SPIRITUAL TOURISM:
RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY IN
CONTEMPORARY TRAVEL

By
ALEX NORMAN
(SID:0122723)

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This subject had its roots in my own travels through Asia, Western Europe, and North America, during which I encountered a number of travellers, whose names I have forgotten, but who left the lasting impression that there were tourists travelling in search of forms of spiritual and religious practice.

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INTRODUCTION

Tourism and pilgrimage have been said to be closely related\(^1\). However, the relationship between tourists and the religions and religious contexts they visit has been neglected. Why tourists travel to places of religious significance and how they conceive of their travels are important questions to both the study of tourism and of religion. This thesis is particularly concerned with those tourists who engage in religious practice or have some form of spiritual experience in a religious context. These I am tentatively calling ‘spiritual tourists’. What the study of their experiences can yield is information on the nature of touristic experiences and the position of religion within society. These patterns are conspicuously played out in the context of travel writing, where stories of personal transformation and self discovery can often seem the standard.

Whether such tourists’ experiences and behaviours are like pilgrim experiences is a relevant starting point, for historically the interaction of religion and travel has revolved around this point. However, there are further questions that spiritual tourists pose, for their particular modes of travel are somewhat unique. One of the key distinguishing factors of pilgrimage is that it is formed out of the desire for some form of change and the belief that this can be found at the pilgrimage site\(^2\). Tourism, by contrast, occupies a functionally and socially different position. At its simplest, we may think of tourism as ‘sightseeing’. Where pilgrimage can appear to be explicitly religious, tourism can appear to be explicitly secular. Therefore, pilgrimage and tourism, despite operating on different planes of meaning, can have some significant areas of overlap. We can see that there may be tourists having similar experiences to pilgrims, and pilgrims who really may be indistinguishable from tourists. It is the former that I am concerned with. Spiritual tourists are for the most part regular tourists. However, what distinguishes them is their seeking out of religious settings.

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and experiences. They differ from pilgrims in that they are not necessarily affiliated with one religion (or at least not with the one(s) at the locations they journey to as tourists), and that they are not necessarily there for the same reasons as pilgrims.

This thesis will examine the accounts of spiritual tourists as found in travel writing and print media, and will look at travel guide-books and websites that are relevant. However, before beginning such a complex analysis, methodological and theoretical foundations must be established. The prominent theories relating to both pilgrimage and tourism will be examined to establish a framework within which spiritual tourists may be examined. In addition to this, theories concerning modernity and postmodernity, and the processes of secularisation will be explored, for it is posited that the phenomena of spiritual tourism is in many ways an outgrowth of these cultural currents. With these topics as theoretical foundations, I will look into the functions and roles such tourism plays, and speculate on how spiritual tourism is portrayed and marketed to future travellers.

For the scholar attempting to study spiritual tourists there is, as with its more general headings pilgrimage and tourism, a critical lack of multi-disciplinary theory. It is a common theme in the introductions of academic literature on pilgrimage to mourn the lack of theoretical publications. Fortunately, this is not the case in travel writing. One need only walk into any book store to see many works published by tourists on their previous experiences. Indeed, it might be said that there is a miniature industry forming to cater for the spiritual tourist that publishes travelogues, autobiographies, guidebooks, and other paraphernalia for their consumption. However, my research to date has found very little in the way of even simple ethnographic-type descriptions of this type of tourist, and little of tourists in general. Nevertheless, it is from these types of primary resources that I wish mainly to draw on.

Within these sources we find fascinating interactions between ideas of pilgrimage, rites of passage, sightseeing, cultural voyeurism, secularism, religiosity, identity, seekership, and the search for meaning to name but a few broad categories. Therein we can find answers to many of our questions about spiritual tourists, such as who they are, and where the motivation to do such journeys comes from. It also reveals
what types of spiritual explorations they do embark upon, and what meanings they derive from their experiences. What attracts them, and how locations and/or activities (religious or otherwise) are marketed to them, and whether the religious context legitimises certain feelings that are otherwise ambivalent, are also brought to light. However, the central questions that I wish to answer in this thesis revolve around the fact that some tourists are travelling to experience religion or spirituality. Whether it is the case that these people are seeking religious ‘truths’, or whether spiritual tourism is something quite different will be examined. This concerns the notion that holidays are becoming ‘holy-days’ in an ironic twist of the influences of secularisation and postmodernity. Perhaps it is the case that taking spiritual journeys is, for some, filling the dual role of religion and relaxation. In either case I intend to argue that the sub-type of spiritual tourist is valid and useful in the study of religion in the world today. It may help us to understand better the shifting trends in popular religiosity.
CHAPTER 1: CONCEPTS AND QUESTIONS

Summary of Argument

There is something intrinsically difficult about studying transitory phenomena like travel and tourism. Perhaps it is the temporary nature of it, and the inherent difficulties in observation and acquiring subject based accounts. Yet, a significant problem with the study of tourism is that it defies compartmentalised analysis. Therefore, tourism requires a multidisciplinary approach to research methods. Further, whilst such difficulties do exist, there is an immense amount of information from and for travellers to be found in the print, broadcast, and internet medias. Given this, the aim of the present chapter is threefold. Firstly, I wish to examine the theories and methodologies that have sought to answer two questions that I see as important to the study of tourism; why do people travel? And, within the wider cultural context, what processes have been occurring to motivate people to travel for these reasons? These include both tourism and pilgrimage theories, and theories related to modernity and secularisation. Secondly, I will draw these theories together to form an interpretive framework and propose a new sub-type of tourism that occurs within the context of religion and spirituality. Finally I will mark out the limits and restrictions of research, and establish the context within which this paper enquires. This will lead the way for the subsequent two chapters and provide insight into my lines of reasoning.

Pilgrimage and Tourism Theory: Contrasts and Problems

It seems that whenever tourism and touristic experience is talked about, the word and notion of pilgrimage is raised. The question of whether pilgrimage and tourism are discrete social phenomena, different types of the same phenomenon, or indeed the same thing under different names, is a contentious one. Both terms are attempts to account for forms of travel. Yet in common usage they seem to describe quite different activities. However, when scrutinised, it can often be found that there is a
significant degree of overlap, sometimes resulting in one being indistinguishable from the other. It is thus prudent to look at the theories of each, side by side, in order to gain a perspective on the problem, and, for the purpose of this thesis, establish a foundation from which the works of travellers can be examined.

Anthropologists have tended to avoid the study of pilgrimage, possibly because it appeared to be an irregular activity, and outside the habitual. Thus, it was not until the latter half of the twentieth century that any dedicated examinations of pilgrimage emerged. Yet it remains a subject lacking in current theoretical work. One of the first anthropologists to seriously engage the topic was Victor Turner, and pilgrimage theory has for some time been influenced by his work. For Turner, the semantics of ritual symbols converged on the pilgrimage process. Approaching the subject from his extensive study of ritual, Turner argued that pilgrimage is a liminal phenomenon, and defined it as a ritual process. Turner’s essential argument was that the ‘centre’ of the individual pilgrim’s world was at the pilgrimage site. Thus, he was specifically concerned with the spatial aspects of that liminal process. With the association to ritual, Turner highlighted as the most important aspect of pilgrimage that the personal dimension is, at a certain level, mystic, and the journey towards one’s centre mythic. Indeed, Preston has argued that Turner’s conception infers a kinship between pilgrimage and mysticism. Turner also argued that the sociology of pilgrimage was one revolving around communitas. This argument sees pilgrimage as a rite of passage, in which the actors share a common bond that unites them throughout their journey. The analysis proved immensely useful in terms of comparing pilgrimages against each other, and against other ritual forms. However, despite containing much that is insightful, Turner’s theory has not been fully confirmed. Indeed, numerous studies have shown his work to be overly essentialist in terms of the behaviours and motivations of pilgrims. Aziz, to name but one, finds that Turner’s model of

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5 V. Turner, ‘Centre Out There’, p.192.
7 V. Turner, ‘Centre Out There’, p.192.
"communitas" can be particularly misleading, and argues that subsequent research has frequently not found such homogenous groups⁸.

The image that Turner’s argument presents is one of large, coherent groups of pilgrims, united in ‘brotherhood’ on a sacred journey to the ‘centre’. The picture is somewhat anonymous, and inevitably leads away from the experiences of the individual, resulting in, as Aziz argues, a more demographic approach⁹. Further, the modes in which pilgrimage operates on the individual social planes are not sufficiently explained by Turner. Yet despite the flaws in his theory, it has been a source of much inspiration and continues to be a valuable resource to scholars of tourism and pilgrimage. Critical analysis has led to further questions being asked of the motivations and goals of pilgrims. Morinis, in the introduction to his book on the anthropology of pilgrimage, begins with the powerful statement that,

*pilgrimage is born of desire and belief. The desire is for solution to problems of all kinds within the human situation. The belief is that somewhere beyond the known world there exists a power that can make right the difficulties that appear so insoluble and intractable here and now.*¹⁰

But one must journey to find them. Yet this too is somewhat universal in vision. The beliefs, motives, and forms of pilgrimage differ from culture to culture, each fashions its own version. Further, each pilgrim interprets their cultural model of it to suit their personal circumstances and beliefs. In this light, Morinis defines pilgrimage as wherever journeying and an embodiment of the ideal intersect.

However, it is important to realise that by no means are all pilgrims on pilgrimage for religious reasons. Reader, for example, has argued convincingly that the term ‘pilgrimage’ ought to be applied to a range of activities that need not be limited to the explicitly religious in motivation or type¹¹. In addition, it is also vitally important to consider the pilgrimage place itself. One common denominator amongst these places is what we might think of as their ‘spiritual magnetism’. That is, the power of the

¹¹ Reader, *op. cit.*, p.5.
place to attract devotees. Preston argues that this magnetism is developed through association with various combinations of miraculous cures, apparitions of supernatural beings, sacred geography, and difficulty of access\textsuperscript{12}. Arguably, the pilgrimage itself will display some basic cosmological principles, specifically in regards to the meanings behind the geographical location of pilgrimages. Physical traces of the divine or saintly relics embody the ideal that pilgrims seek. The sacred geography and the traces of the saint are ‘sketches’ of the ideal incarnate. However, Reader, again looking to expand the field of pilgrimage studies, argues that the pilgrimage site need not necessarily be religious. The ‘secular’ world, he argues has as much potential to create sacred places, and he cites examples of cultural and national shrines, war graves, and sporting venues as examples\textsuperscript{13}.

Accepting this, the boundaries between pilgrimage and what we might call ‘cultural journeying’ cannot always be demarcated. However, one distinguishing factor may be the label that the traveller applies to themselves. Preston argues that the key to understanding pilgrimage is the flow of people, arguing that it is a “circulation of people, ideas, symbols, experiences, and cash” that we should trace the flow of in order to properly document\textsuperscript{14}. Indeed, he goes on to argue that the fundamental paradigms of a religion will emerge in the study of pilgrims and pilgrimages\textsuperscript{15}. However, as has been discussed, pilgrimages are not exclusively the domain of believers. Tourists often tread the very same paths, and, as shall be argued, often for very similar reasons. Given this, pilgrimage, as a journey towards some aspect of the ideal, with diverse and not always specifically religious motivations on the part of the individual, looks less and less like a necessarily religious activity. This has led many to question whether modern tourism and pilgrimage are not the same behaviour in different guises. By looking at the relationship of pilgrimage to tourism the boundaries of both can be established.

