

Exploring religious tourist experiences in Jerusalem: The intersection of Abrahamic religions



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ABSTRACT

By considering the importance of religious tourism for travel and the tourism industry, this study aims to identify religious tourists' experiences in Jerusalem, as one of the most important holy cities. By a survey, 848 data were collected from the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious tourists. Results showed that religious tourism experience was a multi-faceted construct, which consists of engaging mentally, discovering new things, interacting & belonging, connecting spiritually & emotionally, and relaxing & finding peace dimensions. By using these dimensions, perceived experience differences of tourists were examined depending on religion. Moreover, religious tourism experience was identified to significantly affect overall tourist satisfaction with Jerusalem. The study concluded with discussion of the findings and their implications.

1. Introduction

As one of the earliest forms of tourism, religious travels still represent an important market segment in the tourism and travel industry. For spreading the social and economic benefits that religious tourism offers, authorities of the religious destinations need to understand the behavioural patterns of tourists. Many researchers admit that every market understanding starts with identifying tourist motivations and continues by discovering the experiences at the visited destination (Van Vuuren & Slabbert, 2011; Weaver, McCleary, Han, & Blosser, 2009). Interestingly, despite the global importance and popularity of religious tourism, the numbers of researches that investigate the experiences of religious tourists are still scarce. Hence, the religious tourism literature needs to be expanded through the additional studies and the wider scientific perspectives.

Literature review indicates that scholars generally focus on the exploration and comparison of different type of travellers' experiences, such as tourists and pilgrims (Bond, Packer, & Ballantyne, 2015; Nyaupane, Timothy, & Poudel, 2015). In addition, the results of many studies showed that religious tourists with different religions may have different behavioural patterns (Bailey & Sood, 1993; Essoo & Dibb, 2004). However, to the best of the authors' knowledge, to date, behavioural patterns of religious tourists who are the members of different religions, visiting the same destination have not been compared yet.

In light of the importance of religious tourism, and the lack of research about the experiences of religious tourists, this study aims to examine Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious tourists' experiences in Jerusalem through a survey. Jerusalem is purposely selected as being a unique holy city recognized by all Abrahamic religions. This historic city not only owns important holy places; it is also the global meeting point of religious tourists. Therefore, the findings of this study are expected to highlight comparative religious tourist experiences in the same destination, and to contribute to the related literature from this perspective. More broadly, the objectives of the study are: (1) to explore and to compare the demographic and trip-related characteristics of Jewish, Christian and Muslim religious tourists visiting Jerusalem; (2) to measure and to compare the religious tourism experiences of these groups; (3) to identify how the impact of religious tourism experience on overall satisfaction with destination may differ according to religion differences.

The remaining parts of the paper are organized as follows. In the second section, a literature review about religious tourism is presented. In the third section, tourist experience and religious tourism experience are discussed from various perspectives used in other disciplines. Afterwards, the methodology of the research is introduced, and the obtained results are summarized. The paper concludes with a discussion of the findings, the main limitations of the study, and some recommendations for future studies.

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2. Religious tourism

Religious travel, which is the oldest form of tourism (Zamani-Farahani & Eid, 2016) is a journey through spiritual locations for secular or religious reasons (Vukonić, 1996). In principle, tourist activities in the visited destinations such as sightseeing and recreation may motivate religious tourists, in addition to religious motives (e.g. the quest to feel the divine power, to be healed, and to be blessed) (Božić, Spasojević, Vujičić, & Stamenkovic, 2016). Hence, religious tourist motivation is a multi-faceted construct. With the purpose of exploring the underlying travel motivations of religious tourists, many studies have been conducted by the researchers. For example, according to Griffin (2007) and Blackwell (2007), religious tourists are mostly motivated by the desire to learn new things and create spiritual memories in their lives, besides to religious wishes and healing willingness.

In general, most religious tourism research consists of religion based case studies performed in various destinations. Hence, as stated by Bond et al. (2015), religious tourism literature mainly involves the identification and comparison of the experiences of different travellers (e.g. pilgrims and tourists) through collecting data from a destination. Whether focusing on different religions or destinations, the common discussion themes in the literature can be grouped under three headlines, namely: the conceptualization of religious tourism, the evolution of religious tourism, and the economic and cultural impacts of religious tourism. In the following paragraphs, each of these discussion themes is presented, respectively.

Previous studies about the conceptualization of religious tourism attempt to define this phenomenon and to clarify its differentiating features from the other tourism types. A quick literature review, in this context, shows a debate about the overlapping use of the terms spiritual tourism, religious tourism, and pilgrimage tourism (Griffin, 2007). For example, some researchers (e.g. Galzacorta, Guereño-Omil, Makua, Iriberrri, & Santomà, 2016) use the terms spiritual and religious tourism, interchangeably. However, other researchers argue that these are the distinct constructs, meaning different tourism types in terms of varying tourist motivations, visitor beliefs, and the most visited places (Heelas, 1998; Kato & Prozano, 2017). In addition, researchers have documented the distinction between religious and pilgrimage tourism by identifying the participant characteristics. For example, differing from pilgrimage tourists who must fulfil certain rituals in the sacred places, religious tourists might not have a religious belief at all (Galzacorta et al., 2016; Kujawa, 2017). Moreover, religious tourists may want to visit a destination for reasons of curiosity or admiration, while also benefiting from some supporting services offered in the area, such as tours and recreation activities (Bideci & Albayrak, 2016).

Another debate about the conceptualization of religious tourism is related to the distinctions between pilgrims and tourists. Although, Smith (1992) suggests that pilgrims and tourists can be placed at opposite ends of a spectrum (i.e. from sacred to secular), the researchers (e.g. Ostrowski, 2000) agree that it is difficult to make such a distinction for contemporary travellers. While, a pilgrim, apart from his/her religious rituals, may also engage in non-spiritual activities (e.g. visiting touristic attractions and shopping), a tourist can participate in spiritual activities whilst on holiday (e.g. visiting a holy place by taking a daily tour). This implies that, especially in the current post-secular world, “a tourist is half a pilgrim, if a pilgrim is half a tourist” (Turner & Turner, 1978, p. 20).

