

# Influence of Global Religious Routes on Holy Sites and Communities: Communication Approaches and Societal Structures in the Growth of Religious Tourism

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## ABSTRACT

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**Introduction:** The article examines the problem of preserving traditional values and cultural and natural heritage for development and transmission to future generations. Religious tourism aims to satisfy physical and spiritual needs and develop a person's cultural perception. Tourism helps a person to gain experience in cooperation with another culture and helps to gain experience in involvement with the place where he or she is, with its traditions.

**Objectives:** This study aims to determine the essential aspects of pilgrimage tourism to sacred places as a factor in the development of domestic tourism.

**Methods:** Our study examined pilgrimages to sacred places of holy springs and fonts. The article states the significance of the impact of religious tourism on the economy of individual countries and regions of the world, as well as religious centres. The article examines specific pilgrimage routes (Athos, Jerusalem) and explores their history and impact on social groups.

**Results:** The relevance of the theoretical understanding of this phenomenon is due to the current practice of tourism activities, which increasingly requires thoughtful approaches to its implementation, and the need to address methodological issues in determining the directions of further development of religious tourism. It is essential to consider religious tourism as a historical and cultural phenomenon, as it allows for a deeper understanding of its essence as one of the essential creative cultural factors. The analysis of sources leads to the following conclusion: religious tourism is divided into religious and cultural tourism, pilgrimage tourism and special pilgrimage. Many reasons have led to the evolution of these forms, but the main thing is that Christianity is directly related to Christian traditions and culture.

**Conclusions:** Thus, tourists who choose alternative tourism belong to different economic and age groups, emphasising the tourism industry's multicomponent nature. This allows us to build a media strategy for the development of religious tourism.

**Keywords:** pilgrimage, religion, tourism, spiritual centres, holy places.

## INTRODUCTION

Tourism is playing an increasingly important role in the global economy. The beginning of the new millennium is marked by the rise of international tourist traffic and the emergence of new trends in the development of this industry despite the negative impact of COVID-19 [1, 2]. Religious tourism, including pilgrimage and excursions, is becoming increasingly popular. Travel agencies are increasingly developing itinerary programmes for pilgrims [3]. Each type of tourism has specific features and characteristics that can play a significant role in the overall development goals of society and help establish trusting relationships between people of different cultures and religions [4].

Religious tourism became widespread in the late 20th and early 11th centuries [5]. This type of tourism involves tourists visiting holy places, monasteries, and springs and seeing works of art and museums that reflect the cultural heritage of previous eras. The opportunity for tourists to participate in religious festivals and ceremonies is beautiful, so travel agencies offer many religiously themed trips for Christmas, Easter and other holidays. Religious tourism contributes to the knowledge of history and human values, fostering humanism and cultural growth of people, their mutual understanding, and international cooperation [6].

Religious tourism is related to other types of tourism, especially festive, cultural, social and group tourism, and they are linked by seasonality. Religious tourism includes pilgrimage and educational trips to get acquainted with religious monuments or the history of religion. Historically, religious trips have always been multifunctional trips, even when religious factors seemed to predominate. However, religious motivation is less critical in modern societies than in ancient ones. A special place among the world's religious centres is occupied by Jerusalem, a holy place for adherents of three religions. The holy mountain of Athos (Greece) is also one of the most significant shrines of the Orthodox world. According to legend, the Mother of God illuminated this place gracefully. Such sacred places have a media and information impact on the development of religious tourism. The relevance of studying this topic is explained by the fact that, in modern conditions, religious tourism plays a vital role in the system of international and domestic tourism. International religious routes are a tool in religious tourism development, so studying the involvement of media strategies and social institutions is essential.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Tourism is a journey for both entertainment and educational purposes. One of the types of travel is pilgrimage and religious tourism. In their study on particular types of tourism, Panchenko et al. [7] and colleagues note that religious tourism includes “activities related to the provision of services and meeting the needs of tourists travelling to holy places and religious centres outside their usual environment”. A pilgrimage is “a set of trips by representatives of different faiths for pilgrimage purposes. Pilgrimage refers to the desire of believers to worship holy places” [8, 9].

UNWTO (The United Nations World Tourism Organisation) estimates 300 to 330 million tourists visit the world's major religious centres yearly, making approximately 600 million national and international trips. Europe accounts for 40% of these trips. As crucial tourist destinations, religious heritage centres not only stimulate international tourism and economic growth but also serve as a platform for visitors and host communities to meet, thus making an essential contribution to building tolerance, respect and mutual understanding between different cultures [10].

