
Important issues of pilgrimage tourism in Georgia


Tamar Zubitashvili

Doctor of Geographical Sciences
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1698-7968>
zubitashvilitamari@gmail.com
Tel: 599 20 13 35

How to Cite

Important issues of pilgrimage tourism in Georgia. (2025). *Tax Policy Journal*, 21(2), 61-68. <https://taxpolicyjournal.org/index.php/tpj/article/view/7>

Copyright © 2025 Tax Policy Journal

TPJ is open access and licensed under  CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

Submitted: 02 Feb 2025 | Revised: 7 April 2025 | Accepted: 01 Aug 2025

Abstract---From the beginning of human history to the present day, man has always had a need to rest and restore his strength, both spiritual and physical. This pushes him to travel and learn new things. Pilgrimages have made a significant contribution to the development of travel. In ancient Rome, pilgrims of various confessions, whose goal was to spread their religion, went on difficult and long journeys. Today, pilgrimage is the basis of religious tourism and has the largest scale of activity. Today, the forms and geography of travel have expanded and become more diverse. Various directions have appeared in tourism, which are growing more and more according to people's needs. These are cognitive, religious, spectacular, entertaining or other various directions. The development of religious tourism has a long history, because in the early centuries, pilgrims traveled to places of worship for their religious purposes. The basis of religious tourism is pilgrimage. Which is determined by the desire to visit holy places. A special place is occupied by holy relics, tombs, temples, mosques, synagogues, etc.

Keywords---pilgrimage, religious tourism, culture, religious holy places, educational tours, folk customs and traditions.

Summary

The development of religious tourism in the world and, accordingly, in Georgia has a rather rich and interesting history. If in ancient times, pilgrims of various confessions walked on difficult and long journeys to visit holy places, today communication and infrastructure have improved, pilgrimage has become the basis of religious tourism and has acquired enormous scale. Millions of people travel to visit shrines, ancient and modern places of worship.

Thus, religious tourism has become an integral part of the modern tourism industry, and its research is quite relevant, necessary and interesting. On the one hand, it is related to the tourism business, and on the other hand, to the satisfaction of people's spiritual needs. Religious tourism is a constantly growing segment of the international tourism market.

Religious tourism is an integral part of the modern world industry, in recent years, travel with religious and spiritual motivations has become very popular and has become a constantly growing segment of the international tourism market.

The essence of pilgrimage tourism lies in the travel of believers to visit religious places. Religious tourism objects are: churches, monasteries, mosques, synagogues, religious centers, cult museums, etc. Pilgrimage is an ancient form of cult activity, as a rule, pilgrimage aims to visit the places where the greatest religious figures lived. The meaning of pilgrimage is determined by the nature of religious consciousness, believers want to get closer to the holy places. They are happy to participate in

religious situations, talk with priests, monks, nuns working in holy places, receive blessings, and teachings.

As recognized tourism researchers explain, the main purpose of a pilgrimage is to perform or participate in a religious ritual, as well as to worship a holy place, temple, or holy relics, to spiritually improve oneself, receive blessings, spiritual or physical healing, receive advice, and perform a vow or penance to cleanse oneself from sins.

Traveling for the purpose of a pilgrimage can be individual, family, or group, and depending on the duration, it can be long or short tours. Pilgrimage may be associated with visiting certain holy places. These can be not only churches and monasteries, but also natural monuments, mountains, rivers, lakes, caves. In some cases, pilgrimage is limited to a certain holiday. For example, in the Christian church, pilgrimage is planned on the day of a saint venerated by the church. Religious-themed excursion tours are more often one-day and are interesting for both adults and children.

Excursion cognitive tours that fit into the religious framework include visiting religious centers, where tourists can see religious objects of both cult and historical nature. They can visit museums and exhibitions, excursion cognitive tours, unlike pilgrimage tours, are shorter in duration. They do not coincide with religious holidays, both adults and children can participate in them. Religious objects can be visited during combined tours, in which the religious building is only an integral part and component of the program. Excursion groups need a professional excursion guide and a representative of a religious organization.

In terms of familiarization with tourist centers, religious-themed scientific tourism is close to religious tourism, the number of people interested in such topics is not large, but it significantly increases the scope of tourist travel. Travelers are interested in religious manuscripts, cult objects, and materials obtained as a result of archaeological excavations, the research, search, recording, and analysis of which are the goals of visitors.

Religious tourism and its variations are presented in various forms depending on organizational features. Religious tourism can be individual and organized travel. In organized travel, it is strictly regulated and usually carried out with advance payment. The tour operator and the client agree in advance on the travel route, the duration of the tour and the list of services provided (a full package or a certain part of the service), while in an individual tour, the tourist himself takes responsibility for many issues.

