

# SACRED JOURNEYS IN A TURBULENT ERA: RELIGIOUS TOURISM'S TRANSFORMATION AND THE QUEST FOR AUTHENTICITY (2001- 2025)

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## ABSTRACT

This comprehensive review examines the dynamic evolution of religious tourism during the first quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2001-2025), a period marked by significant growth, unprecedented challenges, and transformative adaptations. Drawing on a multidisciplinary approach, the study analyzes religious tourism through economic, marketing, socio-cultural, governance, and sustainability lenses, utilizing a robust review of secondary literature. The pre-COVID-19 era witnessed substantial expansion and diversification of religious travel, characterized by evolving motivations and economic impact. The COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2022) served as a critical turning point, profoundly disrupting traditional practices while catalyzing rapid innovation, including the widespread adoption of virtual pilgrimages and hybrid experiences. The post-pandemic landscape (2023-2025) reveals a heightened demand for authentic, meaningful, and spiritual journeys, coupled with an intensified focus on sustainability and responsible management. Key findings underscore the inherent tension between the sacred and the commercial, and the imperative to balance economic development with cultural heritage preservation and environmental stewardship. The review highlights the resilience of religious tourism, its capacity for technological innovation, and the complex interplay among diverse stakeholder interests. This article offers critical insights for academics, practitioners, and policymakers navigating the intricate future of sacred journeys, emphasizing the need for balanced strategies that uphold authenticity, promote sustainability, and adapt to changing global dynamics.

**Keywords:** Religious Tourism, Pilgrimage, COVID-19 Pandemic, Authenticity, Sustainability

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