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## Tourists, Pilgrims and Cultural Routes: The Case of the Kumano Kodo Route in Japan

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# Tourists, Pilgrims and Cultural Routes: The Case of the Kumano Kodo Route in Japan

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Cultural Routes are one of the most important tools for the promotion and the interpretation of cultural heritage. They are itineraries designed around a core theme and they include, *inter alia*, monuments of archaeological or historical interest, architectural monuments, industrial heritage buildings, religious heritage edifices, traditional settlements, spiritual places. In Japan, one of the most important routes, in Kii Mountain Range, is the Kumano Kodo religious-cultural route. The route reflects the merging of the ancient worship of nature – which is believed to be inhabited by Gods or spirits - Shintoism and Buddhism. The route, due to its great importance, was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2004 and was the second to be named after the Santiago de Compostela Route (1987).

Both religious-cultural routes have started a close collaborative partnership, in order to enhance visibility and attract visitors, by twining the cities of Santiago de Compostela and Tanabe and awarding a ‘Dual pilgrim status’. This article is an attempt to describe and explain the innovative ways of harnessing cultural, religious, and natural heritage in Kumano Kodo and the results to the local community.

Both routes are followed not only by pilgrims but also by tourists who want to experience nature, local traditions, and customs. The region in the Kii mountains is promoted as a destination for pilgrims, religious tourists and generally for tourists who wish to walk around in a unique natural environment, to enjoy the hot springs, to engage in sports, to visit neighbouring beaches, to attend festivals, to visit temples and cultural venues etc. All those who travel on the route, are still known as ‘pilgrims’. A question therefore arises whether the use of the term ‘Dual pilgrim’ is accurate, as those who follow the path cannot be faithful to both religions.

**Key words:** cultural routes, Kumano Kodo, Santiago de Compostela, pilgrimage, religious tourism

## Introduction

Mass tourism development, and more recently tourism overcrowding and overtourism (Peeters, *et al.*, 2018; UNWTO, 2018), not only influences the local environment, economy, social and business governance but more importantly the people, the heritage, the culture and the local traditions. This also leads to commodification (Shepherd, 2002), cultural degradation (Nash, 1981; Greenwood, 1989; Crick, 1989) and ‘incorrect’ interpretation of the cultural goods and the removal of their actual content (CoE, 1987).

With a view to the ‘correct’ interpretation of the content of cultural goods the Council of Europe (CoE) on October 23, 1987, launched the cultural routes programme as an invitation to travel and discover the rich, colourful, and diverse heritage of Europe. The Cultural Routes generate thematic cultural tourism flows in less known parts of the European continent, helping the development of economic and social stability (CoE, 1987; CoE, 2015a; 2015b; CoE, 2017). Different stakeholders, at national and international level are required to support the certification of a cultural (religious) route. The Council of Europe certifies cultural routes in Europe, through

**Figure 1: The Cathedral of St James is a Major Pilgrimage Site**

Source: Author

the European Institute of Cultural Routes (EICR), UNESCO inscribes cultural routes globally, while national governments characterise them at national level. According to UNESCO

*a heritage route is composed of tangible elements of which the cultural significance comes from exchanges and a multi-dimensional dialogue across countries or regions, and that illustrates the interaction of movement, along the route, in space and time* (UNESCO, 1994).

Majdoub (2010:30) defines cultural routes as

*both a geographical journey through a territory and therefore through plural local identities, but also a mental journey with representative values, meanings, expectations, experiences, and finally a tourism product.*

The first cultural route established by the Council of Europe, was the pilgrimage route to St. James of

Compostela (Fisher, 1992:76) which has been the reference point for the development of routes that were designed and implemented afterwards (Figure 1). The route of St. James (Santiago de Compostela) has been inscribed also as a World Heritage Monument by UNESCO (UNESCO, 1993; UNESCO, 2015).