Regarding the evolution of religious tourism, two major changings can be observed, namely: the motivations of travellers, and the perceived essence of religious destinations (Heelas, 1998; Okamoto, 2015). For example, people who visit religious destinations nowadays, often consist of secular travellers (Timothy & Olsen, 2006). Hence, contemporary religious tourists are possibly motivated by various other factors, in addition to pilgrimage motives (Blackwell, 2007; Hyde & Harman, 2011). Another evolution in religious tourism involves the perceived essence of visited destinations. Although, certain religious

locations are addressed in the medieval era as places of pilgrimage (Blackwell, 2007; Collins-Kreiner, 2007), in the present, the locations that are recognized as religious tourism destinations, do not necessarily have the characteristics of a sacred site or pilgrimage area. For example, the home of a famous person or his/her statue can become a spiritual place for people. According to Timothy and Conover (2006), rapid technological and social developments in people's lives might lead to such types of evolutions in religious tourism.

The exploration of the social and economic impact of religious tourism has been another area of discussion for the scholars. Many researchers admit that religious tourism, which represents a global market segment consisting of 330 million international tourists (UNWTO, 2014), offers significant and positive economic impacts for visited destinations (Amaro, Antunes, & Henriques, 2018; Kouchi, Nezhad, & Kiani, 2016). In addition, Rinschede (1992) states that religious tourism contributes to infrastructural developments, as well as increasing recruitment opportunities in host destinations. Especially in some countries, religious tourism constitutes an important part of the tourism industry. For example, in 2009, 44.5% of the export earnings of Indian tourism were from religious tourists' spending (Bollaram, 2017). In contrast to its potential economic contributions, Vukonić (2002) points to the commercialization of religious services and sacred sites as a threat.

The economic exchanges and social interactions between local people and religious tourists may also lead to cultural transformations in host destinations (Joseph & Kavoori, 2001). For example, local religious rituals, which are performed by a small local group, may turn into international festivals (Shinde, 2007). However, local people and tourists can interpret such kinds of changes, differently. From the local people's perspective, such events may have negative impacts on cultural heritages, such as an increase in cultural degeneration. From the tourists' perspective, unique local cultures enrich the value of destinations. For example, one of the most important religious events in the Northern Portugal, which is called ‘festa’, has made a significant contribution to the traditional and cultural identity of this destination (Fernandes, Melo, & Cardoso, 2016).

3. Tourist experience and studies on religious tourist experience

Tourist experience is “a socially constructed term, whereby the meaning of the tourist experience is associated with multiple interpretations from social, environmental, and activity components of the overall experience” (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009, p. 24). In a recent literature review, Adhikari and Bhattacharya (2016) categorize the antecedents, formation, and implications of customer experience into two main streams in the marketing field. While the first stream examines experience as a product attribute or a complete product, the second investigates experience through customer interactions with the physical environment or people. Hence, it would be logical to examine tourist experience research depending on these two streams and to present a review of studies conducted in the areas of economy, marketing, psychology, and sociology/anthropology (e.g. Sheng & Chen, 2013; Walls, Okumus, Wang, & Kwun, 2011).

In traditional economic transactions, customers may obtain products/services in an environment where businesses offer and filter experiences through expectations and mental images relating to the operator and other corresponding products/services (Komppula, 2006). However, as noted by Pine and Gilmore (2013), the nature of economic offerings being sold by companies has shifted in the age of post-modernity from products and goods to experiences. Holbrook, Chestnut, Oliva, and Greenleaf (1984) therefore proposed that the ‘world of products’ perspective should be changed into the ‘world of experience’ by putting a new emphasis on the customers' role (Ritchie & Hudson, 2009). According to the customers' point-of-view, “customizing a good turns into a service, customizing a service turns into an experience and customizing an experience turns into a transformation” in today's

experience economy (Pine & Gilmore, 2013, p. 14). Thus, in either real or virtual marketing places, companies need to offer transforming and authentic experiences to customers through impressive, theatre-like role performances. Moreover, post-modern tourists, like other consumers, became the “co-producers who actively build their experiences through interactions with environment, suppliers and other tourists” (Walls et al., 2011, p. 20).

In the marketing field, academics focus on the functional and technical aspects of service delivery (Huang, Scott, Ding, & Cheng, 2012; Otto & Ritchie, 1996) in order to clarify customer evaluations of service quality and satisfaction with an experience. Many researchers adapt the confirmation-disconfirmation theory, which compares customer expectations and evaluations, and uses Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry's (1994) ServQual model. However, recently, an increasing number of researchers have started to employ Pine and Gilmore's (1998) four-dimensional experience model (i.e. escapist, educational, aesthetic, and entertainment), in which any of the experiences may fall into the active or passive fields of participation spectrums. Based upon Pine and Gilmore's (1998) experience model, tourist experience can be accepted as a powerful driver of future behavioural intentions and a determinant of satisfaction (Kim, 2014). Accordingly, tourist satisfaction is defined as “an individual's cognitive-affective state derived from an experience” by Bosque and Martín (2008, p. 553). Hence, the post-hoc satisfaction approach has been popular in tourist experience research (Quinlan Cutler, 2015).

In the psychology discipline, experiences are seen as subjective, personalized processes, which are related to social cultures and varied systems (Larsen & Mossberg, 2007). The experience of a destination includes pre-trip preparation, post-visit remembering and the sharing of trip-events (Clawson & Knetsch, 1966). Thus, the psychological perspective suggests that “a tourist experience is a past personal travel-related event strong enough to have entered long-term memory” (Larsen, 2003, p. 15). Memories can be viewed passively as a store of experience, but can also be regarded as active re-enactments and guidelines for action (Selstad, 2007). Thus, Ryan (2010) notes that satisfactory and memorable tourist experiences should not simply be seen as a meeting of needs, but as an arising of wants and fantasies. This is because satisfactory experiences are stored in the form of stories and memories in tourists' minds. Tourists, who create stories during their ‘authentic’ experiences tend to share these stories with others later as memories of their travels (Moscardo, 2010). In Tung and Ritchie's (2011) qualitative study, the four dimensions of a memorable tourist experience were identified as the: affect, expectations, consequentiality, and recollection. A recent literature review of Kim (2014) shows that destination attributes that potentially affect the creation of memorable tourist experiences are the: infrastructure, cost/value, accessibility, local culture, physiography and climate, entertainment, environment management, quality of service, safety/security, hospitality, place attachment, superstructure, special events, and a mix of activities.