Duran-Sanchez et al. [11] conducted a descriptive analysis of the literature on religious tourism. It was concluded that scientific documents in this area of research have grown exponentially over the decades. Heidari et al. [12] analysed the trend of scientific research on religious and spiritual tourism, covering the period 1990–2017. Iliev [13] found that religious tourism was initially perceived as overlapping mass and alternative tourism elements. The research contributes to the scientific literature by comprehensively analysing the intellectual structure of the rapidly growing religious tourism research set. Many domestic and foreign scholars have studied religious tourism.

Thus, Alrefaei et al. [14] investigated the impact of the pandemic uncertainty on tourism demand. Bayev et al. [15] demonstrate the cycle of a tourist destination and describe the distinctive stages that follow its development process to plan and manage tourism assets. Griffiths and Wiltshier [16] recommended that tourism capacity refers to the maximum number of visitors and the maximum growth rate above which it is harmful. Csi [17] and Tilson [18] describe the relationship between avalanche capacity and the tourism life cycle and suggest policy implications. Stryzhak et al. [19] described the impact of the national brand on religious tourism.

This study aims to determine the essential aspects of pilgrimage tourism to sacred places as a factor in the development of domestic tourism. The article examines the problem of preserving traditional values and cultural and natural heritage for development and transmission to future generations. One of the objectives of the article is to study the Ukrainian and foreign experience of using international religious routes in tourism. Another task is to study the impact of international religious routes on sacred places and social groups and determine the effectiveness of social institutions.

### METHODS

Conducting a retrospective analysis of the use of media strategies and social institutions. Using methods of historical and logical analysis and comparison, as well as forecasting the development of pilgrimage tourism. The methodology

is based on descriptive statistics of attendance at holy places. To conduct this analysis, we used secondary data in public information related to tourists and pilgrimage. The data were found through websites (World Tourism Organisation, European Association of the Vie Francigene; Oficina del Peregrino, Eurostat, INSETE and others) and allowed us to compare and process the information and provide a complete overview of religious tourism realities.

## RESULTS

Tourism is a form of human migration that is not caused by a change of residence or work. According to the definition proposed by the International Association of Tourism Professionals, tourism is a set of relations and phenomena that arise when people move and stay in places other than their permanent residence and work. Religious tourism has become increasingly popular in recent years. This type of tourism is associated with visits to religious shrines to meet the spiritual needs of tourists. Religious travel is integral to modern tourism and plays a considerable role in international and domestic tourism.

The objects of religious tours are cathedrals, monasteries, and spiritual centres. In Ancient Russia, pilgrims who made a long pilgrimage were highly respected. Famous places of pilgrimage were: The Holy Land, Constantinople, Athos, and other holy places of Universal Orthodoxy. With the emergence of the first churches and monasteries, Ancient Russia developed its traditions of pilgrimage. Traditions of worshipping the holy relics of God's saints and miraculous and venerated icons appeared. The first places of pilgrimage were Kyiv, Veliky Novgorod, Smolensk, and later Goshiv, Pochayiv, and Bogomolets, which are still visited today.

The concept of "pilgrimage" comes from the word "palm tree" – the branches of this particular tree were used by the first Christian pilgrims who visited the Holy Land during the Feast of the Lord's Entry into Jerusalem. In Ukraine, this holiday is called "Palm Sunday" [20]. Pilgrimage is a journey of people to worship holy places. A pilgrim is usually a deeply religious person with a clear understanding of religious knowledge and values. As religion influences the formation of people's self-awareness and stereotypes, they seek to participate in many religious ceremonies, rites, and pilgrimage trips to holy places and religious centres. Pilgrims are religious people with a system of established moral values and ideals. In order to achieve their moral and spiritual goals, they decide to sacrifice their way of life (change the environment, social circle, and food).