Ten of the thematic routes of the Council of Europe are linked directly or indirectly to religion (e.g. a pilgrimage, the footsteps of a Saint, cemeteries, monasteries, etc.) therefore they can be defined as cultural-religious routes, although both the Council of Europe and UNESCO, define these routes mainly as cultural or historical and not directly as religious routes (Moira, 2019). The routes promote, beyond heritage, the inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue, through an open and diverse interpretation of Europe. The idea of cultural routes responds to a growing demand from tourists to explore new destinations of cultural heritage and contributes to the diversification of the tourism supply (Moira, 2019).

It should be noted that many of the existing cultural routes worldwide are not certified by the Council of Europe, and they are not specifically defined as religious-cultural routes but as cultural-historical routes. Moreover, many routes are not confined to the geographical boundaries of the European continent.

In Asia, travellers undertake pilgrimage in ‘The Footsteps of Buddha / Buddha Circuits’ (Maira *et al.*, 2009:478). This path crosses holy mountains and includes Buddhist temples, mountain caves, rivers (many of which are inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List), towns, villages (and cities such as Lumbini, Rajgir, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, Sravasti and Kushinagar<sup>1</sup>) and martial arts schools, associated with Lord Buddha’s life and preaching. (Maira *et al.*, 2009:478; International Finance Corporation, 2018; Geary, 2018:49; Maira, 2019).

In Japan, within dense forests in Kii Mountains there are three sacred sites – Yoshino and Omine, Kumano Sanzan, and Koyasan – which constitute part of the pilgrimage routes towards the ancient capitals of Japan, Nara, and Kyoto. The routes reflect the merging of the ancient worship of nature –which is believed to be inhabited by Gods or spirits - in both Shintoism<sup>2</sup> and Buddhism<sup>3</sup>. The routes were declared a UNESCO World Heritage site as ‘Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage Routes in the Kii Mountain Range’ in 2004 (UNESCO, 2004). The monuments, sites and the pilgrimage route ‘Kumano

- 1 It is recommended that a pilgrim should visit four main sites associated with Buddha’s life: the place of birth, the place of enlightenment, the place where the Buddha gave his first discourse, and the place where he died i.e. the cities Lumbini, Bodh Gaya, Sarnath, and Kushinagar.
- 2 Shinto is an autochthonous (indigenous) religion of Japan, dating back to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. The focal point of Shintoism is the worship of ‘kami’ which in Japanese means god, deity, or spirit. In Japanese Shinto means ‘The road (the way) of the Gods’. It is ranked in animistic religions. It was the state religion until World War II and along with Buddhism, which was spread into the country from Korea, is related to the Japanese way of thinking and Japanese culture. (Encyclopedia of Shinto, 2006).
- 3 Buddhism encompasses traditions, beliefs and spiritual practices largely based on original teachings attributed to the Buddha. Buddhism originated in ancient India between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, spreading through Asia. Most Buddhist traditions have as their target, the overcoming of suffering and the cycle of death and rebirth, mainly by the attainment of ‘Nirvana’ (disappearance / religious enlightenment), or by following the ways of Buddha.

Kodo<sup>4</sup>, form the cultural landscape of the Kii mountains, being a unique fusion between Shintoism and Buddhism (Guichard-Anguis, 2011) and illustrating the interchange and development of religious cultures in East Asia.

## Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism

Pilgrimage, human travel in search of the divine and the display of faith in it, is an important psychological need for every person regardless of race, gender, nationality, or religion. However, nowadays, considering the conditions under which travelling to a holy site takes place, some questions arise as to what degree those who travel there are real pilgrims, in the true sense of the term ‘Pilgrim’. Thus, the concept of ‘homo turisticus religiosus’ has been formed and prevails in contrast to that of the ‘pilgrim’ (Vukonić, 1996:68).

The distinction between the ‘pilgrim’ and the ‘religious / cultural tourist’ has been an issue under study for many years by the scientific community (Turner & Turner, 1978; Pearce, 1991; Rinschede, 1992; Smith, 1992; Jackowski & Smith 1992; Vukonic, 1996; Robichaud, 1999; Moίρα, 2009; Griffin & Raj, 2017; Maira, 2019).