From the sociological and anthropological perspective, experiences emerge from destination-tourist interactions, where destinations are the ‘theatres’ in which experiences take place, and tourists are the ‘actors’ playing the ‘tourist role’ (Stamboulis & Skayannis, 2003). Therefore,

researchers adapt social group theory (Heywood, 1987) in order to test the relationships between tourists' activity-based preferences and their social group characteristics. Some scholars also follow role-play approaches; with the aim of exploring which tourists tend to play ‘a tourist role’. In addition, the theory of tourist gaze is employed in some studies (Urry, 1990). Tourist gaze is considered as a travel experience in these studies which is different for each individual, since tourists subjectively objectify and interpret the places they visit (Tussyadiah & Fesenmaier, 2009).

In religious tourism literature, a few number of studies exist about tourist experiences. In one of these studies, Andriotis (2009) attempted to explore male tourists' experiences visiting Mount Athos, Greece by following a phenomenological approach. His results revealed the importance of spiritual, cultural, environmental, secular, and educational elements in the formation of authentic experience. In another study, Belhassen, Caton, and Stewart (2008) proposed the term ‘theoplacity’ in their conceptual framework, which integrates previous approaches to authenticity. They further concluded that place, belief, action, and self, which are the sub components of theoplacity, generate an authentic pilgrimage experience. By using a phenomenological approach, Lopez (2013) conducted research on pilgrimage tourism experiences for the Way of St. James, examining 63 travel diaries that Italian pilgrims have published on the Internet. She offered a new concept, called ‘pilgrim 2.0’, to highlight the increasing importance of online communities for pilgrims. Recently, Bond et al. (2015) compared cathedral, shrine, and festival visitors' experiences in the United Kingdom. The results suggested that the experience of ‘connecting spiritually & emotionally’ was the main determinant of beneficial outcomes for all types of visitors. In sum, there is still a lack of knowledge about religious tourism experience.

4. Methodology

4.1. Study area: Jerusalem

Jerusalem, one of the oldest cities in the world, is a highly valued location for a number of religious traditions, including the three Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam (Fig. 1). In 2016, Jerusalem was visited by 2.8 million tourists, mostly (61%) originating from the European continent. Tourists coming from the other continents were as follows: 27% America, 8% Asia, 2% Africa, and 2% Oceania. Breaking these figures down per country, 21% arrived from the USA, followed by Russia (13%), France (10%), Germany (6%), and Great Britain (6%). Relatively few tourists came from Islamic countries, such as Indonesia (22,000), Jordan (22,000), and Egypt (6,000) (CBS, 2017). Based on the Tourism to Jerusalem Statistical Report (2017), 36% of the tourists who visited the city were below 35 years old, 15% were between the ages of 35 and 44, 35% were between the ages of 45 and 64, and 14% were 65 and over. These tourists were (mainly) hosted in more than 10,000 hotel rooms in Jerusalem. In terms of religion, 27% of the tourists were Jewish, 53% were Christian, 10% were Muslim and 10% had a different religion. In addition, 22% of the tourists asserted that they arrived for the purpose of pilgrimage.



Fig. 1. Views from Jerusalem (Western wall; Dome of the rock; church of the holy sepulchre).

4.2. Measures

Survey items measuring religious tourism experience were adapted from Bond, Packer and Ballantyne's (2015) study. This study was selected, as it is one of the latest works in the religious tourism context where the survey items were specifically developed for religious tourism. In addition, the scale components have high internal reliability, with Cronbach's alpha values ranged from .88 to .94. Items identifying the experiences of visitors to Christian religious heritage sites located in England were adapted to Jerusalem, Israel. Three items obtained from Prayag, Hosany, and Odeh's (2013) study determined overall satisfaction with Jerusalem. All of the items were measured using a 7-point Likert-type scale (whereas, 1: strongly disagree; 7: strongly agree).

The original English version of the questionnaire was translated into Hebrew by the authors. Two independent PhD researchers who are unaffiliated with this research carried out the translations into Arabic and Spanish. After translation, the questionnaires were distributed to 54 tourists who spoke one of the languages (Hebrew, Arabic or Spanish) as a native language, in order to receive feedback and to examine whether any corrections were required. These respondents were not included in the final sample. Based on their comments, some slight improvements have been made in the questionnaire.

4.3. Data collection

In light of the large population of interest, the authors decided to use a non-probability convenience sampling approach, which is an appropriate method when the chances of being able to implement a random sampling method that strictly represents the population is small (Han, Meng, & Kim, 2017; Song, Lee, Kang, & Boo, 2012).

Two methods (printed and online) were used to distribute the questionnaires to the survey population. The respondents were able to access the online questionnaire via the popular survey platform [SurveyMonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). In order to reach the targeted sample of religious tourists from three religious groups and from a variety of countries, two of the authors, along with two paid MBA students, visited various hotels and popular tourist restaurants in the Old City of Jerusalem and asked tourists to participate voluntarily in an academic study regarding religious tourism in Jerusalem. Those who agreed to participate were given two options, either to fill out a hard-copy questionnaire or to receive a link to the online questionnaire (The online questionnaire was distributed in English and Hebrew only). Data collection was carried out during the first half of 2017. To ensure the full completion of the questionnaires, hard-copy questionnaires were checked on site. Incomplete forms were returned to the participants to be fully answered. The online questionnaire was built in a way that respondents were required to complete a section before continuing to the next. As a result, most participants preferred to complete hardcopy questionnaires (approx. 70%), while the rest (30%) filled the questionnaire via the popular [SurveyMonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com) platform. Descriptive statistics of the items are provided in Appendix 1.

