

Opinion

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Spiritual Tourism: Be a Responsible Tourist

There must be coordinated and integrated efforts between the tourists, tour operators, and officials from the tourism department to promote tourism globally

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Introduction

With a growing number of tourists globally, there is an increased emphasis on spiritual tourism than ever before. Tourism is an activity dependent on three operative elements—discretionary income, leisure time, and social sanctions permissive to travel.

Spiritual tourism blends spirituality and tourism. It gives enlightenment and entertainment to visitors. It also offers education as visitors learn many new things during spiritual tourism.

Spiritual tourism is to travel to find purpose and meaning in your life. It elevates your physical, mental, and emotional energies. It develops, maintains, and improves your body, mind, and spirit. In a nutshell, it connects your body, mind, and soul. Hence, spiritual tourism can be defined as traveling on pilgrimage to acquire enlightenment, entertainment, and education, to leave your footprints and take your memories back to your home by expressing your gratitude to God.

Spiritual tourism is not connected with any specific religion. It is different from religious tourism. Spiritual tourism is to connect your body, mind, and soul, while religious tourism is to seek blessings from God based on your religious faith and beliefs and attain salvation. Spiritual tourism is a broader perspective than religious tourism. Religious tourism is a subset of spiritual tourism.

Be a Traveler, not a Tourist

Some people confuse a traveler and a tourist. There are differences between them. There is a difference between a tourist and a traveler. Most people are tourists, while only a few people are travelers. Tourists follow the road traveled while travelers follow the road less traveled. Tourists observe locals and stay away, while travelers gel with locals and integrate with them. Tourists eat their taste of food while travelers eat local foods and cuisines. Tourists emphasize their native language, while travelers empathize with the locals' language. Tourists often remain in their comfort zones, while travelers come out of their comfort zones and enter into effective zones.

Tourists are time-conscious and sensitive as they have to travel the destinations as per their schedule. Hence, they don't mix and interact with locals unless they have specific needs. In contrast, travelers have the luxury of time and take time to mix and interact with locals. It is obvious that tourists plan an itinerary and follow it meticulously while travelers are wanderers with ample amounts of time without any itinerary. Tourists are the jack of all trades while travelers are masters of a few trades. Tourists intend to know something about everything while travelers intend to understand everything about something. Tourists are ordinary people, while travelers are extraordinary people with a passion for traveling.

Tourists take selfies, while travelers take photos with locals and nature. Tourists often ask, 'What are the prominent places to see here?' while travelers often ask, 'What are the unique and interesting places to see here?' Tourists proceed with a purpose, while travelers travel to search for meaning in their lives. Tourists go for various reasons, including education and enlightenment, while travelers go for entertainment. Tourists follow the brochures, while travelers go beyond the brochures whenever and wherever they travel. Tourists travel occasionally while travelers travel frequently. Tourists are missionaries while travelers are visionaries. Over time, tourists can transform into travelers. Succinctly, tourists are subsets of travelers [1].

Some employees take sabbatical leave to travel to various destinations to unwind and explore the world. There are global organizations that encourage their employees to proceed on business travel to overcome their pressure, enjoy the pleasure of traveling, and improve the organizational bottom lines. There is an increased emphasis on travel globally by all stakeholders. With the rapid growth in technology, it has become easier for people to travel as everything is thrown open.

There are different types of traveling such as solo travel, adventure travel, luxury travel, group travel, honeymoon travel, family travel, event travel, business travel, volunteer travel, and package holidays, to name a few.

Traveling Tips

Traveling is a passion for some, while it is fun for others. Some people treat it as enlightenment while some treat it as entertainment. Some people treat it as pleasure while some treat it as a pressure. It all depends on the way people perceive travel. Traveling opens the human mind and helps people look at the world from multiple perspectives. It helps people understand and empathize with others. It helps respect others' cultures and customs. It broadens their mind.

Draw a tentative blueprint of your tour plan. Be flexible. Don't be rigid in your plan to avoid ending up with regrets. Acquire minimum physical fitness if you plan to go trekking and high-altitude walking. Search online about the places before you visit to understand their customs and culture. Carry lightweight luggage. Remember that the less luggage, the more comfortable. Carry clothing keeping the climatic conditions and cultural factors in view. Wear clothes that are comfortable for you. Carry sweaters or jackets if it is a cold climate. Carry a napkin or travel towel. Carry the map and a smartphone to communicate. Don't carry excessive jewelry. Keep cash in reserve because electronic currency may not be available everywhere. Inform your bank about your travel. Carry medicines. Visit genuine hotels to ensure safety. Carry their address cards to locate if you are lost on the way to reach the hotel back safely. Avoid taking hotels near tourist places as they could be expensive and unhygienic. Hence, stay in hotels that are a little

away from the tourist points as they could be economical and hygienic. Don't hesitate to negotiate the room rent. Of course, you cannot negotiate everywhere especially the food in the restaurant. Carry the address cards of hotels to show to a taxi driver who can understand easily and take you to the hotel. Carry extra batteries for your camera. Carry the adapter charger for your phones. Top up the phones with adequate amounts to ensure smooth communication. Purchase a local SIM card if you intend to stay for a longer duration to avoid paying more for international calls. Update your whereabouts to your close friends and connections wherever you go to track you in case of any eventuality.