The trip can be one-day, several-day, overnight, or 3-hour, 3-5-hour, 6-8-hour, etc.

As mentioned, the purpose of the pilgrimage is to worship holy places, pray, repent, often the purpose of the pilgrimage is to heal from a serious illness, which they want to achieve by touching miraculous icons, relics of saints and holy springs. A believer believes that the soul is eternal and that touching the relics of saints will bestow the same grace as one would receive from living saints.

Pilgrims gratefully accept the discomfort associated with travel, because they want to serve the Lord with dignity. In some cases, believers choose a trip organized by the church itself, in which clergymen also participate. In other cases, religious tourism may be engaged in by curious people who want to spend their free time meaningfully, receive aesthetic pleasure, and expand their horizons. They are mainly interested in the history of religious monuments, the architectural and artistic side. When traveling on a pilgrimage, it is important to determine the time factor. It is necessary to select time intervals when religious holidays are celebrated. A travel company must necessarily take into account that some religious holidays are movable, while others are immovable. Therefore, taking into account the church calendar and properly planning a tour is important for ensuring and satisfying the spiritual needs of those interested in religious tourism.

Due to its geopolitical location, culture and religion of various contents have intersected in Georgia since ancient times, archaeological research has made it clear that both Western and Eastern cultures exist on the territory of Georgia. Georgia attracted attention not only for its location and excellent natural environment, but also for the presence of numerous sanctuaries, which have always been the basis for the development of religious tourism. This tradition continues today. The list of sanctuaries in Georgia is quite extensive, including the Cross of St. Nino, the Girdle of the Most Holy Theotokos, the Robe of the Virgin Mary, the Trinity in the Hand, the Stone of Grace, etc.

In addition, the development of tourism in Georgia is generally determined by Georgian traditions, national and folk customs, extensive experience in hospitality, the diversity of religious and historical monuments; beautiful, pristine, untouched nature. The unique landscape of the Caucasus, its snowy peaks, the subtropical climate of the Black Sea, vast plains, and high mountains are important factors in attracting tourists.

Holy places have a great positive impact on believers. In addition, every believer has a desire to see religious places with their own eyes and receive from them. The aura, tranquility, and order present in holy places allow a person to get closer to God and enrich their spirituality. It is well known that people with great faith experience healing and recovery after visiting holy places.

Pilgrimage is the best way to receive education in religion, learning and understanding the teachings of Christ occurs not only through reading, but also through strengthening faith, closeness to the holy places and the grace that comes from them. Pilgrimage is the best way to get out of real life into the world of goodness, love, and Christian unity, which always gives a person who returns to life the strength to cope with life's difficulties, contradictions, and social hardships.

The basis of religious and pilgrimage tours in Georgia is the rich historical and cultural heritage of the Georgian Orthodox Church. The most important motivation for Christians from different countries of the world to come to Georgia for pilgrimage should be the special fact that a sacred relic of world importance rests here - the Robe of Jesus Christ, which was brought by the Jews of Mtskheta after the crucifixion of the Savior. This place was a holy place for both Georgians and the Christian congregation of the Near East, to which the Christian congregation has been carrying out pilgrimage movements for centuries. Myron is still brewed in Svetitskhoveli today, kings and patriarchs were consecrated here, and their graves and those of many famous clergy and laity are also located here. Other shrines of the Georgian Orthodox Church are no less important in attracting pilgrims.

There are many churches and monasteries on the territory of Georgia, which for centuries were centers of education and culture. Georgians built churches and monasteries not only in Georgia, but also outside the country: in Palestine, Syria, Cyprus, Greece, Bulgaria. Of particular importance in this regard are the Monastery of the Cross in Jerusalem, St. Jacob's Monastery in Jerusalem, Iveron on Mount Athos, Petritsoni Monastery in Bulgaria.

The work of 13 Assyrian Fathers is given a great role in strengthening the Christian religion. The places of work and settlement of the Assyrian Fathers became holy places in Georgia, the veneration of which became a tradition for the Christian congregation.

Of great importance is the fact that in the second half of the 5th century the Georgian Apostolic Church gained autocephaly. After gaining independence, Georgians began to make pilgrimages to the Holy Land in earnest. From the 6th century, a new stage of pilgrimage and monastic life began in Georgia. Georgian kings always showed a special interest in Jerusalem; this was expressed in the construction of churches and monasteries there and the strengthening of church and monastic life, which had great historical and cultural significance.