5. Results

Table 1 depicts the demographic characteristics of religious tourists who participated to the survey. Accordingly, the Jewish sample consists of mostly married (47%), young (38.7% are between 18 and 29 years old) females (51.9%). Approximately, one-third (33.3%) have bachelor degree, and more than two thirds (73.9%) are company employees. In addition, most of the Jewish respondents (54.9%) reported that they had an average level of income.

The Christian sample comprises mostly married (83.5%), elderly

(43.9% are 50 and above years old) female (52.2%) respondents. In general, they are well educated (48.5% have bachelor degree, or above) and work as company employees (64.7%). Moreover, 33.1% indicated that they had a high level of income.

The Muslim sample includes mostly married (54.6%), middle aged (40.5% are between 30 and 39 years old) males (52.9%). The percentage of Muslim respondents who work as company employee is 45.4%, while 41.8% of them have a high school educational degree. In addition, approximately half of the Muslim respondents (49.7%) specified that they had an average level of income. These results partially support the fact that, although the sampling method was not probabilistic, it includes a wide range of characteristics reflective of the tourist population in Jerusalem.

In terms of religious levels, more than half of the Jewish (56.1%) and Muslim (50.7%) participants reported that their religious level was moderate, while this ratio was 35.3% for Christian respondents. Majority of the Jewish (27.7%) and Christian (25.5%) participants are from the United States. In contrast, most of the Muslim respondents are from Palestine (37.6%), followed by Jordan and Indonesia.

Table 2 reflects the trip related characteristics of the participants. Approximately half of the Christian respondents (47.8%) prefer to travel with their families, while this percentage is 39% for both Jewish and Muslim respondents. Although, two thirds of the Christian respondents visited Jerusalem for the first time, almost 85% of the Jewish and Muslim respondents visited the city for the second or more times. While 70.8% of the Jewish respondents organized their visit via a travel agency, 96.8% of the Christian participants choose an agency for their travel organization.

In general, the main travel motives of the Christian and Muslim respondents are similar: prayer, recognition, confession, spiritual development, and pilgrimage. However, for the Jewish respondents, visiting friends and relatives is the main motive, followed by prayer, recognition, and confession. As expected, churches and monasteries are the most visited holy places for the Christian respondents and mosques for the Muslim respondents. Surprisingly, an important percentage of the Christian respondents showed an interest in visiting mosques, while Muslims also visited churches in the area. Differing from the Christians and Muslims, for the Jewish participants, the Western Wall is the most visited holy place.

To determine the underlying dimensions of the religious tourism experience and to identify the items that define it, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted on the combined data set. The reason for employing EFA for the whole data was to obtain a factor structure with which to compare the religious tourism experience of the three religious samples. In order to conduct EFA, Principal Component Analysis, with varimax rotation, was employed. Even though the factor analysis extracted four factors with eigenvalues above one, the inspection of the scree plot implied that a five-factor solution would be the most appropriate solution (i.e. the eigenvalue of the fifth factor was .958). Items that had cross or low loadings (less than .50) were removed from the analysis. After two cycles of reduction, seven items were eliminated. As a result, five factors that explain 64.19% of the variance were obtained. The dimensions were respectively named as 'engaging mentally', 'discovering new things', 'interacting & belonging', 'connecting spiritually & emotionally', and 'relaxing & finding peace'. The Cronbach's α coefficients of the dimensions ranged from .806 to .903, exceeding the acceptable level of .70 (Nunnally, 1978, pp. 1–701). The result of the factor analysis is shown in Table 3.

In addition, for assessing scale reliability and validity confirmatory factor analysis was carried out by using remaining items from EFA. The results of the model provided an acceptable fit for the data ($\chi^2/df = 3.68$; RMSEA = .056; CFI = .99; NFI = .98; GFI = .91). As shown

Table 1
Demographic profile of the samples.

		Jewish (N = 264)		Christian (N = 278)		Muslim (N = 306)	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Gender	Male	127	48.1	133	47.8	162	52.9
	Female	137	51.9	145	52.2	144	47.1
Age	18–29	102	38.7	28	10.1	118	38.6
	30–39	80	30.4	46	16.5	124	40.5
	40–49	41	15.5	82	29.5	43	14.1
	50–59	26	9.8	60	21.6	21	6.8
	60 and above	15	5.6	62	22.3	–	–
Marital status	Single	115	43.6	36	12.9	99	30.4
	Married	124	47.0	232	83.5	112	54.6
	Divorced/widower	25	9.4	10	3.6	95	15.0
Education	Elementary	–	–	–	–	29	9.5
	High school	71	26.9	31	11.2	128	41.8
	Some college	83	31.4	112	40.3	61	19.9
	Bachelor	88	33.3	92	33.1	71	23.2
	Master or above degree	22	8.4	43	15.4	17	5.6
Occupation	Student	24	9.1	2	0.7	55	18.0
	Company employee	195	73.9	180	64.7	139	45.4
	Self-employed	38	14.4	45	16.2	59	19.3
	Retired	5	1.9	48	17.3	26	8.5
	Unemployed	2	.7	3	1.1	27	8.8
Income	Below average	15	5.7	9	3.2	79	25.8
	Average	145	54.9	93	33.5	152	49.7
	Above average	84	31.8	84	30.2	60	19.6
	High	20	7.6	92	33.1	15	4.9
Religious level	Low	69	26.1	91	32.7	45	14.7
	Moderate	148	56.1	98	35.3	155	50.7
	High	47	17.8	89	32.0	106	34.6
Country of Origin	US		27.7	US	25.5	Palestine	37.6
	France		22.0	Russia	15.5	Jordan	24.5
	UK		16.7	Spain	12.2	Indonesia	18.3
	Canada		11.0	Germany	9.4	India	11.8
	Israel		9.1	Greece	6.1	Morocco	7.8
	Belgium		7.2	Chile	6.1		
	Others		6.3	Others	25.2		

in Table 4, factor loadings are significant and range from .513 to .736. The values of composite reliability and average variance extracted for each dimension are all above the threshold values .70 and .50, respectively (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988). Thus, results indicate that the scale has good reliability and validity.

