



ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTION

Analysis of Religious Centers in Cyprus in the Context of Tourism Potential

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Abstract— Countries with significant tourism potential, rising population income levels, and regional development are directly dependent on the development and diversification of the tourism sector. The diversification trend in tourism is increasing the importance of culture, history, and faith-based tourism types beyond traditional tourism. Although faith tourism has changed over time, it remains an indispensable form of tourism, maintaining its importance through people's continued connection to faith and its socio-economic contributions. Island countries like Cyprus have significant potential to advance and diversify tourism. Today, there are many places of worship considered sacred by Muslims and Christians in both Northern and Southern Cyprus. Cyprus has many important religious tourism sites, including the Hala Sultan Tekke, Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque, Sinan Pasha Mosque, Hz. Ebubekir Mosque, Hz. Omar Tomb, Kırklar Tomb, St. Barnabas Church, and Bellapais Monastery. These sites are sacred to both Muslims and Christians, and this study examines their value for faith tourism, offering several recommendations to increase their tourism potential. Making these places of worship accessible to visitors within the scope of faith tourism will provide economic benefits to both Northern and Southern Cyprus and strengthen Cyprus's identity as an island of love and tolerance. The findings of this study highlight that these places of worship are important tourist attractions not only for their religious functions but also because of their historical and cultural value. In future research, examining the visitor experiences and profiles of these places and conducting a comparative analysis of faith tourism policies in both Northern and Southern Cyprus will contribute to the development of a holistic and sustainable tourism approach across the island. Based on this, it is suggested that the attitudes of local people and religious authorities towards faith tourism be examined.

Index Terms— Place of worship, Northern Cyprus, Muslim, Christian, Tourism

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Introduction

Nowadays, we observe that people's understanding of traditional tourism has changed. The demand for different types of tourism has caused the development of alternative tourism activities and the diversification of the tourist profile. With advancements in science, technology, and transportation, leisure-time activities have also changed. This has led to increased tourism activity, and the tourism sector has begun to use the natural, cultural, and social resources of destinations more efficiently.

This approach, generally called alternative tourism, includes various types, such as cultural tourism, congress tourism, health tourism, religious tourism, and creative tourism. Through various forms of alternative tourism, it aims to provide economic benefits, support the preservation of local culture, increase social interaction, and promote regional development.

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Faith tourism, one of the alternative tourism types, is an important tourism activity that focuses on visits to places considered sacred, driven by religious and spiritual motivations. Faith-based travel emerged long before the modern concept of tourism, and it has persisted across different geographies and belief systems throughout history. In this regard, faith tourism is considered one of the oldest forms of tourism. Today, faith tourism includes not only visits for worship but also travel to sacred places for their historical, cultural, and symbolic value.

Güler classifies the components of faith tourism as “visiting religious and sacred places, participating in religious gatherings, attending religious ceremonies, and visiting religious memorials” (Güler, 1978; Hakkı Kaynak & Sezgin, 2008). This classification shows that faith tourism is not limited to individual acts of worship; instead, it has a multidimensional structure that is shaped by religious rituals, commemorations, and religious ceremonies.

Karacil (2025) also considers faith tourism a complex form of tourism with both individual and social dimensions. Faith tourism is considered one of the alternative forms of tourism, which has high economic returns and positive social impacts.

According to Y. F. Yüksel and Baykal (2022), faith tourism reduces seasonality in tourism by attracting visitors to destinations at different times of the year and by contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage and the revitalization of the local economy. In this respect, faith tourism is of strategic importance to sustainable tourism policies. Including religious sites within the scope of tourism can also help generate the financial resources needed to preserve them.

The primary motivation in faith tourism is individuals’ beliefs and spiritual feelings. In this context, travelers visit cities, structures, and places they consider sacred to attain spiritual fulfillment and perform acts of worship. However, faith tourism is not limited to visitors with religious motivations. It is also known that tourists engaged in cultural tourism have a desire to see and experience religious structures for their historical, architectural, and artistic values. This leads faith tourism to be considered in close interaction with cultural tourism.