Given that tourism is one of the world’s largest industries, it is surprising that the sociological aspects of tourism have been largely unstudied. Nevertheless, the theories developed have generated much contention, and have divided academic thought,

\textsuperscript{12} Preston, \textit{op. cit.}, p.33.
\textsuperscript{13} Reader, \textit{op. cit.}, p.22.
\textsuperscript{14} Preston, \textit{op. cit.}, p.40.
\textsuperscript{15} \textit{Ibid}, p.45.
broadly speaking, into two camps over whether pilgrimage and tourism are convergent or divergent. Divergence theories were chronologically prior, emerging most notably from the work of Boorstin. He argued that modern tourism had moved away from the type of ‘spontaneous experience seeking’ of the past, and had become a tautology, merely a repetition of everyday mundane life. Boorstin felt that the “prefabrication” of tourist experiences had resulted in a loss of “the art of travel”, and that “the more strenuously and self-consciously we work at enlarging our experience, the more pervasive the tautology becomes”. However, Boorstin’s work was more a critique of culture than a serious attempt at meaningful sociological theory. Yet it did inspire Turner and Ash, who saw mass-tourists as “the barbarians of our Age of Leisure”. They viewed international tourism as politically, but also culturally unhealthy. At its worst, it was “like King Midas in reverse; a device for the systematic destruction of everything that is beautiful in the world”. Yet theirs too was more a cultural critique than a search for theoretical frameworks.

Convergence theories originally emerged as criticisms of divergence theories, which they saw as elitist. The first anthropological analysis of tourism came as late as 1963. Yet it was not until Dean MacCannell, in 1973, attempted to trace the links between social structure, belief, and action within the context of tourism that any theoretical inroads were made. In this and his later work MacCannell sought a theory for the explication of modern social structure, and in tourists saw the ethnographers of modernity. MacCannell argued that the term ‘tourist’ ought to be read as meaning both sightseers in search of experience, and as a meta-sociological example of modern people. It was the former notion of tourists as on a search for authenticity that distinguished MacCannell’s theory. This search identified tourism as

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18 Ibid., p.88.
20 Ibid., p.15.
23 MacCannell, The Tourist, p.4.
24 Ibid., p.1.
a modern form of pilgrimage, for both were concerned with finding authentic experiences. Thus, as pilgrims journey to places of religious importance, so, MacCannell argued, tourists journey to places of social, cultural, and historical importance\(^\text{25}\). Later, Graburn concurred, arguing that tourism is symbolically and functionally correspondent to other human institutions of the search for meaning, especially, given that it involves travel, pilgrimage. Graburn defined tourism as voluntary travel that was not work. Specifically it was “\textit{re}-creation”, the mode of leisure engaged to renew the individual for their ‘normal’ working life\(^\text{26}\).

However, like the views of Boorstin and Turner and Ash, MacCannell’s theory loses impact due to its universalising interpretation of the motivations of tourists. He argued that the cultural critique of tourists was founded in the idea that there was a way of ‘seeing’ culture and society as it ‘ought’ to be seen. However, MacCannell took the argument too far in the opposite direction by arguing that all tourists seek “deeper involvement with society and culture to some degree; it is a basic component of their motivation to travel”\(^\text{27}\). This seems too simplistic, and does not seem to be able to account for the various motivations of tourists, especially the ‘re-creation’ of Graburn. Conversely, the view of the tourist as simply a ‘traveller for pleasure’ is also somewhat superficial. Whilst it is certainly applicable in some cases, more precise descriptions of tourist motivations are required for any serious attempt at theoretical and empirical analysis.

By studying the similarities and differences between pilgrimage and tourism the complexities of tourist motivations and behaviour can be revealed. It must be acknowledged that it is not possible to attribute one motive to all tourists. However, it seems that all tourists look for some form of contrast with the everyday, both in terms of surroundtings and routines (environmental and cultural). MacCannell claims that “all tourist attractions are cultural experiences”\(^\text{28}\). However, Cohen criticises his argument for lacking a discussion of the contrast of the tourist’s ‘world’ to modern pilgrims. Cohen argues that modern tourism and pilgrimages are founded in different

\(^{25}\) MacCannell, ‘Staged Authenticity’, p.593.


\(^{27}\) MacCannell, \textit{The Tourist}, p.10.

\(^{28}\) MacCannell, \textit{The Tourist}, p.23.
social conceptions of space, and converse notions of the kinds of spaces worth journeying to and their location in the socially constructed world. Whilst the destinations themselves may be the same, they are approached for different reasons. Pilgrimage and tourism involve movement in opposite directions. In pilgrimage, Cohen argued, the individual travels from the periphery toward the cultural centre, whereas in modern tourism, they move away from their cultural centre into the periphery, both socially and physically. This outward movement of tourists points out this significant flaw in MacCannell’s theory. The periphery is necessarily diverse in relation to the centre.

A broad typological spectrum is required to provide a framework within which the motivations of tourists may be examined. Cohen sought to account for the differences in touristic experiences by examining the roles and significance of tourism in a modern individual’s life, and argued that they are principally derived from the individual’s world-view. This is especially dependant on whether the person adheres to a ‘centre’ or not, and, if so, its location. He distinguishes five main modes of touristic experiences (recreational, diversionary, experiential, experimental, and existential) which are informed by the extent to which the journey is a ‘quest for the centre’, in addition to the nature of that centre(s). Cohen sorts the types along a spectrum between the experiences of the pleasure seeking tourist, and those of the modern pilgrim searching for meaning within someone else’s centre. The “recreational” tourist is on a journey of entertainment and recreation, and is only slightly different to the “diversionary” tourist who is escaping from ‘meaningless’ life (whereas the recreational tourist is escaping from meaningful life). In the “experiential” mode, the tourist, alienated from their own society, searches for meaning in the lives of others through travel. This is the tourist characterised by MacCannell. The “experimental” tourist is slightly different in that they do not adhere to their own society’s ‘centre’, but instead of seeking meaningful experience they are searching for a new centre. Finally, the “existential” tourist is one who has elected to switch centres. Their life ‘at home’ is seen as a kind of exile, while life ‘on holiday’ at

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30 Ibid., pp.180-183.
their new centre is felt to be the ‘true life’, and is almost indistinguishable from pilgrimage\textsuperscript{31}.

Smith proposed a similar typological framework to Cohen’s. However, hers was a theory based more on what tourists were specifically engaging in. Thus the framework consisted of ethnic, cultural, historical, environmental, and recreational tourism\textsuperscript{32}. Whilst Smith’s argument is more flexible than MacCannell’s, by requiring a type of tourist activity it becomes normative, and says little about the tourists themselves. However, it is very useful when used in conjunction with Cohen’s typology, and, as shall be discussed further below, the use of Cohen’s typology with an explanation of exactly what the tourist is doing and why they are doing it yields rich details about both the tourist and their place in society.

All tourism theories include the notion that it is a form of leisure activity. However, that this notion is separate from pleasure activities is important to note. Theories that take tourism to mean ‘travelling for pleasure’ exclusively are looking at only one aspect of the phenomena, and are simplifying what is a complex human behaviour. A tourist may indeed travel for pleasure. Yet they may also travel to escape from the everyday, or may travel as a way of searching for meaning, or experimenting with the world views and lifestyles of other ethnic and cultural groups. In the experiential, experimental, and existential modes of Cohen’s typology we can observe that there are many similarities with pilgrimage. What distinguishes tourism from other types of travel is that it is voluntary, that it is not work\textsuperscript{33}, and that it involves some form of change from the individual’s ‘normal’ activities. Certain types of tourism are thus indistinguishable from certain types of pilgrimage. Indeed this similarity led Edith and Victor Turner to write insightfully that “a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist”\textsuperscript{34}. Using a typology, such as Cohen’s, to examine tourism certainly suggests that this is not far wrong, and allows us to examine tourism and tourists with a methodological framework.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., pp.183-190.
\textsuperscript{33} However, the distinction between traveller and travel writer is unclear, as are the times between work periods for business travellers. Further research is required to fully examine the roles and meanings of travel for habitual ‘compulsory’ travellers.
Tourism is thus a leisure activity that can range from a convalescent-type ‘recharge’ away from the normal working world, to an existential search for meaning and truth, or a quest for the sacred that bears many of the marks of pilgrimage. Indeed, in the light of the arguments of Reader and Cohen it seems that there may well be no way to differentiate between the two in certain circumstances. Yet there remain questions about ideas of knowledge and truth that are important to pose before formulating theories about the place of tourism in society. This is particularly the case in regards to the questions raised by the trends of modernity and postmodernity. These are questions specifically concerned with the cultural trends in epistemic modes. Furthermore, if some tourists are seeking the types of ‘truths’ usually associated with institutionalised religion, then the ideas and processes of secularisation must be examined.

Modernity in this context is the socio-cultural movement that emerged out of the European Enlightenment period that was fundamentally a product of the changes brought about by the Reformation. Its core revolves around the idea that traditional forms of knowing, and thus ordering the world, are flawed. The movements of modernity imply, as Sarup argues, “the progressive economic and administrative rationalization and differentiation of the social world”. Thus modernity relies upon the continuing construction and juxtaposition of binary oppositions such as order/disorder, clean/dirty, rational/non-rational, good/bad. All of these are brought starkly into view by travel outside one’s familiar world. Lyotard argues that the stability proposed by modernity is equated with the idea of totality, or a totalised system. This system is maintained in modern societies by “meta-narratives”, or stories a culture tells itself about its beliefs and practices. MacCannell argues that these

35 See discussion above, and Reader, op. cit. and Cohen, ‘Phenomenology’.
trends are most easily viewable in the context of tourism, positing that the tourist is a microcosm of modernity. He approaches tourism using differentiation as the focus of his analysis, and argues that the constant subdividing and reorganising found in modern, highly differentiated societies like Western Europe or North America, is the distinguishing factor and the origin of feelings of freedom. MacCannell’s central thesis is that mass-leisure (especially tourism and sightseeing) is diversely linked to the expansion of modern society, both empirically and ideologically. Yet, in so far as differentiation is one of the foundational aspects of modernity, MacCannell is unsure whether tourism functions as a celebration of difference or an enforcement of it, although he feels the conditions for the latter are doubtful.

That the differentiations and rationalisations of modernity depend upon ‘grand-narratives’ is the heart of the postmodernist critique of it. The trends of postmodernity generally involve the recognition that the narratives of modernity are constructed, and thus question their claim to objectivity. Indeed, Lyotard defines postmodern as meaning “incredulity towards metanarratives”. MacCannell wrote that, “as a tourist, the individual may step out into the universal drama of modernity”. Yet, if the postmodern thesis is correct this may not be the case. Drama is found in conflict. The conflict of modernity is found in the artificial and arbitrary construction of good/bad or desirable/undesirable dichotomies and their subsequent juxtaposition. Tourists can, if they choose, witness this drama as MacCannell says, and from this draw their own conclusions. It may well be in the reaction to witnessing cultural differentiation that we can see the processes of postmodernity. Indeed, it was this very type of manifestation of postmodernity that Sarup insisted was crucial to document, as it was a direction of the attention towards the changes in contemporary society and culture. In contrast, Baudrillard argues that the postmodern world is one that consists only of simulations without any ‘real’ or ‘original’ reality that is separate or being copied. MacCannell argues that the best indication of modernity is the artificial preservation

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40 Ibid., p.11.
41 Ibid., p.3.
42 Ibid., pp.xx-xxi.
and reconstruction of the non-modern world in tourist settings. Again, it could also be argued that this is an indicator of postmodernity. The preservation and reconstruction of the non-modern world allows its recognition as an equally valid take on reality, and, most significantly, allows the exploration of it by those disillusioned with the ‘modern’ world. This echoes Cohen’s argument that some types of tourists are looking for alternate ways of viewing reality. Further, if the arguments of postmodernity are correct, then the tourist – recreational or existential – becomes a traveller moving through a literal landscape of ‘truths’, all seemingly valid, with many offering portals to different modes of knowledge, and, importantly, different modes of tourism.