According to Collins-Kreiner (2010:446)

*...the differences between these two groups are fading as a lot of similarities start to emerge.*

[Finally, she concludes] *...pilgrims cannot be differentiated from tourists, both kinds may be motivated to undergo an experience which will add more meaning to their lives.*

The reason for this is that depending on the space (religious or secular) in which individuals circulate, their needs, their desires and their behaviours are shaped while travelling. In the era of mass tourism and travel many travellers from different religions and doctrines very often visit temples, churches, other sacred places and buildings, etc, not only to express their religious feelings (pilgrims) but out of curiosity, interest to get to know the other culture-religion, the need to communicate, or seeking fitness and health etc. Vast numbers of people who visit the Vatican, Jerusalem, the cave of Apocalypse on the island of Patmos (Greece), Varanasi (India) and other religious / spiritual sites, are not faithful to the specific religion / doctrine linked to the site. On the contrary, many of them are alienated from the religious

- 4 The term ‘Kumano’ refers to the network of three sacred sites -Yoshino and Omine, Kumano Sanzan, and Koyasan and the term ‘Kodo’ means ‘old ways’.

element. For them, the main motive to visit a religious site is cultural-religious (Moira, 2009; Moira, 2019; Oficina de Acogida al Peregrino Catedral de Santiago, 2019).

Under this assumption, although both heritage sites, the Camino de Santiago and Kumano Kodo routes, have traditionally been religious pilgrimage, nowadays many people choose to follow these routes for different reasons. Both routes are followed not only by pilgrims but also by people who want to experience nature, local traditions, and customs. Many 'pilgrims' walk the routes for fitness and for better physical health. Others choose to walk for the mental benefits of unplugging from their daily lives, allowing them time for peace and self-development. For many of them, it's a chance to clear their minds and feel a connection with nature. All those who travel on the routes for religious reasons, are still known as 'pilgrims' (Follow the Camino, 2020).

According to Lois-González and Santos (2015) the success of Santiago de Compostela route is based on the fact that the new tourist mixes pilgrimage motivations with different tourist motivations, such as the search for various landscapes and places, the need to mentally

relax and, to escape from the pressures of everyday life. According to Antunes, Amaro and Henriques (2017) pilgrims' motivations to undertake the Camino de Santiago can vary from religious, to spiritual and cultural.

The same motivations are also obvious in Kii mountain routes where the visitors (pilgrims / religious tourists / hikers etc) enjoy the pilgrimage but also the spirituality of the place, the hiking, the thermal baths etc. (Jimura, 2016). In this aspect, both routes' regeneration as tourist destinations is highly coherent with the modern way of living.

## The Study

The Kumano Kodo route has not been studied to the same extent as the Camino de Santiago de Compostela. Thus, the research in this paper was carried out to:

- a) explore the ways in which the Kumano Kodo pilgrim routes are utilised,
- b) investigate the stakeholders involved in this process and their relationships, and;
- c) study the operation and management of the routes

**Figure 2: Sanjūdō pagoda and Nachi falls at Kumano Nachi Taisha**



Source: K. Mishina, Pixabay at Kumano

Map 1: The Kumano Kodo cultural-religious routes



Source: Japan Travel Adventures (2020)

The study has been mainly conducted through secondary research. The route was studied through the (limited) existing scientific papers, texts, official websites, and UNESCO’s documents. One crucial limitation is that many references are written in the Japanese language, therefore there are out of a westerner’s reach.

It is worth noting that the search of the phrase ‘Kumano Kodo’ on the internet (as accessed in Google scholar on 30/12/2020) gave only 363 results; the phrase ‘Kii mountain’ gave 14,400 and the phrase ‘Santiago de Compostela’ gave 440,000 results.