In order to test whether the perceived religious tourism experience differ significantly depending on the respondents' religions, a series of variance analyses were conducted. The results indicated that there were significant differences in three out of five dimensions (Table 5). Furthermore, the pairwise mean differences across the three religions were examined using Tukey post-hoc tests. The multiple comparison test results showed that the Muslim respondents' experience perceptions about 'discovering new things' and 'relaxing & finding peace' were higher than Jewish respondents'. In addition, Jewish respondents had a better experience of 'connecting spiritually & emotionally' than Christian respondents. Moreover, the respondents' overall satisfaction with Jerusalem was compared. Tukey post-hoc test results showed that Christian respondents' overall satisfaction was lower than that of Jewish and Muslim respondents.

In the next step, multiple regression analysis was employed to investigate the impact of religious tourism experience on overall satisfaction with Jerusalem. Table 6 displays the regression models, predicting overall satisfaction for the three religions. R² values indicated that 51.9, 63.3, and 59.3 percent of the variation in overall satisfaction was explained by the five independent variables of experience for Jewish, Christian, and Muslim respondents, respectively. While all the religious tourism experience dimensions emerged as significant predictors of overall satisfaction for the three religions, their relative importance differed among the religions. The standardized β values were used to compare the relative importance of the religious tourism experience dimensions. Connecting spiritually & emotionally ($\beta = .478$), with the highest β value was the most important determining factor in explaining Jewish respondents' overall satisfaction, followed by discovering new things ($\beta = .419$). Similar to Jewish respondents, Christian respondents' overall satisfaction was highly impacted by connecting spiritually & emotionally dimension ($\beta = .390$). However, it was closely followed by relaxing & finding peace ($\beta = .337$). Differing from Jewish and Christian participants, for

Table 2
Trip characteristics of the samples.

		Jewish (N = 264)		Christian (N = 278)		Muslim (N = 306)	
		f	%	f	%	f	%
Travel partner	Alone	6	2.3	2	0.7	35	11.4
	With family	103	39.0	133	47.8	122	39.9
	With friends	130	49.2	106	38.1	86	28.1
	With tour partner	24	9.1	30	10.8	49	16.0
	Other	1	.4	7	2.5	14	4.6
Number of visit to Jerusalem	Once	39	14.8	199	71.6	40	13.1
	Twice or more	225	85.2	79	28.4	266	86.9
Organization of visit	By myself	77	29.2	9	3.2	42	13.7
	Thorough a travel agency	187	70.8	269	96.8	264	86.3
Holy places visited^a	Church of Holy Sepulchre	37	14.0	236	84.9	35	11.4
	Church of the Visitation	14	5.3	225	80.9	61	19.9
	Monastery of the Cross	10	3.8	110	39.6	70	22.9
	Via Dolorosa	40	15.2	213	76.6	52	17.0
	The Western Wall	221	83.7	178	64.0	25	8.2
	Mount Zion	97	36.7	148	53.2	25	8.2
	Mount of Olives	17	6.4	140	50.4	16	5.2
	Al-Aqsa Mosque	4	1.5	50	17.9	292	95.4
Mosque of Omar	14	5.3	35	12.6	293	95.8	
Main travel motives^a	Prayer, reconciliation, confession	148	56.1	264	94.9	217	70.9
	Spiritual development	45	17.0	238	85.6	144	47.1
	Pilgrimage	23	8.7	235	84.5	86	28.1
	Spending time with family/friends	71	26.9	211	75.9	25	8.2
	Visiting friends and relatives	160	60.6	3	1.1	59	19.3
	Image/popularity of Jerusalem	50	18.9	10	3.6	38	12.4
	Curiosity	35	13.3	45	16.2	45	14.7
	Other	31	11.7	14	5.0	85	27.8

^a More than one options are available.

Table 3
Exploratory factor analysis results.

Items/Dimensions	Mean	Variance explained (%)	Reliability
<i>Engaging mentally</i>	5.22	11.24	.835
I enjoyed seeing beautiful things	.641		
I felt peaceful or calm	.627		
The things I did felt easy and effortless	.689		
I found the information interesting	.690		
I was fascinated by the things I saw, heard or read	.529		
<i>Discovering new things</i>	5.08	15.58	.903
The visit made me remember other times or places	.653		
I felt mentally stimulated	.736		
I experienced something that appealed to my senses	.700		
I felt I was sharing something meaningful with my companions	.559		
It was exciting to learn and discover new things	.536		
I felt privileged to be able to see things I have only ever read about	.525		
I was able to imagine things outside of my previous experience	.527		
I enjoyed doing things I wouldn't normally do	.592		
<i>Interacting & belonging</i>	5.17	11.83	.806
I enjoyed spending quality time with my friends or family	.527		
I felt a sense of belonging or connectedness with other people	.694		
I felt open to interacting with other visitors	.690		
I enjoyed having other people around me	.667		
<i>Connecting spiritually & emotionally</i>	5.30	14.92	.880
I felt inspired	.513		
I felt a spiritual connection to some of the things I saw	.707		
I felt an emotional connection to some of the things I saw	.666		
I felt a sense of wonder or awe	.715		
The visit produced a spiritual response in me	.640		
I experienced a sense of being close to God	.615		
<i>Relaxing & finding peace</i>	5.12	10.62	.840
I felt removed from the stresses of everyday life	.557		
I felt I was able to relax and wind down	.651		
I was surprised how quickly the time passed	.630		
I was able to concentrate and focus on the things I saw and heard	.539		

KMO: .971; Bartlett's Test of Sphericity: 13,486.15 (.000).

Table 4
Confirmatory factor analysis results.