Whatever the claims (and non-claims), the arguments of the putative postmodern world seem to be better utilised as indicators of the continuing movements and changes of the modern world. Modernity is, as Heelas argued, an attempt to establish, find, and explain the workings of the world that inevitably creates, not only “distressing certainties”, but also deep cultural contradictions and fractures. One of the most significant of these has been between religion and politics, resulting most notably in the process of secularisation in the modern world. But first, as discussions about secularisation are often taken to be sceptical commentaries on religion (something this thesis certainly is not), it is important here to note the distinction between secularisation, which refers to a process occurring in society, and secularism, the ideology of the promoters of secularisation. This process shares the same roots as the ideas of modernity. Indeed, the two are arguably intertwined strands of historical consequence. This is a process that, as Wilson would no doubt agree, is multidimensional and socially complex.

Whilst there may be claims that secularisation involves an attenuation of all forms of faith, spirituality, and belief, these are, as both Lyon and Bruce argue, mistaken positions. Lyon states that “much secularization theory is rooted in a more general theory about the modern world”, and Bruce specifically points to the Reformation insistence that individuals remain responsible for the maintenance of their own

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spiritual state\textsuperscript{50}. Therefore, to clarify for the purposes of this thesis, secularisation is thought of as a decline in the influence of mainstream religious institutions and institutional practice. Wilson argues that it is essentially the transfer of power, property, influence, and functions from institutions with claims about unique access to ‘truth’ (what he calls a “supernaturalist frame of reference”), to institutions that are influenced by empirical, rational, and pragmatic criteria\textsuperscript{51}. This does not imply the disappearance of religiosity or spirituality, let alone institutionalised religion. Yet it does have considerable impact on this thesis. Within the context of tourism, this shift is of significant importance, especially in the light of Cohen’s work. The empirically driven, modern, secular world looks to material evidence for value. Cohen’s typology would suggest that tourists travelling in spiritual or religious contexts are evidence of the two aspects of secularisation; both the removal of (familiar) institutional influence, and the increased role of the individual in their own spiritual life.

Such a decline in religious influence raises the question of what replaces it. The answer that emerges from the examination of modernity would suggest various combinations of science, reason, and logic, perhaps best summed up as ‘Humanism’. In this respect, Lyotard argued that science is always in conflict with narrative views as it continually finds them to be false\textsuperscript{52}. That human well-being, not the divine will, is used to justify change is an idea traceable back at least as far as Comte, who distinguished between theological and scientific ways of knowing\textsuperscript{53}. Contrasting this notion, Bruce argues that the decline in religious influence has less to do with competition from scientific ideas than it does with cultural diversity\textsuperscript{54}. The political egalitarianism that rose out of the increasing social gaps of the industrial revolution resulted in states adopting positions of religious neutrality in order to avoid charges of favouritism and conflict with religious bodies\textsuperscript{55}. Further, Campbell notes that with the lessening of power and influence from the churches, other beliefs ‘hitch a ride’ on


\textsuperscript{52} Lyotard, \textit{op. cit.}, p.xxiii.

\textsuperscript{53} Wilson, \textit{op. cit.}, p.9.

\textsuperscript{54} Bruce, \textit{op. cit.}, p.30.

\textsuperscript{55} \textit{Ibid.}, p.25.
counter-cultural movements. Arguably, it is also the case that as individuals feel less moral and social pressure, and identify less with those systems, they will look for other systems with which to make sense of life.

It was this search outside familiar or orthodox fields of meaning that prompted Lofland and Stark to term such individuals ‘seekers’. Campbell, taking this idea, looked at these types of people, and argued that they are characterised in part by the sampling of revelation and therapy. Common amongst individuals moving through such alternatives is their explicit lack of unity in terms of what is found to be successful. In relation to tourism, in so far as tourists, to varying degrees, always travel out from their own cultural context, we can see that the seeker thesis gives an important twist to tourism studies, especially in cases where the tourist is using the journey as a search for alternatives. The forms of ‘seekership’ can be seen to look like a consumerist orientation towards belief and practice, and this can seem postmodern in its relativist approach. Bruce disagrees, and notes that a sectarian seeker (one seeking sectarian type systems) does not operate from a relativist platform. Rather, they remain sectarian in their approach, presuming that each religious position they come to has a unique grasp of the truth. Yet, consumerist seekership remains at least in appearance. Nevertheless, this has been seen by some commentators, such as Campbell, Bruce, and Heelas, to name but a few, as an indication that the process of secularisation has in fact led to an increase in religious or spiritual activity. This is especially significant in the study of tourism.

Heelas argues that religion has become deregulated and put into the hands of the subject. There is an emphasis on freedom of choice and a move away from the traditional religious settings. Thus the boundaries of what is considered religious are blurred, or even removed. In this environment, frameworks of meaning are combined in whatever way is desirable. This resonates with Clifford’s statement that

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58 Bruce, *op. cit.*, p.29.
“twentieth century identities no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions”62. What transpires is the continuous (re)collection of symbols, languages, and histories; both familiar and foreign. There is a certain plasticity of the self, but only insofar as the individual can derive meaning and position within their frame of reference, even if that means defining themselves as without meaning and without place. The five tourist types of Cohen, although often travelling outside their own cultural context, are, nevertheless, engaged in varying forms of alternative activity in relation to the everyday. From the recreational tourist whiling away the days reclined on a sun-chair in a manner totally deviant to the everyday work world, to the existential tourist travelling to their ‘real’ world and away from the false or erroneous one, tourists behave in ways that would often be classified as deviant in the ‘normal’ world. It is the ways in which tourists use these alternatives, the ways they define value, and the ways they subsequently articulate these experiences within the context of religion that is of critical importance.

**Spiritual Tourism: Definition and Approach**

The previous discussion was posited in such a way as to show the strands from which to weave my own theory of what I see as a type of tourist activity. As Lyon noted, whilst institutional religiosity has been, in many ways, in decline in terms of social influence, the “religious realm” has not. Religiosity and spirituality, he argued, have found different modes of expression within different contexts63. I believe that this is evident within the context of tourism, especially when we consider the theoretical positions concerning the similarities between tourism and pilgrimage.

As discussed above, whilst pilgrimage and tourism operate within different spheres of meaning, they have important areas of overlap. Given this, we can see that there will be some tourists having similar experiences, and embarking on journeys for similar reasons as pilgrims. Likewise, there may also be pilgrims travelling for reasons all but indistinguishable from some tourists. This means that in order to distinguish between


63 Lyon, op. cit., p.ix.
tourists and pilgrims we must establish not only what they are doing, but also why they are doing it. Yet, there may still be some tourists who engage in the same activities as pilgrims, and, confusingly, for the very same reasons. It is important to classify and document these travellers, as what distinguishes them is their lack of identification with the religious movement in question. These are tourists who seek out religious or spiritual settings for the purpose of fulfilling their desire to travel, either in whole or in part, and to have some form of religious or spiritual experience. I call these travellers ‘spiritual tourists’, and see them, like MacCannell to an extent, as emerging out of the changes and uncertainties of modernity and secularisation. Yet whilst MacCannell saw tourists as travelling for reasons similar to pilgrims, I argue that there is a wider variety of both purpose and activity. This holds even for spiritual tourists who, using Cohen’s work, I can see as fitting all five types, from the pilgrim-like existential type tourist to a form of recreational type. The latter are quite different from pilgrims in some ways, yet it is my contention that this distinction may not be immediately apparent due to the sort of activities they engage in. The term ‘spiritual tourist’ is thus proposed as a means of both distinguishing between tourists and pilgrims, and establishing further means of examining the position of religion in tourism.

Given this description, it may seem that the spiritual tourist sits, theoretically, somewhere between the pilgrim and the ‘regular’ tourist. However, this is not the case. I wish to adjust the typologies put forward by Cohen and Graburn to form two-tiered typological method of examining tourism. To begin, I believe Cohen’s typological assessment of tourist phenomenology to be excellent. However, to be useful it must be employed as a typology of purpose rather than strictly phenomenological, the input of which comes directly from the subject, and is used as an overlay to interpret tourists’ expressed reasons for travel. On top of this the identification of the types of activity the tourist is engaging in is laid. This second layer might include such labels as ‘cultural tourism’, ‘environmental tourism’, ‘X-treme tourism’, ‘destination tourism’, and certainly includes spiritual tourism. Thus

64 MacCannell, ‘Staged Authenticity’, p.593.
65 Indeed, a criticism of Cohen’s work is that it implies motivation by positing a teleological aspect to tourism.
66 I am borrowing here from the current popular term to demarcate activities such as skydiving, base jumping, and other similar activities designated as ‘dangerous’, both physically and socially.
spiritual tourism and spiritual tourists are defined both by the reasons behind their journeys and the activities they undertake whilst on them. This type-form typology forms a theoretical matrix into which the experiences of travellers are placed, along with related contextual theories in order to distil threads of meaning and identity. The theories of modernity, postmodernity, secularisation, and seekership are drawn together to make up, within the context of spiritual tourism, the contextual interpretive framework with which to do this. However, I speculate that this method will be equally applicable to any manifestation of tourism, with appropriate contextual additions. This means that we may find existential destination tourists, and recreational spiritual tourists. As already noted, a significant aspect of MacCannell’s thesis was that tourists are a kind of leisure class. This included an excellent analysis of the roots of identity, which he saw as becoming more and more derived from leisure activities and pastimes. If identity is considered a key part of one’s ‘centre’, and identity is at least partially derived from leisure, then Cohen’s phenomenological typology of closeness to the centre is entirely applicable. However, it must be noted that different activity types will have a different incidence of purpose types. Thus, for example, X-treme tourism may have a high incidence of recreational tourists and a low incidence of existential tourists. This is an area requiring a great deal of further research crossing many disciplines and unravelling many multifaceted phenomena.

What makes this area of the religious field so incredibly complex is that any particular tourist may fit into any number of purpose-types in addition to any number of activity-types. Further, their journey may encompass work related interests, pilgrimage, or even migration, on top of any touristic activities. Picking out the threads of spiritual tourism from within these knots of meaning is the purpose of this paper. However, any research project must have its limits and restrictions, and this one has many, not the least of which is influenced by the limits of time and space. The most important restriction for this thesis regards the material I will be examining. Specifically, this is primarily a thesis examining aspects of religiosity and spirituality within tourism as found in published material. What will be examined are works by, for, and about spiritual tourists, for it is in these writings that rich descriptions of the touristic experience by tourists themselves are to be found. This includes travel

writing, travel guides, travel information, and websites. As has been stressed, what is required for the academic study of travel is a holistic approach including detailed accounts from the ‘inside’, and clear descriptions from both the academic and subject perspectives. This paper limits these ‘inside’ accounts to what can be found and consumed ‘at home’. It is thus an examination of what is written by, and what is available to, the spiritual tourist as a means of understanding the phenomenon of spiritual tourism within the wider cultural context.
CHAPTER 2: EXAMINATION OF PRIMARY SOURCES

Long before anyone had even thought of round-the-world airfares, the first travellers - pilgrims - were leaving the confines of their villages to walk their way to god. From red-eyed kids on Kho Pha Ngan to dread-headed saddhus [sic] on the Great Trunk Road, there's still no shortage of travellers looking for the path to enlightenment. Whether the question is 'how do I score a good spot in heaven?' or 'why don't my parents understand me?', the answers are out there on the road.68

As this quotation from the Lonely Planet ‘Theme Guides – Religion’ webpage demonstrates, there is a history and continued presence of travellers looking for spiritual answers from their journeys, and it is in the context of ‘being on the road’ that a search of ‘new’ or different answers is both expected and encouraged. With this in mind, and the theoretical and methodological threads of the previous chapter in hand, I now wish to walk through a selection of the works and information published by, and available to, the spiritual tourist. Most important to this thesis are the first-person, biographical accounts tourists themselves have written. Additional important resources are the guide-books that are published, either for spiritual tourists or for the wider tourist community, that include information on locations and their appeals, and newspaper stories by travellers about certain locations or travel ideals, and websites. For the potential spiritual tourist there are hundreds of works to choose from. Indeed, the travel writing industry is geared to publish stories that involve a move out of the ordinary, and in the increasingly secularised world, tales of not only religious epiphany but spiritual exploration may be seen as extra-ordinary. These themes are often the focus of travel writings, and so before examining the collections of publications I will briefly examine the history of contemporary travel and travel writing. This will demonstrate why the historical and cultural place of travel writing is so indicative of tourist behaviour, and thus such a valuable resource to the scholar attempting to make sense of it.