## The Kumano Kodo Pilgrimage Route, Japan

### *Sacred sites and pilgrimage routes in the Kii Mountain Range*

The Kii Mountain Range is characterised by a unique natural environment with its abundance of water, streams, rivers, and waterfalls (Figure 2). Each of the three sites (Yoshino and Omine, Kumano Sanzan, Koyasan) contains shrines and temples which are dated back to the 9<sup>th</sup> century. The area contains many different routes

(e.g. the mountain route, the imperial route, the coastal route, and the eastern route - see Map 1). The Kumano Sanzan is considered as paradise (heaven on earth) and was the favoured pilgrimage route for emperors and aristocrats, seeking treatment for illness and asking for more wealth, dating back in the 10<sup>th</sup> century (Moerman, 1997). The whole area of Kumano was characterised as ‘another world’ and was considered mythical in Japanese cosmology (Yasuda, 2010:368).

The monuments and sites that form the cultural landscape of the Kii’s Mountains, illustrate the interchange and development of religious cultures in East Asia (UNESCO, 2004). They are a testimony of more than 1,000 years of Japanese religious heritage and clearly document the tradition of sacred mountains. As the worship of nature continues until today and the Kii Mountains constitute part of the living culture of Japan, the whole area is a place of pilgrimage as well as a major tourist’s attraction and a hiking spot in a wonderful natural environment. Pilgrims that undertake the Kumano Kodo quite often participate and get involved in various activities, rituals, and the so-called ways of going. One particular ritual is visiting and experiencing the ‘Onsens’ (hot springs), that

are deeply rooted in Japanese culture. Yunomine Onsen is one of the most famous hot springs in Japan and is part of Kumano Kodo. It is extremely popular among pilgrims who perform hot water purification rituals in the mineral waters, after a long day of walking (Tanabe City Kumano Kodo Bureau, 2020a). There are several hot springs with healing qualities in the area. So, nowadays, all visitors are encouraged to visit and enjoy an 'Onsen'. The 'pilgrimage' starts from the city of Kyoto and exceeds 600 km. The focus of the pilgrimage of Kumano is three great sanctuaries the Kumano Hongu Taisha, the Kumano Hayatama Taisha, and the Kumano Nachi Taisha. Today the site is visited by more than 15 million people annually (pilgrims and tourists), and is considered part of the historical, cultural, and spiritual heritage of the area.

Kumano Kodo pilgrimage started out as a sacred route or a combination of routes for the followers of Buddhism. Krayniy (2019) argues that

*... the ideology of Buddhism is closely linked to nature itself, and this route in the Kii Mountains in Japan symbolized unity and closeness to nature.*

The route truly reflects the Buddhist philosophy, because pilgrims are surrounded by mountains, trees, springs, waterfalls, and Buddhist shrines. Another part of the religious / spiritual context of this pilgrimage was the difficulty associated with completing it. Climbing, hiking and walking through often dangerous mountain terrains was and is still considered a religious and spiritual experience (Krayniy, 2019).

### ***The twinning of two cultural routes***

During the 1930s, the Kumano suffered from population decline. The idea was to revitalise the area by tourism expansion and because the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage routes include different natural and cultural resources, they could be used to attract tourists. In 1978, the Japanese Agency for Cultural Affairs started restoration works in different sections of the route. Finally, after many efforts, the Kumano Kodo pilgrimage routes, shrines, paths and hot springs were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site as part of the 'Sacred Sites and Pilgrimage'. This designation changed the local community perception of their heritage, encouraged resident support (Spencer & Nsiah, 2013) and provided new opportunities to strengthen the tourism industry. The area also includes

other tourism attractions, with the hot springs being one of the main ones, along with local gastronomy, health tourism (thermal baths) and cultural resources (Tanabe Commerce and Industry Council, 2009; Tanabe City, 2013).

In 2005 the Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau was established as a regional Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) with the objective to promote sustainable tourism development (Progano, 2018). The Bureau aims at attracting low-impact visitors, (hikers, climbers, nature lovers, and generally individuals and small-group travellers) and developing local tourism activity through preservation and sustainable development. Part of the policy of the Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau, is to increase the number of inbound western tourists by promoting the route as a World Heritage Site (Progano, 2018:157).