Items/Dimensions	Standardized factor loading	CR	AVE
<i>Engaging mentally</i>		.835	.504
I enjoyed seeing beautiful things	.74		
I felt peaceful or calm	.68		
The things I did felt easy and effortless	.62		
I found the information interesting	.74		
I was fascinated by the things I saw, heard or read	.76		
<i>Discovering new things</i>		.903	.540
The visit made me remember other times or places	.71		
I felt mentally stimulated	.73		
I experienced something that appealed to my senses	.75		
I felt I was sharing something meaningful with my companions	.77		
It was exciting to learn and discover new things	.76		
I felt privileged to be able to see things I have only ever read about	.78		
I was able to imagine things outside of my previous experience	.70		
I enjoyed doing things I wouldn't normally do	.67		
<i>Interacting & belonging</i>		.810	.516
I enjoyed spending quality time with my friends or family	.66		
I felt a sense of belonging or connectedness with other people	.75		
I felt open to interacting with other visitors	.72		
I enjoyed having other people around me	.74		
<i>Connecting spiritually & emotionally</i>		.883	.558
I felt inspired	.75		
I felt a spiritual connection to some of the things I saw	.78		
I felt an emotional connection to some of the things I saw	.79		
I felt a sense of wonder or awe	.74		
The visit produced a spiritual response in me	.78		
I experienced a sense of being close to God	.63		
<i>Relaxing & finding peace</i>		.839	.566
I felt removed from the stresses of everyday life	.75		
I felt I was able to relax and wind down	.75		
I was surprised how quickly the time passed	.75		
I was able to concentrate and focus on the things I saw and heard	.76		

CR: Composite Reliability; AVE: Average Variance Extracted; All factor loadings are significant at .01 level.

Table 5
Comparison of tourist experiences by religion.

	Jewish (J) Mean (S.D.)	Christian (C) Mean (S.D.)	Muslim (M) Mean (S.D.)	p	Differences
Engaging mentally	5.31 (.99)	5.15 (1.22)	5.22 (1.13)	.231	
Discovering new things	4.95 (1.34)	5.06 (1.11)	5.21 (1.06)	.027*	J < M
Interacting & belonging	5.17 (1.25)	5.12 (1.23)	5.22 (1.12)	.627	
Connecting spiritually & emotionally	5.44 (1.20)	5.14 (1.17)	5.32 (1.10)	.009**	J > C
Relaxing & finding peace	4.99 (1.32)	5.08 (1.26)	5.26 (1.07)	.027*	J < M
Overall satisfaction	5.71 (1.21)	5.07 (1.23)	5.45 (1.31)	.000**	J > C; C < M

*p < .05; **p < .01.

Table 6
Religious tourist experience - overall satisfaction relationships.

	Jewish			Christian			Muslim		
	B	β	t	B	β	t	B	β	t
Constant	5.690		95.22	5.155		106.72	5.416		101.34
Engaging mentally	.349	.296	6.36	.301	.242	6.16	.560	.405	10.55
Discovering new things	.378	.419	9.47	.410	.263	6.92	.324	.185	4.73
Interacting & belonging	.363	.361	8.02	.312	.241	6.43	.386	.247	6.52
Connecting spiritually & emotionally	.501	.478	10.65	.559	.390	9.87	.491	.323	8.38
Relaxing & finding peace	.402	.407	9.24	.453	.337	8.81	.522	.294	7.75
R ²	.519			.633			.593		
F	55.742			93.755			87.490		

Dependent variable: overall satisfaction with Jerusalem; all coefficients are significant at .01 level.

Muslims, engaging mentally ($\beta = .405$) was the most important antecedent of overall satisfaction.

6. Discussion

This study has a number of important outputs, as being a religious tourism research conducted in Jerusalem, a city of intersection for three Abrahamic religions. Firstly, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious tourists were identified to have varying demographics. While more than half of the Jewish and Christian respondents were women, the share of male respondents in Muslim group was higher than females. This finding shows similarity with Rinschede's (1992) results, where female survey participants were predominant in the Christian religious tourists, and male participants were in majority of the Muslim religious tourists.

Secondly, this study's results showed that only a small share of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim religious tourists travel alone. Differing from Morinis (1984, pp. 1–346), who found that 65% of religious tourists travel with their families, the present study's results indicated that less than half of the Christian religious tourists travel with their family members. On the other hand, this finding supports to Poria, Butler, and Airey's (2003) study, which showed that 48.7% of religious tourists' travel partners are family members. Interestingly, the rate of Jewish and Muslim religious tourists who prefer to travel with their family is only 39%. In contrast to their Christian and Muslim counterparts, approximately half of the Jewish religious tourist travel with their friends.

Thirdly, it is shown that most of the religious tourists prefer to organize their trips through a travel agency. The percentage is 70.8% for Jewish, 86% for Muslim, and 96% for Christian religious tourists. This indicates the high interest of religious tourists in organized tours. Moreover, the results revealed that an important share of Christian religious tourists (71.6%) visit Jerusalem for the first time, while a higher (approx. 85%) share of Jewish and Muslim religious tourists visit to Jerusalem for the second or more time.

Results also reveals that religious-related motives such as prayer and pilgrimage are especially dominant for Christian religious tourists. A small group of Jewish religious tourists (8.7%) indicate pilgrimage as one of their travel motives, although, a majority (approx. 60%) of these tourists state the friend/relative visit as an important travel motive. It is not a surprising fact when it is considered that domestic and foreign Jewish tourists may have family ties or friends living in this city. Compared to their Jewish counterparts, spiritual development is a more dominant motive for Christian and Muslim religious tourists. Although, travel motivation pattern of the three groups is quite different, a general look at the main travel motives reveals that all religious groups have multiple motives, including the friend/relative visits and curiosity, similar to holiday tourists' motives. This finding is consistent with the results of Amaro et al. (2018), who showed that religious tourists have various motives, spanning from religious to cultural. Taken together, the results indicate that religious tourism is closely associated with holiday tourism. As previously mentioned by Andriotis (2009), visitors of the sacred places may have multiple motivations, some of which are not directly related to religion, but are connected with holidaying and seeing the social or cultural attractions.