History of Travel Writing

This collection of travel writing is focussed on English language publications by predominantly Western-background travellers writing in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries. The coincidence of this time frame with the increasing influence of the trends of modernity and postmodernity, and secularisation should not be dismissed. In this period, as MacCannell, and Duncan and Gregory argue, travel and travel writing became part of the project of modernity. In this vein, in the introduction to the 1989 edition of The Tourist, MacCannell states that he initially wanted to study tourists “as a method of gaining access to the process by which modernity, modernization, modern culture was establishing its empire on a global basis”. It was a period that Duncan and Gregory see as one in which travel writing “meshed with secularisation”, and religious frames of reference were moved aside by more complex divisions of cultural difference and the natural sciences. However, it was also a period in which advances in technology brought travel from the status of something for only pilgrims, merchants, and explorers, to one of a leisure activity. Yet, whilst Duncan and Gregory see the importance of the processes of modernity and secularisation in the history of leisured travel and travel writing, they miss entirely the importance of pilgrimage as the forerunner and historical source of modern tourism. Further, while travellers of many kinds through history have written accounts of their journeys, the phenomena of ‘travel writing’ is relatively new, which McMillin sees as emerging out of the British and European colonial era move to make sense of ‘the other’ in relation to the ‘self’.

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70 MacCannell, The Tourist, p.xv.
Works by Spiritual Tourists

i) Motivations & Expectations

The first step in examining spiritual tourists within the context of travel writing must be to establish who they are and what their motivations were for embarking on their journeys. Indeed, it is concepts of identity that are often at the heart of why people choose to travel. What people say about themselves can give vital clues to these reasons. Sun Shuyun, for example, in Ten Thousand Miles Without a Cloud begins by telling the reader the story of her upbringing in Cultural Revolution China. She speaks of the disillusionment of the old communists at the modern destruction of all they had worked and sacrificed for. Her grandmother remained a Buddhist, and spoke of the strength it gave her during that time. Whilst her grandmother was illiterate, “she knew the message that lies at the heart of Chinese Buddhism, the certainty and the solace. That is why she wanted me to follow her faith and acquire the strength it gave her” 73. She writes that, “the idea of a confirming faith dies hard” and that many Chinese feel lost in the intellectual and cultural gulf left by the Cultural Revolution. “Now I wished I could believe something so profoundly”74.

However, such issues are not at stake for all the writers. The back-cover of Marion Halligan’s Cockles of the Heart for example firmly states that, “as a modern pilgrim, prize-winning novelist Marion Halligan has an easier journey – by car, carrying a suitcase and guidebook. But the purpose is similar: to explore and celebrate the joys of food, faith and good company”75. Likewise in William Dalrymple’s From the Holy Mountain there is no immediate idea that the journey being undertaken is one of personal spiritual exploration. Dalrymple follows the steps of the monk John Moschos round the eastern Mediterranean, not in search of his own spiritual identity, but “to see wherever possible what Moschos… had seen… and to witness what was in effect the last ebbing twilight of Byzantium”76. Yet where Dalrymple, as a Christian, is

74 Ibid., p.41.
comfortable with the idea of visiting the holy places of Eastern Christendom, Halligan appears slightly uncomfortable, writing that her journey was not an “archaic, backward looking act of piety more architectural than religious”. Rather, she was “travelling the pilgrim route as people always have” for her own reasons. Further to this she defends her position by stating that “pilgrims were tourists from the start. Pilgrims invented tourism”. Halligan sees religion as a type of archaic behaviour and mode of knowledge. Her discomfort seems to be due to her embodiment of the pilgrim role.

In contrast, the motivations of the other authors lean more towards issues of identity and discovery. Paul Kriwaczek, in *In Search of Zarathustra*, claims that his was “a voyage of personal discovery; to explore the many guises in which the teachings of the first, and greatest, sage of ancient times lived on after his earthly life was over. To go, in short, in search of Zarathustra”. And although sold as a travel book – “a tour de force of travel and historical inquiry by an adventurer in the classic tradition” – it is probably more accurately described as a historical survey. Yet the book does share with Dalrymple’s work the focus on historical enquiry. Dalrymple’s is a journey through both space and time. He uses the remoteness of the locations he visits and the monastic settings to portray the story of Eastern Christendom and its gradual decline. Kriwaczek, likewise, is concerned with looking back in time to highlight the legacy of Zarathustra’s teachings, and his travels are made in a contemporary context.

In *Pilgrimage to the End of the World*, art historian Conrad Rudolph does not thoroughly express his reasons for undertaking the walk to Santiago de Compostela, aside from noting that the idea of doing the pilgrimage came from reading the twelfth-century *Pilgrims’ Guide*. Yet the back cover of the book gives an indication of his purpose, stating that, “Rudolph melds the ancient and the contemporary, the spiritual and the physical, in a book that is at once travel guide, literary work, historical study and memoir”. This is a muted approach compared to that made by Sarah Macdonald, whose book *Holy Cow*, “a wild journey of discovery through India in

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77 Halligan, *op. cit.*., p.11.
79 Ibid., backcover.
81 Ibid., backcover.
search of the meaning of life and death”\textsuperscript{82}, is a tale in which the author faces serious questions about her mortality and what she feels is her own inner spiritual void. Macdonald’s motivations are much clearer, “leaving my wonderful job was the hardest thing I’ve ever done but perhaps I didn’t do it just for love. A part of me wanted to reclaim myself, to redefine my identity”\textsuperscript{83}. This echoes Sun, who states that, “probably when I made the decision to go I wanted some clarity in my life, and the journey would give me a very clear objective”. Xuanzang was her inspiration; “he found his truth by going in search of the sutras – I had to go and look for mine”\textsuperscript{84}.

Intriguingly, Halligan alone of the writers brushes over the difficulties of the road, writing that, “in the more than two months it will take you to get to Compostela the old body dies, a new one is born. So say the walkers. We’re driving; we’re greedy and want to see lots of places”\textsuperscript{85}. In addition she insists that she intended the book to be “a journey of architecture and food”\textsuperscript{86}. In contrast Sun muses that hers would be a “spiritual journey for me but physically demanding too”, and begins the journey with the feeling that, “I was starting the most important journey of my life”\textsuperscript{87}, and that “whatever might happen, I would try and face it. Xuanzang would be my model and my guide”\textsuperscript{88}. This highlights the common theme that the journey is in some significant way a difficult one. Indeed, Rudolph comments that whilst the physical aspects of, in his case, pilgrimage are certainly crucial to defining it, there is a further, more important aspect. This he describes as an awareness that one is following the steps of countless others, and what many dream of doing – “the Great Journey”\textsuperscript{89}. Such journeys are, he argues, an internal experience of many levels\textsuperscript{90}. Macdonald leans in a similar direction when she speaks of long-term travel as a “middle class rite of passage”. She posits that there is a tradition of experiencing the “joy of travel” before settling into a career\textsuperscript{91}. Both certainly see their travels as out of the ordinary, with Rudolph noting it will bee “like nothing else you’ve ever done”, and that one must be

\textsuperscript{83} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.12-13.
\textsuperscript{84} Sun, \textit{op. cit.}, p.42.
\textsuperscript{85} Halligan, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.12-13.
\textsuperscript{86} \textit{Ibid.}, p.9.
\textsuperscript{87} Sun, \textit{op. cit.}, p.47.
\textsuperscript{88} \textit{Ibid.}, pp.42-43.
\textsuperscript{89} Rudolph, \textit{op. cit.}, p.47.
\textsuperscript{90} \textit{Ibid.}, p.x.
\textsuperscript{91} MacDonald, \textit{op. cit.}, p.1.
“free, spontaneous, unstructured” to truly appreciate it[^92]. But despite this, both also see themselves distinctly as outsiders within the contexts they visit. Rudolph finishes his description of his journey by saying that despite being a tourist, or one of the “curious”, he considered himself as much a pilgrim as anyone else[^93], while Macdonald similarly refers to herself as a voyeur, sightseeing through both culture and religion[^94].

There are a number of points immediately apparent from this examination. Firstly, these writers fall into three categories of journeying. Sun and Macdonald straightforwardly state that theirs were intended to be journeys searching for spiritual answers. Rudolph, Dalrymple, and Kriwaczek can be seen to be looking for journeys that explore religion, religious history, or spirituality. Finally, Halligan is looking for a recreational journey, and not concerned about ideals, historicity, or identity. These categories accord very usefully with Cohen’s typology[^95]. Halligan quite clearly fits the ‘recreational’ type, whilst Sun and Macdonald seem to fit either the ‘experimental’ or ‘experiential’ types. Kriwaczek and Rudolph also seem to fit either the ‘diversionary’ or ‘experiential’ modes. However, Dalrymple does not clearly fit into any of Cohen’s types, and I suspect this is because he embarked upon his journey as a writer, not a tourist – he was ‘at work’. In addition, the issues of motivation and expectation examined here also point towards Campbell’s use of the seeker thesis with four of the authors stating that they were looking for some form of alternative[^96].

**ii) The Content of Spiritual Tourism**

The great difference in the books examined for this thesis concerns what the writers did on their journeys in religious or spiritual contexts. Three of them do not fit into the category ‘spiritual tourist’, whilst three do to varying degrees. In each case the writer is specific, from the beginning of their work, as to what type of travel they are

[^92]: Rudolph, *op. cit.*, p.95.
[^93]: Ibid., p.49.
[^95]: Cohen, *‘Phenomenology’*, pp.183-190.
undertaking. To demonstrate this I have grouped and presented the three that do not fit (Kriwaczek, Halligan, and Dalrymple) first.

Kriwaczek looks like a spiritual tourist from the reasons he gives for travelling. However, what he actually does is not at all in the spiritual tourist mode; rather he is conducting research. His journey is thus not strictly a ‘leisure’ one, and this results in an experience of removed observation rather than participatory observation. For instance, on visiting a Zoroastrian fire ceremony in Iran he asks the temple-keeper to sum up the faith. The keeper replies, “Our basic beliefs are very simple. Chose truth and oppose lies. And always strive for good words, good thoughts and good deeds”. Kriwaczek muses that this is a profound belief, and one relevant for “the post-religious modern world”\textsuperscript{97}. This remark is made with the backdrop of Kriwaczek mentioning, a number of times, the existence of a “universal spiritual world-view”\textsuperscript{98}. This type of sentiment is also expressed by Halligan who, when in Moissac, France, visiting the pilgrimage church there comments, upon hearing and seeing the people from around the world gathered there, that

not all of us are going to Compostela, but we are all pilgrims seeking the absolution of the past… It is as members of Christendom that we are here. Its works of art our heritage. Belief in the religion that fostered them is not essential; faith in the common humanity of those who made them and of us who want to look at what they made is what counts.\textsuperscript{99}

Yet, neither Halligan nor Kriwaczek look for or engage in any specifically religious or spiritual activities\textsuperscript{100}.