Since only two pilgrimage routes have been nominated globally as World Heritage Sites, (the Kumano Kodo and the Santiago de Compostela), the governments of Japan and Spain together with the local prefectures (Santiago de Compostela and Tanabe), in order to enhance the 'visibility', to attract Western tourists and to achieve sustainable tourism development, have started a close collaborative partnership<sup>5</sup>. They started to create bonds by fostering friendship and understanding among the two cities by twinning them (sister cities) and awarding the 'Dual Pilgrim' status.

On May 13th, 2014 in Santiago de Compostela City, the two cities (Tanabe and Santiago de Compostela) signed a historic 'Tourism Partnership Cities' agreement, further strengthening bonds between them. The agreement particularly emphasised the need for the exchange of knowledge with a view to reducing the environmental ramifications, and the realisation of the route of pilgrims and tourists in an environmentally friendly way (Tourism Cities Partnership Agreement, 2014). According to the agreement, if someone successfully follows both routes, they receive a certificate of 'dual pilgrim' (Dual Pilgrim Certificate). The certificate is granted if a predefined number of kilometres on each route has been made.

The result of the twinning seems to be a turn towards what is called 'experiential' tourism (Holbrook,

<sup>5</sup> The cultural exchange between the two routes was initiated in 1988, but the exchange was formalized in 2014, during celebrations of the 10th anniversary of Japanese nomination.

2000; Pine & Gilmore, 1999; Schmitt, 1999; Meacci & Liberatore, 2018). Experiential tourism engages travellers with the essence of a place and its people. This form of tourism is based on senses, emotions, and the concept of participation in local activities. Of course, the most significant part of this process is learning how to appreciate the local traditions and cultures (Council of Europe, 2015b) and how to communicate with nature. Based on their cultural identity, knowledge and special interests, an increasing number of visitors from all the continents (pilgrims and tourists) seek to make the most of their travel by combining sightseeing, physical or/and spiritual activities, hiking, climbing, local gastronomy, etc.

For practical reasons, all these who travel on the two routes are known as ‘pilgrims’ (Follow the Camino, 2020; Krayniy, 2019). A question therefore arises whether the use of the term ‘Dual pilgrim’ is accurate, as those who follow the path cannot be faithful to both religions, and perhaps many are faithful to neither.

### *The logo of the pilgrimage*

The Dual Pilgrim logo is a combination of a shell and a crow with three legs (Figure 3). The three-legged crow, which is found as a symbol in many traditional legends from Central Asia, Eastern Asia, Egypt and North Africa, is considered to symbolise the sun in Japan. In ancient China and Korea, the number ‘3’ symbolises the sun and thus, this crow is a symbol of rebirth and renewal. Its form appears both in coins found in Lycia and Pamphylia, and

**Figure 3: The Symbols of the routes of Santiago de Compostela and Kumano Kodo**



Source: UNESCO (2020)

in objects which were found in excavations in the region of the river Yang Tse dating back to 5.000 B.C. There are several variations of the depiction of the bird but the best known is the so-called ‘Golden Crow’ (Heritage of Japan, 2011).

In Japan this is known as ‘Yatagarasu’, or Crow-deity and it is a symbol of guidance. It is believed that the crow was sent from the heavens, as a guide to the first emperor of Japan, when he tried to attack the city of Naniwa (modern Osaka). Meeting strong resistance, he had to move south towards Kumano. The Crow-Yatagarasu helped him to find his way through the inhospitable mountains towards Kumano. In earlier times, it was considered that it was a messenger of the Gods or an incarnation of the Sun (JNTO, 2018). The colours of the emblem are shades of orange, often seen in sunrises and sunsets.

### *The certification of the route*

Throughout the pilgrimage route there are small wooden kiosks where the pilgrim can seal the pilgrim’s passport. The pilgrim must follow one of the four routes - Imperial Route, Mountain Route, Coastal Route, or the Eastern Route (Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau, 2018a) and stamp their pilgrim passport on completion of the route, as Certification of the route. The certificate is written on a special paper which is produced locally with watermarks of the word ‘The Way’ (in the Japanese language) and signed by the high priest of the sanctuary. If the pilgrim / tourist has completed both pilgrimages ‘Kumano Kodo’ and ‘the Way of St James’, they receive the certificate of ‘Dual Pilgrim’. In Japan, the ‘dual pilgrim’ has the honour to attend a short ceremony in the prayer hall of the great Sanctum of Kumano Hongu Taisha and to strike the sacred drum (Taiko drum). In this way, the traveller expresses their feelings, their emotion, and thoughts that their body and spirit have experienced during the spiritual journey. Since 2015 when the twinning of the two pilgrimage routes was signed, more than 300 visitors have completed both routes (Metropolis, 2016).