As mentioned above, the objects of pilgrimage can be considered "holy places", which include churches, monasteries, and various natural objects such as springs, caves, and mountains (for example, Athos). A pilgrimage can also be made in honour of a holiday. In the Christian tradition, a pilgrimage can be in honour of a consecrated church or monastery. The purpose of a pilgrimage may be a desire to pray before a miraculous icon located in a particular church (monastery), to confess in a place of spiritual strength or to a famous religious figure (priest, monk, elder), to perform God-pleasing work on the construction, cleaning of a church or monastery, to make a donation, to receive grace. We use zoning to clarify the varied picture of pilgrimage (Figure 1). There are 11 macro-regions of pilgrimage in the world:

1. Christian Orthodox Europe: Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Greece, Bulgaria, Romania;
2. North America with the dominant position of Christianity and numerous other religions;
3. Latin America with the predominance of Christianity and local traditional religions;
4. North Africa with a massive predominance of Islam;
5. West and East Africa, where Islam dominates, and there are separate centres of Christianity and traditional religions;
6. Western Asia with the dominance of Islam and enclaves of Christianity and Judaism;
7. South Asia, where Hinduism and Buddhism are widespread, and there are centres of Christianity, Jainism, Sikhism and Islam;
8. Southeast Asia, dominated by Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity, and enclaves of East Asia, dominated by Buddhism, Confucianism, Shintoism, and parts of Islam and Christianity;
9. Central Asia with the dominance of Buddhism (mainly Lamaism), Central Asia with the dominance of Islam [18].

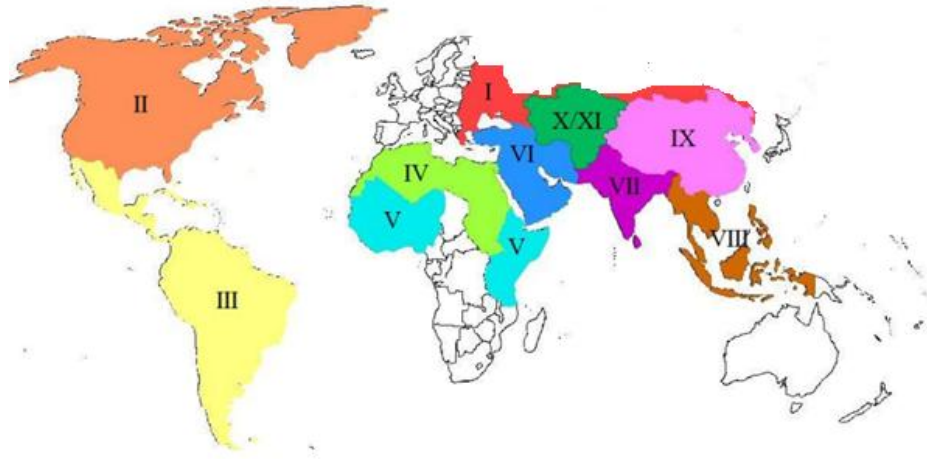


Figure 1: Macro-regions of pilgrimage in the world: I – Christian Orthodox Europe; II – North America; III – Latin America; IV – North Africa; V – West and East Africa; VI – West Asia; VII – South Asia; VIII – Southeast Asia; IX – East Asia; X/XI – Central and Middle Asia

Source: [18]

Each macro-region is distinguished by its well-known pilgrimage centres, which receive vast flows of believers from other countries of the world, combining religious specialisation with the functions of administrative, industrial, cultural and tourist centres. In addition, macro-regions have religious sites of national and local significance. Religious tourism for sightseeing and cognitive purposes involves visiting religious centres where tourists can see religious sites, such as existing religious monuments and museums, attend worship services, and participate in religious processions and other religious events. However, participation in a service is not a prerequisite for such a trip.

Since participation in worship is not a mandatory component of sightseeing tours, they are shorter than pilgrimage tours. Such tours have fewer restrictions, must be timed to coincide with a holiday, and are open to adults and children. Tourists can also visit religious sites during combined trips. In such trips, the excursion component will be part of the programme. For pilgrims, the excursion is of secondary importance to specific religious activities [21]. Table 1 shows the main elements when developing an itinerary for sacred sites.

Table 1: Elements to Consider When Developing a Route to Sacred Sites

Motivation and planning	Special conditions
Rationale	A good reason for the development
Main objective	A clear vision developed by decision-makers
Objectives or sub-objectives	Measurable goals are defined
Inventory of assets	Planners should make a list of assets
Market potential	Determining the attractiveness, target group and economic impact
Development of the route	Availability, asset integration, documentation, route stops and route time allocation

Source: [22]

Religious tourism is closely related to scientific tourism with religious themes. The number of such trips is not large, but thanks to such trips, the geography of tourism is expanding (Figure 2). In such tours, scientists are interested in religious heritage – manuscripts, frescoes, religious objects found during excavations, architectural forms, and much more. Tourists head to the centres of both monotheistic existing religions and countries with a rich polytheistic past. These are primarily Egypt, Italy, and Greece [23].