Çilginoğlu and Çelebican (2022), Cam (2025), and Kabakcı (2024) also emphasize in their studies that individuals are interested not only in learning about their own beliefs but also in the emergence, development, and functioning of different religions. This approach reveals that faith tourism has an aspect that promotes intercultural interaction and mutual understanding. Visiting sacred places of different faiths can foster tolerance, empathy, and shared awareness of cultural heritage among individuals.

The island, which has hosted numerous civilizations throughout history, possesses a rich religious and cultural heritage as a natural consequence of this multifaceted historical process. From the early Christian period, the island has been home to significant sacred centers; with the advent of Ottoman rule, the spatial presence of Islamic belief was strengthened through mosques, lodges, tombs, and martyrs’ cemeteries. This historical process has made Cyprus an important place of faith for both Muslims and Christians.

In the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, numerous sacred and religious sites have survived from the Ottoman Empire and earlier periods to the present day. The island offers significant opportunities for faith tourism, especially for Muslims and Christians. In this context, mosques, tombs, lodges, martyrs’ cemeteries, historic cemeteries, churches, and monasteries are among the main places of worship in Northern Cyprus. These sites attract attention not only for their religious functions but also for their historical backgrounds, architectural features, and cultural values.

However, when the literature is reviewed, it is observed that despite the rich religious heritage in Northern Cyprus, studies on how religious sites are utilized within the scope of faith tourism and how their tourism potential can be increased are limited. Most existing studies examine these sites from the perspective of cultural heritage or historical structures; however, they do not comprehensively assess the opportunities they offer for faith tourism. These studies highlight the religious and historical value of these places, but they do not address their potential for faith tourism holistically and systematically. Research in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is limited, and existing studies are mostly descriptive and do not adequately examine sustainability dimensions. Furthermore, although the literature often highlights the economic impact of religious tourism, research investigating its influence on intercultural engagement, tolerance, and awareness of shared cultural heritage in Cyprus’s multi-faith and multicultural setting remains limited.

Existing research often examines religious sites in Northern and Southern Cyprus in isolation, failing to develop a holistic perspective on religious tourism across the island. Therefore, there is a need for studies that holistically analyze the potential of religious centers in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus for sustainable tourism, visitor diversity, and cultural heritage preservation. In this context, the main problem is that the potential of religious sites in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus for religious tourism has not been sufficiently analyzed and has not been effectively reflected in tourism planning and policies. A large portion of these sites, which can be considered within the scope of religious tourism, are included in tourism activities to a limited extent or are underutilized. This study aims to introduce religious sites in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus in general. It aims to reveal how these places can be evaluated within the scope of faith tourism and to develop suggestions for increasing their existing tourism potential. Accordingly, the study considers the religious centers in Northern Cyprus as both religious and touristic assets, and aims to contribute to the sustainable development of faith tourism.

Literature Review

Trips taken for religious purposes are considered part of faith tourism. “Faith tourism is a significant part of the tourism industry, generally related to followers of specific faiths who visit places considered sacred, and is called “special interest tourism” (Ayaz & Eren, 2020). Within the scope

of these visits, people who visit religious centers not only practice their religious beliefs but also gain knowledge about different religions and cultures. Çam and Çilginoğlu, in their research, also emphasized that people continue to keep the memories of religious figures alive by visiting their tombs within the scope of faith tourism (Çam & Çilginoğlu, 2020). Faith tourism, a different branch of tourism, contributes positively to the tourism potential of the relevant country while also paving the way for the development of world tourism and the spread of universal peace. Recent studies on the subject highlight that religious tourism is becoming increasingly popular, making significant contributions to the economies of the countries involved, and thus holding an important place among alternative tourism types (Demircan & Çeken, 2022).

According to UNESCO, which states that 60% of the world's population adheres to a religion, this population also shapes the demographic structure of religious tourism (Okuyucu, 2020), and the strong motivation inherent in faith directs people to engage in these tourism activities. "Religious tourism, where the underlying motives of faith are active alongside the motivations that lead to tourism mobility, is more promising than other types of tourism in this respect. Providing spiritual satisfaction and inner peace, religious tourism offers religious structures, temples, and tombs, which create a spiritual attraction, in addition to the pilgrimage itself" (Turan, 2020).

