

# Implications of Religious Tourism on the Romanian Tourist Market

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## Abstract

*At present, religious tourism has an important role on the tourism market because, both nationally and internationally, a significant number of people travel from their place of residence to a specific destination, based on religious reasons.*

*In order to enter the sphere of religious tourism, the purpose of a person's journey must be closely linked to faith and benefit from the tourist services that are found on the tourist market.*

*If a person travels to a certain destination without having to do with faith, but out of the desire to visit religious tourist attractions in order to know more, to complete their cultural capital, then it can't be religious tourism, but it is about cultural tourism or knowledge*

*The purpose of this paper is to identify religious tourism and its delimitation from other forms of tourism and also to establish the role that religious tourism has on a tourist market such as the tourist market of Romania.*

**Key words:** tourism, religious tourism, cultural tourism

**J.E.L. classification:** L80, L83

## 1. Introduction

In approaching the concept of religious tourism we must start from faith in God. If there were no faith, it could not be religious tourism, because there would be no religious motivation based on faith as a travel motivation. That is why people who travel with a motivation closely related to faith in God, to participate in pilgrimages or to visit holy places, monasteries, to pray, are part of the sphere of religious tourism.

But we must keep in mind that tourism is an economic activity that involves making a profit. In this case, what is sold is not faith but services that are closely related to the satisfaction of this travel motivation, namely: transport services, accommodation services, catering services.

Consequently, the religious tourist travels from and for faith by purchasing the tourist services necessary to satisfy the main motivation of the trip.

So, we can say that the subject of religious tourism is the religiotourist, ie the person who travels from home to a destination, for a religious motivation, closely related to faith in God.

## 2. Theoretical background

In tourism theory, religious tourism does not appear as a distinct form of tourism activity. Therefore, religious tourism can be identified starting from the motivation or purpose that underlies the journey of a person who has the status of a tourist. In other words, a person traveling to a religious destination can be included in either the sphere of religious tourism or the sphere of cultural tourism, depending on his motivation.

Depending on the tourist motivation, there are four types of tourist activities, namely: holiday and recreational tourism; cultural and educational tourism; health care tourism and business tourism (Glavan, V., 2010, p.145). We notice that these forms of tourism are based on certain travel motivations, such as cultural or knowledge motivations.

Another motivation for travel through all of recorded history is the religious pilgrimage. Pilgrimages are one of the oldest reasons for travel. Many inns and taverns developed to support

pilgrimage travelers (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009, p.288). The Middle East is the cradle of three of the world's most prominent religions – Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Literally millions of people trek to various sites in the Middle East as a form of pilgrimage (Cook et al, 2010, p.306).

In the "Dictionary of Tourist Terminology", Stancioiu considers that religious tourism is a form of tourism practiced for religious purposes to participate in various pilgrimages to visit churches, cathedrals, monasteries or participation in various religious events (Stancioiu, A. F., 1999, p.209).

Other authors (Abargaonitei, S., 2010, p.157) consider that religious tourism consists in the pilgrimages of believers to places of worship, considered holy by different religions. Religious buildings were erected in secluded places for meditation or prayer and became tourist attractions spread across all continents. The buildings with religious function that have entered the tourist circuit are specific to the cults they serve: temples, sanctuaries, cathedral churches, monasteries, mosques, synagogues, mausoleums, cemeteries (Dinu, M., 2002. p.197).

According to other authors, religious events, including pilgrimages, are part of cultural and artistic (Istrate, I., Bran, F., Rosu, A., G., 1996, p.14). Therefore, in order to delimit religious tourism from cultural tourism or knowledge tourism, we must also consider the concept of cultural tourism, because these two notions often intertwine.

Cultural tourism has a mainly formative, cognitive and aesthetic function fulfilled by traveling to destinations with historical and ancient and medieval art vestiges, religious objectives but also scientific, technical and economic (Glavan, V., 2010, p.142). For other authors, cultural tourism involves visiting a tourist attraction or attractive resources with the main function of training through the enrichment of knowledge. (Cocean, P., Dezsi, S., 2009, p.216).