Dalrymple is somewhat more difficult to define. His journey is one made for research purposes, and for the most part he approaches the subject of religions in the eastern Mediterranean with a writer’s mind. However, there are glimpses of Dalrymple slipping into a spiritual or religious mode. For example, when he speaks about the experience of entering Hagia Sophia, he comments that “the power of the building has not been diminished despite its age and history”. He then goes on to note the way

\textsuperscript{97} Kriwaczek, op. cit., p.229.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., pp.228-229.
\textsuperscript{99} Halligan, op. cit., p.68.
\textsuperscript{100} Whilst Halligan is doing the pilgrimage to Santiago, she is, by her own admission, removed from it by both her mode of transportation and the object of her journey.
tourist groups quieten when they enter; “the sacred breaks in on the mundane; and one immediately understands what a Byzantine monk must have felt… for a moment the gates of perception open and one catches a momentary glimpse of the Divine”\(^{101}\). Yet, Dalrymple, again, cannot be said to be a spiritual tourist, for at no time does he look for spiritual experiences.

In contrast, Sun is most certainly on a journey of the spirit. At the Bodhi Tree, in India, she writes that, “I had the sudden sensation that I could share a moment, across time, with this man [Xuanzang] I would never meet, but whom I had been searching for. In following his footsteps, I had made a point of trying to identify with his feelings, thoughts and reactions, to understand him and his world”. She felt she had mostly failed until that point, “but here under the Bodhi Tree, halfway through my journey, surrounded by pilgrims and almost overwhelmed by their devotion… I felt I could enter his world”\(^{102}\). After talking with a Hindu priest in Benares she is spurred to think about faith, especially what she sees as the power of faith to motivate good actions, or help people through hard lives. “If only I could make the leap of faith myself. There is so much in Buddhism that I am beginning to learn, and that I know would help me, as Grandmother had hoped. But something holds me back”\(^{103}\).

To explore this feeling she decides to end her journey with a stay in a monastery. “In Sarnath, Bodh Gaya and Kushinagar, I had experienced the most profound feelings of devotion and piety, but as an observer, not a believer”. “I know I cannot be a Buddhist”, she says, because she cannot accept the ideas of *karma* and rebirth. “But it would be a great help to me if I could spend some time with the monks, to experience the monastic life, to get a clearer idea of Buddhism, and to find out whether I could reach the deep emotion and sense of belonging I so longed for”\(^{104}\). These feelings of being outside the religious tradition, yet wanting to explore it are the key to spiritual tourism. Sun puts it succinctly herself when she says that she is participating within the religious context, not as a believer, but as an observer, a seeker. Her exploration of Buddhist practice in the Tunderbolt Monastery near Dunhuang she describes as

\(^{101}\) Dalrymple, *op. cit.*, p.40.  
\(^{102}\) Sun, *op. cit.*, pp.270-271.  
\(^{103}\) Sun, *op. cit.*, p.298.  
confusing, “like my first day at school”\textsuperscript{105}. She has difficulty understanding what the purpose of monastic life is. Sitting with the monks as they chant the \textit{Heart Sutra} she describes a feeling of calmness surrounding her, “bringing my wandering mind back to holy thoughts”. Nevertheless, she insists that she is not religious and that she does not believe that chanting a mantra can lead to salvation. Yet she appreciates the beauty of the moment and notes that perhaps the ‘yearning’ it stirs in her is the closest she can come to a “spiritual experience”\textsuperscript{106}.

Sun’s experience is closely paralleled in many ways by both Macdonald and Rudolph. However, whilst Sun’s was a journey of historical re-creation, Rudolph’s journey was made in the explicitly religious context of the pilgrimage to Santiago, and to separate himself from such other types of travel he remarks, “to me, the pilgrimage is not like everyday travel. It is not about seeing a museum or yet another beautifully restored medieval church. It is an experience of a different order.” To understand the journey, he argues, one first needs to know what the medieval pilgrim was like so that their experience can be recreated\textsuperscript{107}. Yet despite this idea of separation, Rudolph is in essence positing that the tourist experience is essentially like the pilgrim experience, for he does in fact count himself as one of the ‘curious’; those who do the pilgrimage for ‘non-religious’ reasons\textsuperscript{108}. Significantly, Rudolph states that, even as a tourist, “the pilgrimage is, above all, an experience, and must be experienced to be understood”\textsuperscript{109}. He comments that on the pilgrimage he felt apart from the world, and that whilst the pilgrim is a stranger and has little to do with the places they pass through, they do have a purpose. This leads him to posit that a pilgrim is not a tourist as they are not normal observers. The key for him is the locals, who, he claims,

look at you as a special experience, as authentic… You are a part of the cultural landscape, part of the original reason for being and the history of many of the towns through which you pass.\textsuperscript{110}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., pp.386-388. \\
\textsuperscript{106} Ibid., p.388. \\
\textsuperscript{107} Rudolph, \textit{op. cit.}, p.2. \\
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., p.18. \\
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., p.27. \\
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
The pilgrimage route, he argues, is ingrained into the identity of the locations and their people. “Yours is the experience of a fully reconciled alienation: the pilgrim at once complete insider, and total outsider”\textsuperscript{111}.

The images Rudolph portrays of the pilgrimage route are of intense beauty in the natural world. He notes that “experiences like these can happen anywhere. But they don’t often happen with either the regularity or the strength that they did on the pilgrimage: everyday is an adventure, potentially surreal, and where feelings so unconnected with modern existence become a part of everyday life”\textsuperscript{112}. He goes on, “hardly life-changing in themselves, the vast numbers of these little experiences added up, creating a feeling that wasn’t easy to describe to my friends after I returned: that the unique conveyed exactly the same impression as the everyday”. The contrast for him was that the everyday then became unique. This, he speculates, was probably the result of the extreme hardships of doing the pilgrimage\textsuperscript{113}. Describing one experience in a morning fog he notes the “odd atmosphere to the place… that had been building and building”. This feeling he describes as one “for those long on the trail”, and argues it is not “New Age” or necessarily religious in context. “You might not believe it like myself, you might not understand it, but the feeling is there, no matter what you think”\textsuperscript{114}. In this, Rudolph is articulating the spiritual aspect of his touristic experience. Yet, Rudolph is very keen to point out that pilgrimage is not a vacation, or a tourist activity. In doing so he over-romanticises the experiences and motives of medieval pilgrims. The self-enforced hardship of the pilgrimage creates, Rudolph argues, an “enormous silence and solitude”. This, he argues, results in a feeling of timelessness. The change from everyday ‘fast’ life to the literal walking pace of the pilgrimage “acts like a mental sauna, sweating out the stresses of daily life”\textsuperscript{115}.

This is an important point, for what Rudolph is articulating is that the mode of spiritual tourism, and therein spirituality, is functioning as a psychologically therapeutic. The language Rudolph uses is almost identical to that used by Sun (and as

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., p.34.
\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., p.23.
\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., p.25.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., pp.26-27.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., p.37.
we shall see Macdonald) in describing her spiritual transformation at the monastic retreat. He even acknowledges such similarities saying that the pilgrimage is a layperson’s equivalent to monastic life. In addition, he further highlights this feeling saying that, “for the modern pilgrim, the “curious” pilgrim, the vast epic quality of the pilgrimage still instills [sic] at the very least much of the sensation of a journey with a deeper purpose but with this difference: that the undertaking is spiritual not in the sense of being religious but in the sense of having to do with the spirit”. Such journeys are, for Rudolph, “better sensed than defined”.

While Rudolph’s spiritual experience was not necessarily sought by him, Macdonald deliberately sets out to explore the spiritual supermarket of India. Her initial venture into ‘unknown’ beliefs and practices is with a ten day retreat at a Vipassana centre, remarking that, “I decide to start my quest for inner peace with a brain enema”, this, she says, is to “remove the blockages of the past and find a new way of living”; and is done despite her impression that Buddhism was an “extreme religion that requires people to spend too much time inside their own skull”. Her diary of the time at the retreat is an amusing look at the internal clamour brought into focus by the silent meditation, an experience echoed by Sun and Rudolph from their own experiences. The episode is acknowledged by Macdonald as a search for an alternative way to cope with her new life. She writes that she feels she has purged something and is ready to be “reborn”. However, she acknowledges that to maintain the techniques she has been taught in her everyday life would probably be difficult.

Macdonald’s book is an excellent first-person account of ‘seeker type’ behaviour and the personal motivations that go with it. This is highlighted when she talks about Buddhism, saying that it is, “a good faith for those of us oriented to individualism as it offers a spiritual psychology of self-development. And its central tenet is the one

\[\text{\bibliography{references}}\]
thing us rich western kids can’t buy – happiness”\textsuperscript{124}. Yet it appeals to her as it “complements my society’s approach to individual growth and development, my desire to take control and take responsibility for my own happiness and it advocates a way of living that encourages compassion and care”\textsuperscript{125}. Despite this she continues to explore the faiths and practices she encounters in India, either going on retreats or attending healing sessions, or like Sun, simply observing the practices of others.

Towards the end of the book she reflects on her own spiritual position concluding that, “I realise I don’t have to be a Christian who follows the church, or a Buddhist nun in robes, or a convert to Judaism or Islam or Sikhism. I can be a believer in something bigger than what I can touch. I can make a leap of faith to a higher power in a way that’s appropriate to my culture but not be imprisoned by it”\textsuperscript{126}. In closing she remarks, “I’ve gained much in my karma chameleon journey. I’m reborn as a better person, less reliant on others for my happiness and full of desire to replace anger with love”\textsuperscript{127}.

The physical journeys described by Sun, Rudolph, and Macdonald are vastly different. Yet in many ways their spiritual journeys are very similar. All three books are accounts of journeys made for ostensibly secular reasons, at least to begin with. All three writers, at some stage of their journeys, crossed into the mode of spiritual tourist. Of the three, Macdonald’s is the most easily identifiable as such. By her own admission she was looking for different ways of being and of dealing with the world. Hers is most like Cohen’s ‘experiential’ type that the preset study has found within the literature examined. In contrast, Rudolph is on a less of a search than Macdonald. He lies somewhere between the ‘diversionary’ and ‘experiential’ modes. However, Sun is somewhat difficult to place. She seems to inhabit a number of Cohen’s types. Whilst she is quite clearly engaged in an ‘experimental’ type experience in the monastery, her entire journey is a quest to obtain a spiritual identity with which she is already quite familiar. Thus she seems to also inhabit, at least in the background, the ‘existential’ mode. Halligan, Dalrymple, and Kriwaczek are useful in this context to place what might be called religious tourists, or historical tourists – those who travel to places of a religious context but not for religious or spiritual reasons. Their

\textsuperscript{124} Ibid., p.156.
\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., p.164.
\textsuperscript{126} Ibid., p.258.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., p.296.
accounts of their journeys allow a clear juxtaposition to be made with the types of experiences written of by Sun, Rudolph, and Macdonald. These, it should be made clear, are the experiences of spiritual tourists – individuals who either search for or have significant spiritual experiences whilst being tourists.

Other Material

The sorts of accounts examined above are not only limited to the world of literature. A quick search of the travel pages of the major print media yields similar results. Michael McMahon, in an article for the *Sydney Morning Herald* on his pilgrimage to Santiago, recounts a conversation he has with other pilgrims. They speak of the freedom from the everyday obsessions with time that they experienced whilst on the pilgrimage, and the difficulties they imagine in explaining to their friends how ‘liberating and uplifting’ it was. McMahon, like Rudolph, also notes the companionship he found on the road with other pilgrims. The description is very similar to Rudolph’s, and displays similar traits of motivation, expectation, and experience. Likewise, Nichola Ryan’s story in *The Australian* of her experience at a Vipassana meditation retreat whilst on holiday in Thailand bears many of the marks of the ‘diversionary’ type of spiritual tourist. Her story, by strange coincidence, takes the very same personal-diary format Macdonald adopted to recount her own Vipassana retreat. Ryan notes that it is “not your usual tourist attraction” but that she had decided to come because she needed some “peace and quite”, although she doesn’t elaborate on this. After most unhappily sticking with the routine and her dislike at being “bossed around”, she completes her retreat and notices, again like Macdonald, “the quiet that I seem to have taken with me like an extra piece of weightless luggage in place of a whole lot of angry noise left behind”.