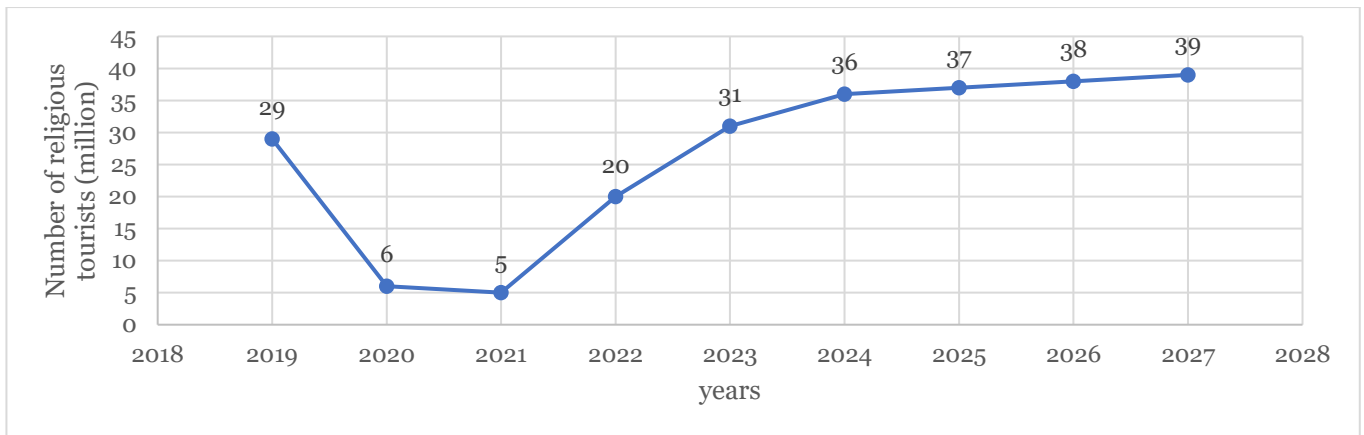


Figure 2: Forecast of Religious Tourists in the World (in millions)

Source: [2]

Over the past 10–15 years, Ukraine has seen an intense revival of the traditions of pilgrims and tourists visiting the holy places of Orthodoxy and Judaism. The reason for this rapid development is the military actions on the territory of Ukraine, which affected the religious message of the population and the relatively low cost. Pilgrimage services have emerged, including those operating at monasteries. At the same time, an essential role in religious tourism is played by providing services to organise such trips, which should be created by representatives of church structures in Ukraine. Providing a high level of such services does not distort the essence of religious pilgrimage, as it does not affect the inner essence of pilgrimage. Instead, it reflects the cultural level of modern society [19].

Pilgrimage is essential to full-fledged church life, so its revival and organisation is a crucial church-wide matter. The development of pilgrimage trips should take into account, on the one hand, the millennial history of pilgrimage, and, on the other hand, the current practice of organising tourism. The main obstacles to the development of pilgrimage and tourism are the lack of information about holy and memorial sites and religious routes, the shortage of trained guides-interpreters and qualified tour guides, and the low level of communication and coordination between government and tourism organisations. The website of the Pilgrimage Centre of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church lists six pilgrimage centres in Ukraine and abroad. There are six monasteries with world-famous holy springs on their territory (Figure 3):

1. Pochaiv (Ternopil region);
2. Hoshiv (Ivano-Frankivsk region);
3. Jerusalem (Israel, Middle East);
4. Athos (Greece).



A



B





C



D

Figure 3: Springs in pilgrimage centres: A – The Spring (Bath) of St. Righteous Anna, Pochaiv village;  
 B – Yardenit, Jerusalem; C – The Spring of St. Athanasius, Athos [24];  
 D – The Holy Spring of the Hoshiv Monastery, Hoshiv village

Source: [20]

Athos. The name of a mountain and peninsula in Greek Macedonia in the north of Eastern Greece. The height of the mountain is 2033 metres. For the Greeks, Athos became a repository of national traditions, the part of Greece where Greek Christian traditions, literature and truly Byzantine rites were preserved for over a thousand years. Women are not allowed on the Holy Mountain. There are many monasteries on the Holy Mountain, but only one is home to the holy spring of St Athanasios, founded in the tenth century [24].