### *Management of the routes*

The involvement of local communities in the management and conservation of heritage is vital (Nicholas, Thapa and Ko, 2009; Timothy, 2011; Jimura, 2016). While developing a cultural route, various factors, tangible, intangible resources and different agencies and bodies should necessarily be taken into consideration. For



**Map 2: The pilgrimages Santiago de Compostela in Spain and Kumano Kodo in Japan**

Source: Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau, 2018b; Towle, 2015

the management, the promotion and preservation of the unique spiritual civilisation of the Far East and the outermost extremity of Europe, the tour operators and the local governments of the two routes (Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau and Santiago de Compostela) collaborate and undertake common actions.

The symbols, sunrise for Asia and sunset for Western Europe (Map 2), are being used (Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau, 2018a & b; *Spiritual Pilgrimages*, 2018). In the context of this cooperation, in 2008 the Wakayama region in Japan and the province of Galicia signed a protocol to jointly promote the two destinations and to exchange know-how and experience with a view to the sustainable development of tourism which would respect the cultural heritage of the two countries.

In Japan, this cooperation and careful management yielded profits from tourism - in 2014-2015 this was worth over \$1.2 million. It is worth mentioning that in the region an innovative tourism management system was implemented, which is based on the community. It was the first time in Japan for a community to start their own travel agency and part of this was the necessary creation of a reservation system for both domestic and international travellers. According to Wong (2015a):

*... the members of the Community are actively involved in the entire process of tourism development' from the creation of a tourist vision, the implementation reservation systems, to the creation of a brand name, and a marketing and sales plan.*

In the wider region of Tanabe with population of 80,000 inhabitants, many small family businesses operate which do not having the means to implement marketing policies, nor having the knowledge of foreign languages. As a result, international visitors find difficulty in approaching the area or making reservations. Thus, the tourism office in Tanabe was certified as a travel agent, in order to operate as mediator between travellers and businesses. This action in addition to the huge bureaucracy, and exertion of pressures at a government level, demanded a large amount of financing and lobbying (Wong, 2015b).

However, the result was truly innovative. For the first time, a Community in Japan started its own travel agency and operated its own reservation system to promote its products and services, both to local and international travellers. The locals are now managing their own affairs, while putting emphasis on responsible tourism, and thus, choosing to attract smaller numbers of high quality

visitors, compared to the large number of low value visitors. In this effort they implement tourism actions which recognise and respect the cultural heritage of the Community (Wong, 2015a; Kato and Prozano, 2017).

The region is promoted as a destination for pilgrims, religious tourists and generally for tourists who wish to walk around in a unique natural environment, to enjoy the hot springs in the area, to engage in sports such as rafting and kayaking, to visit neighbouring beaches, to attend festivals, to visit temples and cultural venues etc.

Because visitors are not only pilgrims but also tourists, consequently they have different behaviours and thus, conservation problems can appear due to a lack of awareness of the Kii routes as World Heritage Sites. This disrespecting of the spirituality of the place leads to:

*... a dearth of a sense of inspiration towards the religious and sacred site amongst some local people and tourists (Jimura, 2016: 391).*

Thus, in their presentation of the route, the Tourist Office issues specific directives. In particular (Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau, 2018a) it is indicated to visitors to respect and preserve the World Heritage status of the region, to respect the religious beliefs of worshippers / religious people, to keep the route clean, to respect and protect the natural environment, to follow the marked trails, to be careful with fires and to be suitably equipped for the journey.