Based on national traditions, secular and church architecture has been developing in Georgia for centuries. Many monuments are recognized as the best examples of world art. The country, which has many holy sites, harmoniously reflected Christian

symbolism in magnificent examples of architecture and monumental painting, manuscripts, church liturgy and icon painting, the analogues of which are rarely found in the world. The high spiritual and material heritage of our country gives grounds to assert that we have great potential for the development of religious tourism in all directions. Each region of Georgia is dotted with ancient temples, which are located at a considerable distance from each other, which makes the tourist route even more important, because along the way there are more than one beautiful monument of nature and a beautiful place to relax.

Religious tourism in Georgia is also given a special charm by the fact that there are many shrines of other confessions in the country. Tourists from different countries of the world, in addition to Christian-Orthodox temples, can visit and pray at shrines of Muslim, Catholic, Gregorian, Jewish and other confessions. Each church and monastery carries an interesting tradition, and their name-day holidays are still valid. This is the best factor for attracting pilgrims from different countries of the world. Based on the above, I believe that religious tourism should be among the priorities of Georgia's tourism development, which will create the basis for the development of not only outbound religious tourism, but also domestic and inbound religious tourism to visit Orthodox shrines. Throughout the territory of Georgia - in the Caucasus Mountains, on the Black Sea coast, in magnificent forested valleys, ancient monuments proudly stand - the stone chronicle of the history of the Georgian nation. In this relatively small territory, there are more than 5,000 different monuments: fortresses, temples, ruins of palaces and farm buildings, which tell us about the history of the nation. Georgian architecture has enriched the treasury of world art with many wonderful works. It is difficult to find a country with such a great cultural heritage as Georgia, its every corner clearly reflects every stage of history.

Kakheti is distinguished in this regard. It is difficult to find a long period of peace in the history of Kakheti, but the Georgian people, known for their hard work and fighting spirit, have always managed to build defensive and religious buildings. The abundance of historical and cultural monuments in Kakheti creates the prerequisites for the development of religious tourism in the region. There are many churches and monasteries in Kakheti, which are not lacking in visitors. Religious holidays and saints' days are especially important, when a person's desire to visit holy places becomes stronger. Georgia is also diverse in terms of religion. It is possible for both Orthodox tourists and representatives of other confessions to visit both Christian churches and monasteries, as well as religious places of other confessions. Foreign tourists are amazed by Georgian architecture and design, which often blends into the landscape.

Conclusion: The development of religious tourism will contribute to respect for religions, as well as strengthening the economy. In this way, we will interest foreign tourists, because religion plays an important role in Georgia, and the traditions of our

country are based more on religion. Church monasteries in Georgia have always attracted foreign eyes with their distinctive appearance, amazing architecture and temples combined with the landscape still amaze foreign tourists with their centuries-old glory.

Georgia is the best resource for the development of religious tourism, because it combines operating church monasteries with ancient history, ancient architectural monuments, wild, untouched nature. Infrastructure development is necessary for the development of this sector of tourism; Opening family hotels and catering facilities in villages near religious monuments; On the roads to temples, away from residential areas, arranging cottages for visitors in the bosom of nature, for their accommodation and relaxation; it is noteworthy that during religious holidays, where the local population will be given the opportunity to sell household products. In the form of ecologically clean products or works of applied art.

In order to develop this type of tourism, it is necessary to pay more attention to advertising and publishing guides. I consider it necessary to create a working group with the residence of the diocese, which will unite clergy, business representatives; interested parties, and travel agency employees. Training the necessary personnel in the field of tourism at the level of modern requirements and especially taking into account the peculiarities of pilgrimage tourism. Planning tours in accordance with the name days of the saints of the church and various churches. For the diversity of religious tours, it will be interesting not only to get acquainted with the temples in which liturgies and services are performed, but also to search for, trace, and present the remains of religious cult objects, which have survived in the form of numerous ruins.

Religious tourism is one of the distinctive tourism destinations. Its proper planning and development will play an important role for each country. Because religion has existed at all stages of humanity and it has constantly accompanied the history of humanity. And tourism, its essence and role, is important for a country like Georgia, because the potential of our country to develop the tourism industry is great. Which will contribute to both the progress of the economy and the promotion of Georgia on a global scale.

References

- Birzhakov, M. (2008) Theory of tourism. Tbilisi. Publishing house LLC "Forma"
- Metreveli M. (2003) Tourism. Tbilisi, Tbilisi State University of Culture and Arts Publishing House
- Terentyev, O. (2003) "On the bow to the saints" Moscow.
- Kvaratskhelia, N. (2009) Tbilisi. Cultural tourism.
- M. Metreveli (2008) Religious tourism in Georgia Journal "Economy of Georgia" #7

Nozadze M. Religious tourism will develop in Georgia. Web page. 2014.

Noga Collins-Kreiner, *Geographers and pilgrimages: Changing concepts in pilgrimage tourism research*. 2010