Therefore, in order to highlight the function of knowledge that cultural tourism fulfills, we must take into account the way in which knowledge tourism is defined.

Knowledge tourism is a form of tourism that is not based on natural factors, but on the motivation to know, to enrich the cultural or professional horizon (Stănciulescu G., Lupu N., Tigu, G., Titan, E., Stancioiu, F., 2002, p.179).

### **3. Research methodology**

The present paper has as a method of scientific research the approach of the notion of religious tourism in the different theoretical concepts from the specialized literature and at the same time the analysis of the data using the existing statistical sources at the level of Romania.

### **4. Religious tourism in Romania**

Religious tourism is closely linked to people's faith and the possibilities of its manifestation by going to religious places. If the faith is forbidden then religious tourism can no longer manifest itself. Thus, in Romania before 1990 there could be no question of religious tourism because at that time it was the communist regime.

The existence of the Romanian Communist Party led to the prohibition of the faith and its forms of manifestation, led to the demolition of churches, to the reduction of religious freedom and expression, pursued the implementation of atheism and trust in man and not in God.

Communism aimed at destroying the orthodox faith of the Romanian people, preserved with holiness and passed down from generation to generation. Under these conditions, faith in God could not be freely expressed and it was not possible for people to travel to destinations where places of worship and monasteries were located and therefore it was not possible to talk about religious tourism officially.

Communism failed to destroy the faith of the Romanian people, but on the contrary, led to its strengthening, preservation and manifestation of the faith through religious customs and traditions passed down from generation to generation by the rural population, from the villages.

After 1990, with the establishment of democracy in Romania, the freedom of expression of faith appeared, which led to the journey of believers to participate in various pilgrimages and visit holy places and places of worship, from various internal or external destinations. Thus, religious tourism appeared for the first time, as a form of manifestation of tourist activity.

Table no. 1 Number of tourists in religious pilgrimage areas, organized by travel agencies inside Romania, in the period 2001-2005 (thousands of people)

Year	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005
Tourists	2	4	4	4	13

Sources: National Institute of Statistics, [www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro)

Analysis of the data from Table no. 1, indicates the following aspects:

- After the year 2000, the importance of religious tourism on the Romanian tourist market began to be seen and that is why it began to be statistically surprised by pilgrimage areas;
- The number of people who traveled through travel agencies in Romania, in areas of religious pilgrimage, increased in 2005 compared to 2001 by 6.5 times, which is a significant increase due to the emergence of travel agencies specializing in religious travel and pilgrimage.
- Here is a continuous and constant increase in the number of people who are based on this travel motivation and who resort to travel agencies to organize their religious trips.
- These data reflect only a part of the tourist phenomenon on the Romanian tourist market, because besides the tourism organized by travel agencies, there are many people who travel to the areas of Orthodox Christian religious pilgrimage in Romania either on their own or through Orthodox churches.

Thus, in the case of unorganized tourism (on their own), people who travel based on a religious motivation are accommodated in hotel units or tourist or agrotourism pensions in the area without registering the real reason for the trip.

People who travel to these areas of religious pilgrimages, through trips organized by Orthodox churches, are accommodated in monasteries which makes the phenomenon of religious tourism not be highlighted at its true value. It should be noted that if pilgrims are accommodated in monasteries, these accommodation and dining services are services that do not fall within the scope of the tourist market because they are not marketed for a profit. These services are offered in a Christian spirit, with pilgrims donating certain amounts of money to the respective monasteries.

Therefore, in reality the number of tourists who travel based on a religious motivation is very high, given the fact that after 1990 the population began to freely express their faith, which was positively reflected in the freedom of movement and travel to places of pilgrimage.