The Tourist Office encourages a wide range of educational and informative programs, as well as a system for the participation of locals that generates a sense of ownership, pride, responsibility, and connection for all the members of the community (Kato & Ricardo, 2017). Also, Kumano therapists 'Kuaoruto' provide various kinds of activities beneficial to health, e.g. geo-therapy, walking, hot springs, herbal medicine, and organic food. The therapists are trained to facilitate these activities, accompany participants during walks, and provide health advice on general lifestyle, diet, and daily routines (Kato & Prozano, 2017).

Finally, in the area there are 'Kataribe' guides, meaning storytellers or 'keepers of tradition', mythology, and legend. These are elders, who are trained as tourist guides and who 'interpret' the local culture and local places (Smith, 1992; McKean, 1976). Finally, the office

implements, through hot springs, walking tours, and other environmentally friendly activities, both health tourism and spiritual tourism (Kato and Prozano, 2017).

Today, many regional authorities from across Japan visit Tanabe city annually to learn about this innovative, grassroots, new model of community-based destination management (Tanabe city Kumano Kodo Bureau, 2020b).

### *Accommodation*

Visitors to the area have the option to choose among different types of accommodation. Staying at traditional accommodation is promoted particularly as a way of acquaintance with Japanese tradition, the Japanese way of life and culture. Staying at a Japanese style accommodation has different rules from a western style hotel, but guests enjoy the experience of acquaintance with Japanese culture and tradition (Tanabe City Kumano Tourism Bureau, 2018c). In this way, dining or sleeping, in traditional public or private shelter, with other visitors (pilgrims or tourists), from different religions and disciplines and having time to talk and make new friends, while sharing experiences with local people, provides an opportunity to break away from the routine of modern life (Wirth, 1938).

These accommodations are:

\**Ryokan*: These are traditional Japanese Inns, dating back to the 8th century (Figure 4). The first Inn of this type was constructed in 705 BC. These types of accommodation serve travellers along national roads in Japan. Today, their form varies (from traditional wooden to more contemporary style). Most rooms in a Ryokan are in a Japanese style with tatami<sup>6</sup> mats, sliding doors and futons<sup>7</sup> for sleeping. Some Ryokan hotels also have rooms with beds. These accommodations have typical Japanese rooms, usually have shared baths and serve meals.

\**Minshuku*: The Minshuku are family run guesthouses in rural and mountainous areas. The distinction between Minshuku and some smaller Ryokans is often unclear. Most Minshuku are small with just a few rooms in Japanese style (Japan-guide.com, 2018). Staying at a Minshuku a traveller gets the

6 The tatami are mats which cover the floor of the Japanese house. Often these rooms called tatami rooms.

7 The futon (Futon) is a Japanese type of mattress, which is rolled or folded and stored easily.

Figure 4: A Typical Japanese Ryokan



Source: Sharon Ang, Pixabay at Ryokan

chance to meet the locals and familiarise themselves with the Japanese culture. The restrooms are usually shared. Served traditional meals are prepared using local products.

\**Kakuminshukusha*: The kakuminshukusha are popular accommodations, which are government, or privately run, with typical Japanese style.

\**Pension*: A pension is an accommodation like the Minshuku, but the facilities and the beds are western style and they often offer western style meals.

\**Skukubo*: The skukubo are traditional Buddhist monastic accommodations. The visitor can enjoy vegetarian meals, while participating in morning prayers.

\**Guesthouses and B&B*: Guesthouses and B&B are newer types of accommodation in Japan. They usually cost less and do not offer meals. The rooms may be Japanese or western style.

\**Accommodation at local house (Home stay)*: Homestays are chances to get close to the everyday

lifestyle of the community. A visitor can stay in / at a family's home, have shared food and experience the Japanese culture. Some homestays offer unique opportunities e.g. helping with the family farm.

\**Campgrounds and bungalows*: This type of facilities is extremely popular and can be found throughout the route. They are an affordable choice for the traveller.

### *Promotion*

After consultations with the Community a website was created, which was translated into six languages (Japanese, Chinese, Korean, English, French and Spanish), as well as an online booking platform in English and Japanese. These actions have led to the promotion of the region and an increase in the influx of money into the local community, previously received by foreign tour operators.