The most visited holy places in Jerusalem are closely related to the participants' religious bonds, such as churches for Christians, mosques for Muslims, and the Western Wall for Jewish. Surprisingly, the findings also show that each religious tourist groups visited to other religions' holy places (i.e. Jewish churches, Christian mosques, and Muslim

churches). As noted by Nyaupane et al. (2015), religious tourists may visit to sacred sites for satisfying their curiosities. Thus, the finding may be seen as a confirmation of curiosity motivation of tourists for understanding the other religious.

In addition to the identification and comparison of religious tourists' demographics and travel patterns, in this study, religious tourism experience of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim tourists is also determined and compared with each other. Exploratory factor analysis results suggested the sub components of religious tourism experience as the: engaging mentally, discovering new things, interacting & belonging, connecting spiritually & emotionally, and relaxing & finding peace. This result confirms to Bond et al. (2015)'s findings who obtained exactly the same dimensions in their study. Following the exploration of the underlying dimensions, group-based comparisons were performed for finding out the differences in perceived religious tourism experience. Although, perceived experiences of tourists about engaging mentally, and interacting & belonging dimensions did not differ based on religion, the experience perceptions of Muslim respondents about discovering new things and relaxing & finding peace were higher than Jewish participants. Thus, the findings further enhance the results of Bond et al. (2015), who showed that religious tourism experience may vary depending on destinations, by showing tourists, who are the members of different religions may have varying experience perceptions about the same destination.

Lastly, in the current study, religious tourism experience and overall tourist satisfaction relationship is investigated by regression analysis for finding out the possible differences among the groups. The results reflect that overall tourist satisfaction with Jerusalem is significantly affected by religious tourism experience. Moreover, religious-based differences are shown in this relationship. For example, spiritual and emotional connection has the highest influence on Jewish and Christian religious tourists' overall satisfaction with Jerusalem. For Muslim religious tourists, mental engagement emerges as the most important antecedent of overall tourist satisfaction. As noted by Bond et al. (2015), both the spiritual and non-spiritual components of a religious destination are important for providing unique tourist experiences. In this study, all of the experience dimensions were found as the determinants of overall tourist satisfaction, although, their relative impacts showed difference among the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim tourists.

7. Conclusion

7.1. Theoretical implications

Unique cities like Jerusalem are called as 'third space' by Soja (1980), where 'religious travellers' as pilgrims, and 'vacationers' as tourists, come together. Such places are an important research setting for scholars. However, in terms of the sacred-secular spectrum, today's tourists have become more diverse, which makes it harder for the scholars to categorize tourists under specific characteristics. For example, the present study's results highlight that religious tourists, visiting Jerusalem, cannot be considered either as vacationers or pilgrims, but rather as secular tourists. Thus, the pilgrim-tourist dichotomy is an outdated argument today (Olsen, 2010). As stated by Poria, Butler, and Airey (2003), religious tourism destinations are representing both the sacred and secular tourist identities.

Moreover, religious tourism and sacred sites are inspiring, shifting, and open areas of exploration for scholars. Even though a number of previous studies have examined some aspects of religious tourism, there

is a lack of comprehensive research about the experiences of religious tourists. Thus, the study has been one of the first comprehensive attempts to examine religious tourists' experiences in Jerusalem. The investigation extended the scientific knowledge by showing that religious tourist experience is a multi-faceted construct, consisting not only of spiritual components, but also interaction with other people and the discovery of new things.

Although, previous studies have examined religious tourist experiences by focusing on a specific religion, the present study is the first attempt to acknowledge how the religious tourist experience differs among three religions. In addition to the identification of the religion-based experience differences of tourists, the findings of this study also reflect that their perceptions for some of the experience dimensions were similar. Thus, religious tourists seem to have common experiences. This result underlines the fact that religion gathers people together for the purposes of meeting similar needs and sharing similar kinds of experiences. Furthermore, the impact of the religious tourist experience on overall satisfaction with Jerusalem was clarified. For the first time in the literature, religious tourist experience was associated with the overall satisfaction with a destination, while previous studies just attempted to identify religious tourist experiences.

7.2. Managerial implications

The present study, which measures religious tourist experiences, suggests several managerial implications for the local authorities of sacred sites, tourism companies, and policy makers. Today, offering memorable and positive experiences to visitors (Chen, Petrick, & Shahvali, 2016) is a key factor for destination success. Principally, tourist experiences at a destination consist of both a peak experience and supporting experiences, such as hospitality, accommodation, and transportation (Quan & Wang, 2004). Therefore, tourists who are mainly motivated by the religious-related attractiveness of Jerusalem still need to be offered a variety of supporting experiences in order to generate high-levels of tourist satisfaction. At the heart of the Middle-East, the city has distinguishing characteristics which can be highlighted, in terms of destination marketing. For example, local gastronomy, cultural richness, and entertainment activities may enrich the total tourist experience. Thus, if supporting experience opportunities are introduced and promoted by the local authorities, religious tourism in Jerusalem has the potential to enlarge both its capability and competitiveness.

Majority of the participants of this study had multi travel motivations and were the people who are curious to visit holy places of the other religions in Jerusalem. Hence, themed tours can be organized for such visitors who are willing to learn about the rituals of other religions and the history of the holy places in the city. Themed tours and some other tourism activities may play an important role in creating peaceful and tolerant relations among the different societies (Nyaupane et al., 2015).

Jerusalem, in particular, is a unique destination for religious tourists, which is seen not a modern and politically controversial city, but as a 'holy place' (Bar-el et al., 2000). The findings of this study indicated that 'engaging mentally' was one of the most important elements of religious tourism experience for majority of the participants, no matter which religion they are belonging. Hence, the exceptional atmosphere of Jerusalem enables people to discover religions by mental focusing.

The second important element of religious tourism experience was 'interacting & belonging' which shows the role of human contacts in tourism. Quality of a religious tourism experience is dependent on

social group interactions and the feeling of being a part of a social group. With the annual events, such as themed festivals and celebrations tourists may get together with other tourists. These events may also facilitate interactions between religious tourists and the host community, as well as the positive socio-economic impacts of religious tourism suggested by Shinde (2003). Moreover, with these organizations a larger variety of tourist demand is possible to be generated for Jerusalem.