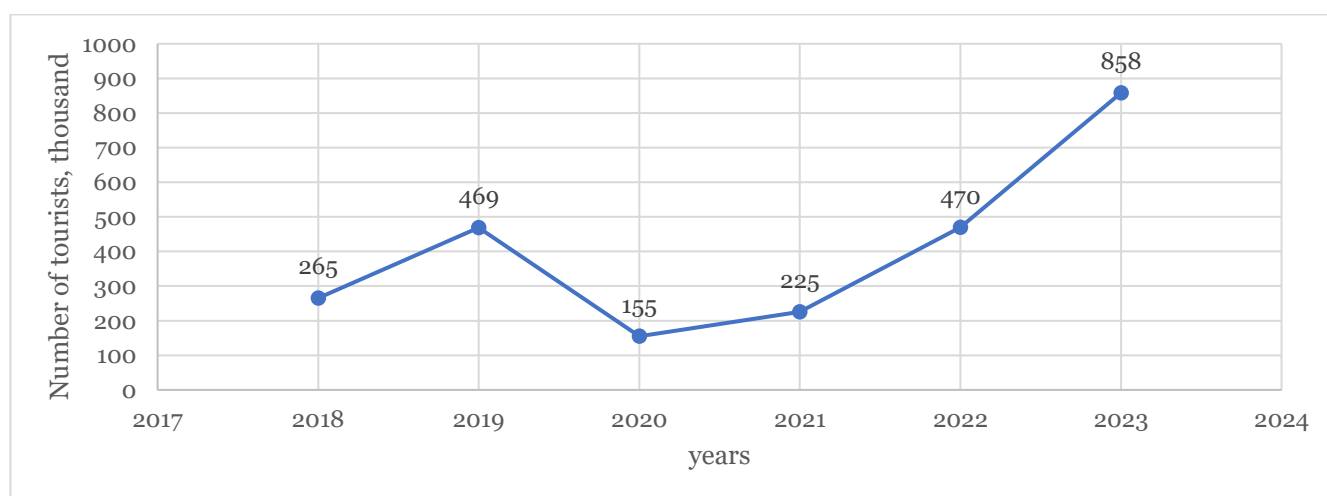


Figure 4: Number of Tourists Arriving for Pilgrimage in Greece in 2018–2023

Source: [26]

In recent decades, pilgrimage and religious tourism has been rising and expanding rapidly (Figure 2 and Figure 4). Currently, the term “religious tourism” is often used in a general sense. This includes the desire of the pilgrim to participate in the liturgical life of a religious community and the intention of the religious traveller to experience faith-based communities and their religious and cultural heritage. Internationally, activities such as attending religious gatherings and events, pilgrimages, and visits to sacred sites fall under the broad category of religious tourism.

Table 2: Number of Pilgrims to Sacred Places in 2019–2023

Nº	A place of pilgrimage	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
1	Athos <sup>*1</sup>	250000	70000	100000	230000	350000
2	Mecca <sup>*2</sup>	850000	10000	60000	200000	13550000
3	Jerusalem <sup>*3</sup>	800000	100000	200000	900000	300000
4	Pochaev <sup>*4</sup>	80000	10000	50000	8000	10000

Source: <sup>\*1</sup> [27]; <sup>\*2</sup> [14]; <sup>\*3</sup> [28]; <sup>\*4</sup> [29]

Therefore, it is advisable to analyse the number of tours and pilgrims to holy places in countries engaged in military operations (Ukraine, Israel) and peaceful countries (Greece, Saudi Arabia) (Table 2). From this perspective, religious tourism goes beyond “niche tourism” and becomes a dynamic and independent area of particular interest.

## DISCUSSION

Pilgrimage, as a historical form of travel, is deeply rooted in the culture of many nations and religions. For example, for Christians, it can be a trip to Jerusalem, the Vatican or Lourdes, while for Muslims, it can be to Mecca and Medina, and for Buddhists, it can be to Lumbini or Bodhgaya. These places attract pilgrims with their spiritual significance, historical ties and religious heritage. The development of pilgrimage tourism in the context of a full-scale invasion, such as war, conflict or natural disaster, is complex due to several challenges and obstacles that arise in such situations. However, history has shown that pilgrimage tourism can survive and grow even under challenging circumstances. Indeed, religious tourists are projected to increase globally by 2030 (Figure 3). The annual number of pilgrims is estimated to reach 40–45 million. This compares favourably with a significant decline in 2020–2021 of 5–6 million pilgrims per year, which Rizun et al. [2] suggest is due to the negative impact of the coronavirus.