For the promotion of the area several websites operate, such as the National Tourism Organization of Japan at <https://www.jnto.go.jp>. More informative is on the website of the Tourist Office of Kumano <http://www>.

[tb-kumano.jp/en/world-heritage/dual-pilgrim/#kumano-kodo-stamps](http://tb-kumano.jp/en/world-heritage/dual-pilgrim/#kumano-kodo-stamps) which is presented in six languages and provides all the necessary information for pilgrims and tourists. There are also many websites by state and private entities, blogs and websites of people who followed the route, such as:

Wakayama World Heritage Centre (<http://http://www.sekaiisan-wakayama.jp/english/>),

The online guide *Inside Kyoto* (<http://www.sekaiisan-wakayama.jp/english/>) etc.

The prefecture of Nara promotes tourism locally through walking (<http://www.pref.nara.jp/miryoku/aruku/>).

The prefecture of Mie, on the east part of the Kii peninsula, promotes walking along the Kumano pilgrimage, as an eco-tourism experience. The eco-tourism programme is centrally fostered by the Japanese Ministry of Environment and locally by the 'Nanki Tour Design Centre' (<http://homepage3.nifty.com/kinan-tdc/>), in Kumano city.

A special website was created (named '*Spiritual Pilgrimages*'), to highlight the 'Dual pilgrimage' (Spiritual Pilgrimages, 2018). The 'Dual Pilgrim' page, honours and celebrates the 'pilgrims' who have walked both pilgrimage routes (<https://dual-pilgrim.spiritual-pilgrimages.com/>).

Finally, due to the characteristic of this environment, the prefecture bureau of local economic revival (<http://www.kumano-de-kenko.com/>) highlights a campaign called 'The therapy of Kumano' (Guichard-Anguis, 2011).

In 2012, Tanabe City was named as a finalist by the World Travel & Tourism Council, for a 'Tourism for Tomorrow Award' for innovation in travel and tourism. After the nomination, many delegations from around Japan started to visit the area, to study the business model, as a good case study for innovative tourism. In 2015, the Tourist Office of Tanabe was listed as finalist by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) for a World Responsible Tourism Award.

## Discussion

Nowadays many people choose to follow traditional religious routes not only for pilgrimage but also to experience nature, local traditions, and customs, for fitness, for better physical and mental health. By 2021, over 45 cultural routes have been established by the Council of Europe, that invite people to travel and to discover the rich and diverse heritage of Europe by bringing together people and places. One of these, The Way of St. James in Spain has also been registered as UNESCO World Heritage, as has another major pilgrimage route, the Kumano Kodo in Japan.

The tourist 'visibility' given by the latter site's inscription as an important element of World Heritage, is an opportunity for the local communities to attract higher quality tourists and to achieve sustainable tourism development. As only two pilgrimage routes have been nominated globally as World Heritage Sites, the governments of Japan and Spain together with the local prefectures (Santiago de Compostela and Tanabe), have started a close collaborative partnership. The partnership gave Tanabe city the opportunity to revitalise the local economy and attract national and international visitors. It also changed the community's perception of the pilgrimage routes and created a new model of community-based destination stewardship. It is particularly important that the local communities can manage their own affairs, placing emphasis on responsible and sustainable tourism. Also, the action of twinning and connecting two different religious-cultural routes, from totally different religious-spiritual disciplines (Catholics with Sintoists and Buddhists) and different geographic regions of the world, is an innovative act for the promotion of sustainable tourism.

However, a contradiction concerning the terminology of 'Dual pilgrim' arises: It is not possible for someone to be a believer / pilgrim for both religions / disciplines. More rationally the term 'Dual pilgrim' could be replaced by the term 'Religious-cultural tourist'; therefore the 'Dual religious tourist certificate' could be issued. In this way the promotion of the routes and the attraction of special interest tourists with different motives, e.g. walking, hiking, health, cultural reasons, etc. and not only 'pilgrims' would be more appropriately accommodated.

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