This is a sentiment shared by Gary Walsh in his article on his journey to Mount Athos, for *The Age*. His intrigue with Greek Orthodox monastic life had led him to do

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the pilgrimage, yet he does not concede any specifically spiritual reasons behind this. However, upon leaving he arrives at the realisation that he has come to a more clear vision of himself. This is an important revelation, and is significant to the understanding of the spiritual tourist phenomena. It is further highlighted by his final remark, when he writes that, “maybe that's the secret of Athos. It gives you the time and the space to understand that the real discoveries are made within”\textsuperscript{130}. This point is crucial, for what Walsh is articulating is that the context of spiritual travel allows the individual to contemplate and explore themselves in ways that may not be possible otherwise. Indeed, these stories indicate that to a certain extent travel is recognised in popular media as a legitimate forum for spiritual exploration. This is an aspect that I have found to be common in spiritual tourists with whom I have had personal communication. One woman, a twenty-five year-old English backpacker, stated that her wish to travel to India and spend time exploring the beliefs and practices she found there was motivated by her desire to try to reconcile her inherited religious tradition. She felt that the Anglican Christianity she had been brought-up in was devoid of a meaningful spiritual side. By exploring the religious systems of India she hoped to both find forms of spirituality she felt were relevant to her life, and by doing so, identify the spiritual aspect to her culturally inherited religion, despite not considering herself a Christian\textsuperscript{131}.

\textbf{Guides}

The sorts of activities and, in a removed way, the expectations of travellers are partially revealed in the travel guide-book industry that has arisen to satisfy their thirst for knowledge of destinations. Religion, in these contexts, is generally used as a selling point, and is often projected as the cultural aspect one must see when travelling. An excellent example of this is the \textit{Lonely Planet} series of guide-books, which are packed with information on everything from accommodation and food, to culture and history. As an example, the \textit{Lonely Planet} guide to Thailand concentrates of Thai Buddhism as the major feature of Thai culture tourists that should see. There


\textsuperscript{131} Personal communication with “Verity”, 27.09.2004.
is a distinct feeling that to ‘do Thailand’ one must ‘do temples’. For example, the section ‘Things to See & Do’ in the chapter on Bangkok begins with five pages describing the major Buddhist temples in the city.\textsuperscript{132} The same is true of \textit{The Insider’s Guide to India} which has a detailed history of religion in India. Although containing an excellent historical background to the major religions of India, the book makes no mention of spiritual activities the tourist can do.\textsuperscript{133} Indeed, arguably the most defining aspect of a location for many western tourists may well revolve around religion. This is especially so when religion and spirituality have overt positions of power and influence, when compared to, for example, the Western world, in which secularisation has attenuated these forms in cultural influence.

This throws into contrast the position that religious, spiritual, and pseudo-religious activities take up in guide-books such as the \textit{Lonely Planet}. As predominantly western published books intended for middle-class western travellers, the overwhelming majority of information of religious and spiritual experience is concerned with ‘other’ religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and ‘other’ religious experiences such as pilgrimage. Indeed, the increasing popularity of Buddhism in the west, along with the influences of individualism and psychological self-help movements results in Buddhist influenced meditation courses being the most heavily publicised. Looking again at the \textit{Lonely Planet} guide to Thailand, the ‘Facts for the Visitor – Courses’ section states that “Thailand has long been a popular place for western students of Buddhism”\textsuperscript{134}. It provides a list of the meditation centres where instruction is given in English, and goes on to recommend a number of “useful premeditation course” books to whet the appetite.

Further examples of this can be found in secular organisations set-up to encourage and help spiritual tourists. The most prominent of these is the Confraternity of St. James, a non-denominational charity group of former pilgrims. Their website states that “most of us have made the pilgrimage and have been sufficiently affected by it to want to give something back: giving advice and help to prospective pilgrims is our

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{134} Cummings, \textit{op. cit.}, p.149.
\end{itemize}
They make a point of stating that there are many reasons why people make the pilgrimage, and that not all of them are religious or spiritual, “though most find that their journey changes them in more or less profound ways”. There are other organisations similar to the Confraternity, such as the Friends of Mount Athos, a group dedicated to educating the public about the Athos monasteries and their history. The group’s website also has a *Pilgrim’s Guide to Mount Athos* that gives information on planning and making the pilgrimage.

What is clear from the previous evidence is that some tourists are travelling for spiritual reasons, some find themselves in situations of spiritual or life-changing significance. The books by Macdonald, Rudolph, and Sun demonstrate that their experiences were both powerful enough to write about, and interesting and relevant enough for publishers to want to publish them. They each travel in or to a religious context, and each records how deeply significant the experience was to them. These accounts are further backed up by the presence of such stories in the print media, and the presence of religion and religious activity as something that ought to be ‘done’ when travelling as seen in some guide books. Organisations such as the Confraternity of St. James further support the theory that some tourists are travelling for religious/spiritual reasons, though they do not necessarily count themselves as practicing a particular religion. Many of them are looking for answers on questions of identity or existence as highlighted by Cohen’s typology, and the foreignness of the places they visit casts into relief the ideas and beliefs they previously had. These are not the ‘plague of our society’ of Boorstin, yet nor are they the simple leisure class of MacCannell. Their positions, motivations, and the outcomes they perceive are complex, like other tourists’. Cohen’s theory yields vital information into these issues. However, it must be used in conjunction with contextual information, such as has been examined, to be useful. This combination reveals that what separates spiritual tourists from other tourists is their desire to place themselves in a religious context when travelling, and to engage in religious or spiritual activities.

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CHAPTER 3: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Summary of Argument

Many questions arise out of the findings of the previous chapter. These revolve around such issues as how spiritual aspects of tourism are marketed, what we can make of the notion of holidays if some people are travelling for spiritual reasons, and following from this the sorts of spiritual explorations they wish to embark upon and their willingness to change according to what they discover. Further questions about the demographic make-up of spiritual tourists also arise. However, the most significant question the presence of spiritual tourists poses relates to what their presence says about the place of religion in contemporary society.

Before attempting to answer such questions it is pertinent to look at what others have said about tourists and especially ‘backpackers’ as they seem to be the group most targeted by the travel industry for such journeys. However, it is pertinent to note that ‘backpacker’ and ‘backpacking’ connotes a heterogeneous style of travel, not a necessarily different type of traveller, who must still be classified as ‘tourists’. Uriely, Yonay, and Simchaj, examining Israeli backpackers who had travelled to South and East Asia, concluded that forms of leisure and tourism could not be separated from cognitive or psychological motivational aspects, yet neither should they be seen as determined by them. That is to say that any observable manifestation of tourism may attract different tourists for very different reasons. This is in accord with the findings of this thesis, that travellers to places of religious significance do so for varied reasons. Whilst half of the books examined clearly depict spiritual tourists, the other three do not. What most clearly separates the two groups of authors are their own conceptions of why they are travelling, and what spiritual

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activities they engage in. The term ‘spiritual tourist’ is proposed as a means to better understand this certain type of tourist.

This heterogeneity of motivations and conceptions of travel prompts questions as to whether others have observed tourists operating in this mode. However, there is little in the way of field research. Uriely, et al, found that of those tourists who did engage in spiritual tourist activities (attending meditation courses, staying in ashrams, etc), the majority admitted they were simply experimenting, or even playing with alternate “centres”\(^\text{141}\). This suggests that the context of the physical and cultural removal of tourism can encourage exploration of ideas of self and world-view, while still allowing the individual to remain connected to their own cultural foundations. Indeed Uriely et al. posit a new type of tourist, the “humanistic” tourist, who “seek meaningful experiences in the centers of other cultures without being alienated from their own”\(^\text{142}\). This type of seekership implies two things easily visible in contemporary travel cultures. The first concerns the search for ‘authenticity’. Where travel is a search for the centres of others, the identification of those centres becomes critical. Travel culture, as Sørensen notes, is clearly highly concerned with the identification of such ‘authentic’ positions\(^\text{143}\). The second concerns cultural issues of truth and belief. The currents of postmodern thought question the hegemony of established secularised forms of knowledge, and subsequently belief. Spiritual tourism can be thought of as a physical manifestation of the search for answers arising from this.

One possibility for solving this problem is to examine the types of places that tourists go to. Boissevain looked at the communities that depend on tourism, and how they cope with the commoditisation of their culture, the presence of outsiders, and their impact on the physical and social environment. In keeping with the postmodern thesis, Boissevain sees today’s tourists as seeking epistemic and ontic holidays, and largely rejecting mass-packaged tours or simple ‘getaways’. However, this seems somewhat simple. The presence of tourist-focussed television programmes, websites, and significant marketing campaigns suggests otherwise. Yet, Boissevain notes the


\(^{143}\) Sørensen, *op. cit.*, pp.862-864.
important point that as communities recognise changes in tourist’s ideals, they change their promotional packages to accommodate them. Boissevain claims that tourist organisations are looking for “quality tourists”; more affluent, more cultured, and more diverse in their holiday ideas. These tourists, he claims, are seen as the liberators of low-spending package tourist destination communities. Although this argument is somewhat circular in that it posits that what tourists want to experience is demonstrated in promotional material, and that what is demonstrated in promotional material is what tourists want, it has the advantage of being strictly empirical.

There is a further consequence that flows from this that concerns travel writing and guide-books. Principally, that there is an expectation that comes from reading others’ accounts that something significant is ‘supposed’ to happen when travelling. Indeed, Noy argues that, as a phenomenon, tourism is “grounded in discourse”. Further, tourism is a phenomenon that is constantly being reworked ‘organically’ from within, by the tourists themselves. Travel writing paints pictures of expectation and influences future travellers’ experiences. In turn these travellers play roles in informing guide-book content and themselves write accounts of their travels. This is a process that explores, imagines, and writes sacred space and is, as McMillin notes, an ironic twist of the de-sacralisation of the world to outfit it for secular modes of life and politics. The sources examined in this thesis are very much a part of this process, and there are significant implications such accounts have in the creation of personal identities, and the formations of expectations of the tourist experience.

Given this, the ways in which tourism is ‘sold’ can give vital insights into what is a continuous process. The market is always open, and will shift and change according to the trends and fashions of its shoppers. In the context of spiritual tourism this concerns both the marketing of spiritual travel and the ways in which it is portrayed to a sympathetic audience. With this in mind, we can note that we find religious sites and practices the focus of ‘things to do’ listed in guide-books. Likewise, the travel books, including those not written by spiritual tourists, ‘sell’ the spiritual and

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145 Noy, op. cit., p.78.
146 McMillin, op. cit., p.50.
147 Noy, op. cit., p.79.
transformative aspects of the journey. The back-covers of the books (the book’s ‘advertisement’) contain the vital clues; Rudolph’s ‘captivating melding of spiritual and physical’\textsuperscript{148}; Macdonald’s “mission to save her soul”\textsuperscript{149}; Sun’s journey to “find a faith for herself”\textsuperscript{150} all speak of the spiritual transformation brought by travel. The back-cover of Halligan’s \textit{Cockles of the Heart} paints her as a “modern pilgrim”\textsuperscript{151}, Kriwaczek’s \textit{In Search of Zarathustra} appeals to the Boorstinian mode of travel “by an adventurer in the classic tradition”\textsuperscript{152}, and the critic’s comments on the back-cover of Dalrymple’s \textit{From the Holy Mountain} invite the reader to explore “the shadowy hinterland of the human story” with him\textsuperscript{153}. All of these presentations have to do with conceptions of what travel is supposed to be, ideas of what travel is supposed to be for, what religious or spiritual experience is supposed to be, and how significant religion and personal spirituality is within society to conceptions of personal identity.