Table no. 2 Number of tourists in religious pilgrimage areas, organized by travel agencies inside Romania, during 2001-2005

Year	Total Tourists		From which:			
			Cultural Tourism		Religious Pilgrimage	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
2015	430632	100	12377	2,87	3847	0,89
2016	590500	100	25101	4,25	22885	3,87
2017	670428	100	5199	0,77	29052	4,33
2018	959030	100	56873	5,93	30163	3,14

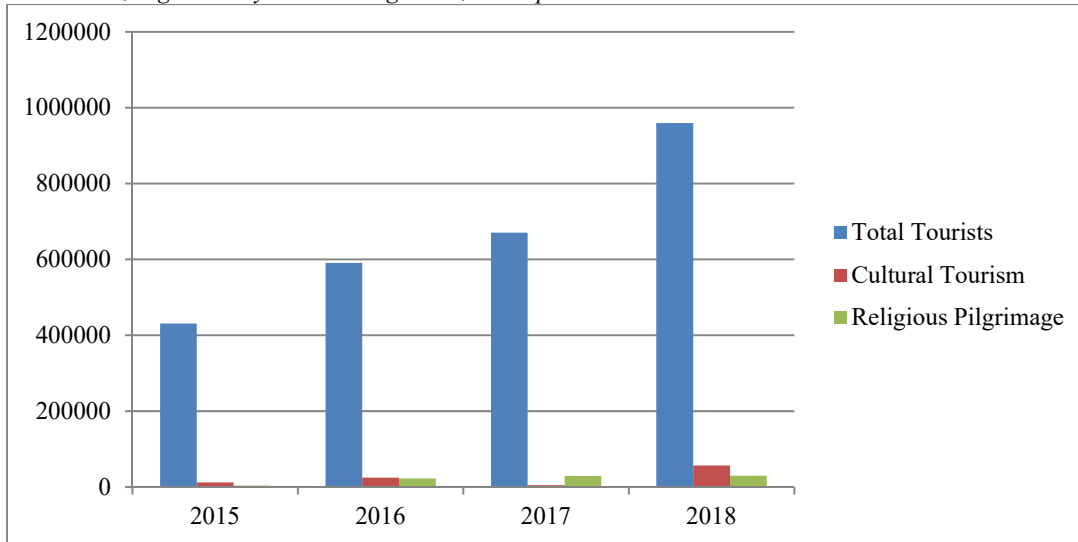
Sources: National Institute of Statistics, [www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro)

The analysis of the data from Table no. 2, regarding the number of tourists in the areas of religious pilgrimage, pilgrimages carried out through travel agencies in Romania, highlights the following aspects:

- The total number of tourists who traveled through travel agencies increased in 2018 compared to 2015 by 122.7%, ie 2.3 times which reflects the importance of the development of travel arrangements through travel agencies.
- There is an increase in the number of tourists based on a cultural tourist motivation 4.6 times in 2018 compared to 2015. This increase highlights the interest shown by tourists for cultural tourist trips.
- In the case of religious tourism, there is an upward evolution of the number of tourists who traveled through travel agencies, based on a motivation that takes the form of religious pilgrimages. Thus, their number increased from 3847 in 2015 to over 30,000, which is an increase of almost eight times.

This significant increase (see also Figure no. 1), highlights the importance of religious tourism on the Romanian tourist market, which determined the increase of the offer of religious tourist trips from the travel agencies but also the appearance of specialized tour operators in religious pilgrimages.

Figure no. 1. The total number of tourists, the number of tourists who have a cultural motivation and the number of tourists who have as motivation the religious pilgrimages, participants in the tourist actions in Romania, organized by the travel agencies, in the period 2015 – 2018



Source: Table no.1, National Institute of Statistics, [www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro)

Thus, representative for the religious tourism market in Romania is Basilica Travel, which is a tour operator of the Patriarchate of the Romanian Orthodox Church (<https://www.pelerinaj.ro/>)

The large number of churches and monasteries existing in Bucovina, contributes to the development of religious tourism, offering the possibility of organizing pilgrimages by creating tourist routes that highlight these places of worship and spirituality (Abargaonitei, S., 2010, p.158).