The island of Cyprus, which has been home to many civilizations throughout history, has significant tourism potential. Careful examination of studies in this context reveals that many civilizations that ruled the island at different points in history left a rich cultural heritage in Cyprus (Cizreliogullari et al., 2020). Hosting sacred structures of various religions, such as Islam and Christianity, from the past to the present, Cyprus has been welcoming people from many countries around the world for years, especially for religious tourism. Therefore, scientific studies on this subject will undoubtedly contribute to the development of religious tourism. This study aims to introduce the places in Cyprus that are extremely important for religious tourism, highlighting their significance, especially for island nations. In the research, religious centers in Cyprus, important to both Christians and Muslims, are presented in a table, followed by detailed information on religious sites and centers of faith with great potential for religious tourism.

Findings

Northern Cyprus is a treasure trove of artifacts from various nations. The mosques and tombs are part of the rich heritage left by the Ottoman period. On the other hand, churches and monasteries bear the imprints of the various nations that ruled the island before the Ottoman Empire. Martyrs' cemeteries and cemeteries are sacred sites that emerged primarily as a result of the attacks launched by the Greeks against the Turks in the 1960s, adding a layer of historical significance to these sites.

Table I
Some religious sites and faith centers in the TRNC

Mosques	Shrines and lodges	Martyrs' cemeteries and graves	Churches and monasteries
Arab Ahmet Mosque	Canbulat Tomb	Bosphorus Martyrs' Cemetery	Apostolos Andreas
Bayraktar Mosque	Dede Tomb		Aya Anastasia
Hala Sultan Mosque	Tomb of Hazrat Omar	Karaoglanoglu Martyrdom	St. Mamas Church
Haydar Pasha Mosque	Karababa Tomb	Nicosia Martyrs' Monument	Kizilbash Church
Hazrat Abu Bakr Mosque	Tomb of the Forty		Church of Grace
Yarn Market Mosque	Kurt Bey Tomb	Muratağa and Sandallar mass graves	Barnabas Church (Monastery)
Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque	Qutb Osman Tomb	Tashkent Martyrs' Cemetery	Bellapais (Monastery)
Laleli Mosque	Tomb of the Seven		Chrysorrogiatissa Monastery
Omeriye Mosque	Zahra Tomb		Armenian Church(Monastery)
Pir Pasha Mosque			St. Andrew Church
Selimiye Mosque			St. Marina Church
Hagia Sophia Mosque			St. Paul Anglican

Table 1 lists the religious sites and faith centers located in the northern part of the island (excluding the Hala Sultan Mosque and Tomb). These sites could be expanded. However, the preference here is to highlight sites that can be effectively used in faith tourism.

As can be seen, the table includes not only various mosques and churches but also mausoleums and dervish lodges. This study will first describe some of the sites mentioned in the table, and then make observations and recommendations regarding their planned expansion and preservation for tourism.

Religious Sites and Places of Worship

Mosques

Hala Sultan Mosque and Dervish Lodge

This dervish lodge, located in what is now Southern Cyprus, is located south of Larnaca. This lodge, consisting of a tomb, mosque, outbuildings, cemetery, and fountain, is the resting place of Umm Haram, the aunt of the Prophet Muhammad, who was martyred after falling from her horse during the Islamic raids on Cyprus led by Muawiyah, the Governor of Damascus, in 647. When the Ottomans conquered the island, the tomb was repaired, and Sheikh Hasan built the present tomb in 1760. The Hala Sultan Mosque, located north of the tomb, was built in 1816 by Seyit Mehmet Emin Efendi, the Cyprus tax collector (Serter, 1977). Umm Haram's great affection stems from her role as the Prophet's wet nurse. Hala Sultan means the same to Turkish Cypriots as Eyüp Sultan in Istanbul means to the local people (Demiryürek, 2018; Tanman, 2021). Legendary narratives about places opening up to faith tourism also increase visitor interest. Therefore, considering that anecdotes about religious sites such as Hala Sultan, the Tomb of Hz. Ömer and the Tomb of the Forty Tombs will increase the number of tourists visiting these sites; it is important to utilize these stories in promotional activities. For example, the following religious story about the Hala Sultan Mosque and Dervish Lodge can be used for this purpose. Two different legends are told about this sacred place. One of these is as follows:

Hala Sultan, accompanied by the Arab armies, embarked on Cyprus from the port of Larnaca. He attempted to advance his camel through the marshes near the Salt Lake. His camel stumbled. Losing his balance from the shaking, he fell. His head struck a stone. Unable to withstand the force of the impact, he attained the status of martyrdom. Much time passed, and the location of his grave was forgotten. Much time passed. The Ottoman Empire conquered Cyprus from the Venetians. It was then that Hala Sultan was remembered to have attained the status of martyrdom near the Salt Lake in Larnaca. A search for his whereabouts began. A shepherd guided the searchers. They went to the designated spot. Among the tall grasses and reeds, they saw the Carob tree. When they arrived at Carob, they saw the stone Hala Sultan had purchased from a Christian Arab for a single gold coin during her visit to Egypt, hanging in the air directly over his grave. They immediately cleared the grass around the grave and built a new tomb for Hala Sultan. From that day on, the island became a place of pilgrimage for Muslims. It has a place. One day, among the visitors was a woman loaded like a ship. When the woman saw the stone hanging in the air, she let out a "huh", whether from fear or surprise, it is unclear. At that moment, she miscarried the baby she was carrying. Since then, the marble stone hanging in the air has been rebuilt. It was saved from suspension. Construction began around Hala Sultan's tomb in large numbers. A person named Şekerzade, the envoy of the Foundations, embarked on a major construction project. During the construction, they wanted to cut down a large carob tree. Arguments broke out. Şekerzade had a dream. In his dream, a large, fat woman in a white dress slapped Şekerzade. "Do not cut down the tree whose branch I cut off for my staff," she said. Şekerzade ignored his dream. While the wall around the tomb was being built, he began to have the tree cut down. With every blow of the axe, groans came from within the trunk. The wall was finally built, but shortly after, Şekerzade's daughter died in childbirth along with her child. Finally, he died, and his lineage was cut down (Gökçeoğlu, 2004).



Fig. 1 Hala Sultan Mosque



Fig. 2 Hala Sultan Tomb

Bayraktar Mosque

This mosque was built in honor of Bayraktar, a heroic soldier who was martyred while raising the Turkish flag on the Konstanza Tower during the conquest of Cyprus. First, a mausoleum was built on the site of Bayraktar's martyrdom, and then a mosque. During the 1960-63 Republic of Cyprus era, the mosque and mausoleum were destroyed by Greek Cypriot bombings twice (Serter, 1977).

The Bayraktar Mosque, considered sacred by Turkish Cypriots, was bombed and blown up by Greek Cypriots on 25 March 1962. Following this incident, Özker Yaşın wrote the poem "Bayraktarım" (My Flag), in which he recounted Bayraktar's heroism and addressed him, urging him to rest in peace in his grave. Özker Yaşın and Arif Nihat Asya went to the Bayraktar Mosque together on a holiday morning and visited Bayraktar's tomb. After this visit, Asya wrote a quatrain.

Selimiye Mosque (St. Sophia Cathedral)

Standing today in Edirne like a masterpiece of art, the Selimiye Mosque, a remarkable monument of the Ottoman Turks, is a significant work commissioned by Mimar Sinan for Selim II. Built at the age of 80 and referred to by Sinan as his "masterpiece," the Selimiye Mosque is one of the most important masterpieces of both Mimar Sinan and Ottoman architecture (Koçu, 1981). Previously known as Hagia Sophia, the mosque was renamed Selimiye Mosque in 1954 by order of the Mufti of Cyprus (Turkan & Özburaç, 2018).



Fig. 3 Selimiye Mosque

Today, a mosque of the same name exists in the TRNC. Construction began in Nicosia in 1209 as the St. Sophia Church and was converted into the largest mosque in Cyprus in 1571. The St. Sophia Church, along with the St. Nicholas Cathedral, was built by the Lusignans in Nicosia and Famagusta (13th century), 300 years before the Ottoman conquest (Öztürk & Gürdalı, 2021). The mosque, renamed Selimiye in 1954, is one of the most beautiful structures not only in Nicosia but on the entire island. During the Ottoman period, Selimiye was the largest mosque on the island and served as the site for Ottoman governors, high-ranking officials, and city dignitaries (Bağışkan, 2005). Immediately after the conquest of Cyprus, the Hagia Sophia Church in Cyprus was converted into a mosque by order of Lala Mustafa Pasha and renamed the Selimiye Mosque.

Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque (St. Nicholas Cathedral)

The Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque was once an important Catholic structure, formerly known as St. Nicholas Cathedral. It is one of the TRNC's most important religious shrines. Today, it is one of the largest mosques in the TRNC. The mosque is named after Lala Mustafa Pasha, known as the Conqueror of Cyprus. The cathedral, known to have been inspired by Notre Dame Cathedral (Yüceer, 2016) (Walsh, 2005, holds great significance for Christians because it was the site of the coronation of the King of Jerusalem (Yüceer, 2016)(Gunnis, 1956).



Fig. 4 Lala Mustafa Pasha Mosque

Tombs and Dervish Lodges

Nicosia Mevlevi (Whirling Dervishes) Lodge

According to Harid Fedai's research, the Nicosia Mevlevi Lodge, the branch of the Mevlevi order active in Cyprus, was founded in the 1590s (Akgün, 2010; Fedai & Altan, 1997).

It is believed that the Mevlevi order was introduced to Cyprus by settlers from Konya, Kula, Karaman, and Sivas, beginning in 1571, when Cyprus came under Ottoman rule. The lodge made significant contributions to the religious, Sufi, social, cultural, and artistic life of Cyprus throughout the centuries under Ottoman rule (1640).

"The Nicosia Mevlevi Lodge has been one of the brightest pages of Turkish Cypriot history since the island's conquest, serving as the focal point of Mevlevi belief on the island and making significant contributions to the religious, Sufi, social, cultural, and artistic life of Cyprus, particularly during the centuries under Ottoman rule" (Kaya, 2017). This lodge, where religious ceremonies were also held, contains the tombs of prominent Mevlevi figures.



Fig. 5 Nicosia Mevlevi Lodge

Martyrs' cemeteries and cemeteries

Nicosia Martyrs' Memorial

This monument in Nicosia, dedicated to the Turkish Cypriot soldiers who fell in the Turkish Cypriot struggle for national freedom, was built in 1963. "The monument was erected in memory of the martyrs who willingly gave their lives for the maintenance of the Turkish presence in Cyprus and its existence in these lands. This monument is the first monument erected by Turks during the Republic of Cyprus (1960-1963) period" (Okaray & Şimşek, 2018).

Boğaz Martyrs' Cemetery

Turkey built this cemetery in Boğazköy in memory of the Turkish Armed Forces and some Turkish Cypriot soldiers who were martyred as a result of the Cyprus Peace Operation. The cemetery contains the graves of 331 martyrs: eighteen officers, fifteen non-commissioned officers, two hundred and sixty-four non-commissioned officers and privates, and thirty-four Mujahideen. The cemetery, transformed into a monumental structure by the Turkish Armed Forces (GKK) in August 2002, includes a large Turkish soldier, four lions, four monumental sculptures containing compositions, and five reliefs created by the architect Tankut Öktem (GKK web page).



Fig. 6 Boğaz martyrs' cemetery

Atlılar, Muratağa, and Sandallar historic mass Graves and Martyrs' Cemeteries

The Turkish Cypriot population living in the villages of Muratağa, Sandallar, and Atlılar was subjected to massacres by the Greeks after the First Peace Operation. The Turkish Cypriots martyred by the Greeks in this region were transferred from mass graves discovered at the end of the Second Peace Operation to areas that are now martyr cemeteries. Monuments were erected at each cemetery to immortalize them, and in 1980, perimeter walls were constructed, giving the area its present appearance (Alasya, 1987).

Churches and Monasteries

St. Barnabas Monastery

Joseph Levi (St. Barnabas) and St. Paul came to Cyprus in 45 AD and began spreading Christianity (Komisyonu, 2014). This important structure is located in Famagusta and today serves as an icon museum (Işıkören, 2018). Joseph the Levite is also known as the person who mentioned the Quran in his Bible. This work is also known as the Gospel of Barnabas. He is a significant figure for being among the first to believe in Jesus and for mentioning the coming of the Prophet Muhammad in his Bible. The construction of this monastery is also quite interesting:

"St. Barnabas, the son of a Jewish family born in Salamis, returned to Cyprus after studying in Jerusalem and began working with St. Paul to spread Christianity in 45 AD. Because of these activities, his fellow citizens killed him, and his body was hidden in a marsh to be thrown into the sea. St. Barnabas's disciples observed the events, buried the body in an underground cave west of Salamis, and placed a copy of the Bible made by St. Mathews on its chest. Because the location of the body was unknown, it remained hidden for many years. Four hundred thirty-two years later, Bishop Anthemos, claiming to have seen the tomb in a dream, requested its opening. When the tomb was opened, St. Barnabas was identified through the St. Matthew's Bible. Following this discovery, the bishop traveled to Constantinople, informed Emperor Zeno, and secured

autonomy for the Church of Cyprus. The emperor provided a sufficient grant for the construction of a monastery at the site. The monastery was built in 477 AD" (Özerden & Yıldız, 2016).



Fig. 7 St. Barnabas monastery

Bellapais Monastery

Bellapais Monastery is located in the mountain village of Beylerbeyi (Bellapais), near the district of Kyrenia. This monastery dates back to the Lusignan period and, like the Lala Mustafa Pasha and Selimiye buildings, has a Gothic architecture. "Bellapais Monastery means 'Peace Monastery' in French. It is also known as the 'White Abbey' because of the white robes worn by those who serve here" (G. Yüksel, 2019).

It is known that the first settlers in the monastery were Augustinian monks who migrated from Jerusalem (1187). After the island's conquest, the Ottomans transferred the monastery to the Orthodox Church.



Fig. 8 Bellapais Monastery

Apostolos Andreas Church

The Apostolos Andreas Monastery is located in the Dipkarpaz region of the İskele district. The structure is situated on the seashore at the tip of the island known as Zafer Burnu (Cape Zafer).

According to one belief, Andrew, one of Jesus' apostles, ran out of water on his way to the Holy Land by ship and experienced great hardship. There are two stories about this:

According to Christian legend, Saint Apostolos Andreas, one of Jesus' saints, guided the ship's crew, who were suffering from thirst during a long sea voyage, to the shores of the Karpaz, where the monastery is located, and they found water. It is believed that those among the crew who drank the water were healed, and even a blind person regained sight." (Bozkurt, 2016, 31, cited in Şen and Çalışkan, 2020, pp. 5-6).

In the Islamic version of the legend, during the Arab expeditions to Cyprus, thirst arose, and Seydū'l Bedouin, aboard a ship, landed on the shores of the Karpaz in search of water. When he struck the ground with his stick, fresh water gushed forth. (Bozkurt, 2016, 32, as cited in Şen and Çalışkan, 2020, p. 6).

Today, the monastery is open for worship on special occasions such as holidays or Easter.



Fig. 9 *Apostolos Andreas Church*



Fig. 10 *Apostolos Andreas Church*

Discussion

In this study, religious sites located in Northern Cyprus were identified and evaluated. Based on our study, Northern Cyprus hosts important religious and historical sites.

In their study, Kaçar and Türker found that the basic travel motivations of tourists motivated by faith are to approach God, strengthen their faith, achieve inner peace, and participate in rituals. Furthermore, perceptions of the destination's social and psychological aspects are important factors in deciding to visit the destination (Kaçar & Türker, 2020). The socio-psychological perceptions of local and foreign tourists visiting the Hala Sultan and Hz. Ömer Tekkes in the TRNC are also important. Those who go to these places to pray believe that their prayers are answered. Consequently, they also perform certain religious rituals at these locations.

In their studies, Gökbulut and Yeniasır found that Muslims living in Northern Cyprus have a favorable view of religious tourism and have general knowledge of these places, and that local people are tolerant of this type of tourism (Gökbulut & Yeniasır, 2022).

According to Alaeddinoğlu and İzi (2024), these religious places carry not only religious but also cultural and historical meanings for visitors. In these aspects, they become places where social memory is preserved and reproduced. In this context, within the scope of faith tourism, tourists also establish social, cultural, and religious contact in the destinations they visit. In this way, they contribute to the preservation and development of faith tourism centers and ensure that the memories associated with these places remain alive. In Northern Cyprus, our area of study, the proper and sustainable use of religious sites for tourism purposes will help preserve collective memory.