\textit{Who are they?}

One important question that must concern the scholar attempting to understand spiritual tourism is ‘who are they’? This is a question requiring deeper and broader research than is possible in this thesis. It should be acknowledged that this study is partially limited in ascertaining the demographic of spiritual tourists, for it only looks at works published by or published for spiritual tourists, and does not include interviews with the tourists themselves or more broad ethnographic research. As noted above, these types of studies have been undertaken by the likes of Uriely et al., Noy, and Sørensen amongst others. Further, the work of such theorists as Cohen, MacCannell, Turner, and Campbell give good evidence that, when combined with the present study, indicates certain trends in the demographic makeup of the spiritual tourist sub-type\textsuperscript{154}. The works examined in this study are all written by well educated, articulate, and probably middle-class writers.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{148} Rudolph, \textit{op. cit.}, back-cover.
\item \textsuperscript{149} Macdonald, \textit{op. cit.}, back-cover.
\item \textsuperscript{150} Sun, \textit{op. cit.}, back-cover.
\item \textsuperscript{151} Halligan, \textit{op. cit.}, back-cover.
\item \textsuperscript{152} Kriwaczek, \textit{op. cit.}, back-cover.
\item \textsuperscript{153} Dalrymple, \textit{op. cit.}, back-cover.
\item \textsuperscript{154} Se discussions in chapter 1.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
There are some significant studies that have found that it is in fact this type of person who is most likely to be found searching and shopping for spiritual answers. Sørensen notes the heterogeneity of the backpacker demographic, citing affluent westerners, university students, gap-year students, and ‘ordinary’ holiday makers. Stark, in his study into the reasons people join ‘cults’ found similar results. However, of specific interest to this study, is his finding that in social environments where such experimentation is accepted or tolerated, “almost anybody might participate”. This type of experimentation is in accord with that noted by Campbell, and the results are, I believe, transferable. Campbell argued that, whilst the counter-culture was made up of elements rejected by cultural orthodoxy, it was typically not heavily punished in western cultures. Further, Campbell’s thesis that the lessening of moral pressure to belong to orthodox systems, such as religion, results in increases in numbers of ordinary people turning to other systems in their search for ‘authenticity’ and meaning in everyday life. In addition to these findings are the relatively straightforward economic factors that emerge from travel. Namely, that extended travel remains a pastime for the middle-class, the ‘leisure class’ of MacCannell, who have enough surplus income and time to be able to afford to embark upon such journeys. As tourists, spiritual tourists cannot thus be classified as ‘normal’ or ‘average’ as their social position and their desire for spiritual travel sets them apart. However, they are certainly not ‘abnormal’ nor even uncommon.

‘Secular Life’ and Hol(y)days

The previous points concerning demographics and the shaping of the tourist experience by travel writing raises the question of whether holidays are, for some tourists, becoming seen as opportunities for ‘holy-days’. In an article for the Sydney Morning Herald, Robert Dessax, attempting to make a distinction between tourists and travellers, argues that “travellers leave home to find out if they’re really who they thought they were”. He cites the example of pilgrimage to highlight the decrease in

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155 Sørensen, op. cit., pp.848 and 852.
157 Campbell, op. cit., pp.119-130.
158 MacCannell, The Tourist, passim.
such ‘soul-searching’ travel, positing that “travellers travel to save their souls. Not believing very strongly in souls any more, we call it self-discovery”\textsuperscript{159}. This is the position favoured by MacCannell\textsuperscript{160}. However, his application is more universal, including tourism in general in his assessment. Yet the idea of travel as self-discovery is a common one as can be seen in both the books and articles by tourists examined here. Further, according to Cohen’s existential-type the ‘real world’ can only be found on holiday, away from the fake or profane everyday world. Further, in cases where spiritual tourists are in any of the other modes proposed by Cohen, notions of holy-days can be found; from the re-creation of the recreational tourist to the spiritual shopping of the experimental and experiential tourist, there is a definite feeling that travelling holidays are, and are meant to be, in some way special or holy, at least in the context of spiritual tourism. These are times when the stress and fatigue, and often the perceived falsity, of the everyday world can be left behind and a more ‘true’ and re-creating space found.

\textit{The Sorts of Spiritual Exploration}

In each case examined in this thesis the kinds of spiritual exploration embarked upon were anticipated by the authors. As discussed above, there is an expectation that such travel will be unique, and yield answers otherwise unobtainable. Yet, the answer typically comes from questions. Sun noted that she was looking for clues to both her own, and the greater Chinese, spiritual identity. Macdonald speaks of similar motivations concerning identity in addition to seeking new ways of being. The spiritual journeys they embarked upon were all in response to these fundamental questions. Thus spiritual exploration seems to be undertaken within certain limits of familiarity. That the experience of a journey in a religious context is removed from normal is also something that the writers of the shorter accounts share, and is a selling point for guide-books who provide information on how to access such experience. What is actually done is, in all three works, related in some aspect to consciousness change. Both Macdonald and Sun approach this explicitly by doing meditation


\textsuperscript{160} MacCannell, \textit{The Tourist}, passim.
retreats (Macdonald does so within a number of traditions)\textsuperscript{161}. Rudolph’s approach is more implicit, yet is nevertheless concerned with a similar experience. He notes the changes in time (the pace of the pilgrimage) and the changes in social interaction that come with doing the pilgrimage, and he highlights this at the beginning of the book as both the idea, and the object of the pilgrimage\textsuperscript{162}. Whether this is indicative of the rise in popular interest in psycho-consciousness activities such as meditation and yoga, or is more related to ideas about what travel is supposed to entail remains unclear, and is in need of further research.

In the context of tourists doing a pilgrimage there is a sense that all the authors feel themselves as equal, at least in some way, to the most devout pilgrims. In fact, any differences seem to be forgotten or erased by the experience itself. This is a significant point, for what it entails is that these spiritual tourists regard themselves as on journeys of self discovery and exploration that are recognised as valid, at least by some. Further, their physical journey may be recognised as one of ‘secular’ cultural and historical relevance within their own society. That such affirmation is possible for journeys of such spiritual significance is especially important, as it means that the validity of spiritual exploration is being reaffirmed, if not openly, at least tacitly. Macdonald, in particular, is not much concerned with the way she will be perceived at home, and sees her journey as one of extreme personal importance\textsuperscript{163}. What is clear from the research for this thesis is that the types of spiritual exploration undertaken are governed by the background of the person, their motivations and expectations, and the context within which they choose to travel. Sun, a Chinese born academic re tracing the steps of Xuanzang and searching for her own spiritual identity, does a Mahayana monastic retreat; Macdonald, an Australian university educated media personality living in India temporarily and disillusioned by India’s and her own culture’s ways of approaching the world, experiments in some of that country’s multitude of faiths; Rudolph, an American professor of medieval art, does the pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Such foreknowledge can also be found in the editorial accounts examined. Therefore, it seems that whilst these journeys are made

\textsuperscript{161} Macdonald, \textit{op. cit.}, passim & Sun, \textit{op. cit.}, passim.
\textsuperscript{162} Rudolph, \textit{op. cit.}, preface and ch.2.
\textsuperscript{163} Macdonald, \textit{op. cit.}, pp.296-298.
into the unfamiliar, in fact they are made with certain conceptions of familiarity with which the participant is able to place themselves.

The Plasticity of the Self: Being and Identity in the Search for Meaning

One thing that is important to remember is that spiritual tourism does not necessarily coincide with conversion. Even experiential and experimental tourists, who bear all the marks of potential converts, appear not to be interested in officially converting. This is shown in the writings examined in this thesis, where, of the spiritual tourist’s stories examined, none actually convert. Macdonald, who’s journey is explicitly about finding new spiritual modes, says “the Buddhist way of living attracts me most”, yet does not convert\(^\text{164}\). Rather, she takes elements she finds most useful from the various spiritual traditions she explores, and applies them to herself. Rudolph says that despite your system of belief you just have to ‘accept the experience of pilgrimage as a deeply spiritual one’ “no matter what you think”\(^\text{165}\). He notes that really a pilgrimage is a series of reflections on the self, implying its spiritual use is highlighted therein\(^\text{166}\). The same is true for Sun, who says that while she can’t accept some of the soteriological principles of Buddhism, she recognises its place as part of her identity and her desire to embrace it. Further, she expresses a like for some aspects of Zen Buddhist philosophy\(^\text{167}\). Finally, Ryan’s account of her time in the Vipassana retreat is focussed on the efficaciousness of meditation techniques and philosophy in calming and quieting the mind\(^\text{168}\). Through all these accounts there is a willingness to experiment and accept, at least whilst on the journey, yet there is no suggestion whatsoever of conversion.

The rejection of established orthodox systems of belief, and the sampling of other systems are perceived as increasing, even resulting in the magazine *Cosmopolitan* appointing a ‘Spirituality Editor’ to cater for the “growing congregation of

\(^{164}\) Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p.164. 
\(^{165}\) Rudolph, *op. cit.*, p.27. 
\(^{167}\) Sun, *op. cit.*, pp. 
\(^{168}\) Ryan, *op. cit.*
"spirituality seekers" among its readership". This suggests other social processes are at play. In all of the cases a certain ‘bending’ of usual inhibitions or conceptions of self occurs. Each of the authors is in unfamiliar social space. Yet, it is their desire to delve into this type of experience that demonstrates the spiritual tourist’s tendency towards a changeable conception of self. Further, each is explicitly willing to accept, as part of the experience of the journey (both physical and spiritual), the changes that come to them. This is something that some critical commentators on tourism cite as being degraded. To many, such as Boorstin, Turner and Ash, and Dessaix, travel is about exploration of the self through the experiences and experiencing of the ‘modes of the other’. Depending on what is being sought, if anything, there are questions here concerning the plasticity of the self in contemporary western society. If secularisation also affects the formation and conceptions of personal identity, the place of religiosity and how willing individuals are to bend their own sense of being and identity in the quest for others’ ways and means of living in the world is brought into question. In the processes of spiritual tourism the influences of secularisation and modernity/postmodernity, along with the cultural influences of materialism, can be clearly seen.

**The Roles of Spiritual Tourism**

The final question arising from this study revolves around conceptions of motivation for spiritual tourists; why do some people travel in this mode? From my research it is clear that there is no single reason that can be attributed to all spiritual tourists. This is demonstrated well when Cohen’s typology is applied to spiritual tourists. However, spiritual tourists do share the common trait of travelling within religious contexts. The questions concerning what draws them to these contexts revolve around issues of motivation, expectation, and the cultural ideals associated with the notion of ‘travel’.

169 L. Brooks. ‘Spiritual Tourism’. *The Guardian*, 08.12.2003. Accessed from [http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1102184,00.html](http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,3604,1102184,00.html) on 28.09.2004. It is interesting to note that Brooks terms the “pick and mix” approach to spirituality “spiritual tourism”. She is employing the term in the sense of ‘touring religious systems’ in a pejorative sense, implying a ‘package tourist’ type approach to spirituality. She closes noting, “Perhaps it's time to question the civilising potential of an individuated belief system that only picks the soft centres from the chocolate box”.

All three author’s works examined in this thesis express an explicit desire to place themselves in religious contexts. There is no indication of accident or coercion. The same is true for the editorial articles. Further, the study of guide-books indicate that these sorts of contexts and activities are ‘the things to do’ when travelling. Yet, this question can only be answered fully in individual contexts. Some tourists will approach spiritual aspects from a recreational or diversionary point of view, whilst some will come with ideas of experimentation or will be seeking alternatives. In this sense, the religions of other cultures, by virtue of their relative uniqueness, can be seen to be facilitating explorations of the self at a variety of levels. In addition, issues of secularisation and modernity/postmodernity are very much a part of this picture. The removal of religious institutional authority, and the subsequent questioning of religious belief has left a gulf in conceptions of fundamental personal identity that postmodern currents see as repairable with any ‘truth’ applicable. This thesis posits that spiritual tourism is a manifestation of the increasing acceptance of individuated formations of personal identity, and a way to explore concepts of truth, morality, and belief that are typically either ignored or not accepted within Western societies.