However, although there is an increase in the number of tourists with cultural and religious motivations, their share is small in the total number of tourists (see Figure no. 2):

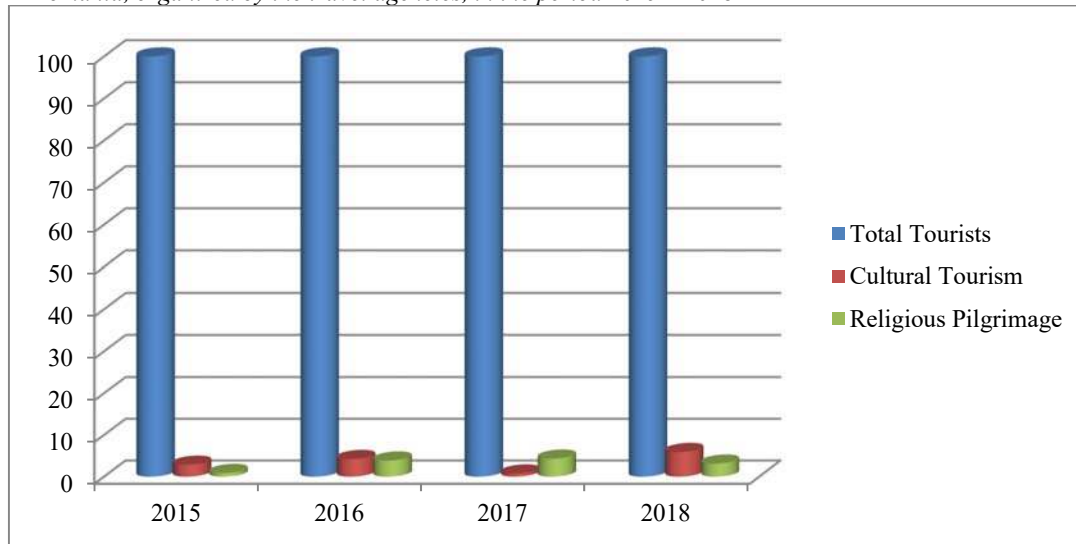
- Within cultural tourism, the share of tourists in the total number of tourists increased from 2.87 percent in 2015 to 5.93 in 2018;
- In the case of religious tourism, the share of tourists whose motivation is religious pilgrimages increased from 0.89% in 2015 to 3.14% in 2018, which highlights its share of the Romanian tourist market.

In the analysis of religious tourism and its importance on the Romanian tourist market we must keep in mind that the number of tourists is actually very high, because in the statistical data provided by the National Institute of Statistics there are no figures on accommodation from monasteries nor to the accommodation places in the tourist reception structures, which accommodate tourists with a religious motivation.

Therefore, as previously mentioned, in reality the market for religious tourism in Romania is very large because most people who travel either go on pilgrimages organized by Orthodox churches, in which case they are accommodated in monasteries or travel on their own to participate in religious pilgrimages or to visit monasteries and places of worship for religious purposes, closely linked to faith in God, in which case these people are accommodated in private boarding houses in the area.

These rural or agro-tourism tourist pensions, whether or not they are part of the tourist circuit, have emerged and developed around monasteries and places where religious pilgrimages take place, offering pilgrims the necessary tourist services, namely, accommodation, food and leisure opportunities, by organizing activities in one's own household

Figure no. 2. The total number of tourists, the number of tourists who have a cultural motivation and the number of tourists who have as motivation the religious pilgrimages, participants in the tourist actions in Romania, organized by the travel agencies, in the period 2015 – 2018



Sources: National Institute of Statistics, [www.insse.ro](http://www.insse.ro)

## 5. Conclusions

In Romania, religious tourism has a special importance on the tourism market because it contributes to satisfying the main travel motivations by providing specific services to the tourism sector related to accommodation and dining and it also generates jobs in these sectors that provide tourist services for religious tourism.

The religious tourism market does not have as object of commercialization the faith in God, but the provision of the complementary services that derive from this motivation, namely the transport, accommodation and food services.

We must keep in mind that in Romania the incidence of religious tourism on the tourist market has a high intensity, because it interferes with cultural tourism and rural tourism, by capitalizing on religious traditions and customs that generate significant flows of tourists during religious holidays..

At the same time, religious tourism leads to a good use of tourist services for transport, accommodation and catering, because it is not affected by seasonality as in the case of forms of tourism that are dependent on natural resources.

Religious tourism is manifested with a high intensity during religious holidays, but can be carried out constantly by organizing pilgrimages, both in the case of domestic tourism and in the case of international tourism.

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