With the growth of global tourism, there is an increase in interest in religious travel, which plays a significant role in developing tourism to sacred sites. In particular, Figure 4 analyses the number of pilgrims who visited Greece, in particular, mostly Mount Athos, where religious tours have been top-rated recently and have grown significantly despite the negative impact of the coronavirus. Indeed, in 2020, there was a 70% drop in attendance, and in 2021, it was possible to slightly improve these figures slightly, reaching 50% of the 2019 figure. In 2022, it was possible to reach the indicators before the pandemic year of 2019. From 2022, the number of pilgrims is projected to double, reaching 858,000 in 2023 compared to 470,000 in 2022.

The definition of tourism as a type of activity is in no way inferior to the concept and essence of pilgrimage. The purpose of pilgrimage is to travel to religious centres and holy places. Hence, it is more related to tourism than spiritual activity, so we can safely describe pilgrimage as a tour. That is why Table 2 analyses the number of pilgrims to countries that are engaged in military operations (Ukraine, Israel) and peaceful countries (Greece, Saudi Arabia), and these data show a significant drop in the number of tourists during the coronavirus and military operations. Thus, during the pandemic, from 2020 to 2021, the number of pilgrims to Mecca was limited to 10,000 and 60,000, respectively. However, in 2022, these restrictions were lifted, doubling the number of pilgrims compared to the pre-coronavirus year of 2019, and in 2023, more than a million pilgrims are expected. Military operations and the coronavirus have significantly affected the number of pilgrims to the holy sites of Jerusalem, with an 80% drop in 2020 and a 70% drop during the Palestinian War. A similar picture is observed in the holy places of Ukraine, particularly in Pochayiv; due to the Russian full-scale invasion in 2022, there was an almost tenfold drop in attendance, which recovered after the coronavirus crisis.

New approaches in the scientific literature have proposed a broader conceptual framework for religious tourism in modern times. Thus, Andriotis [30] noted: “Religious trips are often multifunctional journeys that include religious dominant factors alongside other tourist motivations”. The current analysis is based on “polymorphic religious tourism”, which combines different ways of motivating tourists to visit different destinations. The proposed conceptual framework refers to the long evolution of definitions and concepts in this field. As the world changes, tourism phenomena and theoretical approaches evolve.

Today, many people have a vague idea of pilgrimage. As is well known, the media nowadays transmit information and cover various topics for a large number of people at once. The most accessible sources of information are

television, radio, newspapers, and especially the Internet. As Bishop Ihor Ohienko noted in his report, the knowledge about pilgrimage among journalists is shallow. Moreover, in secular publications, the term “pilgrimage” is often not used in its direct meaning. Instead, it refers to a mass movement of people to a place. The other side of this phenomenon is the authors' free interpretation of pilgrimage as a journey to places of worship. In these cases, the objects of “pilgrims”, for example, Elvis Presley fans, are places associated with the singer's life, and exotic butterfly lovers – the corners of wildlife where they live [31]. As Rickly [32] emphasises, religious tourism is multidimensional. It includes “not only monuments, relics and artefacts, intangible heritage, local communities' beliefs, values and lifestyles, art, legends, liturgical texts and chants”.

### CONCLUSION

Religious tourism is a significant source of economic revenue, as it provides an influx of foreign tourists and contributes to infrastructure development in regions with religious sites. It is essential in developing the tourism industry in many countries, including Ukraine. It can bring many benefits to the country's economy, including increased tourism revenues, new jobs, infrastructure development, and improved living standards for the local population.

This study defines the essence of pilgrimage tourism to sacred places as a factor in the development of domestic tourism. The article examines the problem of preserving traditional values and cultural and natural heritage for development and transmission to future generations. The article also examines the attendance of sacred places in Ukraine and abroad, using the experience of international religious routes in tourism. The coronavirus and hostilities' impact on the attendance of sacred sites, particularly Mecca, Athos, and Jerusalem, is analysed. The paper also forecasts an increase in religious tourists by 2030.

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