Some further insights can be gained by looking at the places visited by spiritual tourists. In the same sense that MacCannell argued that tourist destinations were “an unplanned typology of structure” that allowed a view of modern consciousness171, the types of destinations visited by spiritual tourists can yield information relevant to ascertaining its role. Importantly, none of the tourists examined here undertook any formal doctrinal training. Whether this is an indication that spiritual tourists are not interested in such ‘institutional’ aspects, or simply a restriction of limited time and money (or both) is unclear, though it seems more likely to be the former given the influences of modernity/postmodernity and secularisation. However, all of the tourists examined here visited places of active worship. It is suggested that their object was to immerse themselves in the everyday practical aspect of the religions they visited. This betrays certain ideals concerning religion; that it should be done at a personal level or in small-scale ‘organic’ groups. Indeed, the tendency towards individual consumerist religion, a hallmark of secularisation, is well demonstrated in these ideals. Spiritual tourists, as ‘consumers’ of religious novelty (and potential re-makers of themselves

therein) are easily observable indicators of the trends of contemporary Western religiosity.

**What These Conclusions Say About the Place of Religion in Society**

This thesis has examined the published works of a number of tourists, and a variety of information sources available to them in order to establish that some tourists deliberately set out to travel to religious settings for the purpose of having some sort of spiritual experience. I have called these travellers “spiritual tourists”, both in the sense that they are travellers looking for spiritual experience, and that they are ‘touring novel religions’ spiritually. They are distinguishable from ‘regular’ tourists by these motivational traits, and by not being satisfied with simply viewing religious practice in passing. Their journeys, or the spiritual portions of them, are explicitly concerned with moving closer to the religious setting and their immersion in religious or spiritual practice. However, spiritual tourists also differ from pilgrims. Where both religious (including implicitly religious) and secular pilgrims travel towards an acknowledged sacred ‘centre’, spiritual tourists are often moving towards novelty, or are experimenting with concepts and practices. Yet, the common foundational aspect of religion results in both the ‘pilgrim’ and the ‘spiritual tourist’ types overlapping. Indeed often pilgrims and spiritual tourists will be on journeys that may look identical. The contrast, both between ‘regular’ tourists and spiritual tourists, and pilgrims and spiritual tourists comes when the fundamental reasons behind the journeys, and the understandings of why they are travelling are examined.

It is this contrast that brings the spiritual tourist type into relief against the greater tourist background. Whilst Cohen proposed his typology for the analysis of all tourists, when it is used with the addition of tourists’ personal conceptions of their motivations and goals it shows new types of tourists, such as spiritual tourists. This shows that while all spiritual tourists are deliberately searching out religious contexts for their journeys, they do so often for very different reasons. The use of Cohen’s thesis accounts for the variation in the motivations of spiritual tourists. Thus the

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‘destination’ of, for example, a meditation retreat may be approached for recreational purposes, as a diversion from ordinary life, to have new experiences, to search or experiment with other religious beliefs and ways of being, or to travel to the religious setting the individual feels is their centre. This final group involves, as Cohen rightly pointed out, an experience close to both religious conversion and pilgrimage\(^{173}\). These categories of reasons are both phenomenological, as Cohen originally intended, and cognitive, and the two must be taken together. However, the types and descriptions given by Cohen are well applied here and demonstrate there will be different types of spiritual tourists according to their conceptions of the purposes of their journeys.

Having the type designation of spiritual tourist allows for a comprehensive analysis of tourist behaviour and motivations with relation to religion. Many previous studies have focussed on tourism without taking account of the tourists themselves. MacCannell focused on tourism as a type of activity from a functional perspective, while Cohen developed an excellent typology, yet intended it for universal application. Both are essential in the study of tourism and travel, yet both are incomplete and can only give surface information about tourists and the societies they come from. By combining these two theories, along with aspects of others’, and applying them to a specific context much richer results are yielded. ‘Spiritual tourist’ is thus a term to both designate a type of traveller, and an indicator of the context being examined. This is especially relevant when considering the prevalence of ‘religion’ as an object of tourist fascination, in a number of formats. Further, the inherent liminality of travel means that, for many, it is an ideal time to experiment with, experience, and attempt to understand foreign religions. Yet, it can also be a way to understand one’s own spirituality in the context of inherited culture. The ‘spiritual tourist’ category thus allows a more thorough analysis of tourist behaviour with relation to religions to be undertaken as the observer must take into account both motivations and what is done.

Finally, by examining spiritual tourists, we are able to gain a particularly unique perspective of religion in society. With the application of Cohen’s thesis, the study of spiritual tourism gives further insight to perceptions of the place of religions in

society and the ways people are attempting to re-sacralise their lives. This operates in a number of ways. Firstly, it implies that some people are using the context of travel to explore their spirituality through the religious systems of others. This can be seen as an outgrowth from the idea of ‘cultic milieu’ of Campbell, within the leisure class of MacCannell, and operating closely in accord with Cohen’s typology of tourists. It is not a fundamentally new phenomena, in that people have always both searched for new ways of being and have travelled throughout human history. However, the combination of the two is somewhat unique to contemporary society. The increases in communications and information technologies, the increasing ease and lessening cost of travel, and the influences of modernity and postmodernity combined with the process of secularisation have resulted in a situation within western society where the combination of travel and the search for spiritual novelty is both possible and accepted. Consequently, spiritual tourists can be seen as exemplifying, in various ways, the positions religion, and religious practice and meaning occupy in popular culture. Namely, that individual religious positions and practices are seen as more and more interchangeable to adapt to life changes, and that the context of travel is one in which such changes can be, and are, explored.

174 See discussion of Campbell’s theories in chapter 1.
APPENDIX

Appendix A – Portrayal of religion

A further aspect of travel writing that must be examined is the way religion and religions are portrayed within the context of the journeys undertaken. Macdonald’s book stands out in this regard. It is a story of the cultural and spiritual exploration of the religious traditions she encounters in India. Her quest is to find a spiritual aspect suitable for her life, thus her perception and portrayal of religion is made within the context of seekership. Each tradition she approaches is appraised for its suitability to her own world view and her vision of her life to come. Thus we find that she notes her criticism of Christianity as it is her own culture’s dominant religion, a culture that has left her with a spiritual void. Originally from an atheist family, after spending some time exploring India’s faiths and observing how intertwined they are with everyday life she remarks that “I’m less harsh in judging the faith of others. I now feel being an extreme atheist is as arrogant as being an extreme fundamentalist”. Like Macdonald’s, Halligan’s is a very ‘street level’ book, a commentary on the aspects of the everyday and the mundane. The feeling in Halligan’s book is one distinctly present-day and modern. Religious significance is portrayed as something more like cultural memory than existential direction, and is seen as an artefact of the past. Halligan tours France and Spain to see what architectural works of beauty religion has created, but is not at all looking for, or even conscious of, anything further. Religion is portrayed as something dying. For example, writing of a monastery in the Pyrenees she says “there’s a cloister, calm as cloisters always are, but sad. The mist weeping”. However, it must be remembered that Halligan’s book is concerned with food and architecture, even including a number of recipes to stimulate the hungry reader.

175 Ibid.
176 MacDonald, op. cit., p.249.
177 Ibid., p.124.
178 Halligan, op. cit., p.135.
In contrast, Kriwaczek uses his journey to demonstrate the ways in which religious and cultural histories in Central Asia and Europe are reworked to fit into the worlds of local people. Yet he is quite critical of what he sees as an Islamic ‘rubbing out’ of other religious traditions, noting the “great amnesia about their ancient past that settled over the Iranians after being conquered by the Arab forces of Islam”\(^{179}\). However, he does concede that modern Iranians seem keen to discover more about their pre-Islamic past\(^{180}\). He also spends some time writing of the insightfulness of Zarathustra’s writings to the contemporary Western context, and notes that while it is the nature of religions to change, the founders of the major world religions would be surprised at what their visions had become\(^{181}\). Dalrymple follows a similar route. Like many of the other writers, he portrays religion at the street level, with all the phlegm, farts, coughs, and wheezes, as well as the deeply spiritual aspects. Yet Dalrymple constantly comes back to the idea of syncretism and the ways in which people take what is meaningful and incorporate it into their everyday practice. However, Dalrymple’s is a book primarily concerned with the interaction of religion and politics, portraying the demise of Christianity in the eastern Mediterranean. Yet he does so with a frankness and humour that is aimed at making the book more palatable for the mass market than the academic. On being told that the largest Nestorian community in Europe was in Ealing in London, Dalrymple remarks; “such are the humiliations of the travel writer in the late twentieth century: go to the ends of the earth to search for the most exotic heretics in the world, and you find they have cornered the kebab business at the end of your street in London”\(^{182}\).

Sun portrays religion at street level as cathartic, a tool to help people through lives of oppression and poverty\(^{183}\). She comments that what Chinese Buddhism teaches is not how to change life, but to change how one looks at it. This, for her, is a crucial aspect of the loss of identity she sees in China as rising out of the purging of traditional ideologies that came with communism\(^{184}\). She also comments that the Communist depiction of utopia always reminded her of the Buddhist Western Paradise. In either

\(^{179}\) Kriwaczek, op. cit., p.88.
\(^{180}\) Ibid., p.95.
\(^{181}\) Kriwaczek, op. cit., p.217.
\(^{182}\) Dalrymple, op. cit., pp.142-143.
\(^{183}\) Sun, op. cit., p.107.
\(^{184}\) Ibid., p.142.
case she found the idea inconceivable, and existing only in the heart\textsuperscript{185}. However, what is most strikingly noticeable is that aside from noting some Buddhist temples and some passing references to Islam, for most of the book there is very little said of the practice of religion in China today. It seems that, like it was during the Cultural Revolution, religion for Sun is mostly done behind closed doors. Of all the writers here examined, Rudolph stands out as most romanticising religion. His language of the stark beauty of religiousness on the pilgrimage carries through the book. To place himself, an atheist, within this he stresses the physical hardship of doing the pilgrimage. Blisters, weight loss, tiredness – “the average day on the pilgrimage is physically harder than the hardest day in the average person’s life”\textsuperscript{186}. With this hardship comes the communitas described by Turner between Rudolph and other long-term pilgrims. Religion for Rudolph is very much concerned with what is done. There is virtually no concern for doctrine in the description of his journey.

\textsuperscript{185} Ibid., pp.395-396.
\textsuperscript{186} Rudolph, op. cit., pp.18-19.
Appendix B – Avenues for Further Research

This is a field requiring a great deal of further research. In order to be fully examined, spiritual tourism must be approached from a number of what may seem contrary angles. The most critical area for research is collection and collation of data from tourists themselves. This, most importantly, should include interviews conducted before, during, and after travel in order to establish both a firm empirical foundation for conclusions, and give insight into the ways expectations and motivations interact and change throughout the travel experience. In addition, there is a great deal of work required on the demographic and economic aspects of spiritual tourism. Many questions are yet to be answered concerning the level of influence financial considerations have on both tourists ability to begin journeys and continue them when a ‘quest’ has not been finished. Further, there are also questions to be asked about the monetary value attached to spiritual experience. Enquiries into the levels to which religion and one’s spirituality are seen as commodities can give vital clues to the shifting trends of religiosity in society. Finally, experts in the areas of social geography could give extremely useful information concerning positions of spiritual significance within given cultural and demographic contexts. An examination of social geography, especially in its fluid mode as it relates to the movements of social groups would yield particularly informative data concerning the kinds of places the different types of spiritual tourists visit.
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