Nasibov and ŞEN (2017), investigated the relationship between religious and cultural tourism in their studies, examined the impact of religious tourism on cultural tourism demand in Istanbul, and found that religious tourism did not significantly increase cultural tourism demand. It can be said that religious tourism is also low in Northern Cyprus and does not adequately contribute to the growth of cultural tourism.

Theoretical implications

Based on the study's conclusions, it can be said that although Northern Cyprus has significant religious centers, they are not effectively utilized in tourism and receive insufficient recognition.

Limitations of the study

The study is limited to Northern Cyprus. Only the Hala Sultan Mosque in Southern Cyprus is included; other religious centers in Southern Cyprus have not been evaluated.

Recommendations

To effectively protect and utilize religious centers in Northern Cyprus for tourism, sections on these sites should be included in the tourism master plan. Furthermore, the value of these places should be instilled in the younger generation through school education. In addition, the importance of religious sites should be explained to the local population through seminars. These places should be given more space in tourist catalogs.

Conclusion

Religious centers in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus are spread across the island's various regions. These centers encompass a wide range, from mosques and churches to monasteries and tombs. Among these, the Hala Sultan Mosque and Tomb in the south of the island is one of the most notable. This site is highly valuable and important for Muslims. Therefore, it has the potential to appeal not only to the Turkish market but also to the Turkic world and the Arab market.

Alongside Hala Sultan, the Mevlevi Lodge in Nicosia is also a significant center for religious tourism. For centuries, the Mevlevi Lodge has been an important center in Cyprus for spreading Mevlana's Sufi philosophy and explaining Islamic tolerance. It is necessary to enrich and promote the site with activities that will attract people interested in and passionate about Mevlevi philosophy. Preparing and marketing promotional materials in different languages for foreigners who want to learn more about the philosophy of Mevlana, better known as Rumi, would also be effective. Among other religious sites, mausoleums are places that demonstrate the spiritual loftiness of the Turkish Cypriot people. Mausoleums, found in almost every region of the Turkic world, possess both Shamanistic and Islamic aspects. In Turkish tradition, mausoleums are not only places of pilgrimage but also places where prayers are offered and requests are made to saints and holy figures in various ways.

Therefore, the island's legendary mausoleum stories should be used in tourism marketing to increase visitor numbers. Looking at sites in Cyprus in the context of religious tourism, it is evident that the island is rich in this regard and hosts important sites dating back hundreds of years. When examining some important places of worship mentioned in the study on Islam and Christianity, it becomes clear that significant structures that have left their mark on both Islamic and Christian history stand out. In these respects, it can be said that religious tourism on the island holds significant potential for both religions. In addition to these, the martyrdom sites, which are evidence of the oppression and attempted annihilation of Turkish Cypriots under Greek atrocities, have a spiritual value, especially for Turkey, and hold a special importance in faith tourism. Planning and organizing visits, particularly within domestic tourism (including formal education levels), is crucial for maintaining awareness (or raising awareness) about Turkish Cypriot history. To avoid damaging the spirit of the place, interactive museums located farther from these areas will further enhance this awareness and even increase foreign tourists' interest and attention. Northern Cyprus also hosts many Christian faith centers. However, including the true origin stories or legendary narratives of these churches and monasteries in tourism marketing will add significant character to the places and increase visitor numbers. For example, the origin story of St. Barnabas Monastery is quite interesting and noteworthy. With proper planning and effort, the place will begin to receive much more attention than it currently does. Barnabas is a significant figure for both Christians and Muslims. Therefore, it is necessary to increase awareness and promote sites that will be opened to religious tourism in a planned and organized manner. In addition, restoring the sites and landscaping their surroundings will make the artifacts more attractive and marketable.

While doing all this, one important aspect to consider is planning and scheduling visits without damaging the centers' spiritual and physical structures. Excessive visitor numbers, noise, and environmental pollution; all kinds of construction; viewing the site solely as a source of material gain; and generally any destructive or corrupting elements that could damage the spiritual structure must be prevented.

One important issue to consider when making all these arrangements is to plan and conduct visits without harming the centers' spiritual and physical structures. High visitor numbers, noise, and environmental pollution; increased construction of all kinds; viewing the place solely as a source of material gain; and anything that could potentially damage the spiritual structure in general must be prevented.

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