Local tourism companies are also recommended to offer market-focused services to religious tourists, who have varying trip-related characteristics and experience perceptions. For example, accommodation facilities could increase the variety of their menus for tourists belong to different cultures and organize recreation activities specifically for families with children. Specific promotion strategies (such as price policies, group discounts, and advertising messages) should be also generated by emphasizing both the profiles and expectations of tourists belong to different religions.

8. Limitations and future research recommendations

This study also has some unavoidable limitations. For example, the research data was collected (by using convenience sampling method) from tourists who were the members of one of the Abrahamic religions and were visiting Jerusalem at the time of survey. Hence, the findings cannot be generalized to all the tourists who visit Jerusalem, such as those who are atheists, or the members of other religions, such as Buddhism and Hinduism. Further research should examine the experiences of tourists belonging to religions other than those of the Abrahamic faiths. In addition, the national and cross-cultural differences of religious tourists were ignored, since the study aimed to examine tourist experience differences relying on the Abrahamic religions. Lastly, the use of an adapted version of a scale developed for the measurement of tourist experiences in Christian religious heritage sites by Bond, Packer, and Ballantyne's study (2015) might have caused an ignorance of other experience elements that are important for Jewish and Muslim tourists. Therefore, the authors recommend the development of a measurement tool that can be used to represent the religious tourism experience. Alternatively, qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews, may highlight the internal and subjective experiences of travelling to religious destinations. In the future studies, it may be also appropriate to perform comparative studies among holy and secular heritage sites for the identification of differences in tourists' experiences.

Contributions of the authors

Tahir Albayrak proposed the research theme, designed the research methodology, made the data analyses. He also revised the manuscript.

Ram Herstein contributed to the research design and organized the field study.

Meltem Caber contributed to the design of the whole paper and to the data analyses. She also revised the manuscript.

Netanel Drori conducted the field study and entered the data into software.

Müjde Bideci contributed to the design of field study.

Ron Berger conducted the field study and entered the data into software.

All authors contributed to write some sections and gave approval to the final version of the paper.

Appendix B. Supplementary data

Supplementary data related to this article can be found at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tourman.2018.06.022>.

Appendix 1. Descriptive statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
			Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
My curiosity was aroused	5.07	1.538	-.580	.084	-.279	.168
I enjoyed seeing beautiful things	5.39	1.393	-.732	.084	.102	.168
I felt peaceful or calm	5.05	1.560	-.544	.084	-.314	.168
The things I did felt easy and effortless	5.15	1.463	-.597	.084	-.189	.168
I found the information interesting	5.33	1.369	-.667	.084	.036	.168
The things I saw were meaningful to me personally	5.37	1.446	-.657	.084	-.193	.168
I was fascinated by the things I saw, heard or read	5.23	1.462	-.683	.084	.010	.168
The visit made me remember other times or places	5.22	1.530	-.674	.084	-.194	.168
I felt mentally stimulated	5.00	1.563	-.652	.084	-.062	.168
I experienced something that appealed to my senses	5.02	1.603	-.678	.084	-.154	.168
I felt I was sharing something meaningful with my companions	5.07	1.536	-.595	.084	-.202	.168
It was exciting to learn and discover new things	5.22	1.469	-.736	.084	.151	.168
I felt privileged to be able to see things I have only ever read about	5.21	1.504	-.755	.084	.036	.168
I enjoyed spending quality time with my friends or family	5.40	1.427	-.726	.084	-.002	.168
I felt a sense of belonging or connectedness with other people	5.15	1.546	-.672	.084	-.058	.168
I felt open to interacting with other visitors	5.02	1.574	-.608	.084	-.199	.168
I enjoyed having other people around me	5.14	1.504	-.611	.084	-.241	.168
The visit made me reflect on the meaning of things	5.07	1.567	-.672	.084	-.121	.168
I felt inspired	5.18	1.466	-.592	.084	-.165	.168
I felt a spiritual connection to some of the things I saw	5.33	1.429	-.706	.084	.034	.168
I felt an emotional connection to some of the things I saw	5.30	1.474	-.749	.084	.030	.168
I felt a sense of wonder or awe	5.41	1.401	-.721	.084	.056	.168
The visit produced a spiritual response in me	5.25	1.488	-.726	.084	.060	.168
I felt removed from the stresses of everyday life	5.09	1.521	-.618	.084	-.174	.168
I felt I was able to relax and wind down	5.07	1.515	-.614	.084	-.134	.168
I was surprised how quickly the time passed	5.10	1.475	-.600	.084	-.113	.168
I was able to concentrate and focus on the things I saw and heard	5.22	1.449	-.738	.084	.128	.168
I enjoyed seeing other people having a good time	5.17	1.512	-.660	.084	-.162	.168
I was able to feel the aura or spirit of other times or places	5.08	1.450	-.584	.084	-.038	.168
I enjoyed seeing things that were out of the ordinary	5.20	1.409	-.580	.084	-.051	.168
I was able to imagine things outside of my previous experience	4.98	1.457	-.427	.084	-.310	.168
I was able to connect deeply with the things I saw or heard	5.13	1.484	-.619	.084	-.085	.168
I enjoyed doing things I wouldn't normally do	4.96	1.536	-.493	.084	-.319	.168
I experienced a sense of being close to God	5.35	1.564	-.855	.084	.153	.168
Rate your Satisfaction with your visit to Jerusalem	5.41	1.385	-.772	.084	.203	.168
Rate your level of happiness with your visit to Jerusalem	5.36	1.446	-.679	.084	-.165	.168
Rate how much you liked your visit to Jerusalem	5.46	1.464	-.836	.084	.172	.168

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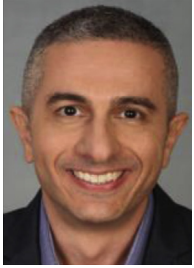
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