Try new foods but guard against allergies. Eat light food. Avoid eating food that upsets your stomach. Ensure that your bags are right in front of you when you eat. Don't accept anything offered to you by strangers. Don't keep the luggage of strangers with you.

Avoid taking pictures of people without their permission. Understand the local customs and cultures. Seek their permission before you take pictures. Take as many photos as possible. You can delete the duplicate photos later. Don't forget to back up your photos. Carry a hard disk to copy your photos and keep it in the hotel. In this way, you don't lose your precious photos if you lose your camera or smartphone.

Avoid staying in your room for a long time. Remember that you have gone on tour to explore and experiment, not to relax in the room. Therefore, step out of the room to experience the miracles in your life. Don't glue it to your smartphone. Stay away from technology. Enjoy every moment of your life. Explore new places. Avoid talking politics with locals, as they may have strong views and opinions, leading to arguments and altercations.

Avoid keeping your money in one place. Distribute it to different places, including your wallet and baggage. Don't put your phone in the back pocket, as it can be stolen easily. Carry a minimum of two ATM cards and keep them in different places. If you lose one, you will still have one in another place. Avoid using credit cards or ATM cards that demand a foreign transaction fee. Be cautious about public Wi-Fi, as your passwords may be hacked. Use a VPN to protect yourself from hackers. Avoid exchanging your currency at the airport, as you end up paying more. Get a currency converter on your smartphone to convert your currency easily. Get travel insurance.

Carry around spare passport photos. Keep soft copies of your identity cards and passports, visas, and other important documents on your phone or tablet, and hard copies. They help you show your identity if you lose the original ones. Scan the important documents and send them to your email to retrieve if stolen or lost.

Travel in the offseason is a shoulder season to enjoy your journey peacefully with limited money. Purchase unique items to gift to your friends and connections after you return from

your tour. Use Skyscanner to find cheap flights. Go by the road less traveled. Keep your travel budget higher than required. If you have surplus money at the end, you can bring it back. Tour unknown and uncharted paths instead of following the beaten path. Pack in the night one day before you travel to save time and avoid forgetting your belongings. Keep used clothes in one bag and unused clothes in another bag. It helps not to open the bag containing used clothes. When you check out the hotel, check out your bathroom, under the beds, desks, and other places where you keep your items. If you go with another person, ask another person to cross-check so you don't forget to carry your belongings.

Travel at night to save on the amount you pay for a hotel. You can sleep at night, utilize your time effectively and visit the places the next day morning. Learn a few words of the local language, connect with locals, and make your tour pleasant and peaceful. Talk to other travelers and strangers so that you learn a lot from them. Avoid arguments with them. Understand travel etiquette and adopt it effectively. Wear sunscreen. Carry toilet paper. Expect the unexpected. Be prepared for the worst and hope for the best. Journal your activities daily to reflect during your leisure time. They serve as sweet memories. Observe these tips, tools, and techniques to travel pleasantly and safely to reach your home with sweet memories.

Traveling is an Investment, Not an Expense

Tourists are the people who provide bread and butter to tour operators when they travel to tourist destinations. Hence, tourists come first. It is the tour operators who work hard to identify and elevate tourist destinations through various means, including online and offline. Hence, they come second. It is the tourist destination that tourists visit to spend their precious time on vacation. Hence, tourist destinations come third. Many such tourist destinations are still lying untapped due to the dearth of publicity by tour operators and the tourism department.

Tourists have various roles and responsibilities while traveling to different tourist destinations. Although spending leisure time is the main thing, they must understand and respect local traditions and cultures. They must keep the environment safe by not polluting. They must empathize with locals and respect

them. They must encourage locals. They must purchase locally made goods and use the facilities of hotels and accommodations by paying reasonable prices. In this way, tourists can promote destinations and sustain tourism.

Tour operators provide information to tourists about tourist destinations, and plan and coordinate with various agencies to create customized packages and services. Hence, they serve as the bridge between the tourists and the destinations. They must provide genuine and accurate information to the tourists. They must plan in such a way that the tourists save their time and enjoy the destinations. They must also charge prices reasonably to the tourists because all the tourists are not rich. Some of the tourists may have a low budget but are passionate about traveling. The tour operators must educate tourists about the local customs and cultures and ensure safety. If tourists are satisfied, they hire the same tour operators to visit the destinations. They can also refer to others through word of mouth.

The local people in the tourist destinations must treat tourists as guests and welcome them wholeheartedly. They must be warm and friendly with the tourists. At the same time, they must take adequate precautions because not all tourists may have good intentions. They must showcase their local cultures and customs to attract tourists and enable the latter to return with sweet memories. They must provide safety to the tourists and keep them in good humor. They must guide tourists in the right direction and cooperate with the tour operators who work hard to bring the tourists to the destinations. Above all, they must not compromise with their cultural identity.

If tourist destinations are improved and elevated by tour operators, tourists provide repeated business to tour operators by posting online reviews and spreading word of mouth. If tourists are satisfied with the services of tour operators, they stay for a longer duration in tourist destinations. Therefore, it is essential to prioritize tourists over tour operators, and tour operators over tourist destinations.

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