the importance and applicability of national segmentation of visitors in pilgrimage sites. Qualitative methodology was chosen, based on previous research carried out mostly with quantitative methodologies. In particular, as means-end has been effectively used for national segmentation and cross-national studies, it was deemed as a suitable methodology for the present study. Fieldwork was mainly carried out at the Takahara community, located in Tanabe city, Wakayama prefecture. Regarding the visitors, the two most numerous groups, Japanese (domestic) and Australian (international), were selected to be studied.

Through means-end, results showed differences and similarities among both sampled groups, showing the validity of national segmentation for the study of visitor diversification in pilgrimage tourism. In particular, in-site knowledge and support from stakeholders was found to be indispensable. The research results demonstrated important implications for both academia and tourism policies. Finally, research limitations are addressed.