

## Motivations for visiting sacred sites: the case of Senhora da Lapa Shrine

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## **Biographies**

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## **Abstract**

Religious tourism in Portugal is extremely rich and integrates a variety of religious festivities, sacred heritage, Jewish legacy, organized and well known routes and famous religious shrines throughout the country. The *Nossa Senhora da Lapa Shrine* can be distinguished, since it is one of the oldest sacred sites in Europe. According to Raj and Griffin (2015) in the current literature there is relatively limited research exploring the understanding and motivation of religious tourists' patterns of visitation to sacred sites. Thus, the current study intends to identify what motivates people to visit sacred sites and why visitors choose to visit the Lapa Shrine. For this purpose, a questionnaire was developed and applied to the visitors of the Lapa Shrine. A total of 250 responses were obtained. The results reveal that the most important factors when visiting a Shrine are the existent monuments, cleanliness, the existence of museums and exhibition rooms and the religious festivities that occur there.

## **Introduction**

Since the Portuguese are predominately Roman Catholic, religious tourism has a great potential to contribute to tourism development in several regions of the country. Religious tourism in Portugal is extremely rich and diverse and integrates several organized and well known routes (e.g. The Ways of Fátima, The Way of St. James and Faith Ways), a variety of religious

festivities, sacred heritage, Jewish legacy and famous religious shrines. Among them, the *Nossa Senhora da Lapa Shrine* should be distinguished since it is one of the oldest in Europe. In fact, during the Medieval Period, the Lapa Shrine and the Santiago Shrine (in Spain) were the most important pilgrimage sites on the Iberian Peninsula. However, over time the Lapa shrine has been forgotten and its development has been far below expectations. Within the authors' knowledge, there is no study that specifically investigates tourist motivations for visiting *Senhora da Lapa Shrine*. Therefore, the aim of this study is to identify what motivates people to visit sacred sites and why visitors choose to visit the Lapa Shrine.

## **Literature Review**

According Rinschede (1992) religious tourism is one of the oldest types of tourism and a worldwide phenomenon of religious history. It is exclusively or strongly motivated for religious reasons. For Collins-Kreiner (2010), pilgrimage is one of the most basic forms of population mobility known to human society, and its political, social, cultural and economic implications have always been, and continue to be, substantial.

Travel to sacred places was, and is, an inherent aspect of all cultures and today all over the world, more and more people are travelling to sacred sites (Blackwell, 2007). Religious site tourism is growing in popularity across Europe (Bond, Packer and Ballantyne, 2014).

According Nolan (1992) there are different types of religious attractions: (1) pilgrimage shrines with strong emphasis on religious devotions, but with few characteristics to attract secular tourists; (2) shrines that function as devotional centers and religious tourism attractions because of various combinations of historical, artistic, and scenic site characteristics; (3) places where religious festivals are the principal attractions.

Although a considerable number of tourists participate in pilgrimage Tourism and it represents a significant market segment, limited research has been conducted on tourists visiting pilgrimage sites (Bideci and Albayrak, 2016). In one study developed by Poria (2003) concerning the motivations of non-religious people who visit the Western Wall in Jerusalem, the most important motivations were identified as 'praying', 'sense of belonging', and 'curiosity'. On the other hand, religious visitors were more motivated by 'destination culture' and they felt more emotionally

involved. In another study from Bideci and Albayrak (2016) concerning the motivations of the Russian and German tourists visiting Saint Nicholas Church, the “religious characteristics of the church”, the “history of the Church” and “a place that has to be seen once in a lifetime” was identified as the most important motivation factors.

Religious tourism can include excursions to pilgrimage shrines, religious conferences, religious festivities, sacred heritage and religious routes, among other activities. According Bideci and Albayrak (2016), countries that contain religious buildings or sites have the potential to become popular pilgrimage tourism destinations. So it is very important to understand the motivations of the people who visit shrines and what characteristics they value most.

## **Methodology**

To identify what motivates people to visit sacred sites and why visitors choose to visit the Lapa Shrine, a questionnaire was developed and applied between October and November of 2014 to the visitors of the Lapa Shrine by convenience sampling method. The questionnaire was applied in Portuguese language and a total of 250 responses were obtained.

## **Results**

Regarding the sociodemographic characteristics, the sample indicates that all respondents are Portuguese. About 38% are female and 62% are male. Majority of the participants were 41 – 60 years old (48.8%) and between 19 – 40 years there are 32.4%. Twenty-nine percent have university level of education and 38% basic education. Regarding the frequency of their travels in the area, 34.8% visit the Lapa Shrine monthly and 32.8% visit once a year. For 8.4% it was their first visit to Lapa. Majority of the participants (79.2%) consider the Lapa Shrine a very attractive religious tourism site and 15.4% consider it quite attractive. Only 3.6% considers only attractive and 1.2% unattractive.

Table 1 shows the characteristics they value most in a Shrine. The results reveal that the most important factors when visiting a Shrine are the existent monuments (4.68), cleanliness (4.59), the existence of museums and exhibition rooms (5.58), the religious festivities that occur there

(4.50) and having restaurants in the surroundings (4.43). Factors that were less valued by the respondents were games rooms (3.39) and cafes and bars (3.89).

**Table 1.** Mean and standard deviation of the most valued characteristics in a Shrine

Items	Mean	Standard deviation
Monuments	4.68	.648
Cleanliness	4.59	.672
Existence of religious events	4.50	.684
Existence of cultural events	4.38	.861
Landscape surroundings	4.29	.816
Cafes and Bars	3.89	.988
Games rooms	3.39	1.424
Bakeries, pastry shops and tea rooms	4.18	.814
Hotels, rural tourism and local accommodation	4.40	.717
Sale of endogenous products	4.28	.756
Sale of agricultural products	4.14	.971
Souvenirs Shops	4.28	.773
Handicraft sale	4.27	.800
Restaurants	4.43	.737
Museums and exhibition rooms	4.58	.643

The majority of the respondents considers religious tourism very important to local development and could be a great opportunity to strengthen local economy and it can contribute to the development of other tourism products, such as Food Tourism, Cultural Tourism, Nature Tourism, among others.

## **Conclusion and Discussion**

This study has identified a number of factors that are considered important by pilgrims/tourists when visiting a Shrine. In order to be more competitive, host authorities should identify the motivations of tourists who visit pilgrimage sites. Perceiving the characteristics that visitors value most when visiting this places, authorities can adapt their strategies of tourism development. The conservation of the monuments and the cleaning of the pilgrimage sites should be a priority, as well as the promotion of religious events that may attract more tourists, especially foreign tourists. Senhora da Lapa Shrine, especially its surroundings, needs revitalization. This is crucial for tourists to maintain the motivation to visit this place. This shrine

is secular, rich in authenticity, full of stories and experiences but need to be more developed and promoted.

Like any other, this study had some limitation. For example, only Portuguese Pilgrims of the Lapa Shrine answered the questionnaire and the small sample size. For future research it can be interesting to conduct the study with other pilgrims and other nationalities.

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